

Papatoetoe Kindergarten Making Literacy Visible for our Children and Their Families

INTRODUCTION

Papatoetoe Kindergarten is one of 107 kindergartens within the Auckland Kindergarten Association (AKA), a charitable trust. It is located on the corner of Wilmay Avenue and St. George Street, Papatoetoe. AKA Kindergartens employ fully qualified teachers who have an early childhood teaching diploma as a minimum qualification and hold a current Teacher Registration Practising Certificate. Teachers must be involved in professional development to maintain teacher registration status. Professional development supports positive learning outcomes for children by providing teachers with new and inspirational ideas and assisting them to remain informed about current theory and teaching practice. AKA environments “reflect the diversity of New Zealand society, and are inclusive of and support all children and their families. Cultural diversity is celebrated for its ability to enhance and enrich the learning environment.”¹

Cultural diversity is a defining characteristic of Papatoetoe Kindergarten. At least 90% of children attending Papatoetoe Kindergarten are from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Ethnicities include Indian from India, Indian from Fiji, various Middle Eastern, Chinese (from China), Vietnamese, Cambodian, Korean, a few Pacific Islands people and a few Maori (3 currently). Forty percent of children have a grandparent as their main caregiver during the day. Some families delay starting their child at kindergarten until a family member moves in with them and can take the child to and from kindergarten. The majority of parents, grandparents and children walk to kindergarten, and in all weathers.

Recognising the special character and needs of the kindergarten community, the Auckland Kindergarten Association agreed to build a community room adjoining the main class room area. Completed mid-2007, 20 months behind schedule, it provides a separate space where parents and/or grandparents can choose to stay and relax while their children/ grandchildren are at kindergarten. Many bring a book or newspaper to read, others lie down and have a rest, or if there is a shared language, they may converse. The community room now incorporates a lending library of children’s puzzles and books in the languages of the families

¹ Auckland Kindergarten Association website. (accessed 26/8/08)
<http://www.aka.org.nz>

(English, Vietnamese, Arabic, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi and Mandarin), purchased with a grant approved by the AACT in June 2006.

Papatoetoe Kindergarten's roll is maintained at a constant level of 90 children, 45 enrolled in daily morning sessions, and 45 enrolled in afternoon sessions on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays (12.45 to 3.15pm). With three teachers, the child/teacher ratio is 15:1. Their waiting list ranges between 250 and 310 children, the longest waiting list in New Zealand. Children begin in afternoon sessions and move to morning sessions as children turning 5 transition to school. While children's names can be placed on the waiting list as early as age 2, many children are not enrolled by their parents until they turn 4. Entry to kindergarten is in age order. On average, children spend between 9-11 months at Papatoetoe Kindergarten, compared with around 18 months average time in other New Zealand kindergartens. This comparatively short time and high turnover of children (approximately 45 each term) poses a challenge for establishing relationships with families:

Because our children do not enter kindergarten until they are approximately 4 years 3 months, families are only with us for the time their children attend kindergarten. It has been difficult to maintain continuity because by the time relationships are formed between teachers and whanau, their child is close to leaving for school. Thus the relationship/learning cycle starts over for new families.²

Another thing that sets Papatoetoe Kindergarten apart from most other kindergartens is its expansive, well developed outdoor play area.

² Papatoetoe Kindergarten ICT/literacy Project (2005-2007) Historical summary of events supplied to the Auckland Airport Community Trust.

ICT PROJECT RATIONALE AND GOALS

A more visual approach utilising digital camera and computer technology was seen as offering a way of achieving communication and partnership with parents and caregivers, especially in situations where there is no shared spoken language, thereby adding benefit to the education of their children. Papatoetoe Kindergarten's funding application stated as follows:

The teachers, volunteers and committee want to involve parents/whanau in their own child or children's learning. To attain this goal, we need to use a more visual approach for our families, most of whom have English as their additional language.

In early childhood, one of the major cultural tasks for children is to develop competence in, and understanding of language. Adults, for their part, should understand and encourage this, and we believe through a more "hands on" visual approach, we can encourage and teach parents to be part of their children's education and learning.³

Specific goals:

The first of the following four were explicit aims in the kindergarten's funding application. The fifth and sixth were listed as 'anticipated continuity of benefit'. I have added numbers 7 and 8. They were not explicit in the kindergarten's funding application to the AACT in 2005. Rather, they were implicit in the way the project unfolded from the start, suggesting that they were self-evident to the teachers all along.

- 1) To build up parents' confidence and self-esteem;
- 2) To enhance the ability of parents and caregivers to see how their children interact at play;
- 3) To facilitate the creation of story booklets/ folders highlighting various aspects of children's activities and achievements at kindergarten.
- 4) To use the booklets/ folders as a way of sharing and as a vehicle for communication with others.
- 5) To further develop and make visible a "culture" (within the kindergarten) that values and promotes literacy.
- 6) To up-skill parents to help maintain literacy interests for our children;

³ Papatoetoe Kindergarten's funding application to the AACT, March 2005.

- 7) To demonstrate a valuing of children's uniqueness and assist them to give expression to their special qualities and potentials.
- 8) To advance children's learning.

The ICT project was envisaged as synergistic with other initiatives in the kindergarten, including the building of the community room.

Items Purchased with AACT 2005 Grant

1 digital projector, 2 digital cameras, 2 Ibook computers, appropriate computer software: \$9,000-00.

The kindergarten fundraised to purchase a colour printer. A scanner and colour copier is leased from the AKA. The kindergarten pays for pages printed under a contract with Fuji Xerox.

DATA SOURCES

- Background literature: Report on a pilot project at Roskill South Kindergarten using information and communication technology (ICT) for teaching and learning. ⁴ Roskill South Kindergarten is a 'Ministry of Education Centre of Innovation'.
- Documentation including AACT funding applications and Papatoetoe Kindergarten's printed reports to the AACT.
- Interview with Head Teacher, Judy Barnes and the two other teachers, Christine Suisted and Shah-Naaz Ali.
- Participation in a shared lunch for families of morning and afternoon children currently attending. A huge turnout of parent and grandparent caregivers provided a picture of kindergarten families and how they fit into the kindergarten.
- Viewing the children's folders with stories and photographs taken with the digital cameras and printed via computer. Teachers were available and contributed background information. Selected pages extracted from some of the stories are included with this report.
- Observation of children and talking with several of them about their folders.
- At the shared lunch, I took the opportunity to interview several parents, one grandparent and two Early Intervention Special Education teachers.
- Telephone interviews with Principals, Deputy Principals or New Entrant teachers at the schools to which Papatoetoe Kindergarten children are most likely to transition (Papatoetoe East, Papatoetoe Central, Holy Cross, Puhinui, Papatoetoe West Primary Schools).

Note: Where pages from children's stories contain information that could identify the child or family (e.g. name or photograph), family consent was obtained with the knowledge that the report would be made available to the general public.

⁴ Ramsey K., Breen J., Sturm J., Lee W., Carr M. (2006) Strengthening learning and teaching using ICT- Roskill South Kindergarten final research report. Ministry of Education. [Hp://www.minedu.govt.nz](http://www.minedu.govt.nz)

PROCESSES AROUND ICT AT PAPATOETOE KINDERGARTEN

Preparatory Stages

The ICT Equipment Project was the subject of Papatoetoe Kindergarten's funding application to the AACT in March 2005 and approval was notified in June 2005. After receiving confirmation of funding approval, Judy Barnes spoke at length per telephone with Karen Ramsey, Head Teacher of Roskill South Kindergarten, who is highly regarded for her knowledge and skills in incorporating ICT equipment into kindergarten programmes to involve children, parents and whanau. A suggestion that emerged from the phone discussion was that consideration be given to purchasing a digital projector in place of the e-mac desk-top computer listed in the funding application. A digital projector offered the advantage of a far greater viewing area than a computer. Two computers would still be required for downloading, processing and printing. Kindergarten staff later met with Karen Ramsey to plan the project in specific detail and set realistic timelines. With approval for the variation from the AACT, the kindergarten proceeded with the purchase of a projector and other equipment. The kindergarten's ICT Manager, Ian Newson, was part of all purchase decisions. All three of the Papatoetoe Kindergarten teachers attended various workshops to up skill in ICT use.

The next step was a survey of their families, translated into five languages, to ascertain the skill base of using ICT at home and also the interest of parents in attending a planned workshop, facilitated by Ian Newson. Parents responded with enthusiasm to the surveys, with many eager to attend the workshop. The workshop, held on 11th November 2005, focused on giving families an overview of the direction the kindergarten was taking in early childhood education by viewing the DVD "Kimihia-Nga-Pae", produced by the Ministry of Education. Families were then given the opportunity of hands-on experience with digital still-shot cameras and making slide shows using the computer.

How is the ICT Equipment used?

The digital cameras are used by the teachers, children and parents to record events, activities, achievements and interactions, with the kindergarten children, or occasionally a family member as the focus. Families may borrow a camera to record a special event such as a birthday gathering for the child or something that has special meaning for the child (e.g. his/ her bedroom, a new baby in the family, a treasured toy etc.)

Photographs are downloaded onto a computer and processed in a variety of ways, depending on how they are to be used. They may become part of a slide show with the digital projector. Slide shows are a feature of special events such as four end of term shared lunches and annual Diwali celebrations, to which all parents and caregivers are invited. In the case of photographs of a group activity or visit to a place of interest, they are displayed on a poster board within the kindergarten. Photographs also become part of children's individual story folders when they are a 'key player', a leader in the activity, or if it is *their* story. Visits to a place or event of interest may inspire an individual child to take a theme to another level that is meaningful to them, providing an opportunity for sharing. Some stories record an event that has arisen quite spontaneously at a session, instigated by a child, but gaining impetus with encouraging input from a teacher.

The photographs are complemented by the addition of a caption or story. The stories are the work of the teachers and the child/children involved. A special skill is required of teachers in captioning and story writing. Even more important than the technical skills aspect is that story writing draws on the teachers' understanding of children and child development and behavior and promoting learning and social development. For a start, teachers have to be able to identify when there is potential in a situation that makes it worth recording. It is noticeable that the stories are written in ways that are consistently affirming of the child, highlight the specialness of the child, reinforce a bond between the teacher and the child, and sometimes between the child and other children (e.g. a budding friendship, or explaining 'how it's done'). Often there is a note of humor. Frequently they incorporate a hint or suggestion of what could happen next to keep the activity or learning alive. The stories are written in a way that encapsulates the child's world. Use of phrases and exclamations etc. that 4 year old boys/girls use helps towards that effect. Opportunities are taken for the children to have input using other modes (e.g. drawing pictures) to enhance their story. If extra information needs to be sourced from the internet, the teacher and child/children do a web search together, with the children having the final say about what will and won't be included. Sensitivity is required of teachers in pitching their input to progress children's learning while not infringing on children's ownership of their story.

Sometimes the development of a story is sustained through supportive input from the parent/s. Some stories show the child with a family member and convey a valuing of that person by the kindergarten. Many record a child's achievements. Other stories demonstrate respect for cultural traditions. For example, 'Roti for Morning Tea' records a group of children making the traditional Indian bread at kindergarten, each adding his/her own touches, as well as information about mum's embellishments of roti. The kindergarten is most fortunate to have a Muslim Indian teacher who is fluent in Urdu and

English, speaks and understands some Hindi and, while not speaking Punjabi, understands it. She contributes first language input to the stories of many of the children. They have recently recruited a teacher-aide who is fluent in Mandarin and English.

Word art and fancy borders provide the final touches to photographs, children's pictures or writing, and the written narrative before they are placed inside the protective transparent leaves of a child's folder. Each child has a folder of his/her own with name clearly marked on the cover spine, kept on a shelf at the kindergarten within easy reach. Children know they can pick up their folder at any time they choose to. When the child transitions to school, the folder becomes his/hers to keep at home.

OUTCOMES

There is common ground between the outcomes observed at Papatoetoe Kindergarten and those reported for Roskill South Kindergarten. Roskill South Kindergarten, like Papatoetoe Kindergarten, serves a multicultural, multilingual community. My participation in the shared lunch at Papatoetoe Kindergarten made it abundantly clear that they have achieved an impressive level of success in involving their community of families. Estimated conservatively, at least 80% of the 90 morning and afternoon children had a family member present, sometimes more than one. The table was laden with a magnificent choice of ethnic dishes, prepared by families with obvious care and pride. I observed that the poster boards, continuing slide show and story folders were points of interest for children and families.

Building Relationships with Families

The most significant finding reflects accomplishment of the main goal of the ICT project, as stated in the funding application. It relates to the preponderance at Papatoetoe Kindergarten of first-generation immigrant families with little or no English language and the effectiveness of photographs as a vehicle for communicating with families. Photographs make the children's learning visible to families, thus serving as a bridging language. They contribute significantly to engaging families in their children's learning and social development in the wider world. While the information sharing potential of photographs is also true for English speaking families there is special salience in the case of immigrant families. A recurring phrase in the Roskill South Kindergarten report, 'reading photographs' is just as applicable here to refer to the way in which non-English speaking family members grasp information from photographs.

At Papatoetoe Kindergarten, the family identified and acted on opportunities to give tangible support to their child in developing their stories, so that the communication became two way. The stories of Gurveer and Wendy are but two of a multitude of possible examples.

The communication embraced family beyond New Zealand. Educational opportunities for children and prospects of a better lifestyle are the main reasons for many families choosing to come here. Many immigrant families keep close communication with family overseas and are keen to send news of their children's educational experiences back to the family in their country of origin. A not uncommon scenario is for a father to continue living overseas for business or employment reasons and for mother and children to reside in New Zealand.

There were frequent instances of Papatoetoe Kindergarten families sending photographs of kindergarten activities and achievements to family members overseas, including children's dads. If kindergarten staff knew that children were to travel overseas, they encouraged the family to bring back some photographs to be incorporated in their child's folder. Families were responsive to teachers' requests to share their photographs of events that held significance for their child.

Relationships of trust were also strengthened when families saw aspects of their culture acknowledged. Activities such as the making of roti, children's accounts of their religious beliefs, and the incorporation of the family's first language in story folders conveyed crucial messages about richness in cultural diversity and respect for different cultural and religious traditions.

Building English Language Fluency

The addition of ICT to children's communication repertoire enhanced their motivation to participate and encouraged their use of other modes, such as talking, writing and drawing. It opened up communication across cultures among children in their day-to-day activities at kindergarten. It encouraged children from non English speaking backgrounds (NESB) to make use of their English language vocabulary and, with help from extra resources such as books and DVDs, develop it.

The story of Gurveer, whose first language is Punjabi (*pages 69-72*) is one example of a child who, according to his mother and teachers, lacked confidence and had difficulty in relating to other children in the kindergarten. That was until a teacher "*tapped into the right place at the right time...and found a new Gurveer (which he always was at home)*" (letter from Gurveer's mother). The point of connection, 'Thomas the Tank Engine' came to light when Gurveer overheard the name 'Percy' in a story that the teacher was reading to a group of children. Percy is Thomas the Tank Engine's sixth engine. In telling others about something he felt passionate about, Gurveer became increasingly confident about communicating in English. He brought each of his engines to kindergarten, drew pictures of the engines and explained in English the features which distinguished one from another. The interest shown by the teachers and other children encouraged him. Gurveer revealed a facility with English which came as a complete surprise to his mother and teachers.

What part did the digital technology play in facilitating this sequence of events, triggered coincidentally? The teacher was quick to identify the potential inherent in Gurveer's response when he heard the name 'Percy' to gain trust with him and to get him to reveal more of himself. Recording the episode using

the camera and building a story around the photographs showed a valuing of and shared interest in what was important to Gurveer, initially by the teacher, and then by others. It enabled Gurveer to revisit his story and explore it further. It encouraged him to employ a range of modes of communication, including drawing, duplo modelling, bringing his engines to kindergarten to show others and using his English language to explain what needed explaining. The teacher's tracking down of a DVD encouraged the involvement of more children. An ultimate result was a strengthening of the teaching/learning partnership between the kindergarten and Gurveer's family. A letter from his mother that became part of Gurveer's folder underscored the kindergarten/family partnership.

Building Confidence and Sense of Identity

Building of self-confidence and affirmation of the children as competent learners were woven into the fabric of the stories and recording of events. Processes around writing stories and taking photographs conveyed to children that their stories were valued. Children gained in confidence through explaining their stories to other children. The stories of Wendy and Gurveer illustrate growth in self confidence.

Each folder reflects the uniqueness of the child whose photographs and stories it contains. The Deputy Principal (see next page for a précis of the interview) was clearly referring to identity when she described the photographs as "giving children a sense of who they are", with the potential for that to change as they move into new contexts as part of their life journey. Importantly, the photograph always represent identity in a positive and affirming way. Engaging parents and building understanding with them may help resolve conflicting expectations, a potential source of identity confusion for children. One of the key aspects of identity development is 'reconciliation' between membership of different 'communities of practice':

"It is a matter of making connections across communities to make the learning context at kindergarten more meaningful by 'reconciling' it with other spheres of the children's lives. And vice-versa, that other spheres of children's lives are enriched by connections to their kindergarten experience."⁵

The photographs were also a way of affirming and placing on record social connections and friendships between children. One of the mothers I interviewed said that this was a particularly important benefit for her son, who lacked social confidence and friends when he started kindergarten. Sometimes events

⁵ Wenger E. (1998) *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

recorded in the photographs and stories, although unhappy, need acknowledgement. One mother described how writing about the death of his cat helped her son to express and cope with his sadness. It was helpful that the folders were stored within easy reach of the children so that they could revisit their learning and social accomplishments and special memories when they felt a need to do so.

Expertise with Technology

Children gained knowledge and practical experience in using the internet as a tool for gathering information. They also gained expertise using the digital cameras and computer technology to prepare their own learning stories. I saw many photographs and stories where children's quick acquisition of ICT skills was the subject matter of the story.

Children's Learning Gains

The photographs and stories gave tangible expression to the children's achievements, with potential to revisit the achievement. This is conducive to self-efficacy⁶. In simple terms, self efficacy refers to the tendency for people to build further successes using their appraisals of their previous successes as a frame of reference. Self-efficacy aligns with self-confidence but is not the same thing.

With the digital technology, children could see immediate results. This was helpful in capturing and maintaining their interest.

Children developed their story-telling abilities by telling visual stories (often about their own or other children's learning).

The digital technology enabled children to 'read' and revisit their learning, strengthening their identities as confident and competent learners.

Children gained expertise in explaining their stories and areas of knowledge to others.

ICT added excitement and interest to the learning in many areas and topics.

Teachers used websites and commercial DVDs to add to the knowledge of topics of interest to children, and to introduce new angles.

⁶ Bandura, A. (1982) Self-efficacy mechanism in human agency. *American Psychologist*; 37: 122-4.

Transition to School

The two Special Education Early Intervention Visiting Teachers I interviewed were at the time involved with four children (morning and afternoon sessions). They commented on the usefulness of the folders for children's transition to school. *"They are a valuable aid to new entrant teachers in becoming acquainted with the children and knowing their special interests and talents."*

One mother said that she has continued with the photo/story folder idea since her daughter started school *"as a type of diary of events for her to refer back to"*.

The following is a précis of my interview with the Deputy Principal of one of the schools to which Papatoetoe Kindergarten children transition.

Approximately 80% of their children attend some form of pre- school, often for only a very short time. The digital cameras make an important contribution in transition to school. Photographs are very important. Potentially, starting school is quite daunting for children as it involves a much bigger environment with 500 children instead of 40 or so. Children make a visit to their nominated school before their time at kindergarten has ended. As far as this particular school is concerned, one of the important things to happen is that on the pre-enrolment visit to the school, they take a photograph of the child in what will become their new room with their new teacher. The child receives two laminated copies, one for their folder at kindergarten, the other to take home to promote discussion with the family. This helps towards the child building a new identity – i.e. a sense of who they are and where they will be next in their life journey. They also photograph all the children on their first day at school and the family receives a copy of that photo. The photos are a tool by which the child can revisit the experience of the school visit. Folders that the children bring with them when they start school help the school in gaining some understanding of the child- what their interests are, how confident they are socially, their interaction with other children. (The family keeps the folder.) The school also provides the kindergarten with a series of photographs of the school to help familiarise children with the school they will attend – toilets, library, classrooms, teachers etc. Parents can access this information through the kindergarten.

Teaching/Learning Partnerships: Children and Teachers; Teachers and Parents

ICT took teachers into domains of knowledge where the children were the experts. It added ways in which children could take responsibility in the learning and teaching process. Children took up these opportunities with enthusiasm. This is suggestive of a power shift, which could be regarded as confidence building for children.

It included families and whanau in a mutual learning and teaching endeavour with the teachers and children. Children and families became teachers as well.

Teachers honed their skills in recognising and responding to the children's learning in more thoughtful, intuitive, and often innovative ways.

CONCLUSIONS

The Roskill South Kindergarten report noted that learning outcomes are invariably the result of a combination of factors. Attributes of the technology, family participation and teacher approach towards empowering the child were highlighted as significant mediating influences. The strengthening of children's learning using ICT became probable only when mediating influences were in synch or working together with the same principles and vision in mind.

This applies equally in the case of Papatoetoe Kindergarten. The outcomes listed in the preceding section were a reflection of the commitment of Papatoetoe Kindergarten staff to their children and community of families. The processes around the introduction and roll-out of ICT technology set the scene for successful outcomes. The Roskill South Kindergarten Pilot offered a frame of reference and source of expertise that the Papatoetoe teachers wisely tapped into and adapted to suit the needs of their unique community. The ICT venture would not have succeeded in the many ways that it did were it not for the teachers' ability to recognise the potential in small incidents and to take story writing to another level. The project drew on the teachers' understanding of child development and behavior and of empowering and promoting learning and social development, as well as a valuing of their community.

In a community where a majority of families had little or no English, photographs taken with the digital cameras were a vehicle for communicating with families. They made the children's learning visible to the families, thus serving as a bridging language. They contributed significantly to engaging families in their children's learning and social development in the wider world. Relationships of trust were strengthened when families saw aspects of their culture acknowledged. The incorporation of cultural traditions and language in story folders conveyed crucial messages about richness in diversity and respect for different cultural and religious traditions.

The photographs and stories gave tangible expression to the children's achievements, with potential to revisit the achievement.

*By the time this (early childhood) period is over, children will have formed conceptions of themselves as social beings, as thinkers and as language learners, and they will have reached important decisions about their own abilities and their own worth.*⁷

⁷ Donaldson M., Grieve R., Pratt C. (1983). Early childhood development and education. Readings in Psychology. Oxford: Blackwell. (Cited in Ramsey et al, 2006)

Building of self-confidence and affirmation of the children as competent learners and social beings were woven into the fabric of the stories and recording of events. Story folders reflected the uniqueness of each child. Processes around writing stories and taking photographs conveyed to the children that their stories were valued. Children developed their story-telling abilities and gained in confidence through explaining the subject of their stories to other children.

The addition of ICT to children's communication repertoire enhanced their motivation to participate and encouraged their use of other modes, such as talking, writing and drawing. It opened up communication across cultures among children in their day-to-day activities at kindergarten. It encouraged children from non English speaking backgrounds to make use of their English language vocabulary and, with help from extra resources such as books and DVDs, to develop it.

Children gained knowledge and practical experience in using the internet as a tool for gathering information. They also gained expertise in the use of the digital cameras and computer technology to prepare their own learning stories. The digital technology offered the advantage of immediate results, which contributed to capturing and maintaining their interest.

One school has adopted the practice of photographing prospective new entrant children on a pre-enrolment visit to the school. The children receive a print to take home and one for their folder. The idea is to stimulate family discussion and encourage the child to envisage him/herself in the new setting. They have also found the photograph folders to be a valuable aid to new entrant teachers in becoming acquainted with the children and knowing some of their special interests and talents. There is potential for other schools to use the folders to a greater extent than is the case at present, to ease children's transition to school.

Children and families became teachers as well. ICT took teachers into domains of knowledge where the children were the experts. It added ways in which children could take responsibility in the learning and teaching process. Children took up these opportunities with enthusiasm. This is suggestive of a power shift, which could be regarded as confidence building for children. It included families and whanau in a mutual learning and teaching endeavour with the teachers and children.

The funding grant from the AACT was indeed well directed. The digital camera and ICT technology is valued by the kindergarten community and being put to ongoing use with excellent results.