

## Book Review

Giugni, M., & Mundine, K. (2010). *Talkin' up and speakin' out: Aboriginal and multicultural voices in early childhood*. Castle Hill: Pademelon Press.

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*Talkin' up and speakin' out: Aboriginal and multicultural voices in early childhood* is a collection of “yarns, stories and narratives” which discuss issues of social justice in early childhood education. Its refreshing method of collating those seldom heard voices of practitioners and activists in early childhood settings, allows a new and, for me, meaningful way of illustrating their point. Not only are the voices of the often ‘othered’ being ‘talked up’ but the physical presentation of these stories to include poems and visual narratives allows a fresh perspective on an important topic. Giugni and Mundine state, that ‘when early childhood curriculum is inclusive, focused on diversity and difference, and politically engaged, then social justice is possible’ (p1), but in this text, they have shown that social justice is possible through the ‘troubling’ of the traditional ways of discussing these complex issues. More than stories of ‘best practice’ the authors of these chapters engage in critical reflections, which expose their challenges and ways of thinking in a frank and powerful way. Their strength lies not only in the telling, but also in the way it challenges the reader to question their own assumptions and un-critiqued prejudices.

Social justice education in early childhood draws from a movement created in the late 1980s in the USA by Derman-Sparks and the Anti-Bias Task Force, and later by Elizabeth Dau in Australia (1995/2001). This book, *Talkin' Up and Speakin' Out*, takes the issues raised by social justice education to the site of early childhood practitioners and creates thought provoking discussions, which are accessible to students, practitioners and academics alike. It is a great springboard for teachers from which to address some of the issues of social justice in the classroom. It challenges our ideas about Aboriginality/whiteness, sexuality/gender, ethnicity/language, ability, refugees, and spirituality/religion. Giugni and Mundine’s aim to ‘talk up’ more than just a chosen few social justice issues is a strength that provides the reader with a sense of some issues that will be important in either their future career, or as current teachers in early childhood environments, schools or higher education. While Giugni and Mundine focus on the field of early childhood, this book is a strong teaching tool for anyone – not just for its content but also for its presentation and ability to physically encompass ‘other’ ways of telling.

The contributing authors of this text come from a variety of educational experiences, ranging from untrained, two-year TAFE trained, university qualified new graduates, and highly experienced early childhood educators. The authors share stories as “examples of everyday practice where [the educators] have struggled and at times succeeded in acting differently to tackle issues of social justice” (p. 1). The editors do not promote the book as an academic text focused on the practical engagement of theories, but instead, as a response to how early childhood educators used the work of

researchers to critically examine their own teaching practice. However, there is a strong incentive here for any teacher to engage with the academic literature in the same way the authors in this book have done, to challenge the dominant paradigm and to 'speak out'.

The editors have allowed ideas of 'inclusion' to move beyond a discussion by dominant western white ways of knowing to "more diverse and democratic forms" (p. 3). The concept of inclusiveness is not new to us as early childhood educators but as Giugni and Mundine point out, the 'what' that others are 'included in to' is rarely critiqued. In order to 'trouble' this idea the editors have placed Aboriginality (and the political and cultural complexity of this term) as the centre premise of the text and critically analysed 'whiteness' in response to this. The other authors' narratives have also linked in to, and critiqued, the hidden dominance of 'whiteness' in early childhood education.

Mundine, in her chapter titled *Flower Girl*, discusses what it is like to be an Aboriginal woman working as a teacher in the dominant culture of education. This chapter takes the rhetoric from policy documents on inclusiveness, with references to Aboriginal peoples and knowledge, and puts it into a powerful and personal context. In particular, the section where she discusses 'Knowledge' pinpointed a gnawing anxiousness I've had around who has the right, or ability, to discuss Aboriginal issues in classrooms. Her astute understanding and exposure of how I, as a non-Aboriginal teacher, have discussed and debated this topic with myself and colleagues, and the way it has limited my teaching, has been helpful at allowing me to readdress the teaching of Aboriginal culture with new information and new perspectives, and armed with more insightful strategies.

In the conclusion Giugni talks about the concept of 'becoming activist' or 'worldly' by "exceeding the limits of the already-known" as an ideal for both children and teachers (p. 279). She uses the idea of 'assemblage' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) in order to remind us of our interconnectedness and our historical place in a timeline of feminists, civil rights activists and the reconceptualising of early childhood movements as a way of inspiring the reader to "continually 'become activist' in our classrooms, in advocacy and activist groups and in our everyday lives" (p. 279). She lists some ways in which to begin thinking about these ideas, but I found the narratives of the various authors in this text, those from the 'everyday' and their response to, not only their work, but also to some current academic literature, an inspiring and achievable aim.

This book helps highlight those issues that are very often hidden from us when we discuss learning and teaching. If we don't stop and critically assess some of the learning we want children to engage with, even if our intentions are admirable, then we risk not allowing children to express all that they are. There is a need for each of us to live a more socially just life and carry these ideas into our professional work. Our work in early childhood settings is most definitely political and the diversity in these settings can be an enriching experience if we take up the challenge proposed by Giugni and Mundine to 'talk up' and 'speak out' and make ourselves just a little bit uncomfortable in the process.

For me, engaging in social justice in my every day life, and in my interactions with the children in my life, is a way of engaging in critical practice with myself, and a means of personal growth, which keeps me engaged as a learner. I still have much to learn, and this book draws me to analyse and engage in a deeper way with some of these topics. This book is important for early childhood teachers, especially those of us who identify with the dominant Australian culture. It calls on us to take responsibility; it turns the lens back towards us and asks us to engage politically with these issues. We ask our children to think creatively, to analyse, to question why. Why don't we ask ourselves these questions? And once we start asking, how can we ethically remain silent?

## References

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