

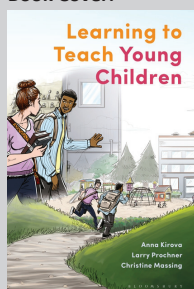
# A refreshing way of 'Learning to teach young children'



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Learning to teach young children: Theoretical perspectives and implications for practice

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## Authors:

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## Review Title:

A refreshing way of 'Learning to teach young children'

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## Introduction

The book entitled *Learning to Teach Young Children: Theoretical Perspectives and Implications For Practice*, by Anna Kirova, Larry Prochner and Christine Massing, is a brilliant book in which the multimodal use of comic book conventions is used. Two preservice teachers, Emma and Luka, are the main characters. Their speech and thought bubbles, as they use their own childhood and classroom experiences to describe the 10 knowledge and practice standards (KPS) for early childhood care and education (ECCE), are depicted throughout the 256-page book. The book was published in 2020 in Great Britain by Bloomsbury Publishing. Divided into 10 sections that consider how teacher educators teach preservice ECCE teachers, it purposively uses the voices and faces of the preservice teachers so that students can find common ground in the thinking of the two characters used in the illustrations, as they talk about theories, relating them to classroom practice.

When I was requested to write a review of this book, I was fascinated by the refreshing and simple way of explaining the 10 KPS for ECCE. The authors call these their principles, giving each principle a proposition. The policy on minimum requirements for programmes leading to qualifications for early childhood development teachers (MRQECDE) (DHET 2017) states that investment in early childhood development should be a key priority. Over 10 years ago, the authors were requested by their provincial Ministry of Education in Alberta, Canada, to develop a set of guiding principles to provide a framework for programming kindergarten. Being a project leader for the Project for Inclusive Early Childhood Care and Education (PIECCE) at my university over the last 3 years, this book proved to be a delightful and effective tool for the consolidation of my ideas on the development of the degree and diploma for ECCE. It was not surprising that the 10 principles and propositions outlined in the book were related to the 10 KPS as researched by the PIECCE collaborators. Very often, teacher educators seek books that student teachers can understand and that create dialogues about theory that they wish to highlight in their lectures. This book draws the students into the dialogue of Emma and Luka, who in comic-book style, debate the theories and practices and finally engage in critical reflections about the practical use of theories in ECCE.

The book provides online resources such as a companion guide and a website, essential for any training organisation today, as coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has dictated a new way of delivering university education via technology. The authors understand how teacher educators need to present theory in order to encourage critical thinking and to develop student teachers' ability to evaluate their theories, ideologies and curriculum. Teacher educators in further education and training (FET) colleges, non-governmental organisations and higher educational institutions will welcome this book as it provokes the students (preservice teachers) to develop the basic competences for professionally qualified ECCE educators (DHET 2017:31).

## Review of key issues

The authors present a new approach to sharing and understanding theoretical perspectives, not as foundational principles for educational practice but as points to be discussed or maintained in an argument (propositions). The illustrations by Ugandan Andrew Jackson Obol are evocative and appropriate, as he uses his own childhood experiences to provide much-needed diversity for understanding the richness of majority world childhoods. These illustrations set up the scenarios for discussion of the 10 propositions by the authors. This process allows students to use the illustrations as points of departure for discussion in the lecture room or for assignments on

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selected illustrations. Both lecturers and students will find the conversational tone of the book appealing and exciting in their lectures.

The multilayered approach that the book presents itself leads students to critically reflect on each proposition in relation to their personal educational experiences and beliefs. Firstly, the text in each chapter presents different, sometimes contrasting, theoretical views on the propositions, offering the students opportunities to engage in the discussion. Secondly, some of the key concepts defined by the theories are brought to life by the teacher characters, who share their life experiences vividly in the pictures. Thirdly, the companion guide provides 'how to' ideas related to the practical implications of each proposition.

## Chapter overviews

Chapter 1 focuses on childhood and society and proposes that the way that childhood is presented plays a role in the way that childhood is *experienced*. The Standardised National Framework that was designed for the ECCE degree and diploma by PIECCE also emphasises the importance of 'constructions of childhood' as an important module in the qualification. Nine different perspectives on the idea of a child and childhood are mentioned: (1) the free and constrained child, (2) the environmentalist, (3) the conditioned child, (4) the child and the species, (5) the loss of innocence, (6) the ages of man, (7) an upbringing fit for society view, (8) the agentic child and (9) the child from non-Western perspectives.

In Chapter 2, 'Children are citizens', the proposition '[c]hildren have rights as citizens and active members of their communities' is debated. Early Learning Development Standard 2, Identity and Belonging, is carefully unpacked in this chapter, which raises the following questions: (1) What is the nature of children's participation in their diverse social ecologies from a rights-based perspective? (2) How do children express their citizenship rights in their cultural and national communities? (3) What is the teacher's role in supporting children to express their rights as learners?

Chapter 3 emphasises the importance of children, communities and cultures, relating to the proposition '[c]hildren's everyday life and participation in multiple communities influences their emerging social and cultural selves'. 'Culture as a pattern' is related to two ecological theories: the paediatric and pedagogical models of early childcare and the developmental niche theory, which considers parents ethno-theories. The relationship between cultures and identity formation is explored with respect to the impact of worldviews on narratives of the self and the sociocultural approach to identity formation, including the concept of funds of identity.

The focus in Chapter 4 is on experience, learning and development. The proposition '[e]arly experiences influence children's development and learning' is explored through

three questions: What is environment? What is development? How do children's experiences in the environment influence their learning and development? An example refers to the Chagga people in Tanzania, who believe that 'everything is alive. Stones, mountains, rivers lakes, are all alive in their intrinsic meanings and in their active partnership to people and everything else' (Moshia 1999:213). Indigenous worldviews are characterised by notions of interconnectedness and a dynamic relationship with nature.

Chapter 5, 'Partners in learning', highlights the proposition '[c]hildren and adults are co-constructors of learners and partners in learning'. The authors acknowledge that the idea of children and adults as partners and co-constructors of knowledge is a relatively new thought for ECCE. The chapter explores the role of adult and children's learning according to constructivist orientations, both cognitive (Piagetian) and sociocultural (Vygotskian). The theories emphasise the need for indigenous knowledge(s) as a means of decolonising ECCE practices. The Reggio Emilia approach and how it is influenced by the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky generates a provocative discussion about giving children power and visualising them as capable, competent and having great learning capacity.

Chapter 6, 'Meaning making and representing knowledge', describes how children make meaning and represent knowledge in a variety of ways. Children and adults use imagery, art, music, drama and other forms of communicating meaning. The role of language as one of the symbolic tools through which humans make meaning and construct knowledge is discussed, as well as that of art and art making as significant ways of knowing, problem-solving and creating that allow for construction and multiple meanings.

Chapter 7, 'Childhoods and play', reflects play as an integral part of childhood. The MRQECDE (DHET 2017) also highlights 'play-based methodology' as the 'exploratory engagement between the practitioner/educators and young children' (p. 13). This chapter shows the complexity of this phenomenon, the array of meanings attached to it and the different approaches, functions and roles assigned to it within ECCE. 'Playful pedagogy', as described in the practical implications, asks teachers to 'be flexible, interactive and relentlessly responsive, while engaging closely with the learners so that they may guide learners while following play directed by learners' (Gooch 2008:94). Three approaches for integrating play into the curriculum are discussed: the trust-in-play approach, facilitate-play approach and learn-and-teach-through-play approach.

Chapter 8, 'Children, difference and diversity', explores the complex issues of diversity and the ideologies of difference, as relates to multiculturalism, inclusion and the right to be different, through different theories. Challenging the notion of difference as a deficiency, this chapter advances the view that if society is to be enriched by diverse perspectives, experiences, ideas, knowledges and ways of being, education must actively confront racism and discrimination against

children in the minority at both the institutional and individualised levels. Intercultural knowledge is affirmed by children's multiple identities and funds of knowledge. The authors propose that children have abilities, strengths and needs as well as the right to be different.

In Chapter 9, 'Teachers are researchers', we see why teachers should possess basic leadership, management and administrative skills. The chapter proposes that early childhood teachers are (also) researchers and should be able to be thinking teachers. Pedagogical documentation as a tool for creating reflective and democratic pedagogical practice is explained through three key questions: How can pedagogical documentation be a learning process? How do teachers learn to document, and what does pedagogical documentation look like in classrooms? How does pedagogical documentation challenge the dominant discourse?

Chapter 10, 'Children are collaborators of research', proposes that children are active collaborators in and users of assessment. The KPS called '[o]bserving, documenting and assessing to support young children's development' is unpacked in this final chapter, with examples of how pedagogical documentation could serve as a means for teachers to engage in dialogue and negotiation. However, the authors alert the reader to 'schoolification', which has become an epidemic promoting the standardisation of education. This standardisation has been contested by Bipath and Theron (2020) via snapshots of pedagogy-in-participation in ECD centres in South Africa. They argue that we need to make schools children-ready rather than making children school-ready. This final chapter describes children as active

collaborators (pedagogy-in-participation) in assessment, making their cognitive development more effective and purposeful.

## Conclusion

This book is highly recommended for teachers, both novice and experienced. Bloomsbury Publishing has offered to reduce the price of the book for South African students, should lecturers prescribe this book for the programme. It would be disappointing if universities offering the degree or diploma in ECCE do not choose to use this as a prescribed text in the delivery of their programmes. It is a fantastic way to engage preservice students, as the scripted scenarios based on real-life situations would better prepare students for their critically reflective role as prospective teachers and for work integrated learning experiences. This is what we have been calling for in ECCE. Departments of education should also consider buying copies to enhance the understanding of district officials working in this field.

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