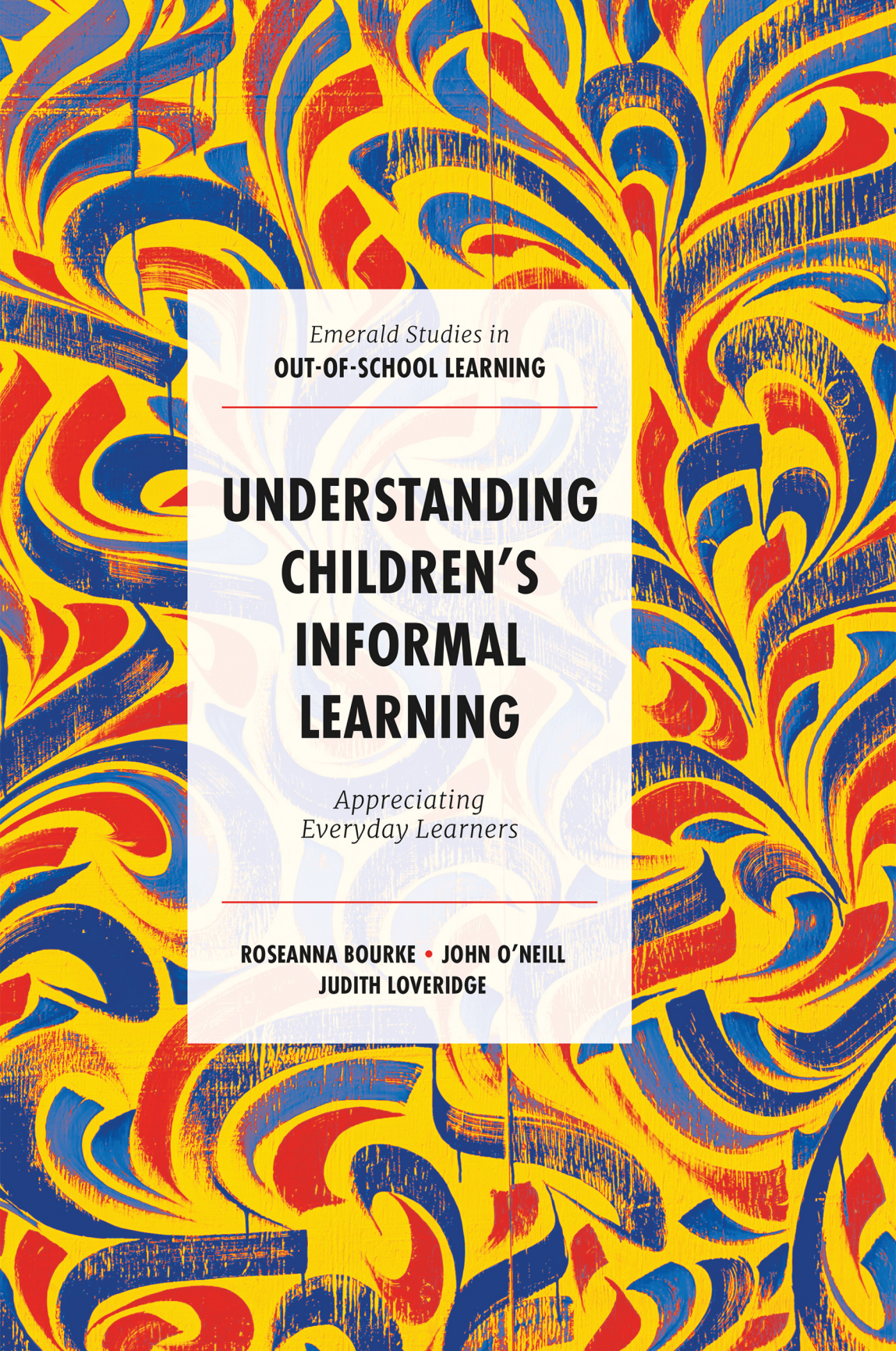
Emerald Studies in
OUT-OF-SCHOOL LEARNING
UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S INFORMAL LEARNING
Appreciating Everyday Learners
ROSEANNA BOURKE • JOHN O'NEILL
JUDITH LOVERIDGE

Understanding Children's Informal Learning

EMERALD STUDIES IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL LEARNING

Series Editors: Professor Tim Jay, University of Nottingham, and Associate Professor Jo Rose, University of Bristol.

Emerald Studies in Out-of-School Learning focuses on the thinking and learning that children engage with outside of school, mainly in primary age groups from 4 to 11 years. Books in the series emphasize the ways in which such out-of-school learning does and does not align with children's classroom learning, and the potential barriers to, and opportunities for, synergy between these two contexts. A key feature of the series is the problematization of out-of-school learning in terms of its alignment (or otherwise) with classroom learning.

This series examines some of the complexities of researching out-of-school learning, and the need for new conceptual and methodological approaches and provides a space for work that looks at both informal and formal learning outside of the classroom and will help to scope and shape this growing discipline.

Understanding Children's Informal Learning: Appreciating Everyday Learners

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Emerald Publishing Limited
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL.

First edition 2024

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80117-275-2 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-80117-274-5 (Online)
ISBN: 978-1-80117-276-9 (Epub)

To our parents: Ellie and John, Sheila and Paddy, Barbara and Spencer

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About the Authors

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Judith Loveridge is an Associate Professor in the School of Education at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. She is particularly interested in the intersection between social and cultural processes and individuals' learning and development and ethical research with children and young people.

Foreword

Dana Mitra, Penn State University

As a researcher of student voice, I define student voice as opportunities to participate in and influence the educational learning and decisions that shape students' lives and the lives of their peers. This book extends student voice to children's voice by broadening the definition of learning to include out-of-school spaces.

This book engages in important bridging of inside and out of school spaces. It expects that part of the learning process in school is to understand what inspires and motivates young people outside of learning spaces. It speaks to the value of child-driven learning and agency in what and how to learn.

The book demonstrates how focusing on efficacious and agentic learning can build curiosity and confidence in young people. This definition of learning is much broader than benchmarks and skillsets and must be measured more deeply and authentically than is possible with standardised testing. A focus on children as learners then shifts a classroom focus from reducing deficits to building on strengths and assets.

Childhood, then, is not about transitioning to adulthood. Instead, it is a time of valuing the talents and gifts of the young person in that moment – a stance taken by the Childhood Studies movement (Hammersley, 2017). Childhood is a time of being rather than becoming. From a stance of childhood as agentic and empowered, schooling can be a bridge to expanding learning occurring in all parts of life rather than solely in the building. The book speaks to the concept of Funds of Knowledge (González et al., 2005) as a way to describe how to broaden the scope of what knowledge is valued in schools and communities.

This book creates an expectation that schooling and teaching should include efforts to listen and learn from children. This perspective shifts the role of young people in school settings. It affirms that the role of children in school and out of school is not only one of voice and participation, as put forward in many child rights documents. Instead, it speaks to the need for young people to influence policies, the curriculum, the pedagogy, and the climate of schools. Lundy (2007) describes this broadening to be about space (opportunities to consider child perspectives); audience (adults to listen to child perspectives); and influence (results and consequences based on the impact of child opinions). This shift in perspective places greater onus on adults to change their relationships with young people and for the process of children's voices to have follow through.

The book intentionally focuses on some of the most historically silenced voices in New Zealand. It focuses on students in socioeconomically challenged communities with high levels of Māori populations. Significant care was given to partnering with Māori and Pacific researchers to understand and interpret data and results. An ethical approach to research in this book included having students engage as co-researchers to help make sense of and interpret data. Researchers also only entered into spaces and places where they had an explicit invitation from young people. They also looked at ways that adults could support and scaffold the youth researcher experience so that the concept of research itself is intergenerational.

Communities that have faced colonization and discrimination tend to have great dissonance between home and school space. I find the concept of Multiple Worlds (Phelan et al., 1998) helpful to describe this boundary crossing of experiences and identities. The idea is similar to code switching – that dissonant contexts require the ability to switch language and identity to feel like one belongs. The book speaks of a similar process in Chapter 8 when it cites the work of Jean Clandinin et al. (2006). It discusses 'ways to live by', explaining that children tell stories about their lives to make sense of what they are experiencing. When shifting contexts no longer fit their story, they experience tension, and conflict and must expend energy and emotion to re-envision the story to fit these new contexts. It also suggests the responsibility of adults to notice when and how children are rewriting their narratives and how to help scaffold these experiences.

The book builds this 'ways to live by' stance by using methodologies that are child-centred and extended over three years of data collection. These methodologies included open-ended interviewing of students to understand their construction of concepts such as learning. Their processes also included student-led data collection techniques such as collage creations, creation of interview protocols with young people, and digital documentaries co-constructed with teachers and students.

I expect that the greatest impact of this study will be the applications of the CRISPA framework. We find that outcomes of student voice research for young people include agency/becoming, belonging/relationships, and competencies/learning how to learn (Mitra, 2004; Mitra & Serriere, 2012). The CRISPA framework adds a much greater emphasis on culture and collective identity. I suspect that this construct increases in importance the greater the dissonance between the home and school. The CRISPA framework also places needed emphasis on affect/emotion.

The contribution of this book is that it stretches the concept of learning and of students to be broader and deeper. It places greater agency in the beliefs and activities of young people. It places great expectations on practitioners and policy makers to broaden their understandings of possibility, and with this possibility, the scope of what wellbeing, knowledge, and action can look like for young people.

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Acknowledgements

Nā tō rourou, nā taku rourou, ka ora ai te iwi
(With your food basket and my food basket the people will thrive)

This whakataukī (proverb) from te ao Māori (the Māori world) evokes community, collaboration, and the interdependence and collective effort involved in bringing the project that underpins this book to fruition.

We are indebted to the many courageous and curious people involved in supporting and working in this project over several years, all of whom shared a love of learning, a willingness to take risks, and a desire to explore the boundaries of what it means to learn in the everyday.

The research was funded through a three-year contestable grant from the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative administered by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. Sally Boyd from the Council provided helpful feedback on our quarterly milestone reports throughout the project. Each grant awarded through the Initiative requires a genuine researcher-practitioner partnership in the design and conduct of the research. The sector partners are acknowledged as co-researchers and named and made visible in reports and publications arising from the research. We are proud to acknowledge Somerset Crescent School, Central Normal School, Cloverlea School, and Te Kura o Takaro as our sector research partners.

This project could not have been started or completed without the energy, enthusiasm, and commitment of our multi-talented research team who worked alongside us at various times over the three years it took to complete the fieldwork: Andrew Jamieson (Pacific Cultural advisor, 2015–2017); Bevan Erueti (Māori Cultural advisor, 2015–2017); Nathan Matthews (Māori Cultural advisor, 2014); Quentin Roper (e-Learning Designer); Claire Rainier (Research Assistant, 2015, working with children); Ella Bourke (Research Assistant, 2016, working with children); Sarika Rona (Research Assistant, 2016, working with children); Dave Cochrane (Videographer, 2016, digital learning documentaries support); Amy Young (Research Assistant, 2016, working with children); Maria Dacre (Teacher Researcher, 2017); Jami Wallace (Teacher Researcher, 2017); and Jan Macfarlane (Kaiwhakarite, Administrator).

This research was made only possible through an extended partnership with schools and teachers. We thank the teachers who invited us into their classrooms, workgroups, and staffrooms to observe, discuss, inquire, share, and celebrate

learning in action in diverse learning areas and spatial arrangements across 12 school terms. We especially acknowledge those teachers who worked with us to try and help their students bring some of their everyday learning strengths into the interactional framework, routines, and relations of the classroom. They were: Mara Kean, Lyn Loveridge, Clare McIlhatton, Raewynne Hill, Maddy Speirs, Mary Burnett, Fiona Jensen, Lisa McFadzean, Matt Barnacott, and Marilyn Miller.

The four school principals in our partner schools understood from our first conversations with them the significance of this research project for their students, families and whānau, participating teachers, and the school staff as a whole. 125 children participated in a collage art-making activity to help us get started on our partnership research journey in early 2015, and other children and teachers later followed in their footsteps. 36 children agreed to be interviewed to help us arrive at our initial understanding of informal and everyday learning as a sociocultural phenomenon.

We continue to be in awe of the 12 children who worked with us over 18 months as they explored and recorded their informal learning using digital tablets and then produced powerful, personal learning documentaries that they shared with their family, whānau, peers, teachers, and the researchers. We also thank those families who invited us into their homes or met with us at the school to talk with them, learn from them, and to explore their child's informal and everyday learning together. We acknowledge with gratitude the feedback and advice we received from the eight children from a non-participating school who acted as our Children's Research Advisory Group in 2016.