

Early **Education**

Volume 51 Autumn / Winter 2012



- ICT and special education •
- From a Chinese kindergarten •
- Researching with Rogoff •
- Why men teach in e.c.e. •
- Steiner and RIE •

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'Early Education' is a professional journal for people involved and interested in early childhood education. A partially peer-reviewed journal, it is published twice a year by the School of Education, AUT University.

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Back cover: Tiffany Ye (Cantonese speaker) and Claire Yueran Hua (Mandarin speaker) developed a strong friendship before establishing English as a language in common.

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Photos

Contributors supplied the other photos in this issue. (Thank you!).

Contributions

Contributions of articles and photos are welcome from the early childhood community. Please keep copies of any contributions as we cannot guarantee to return what is sent. Cover photos need to be 'high resolution'.

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Editorial

“It is good to have an end to journey towards; but it is the journey that matters, in the end”.

This quote, by Ernest Hemingway, ties in well with this particular volume of *Early Education*, which by happenstance rather than planning, has wound up being themed around journeys of one sort or another. The issue of not necessarily knowing the end point of the journey, but being open to possibilities on the way is a theme in all of the papers in this volume.

Here in New Zealand, we are beginning yet another journey in the early childhood sector, following the Minister of Education's pre budget speech of 16 May. In this speech, which contained the normal claims about the extraordinary amount of money that is being spent in early childhood, there were also some very new issues for the sector to grapple with. One claim was that the government aimed to get 98% of all children into early childhood education by 2016, which would reinforce the positive parenting that most parents give their children and provide for the most vulnerable of children. Although carefully couched to acknowledge parents, there remains the theme that underpins the 20 free hours philosophy that parents are not the best educators of their children and need early childhood education. Combined with the 98% aim, is the statement that targeting will be the strategy in use for ensuring that vulnerable children, and in particular Māori and Pasifika children, gain access to early childhood education. So what, you might say? How is this different that the previous two budgets? Perhaps nothing, unless you look at the bigger picture statements about the education sector, which will also have effects on the current provision of early childhood in this country.

The first of these major changes concerns moving teacher education to a postgraduate qualification. This makes sense for the government, because a graduate or postgraduate teaching qualification will cost the government only one year of teacher education funding, rather than the three years which are the norm now. There are multiple implications of this move. First, it will mean that students have four years of student debt in order to become an early childhood teacher and that they will be looking for the pay structure that will support repayment of a four year student loan within a reasonable period of time. The government's other announcements about reducing the number of weeks of entitlement to student loan will also have effects on the timeliness in which students complete their degrees. Both issues will make potential students think hard about whether early childhood teaching will provide a good return on their investment.

For early childhood centres, which are faced with trying to meet 80% qualified staff levels, the costs of supporting staff through training will increase. For most centres, this will mean that they move away from supporting students in training and will either appoint newly trained or completely untrained staff, as the best bet financially. Highly qualified and experienced staff will become an expensive choice, as will students who want financial support to train.

For providers of teacher education, the costs are equally high. Many smaller polytechnics and private training providers have invested in early childhood education in recent years and have developed Bachelors' degrees, at considerable expense both financially and personally to the individuals involved. These institutions face major decisions: do they now commit to developing an undergraduate degree in education and a postgraduate teaching qualification with the associated costs for programme development and up-skilling of staffing? In order to teach at postgraduate level in a teacher education programme a minimum of a Master's degree in a relevant discipline is required. Few of these smaller institutions have sufficient staff with higher qualifications to staff such programmes. My prediction is that the face of teacher education will change significantly in the next few years and teacher education will become the province of universities and the larger organisations that can attract and pay staff with postgraduate qualifications. It is also likely that employers will start asking graduates more commonly about where they trained and that ranking of teacher education institutions amongst employers becomes more common.

There are other signs that we need to be wary of too. The Minister has announced that a cap will be put on the number of teachers in training, arguing that the education sector has enough teachers. She stated that the government did not intend to grow the profession; instead they were looking for better quality teaching and better quality professional leadership for the best possible learning outcomes for children. She also announced that the government intended to invest in an appraisal system which would be used for a performance pay system.

These two interrelated issues may have effects in early childhood. The reduction in the number of teacher education places is a result of removing early childhood from the immigration staff skills shortage list and removing the barriers to internationally and primary trained staff being recognised as trained in the early childhood sector for the purposes of funding. It is feasible that we will see fewer

New Zealand trained teachers in future and only those who are capable of succeeding at a postgraduate level.

For those teachers who do gain qualifications and employment, what would a performance appraisal system look like in early childhood? There are warning signs in Hekia Parata's speech about children starting school being ready to learn. I (Claire) have just returned from a journey to Chicago to the International Reading Association conference, which was full of sessions on "common core standards" and associated papers on getting children "ready" for common core standards. Would teachers who have children "ready" against a pre-ordained check list get a performance payment? Although I am a strong advocate of children being given rich opportunities to learn new knowledge and skills in early childhood from highly knowledgeable and capable teachers, I am deeply concerned that we may yet be on the receiving end of reductionist approaches to early childhood education. We need to be prepared to defend excellence and choice in early childhood education in the face of such potential threats. I was quite frankly appalled at what I heard spoken about "pre-K" as it is called in the USA, which seemed to me to be based on highly problematic notions of developmentally appropriate practice, which did not take account of the diverse developmental, social and cultural pathways to children's learning in our multicultural society. We need to be alert to the challenges we may yet face.

In this issue, and related to this topic, Karen Guo and YingHui Qu not only give us an insight not into the life of a Chinese kindergarten, but also how the kindergarten teachers are integrating diverse requirements into their classroom pedagogies, including the complexity of parental expectations that run counter to governmental guidelines to encourage children to play. The authors remind us that one Chinese kindergarten isn't the basis for generalising about ECE in that immense nation, but it helps to challenge stereotypes and to recognise innovative ideas.

Similarly travellers through these shores - such as Niina Rutinen - can reflect on the significance that we can miss in the normalness of what we experience day to day and help us to reflect on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to early childhood in this country. People who break stereotypes help keep our thinking complex. In his consideration of how men become early childhood teachers, Alex Williams identified storylines of early childhood male teachers which stand out as distinct to the storylines of female teachers and suggests some ways to recruit males into the early childhood sector as teachers. Having more than one allegiance can set up a dynamic tension, such as when Jana To describes in her commitment to mothering, to RIE and to Steiner education, creating a personal journey worth reflecting on. Or when Jenny Burke draws on her experience as the mother of a child with cerebral palsy in her work as an early intervention teacher. Similarly two emerging early childhood researchers, Karyn Aspden and Penny Smith, juxtapose their recent postgraduate research journeys using the 'planes of analysis' of Barbara Rogoff,

suggesting possibilities for other early childhood researchers and practitioners to reflect on.

Finally the complexity of innovative practice is considered in Valma Wills' retrospective account of a Ministry-funded ICT project in which a small community crèche pioneered using ICT to build their inclusive community of learners. It is a reminder that while reflective teachers are at the core of our capacity to innovate and to deliver outcomes, supportive systems of professional development can help shape and enable excellent practice to develop further, and to bring those stories into a public arena, such as Early Education.

We are grateful to all these authors bringing their storylines about their respective journeys into this issue. As usual, we conclude this issue with some reviews of recent books that you might wish to read as time permits.

Our next volume will be a themed volume, edited by Professor Carmen Dalli, on the topic of professionalism in early childhood education. It promises to be an interesting volume, from my insider view of proposed contributions.

I hope you continue to enjoy reading *Early Education* and will send us your feedback on the content of the journal or will consider writing something that you would like to share with the sector. Please do not hesitate to contact either me or us, if you would like the guidelines for authors. In the light of increasing managerialism in our sector, it is even more important that the range of voices can be expressed and the importance of diversity and complexity is maintained.

Kia kaha

**Claire McLachlan
and Sue Stover**

Editors

Letter from Finland

Impressions of a Finnish post-doctoral researcher after a tour in New Zealand

Niina Rutanen

In 2011, I had the opportunity to travel to Australia and New Zealand and experience practices and discussions in early childhood education there. After an intensive one-week Infant-Toddler symposium in Australia, I had even more intensive few days in NZ, participating in the Annual General Meeting of OMEP Aotearoa/NZ, the ECE Special Interest Group Research Hui of the NZ Association for research in education, and finally visited rapidly seven kindergartens and childcare centres in Tauranga and Hamilton. Both the speed of my visits and my conversations with people left me quite overwhelmed - and extremely privileged and excited. I am particularly grateful to Jayne White, PhD, senior lecturer at the University of Waikato, who invited me to visit NZ. This letter describes both experiences in NZ, and the seminar I later arranged in Finland, where Professors Eeva Hujala, Kirsti Karila and Jarmo Kinos gave valuable feedback on the basis of their collaboration with researchers from NZ.

The image of the child and the learning environments

The 'Nordic model' of early childhood education and care is allegedly based on a child-centered, holistic approach emphasising participation, democracy, autonomy and freedom (e.g. Jensen, 2009) in a social-democratic welfare state. In Finland, the *National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland* (2004) define the gradual build-up of autonomy as one of the three educational goals, thus acknowledging both the child's need for adult support and the development of autonomy and competence. Having this discursive background as a starting point, it was really thought-provoking to observe some practices in NZ.

In Papamoa kindergarten, I enjoyed the creativity and 'colourfulness' of the learning environment. I had never seen such a centre/kindergarten in Finland, despite the occasional waves of 'Reggio Emilia' influences. A wide generalization is likely to be unjust, but the majority of our spaces seem less 'colourful', aimed to enhance certain specific activities following the daily schedule. The sometimes applied practice of specifically themed, restricted play-areas forces one to rethink the widely applied concepts of 'competent child'

and children's 'agency'. What if we do pay a good deal of attention to safety and prevention of accidents with the cost of restricting children's agency and learning opportunities (c.f. Rockel, 2011)? In Papamoa, children were challenged by the physical environment, particularly outdoors, with woods and bricks to climb on and different material to work with. The 'colourfulness' also rendered children's interests visible as different historical layers of the collective learning environment seen on walls and in folders. The physical environment suggested parallel ongoing projects, and children could return and continue the processes already started. Clearly, similar values, such as 'holistic approach to learning' and 'participation', can be interpreted and materialized very differently in actual practices.

Infant-toddler care

In Finland, children under one are uncommon in care settings outside the home. Paid maternity and parental leave provide support for one parent to stay at home until the children are older. In comparison to other Nordic countries with somewhat similar financial subsidies, Finland has the highest rate of home-care for children under three. This may explain the paucity of infant-toddler care research in Finland. In NZ I was impressed by the quantity and quality of the research in infant-toddler care and education. In practice, I could see examples of centres, such as Greentown Education and Care Centre, where infants were seen as a natural part of the community of learners. With the young ones, the teachers were not left 'without tools' but applied the assessment framework (Carr, 2001) showing that the adults were also *learning from* and *together with* infants-toddlers. The 'practice tools' were also examined critically along with new theoretical-methodological developments in infant-toddler research (e.g. White, 2011).

I was also intrigued by the various themes and concepts discussed in relation to the relationship between the teacher and infant and the qualities in the relationship observable in the places I visited. Instead of simply rejecting or praising the somewhat controversial attachment theory, I witnessed interesting debates about the notions of 'love', 'ethics of care', and 'voices' rarely heard in Finnish discussion.

Research-practice-policy collaboration

I learned about the multiplicity of horizontal and vertical collaboration among researchers, teachers and policymakers in NZ. The researchers and other active discussion partners such as OMEP/NZ seem to have an agenda to pursue Early Childhood Education quality as a priority in the political debates. Important work is being done to enhance the critical debate, such as the ECE Taskforce Report (2011) and a review, both of which highlight the urgency of political and financial investment in infant-toddler education and care (Dalli et al., 2011). To achieve impressive results, financial resources, coordination and other types of support are necessary, as the Centres of Innovation Programme (COI) has noted (Meade, 2011). However, long-term changes in practices, such as the implementation of Te Whariki, obviously take time, as I was reminded in the kindergartens and centres. In that regard, it is alarming how both in Finland and in NZ the development of practices seems to be heavily dependent on short-term projects and funding.

I was left wondering whether the heterogeneity both in the cultural background, within the service structure, among the service providers and in qualification among the professionals in NZ accounts for the more lively debates and production of extensive national resources for practices. The Ministry of Education in NZ/Early Childhood Education web-pages are doing much to support the construction of shared knowledge and description of (examples of) good practices. Compared to NZ, ECE in Finland is more uniformly based on municipal service structure and administration, and curricular guidance is de-centralized, leaving the municipalities and centres free to do local planning. The services rely on the high quality of the ECE professionals' basic training and occasional in-service training. Also, NZ is very different from Finland in emphasis on cultural diversity. Our somewhat homogeneous population sets a completely different starting point for the development of practices compared to NZ, where the Maori cultural heritage is highly valued.

Concluding words

Obviously, I was fortunate to visit some high-quality centres in NZ. During my tour, I also heard about the downsides and criticism of the current situation in NZ. In addition to single topics, two issues emerging in various encounters were the effects of the increasing privatization on the quality of services and the struggle to meet the required level of qualified teachers in services. In spite of scientific evidence long available to support the enhancement of non-profit, community based services (e.g. Mitchell, 2002), the situation did not seem to be improving with the new right-wing ideology promoting private enterprise.

In Finland, ECE is based on a welfare state model with not-for-profit, community based service structure as the basis for offering universal, equal-access services for all. Private services are rare in comparison to the situation outside the Nordic countries. This system has also its weaknesses. Faced with economic pressures, the municipalities are compelled

to increase productivity e.g. by increasing group sizes. Consequently, some attempts to create national regulations are called for. In NZ I encountered similar concerns about large group sizes and regulations governing centre sizes. In relation to professional qualifications, in Finland we share the concern to meet the qualification requirements. However, the recent news has been that new funding is to be allocated to teacher training. In NZ, under the National Government, this challenge has been tackled by relaxing the percentage of formally competent teachers required from 100% to 80%.

All in all, New Zealand was an excellent reminder of the connection of early childhood education to wider cultural and political backgrounds. Journals such as 'Early Education' and 'the First Years' are valuable forums to enrich the discussions on ideologies and values, and support the exchange of experiences and research evidence.

More information about the research:
<https://invisibletoddlerhood.wordpress.com>

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'That's me on the net!'

Children with special rights and ICT

Valma Wills

How can using ICT enable an early childhood centre to more effectively support children with special rights?

This article reports on an action research project lasting three years in which our centre, Meadowood Community Creche, explored the innovative use of Information Communication Technology (ICT), especially private blogs and videos by, for and about children with special rights. Blogs enhanced collaboration between parents, teachers, and support professionals as well as with extended family members.

The centre and the project

Meadowood Community Creche is a not-for-profit early childhood centre located on Auckland's North Shore. With a roll of 125 children, each week we run 10 mixed-ages sessions with a maximum of 25 children attending each session. Most children attend two sessions per week. Ongoing professional learning is highly valued by our management and teachers. It is our view that professional development and self review opportunities are important contributors to continuous centre development, as well as to personal and professional growth.

In 2006 we began a three-year Ministry of Education-funded Early Childhood Education Information and Communication Technologies Professional Learning (ECE ICT PL) programme facilitated by Core Education. A requirement of this programme was that we used a cyclical, participant action research approach to introduce and monitor a self-selected change to our practice (Atweh, Kemmis & Weeks, 1988; McNiff, 2002).

We were inspired by Blomfield School in Whangarei who used digital diaries to record the learning of children with special rights ('Dear diary', 2006). We wondered if we would have strengthened understandings and relationships by documenting children's experiences using videos that could be shared with the child, their families and the specialists involved.

We decided to adopt a case study approach and to pilot the use of first video and later blogging with a small group of children with identified special rights.

Our research question became *"How can we more effectively*

support children with special rights through the use of ICT?"

Where possible, data was gathered from multiple sources (parents/families, specialists, children and teachers) to increase validity (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Inductive analysis (Thomas, 2006) led to the following questions:

- How does partnership between teachers and parents/caregivers support the children's learning?
- How does collaboration with key support people support children and their families?
- How does documentation of children's experiences support self identity for children?

Importantly, the blogs about the children were only used with the consent of parents, who own the blog. When their child leaves our centre, parents have the choice to continue or discontinue the blog. We gained informed written consent from parents to gather the data and report it, consulting with parents when the changes occurred concerning the introduction of blogs as well as videos to document children's learning.

Of the five case studies we undertook for our research, four involved children with an individual plan. An individual plan (IP, also known as IEP or IDP) is a living document developed by those directly involved that provides guidance for a child's learning and development for a defined period (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 45).

In this article, information is shared about the following children – Jaden, Nathan, Kirika, Fynn and Child A. The names used are determined by the parents.

Guiding influences

Before beginning our research, we examined our guiding influences. These included our core values and the importance of inclusion and collaboration. Inclusive education is based upon the notions of rights, fairness and social justice. The Ministry of Education (2000) defines inclusion as: 'A principle, an attitude and a set of processes that affirm the *right* of every child to develop and learn in accordance with the principles and values of Te Whāriki...' (p. 45).

For collaboration to be evident, communication and

coordination are essential (Bruner, 1991 cited in Hendrickson & Omer, 1995). The implication of an inclusive and collaborative educational approach is that the richness of diverse perspectives and views within each learning community has the potential to challenge current practice and point to innovative approaches to practices (Ministry of Education, 2006).

As a teaching team, we identified our core values:

- respect,
- valuing of individual differences,
- relationships,
- fairness and social justice.



Jaden at the computer.

Valuing differences is considered essential for inclusion of children by revealing as much as possible of each child's potential.

After careful deliberation we chose to use the term "special rights" (Smith, 1998; Rinaldi, 2007) to describe children with learning differences, as that term aligns with our values of the image of the child as being competent and as a possessor of rights.

Our story

In the first cycle of research, the teaching team and families of the children gathered evidence of children's learning capabilities through the use of photographs, video and Photo Story 3™ to share with other key people who support and plan for children's learning.

At IP meetings we used a laptop to share photos and video clips with parents. This data was copied onto a disc to create a digital diary – a chronological record of each child's learning. As the success of the diaries as tools for communication became more evident, so did the size of the child's digital diaries.

Teachers decided to learn more about blogging as a way to share these collections with all those involved in the IP process but were initially wary for fear it would compromise our ethical standards. So all teachers completed cybersafety training.

A further action plan was developed whereby parents and the educators worked collaboratively on the creation and publication of each child's private blog. Access was restricted to those invited. Teachers and parents became co-authors of the blog with editing rights to post and/or remove content.

It was crucial for us that the content reflected positive and competent images of the child in context. The intention was that comments we left were constructed in a way that the child – reading them years later – would be comfortable.

The use of video can be an effective tool for assessing areas (such as voice recording, physical movement and strength) that may not be easily documented through still photos and learning stories. As we gathered video footage, it became apparent that using the existing digital cameras, rather than a video camcorder was less obtrusive and more familiar to children. The use of a private blog for each child provided an alternative platform that was readily accessible at any time for viewing and comments. Editing video clips was necessary to create short, relevant footage with an appropriate file size to be uploaded onto the blog site.

Partnership between teachers and parents caregivers

Creating and publishing the children's individual private blogs provided an opportunity for educators and parents/caregivers to work in partnership. Having the material online enabled easy anytime access. This was appreciated by both parents and the support professionals working with the children.

For Kirika, the learning goals formed at an IP meeting included strengthening both her voice her physical capabilities. The videos prompted these comments from her parents:

When I saw how she used the climbing equipment at crèche, I knew when I took her to the park she would be happy. She was very excited, explaining what she was doing over and over to

everyone who watched the video.

Crèche children can't read teachers' comments in portfolio but it is easy for them to see and learn watching themselves on video.

Her early intervention teacher also commented:

I can hear and compare the child's voice. I can view events I might have not seen during a centre visit.

Parents gained confidence and took responsibility for adding learning experiences to the blog. Nathan's mother remarked:

I was very hesitant at first with creating the blog.... imagine my surprise when I took to it like a duck to water and I have not looked back.

And later she said:

I am so excited to get this video uploaded as it shows how quickly he is trying new things and mastering them.

The partnership with Fynn's mother resulted in a deeper understanding of his rare medical condition. She used her technical expertise to inform crèche teachers and the early intervention team, making links on the blog site to relevant information.

Partnerships strengthened teacher awareness of the child and their family interests; as a result, appropriate curriculum experiences could be provided. An example of this was when Jaden began horse riding therapy. His parents posted a photo of Jaden riding 'Sparky' the horse and then teachers added a video of him at the centre, making a wooden horse (also named 'Sparky') at carpentry. Similarly, having seen their son's progress with swinging at the centre, Fynn's parents took him to the park to use the monkey bars.

Parents were able to make informed decisions about assessment and planning. After viewing on video of how he accessed the sandpit in his walking frame, Jaden's dad saw possibilities for improving its functionality of the walker by adding a tray so that Jaden could carry objects while moving from place to place with the walking frame.

Collaboration with key support people

Authentic assessment is complex. It involves recording systematic observations of naturally occurring behaviours of a young child in everyday settings over a long time from multiple perspectives (Carr, 2001). It also reflects firsthand knowledge of those directly involved in the child's life about the child's competencies (Bagnato & Yeh Ho, 2006).

Using the blogs as platforms enabled multiple perspectives of the child's competencies to be evident not only in the centre, but in different contexts. Further more, it enabled collaboration not only with parents, but also with team members from Ministry of Education Special Education, Child Development Service and CCS Disability Action.

The value of video in assessment was endorsed with the comment by a paediatric physiotherapist:

I can focus on the child, not just looking at what he can do, but how he is doing it. Even if I am present with a child, it is very useful to have a session of physiotherapy videoed for review and reflection.

The video can be a powerful tool for clinical assessment, especially gait analysis – the video can be slowed down in playback ... The child can also reflect on their experience and it can be a motivator.

The relevance for assessment in context was noted by Child A's speech language therapist:

I think that the blog page offers a lot of potential for sharing information and monitoring progress i.e. tracking skills in different settings.

An early intervention teacher noted the impact of videos as a teaching tool after a physiotherapy session:

I can see how the physio was working with Nathan when he took some steps for the first time and his education support worker and I can watch how she positions herself.

When Nathan left to attend another early childhood centre, contact continued by using the blog. His prior learning was evident to his new teachers.

Similarly physiotherapists, unable to visit the centre, could view and analyze Jaden using a walker for the first time in a centre setting and again two weeks later to monitor the progress, resulting in dialogue between the physiotherapists about a possible way to increase stability.

Jaden's mother also commented on how the blog increased ongoing communication for all involved:

I would love for this kind of technology to be used in the health environment between his specialists, doctors, therapists, so we can move away from a piecemeal approach to a more collaborative approach. The benefits would be enormous and everyone would be working together more efficiently and effectively.

Self identity

According to Curzon, Selby and Ryba (2000), a developing sense of self may be the most important factor in learning with ICT. When children see themselves as capable learners they will more likely be motivated to develop life skills and knowledge. Memory enhancing images (such as photos and videos) grow a child's sense of history and assist the processes of learning and identity formation (Curtis & Carter, 2008; Rinaldi, 2002).

Teachers received comments from all parents indicating children wanted to watch their video clips repeatedly (either on disc or using the blog), suggesting children were developing a sense of identity. Watching himself on video at home 3 year old Fynn and his parents commented:

He says "Me swing, me stretch". He also tells us "Me monkey oo oo ah ah!" then he claps his hands at the end of the clip because he is so proud of his achievement...

P.S. Sharing the clips with Fynn helps us to reinforce his learning and achievements. The clips also provide motivation for him to talk about what he has been doing at crèche. He is very excited when he talks about what he is doing. It is just fantastic!

Jaden created several stories using Photo Story 3™ for his blog. In re-visiting this visual and auditory documentation, he recalled what was happening and made links to more recent events. Creating his own posting extended his oral and written literacy skills, acknowledging his strengths and reinforcing a positive self-image.

Conclusions and recommendations

Professional learning throughout the project impacted on the confidence and skills of teachers, parents, support professionals and children to explore the meaningful use of ICT. Undertaking action research in the centre involved risk taking and times of uncertainty, as well as opportunity for aspirations, skills, knowledge and understandings to be shared. Respectful relationships and reflection were critical in transforming our practice.

For children with special rights, it is important that there is collaboration and ongoing consultation between teachers, early intervention professionals, parents and the child. Individual private blogs are an extremely valuable way of achieving truly collaborative assessment. Blog postings can capture, in one convenient place, experiences from multiple settings to view the child's learning progress through multiple lenses to support ongoing analysis and planning. Blogs also provide a tool for children to revisit their experiences for reflection and self-assessment. The ongoing access to the child's progress facilitated by the blog enables teams come to IP meetings well informed. Video was a vital link in capturing children's achievements in context.

With rapid advancements in technology, we wonder whether blogging will continue as a viable platform. The use of VoiceThread™, an on-line media album where people can comment in many different ways offers another option to explore.

For those considering using blogs in e.c.e., we have the following recommendations:

- Research the process thoroughly first.
- Consider ethical aspects, such as respect for parent's choice to be involved in blogging, sensitivity and discretion. This includes who and how videos are edited, and who administers the blog both in the present and future.

Trust, relationships and collaboration develop over time. The technology was a tool in the process.

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Especially, I would like to thank the children, parents and families who inspired us and embraced ICT wholeheartedly. Arohanui.

Glossary

Blog: A blog is a personal diary. (See: www.blogger.com).

Cybersafety: the safe and responsible use of the internet and ICT equipment/devices, including mobile phones (see www.netsafe.org.nz)

PhotoStory 3™: a free software download to create a digital slideshow (see – www.microsoft.com).

VoiceThread™, –An online media album to hold media (images, documents and videos) and allowing comments in five different ways (see www.ed.voicethread.com)

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Noticing the clumsy

An opinion piece

Jenny Burke

To work effectively with children diagnosed with special needs, in my opinion, we early childhood teachers need a complex mix of capabilities. We need to be able to recognise the significance of children who are struggling to cope in their surroundings and progress typically alongside their peers. Yet we must recognise that it is only the parents who are in a position to seek professional early intervention and diagnosis. So once we identify a child that is not progressing in a typical way, we have the complexity of assisting parents in achieving the specialist care, attention, support and funding necessary to provide the child with every opportunity to develop to their full potential. We also have the ongoing responsibility for the wellbeing of the children in our centres. It is easier to write this than to do it!

In my experience, typically developing children do not automatically embrace their peers with disabilities and disabled children do not readily observe and adopt the positive and socially acceptable traits demonstrated by the children around them. My experience is that children with learning difficulties often have poor peer relationships so we must learn to not only observe what is happening and what learning is occurring but also who is participating within groups of children.

We must also appreciate that a child with a disability may be included within groups when their disability has little or no effect, but the same child will likely be excluded from

activities where the disability becomes noticeable or when it affects the group performance. Once exclusion is noticed, we must also review the cause; is it due to aggressive behaviour? poor expression? an inability to share or take turns? or a lack of confidence or skills at a particular activity?

Our responsibility is also to engage professionally with parents. The experience of going through my daughter's diagnosis of cerebral palsy acts as a constant reminder of the struggle that parents often encounter. Although it was evident early that her physical development was slower than her peers, initial medical reports were inconclusive, often with an accusation of her parents being overanxious. Her preschool teacher was concerned about frequent falls. When she approached me and advised that we needed to bring forward a specialist appointment, my immediate reaction was to remove my daughter from the centre. At the time, my emotions were extremely volatile. Even after a home visit from the teacher I was not able to explain my feelings, or justify my actions. After the diagnosis of cerebral palsy, and the placing of my daughter into a different centre, I gradually came to terms with the situation.

I now believe that the initial approach from the educator led me to unfairly and irrationally apportion some blame on the teacher and centre. Although it is clear now that this is not the case, the clumsy nature of the teacher-parent interaction remains with me as a lesson in the importance of sensitive professional communication.

From a Chinese kindergarten

A personal journey

Karen Guo with YingHui Qu

How do Chinese kindergarten teachers understand their teaching practices? How are these influenced by cultural, political and economic forces? What do their classrooms look like from the perspective of a Chinese New Zealander?

This paper is based on interviews with Chinese kindergarten teachers in ChangChun City following two days of classroom observation in June 2011. With the guidance of YingHui Qu, an early childhood education (e.c.e.) professional development facilitator, it is written from the perspective of a Chinese émigré, Karen Guo, whose professional knowledge about e.c.e. has been largely constructed in New Zealand over the past ten years as a mother, teacher, postgraduate student and lecturer. YingHui Qu's input included setting up the visit and interviews, providing information about Chinese e.c.e. context, as well as planning the paper and reviewing the text.

Early childhood education in China

Early childhood education in China generally caters for children aged from three to six years; preparation for school is a key purpose (Pan & Liu, 2008). Children younger than three are normally cared for in homes or in the nurseries which are not seen as educational institutions (Zhu & Zhang, 2008).

Cultural influences are diverse. Early childhood education in China is shaped by at least four sometimes conflicting cultural influences: Chinese, Communist, Western and Global cultures (Pan & Liu, 2008; Zhu & Zhang, 2008).

The influence of traditional Chinese culture on e.c.e. has been to direct attention towards the ideal of self-perfection as the key element in children's learning and development (Xu et al., 2005). This ideal focuses on the development of proper behaviours such as self-restraint, emotional regulation, harmonious relationships, and trying hard to pursue knowledge to the best of one's ability (Guo, 2010).

One of the main insights of the Communist culture has been "the systematic transmission of subject matter through teacher-led group instruction of a teacher centred, textbook-focused and classroom based model" (Pan & Liu, 2008, p.36). The contributions of this culture are chiefly in providing general approaches to teaching.

In the past 30 years, the introduction of Western culture has encouraged a new conceptual and practical model for understanding and reflecting on the kindergarten curricular practices in China. In 1989, the Chinese government issued trial guidelines and regulations for kindergarten education which legitimized educational ideologies and related practices about respecting children, active learning, teaching for individual learning needs including play-based teaching and learning.

Since the 1990s globalization has extended interest in e.c.e. (Scholte, 2008; Power, 2006). Central Chinese government issued policies that have led to the formation of a large number of private early childhood educational settings (Pan & Liu, 2008). Between 1990 and 2005, the Chinese government issued more than 30 new legal and regulatory documents on kindergarten and preschool education (Husueh, Tobin & Karasawa, 2004). Among them, the *National Kindergarten Education Guidelines* was the most important because all provincial education bureaus were required to create local kindergarten guidelines in line with the national guidelines. The national guidelines signify a commitment to the rights of children, and the valuing of childhood as an important phase for developing the children's potential for learning and development (Ministry of Education in the People's Republic of China, 2001).

A kindergarten in Changchun

We visited three classrooms in a kindergarten affiliated to a large automobile factory in ChangChun which caters for the children of the workers. The kindergarten consists of 190 children in eight classes, each with about 25 children. Altogether there are 117 staff (including teachers, managers and administrators).

Parents can choose whether to enroll their children in classrooms run by native speakers of English (which costs more) or by Chinese. They can also choose classrooms that are differentiated by the special interests of the teachers. I visited kindergartens that taught in Chinese and which had a special emphasis on art.

Classes were arranged into three levels: senior classes (four to five year olds), and middle classes (three to four year olds) each have two teachers plus a caregiver, while in the junior

classes (2 ½ – three years old), there were two teachers and two caregivers. Teachers were responsible for the learning programmes while the caregiver was responsible for meals, children's hygiene and classroom physical conditions. 80% teachers were university graduates. Some were trained directly in universities and some upgraded their diplomas to degrees. The ages of the teachers ranged from 19 to 45.

At the discretion of their parents, and for an extra fee, during free play times of the normal classes and after the kindergarten operational hours, children could enroll in specialty classes, such as dancing, art, performance, music or literacy.

We used pen and paper to document what we saw in the three classrooms over those two consecutive days. The vignette (see sidebar) was recorded in a classroom and we believe it is a typical scenario of teaching and learning in the kindergarten. It was an example of formal teacher-children interactions. Teacher instructions seemed to be valuable to children and children's cooperative responses were important to the teacher.

The kindergarten was organised around three types of daily routines so three and four year old children were involved in:

- *Structured learning* (such as in the vignette) where teacher instructions guided children in techniques of goal setting, cooperation and competition by showing children how and what to think, how to work in groups, and the processes of working towards goals.
- *Area learning* in which teachers, on the basis of their assessment of children's interests and needs, assign small groups of children to specific curriculum areas, such as art, writing, or dramatic play; and
- *Free play* in which children had choices about what they did, and characterised by games and free exploration.

Structured learning took about half the day, while area learning and free play each took a about quarter.

Observations in the kindergarten classrooms showed many ways of teaching, such as demonstrating, describing, instructing, encouraging, feedback, listening, singing, or suggesting (MacNaughton & Williams, 2009).

From the teachers' perspective

Individual interviews with five teachers were conducted between the authors and each teacher. We spoke in Mandarin. The interviews took place for 30 minutes each and were recorded in paper and pen and transcribed afterwards. We asked the teachers what they thought about the programmes and their practices, and their concerns and expectations.

The teachers told us that development of the learning programmes in the kindergarten drew on four dimensions: Curriculum Guideline of the JiLin province; the kindergarten's own specialty in arts; the ideas of teachers; and the needs of parents.

In the JiLin Curriculum Guideline, learning programmes were thematic and while derived from the National Kindergarten Education Guidelines issued by Ministry



On a display board in the kindergarten is artwork by 4- and 5-year-olds. The upper painting is titled 'Beautiful Home Town'. The one on the left is entitled 'Singing Frogs' with the one next to it called 'Firing Fox'. The bottom picture is called 'Blood Sisters'.

of Education in China, encapsulated the understandings about early childhood curriculum by a group of regional early childhood academics. In JinLin province all children in the same year level are required to have the same learning experiences and equal opportunities for learning. The themes were organized on a monthly basis and reflected these academics' shared vision for children's learning and development at a particular age within their current living contexts. In October, for example, the theme is 'My country' because it is the month of the National Day in China.

For each theme detailed teaching plans were provided including worksheets, teacher instructions, games, art work, and peer cooperation were typical ways of learning. Of particular importance in these programmes was the idea that learning was a holistic concept, therefore all attempts should be made to integrate experiences across domains. For example,

under the theme of 'My country', children explore 'My country' through songs, books, stories, movies, as well as through dance, writing, drawing, reciting poetry, and even talking to parents and then reporting back to class.

Programmes that followed teachers' ideas reflected the benefits of what teachers learned from individual children and were justified by teachers because this enabled children's learning programmes to incorporate meaningful learning opportunities for children.

Involvement of parents in the kindergarten programmes was a strong feature of the teaching practice. Specifically, in each class, there was: 1) a committee of four to five parents who met once or twice a term to discuss issues, concerns and intentions of the parent groups; 2) an interactive blog which teachers shared with parents their weekly teaching plan, children's learning experience and parents provided suggestions and comments; 3) daily mobile phone messaging to each parent informing them of their child's activities; 4) face-to-face talks everyday between teachers and parents during the arrival and departure times; 5) once-a-term home visit of teachers to each child; 6) grouping parents together in a network for a closer sharing of ideas and opinions; 7) two times a year parent-school outing; 8) bi-monthly parenting class on child learning and development, current early childhood issues or parenting strategies.

Underpinning all these strategies was a belief that in today's educational market, it was the relationship between teachers and parents that constituted the success of children's learning and the prosperity of an early childhood business.

The teachers said explicitly that the key of their work was to serve children. "All we do should be for children". An appropriate approach to e.c.e. needed to benefit children. All the teachers told us that they valued both a teacher-directed pedagogy and child-centred learning style. While they believed that it was important that e.c.e. had the component of direct teaching and learning, they also thought that children needed to have enough free play opportunities. One teacher said:

I really feel that early childhood education should have a unique function of both

A vignette

25 three-year-old children sit on chairs in four rows. A teacher sits in the front facing them. Another teacher sits at the back in the children's group. The teacher in the front takes off her shoes and holds one up.

Teacher: *I want all of you to take off your shoes and leave them beside you.*

Children (*all do as the teacher told*).

Teacher: *Who knows how to tie shoelaces?*

(*Six children put their hands up.*)

Teacher: *So the others still cannot do it and have your mum, dad or maybe grandma does it for you, right?*

Children: (*silent but watching the teacher*).

Teacher: *The teacher teaches you to do it now. Watch how I do it. (The teacher puts on a shoe). Now, everyone puts one shoe on.*

Children: (*do as the teacher was demonstrated*).

Teacher: *Now watch. (The teacher puts a foot up high against the wall and demonstrates tying her shoelace. She verbalises each action).*

Children: (*watching attentively*).

Teacher: *Did you get it? Now try yours.*

Children: (*all try to tie their shoelaces*).

Teacher: *those who know how to do it stand up and help out.*

(*Six children leave their seats and go to help the peers who are learning to tie shoelaces. The other teacher joins them too.*)

The teacher (*front*): *All done that?*

Children (*shouting loudly*): *Yes!*

Teacher: *Now, the children sitting on the first and third row turn to the friends behind you. You tie the shoelaces for each other and see who is faster.*

Children (*do as the teacher told. They laugh and talk*).

The two teachers move around the children.

Teacher (*front*): *Now move back to your seats and sit down nicely. I want you to tell me in words the steps of tying shoelace. The first is...*

Children: (*some shout 'make a knot like number 10' because 10 in Chinese is a cross. Some use their hands to indicate. Some laugh. This continues on to the second, third and fourth step.*)

Teacher (*front*): *Good. Can we do it the last time? Now untie your shoelaces and tie them back up again. I will see who is the fastest.*

Children: (*do what they are told to do*).

Teacher (*front calls out names of four children*): *I want you to go to the family area later to practise it. We have things for you to use¹. Tomorrow morning, you tie the shoelaces yourself. Don't have mum do it anymore. I will check. If you still haven't learned it, try again later on. Come to me if you forget. Now, we'll do...*

The class moves on to something else.

Note: Children were told the day before to come to the kindergarten in shoes which had laces.

serving children's playful desires and preparing them for future. I hope that we can do more about this.

There were a number of difficulties involved in making a balance between teaching and free play. The teachers expressed a number of reasons why early childhood programmes in this kindergarten had to be structured, academically driven and teacher directed. These included:

- (1) challenges of the single child family conditions;
- (2) populist demands on early childhood services to prepare children for school;
- (3) the guiding nature of National and Provisional Kindergarten guidelines;
- (4) Chinese tradition that emphasizes the importance of teaching and shaping children's behaviors;
- (5) contemporary social, cultural and economic influences.

Teachers referred to the single child condition of the Chinese society as the 'trigger' of many issues that they encountered in teaching. They described difficulties in accommodating the enthusiasm of Chinese parents who set high demands on their only-child's academic performances and performances in arts, music or physical development. One teacher described Chinese parents as wanting a clear conscience so that they provided children with all learning experiences that were possible. Teachers agreed that although theoretically it was children they served, parents paid for the services so in reality it was parents who they had to serve. Parents' high expectations of children, their lack of understanding of young children's learning characteristics, and their demands for immediate outcomes of children's learning were challenges to teachers in e.c. services. Teachers found themselves constantly struggling with the idea of how to provide the support needed by children within the high expectations of their parents.

As one teacher said:

Early childhood education has been struggling desperately with the expectation of teaching children in a pre-school way. We do not seem to have an independent status in terms of how to operate our programmes but have to make all the considerations of whether what we do fits what happens in schools.

The competition is fierce. If we don't do it in that way, we lose children. To run the business, there is no choice.

The Chinese tradition that emphasised the importance of teaching in learning and of the 'ideal' behaviours of young children also undervalued a child-centred and play-oriented programme. Having been reared in a country that traced its roots to adult power over children, many parents and teachers alike could not help but believe that children's passive learning from teachers was the route to success. Teaching practice, for



This is the entrance to the kindergarten. On the side of the stairway there is space for weekly schedules that parents can view as they enter. Exemplary photos of children's learning are also displayed.

this reason, had a strong teacher-directed feature. The teachers assumed that the cultural make-up of China added particular complexity to education reforms in early childhood sectors.

This is at variance with the National Kindergarten Guidelines which placed strong emphasis on a play-oriented and child-centred approach to education. Given that the kindergarten was operated in the form of a business, parents' ideas had to be given more weight than what was stated in the guidelines.

In addition, media and commercial promotions of training opportunities for young children have foregrounded children's acquisition early knowledge and skills. Visualising children as in a race towards success, parents are encouraged: "Do not let young children lose on the starting line". Teachers saw this pressure for early academic achieve as stymieing their own efforts.

Reflections and conclusions

Education in this kindergarten sits within a wider economic, sociocultural and educational context for preparing children to become competitive citizens, aligned with parent's aspirations, western educational orientation, national and regional policies, contested professional status of teachers, and a need to operate the kindergarten business.

Having experienced the educational system in China themselves, both authors could tell the reason why learning programmes in this kindergarten had more structures. For a society such as China that values academic success and teacher knowledge, there is of course a powerful argument for running e.c.e. in a way that is academically focused and teacher directed.

However, what surprised Karen was that given the vigorous growth in child-centred education in China, and that teachers valued this pedagogical approach, children in the kindergarten experienced a small portion of child-centred programmes. Apparently, there was a tension between the educational values of teachers and their teaching practices. The authors

understood that the privileging of business operation over other considerations resulted in a strong preoccupation of the teachers with meeting the populist demands on preparing children for school. For this reason, learning experiences of the children in this kindergarten had for the most part abandoned the needs of the children in favour of the ideas of their parents.

What nicely impressed Karen was the active involvement of parents in the programmes of the kindergarten as Chinese tradition set a clear boundary between home teaching and school education. The general relationship between teachers and parents in Chinese culture is that parents educated children in their families and they left education in schools with teachers to organize. In line with the Chinese culture, Karen expected parents to be quiet and reticent in the kindergarten environment. Therefore, the active participation of parents was a remarkable discovery. What the authors found is that the many opportunities that teachers provided to parents were important forces that motivated parents to participate. In addition, in the current situation in which most families have only one child, helping their only-child to win on the 'starting line' has become a parental priority. Parental expectation for an early acquisition of knowledge and the importance for teachers to meet parental expectations in order to run the kindergarten business explain why teachers could not incorporate many play activities in the programmes.

From a comparative education perspective, the authors would like to make the following point: there are influences from a number of contexts in Chinese society in the accounts presented in this paper of how a kindergarten in China provided children with early childhood experiences, and this is the same as in New Zealand where early childhood education is similarly influenced by multiple contexts of the society. Therefore, it is important that teachers in New Zealand work out the implications of the experiences in this Chinese kindergarten for their teaching practice and programmes.

It is impossible that what we have described in this kindergarten could be immediately applicable to the early childhood context in New Zealand. For this reason, it is also not appropriate to make judgments about the e.c.e. in another context.

The experience of looking into a Chinese kindergarten through Karen's New Zealand experiences has had the effect on bringing into the open an important cross-national finding: the key issue that should come up in educational conversations is diversity. There are values in any educational approach. For example, the ways that teachers used to involve parents in this Chinese kindergarten could help teachers in New Zealand with their relationships with parents.

This study thus leads us to think that e.c.e. could be more effective if there is more sharing of information and teaching practices from across the world.

One note of caution is that the information presented in this paper comes only from one kindergarten in China. Given the vast variability in China in many dimensions, such as people's ideologies, or contextually specific practices,

this paper only reports one single case in a particular early childhood educational context. It is beyond the scope of the paper to present detailed and integrated discussions of early childhood education in China.

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Researching with Rogoff

Our use of the ‘planes of analysis’ in educational research

Karyn Aspden & Penny Smith

Barbara Rogoff is an innovative US educational academic and thinker whose anthropological research has included considering how children learn in societies which do not have schools. In 1998 she proposed that learning occurs within the complex interplay of predictable contextual factors, which she called ‘planes’: the subjective (personal), the interpersonal and the institutional (community).

In the context of e.c.e. research, Rogoff’s (1998) planes of analysis provide a useful and exciting tool for teachers and researchers. A growing body of educational research is emerging that is grounded in this perspective (for example Fler, 2009; Fler and Richardson, 2004). Recent New Zealand studies have used her planes of analysis to frame and analyse complex investigations of early childhood education (e.c.e.) (White, Ellis, O’Malley, Rockel, Stover & Toso, 2009; Bary et al., 2008).

In this paper, we share our experiences of how we have adopted the planes of analysis as a methodological and analytical framework in two different research projects: Karyn Aspden’s (in-progress) PhD investigation of the assessment of practicum in initial teacher education, and Penny Smith’s (2010) case study which explored how children worked collaboratively and as peer tutors during play.

We argue that these planes of analysis provide a valuable tool to guide both the construction of the research protocol and the later analysis and discussion of the data gathered, through the opportunity to foreground different elements. We suggest that educational research which considers interpersonal, intrapersonal and institutional perspectives can offer a rich understanding of the research focus.

Sociocultural-historical ideas and their relationship to educational research

The work of Lev Vygotsky has had a major impact on what we know about how learning occurs in an education setting. Vygotsky’s (1978) cultural historical theory proposes a participation model of learning in which the internalisation of knowledge is derived through social interaction. As Vygotsky (1978) explained: “Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes

that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers” (p. 90). This acknowledgement of the role of the social context in learning requires an approach to educational research which studies the means by which participants engage with others in the activities of their community. It is this process of participation in social endeavour which is the focus of Vygotsky’s theory (Rogoff, 1995).

The ideas of Barbara Rogoff (1984, 1995, 1998) have contributed to post-Vygotskian debate and are significant in contemporary understandings of socio-cultural learning models. Rogoff (1995) states that research from within a developmental psychology paradigm has limited attention to either the environment or the individual as separate entities, rather than considering the relationship between each factor. She further argues (Rogoff, 1984) that the content and context of intellectual activity must be attended to in order to fully understand thought processes. She strongly emphasises the importance of understanding the context within which cognitive processes occur. Rogoff (1998) identifies a key premise within sociocultural theories whereby individual, interpersonal and cultural processes are not independent entities, rather they are connected. Therefore, analysis of learning must consider individual, social and cultural processes. Rogoff (1998) proposes the use of differing planes of observation and analysis to consider learning through three different foci, namely:

- individuals,
- their interactions with others, and
- the institutional or community context in which learning occurs.

Any one of these can be brought to the foreground, while the others are present in the background. In the discussion that follows, we consider our use of the intrapersonal, interpersonal and institutional planes in the design and analysis of our research.

Using the planes to develop a research design

Considering the assessment of practicum

Karyn Aspden

My doctoral research (a current work in progress!) focuses on examining the way in which student teachers are assessed when on practicum. As a teacher educator with a leadership role in the area of practicum over a number of years, I was deeply interested in the complexity of experiences in relation to this specific assessment process. I often felt that practicum was somehow seen as straightforward in what I read, but highly complex when discussed around the table with colleagues on return from visiting. I felt that there were areas of this assessment process that were openly discussed, and other areas that we tended to shy away from, mainly in relation to subjectivity and potential for bias. This led to the formation of my doctoral topic, but all along, I wrestled with the challenge of how my research could capture and effectively consider the very complexity of the practicum assessment process. Much of the research I read in developing my initial literature review seemed to only consider practicum from the perspective of one participant. While this was certainly valuable, I wanted to develop a study that gained the perspective of all who were involved, as well as considering the significance of the relationships between the participants.

I came to believe that the practicum is a socially constructed event, therefore the social-constructivist paradigm appeared the most cohesive and appropriate framework to guide the research. Above all, from the inception of the study, the most important factor for me was a desire to gather the stories, experiences, and opinions of the critical participants in the practicum experience. I wanted to value the contribution of student teachers, associate teachers and teacher educators and allow each the opportunity to express their standpoint – to give voice to what the assessment of practicum really meant to them. I strongly believed that these stories did not exist in isolation, but would be reflective of the highly social nature of practicum, in which key participants are required to engage with each other at different levels. It was also apparent that practicum exists within an institutional culture and is bound in many ways by the expectations and requirements of this culture.

It was quite a while into my research journey, as my supervisors were encouraging me to ground my work in a theoretical perspective, that my light-bulb moment came. It was thanks to a colleague who suggested I relook at the work of Barbara Rogoff. As I read through her conceptualisation of the planes (or focus) of analysis, it seemed as though the puzzle pieces came together. Here was an approach that allowed me to consider the individual

experiences of the participants (intra-personal plane), the relationships and interactions between them (inter-personal plane), as well as the wider context that determined the parameters of the assessment experience (institutional/cultural plane). These seemed to encompass the very intent of what I was hoping to achieve.

As per Rogoff's contention, one plane of analysis is not considered more or less important within this study. Each plane is equally influential – in considering them separately it is only to foreground one plane in the moment, so that it may be given due consideration. Bringing one element into focus is not to suggest that it can be effectively considered in isolation. The practicum experience is highly complex and multi-faceted, with intricate connections of relationships and practices. However, while it is important to see the reality of practicum as a complex whole, it is also this very complexity that requires that it be unpacked into pieces that are manageable enough to allow some inferences and understanding to be gathered.

Each plane is equally influential – in considering them separately it is only to foreground one plane in the moment, so that it may be given due consideration.

In her book *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*, Rogoff states that her overarching orienting concept is that “humans develop through their changing participation in the socio-cultural activities of their communities, which also change” (2003, p.11). Community can be defined in terms of different orienting factors such as ethnicity, religion, location, but the common feature must be “some common and continuing organisation, values, understanding, history and practices” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 80). Communities require shared communication, stability of involvement, a degree of commitment, mutual goal accomplishment and shared (sometimes contested) meaning (Rogoff, 2003). All of these features are evident in some way to varying degrees in the practicum relationship. For a period of time (which varies according to institutional requirements) the student teacher, associate teacher and teacher educator come together to achieve a mutual goal, requiring collaboration, communication and a degree of trust and openness in the giving and receiving of feedback. In adopting (and adapting) Rogoff's work with the context of the study, the practicum becomes conceptualised as a site of professional and personal learning, and the practicum relationships as a functioning community of practice. When viewed this way, the principles that Rogoff applies to human development became readily transferable to the practicum context.

From this theoretical foundation I was then able to consider how my research design, and in particular, data

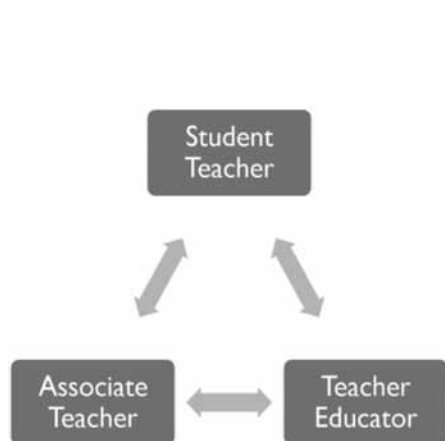


Figure: 1.1

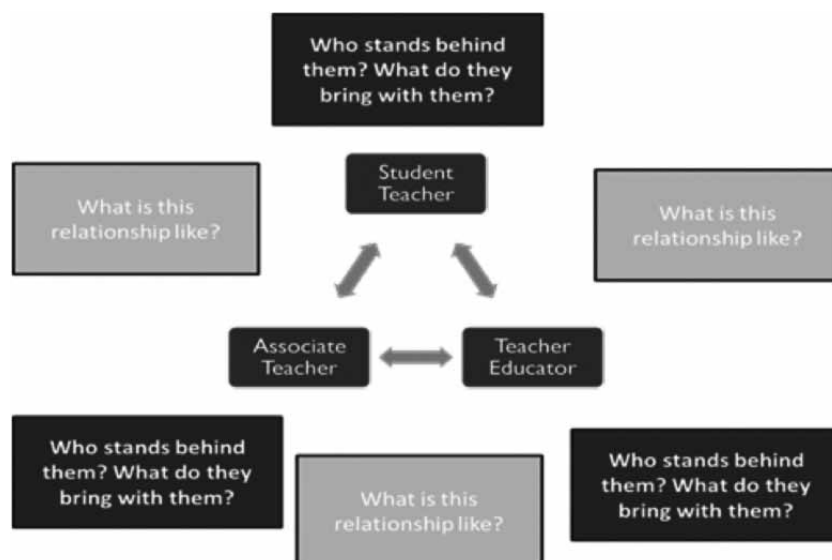


Figure: 1.2

Karyn: The above diagrams reflect my early thinking. It seemed to me that practicum, and in particular the assessment process, was typically viewed from the perspective of a simple triad – Associate Teacher, Student and Teacher Educator (Figure 1.1). However, the model that I had seen in practice was much more influenced by what each participant brought to the practicum and the relationships between the participants that then emerged (Figure 1.2).

collection could be shaped to attend to the three planes. This approach gave me the freedom to allow one plane to be foregrounded at a time, thereby addressing some of the challenges of complexity that I was facing. This meant I was able to look at the assessment process in different ways at different times, and then step back to look at the data as a whole at the completion of the process. I therefore developed a research design with three distinct phases, each one specifically targeted to a specific plane of analysis. Phase one involves conducting personal interviews with 'key informants' in the represented teacher education institutions. These interviews are designed to gather data as to the institutional beliefs and practices in relation to the assessment of practicum. The interviews will explore the rationale behind institutional decision-making on both a philosophical and practical level. The second phase of the study utilises a large scale survey of student teachers, associate teachers and teacher educators to garner self-reports about beliefs, practices and experiences related to the assessment of practicum. This phase reflects the individual plane of Rogoff's theory. The final phase of the study involves the use of case studies, to provide data in relation to the interpersonal plane. The purpose of these case studies is to see the interplay between the participants of the practicum and to consider the way in which the relationships between the student teacher, associate teacher and teacher educator are manifest in the realities of assessment. It is my hope that each phase of the research will yield valuable information in its own right, but that the richness and strength of the study will emerge when data from each of the three phases is considered together, to provide a broader understanding of practicum assessment on multiple levels. It is anticipated that the planes of analysis will also be used as the guiding framework for data analysis, as was the case for my colleague, Penny Smith.

Using the planes to analysis data

The role of peers in children's learning

Penny Smith

I conducted a case study of peer learning in two New Zealand early childhood settings (Smith, 2010) which explored how children worked together collaboratively and as peer tutors as they engaged in play; the role of the environment was an additional focus. The data collection methods comprised of observations of the children as they played, conversations with the children about their roles as peer tutors and observations and interviews with the teachers. By talking with and observing the children and teachers, the intent was to investigate the nature of peer learning from a number of perspectives. This triangulation also ensured confidence in the findings and validation of the data in terms of accuracy and authenticity (Denscombe, 2007).

The context in which the observations took place contained a multitude of interactions between teachers and children and children and their peers. In addition, the environment was not static but changed in response to children's ideas about their play. When completing the observations of the children's play, I recorded as many instances of peer collaboration and peer tutoring as possible. Notes about the environment were also kept in order to

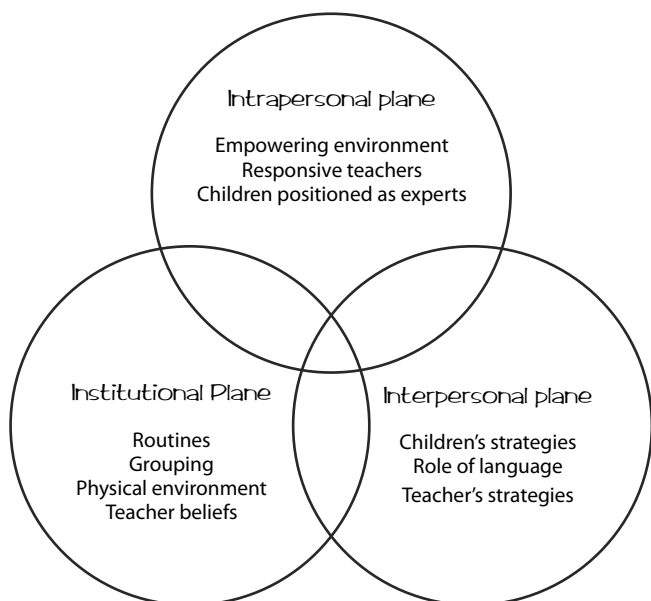


Figure 1: Adapted from Rogoff's (1998) planes of analysis

generate rich data of the setting in all its complexities. At the end of the data collection phase, I had to make critical decisions about what I was going to do with the complex array of notes and interview transcripts. The use of a case study approach within an educational setting resulted in data which was rich in complexity.

Initially, data analysis seemed a simple task. In coding the data, emerging patterns identified a number of factors which influenced opportunities for children to work collaboratively and to share their knowledge and expertise with their peers. However, it became apparent that an analysis that went beyond identifying patterns and themes would be necessary if I was to interpret the data in a meaningful way that would be useful to teachers in the field. Effective research leads us to ask the question 'so what?' – What is the significance of what we have discovered? I wrestled with this question for some time and it was a conversation with my supervisor that led me to the decision to use Rogoff's (1998) planes of analysis to explore the relationship between the main themes and patterns and therefore answer the question 'so what?'

Undertaking further analysis of the data using Rogoff's (1998) three planes of analysis enabled the data to be interpreted through three different lenses, allowing focus on the participation of individual children (the intrapersonal plane), a focus on the interaction between the child and others (the interpersonal plane) and a focus on the surrounding learning environment (the institutional plane). Analysis included the participation of the teachers across the three planes. As each plane was applied to the data, a lens was created which enabled particular factors to be highlighted while the other aspects of the data which were just as significant, remained in the background. The different planes within sociocultural activity – the institutional, the interpersonal and the intrapersonal planes – make up a whole unit of analysis, in which one plane is foregrounded

while the other planes remain in the background; none exist separately. This unit of analysis highlighted the impact of one plane on another and was useful for understanding the complexities of peer learning. Use of the planes enabled an examination of the children's learning on different levels.

Within this analysis of the institutional plane, the important role that the centre routines played in supporting and sustaining opportunities for peer tutoring and collaborative learning comes into focus. Other factors such as how children were grouped, the organisation of the physical environment and the teachers' beliefs about their role in children's learning were also identified as impacting on opportunities for peer tutoring. When the lens was applied to the interpersonal plane, the strategies that the children adopted, the language they used and the strategies used by teachers to support peer tutoring and collaborative play were able to be identified. Finally, highlighting the intrapersonal plane allowed the children's experiences to be fore-grounded while the other factors which impacted on their experiences with their peers remained in the background. In placing a lens on the intrapersonal plane, the presence of responsive teachers, the provision of an empowering environment and the positioning of children as experts were all highlighted as being critical for children to be effective peer tutors. The use of Rogoff's (1998) planes allowed these three aspects of peer learning to be elucidated, and in doing so conclusions could be drawn about teacher's practice in relation to maximising children's experiences with their peers.

Effective research leads us to ask the question 'so what?' – What is the significance of what we have discovered?

The following Venn diagrams illustrates the relationship between each plane of analysis and pinpoints the critical factors which impacted on peer learning.

The use of Rogoff's (1998) planes to analyse the data in this case study was useful for two reasons. Firstly, it allowed the data to be viewed from multiple perspectives which resulted in a greater understanding of the complex nature of peer learning. Secondly, contextual factors were highlighted in the institutional plane. Consideration of this wider context meant that the impact of the centre routines, for example, was revealed; these contextual factors may not have been evident if this form of analysis had not been selected. Adopting Rogoff's (1998) planes of analysis greatly enhanced understanding of how children could be supported and empowered to direct their own learning alongside their peers.

Conclusion: Implications for educational research

In sharing our research journeys we are advocating for the use of Rogoff's work as a valuable framework for other educational researchers. The principles that underpin Rogoff's approach appear to resonate with those doing research in educational settings, particularly when there is a strong desire to gain an in-depth understanding of a situation in context (for example, White, et al., 2009; Jordan et al., 2008; Sewell, 2006; Fler & Richardson, 2004). This approach sits well within the current context of education, particularly in relation to teachers' growing role in self-review and practitioner research (Cahill, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2007).

We believe that the greatest benefit in applying Rogoff's planes of analysis to educational research is that it allows different elements of the research focus to be foregrounded at different times, whilst still acknowledging the contextual setting, a common feature of both our studies. The breadth of this approach also allows for multiple data gathering methods to be adopted, thereby accommodating the complexity of educational research. Furthermore, this approach supports triangulation of data (Denscombe, 2007) which reinforces confidence in the validity of the research findings. The multiple perspectives that the planes offer allow the researcher to determine if findings are cohesive across the data gathered; these points of similarity and difference then enhance the depth of analysis.

Rogoff establishes the foundational argument that it is not possible to effectively understand learning and development if it is isolated from the cultural context in which it occurs. This premise readily translates to educational research, arguing that it is not possible to fully understand a situation without discovering the contextual and cultural factors that are significant for each of the participants involved. Rogoff's planes of analysis provide a valuable tool to guide both the construction of the research protocol and the later analysis and discussion of the data gathered.

In advocating for the use of Rogoff's planes as a research tool, we acknowledge that there are challenges to be addressed. Primarily, it is essential that the researcher utilise this approach in a wise manner in order to ensure the rigor of the research, considering issues of validity and reliability. Researchers must also face the challenge of determining appropriate data gathering methods to foreground each of the planes effectively. These challenges required thoughtful resolution. However, our journey has shown us the richness and flexibility that this approach can offer, and has allowed our research to honour and reflect the complexity of the research settings that we sought to explore.

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Accentuating the positive

Men in early childhood education

Alex Williams

Early childhood education (ECE) continues to be one of the most gendered professions in Aotearoa with recent statistics indicating that approximately one percent of all teachers working in our ECE centres are men (Ministry of Education, 2010). Although statistics on this issue appear to have fluctuated slightly over the last ten years, the overarching picture is one whereby men are largely underrepresented in the early childhood teaching sector. Recent research has illuminated the complex raft of social, economic, political and personal factors that may collectively help to create and perpetuate the gendering of the ECE sector (Farquhar, 1997, 1999, 2007; MacNaughton & Newman, 2001; Peeters, 2007; Sumsion, 2005). However there is a scarcity of local research that highlights the many positive factors that might attract men into the world of ECE. Rather than building on existing research that ponders the absence of male ECE teachers, the present study highlights the many aspects of ECE that might appeal to male teachers.

Facing the facts

Although, as suggested by Farquhar (1997), the absence of male teachers in our ECE centres can often be evidenced by visiting an 'average' ECE setting in Aotearoa, it is the statistics that create a clearer picture. On noting the absence of male educators during a visit to an ECE setting, the casual observer may assume that although no men appear to teach in one particular setting, they will surely be found in many other ECE centres. Unfortunately further visits to these 'other' centres are likely to produce the same results, where the "invisible man" (Williams, 2009, p. 33) in ECE remains, to all intents and purposes, largely 'invisible'. The extent of this issue is evidenced when statistics on the gender balance of the ECE workforce consistently show that men are very under represented. Farquhar (2007) indicates that in 1992 men made up just 2.34 percent of all early childhood teachers and although this figure may seem rather small, the situation actually worsened in the period between 1992 and 2005 with less than one percent (0.96%) of early childhood teachers being men by 2005 (Farquhar, 2007).

So why so few men?

Peeters (2007) and Sumsion (2005) suggest that the absence of men in ECE is a historically long standing issue that is in no way exclusive to the Aotearoa context. Sumsion (2000) notes that the highly gendered nature of contemporary early childhood education merely reflects a historical situation where the actual activities, tasks and work of the early childhood educator mirrored traditional stereotypes of men's and women's roles. According to MacNaughton and Newman (2001) such gender roles are deeply embedded in the structure of our society and the gendered nature of the early childhood workforce, and how society perceives their work, is best considered within a wider social view. Sumsion (2000) further adds to this debate by suggesting that nurturing and caring for young children is not only central to the early childhood educator's role, but that such activities have also long been associated with notions of 'women's work' which again reflect wider social norms and stereotypical understandings of gender roles. According to Peeters (2007), "Childcare is seen as women's work, something that women naturally do and are intrinsically better at." (p. 15).

Such a view encapsulates an historical stereotype whose legacy can still be seen in the gender imbalance of the contemporary ECE sector where men continue to be a minority. As discussed by Peeters (2007), there continues to be a widespread belief that men's ability to operate effectively in the early childhood teaching environment is somehow inferior to that of women. Cameron, Moss and Owen (1999) suggest that the shortage of men in ECE is not easily attributed to tangible professional qualities of the male or female teacher but rather lies in outdated notions of what constitutes men's and women's work. MacNaughton and Newman (2001) further argue, "why don't men work in early childhood? Because it's 'women's work' or, more importantly, it's not men's work" (p. 152).

Both Cameron et al. (1999) and Peeters (2007) agree that the pervasive view of early childhood education as an inherently women's career is a key factor hindering men's uptake of the many opportunities present in the sector. Farquhar (1997) identifies factors significant in contributing to low male representation in ECE, including relatively low

pay rates, false child abuse accusations and the low status often associated with the sector. However Farquhar also indicates that the social perception of ECE as women's work is pervasive and has helped to discourage men from entering the sector, both historically and in the contemporary context. It is this unhelpful perception and its associated discourse that needs to be challenged and deconstructed via the deliberate repositioning of ECE as a viable career option for men.

Small steps forwards

Although the statistics paint a potentially concerning (but accurate) picture of male involvement in ECE, it does appear that the seriousness of this situation has finally prompted some long overdue attention. Farquhar (2007) suggested that it was not until as late as 2006 that various interested agencies began planning for a concerted push to start addressing the gender imbalance in the ECE profession in Aotearoa. This initiative involved a diverse range of groups including the Early Childhood Council, Ministry of Education, pre-service teacher education providers and representatives from the ECE teaching sector itself. The Ministry of Education recruitment division, TeachNZ, has started actively targeting men in its ECE recruitment and promotional material. According to Robertson and Le Quesne (2007), TeachNZ has a variety of paper, audio visual and web based recruitment orientated resources that are specifically targeting male ECE recruits.

Although both Ministry of Education and TeachNZ representatives acknowledge "We have made a small start..." (Robertson & Le Quesne, 2007, p. 35), it is important to recognise that positive changes are now underway. More recent statistical data (i.e. post 2005) suggests improvement as the percentage of males is increasing. In 2006 the percentage of male ECE teachers rose to 0.98%, 2007 = 1.1%, 2008 = 1.3% and finally in 2009 the percentage rose to just over 1.5% (Ministry of Education, 2010). Arguably these statistics show a gentle but upwards trend in male ECE teachers, recognising that in the years between 2005 and 2009 the percentage of males in the ECE workforce in fact rose over 50 percent (Ministry of Education, 2010; Farquhar, 2007).

It is important to also recognise the initiatives that have emerged from within the ECE sector itself. Of particular note is the development of an Aotearoa-based network established by men currently working and training in the ECE field to support and advocate for greater male involvement in ECE. Pilburn (2010), in his discussion of local and international initiatives to promote ECE to men, is careful to acknowledge the work of the Aotearoa network "The National Network for Men in Early Childhood Education (EC-MENz) which interacts nationally and internationally with men in ECE and their allies and supports research, promotions, campaigns, and initiatives to increase the numbers of men in ECE. The EC-MENz network holds an annual summit where male early childhood teachers, supporters and other interested groups and individuals formally meet to share experiences,

stories and discuss issues facing men in a largely feminised profession. Janairo, Holm, Jordan and Wright (2010) suggest that the deliberate advocacy for male early childhood teachers can help attract more men to the sector and it is likely that the positive celebration of men in ECE that underpins the EC-MENz network has played some part in the recent gradual increase in male representation in the Aotearoa ECE sector.

"From the very start I was fascinated by the idea that I could have heaps of fun in the kindy...but at the same time be doing a really important job... yeah helping the kids learn while playing..." (Brian).

Methods

A small scale qualitative research study was designed to examine factors that motivate men to enter a profession that is currently so lacking in male representation. Semi structured interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2005) were conducted, employing a range of questions designed to encourage participants to openly articulate what attracted them to the ECE sector as a possible career option. Although a pre-developed interview schedule was used to guide the interviews, the questions were kept deliberately broad and open ended to allow the participants to express ideas that may not have emerged through more structured interviewing approaches (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The questions were clustered under the following three key areas of interest:

- Background information
- Factors informing participants' decision to work in ECE
- Experiences in ECE

During the initial stages of the study it became apparent that locating male ECE teachers may be problematic given their relative scarcity. Initial efforts to recruit male participants by contacting randomly selected Auckland based ECE centres proved unsuccessful as it was clear that the majority of these centres had no men on their teaching staff. A decision was made to contact the Auckland branch of the EC-MEMz network in order to recruit male participants. No formal selection process was utilised as there was a very limited pool of men from which to select the sample, except that the men needed to be practicing teachers. Of the 13 men who were initially invited to participate in the study, 3 declined and 10 opted to be involved.

Clearly 10 participants is a relatively small sample of the total number of male teachers currently employed in ECE

in the Auckland region. However, Bryman (2008) argues that small sample groups can provide useful insights into the area of study. The 10 participants came from a diverse range of ECE settings, socioeconomic groups, prior work experiences, family statuses and, to a lesser degree, ethnic backgrounds. The interviewees ranged in age from their early twenties through to nearly sixty years of age and experience ranged from two to thirty years. The average period of experience was just over 12.5 years.

As part of ethical approval for the study, all participants' names and centre details have been changed. Participants were invited to select the location where they would prefer to be interviewed and most case the participants' place of employment (i.e. an ECE centre) was the preferred location. All interviews were electronically recorded, transcribed and the transcripts were subsequently analysed using what Bryman (2008) describes as a 'thematic analysis' approach where common themes in the interview data were identified and explored. Using this type of analysis, it quickly became apparent that there were indeed a number of themes common to most, and sometimes all, of the ten men interviewed in the study. These themes are explored in the next sections.

"...I've spent my working life, you know, just chasing the dollar and I want to be able to look back and say wow I've done something important, I've done something for the community that I can be proud of..." (Roger).

A second career choice

A theme that was common to all ten participants was that they had all come to ECE as a second or subsequent career choice. For many of the men, their decision to join the ECE workforce was sparked by a change in their lives that provided them with opportunities to reflect and re-evaluate their current and future career options. For some, such as John, it was a major workplace accident and subsequent recovery period that allowed him an opportunity to reflect upon the rewards and wider significance of his present career and to consider other options. *"I had a serious accident and I nearly died and it kind of changed my life around and I realised I could do more...early childhood teaching just seemed right for me at that stage in my life"* (John). Brian's story was similar in that a failed business venture left him at home unemployed and responsible for the day to day care for his young son. It was this hiatus from the daily grind of the workplace and his involvement with his son's kindergarten that initially exposed him to the many rewards of ECE

teaching *"It was really a fortunate series of events that allowed me the chance to just hang out with my son at kindy that really got me interested...I think most men are not exposed to how cool ECE is because they are usually bogged down at work all the time..."* (Brian).

According to Farquhar (1999), male ECE teachers often come into the sector from more traditionally male orientated careers and that ECE teaching "is not something that men dream about or aspire to as teenagers, but rather something they go into after trying more traditional jobs" (p. 4). Since early childhood education has generally been perceived largely as a career choice for women, men have not therefore considered it an obvious employment option (Cameron, Moss & Owen, 1999; Peeters, 2007). However, as suggested by Farquhar (1999) and reinforced through the stories of the men in this study, it does seem that given the opportunity to re-evaluate their current careers and possibly some meaningful exposure to the world of early childhood teaching, men may be more willing to consider early childhood teaching as a potential second career option.

The desire to make a social contribution

A number of the men indicated that their decision to join the ECE sector was underpinned by a strong desire to be involved in a profession *"that did something of wider social significance...that was about more than just a job..."* (Aaron). This altruistic sentiment was expressed by many of the participants but was articulated in a variety of different ways:

"Yeah, I realised I wanted to give something back, I wanted to contribute to society and young children, for me, was an obvious place to start" (Clint).

"...I've spent my working life, you know, just chasing the dollar and I want to be able to look back and say wow I've done something important, I've done something for the community that I can be proud of" (Roger).

"...the accident made me think about my life, work and how I could try to make a positive impact...try to help in some small way" (John).

As discussed by Kane (2008) altruistic notions of helping society or of doing a job of wider social significance often informs early childhood teachers' decisions to join the sector. According to Kane, early childhood teachers, and indeed the wider teaching profession, is seen both internally (by those involved in teaching) and externally (by society at large) as being involved in an area of great social importance and the male participants clearly share this view of their work. Similarly, a case study of a male early childhood educator conducted by Sumsion (1999) suggests that the altruistic agenda highlighted by this study is not new, but rather reflects a strong desire of many men employed in ECE to make a positive social contribution via their work. As Sumsion quotes: "But there had to be something more to life than getting up in the morning just for the money... I needed to be able to make a difference to someone's life. If

I did, maybe I could make the world a better place” (1999, p. 458). Sumsion’s research, and confirmed by the present study, make it clear that an altruistic agenda often underpins teachers’ decisions to join the ECE sector, but is not limited to a specific gender group; it is a sentiment strongly held by both male and female early childhood practitioners.

...I was sick of not really enjoying my work...I found myself looking for a new career and wanted it to be a job that I enjoyed, a job where I had fun while at work...” (Sam).

Recognising the fun aspect of ECE

Almost all the men interviewed in this study indicated that a factor initially attracting them into ECE was the perception that *“early childhood teaching was going to be a lot of fun...I knew spending my days playing with a whole lot of young children would have to be fun...lots of fun.”* (Ben). The notion that early childhood education is an inherently ‘fun’ and ‘enjoyable’ job, where play is valued as a central component of young children’s learning, appears to have been a strong theme underpinning many of the participants’ decisions to join the sector. A number of those interviewed clearly articulated that their initial interest in ECE was informed by the desire to bring greater enjoyment and fun into their everyday work “

...I was sick of not really enjoying my work...I found myself looking for a new career and wanted it to be a job that I enjoyed, a job where I had fun while at work...” (Sam).

Although this theme emerges in this study, it does not figure as significantly in Kane’s (2008) findings, which also examined factors attracting teachers into the ECE sector. It therefore appears that the ‘fun’ aspect of ECE is potentially of greater interest to men when in the initial stages of considering a future career in ECE than for their female counterparts.

However, as highlighted by Kane (2008), many early childhood teachers clearly would prefer wider society to “not construe early childhood teaching as being just about fun” (p. 4) and this more serious perception of play and fun in the ECE context was also shared by many of the participants in this study.

“From the very start I was fascinated by the idea that I could have heaps of fun in the kindy...but at the same time be doing a really important job...yeah helping the kids learn while playing” (Brian).

“...nah I wasn’t worried about it just being all fun because I knew from my own kids that having fun with them really helps them in the bigger picture...you know learning is heaps easier when you are having fun, so learning and fun can work together

News from West End Kindergarten

Joseph Pomana has settled in nicely to West End Kindergarten to cover maternity leave. He describes his job title as (deep breath) handyman, transformer, lego builder, swing buddy, volcano maker, trolley pusher, dress up wearer, painter, play dough maker, ballerina, story tellerand the list goes on.

Joseph still works nights at the Ezibuy contact centre and he’s previously worked at Hokowhitu Children’s Centre, Group Special Education and Nga Rito o Te Puawaitanga (Teen Parent Unit) at Freyberg High School. We asked him for any other information. His response? “The only other info I can give you is that I am a boy. Pretty rare commodity that, in this day and age!”



Reprinted with permission from Ruahine Kindergarten Associations’ “Up with the Play” Issue 15, Term 1 2012.

when teaching young kids” (Roger).

These quotes indicate that although fun was a significant factor in initially attracting the men into ECE, they did not view fun from a purely frivolous perspective. Rather they recognised that fun and play are closely interrelated and often support more serious educational agendas in ECE. This sentiment is reinforced by both Dockett and Fleer (2003) and the early childhood curriculum *Te Whariki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) where play is positioned as a central aspect of teaching and learning in ECE. According to Van Hoorn, Scales, Nourot and Alward (1999), the philosophy of learning, playing and having fun while playing is fundamental in the ECE environment. The notion of having fun while playing and learning similarly appealed to most of the men in this study.

Where to next?

Although the under representation of men in ECE is both a statistical and historical reality, there has been a gradual increase in numbers in recent years. This study has sought to capture insights from men in ECE regarding the factors that initially attracted them into the profession. The findings suggest that men enter ECE as a second career choice, have altruistic and socially oriented motivations for ECE teaching and find the fun aspects of ECE to be a major drawcard. These findings highlight aspects of what the ECE sector can offer men and may be useful to future campaigns to recruit men into teaching. As previously discussed, 'small steps' are now being taken to reposition ECE as a positive career option for men and this study identifies some key factors which may attract more men into the sector.

Early childhood education needs to be reframed as a rewarding, enjoyable and socially meaningful career option for men. Current male early childhood teachers need to be acknowledged for challenging restrictive traditional gender role stereotyping and potential male teachers should have the potential rewards highlighted. In the words of one of the participants of this study who has over thirty years experience in the ECE sector "We need to really focus on the positive... let men know how great early childhood teaching is... we need to talk it up...". Finally, it may be that it is this very process of accentuating and 'talking up' the positive aspects of early childhood education for the male teacher that further contributes to the slow but gradual reframing of early childhood teaching as a valid and rewarding vocation for men.

For information about ECMENz, visit: www.ecmenz.org/index.html

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Educating with compassion

The resonances between Steiner and RIE

Jana To

It did not surprise my friends that I chose to specialise in Steiner education. But unless they were following me closely as I studied towards my degree in early childhood education, they would be very surprised in my fascination with the Magda Gerber-articulated 'Resources for Infants and Educators' (RIE) approach to infants. This is because until I had a student teaching placement in a RIE-influenced infant-toddler centre, I was keenly ambivalent about (even opposed to) the normalising of infants in institutional settings.

This article is a reflection on these two approaches – Steiner and RIE – which I've now studied, experienced and in which I now recognise much resonance, as well as some key differences. As I write this, I know that I am also speaking from another new space in my life – the space of being a new mother to a fascinating infant.

So let us begin with a tribute from Pennie Brownlee to that intricate 'dance' between adults and infants which positions child as being of the divine:

“Every baby is the divine child
Every child is a miracle
Every child is born capable
Every child is a free and equal human being
Every child is born to act out the love story
Every child wants to dance in the heart.”

Pennie Brownlee (2008, p. 14).

Rudolf Steiner believed that children come to us, to the earth from the spiritual world where they were cared for by angels. Therefore education should reflect loving care and beautiful environment (Steiner, 1995a).

Magda Gerber emphasizes that 'infancy is a vulnerable stage of development, therefore it's not enough that babies receive a good care, the care must be excellent' (in Petrie & Owen, 2005, p. 83). Respectful relationships and care matters most to the child.

So educating with heart, respect and reverence are evident in both Steiner education and the RIE approach to learning.



Jana's daughter

These ideas pull me into both Steiner and RIE approaches to e.c.e.

When looking for the roots of Steiner and RIE approach to education, I found they are both born in Europe and each triggered by the events of war. The seed of what became known as 'Waldorf education' was planted by its founder, Rudolf Steiner, in Germany after World War I. The aim was to improve life of the new generation by encouraging every child to follow its own path towards full potential (Trostli, 1998).

While RIE was developed in California by Magda Gerber, a passionate Hungarian educator and advocate for a respectful infant and toddler care and education, she was developing the work done by Emmi Pikler in Hungarian orphanages during World War II. Pikler's peaceful approach of respecting and trusting baby's inborn capacities inspired Magda Gerber who later developed an approach to teaching based on a culture of respect that offers a good balance between adult stimulation and the child's independent exploration (Petrie & Owen, 2005).

So both Waldorf education and the RIE approach are built on respectful relationships, and have similar drives to improve the life of the new generation. They both emphasise that children learn through doing and hands-on experiences on their journey of becoming healthy people free in their body,

soul and spirit (Almon, 1998).

Another way I've visualised these two approaches is as a tree: free to grow healthy roots, trunk, branches and leaves; a tree which unfolds to its natural beauty according to its own 'clock', and which can embody seasonal changes.

Both Rudolf Steiner and Magda Gerber focused on allowing the child to do things that he would do naturally in their own time. Anna Tardos, daughter of Emmi Pikler once explained: 'Self-initiated movement creates a sense of competency and self-reliance in the child. Flexibility in movement leads to independent, psychic flexibility and eventually, to independent, flexible thinking' (cited in Gallardo, 2005, p. 17).

Rudolf Steiner also accentuated non-interference and a reverence for an infant's self-determining movement and autonomy, which is interlinked with the formation of self-confidence in later life. According to Steiner, the first seven years of life are overtaken by the four lower senses – the sense of touch (tactile), life, self-movement (proprioception), and balance (vestibular). The sense of movement is one of them and infants need to develop their individual pattern of movements in their own time according to their body clock. They should not be rushed or restricted as this may hinder their development (Schoorel, 2004; Soesman, 1998). Similarly a healthy body and posture is a significantly important outcome of RIE approach where children have the opportunity to unfold their body movements in the natural sequence (Gallardo, 2005).

In Waldorf education, the tree metaphor has further relevance because of the recurring curriculum that reflects the seasons. Seasonal festivals and an environment that foreground the pleasing aesthetics of nature are essential aspects of life in the Waldorf kindergarten and school. Steiner believed that seasonal festivals enable children and adults to find balance and connection to the seasons and nature. Through festivals children experience a mood of reverence, and joyous celebration with others. They learn to develop a real love and gratitude for the things every season and festivals offers, for example harvesting and learn not to take things for granted (Almon, 1998).

Toys and resources are items that nature offers and provide very rich experiences for exploration and imagination. Open-ended resources such as shells, stones, twigs and wooden branches are only a few examples of objects and materials you would encounter in both RIE and Steiner early childhood settings. They are believed to connect children to nature and foster appreciation of real beauty.

Stimuli of nature are believed to be incomparable. Birds singing, shadows, leaves, air circulation, changes in temperature, rain, sunshine, breeze, blue or grey sky, grass etc., are treasures that nature offers and which provide rich learning experiences for children.

Children in both Waldorf kindergarten and RIE centres are encouraged to move within a natural, sensory world. Children have opportunities to spend significant amounts

of time outdoors; in some early childhood centres they are enabled to take naps outdoors in the cots in any weather. Sleeping outdoors is believed to have health benefits (Gerber & Weaver, 2002).

Pedagogies of respect

There are also similarities but significant differences in the role of the teachers within Waldorf and RIE centres. Both emphasise a curriculum based on child-initiated learning and eliminating unnecessary interactions that would interfere with the child's natural desire to learn and unfold. A strong emphasis is put on observations and creating environments for children which are challenging, beautiful and nurturing.

Waldorf teachers see each child as coming to earth having been cared by angels in the spiritual world. Children that feel loved are more likely to experience feeling of belonging and security. This is visible in considerate and delicate movements and gestures between adult and a child and in social relations amongst adults.

Similarly I found that within the RIE approach that each child is valued and seen as an independent human being with many qualities. Children in both Waldorf philosophy and RIE approach are not rushed through developmental stages. Glockler (2004) explains that teachers need powerful human qualities, as children are absorbing everything surrounding them. It is important to meet the child without prejudice, judgment and unrealistic expectations.

In comparing the two approaches, I found there is one particularly noteworthy difference. As a student teacher in Steiner e.c. settings, I learned that we as teachers were to be worthy of imitation. We were visualised as a mother figure who is loving and caring, but also with tasks to do within a home. A Steiner teacher is likely to be engaged in 'purposeful' work throughout the day such as cooking, sweeping, cleaning, etc. to set an example for children and to be worthy of imitation.

In the RIE approach, teachers are also role models but not constantly physically busy doing chores. An important focus is on mindful and respectful responding to children during caring moments, such as nappy changing, feeding, and settling a child to sleep. Children are encouraged to become active participants rather than passive recipients. This does not mean that RIE educators (which was what RIE-influenced teachers are sometimes called) do not engage in purposeful work. They are fully present and available when a child may need them most. It may sound easy but it requires a strong focus, reflective practice, sensitive observation and the ability to be truly present in the moment in order to slow down and tune in to the child. As Magda Gerber once said: "The more we do, the busier we are, the less we really pay attention" (in Gerber & Weaver, 2002, p. 63).

Role modelling of the human qualities and incorporating space for compassion, empathy, positive relationships, and acknowledgement of emotions, warmth and kindness into the curriculum is an aspect of both philosophies (Petrie & Owen, 2005).

Environments that calmly challenge

When I walk into Steiner kindergartens, I am struck again and again by the peaceful, nurturing, purposely busy, welcoming but also challenging environment that awaits me. The environment reflects how Steiner emphasised the importance of colours and their impact on a child's soul. Sensory experiences have a very powerful impact on a child's psyche and therefore every item and resource used in the Waldorf kindergarten or nursery provides rich sensory experiences. Beautiful natural resources, wooden furniture, flowers, light pink walls and curtains have a calming effect. Fabrics such as cotton and silk are used. The environment needs to be aesthetically pleasing, and be as 'natural' as possible; every piece of equipment reflects that need. Rarely have I seen any plastic pieces of equipment in a Steiner environment.

I experience a comparable feeling in RIE-influenced early childhood centres. There is freedom of choice and emotion, exploration, movement and problem solving. The environment feels safe, comforting, nurturing but not overstimulating. From the RIE perspective, the environment is also an essential part of the curriculum and there is a significant consideration put into choosing resources. These can include plastic (which differs from the Steiner perspective) and other open-ended objects of various shapes, sizes and materials to provide rich sensory experience as children are learning through their senses. Both approaches emphasise predictable and consistent environment.

Rhythm is also important in both approaches. Children's bodies work in a rhythmical way. This is particularly true for young children who benefit and respond well to rhythm which may be evident in a daily schedule, as well as in the repetition or regularity of activities. In a Waldorf setting, rhythm is understood to help children to harmonize the soul and the physical body. Every day, week, season and year has its rhythm suitable for child's development (Trostli, 1998).

In RIE-influenced centres, rhythm is evident in routines that are not regulated by the clock but rather are consistent responses to child's individual needs. Consistency, regularity and predictability within defined limits and expectations enable children to feel secure without experiencing feelings of anxiety (Oldfield, 2001).

Finally – both approaches encourage unrushed and uninterrupted children's play. As I compare my experiences across multiple settings, I recognise that mainstream e.c.e. centres provide play-based curriculum. However, uninterrupted play occurs only at some early childhood programs whereas it is of fundamental importance within Waldorf and RIE education. I observed children actively occupied in sustained play in both settings. They were free to explore and experiment. Uninterrupted play fosters independence, long attention span, initiative and spirit of cooperation. It can be seen as a child's work where importance is put on learning rather than teaching (Almon, 1998; Petrie & Owen, 2005).

Conclusion

These are only some of the similarities and differences I encountered during my training as an early childhood teacher in New Zealand. In both Waldorf and RIE education children are viewed as competent and capable individuals who need to follow their path and unfold their inborn capabilities. Isn't that what we aim to achieve for the next generation? Child takes the lead. Teacher is to be present but not dominate.

In my experience, the only significant difference between the two approaches is the way teachers in Waldorf kindergarten tend to be physically busier engaging in chores. Teachers in RIE-influenced centres are busy, but not with chores. They are busy doing sensitive observations and being available to the children in their primary care. Both approaches emphasise teachers' sustained observation of children and taking time to respond appropriately rather than interrupt and overwhelm the child.

I am drawn to both approaches as they resonate with my values. There is pleasure and great sense of purpose when I am in a setting which, as Steiner once said, the child is 'received with reverence, educated with love and sent forth in freedom' (Steiner, 1995b, p.56).

From both these approaches, I have learnt to slow down, to educate with love, to notice beauty, and to wait, to listen and to be present in every moment. What is the hurry? The best things take time.

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Starting school

A retrospective

"I am five and I go to school: Early years schooling in New Zealand, 1900-2010".

By Helen May, Otago University Press, 2011.

Recommended price: \$49.95

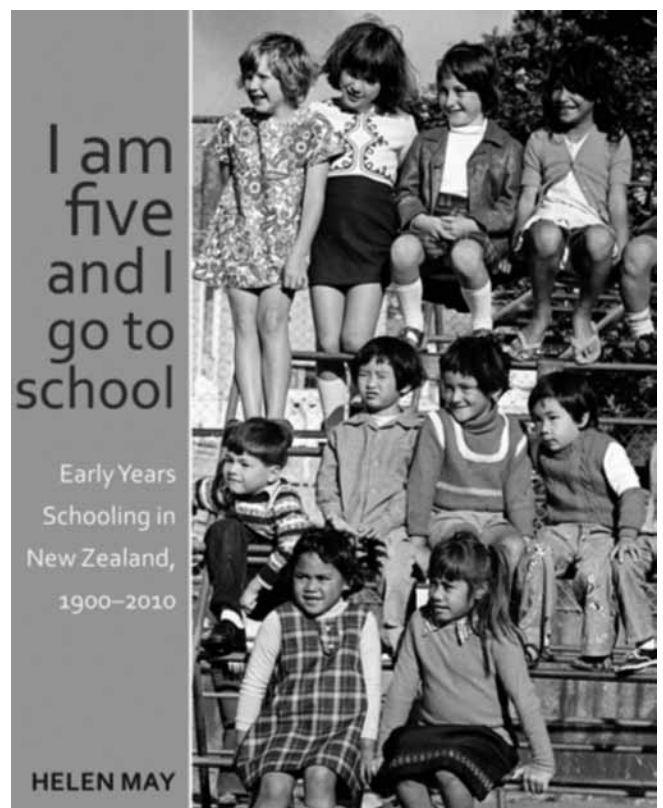
Reviewed by Claire McLachlan

I recently read this book as part of my research for a new book on literacy in early childhood and primary that I have been preparing for Cambridge University Press, looking for information about how literacy was promoted in the last century. I had previously enjoyed reading Helen May's earlier book, "School beginnings: A 19th century colonial story", published by NZCER Press and I looked forward to reading the history of the next century and one I knew more about. May's writing about the history of early childhood education is always awe inspiring – she provides a detailed and thoughtful analysis of what national and international archives can reveal about our sector. May is a superb historian and her books never disappoint in the range of interesting artifacts that she unearths. May provides a rich and detailed history of the junior school in New Zealand, illustrated with wonderful photos and other artifacts.

The first three chapters of this text do not disappoint in this regard. These chapters provided superb insights into the likely junior school experiences of my parents and grandparents who lived in New Zealand. In the fourth chapter, May explores the politics of "playway" in the junior school curriculum and to a certain extent revisits issues explored in her previous texts, which explored the growth of new ideas about education and the emergence of new models of education such as Playcentre, under the benevolent progressive influence of Clarence Beeby when he was Director General of Education.

In chapter 5, May begins to focus intensively on the teaching of reading in the junior school and introduces the issues associated with New Zealand's "reading wars". I particularly enjoyed this chapter, because it represented the period in which I attended primary school, but also because it related directly to my interests in children's literacy and it addressed the emergence of the early childhood sector in this country as an accepted part of a child's early childhood journey.

After this rich lead into the more recent period of history, the final chapter of this text was a bit disappointing. In my opinion, it seemed to present a slightly selective account of research in early childhood in this period, a somewhat uncritical account of the development of *Te Whāriki* and issues of transition and literacy in early childhood and



the junior school, and an even more uncritical account of the "reading wars" debate, which became of significant importance during this period. I do not think May addresses well the complexity of literacy in the junior school and reading achievement in an increasingly multicultural country. In her selection of key themes, issues and important voices, May's view is arguably debatable. Perhaps it is easier to write educational history from a distance.

However, apart from my misgivings about May's account of the more recent history of the junior school and transition from early childhood, this book, like all of May's other accounts of New Zealand's history of education, is an easy but thought provoking read.

A rights catalyst

Review of For each and every child: He taonga tonu te tamariki'

Published by UNICEF New Zealand. Available for \$15 from www.unicef.org.nz

Reviewed by Charlotte Robertson.

Do you believe that children have rights? Have you ever wondered how to acknowledge children's rights in your practice? How familiar are you with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC)? Have you ever talked about it with young children?

UNCROC is the most signed global covenant. When Aotearoa New Zealand ratified UNCROC in 1993, the Government in effect stated that all laws, legislations and practices complied (apart from three reservations). As part of their responsibility when ratifying the Convention, the Government was obliged to inform children of their rights. They have yet to do this in an effective way.

So it is a relief that at last there is a resource on children's rights reflecting our nation that is both visually and aurally suitable for use with young children. While the implications of the words are deeply profound and may particularly resonate for some children, they are written in a way that has appeal for all. For example, "Let us tell you what we think, feel, and dream. Hear what we have to say. See what we have to show you. Talk with us about things that are happening" (p. 13).

Although written for children *'For each and every child: He taonga tonu te tamariki'*, has appeal for adults too. It illustrates the essence of the provision, protection, participation and place rights of children. By using nine different New Zealand illustrators, this book captures a visual sense of diversity connecting to the inherent messages in the content. On closer inspection, children can identify ways to be inclusive and to feel included, respected and part of their communities. Settings for illustrations vary from rural to urban, private to public, recreational to educational, daytime to nighttime as well as one child to many and young children to adolescents.

Children are seen in context with their families and their communities, identifying the interdependence between a child and an adult and their community. Each double page illustration is accompanied by texts addressed to the reader in te reo Māori and in English. In the bottom right hand corner of each double page is a small box with the specific relevant article identified.

While the texts are an integrated and simplified explanation of UNCROC suitable for children, they are also a plea to those responsible for their well-being and welfare. After an initial introduction of what rights are, the text is addressed to all responsible for children and is written as if with the collective voices of children. For example, "If there is a

disability in our body or mind, take special care of us so that we can live happy in the world like other kids" (p. 19). The accompanying illustration for Article 23 is set at a swimming competition.

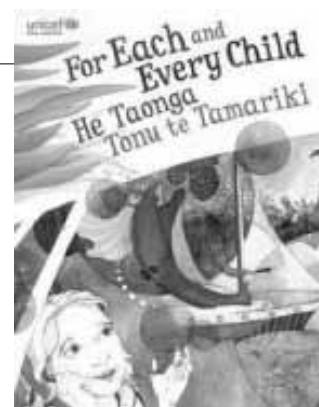
When I read *'For each and every child: He taonga tonu te tamariki'* to a large group of three and four year olds, they were fascinated. The next day when I showed them the illustrations only and queried the context, they were able to identify the issues addressed from 'being safe' to the 'right to dream'. In the days following, individual children would spontaneously initiate conversations around the content, especially around being safe and their dreams. Months later, children often spontaneously tell me what they dream about.

This book provides another catalyst to dialogue around how we treat others and how we want to be treated. It links clearly with enhancing responsive, respectful, reciprocal relationship; the right to be listened to and the right to listen carrying both rights and responsibilities. As rights are equal for all children, it means that children also have responsibilities to and for other children.

The Ministry of Social Development currently holds responsibility for regular reporting to the United Nations on the implementation of UNCROC on behalf of the New Zealand Government. A practical example of how UNCROC can be used in every day work was the recent Ministry of Social Development Green Paper consultation which raised concerns about the right for children to achieve, belong and thrive in this country. It appears many of us are unfamiliar with the UNCROC articles. Few organizations referred to UNCROC principles or specific articles in their submissions. It is twenty years since ratification of UNCROC and this book is a timely reminder as it raises the question of general awareness and effective implementation of UNCROC in Aotearoa New Zealand.

While the responsibility for producing this book has fallen on nongovernmental organisations and industries, it has been distributed to primary schools through a government arm, Learning Media. Resources for working in school settings have also been developed. However, distribution within the early childhood sector has been more sporadic.

This is a book by New Zealanders for New Zealanders.



While the idea imitates a similar publication in England, this book is home grown and bicultural. What a delight. It has an added value of highlighting children's rights for any person whose life transverses that of an individual child, or children collectively. Children's rights align with the aspiration statement in *Te Whāriki* and the MSD's Green Paper's goal for children to achieve, to belong and to thrive (Ministry of Social Development, 2011). Regrettably as a country our statistics for many children do not resemble these aspirations. For those unfamiliar with the Convention, a simplified version with explanations of the intent of each article is included at the rear of the book.

For the price of four cups of coffee, or \$15, how easy it is to be informed (special rates for bulk copies for ECE centres). You can use this book as a catalyst with children in your home, in your centre, in your community. Just by reading and sharing the text you become an advocate for children. Yet

provocations remain when you consider what many children and young people face in this country.

So, how can you contribute to ensuring every child's rights to well-being, belonging, communication and exploration move from a possibility to a reality?

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Contributors

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Jenny Burke works for CCS Disability Action as an Early Intervention Teacher. Her daughter who was diagnosed with cerebral palsy as a three year old, is now studying politics and history at university.

Karen Guo is a Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Education, University of Waikato. Her research interests include cultural diversity, Chinese immigrant parenting, immigrant children's learning and development and cross-national studies.

YingHui Qu is a teacher and researcher. She is the correspondence programme manager of professional development of ECE teachers, ECE subject specialist, and ECE project executive in the training centre of early childhood and primary teachers, Continuous Education Department at JiLin Educational Institute, JiLin Province, China.

Charlotte Robertson is a member of OMEP (World Organisation for Early Childhood) and ACYA (Action for Children and Youth Aotearoa) who both have the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child at the forefront of their thinking. Advocacy opportunities evolved through Playcentre, studying child advocacy and working for CCS Auckland and continue in her current role as a teacher with the Auckland Kindergarten Association.

Penny Smith is a Senior Tutor in Early Years Education at Massey University. Penny teaches papers on professional practice, early childhood curriculum and learning in the early years. Penny is provisionally enrolled for Ph.D, furthering her studies into peer learning in the early childhood context; a topic she also studied for her M.Ed using Rogoff's planes of analysis. Penny has several years experience as a kindergarten teacher and tertiary educator.

Jana To: Living and working with children in three countries has made me interested in various philosophies and pedagogical approaches to education, particularly the Waldorf and RIE approach to learning. I was born in Czechoslovakia (now Slovakia) where I lived my entire childhood and teenage years before moving to London and then settling down in New Zealand with my husband and now our baby girl who I adore immensely. I feel privileged to be her partner in learning and experiencing through her eyes the joys and sorrows that life offers.

Alex Williams is a lecturer in early childhood education at the Unitec Institute of Technology in Auckland. His experiences as a pre service teacher educator (both primary & early childhood), primary teacher & father of four has fostered his interests relating to male representation in early childhood & primary teaching contexts.

Valma Wills is the supervisor at Meadowood Community Creche and has been teaching in community based early childhood education for 20 years. It is her belief that the questions we ask of our practice open us to further possibilities.



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