

Book Review / Compte rendu

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Vitalizing Vocabulary: Doing Pedagogy and Language in Early Childhood Education by Nicole Land and Christian D. Vintimilla. University of Toronto Press, 2024, 147 pages (Paperback). ISBN 978-1-4875-5939-7, 2024,

Vitalizing Vocabulary: Doing Pedagogy and Language in Early Childhood Education by Nicole Land (Toronto Metropolitan University) and Cristina Vintimilla (York University), examines how language shapes reading, writing, citing, and speaking as active, relational, and pedagogical practices within early childhood education (ECE) in Canada. The authors encourage readers to critically reflect on language and consider how vocabulary shapes pedagogical thinking and practice. In this way, the book highlights language as an active element that influences relationships, knowledge creation, and everyday pedagogical work in early childhood settings.

Although this book is not lengthy, the readers sometimes might struggle with uncommon, yet intentional and strategic vocabulary used in the book. The strategic use of language shapes how pedagogy is conceptualized, positioning reading, writing, and speaking as relational and ethical practices rather than neutral skills. The authors were highly successful in providing provocations within the text, guiding readers to invent or create new meanings through their interpretations. Rather than elaboration with extensively detailed writing, the creative concise language used in the book gave an opportunity of exercise for readers to develop their progression in thinking and comprehending the contents of the book.

The *Vitalizing Vocabulary* segmented the ideas into four main domains of language practice, with the review focusing briefly on each section starting with vocabulary.

VOCABULARY AND GRAMMAR

Land and Vintimilla state that current early childhood education is trapped with a technical language. They describe this emptiness using the phrase “hollow grammars” and talk about possibilities for creating lively, local vocabularies. It reminds readers of the reality that certain terms in the ECE context become widely adopted, while others gradually fade away. The metaphors ‘catch fire’ and ‘embers’ are used to accentuate the meanings of the widespread adoption and gradual decline of terms used in ECE contexts, respectively. The term ‘vocabulary’ is described as a verb rather than a noun, specifically as a ‘doing’ and was supported with the line, “We want to imagine a future where glossary becomes a verb, not a gesture towards a canon” (p.7). The authors proved that this vocabulary becomes provocations so that readers can invent meanings from these provocations. Along with the vocabulary, the technique of brevity in writing also fuelled the invention of new meanings.

Grammar is mentioned as a practice but not a rule. Instead, the book states that grammar is formed through how educators read, write, cite, and speak rather than as a fixed system of linguistic rules. This suggests that grammar is not universal or transferable. The perspectives of the authors align with sociocultural and academic literacies scholars who argue that language conventions are socially situated and shaped by disciplinary practices rather than existing as neutral rules (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). However, it contradicts with traditional linguistic approaches, such as Noam Chomsky's work, which conceptualize grammar as an underlying rule-governed system that is universal across contexts (Chomsky, 1957; Shang & Cui, 2024).

READING AND WRITING

With regard to reading, Land and Vintimilla highlight how fixed and constrained contemporary reading practices have become. The authors talk about the power structures, especially settler colonialism and neoliberalism that have impacted the ways we read today. For instance, reading is meant to be predictable and efficient. This way of reading is in a stark contrast with what authors suggest. The claim that, "different ways of reading shape who we can be as reading subjects and what educational realities we can imagine" (p.24) highlights the transformative potential of reading. Throughout the text, vivid and transcendental vocabulary is employed to evoke the deeper meanings that the authors aim to convey. For example, authors use a word 'contamination' to describe readers opening their minds to others' ideas and say readers become 'porous'.

The authors invite us to see writing not just as a technical skill, but as a deeply intimate and generative process. Writing is portrayed as a way of thinking, wondering, and creating possibilities for pedagogical worlds, rather than simply compiling texts to publish. Land and Vintimilla highlight the idea that writers who write for accessibility are welcomed and accepted but those who write against it are marginalized. This is elaborated with, "It also shapes who and how we can become with our writing" (p.61). In this way, writing is not merely viewed as an expression, but as a practice vested with power.

CITING AND SPEAKING

Vitalizing Vocabulary offers a critical exploration of citational practices in Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Canada. The book reminds readers about the practical realities and influences that shape what is considered valid knowledge. In this regard, authors use their free expressions bravely. The authors remind readers about the true role of citations—to be ethical, relational, and political acts rather than framing as a technical exercise. For instance, authors elaborate that citing is deciding whose ideas we are choosing to think. "Stand on the shoulders of giants" (p.63) is an example for another authors' skillful idea dissemination recalling the power dynamics determining which knowledge is amplified. In summary, the citing section reminds readers about their responsibilities and how things should have changed to improve the current trends in citing.

Authors nicely contrast two aspects in speaking: the agency ("words can liberate", p. 103), and the vulnerability ("words can wound", p. 103). It reminds readers that although we are allowed to speak freely, the acceptance of the speech is determined by the way it is delivered. This means that you are recognized as a legitimate person in the field only if you speak in recognizable ways. The authors discuss restrictions imposed on speech which could make it ignored, labelled as unprofessional, or even be silenced, leaving limited space for alternative ways of speaking that might challenge existing expectations in the field. These bold expressions invite critical thinking and have the potential to support the development of more responsible educators in the field of ECE.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of *Vitalizing Vocabulary* intentionally avoids presenting a traditional summary of the chapters but reminds readers to act to act intentionally and ethically in all language practices. The text serves as a timely and effective resource for professionals working directly in the field of early childhood education. Authors used strategic words to induce the authentic meaning they wanted to convey to the reader. At times, those words were very simple but offe-

red powerful meanings to bold the writing work. Adequate and effective references and citations were used throughout the book.

REFERENCES

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