Contents

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The covers

Photos courtesy of Massey Childcare Centre, Palmerston North

Front cover:
From Monika Charlton: This was Armin's first experience of playing in the sand, after some time of watching and touching the sand from the safety of my lap, he wiggled and moved, reaching out towards the sand, I gently lay him down in the sand. Armin stiffened and held his arms out straight, seemingly quite worried about this experience. So I lay down next to him, my face really close and talked soothingly about the sand, picking some up and trickling it in front of Armin. I could then see and feel how Armin relaxed and started to investigate the sand.

Back cover:
Tommy and Mason rake and gather the leaves on a chilly morning. Tommy takes this opportunity to share with him how gathering the leaves and composting them will benefit the Centre's vegetable garden once the leaves have all decomposed. This is part of the centre's curriculum for education for environmental sustainability.

Knitting together:

A sector with brilliant threads

Perhaps it's the winter chill, but I keep thinking in terms of knitting projects. Not the warm woolly ones, satisfying as they may be. I'm thinking about the early childhood sector as a knitting project: a construction of brilliant and varied patterns and under closer inspection, clearly identifiable threads that connect, and connect and connect.

But knitting also invites recognition of missed stitches. One stitch that I'm missing is the early childhood convention. The 2011 Christchurch earthquakes have disrupted this cycle of intentional delight and discomfort that comes from the encountering meeting 'the others' who share the identity of 'early childhood'. When the next convention is scheduled for 2015, it will be a very different sector than what gathered in 2007 in Rotorua. The cost of travel has climbed, the sector has now had a half decade of pragmatic national policies which encourage participation but undermine the value of early childhood teacher qualifications. The aftereffect of the 2011 'EC Taskforce' includes the determined attempt by Te Kohanga Reo National Trust to move outside 'education' in pursuit of a legislative framework in line with its kaupapa.

Another potential missed stitch comes in the form of a recent "Request for proposal" from the Ministry of Education for a trial of a postgraduate diploma of teaching, which excludes both early childhood and total immersion Maori teacher education programmes, and would only be available for primary or secondary teacher education. The Ministry of Education rhetoric was that early childhood was not ready for postgraduate teacher education, although this evidence for this claim is not readily forthcoming. The early childhood academics at six universities have this week sent a submission to the Ministry protesting this move under the able leadership of Professor Helen May from Otago University. It has been backed by a submission from the new Council of Deans of Education, which argued strenuously against such a short sighted and divisive policy decision. Now, as in previous generations, we have to be vigilant to make sure that early childhood does not wind up as a stitch that is slipped or missed or worse in some alternative, future, cheaper and less attractive pattern.

Yet the knitting continues. In this issue of *Early Education,* Margaret Carr identifies the threads that connect the early world and the school worlds, through their curriculum documents, as well as how the walls of academia can be crossed by researchers drawn into the sandpit by the pull of research inquiry with teachers and children. An example of this is the 'teachers work' research done by the team of researchers led by Anne Meade at Te Tari Puna Ora

Early childhood education is a sustained shared creative project.

Photo courtesy of Massey Childcare Centre

o Aotearoa New Zealand Childcare Association. Their research into 'sustained shared thinking' (SST) provides qualitative insights into the role of early childhood teachers positioned within a context which they describe as 'playful' – highlighting a key historic thread: that young children continue to learn through play. But their research is also quantitative, showing higher frequency of SST in centres with fully qualified teachers and so their research pushes into contemporary politics where the professional status of e.c. teachers remains contested. Similarly Shareen Harvey considers another contested policy area: professional learning. With marked changes in government policy, responsibility for teachers' professional learning has shifted back into the hands of centre management and centre teachers.

With children come adults – families who care for the children who populate our centres. Joanne Hayes draws on her experiences both as teacher and as a parent to foreground the emotional thread which runs through the transition to school. A Tauranga kindergarten teacher, Aimee de Candole, walks us through how the transition can occur. The emotional life of the PhD researcher – writing, writing, writing in 'a cave' – is given life by Caterina Murphy who, after 26 years of studying, has some tips for maintaining

spiritual and emotional wellbeing while writing, writing, writing.

And so to the written word: books serve as threads that connect disparate parts of the early childhood community. From the oldest publisher of early childhood material, Playcentre Publications, comes an invitation to reconsider the how and why of consensus decision-making as a prompt to reconsider how groups choose to navigate diversity. On the international stage, as part of a new series on 'approaches', *Te Whāriki*, takes its place alongside other 'approaches', such as Montessori, Steiner or Reggio Emilia. And a collaborative conversation with our Australian colleagues invites us, especially those of us who work closely with children, to reconsider assessment processes and purposes.

Finally – what of this journal and others that use the written word (and some delightful photographs) to pull together ideas and to encourage a community of practice that encourages debate? While online publication is sorely tempting for its ease of access (for those with a computer close at hand) and affordable production costs, what future exists for printed journals which arrive in your letterbox or are lifted off the shelf of a library? Is there still a need for a tangible printed journal? Or is that an extravagance; an old fashioned relic, perhaps?

So welcome to this the Autumn/Winter edition of *Early Education*. Pull up your chair, get a cup of tea, and be prepared to read, to consider, to debate. Pass it along. Stay connected. Keep the knitting project going.

Sue Stover, with Claire McLachlan

Editors

Brief historical background on early childhood teacher qualifications

Helen May

It is only since the development of the three-year diploma qualification phased in between 1988-1990 that former Colleges of Education and – nowadays – University providers have been able to offer equivalent qualifications to teacher education candidates in both the early childhood and schools sector. Prior to the 1988 policy initiative, kindergarten teachers undertook a two-year teaching diploma programme offered by the NZ Kindergarten Union previously delivered by the four city kindergarten associations. For those who worked in childcare services, there were few qualifications excepting a one-year certificate qualification in the four city colleges of education or a certificate with the New Zealand Childcare Association.

The 1988 three-year Diploma of Teaching (ECE), finally brought parity of status across the teaching profession. In the 1990s, three-year degree programmes in Colleges and/or Universities were established for both ECE and primary, and similarly the opportunity for one-year graduate diplomas was made available across all sectors. Outside of the College-University sector the situation for ECE was somewhat messy, with a raft of private training providers and polytechnic institutions gaining approval for lower NQF level qualifications particularly for nanny and childcare work.

It was not until the 2002-2012 Strategic Plan: Pathways for the Future, that the benchmark qualification for the ECE sector became a three-year diploma of teaching. By 2012 almost all ECITE providers were offering level 7 degree qualifications. The Strategic Plan policy was also intended to achieve 100% qualified teachers across the ECE by 2012. This policy was halted by the current government in 2010. There is now around 71% of all staff in ECE with a teaching qualification and a significant proportion of the others currently in training. These developments, albeit still incomplete, have created a huge shift in status and quality across the early childhood sector. Our position is much admired internationally, and is underpinned by a burgeoning and internationally recognised research community. In the 2012 Performance Based Research Fund exercise, 64 Evidence Portfolios were submitted from ECE academics. This body of research within university settings has been significant in informing the policy and pedagogical transformation in ECE in New Zealand. The alignment of professional expertise, quality provision, qualification levels and research infrastructure is much entwined. This synergy is not apparent in many other countries, and was certainly not evident in the 1980s where there was almost no ECE presence in University settings.

(Extract from Submission on Postgraduate Initial Teacher Education from Helen May on behalf of early childhood academics to the Minister of Education.)

Letter from the Waikato

An Early Years Research Centre, sited inside the Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, has recently been approved by the University of Waikato. This includes all the staff in early childhood on the Hamilton and the Tauranga campuses, and a number of staff in other disciplines at the Faculty who are interested in the early years. We used to be an Early Years Research Unit, and are very pleased to become a Centre. This means that we will develop a website, and this, we hope will be available in the second half of June. It will include case studies of research projects and publicity material about upcoming events. In the meantime, detail on our research projects can be found on the Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research website www. waikato.ac.nz/wmier/

Margaret Carr at the launch of the new Early Year Research Centre

The academic staff in the Faculty now includes a group of scholars who have built up a local and international reputation in the following three areas of research on the early years: *pedagogy, policy* and *community connections*. It's not just us, of course, who have developed this reputation, since we have collaborated on projects with researchers and teachers across the country, and we will continue to do so. Aotearoa New Zealand is a small country, and the value and quality of the early childhood sector here has come from a combined effort from many teachers, researchers, professional developers, thinkers and friends of early childhood across the country and over many years. We are very conscious of this legacy, and like the readers of *Early Education*, proud of it.

Those three areas form the three themes of our Centre research programme. Designed with a social justice agenda, the Centre's aim is to make a difference for young children, early years teachers, and whānau in Aotearoa New Zealand by undertaking robust research that influences policy, that makes a difference for children and families, and that informs scholars worldwide. The Centre will provide a coordinating and connecting function, creating a supportive platform for ongoing and future research by researchers at Waikato – on their own, in collaboration with each other,

and in collaboration with researchers in other centres of early years research in Aotearoa New Zealand and elsewhere.

The Centre has built up its profile from a range of research projects, including evaluation and curriculum work for the Ministry of Education. A great deal of our 'portfolio' is research with teachers. We have led a number of Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) and Centre of Innovation (COI) projects. Both of these programmes are about collaborative projects with teacher-researchers, and we have enormously valued these opportunities to 'keep our feet on the ground', moving out of academia to listen to voices from teachers, whānau and children.

I personally find that it feeds my soul to sit down with teachers and talk about teaching and learning, or to be with children in a centre, and I think that is true for all of us who enjoy research with practitioners. Many of us, of course, began our early childhood careers as teachers in the field. The research community internationally is beginning to talk about the need to include scaling-up questions: questions that include the implementation of findings in the design of

a research project. That means that unless we keep closely in touch with teachers and professional development providers, then research findings will not make a difference; the research must deliver findings that include principles and strategies that can be adapted by the profession to 'fit' with their social and cultural community contexts.

It is not about translation; just as we want young children to develop adaptive expertise, this is also a quality that teachers must have as well. We are fortunate in Aotearoa New Zealand to have a well qualified teaching profession in early childhood; it is a fiercely complex task and the researcher community has found teachers to be invaluable collaborators and a ready audience.

The Centre is an *Early Years* Centre; it covers a wide age range. We have completed projects with babies in centres and a number of projects have included teachers and children in the first few years of school. We also support the New Zealand (school) Curriculum in its vision of what we want for our young people: confident, connected, actively involved lifelong learners. The school curriculum includes a cross-sector alignment between the strands of Te Whāriki and the Key Competencies in the school curriculum (and it takes this alignment across into tertiary education as well). In my view, that diagram on page 42 of the school curriculum should be made into a poster and on the wall of every early childhood centre and school classroom!

Our website, when it goes live in late June this year, will keep you posted at www.waikato.ac.nz/earlyyears.

Warm regards,

Margaret Carr

The three directors of the Early Years Research Centre, Margaret Carr, Sally Peters and Linda Mitchell

Early Education

What is the future of 'Early Education'?

"He tomokanga paepae he ara ki te aotūroa."

"Crossing a threshold leads to a path towards the future".

The Editors and Editorial Board are working on a strategic plan for *Early Education*. For nearly 20 years, *Early Education* has been published and printed for distribution to subscribers. This year, we are considering whether to 'take the journal online' and if so, whether to also continue producing a paper-based version.

Going online has the advantage of lower production costs and easier access for students and researchers. However, going online would make *Early Education* less available to those who prefer to hold the journal in their hands. If we continue to print the journal, the cost to subscribers will likely increase.

What is your opinion? Can you help us understand the impact of these decisions on our readers? Your input is welcome. Deadline is 15 August 2013.

Please participate an online survey or give us your opinions by emailing us at eejournal@aut.ac.nz.

The online survey is available at: http://tinyurl.com/eesurvey2013

Many thanks for your support.

Sue Stover and Claire McLachlan,

Editors

Adult-child sustained shared thinking

Who, how and when?

Anne Meade, Joanna Williamson, Margaret Stuart, Sue Smorti, Lesley Robinson, and Janis Carroll-Lind

Abstract

Meaningful inquiries between adults and children deepen with relational and pedagogical knowledge when adults are informed, thoughtful and intentional contributors in children's playful learning. Drawing on a wider study of early childhood teachers' work, this article examines the role of adults in enabling or constraining learning, reporting on data about episodes of adult–child 'sustained shared thinking' (SST). Examples of SST offer opportunities to consider whose goals and interests are foregrounded when adults join children's play with pedagogical intent. Further, the data indicates that SST episodes are more frequent when early childhood teachers are qualified.

Introduction

This article examines practices where the adult – conscious of children's thinking – acts to extend their knowledge and understanding through 'sustained shared thinking' (SST). The article draws on the Teachers' Work Project, undertaken by Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/NZ Childcare Association. This wider study explored the profiles, patterns and purposes of early childhood teachers' work in New Zealand education and care centres with differing proportions of qualified teachers (Meade et al., 2012). We explore episodes of adult-child SST drawn from data collected in 10 centres and ask whether recent sociocultural understandings of children's learning are evident when adults join children in playful learning.

Reconceptualising teaching and the role of the teacher

The powerful influence of educators as mediators of children's learning is becoming widely recognised as teachers engage with sociocultural theory and practice (e.g., Anning, Cullen, & Fleer, 2009; Edwards, 2006; Fleer & Richardson, 2004). Rogoff (1990), for example, positions the teacher as critical in supporting children's social and cognitive development. Interactions with others are central because it is "through others that we become ourselves" (Vygotsky, 987, cited in Fleer, 2010, p. 41).

In this view, if teachers are to engage in meaningful inquiry with children, they need to have both relational and pedagogical knowledge to be thoughtful and intentional contributors to playful learning. They understand the role of everyday experiences, language and conversations in extending children's thinking. Mindful and intentional teachers can facilitate the transition from informal and lower order thinking to higher order and more complex cognition. Fleer (2010) argues that everyday, informal moments are important times when teachers can enter the conceptual space of children.

With the developmental approach to curriculum, teachers emphasise the role of materials and resources rather than actively supporting children's self-constructed learning. However, the sociocultural approach positions teachers as mediators of children's learning; hence they foreground the 'thinking' part of their teaching (Fleer, 2010).

Citing various studies emphasising the need for staff to be professionally qualified, we found a consensus in the literature that quality early childhood education (e.c.e.) is experienced by children through care-giving behaviours, adult–child interactions, and learning activities (Meade et al., 2012).

New Zealand research

Earlier work on schema learning by Meade and Cubey (1995, 2008) gave educators specific ideas on how they could enhance children's cognition. The longitudinal *Competent Children* study (see Wylie et al., 2004; Wylie & Hodgen, 2007; Wylie, Thompson, & Kerslake Hendricks, 1996) monitored the long-term benefits of early childhood education and noted that 'teachers make a difference' when effecting changed outcomes for children.

There has been a growing interest in a sociocultural understanding of knowledge construction; for example, Hedges (2010) and the 2005-2010 Centres of Innovation 'Waves' series (e.g., Meade, 2010). Jordan (2009) argued for co-construction of understanding with neither teachers nor children dominating the engagements. She highlighted the need for more effective pedagogical strategies to ensure that children make their own decisions about the direction of their learning. Hedges (2010) concluded that teachers must become more analytical and able to engage at a deeper level with children. They need to tap into children's 'funds of

knowledge' and use pedagogical skills that support children's deep-seated interests and satisfy their 'fundamental inquiries' for worthwhile learning.

Davis, Peters and White (2012) explored how to listen and respond to children's working theories. Data showed that despite good intentions, adults often 'hijacked', or missed the subtleties and nuances of children's thinking; that is, opportunities for SST were missed. They also observed occasions when children were assimilating new knowledge, and adult attempts to offer 'correct information' were not helpful (Peters & Davis, 2011; White, 2012).

The pedagogical concept of SST

The quality of teachers' interactions with children can be shown in the way that teachers move beyond short exchanges to interactive dialogue that provokes and stretches children's thinking. The concept of 'sustained shared thinking' sets out the role of the teacher as a facilitator of children's cognition. Researchers in the UK's *Effective Pre-school and Primary Education (EPPE)* study identified this aspect of practice in effective settings (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004, 2010). SST is associated with creative and critical thinking and the development of higher-order thinking. They defined SST as "instances where two or more individuals 'work together' in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, or extend a narrative" (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010, p. 175). An episode of sustained shared thinking involves 'extra talk' beyond the level of instruction that deepens children's thinking. There is reciprocity in the interchange – both child and teacher contribute to the dialogue but neither dominates. Thus, "each party engages with the understanding of the other and learning is achieved through a process of reflexive 'co-construction' involving sustained shared thinking" (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009a, p. 153).

Shared understanding has both intellectual and empathetic emphases, with the emotions assisting learning (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009b). Elkonin (1978, cited in Siraj-Blatchford, 2009b, p. 84) explains that play partners communicate from their own historically constructed perspective including their understanding of themselves as constructed by the other participant in the communication (or SST). This has important implications for development and learning. The EPPE research found that SST had strong predictive value for positive child outcomes.

Methodology and findings

The Teachers' Work project sought in part to examine the pedagogical understandings and intent of teaching staff in centres with differing proportions of qualified e.c.e. teachers (Meade et al., 2012). The project results established clear links between acts of intentional teaching, underpinning pedagogical theories and qualified teachers.

Our study used a mixed-method research design for data gathering based on two collective cases (five centres with 100% qualified teachers *collectively*, and five centres with 50–79% qualified teachers *collectively*). The participating e.c.e. centres were randomly selected from Ministry of Education databases, and were stratified by location, levels of qualified teachers and the enrolment of both toddlers and young children.

Event sampling included types of adult–child interactions (such as 'conversations' and 'SST'). In each case study, centre 10 'target children' were observed: six young children aged four years, and four toddlers aged between 10 and 30 months. Over a period of two or three weeks, each target child was observed in episodes of eight minute intervals. On average there were 15 observation scripts per child. We gathered over 1000 minutes of child observations in each of the 10 centres. Every observation script was examined on site daily for events of SST where both parties had contributed to the thinking.

Like the EPPE project in the UK (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009b), the overall incidence of SST in our data was relatively low (101 episodes), which is less than 10% of all adult-child interactions. Table 1 shows that episodes of SST were also distributed unevenly across the ten centres.

Sustained shared thinking occurred more frequently in centres with 100% qualified teachers (nearly 2/3 of the episodes were observed in the five centres in this category). In the centres with 50-79% qualified staff, over 80% of the SST episodes occurred between a qualified teacher and a target child. Looking at who initiated episodes of SST, we found that qualified teachers initiated 73 of the 101 episodes, nine were initiated by unqualified staff, and the balance was by children. Analysis of the child-initiated interactions involving SST identified that children initiated the sharing of ideas mostly with qualified teachers – indicating that children recognise the expertise of qualified teachers in discussing ideas.

Table 1: *Episodes of SST by age group in case study centres with 100% qualified teachers and 50-79% qualified staff*

	100% qualified		50-79% qualified teachers	
	QT	UQ	QT	UQ
2 years and under	13	3	20	2
4 years and over	40	3	14	6
Total	53	6	34	8

Notes:
1. QT = Qualified Teachers; UQ = Unqualified teachers.
2. In the 100% qualified centres, UQ includes relievers who are unqualified, students and supernumerary staff.

There was considerable variation between centres. Half the centres had fewer than seven episodes and in one of the centres with fewer qualified staff, no episodes of SST were observed. Qualification levels also influenced the length of SST episodes; qualified teachers were often involved through all eight minutes of a SST episode, whereas unqualified staff interacted for less time. The picture emerges of fewer opportunities for children in centres with fewer qualified teachers to engage with adults in knowledge construction. Connecting these analyses, we conclude that teacher education qualifications make an important difference to children's learning.

Will you play with me? Shared space leads to shared inquiry.

Instances of SST were observed across the curriculum. In the 100% qualified teacher collective case study, SST occurred more often in creative activities, followed by outdoors, manipulative construction and 'unstructured/waiting/watching' activities. In the collective case with 50-79% qualified staff, episodes of SST occurred most often in activities planned to provide literacy or numeracy learning, often in connection with group times for four-year-olds. When unqualified educators in these centres engaged in SST, it was observed most often during creative activities.

The occurrence of SST during unstructured activities was unexpected. Closer analysis revealed these conversations occurred during meal times and when helping adults tidy up. These episodes were more frequent in the centres with fewer qualified staff.

Scenarios

The following scenarios present indicative examples of SST that occurred during child observations across all centres. They highlight the role of teachers in the mediation of learning, the importance of having a rich knowledge of the child's interests, as well as a deep theoretical understanding of concept formation to extend learning in meaningful ways. Furthermore, they illustrate the variety of play experiences where teaching staff were engaging in sustained interactions during playful learning.

Scenario 1 – Sticky sellotape

A toddler was discovering how to how to use a tape dispenser without tangling the tape in her fingers. The teacher stepped the child through the process, verbally and by modelling, until she managed this alone. The child repeated the dispensing of tape and sticking of tape onto paper for some time with great concentration, before exploring the wearing of tape on her mouth.

This scenario exemplifies SST where the adult mediates a toddler's play through thoughtful interactions, using her understandings of the child's conceptual experience and the social context. The teacher knew the child well and noticed her persistence with the problem. Having clarified the child's intention based on the child's nonverbal affirmative signal, the teacher sat alongside the child and used verbal explanation to help her remove the tape from her fingers, and followed up by modelling how to use the tape dispenser.

Having mastered skills related to stickiness (adhesion), the toddler explored the concept through a new action – taping her own mouth. She helped create a 'double move' enabling the teacher to be intentional and further extend the child's conceptual thinking (see Hedegaard & Chaikin, 2002, cited in Fleer, 2010, p. 14).

Scenario 2 – 'Fossil' hunting

Few 'pedagogical events' were observed where teachers intentionally planned to frame play; however, this 'fossil hunting' scenario was an exception. The group activity was carefully orchestrated around children's on-going inquiries about dinosaurs and fossils. Within map play and treasure hunts, the adult also introduced information about paleontologists.

A student teacher, taking on the role of paleontologist, took a group of children on a journey through the playground using a map designed by the children. This led to an 'excavation' site to dig for fossilised bones, using paleontologist tools, before cleaning and investigating bones in a table-top (child-designed) 'laboratory'.

This scenario is an example of teaching that enabled rich and varied exploration of concepts connected to the work of paleontologists and associated language. The student teacher ascertained what the children already knew before intentionally framing further scientific concepts and supporting higher order thinking. Her planning considered

Maggie and Barbara share responsibility for the well-being of the seedlings for the centre's vegetable garden.

Photo courtesy: Massey Childcare Centre, Palmerston North

what might be a playful, motivating and conceptually-engaging activity.

There was another layer of inquiry about symbols as the group used a map for a visual representation of the centre playground. Symbols (e.g., 'X' and arrows), and actual materials (e.g., sand), were used on the map to represent 'landmarks'. The concrete playful learning activities included following a map, excavating, cleaning and investigating bones. The children drew on what the student teacher framed about scientific concepts associated with paleontology and maps. She used open questioning and commentary to keep the children thinking. The experiences broadened children's visual literacy, as they worked with maps with two- and three-dimensions. They explored mathematical concepts of comparison, measurement, texture, density and recording data. Being careful to make children's learning their own, the student teacher used relational knowledge of children's inquiries and generated deeper knowledge in a playful way.

Scenario 3 – The key to the door

A group of children demonstrated a schematic interest in enclosure, and the teacher built her narrative on this concept as she interacted with toddlers one morning. A toddler was inside waiting to go out. An adult gave her a bundle of keys to take to another teacher to open the shed. She picked the child up and settled her on her hip so that she could reach the lock. The teacher modelled curiosity and inquiry (e.g., "I wonder which key will fit?"). They tried a number of keys in the lock; each time the teacher waited patiently while the child singled out a key. She talked the child through the activity: "Hold onto it … that one there … push it all the way in … pull the handle all the way down". There was a degree of instruction to keep the thinking shared and sustained. As the key turned and the door swung open the toddler verbalised, "ooh".

During this episode of SST the teacher was unrushed. She gave her full attention to the toddler, and allowed the child to lead in her exploration of keys in a lock. The teacher's intention was to create learning from a routine, unstructured event. There was a strong sense of relationship and reciprocity in their interaction. By lifting the child up to her level and holding her close, the teacher supported and valued the child's participation. Relationships are paramount to the care and pedagogy of infants and toddlers. New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, (Ministry of Education, 1996) requires pedagogy to be cemented in relational intersubjectivity.

A sense of autonomy is fostered in children when attuned caregivers recognise and respond with loving sensitivity to the intentionality of infants and toddlers (Christie, 2011). In this particular scenario the teacher made time to involve the child in making decisions, thus demonstrating her regard for the child as a partner in co-constructing curriculum. Early concepts about the physical world (mechanics and the use of keys as tools to open locks) were implicit in the dialogue. Worth noting also was the engagement of the group of children on the periphery. The teacher's deep engagement and building of anticipation transferred to those who waited excitedly as bystanders in the learning experience.

Scenario 4 – Bracelets in boxes

The family corner had open shelves on which were placed a range of boxes. Some had smaller boxes nested inside them, while others had a range of small objects inside. A toddler moved to the shelves and picked up a round container. The teacher moved alongside and said: "You do the small one. I'll do the big one." (The teacher took the lid off the bigger box). "Anything in it?" The child looked in, and put her hand in the box to discover it was empty. The child then picked up her box. The teacher responded, supporting the child to open it. The teacher next offered another slightly bigger box. The child held the lid in her palm, but her fingers were too short to span the lid. The teacher suggested, "Stretch your little fingers round" (meaning stretch your fingers across the lid). She added, "You might need two hands … keep stretching …." The teacher then picked up a small bracelet and put it in the empty box. The child took it out, running her finger around the bracelet. The teacher commented "… it's got bumps on it". The teacher held out the box and the child put the bracelet in, and together they put the lid back on. The child removed the lid again. The teacher said "Yeah, you got it off again. You take it out this time". The child took the bracelet out. Throughout, the teacher talked, named, and inputted language such as: "Oh, do you need to take the lid off to put it in?" Then the child found another bracelet and added it, as the teacher commented: "Two in there now … can you fit a third in there?" When the child put another bracelet in and found the lid did not fit, the teacher noted that fact verbally. The child took the bracelets out. The teacher responded as the child took each out. "Take it out … the container is empty… nothing in there". At this point another child came and took the lid, and the child picked up the container and moved off.

The teacher had responded to the child's known interest in containment and enveloping by setting up the environment accordingly. Using the boxes, the lids and the bracelets, the teacher and toddler focused on their joint task, with the teacher adding complexity as well as encouragement. Throughout the seven minutes of sustained joint engagement, the teacher's intentions were visible. Although the child was pre-verbal, SST was clear, with each participant taking turns to lead, and with the teacher intentionally providing language to support the child's concepts of enveloping and containment, as well as size.

Discussion and conclusion

In 2008, Meade called for further research on the adult's role in extending children's thinking in early childhood environments. The event sampling of sustained shared thinking within the observational data of the Teachers' Work study addresses this call in part. Our methods did not allow, however, for interpretive analysis of SST; only analysis of their frequency, the subjects, contexts and a brief exploration of teaching intent.

In New Zealand, co-construction is a practice known more widely than sustained shared thinking. SST differs from co-construction in that the adult, while still sharing power, may have a direction 'in mind' hence there is typically a degree of instruction within the SST episodes that extend children's conceptual knowledge during play. The data showed that those who could do this in meaningful and playfully-engaging ways had professional expertise and sociocultural understandings of learning.

Our Teachers' Work study (Meade et al, 2012) found a similar low frequency of episodes of SST to those found in the UK's EPPE study (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). Likely explanations include environmental constraints linked to teacher values and beliefs and centre philosophies of play, as well as rosters and staff deployment. More importantly, the infrequency of SST suggests a lack of understanding and knowledge of both the importance of SST for cognitive outcomes for children and the intentional pedagogical strategies and conceptual knowledge teachers must employ to successfully engage in meaningful and reciprocal conversations aimed to extend children's thinking.

In our study, this was particularly noticeable among unqualified educators working in the case study centres. SST requires deep theoretical understandings of concept formation, conceptual scientific knowledge and relational pedagogy, generally afforded through completing a teacher qualification related directly to early childhood education. The findings of this study indicate how conceptual knowledge strengthens the ability of teachers to recognise inquiry and opportunities for engaging in meaningful SST in play.

Relationships (a key principle of *Te Whāriki*) mediate the negotiation of meaningful curriculum when teachers, who know children well, recognise and respond to their inquiries by engaging in intersubjective exploration of conceptual thinking. While a number of the episodes of SST in the Teachers' Work project focused on the acquisition of more traditional knowledge and skills in the wider study of teachers' work, many were also about relationships, children's identity, well-being and contribution to the group – learning outcomes brought to the fore in *Te Whāriki* – and evidently recognised and valued as everyday learning experiences for extending thinking.

Relational pedagogy means having 'in mind' what a child brings and what a teacher knows (Dalli, Rockel, Duhn, & Craw, 2011). Relational pedagogy underpins intentional teaching because it necessitates tuning into children's thinking and recognising their inquiries. Lindfors, (1999, p. 16) states, "Children's inquiry acts to provide a window to their thinking" (cited in Hedges, 2010, p. 35). Intersubjective relationships are central to the *quality* of interactions. Teacher knowledge of the child, their prior experiences and dispositions for learning will influence intentional pedagogical approaches. In our project we found that on the occasions when a researcher could ask a practitioner about her or his thoughts after a longer-than-usual interaction with a child, and/or when she had noticed conceptual content, their responses always indicated intentional teaching and relational knowledge of the child.

By avoiding 'adult-known solutions' and assumptions (Davis et al., 2012), teachers instead follow the child in creative and unknown directions, intervening only as thoughtful, intentional and sometimes instructional contributors to children's playful learning (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). Teachers' active use of theorising encourages young children to critically examine and problem solve. The basis must be the teacher believing the child has this capacity and knowing the child's dispositions for learning.

Our New Zealand study found that episodes of sustained shared thinking were much more likely to be facilitated by qualified teachers and happened more often in centres with 100% qualified teachers. These findings about pedagogy associated with children's thinking confirm what we already suspected – that qualified teachers matter.

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How will it change when I poke it?
Shared inquiry in the sand pit.

Photo courtesy: Massey Childcare Centre, Palmerston North

Change and challenge

EC teachers' professional learning and development

By Shareen Sapsworth

Significant changes are occurring in how early childhood teachers engage in professional learning and development. As a facilitator of professional learning programmes, I have observed and experienced the changes first hand. Using the theme of 'change and challenge', this article considers those aspects of professionalism I believe are particularly relevant to professional learning, as well as proposing strategies for establishing and sustaining a culture of continued learning and development.

So what is professionalism?

Simpson (2010) broadly defines professionalism as dispositions and orientations of professional groups while Locke (2001) describes it as a dynamic term. Thus pinning down a definition is problematic. However, in my experience with teachers', leaders and managers in the early childhood sector, professionalism appears to be defined most commonly with reference to the role of the teacher, ways of working, and status of qualification.

In her classic consideration of professionalism in early childhood, Katz (1985) identified eight criteria, three of which I believe are particularly relevant to professional learning and development.

Prolonged training – where teachers, leaders and managers design and engage in a programme of continual and progressive activities in a contextually responsive way.

Autonomy – where the learning community takes ownership for their learning and development and where activities are planned formatively with a strong focus on identifying actions, behaviours and outcomes for practice – asking what does this mean for me as a teacher? what will I change, do differently as a result of my learning and what does this mean for the teaching of those I work with and alongside?

Altruism – a virtue that is very visible within the early childhood sector. Professional learning and development activities more often involve teachers', leaders' and managers' sacrificing an increasing amount of personal time to engage in learning that provides benefits to others.

Change

Language is changing as ideas about the nature of teachers' learning also change. One notably significant change within the in-service education environment has been the professional discourse surrounding continued learning and development. 'PD' as it is widely known has become a deeply entrenched acronym; however a growing body of research in this area is prompting a change to this acronym from PD to PLD (professional learning and development). Development alone (as in PD) implies an approach that is summative in nature, whereas PLD incorporates learning which reflects greater alignment with the characteristics of effective engagement of adult learners. Learning alongside development implies the formative continual nature of learning, growth, and progression of education (Timperley, 2007). Considerable research undertaken about PLD has focused on models and approaches of effective learning and development (Timperley, 2002; Fullan, 2001; Gusky, 2002). Such research portrays PLD as integral to teachers' continued learning and practice of teaching to "continually update, deepen, and refine their knowledge and skills" (Timperley 2002 p. 13). Symes, Jefferies, Timperley and Lai (2001) also argue that PLD is likely to be most effective when it is collaborative, of contextual relevance and with continued support.

> *ECE services have to take greater ownership and responsibility for identifying, accessing, and engaging in PLD*

Changes to Government policy have influenced the direction and shape of PLD in the early childhood sector. Consecutive Governments have made considerable investments in early childhood education (ECE). Notable among these was the implementation of the 2002 strategic plan signalling a strong and decisive direction for the future of quality early childhood education in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2002). The plan's objective included a clear path toward a fully qualified sector where teachers

invested in regular engagement in professional learning and development. However since 2010, accessibility to government-funded professional learning has become increasingly targeted. As a result, ECE services have to take greater ownership and responsibility for identifying, accessing, and engaging in PLD.

This shift in responsibility places ownership back in the hands of ECE services. Teachers', leaders' and managers' are becoming increasingly aware of factors that constitute effective PLD while expectations about the level and intensity of engagement in continued learning and development have been heightened. I have noted that as the early childhood sector has included an increased proportion of qualified teachers, teachers have also become increasingly aware of the importance, value and need for engagement in continued learning and development. Increasingly there is a shift away from seeing PLD solely as 'isolated islands' that are visited occasionally (i.e. as 'one off' courses), to a view of learning and development as 'the island we live on', thus PLD exists as a part of practice - connected, continual and contextual. The recognition and value of collaborative learning, based on (and in) the ECE context is commonly recognised as fundamental for supporting a collegial profession (Dalli, 2012).

Challenges

Promoting professionalism through establishing a culture of continued learning and development requires close examination of the foundations (climate and context) that shape the organisational culture of a service. Sharing beliefs and values about PLD, discussing interactions and relationships, identifying approaches conducive to learning, and developing an effective infrastructure (internal systems and structures) are important aspects to consider in establishing a culture of continued learning and development.

Professionalism can be promoted through the ways teachers', leaders' and managers are involved in planning for and engaging in PLD opportunities. The extent to which PLD becomes a sustainable part of a services culture largely depends I believe on three core components - collective commitment of the learning community, infrastructure within the service (time, space, resources) and effective educational leadership.

• *Learning communities*

Continued commitment toward PLD derives (in part) from the learning community being able to see its purpose and value. To sustain learning and development along with the outcomes and changes that result, learners' must be able to experience the value, for themselves as an individual, collectively as a learning community, while most importantly be able to see the benefits this has on outcomes for children. A clear rationale and purpose also supports to sustain momentum of learning and development *(e.g. Why are we engaging in this learning and development? What do we hope to achieve and how will we go about enacting (and sustaining) changes in our practice)*. Revisiting the rationale and purpose

of a specific learning and development activity, programme, or experience a learning community is involved in will support to sustain collective commitment while promoting professionalism of engagement.

• *Infrastructure of systems and structures*

Identifying and implementing dedicated time; space and resources will enable (and promote) the value of continued learning and development.

Identifying and enabling time when teachers can meet to engage in learning and development activities – individually, in small groups, and as a whole team – promotes the professional value of continued learning and development. It is acknowledged however that for a significant proportion of services the only collaborative time available to meet and engage in PLD exists outside the working day. This is a problematic issue in the sector and a hurdle that services need to address in order to establish (and sustain) a culture of continued learning and development. The altruistic motivation of teachers is an attribute to the sector; however it is a virtue that must be acknowledged. In order to sustain a culture where continued learning and development is meaningfully embedded in practice, it is fundamental that this virtue is not taken for granted' .

Commitment to resourcing the environment with tools and resources that both enable effective teaching practice while supporting PLD demonstrates recognition of the value that continued learning brings. Dedication of space conducive to adult learning makes visible (both to teachers' and the wider community) the value a service places on continued learning and development. Consideration of the way these systems and structures are designed (or revised) to enable teachers' to engage in continued learning demonstrates its value and promotes professionalism of teaching practice.

• *Educational leadership*

Effective educational leadership is a fundamental element essential in establishing and sustaining a culture of professional learning that will nurture and promote professionalism. Fullan (2001) describes leaders as those that focus on building the capacity of teachers to recognise, implement and maintain beneficial educational improvements. In terms of outcomes for learners, leadership is a central ingredient and a keystone element of education (Leithwood, 2004). "The leadership goal is no longer to develop a vision and build a good learning community. The new goal requires leaders to do all those things in a manner that improves teaching and learning" (Robinson, 2004 p. 40). Therefore for PLD to contribute to teachers' capacity, opportunities to engage and grow professionally need to be fostered. The role of leaders in enacting this goal is fundamental.

Strategies and reflective questions are needed to provoke discussion and inform practice about promoting professionalism through continued learning.

EC leaders need to consider:

- *Collective Commitment*

  - Challenge historical approaches to 'PD' – dedicate time to talking about what learning, changes and improvements the service/learning community wants to achieve and identify effective approaches to help achieve this purpose.

  - Create opportunities where those involved in PLD are part of the decision-making process. Promote engagement and ownership through learners being actively involved in making decisions about their learning (what, when and how).

  - Demonstrate the value of teachers as professionals by making collaborative decisions about the nature and approach to PLD (fostering autonomy).

  - Dedicate time to discussing expectations about levels of engagement.

- *Effective infrastructure (systems and structures)*

  - *Establish/review systems and structures to create time, and provide space/s and resources to foster continued learning and development.*

  - *Review how time, space and resources are allocated (individually and collectively) to enable teachers' to engage in professional dialogue and on-going collaborative learning and development.*

- *Effective educational leadership*

  - *Revisit the role of the leader within the service – How does leadership in this service model, promote, and nurture professionalism through PLD.*

  - *Consider ways the leader/leaders in the service develop the capacity of teachers and system/structures to promote collective commitment to continued learning.*

  - *Identify ways leadership practice promotes and supports teachers' engagement in continued learning development.*

Summary

Professionalism of the organisational culture in a service is crucial in creating a climate in which teachers'; leaders' and managers' have the disposition and capacity for continued learning and development. An environment where interest and engagement in prolonged learning is nurtured, autonomy fostered and altruism acknowledged provides a positive foundation on which to build an organisational culture that promotes professionalism.

The early childhood sector is dynamic and will continue to be confronted by change and challenge. In order to foster professionalism, I believe the sector needs to use such influences as provocations to prompt collaborative discussion and engagement in continued learning and development.

Collective commitment, effective infrastructure and effective leadership are aspects I consider fundamental for promoting professionalism. Establishing and sustaining a culture of continued learning and development where these are embedded in practice provides a solid platform in which to nurture and promote professionalism in the early childhood sector.

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Getting to school on time

Planning for successful transitions

Aimee de Candole

Responding to parents' queries and concerns about their child's transition to school is often hindered by a lack of straightforward, practical advice for families. Often teachers have the knowledge, or know where to find it, but this can be complicated by educational jargon. The purpose of this article is to give teachers a practical tool and resource to use with parents as they prepare for their child's journey into the new entrant classroom. David Yeboah (2002) states that "a quality transition is said to occur when the child is emotionally, psychologically, physically and intellectually ready to settle into primary school" (p. 52). However, being able to articulate what this looks like, using clear and concise language and relevant research, is the key when helping parents to prepare themselves and their child for the transition from early childhood education to the school environment.

The following ideas are based on a parent evening that I held at my Tauranga kindergarten, after some clear community needs were identified. Firstly, it became apparent that there was a very uneven spread of children into the four local primary schools. Seemingly, many parents were basing the decision about where to enrol their child on hearsay and external influences, rather than making informed choices. Secondly, many parents were underestimating the amount of time needed to research the various schools, complete the relevant paperwork, and begin transition programmes with their child. Furthermore, many were unaware that transition classes formed the basis for a successful transition to school process. Consequently, the presentation to parents and whānau was aimed at assisting them in making educated choices about which local school was right for them and their child, and how to begin the transition process.

'Choosing the school that's right for you'

Finding the right school is a significant decision for parents, as "the likelihood of successfully completing school, gaining employment and becoming a productive, socially adjusted citizen can be traced back to a child's experiences during school entry" (The Future of Children, 2005 cited in Royal Children's Hospital, 2008, p. 2). Parents will often seek information from teachers on local schooling options and while it is important to remove biases and stay neutral, it is

also part of the teacher's role to ensure that parents have the relevant facts to guide and support them in the transition process.

In many cases, parents ask their child for their school preference as well as seeking advice from family and friends. While this will provide parents with some useful opinions, it is worth reminding them that ultimately it is their responsibility and choice, and that they have the final say. The best thing parents can do is research the local primary schools for themselves, meet the staff, ask questions, have a look around and get a proper feel for the place.

Early childhood teachers should explain to parents that principals and new entrant teachers welcome these meetings and that they are a normal part of the enrolment process. Some parents will require assistance in arranging these meetings and for others having a support person present may be beneficial. For example, if the family has English as an additional language, is unfamiliar with the New Zealand school system, or has a child with special needs, they may appreciate a teacher's support.

Outlined below are a few key factors for parents to carefully consider when researching and visiting the schools. In order to remember details later on, parents can take notes and even a camera so they can compare the different primary schools.

Location?

The geographical location of the school can be a major factor for parents due to family schedules, work commitments, transportation options, petrol costs and the closeness of support people. However, it is important that parents do not base their decision solely on this one feature of the school, as family circumstances may change during the course of their child's school career. School zoning restrictions will apply in some high density areas, which limit the primary school options available to parents but they can still apply to enrol in schools outside of their immediate zone.

Costs?

Transportation is just one of the many additional costs, fees, or expected donations that families can anticipate when their child begins mainstream schooling. These charges will vary from school to school, so parents will need to ask for this information when meeting with the principal or teaching

staff. Talking to other parents whose children attend the school would provide additional clarification.

Special character?

Typically, this refers to language immersion schools like Kura Kaupapa Māori, religious education settings or special character schools, such as Steiner or Montessori. However, it can also be extended to include the special characteristics of a school which some parents will want to consider. For example, a number of parents will have cultural aspirations for their child or want to foster a special interest. Therefore schools that have bilingual classrooms, cultural groups, clubs and extra-curricular activities in these areas would be of high importance for them.

School environment?

First impressions count, so encourage parents to have an extensive look around the school facilities such as the library, technology suites, sports halls and a range of classrooms. The environment should be clean, warm and welcoming, well-resourced and show many examples of children's work on the walls as well as information about the schools values, programme and curriculum (Farquhar, 2011). Parents will also gain an insight into the way children, their peers and the staff work together. Their interactions and the body language used will let parents know if warm, nurturing, respectful, purposeful and productive relationships are evident in the school environment.

Existing contacts at the school?

Extensive research shows that children are more likely to successfully transition when they know other children at the school, such as preschool friends or siblings (Yeboah, 2002). This is because children use these familiar contacts as a support network while they adapt to the new rules, routines and culture of school life (Loizou, 2011). However, this is arguably just one part of the overall picture. If other areas of the school are a cause for concern or do not meet the child or their parent's needs, then alternative options need to be considered.

Official documents?

Many parents will not be familiar with official documents, which provide a great deal of information about the school and the quality of education their child will receive there. Early childhood teachers can provide copies of these documents or direct parents to the relevant websites. It is important to point out that Education Review Office reports are carried out and published approximately every three years, so some may be slightly out of date. The School Charter is sent to the Ministry of Education annually, so this will be more current.

Harshaan Rai reflects on her time at Te Puke kindergarten and celebrates her ongoing learning journey with family, friends and teachers on her 5th birthday.

Photo courtesy of Aimee de Condole

'Big fish - little fish'

The majority of four year olds are incredibly excited about starting school and cannot wait to be 'big' school children. However, even though this is an exciting time in their lives, transitioning to school can also cause anxiety for children and their parents. This is due to all the change and unknown factors involved. Children go from being the oldest, most experienced and well-known member of their early childhood centre, to the school environment where they are smallest, newest and least familiar. Consequently, a number of behaviour changes are to be expected as children begin the transition process. Not only are children faced with a barrage of new information, faces, rules and routines to internalise, there are many, seemingly minor details that they frequently find unsettling. Indeed, Dockett and Perry (2003) found that new entrant children wanted their preschool peers to know about the different boys' and girls' toilets, the out of bounds areas, the sick bay and the water fountains, so that they would be better prepared when transitioning to school.

In addition to these environmental difficulties, parents of four year old boys in particular need to be aware of the surge in testosterone that many experience prior to starting school. This often leads to challenging and boisterous behaviour that leaves many families confused and strained. In order to help parents gain a better understanding of the changes affecting their child at this stage of development, teachers could suggest they read Biddulph's (2008) *Raising Boys* which has some great explanations along with tips and advice.

Sometimes however, the simplest thing that families and educators can do when feeling frustrated with soon-to-be school children's behaviour, is to take a step back and put themselves in the child's position. Viewing transitions through the lens of the child and thinking about their feelings

of anticipation, nervousness and uncertainty, can assist both parents and teachers in gaining an increased appreciation of what the child is going through.

To ease the transition to school process, there are a number of strategies that parents and teachers can utilise. Walker (2005) suggests that those close to the child need to approach the upcoming transition using what she describes as the 'slow drip' method; by gradually talking openly and honestly about what children can expect from school while also being positive and enthusiastic. She also warns against building up the event by starting a countdown months in advance of the big day, as this can lead to undue stress and anxiety and create an anticlimax. Children need to slowly become familiar with the school environment and the expectations associated with school life, and this is the reason that transition programmes are so valuable.

Transition classes are an essential part of the preparation process because they allow children to ease themselves into their new setting. They learn where things are and how they work, get to know the daily routines and events, and establish relationships with the teacher's and other children. More importantly though, these school experiences build up the child's confidence and help them to understand that this is their place, thereby ensuring that they feel safe and develop a sense of belonging at their new school. How this looks in practice will be dependent on the needs of those involved. Transition programmes must be individually tailored to suit the members of the community to which they serve (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003).

School Readiness vs. Ready Schools

The New Zealand practice of enrolling children to start school on their fifth birthdays is actually very uncommon internationally (Peters, 2002). Globally, two thirds of all children start school when they are six years of age, while a further 23% begin formal schooling when they are seven years old (Huebler, 2010).

Many parents would not be aware of these facts and in some instances, it may be appropriate for teachers to inform them that not all children are 'ready' to start school on the day they turn five. Specific cases would include children with special needs or developmental delays, but it could just be that the child would benefit from spending some more time in the early childhood centre. As Podmore, Sauvai and Mapa (2000) state, "being responsive to a child's current level of understanding is a crucial factor in transition" (p. 82).

Parents need to remember that they know their child best and if they feel their child is not ready to start school yet, they should not feel pressured to do so just because it is the societal norm. Legally, primary school education in New Zealand is not compulsory until children reach the age of six (Ministry of Education, 2012).

'School readiness' is a term that traditionally conjures up images of a checklist of things that a child 'should be doing' at school entry age, such as recognising their name, identifying letters, numbers and colours. More recently however, the

skills identified as being beneficial for children to have prior to starting school have related to the essential learning dispositions, such as having the confidence to take risks and the ability to get along with others (Carr, 1998). While such understandings are surely advantageous, this view does imply that readiness is a responsibility that lies with the child (Noel, 2011). Nowadays, the philosophy of school readiness is seen as referring to "the practices and policies that assist children and families in comfortably transitioning from early childhood education to primary school" (Dockett & Perry, 2008 cited in Noel, 2011, p. 2). The school needs to be ready for the child, just as much as the child needs to be ready for school.

Along with participation in transition programmes, one way that early childhood teachers and parents can assist is by sharing the child's learning portfolio with the new entrant teacher. These documents tell the story of the child, and their background, learning and development so far, providing an excellent starting block for relationship building. This is the most critical factor in ensuring children experience an effective, quality transition from early childhood to primary school. All stakeholders involved – teachers, parents and children – need to invest time and energy into the establishment and maintenance of positive working partnerships (Dockett & Perry, 2001).

It is also important that information sharing continues throughout the child's educational journey, rather than stopping once the child is deemed to have transitioned successfully. Often, children appear to adapt quickly to school life but can become disillusioned after a few weeks, once the initial excitement has worn off (Renwick, 1997). Walker (2005) states that this is fairly common, due to children's understanding around the concept of time; some may feel that they have been to school, done that and are now ready to move on to something else. Talking openly with the new entrant teacher will help to ensure that all involved can work together to support the child. Ensuring children experience a successful transition to school goes beyond the initial settling period (Yeboah, 2002).

In the worst case scenario, parents need to know that it is in their child's best interest to voice any concerns as soon as they arise. Making time to discuss issues will help alleviate potential problems which could lead to negative outcomes for the new entrant child. If difficulties persist, it may be worth requesting a change of classroom environment for the child, or in extreme situations, a new school. Obviously this would require an additional transition for the child and is not a decision to be taken lightly. However, some parents may believe that once they have chosen a school they are locked in. For the sake of the child's overall well-being and future learning outcomes, there are a small minority of cases where alternative schooling options may be worth pursuing.

Other ways to assist children reaching their full potential in the primary school setting are much simpler, but should not be overlooked. Starting school is incredibly draining for the new entrant child, mentally, physically and emotionally (Walker, 2005). Children need to be fit, healthy, well-

nourished and well-rested in order to gain maximum benefits from all the learning opportunities they are provided with each and every day. It is advisable that parents refrain from signing their child up for extra-curricular activities or organising numerous afterschool play dates, particularly in their first term of school. This is a time of immense adjustment for the child and they need to balance all the busy learning and playing with friends they have done during the school day, with some quiet and relaxing times at home (Walker, 2005).

Summary

Ensuring the well-being of the whole child is of the utmost importance when preparing for the transition from early childhood education to primary school education. By providing information related to all aspects the transition process, teachers can assist parents and children as they take the next step in their educational journey. This begins with choosing the right school based on a range of facts, combined with first-hand experiences. Teachers can then support parents and children as they cope with the many emotional responses that can be expected during this time of change. By viewing the transition through the lens of all stakeholders, a greater perspective will be gained which will lead to positive strategies being implemented to assist all involved. Children in particular need to become familiar with the school culture through the aid of transition classes, which also allows time for vital relationship formation between the teacher, parents and child.

When responding to parents' requests for guidance during their child's transition to school, it is hoped that the topics covered provide practical advice for early childhood teachers to share with parents to help them understand the transition process, and to make well informed decisions.

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Families need to belong too

Building relationships from the very first contact

Joanne Hayes

I was unprepared for the feelings of worry and uncertainty which swamped me when my eldest child started school. As an ex Nanny, Early Childhood Teacher and former New Entrant teacher, I had plenty of experience helping children transition into school and early childhood education, but I found myself worrying about the unfenced driveway, thinking "Why are there so few teachers on duty at lunchtime to look after the children?"; wondering whether he would remember to ask the teacher when he needed to go to the toilet; and uncertain about what my role in his life now was. I knew with my head that he was in a safe place and would be fine, but my heart was not so certain.

This experience made me aware that while starting school or early childhood education is a significant time for children, it can also be significant for other family members. If I, who was so familiar with the school routines and knew from experience that most children settled into school quickly and well, could have such strong feelings, what must it be like for those families who have had less experience of educational institutions when their child leaves them for the first time? How could educators support families at this time?

It became apparent to me that while it is important to foster a sense of trust and belonging in the child, families also need to develop trust and a sense of belonging to the centre or school. Educators therefore must consider the ways in which they relate to family members from the very first time they meet them. As Brooker (2008) suggests "Children's transitions must be understood as family transitions" (p. 89).

When families first enrol their child into an early childhood centre, it seems natural to think that they would have some concerns and worries. They are proposing to leave their precious taonga in the care of a virtual stranger and in an unfamiliar environment. Often they may also be dealing with other changes in their own lives such as going back to work after being on maternity leave.

Common worries at this time are often centred around knowing whether the centre staff can be trusted to ensure the health, safety and happiness of their child (Dalli, 2001). Daniel (1998) suggests that mothers in particular can

struggle with feelings of guilt about putting their child into the care of other adults. This can be due to historical discourse about the role of the mother based on Bowlby's writings about attachment and the negative effects of mother absence (Skolnick, 1998).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory can help us understand how paying attention to the needs of family members can also affect the adjustment of children (Brooker, 2008). Bronfenbrenner's theory positions the human as central to a range of interlocking systems which each have an impact on development. A change in one system can affect others. Thus, a change in the adult's life may result in the child being enrolled in childcare and conversely, when the child begins childcare, there may be different demands made of the adult. If the parent feels stressed and worried about the transition process, then this may affect how they interact with the child and the new setting, potentially resulting in a less successful transition.

Building relationships with children and families begins with the very first contact. First impressions can make people feel welcome or have the opposite effect. Picture this: *After calling to make an appointment, a mother and child arrive at a centre to visit with a view to enrolment. They enter the building and stand by the door waiting to be noticed. A couple of adults look up, but no one approaches them. After a minute the mother moves to a table and explains to someone why she is here. The staff member responds telling the mother that as the supervisor is away today, she will need to make another appointment.*

How welcome will this parent feel? Will this experience kick start a collaborative relationship with the family?

How different might the experience have been if the mother and child were welcomed at the door with the explanation that the supervisor was away but they were welcome to stay and visit? Imagine this: *that mother and children are shown around the centre, introduced to other staff and children and invited to join in the play. The educator might spend a few minutes talking with the parent and child and finding out about the child and the family. As they leave, they could be given some information and invited to visit again, thus inviting a connection with the centre.*

When working with families, educators must examine

Older children can help younger children transition.

their own assumptions, values and beliefs. Our relationships with children and their families and our actions towards them are influenced by the lenses through which we view them. How we view "the child" and "the family" is influenced by our own experiences, the culture and society within which we live, prevailing theories and discourse and historical views of these concepts.

With a background as a middle class European child from a nuclear family and my own experience of life as a married mother, I became aware of my own assumptions influencing my actions when I realised that when in conversation with mothers, I often referred to children's fathers as "your husband". This may have appeared to these mothers as a lack of acceptance for, or understanding of, their family. Such assumptions can impact on the family's sense of belonging and on the formation of a meaningful relationship between the family and early childhood centre staff.

Brooker (2008) suggests that a model that is useful in helping babies and families settle into centre care is the 'triangle of care'. This involves a partnership between a primary caregiver, the child and the parents. The sharing of information and support is critical as it enables a sense of trust to build up between the members of the triangle. The feeling of being in partnership can create an immediate sense of belonging in the parents.

When studying families involved in the transition to school, Peters (1997) also found that being informed was important. Families wanted as much information as they could get about the setting and the kinds of things that would happen in the setting. If families are well informed, they feel more confidence in leaving their child in the new setting. From a socio-cultural perspective, informed family members can also play a part in scaffolding the child during this time (Niesel & Griebel, 2007). For instance, they can talk to children about the things that will be different and discuss what may be expected of the child. When parents are not informed of matters they consider important, this can create barriers to forming collaborative relationships. For example, soon after my first child started school he came home and told me about his visit to the dental nurse. Imagine my horror when further conversation revealed that he had walked to another school, crossing roads in the care of an older child. I had not been informed that this was the process in the school and this affected my relationship with the staff at the school and my ability to trust them to care for my child.

As well as ensuring that families are informed about the new setting, it is important that information from the families is collected and valued. Centres collect information about children when they are enrolled but we need to reflect on what is the purpose of collecting the information, how we will use it and whether the kind of information we are collecting can be useful to us. For example, examining

the information collected at enrolment might enable the centre to identify multilingual families and who may be able to act as interpreters for other new families. Collecting information about how a child may be settled when unhappy is only of use if staff members use the information when the child is unhappy. If we do not use the information, it shows little respect and value for the knowledge that parents hold about their children.

The more educators know about children and their families the greater their ability to provide appropriate support during transitions and the more links can be made between contexts (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Fabian, 2007; Jones, 2006) to support development. Knowing the sleep time routines can allow for continuity of practice between home and centre, creating a link between the known and the unknown. Knowing more about children can circumvent problems as I found when I was working as a nanny. It took me weeks to work out the reason for the major tantrums that one child used to throw most evenings. She was used to eating dinner at 5.00 and I grew up in a family who ate dinner at 6.00. As a young 18 year old nanny, I assumed that everyone ate dinner at the same time and had not asked the parents what time the children were used to eating. Once I changed the dinner time, the tantrums ceased. In a centre context, it is helpful to know the child's familiar eating and sleeping patterns to avoid similar issues.

One way in which we can support families to have confidence in us as educators and caregivers of their tamariki is to plan with them the process for transition into our setting and explain to them the ways in which staff will support the child during the transition process. This helps reassure them and also encourages them to act in partnership with us. Actively involving families in the transition process has been found to be supportive of adjustment for children (Dalli, 2001; Dockett & Perry, 2009; Fabian, 2007; McGann & Clark, 2007). This does not mean that we 'the experts' sit down and tell the family how many visits are to be undertaken over what span of time, but may involve us sharing our understanding of the importance of pre-visits and discussing with family members what may be appropriate for *this* child. How can we know what might be appropriate for this child who we have just met? The family knows so much more about their child and how they are likely to react.

When my friend and I went together to enrol our two children at an early childhood centre, we were able to discuss with the educators how many visits were appropriate. This resulted in different transition plans for the children. My daughter was a confident child who already knew a couple of staff members and several children at the centre so did not need as many pre-visits as her friend. In contrast, my friend was experiencing the breakdown of her marriage which was of course impacting on her daughter and her daughter did not know anyone at the centre. Involving us in planning the transition process for our girls gave us an immediate feeling of being in a relationship where our knowledge was valued. The amount of involvement that families have in planning the transition may be varied due

to the amount of time and the level of expectation that they will be involved. Additionally, educators need to keep in mind that parents can feel intimidated and overwhelmed in educational institutions, so a lack of involvement does not always mean a lack of concern (Dockett & Perry, 2007).

Families will be reassured when we explain the ways in which we support continuity for their child enabling adjustment to the new setting. In a study of home-school relations in five Italian cities, New, Mallory and Mantovani (2000) found that one of the ways this could be achieved was for teachers to observe and learn from the ways in which parents would interact with their child. In this way they learned how parents would feed the child or settle them to sleep, and so were able to provide continuity for the child by following the same process. Centre visits encourage familiarity with routines for both parents and teachers. This is a good way of developing a sense of belonging and also enables relationships to develop as families and staff get to know each other.

The importance of social skills and friendships has been identified as a factor in helping children adjust to new settings. Where possible, children can be placed with a familiar playmate. Staff can support new children to interact with others and encourage new friendships to develop. The role of siblings in scaffolding the process can also be explained and encouraged. If they already attend the school or early childhood service, siblings may have a bank of knowledge about the setting which they can share. My older children were able to talk to my youngest child about the kinds of things that happened at school that they felt it was important for her to know.

Relationships with families may be easier to establish when the culture of the setting matches that of the family. If they are aware of potential differences educators can take steps to reduce any mismatch. Brooker (2008) suggests that while there are some aspects of child rearing which are common across cultures, there are some that are culture specific, and educational institutions tend to reflect the practices of the dominant culture. This can lead to barriers to forming relationships and a sense of belonging. Families may be concerned that children will lose their cultural identity. Early childhood education in New Zealand tends to be based on a Western tradition which values independence. This can be in conflict with some other cultural perspectives which expect children to be more submissive and dependent (Gonzalez-Mena, 2002). Staff must be mindful of cultural difference in our increasingly multicultural society and endeavour to find out about the values, beliefs and home practices of minority cultures so that they can support the cultural identity of children and families and encourage a sense of belonging.

Dockett and Perry (2007) found that for Aboriginal families in Australia, it was important for their culture to be visually represented in the setting. This gave them a feeling of comfort in the new setting and something familiar to identify with. It also showed value for their culture. Similarly, Ritchie and Rau (2010) suggest that

educators should focus on how to support those whose home culture differs from their own by including elements of the home culture in the centre. They suggest that for Māori families, this may involve including karakia and waiata and incorporating tikanga as an integral element of the programme. Learning simple greetings in the home language can help families to feel welcome.

As New Zealand continues to become more multicultural, educators must be aware that not all cultural groups assign the same roles within families and allow for this in their interactions with families. For example in some Chinese families the grandmother takes on the caregiving role. In contrast, some fathers choose to be the primary caregiver of their children, so if educators focus their language on the assumption that the mother is the one most involved with the child, they are not showing value for the diversity of family life. Māori families may expect recognition for the role played by whānau in the lives of their tamariki. It is important for educators to know who are the important people in a child's life so that they can make links with the child's prior experience and ensure that whānau and key family members are welcomed and included in the centre.

Many centres have whānau walls where pictures are put up of children and their families. This can be an opportunity to include extended whānau who are of importance in children's lives. Families can be encouraged to bring in photos that include the significant people in the child's life rather than just siblings and parents. Seeing themselves represented in the centre may create an instant feeling of having a place in the setting.

Although culture is often discussed in terms of ethnicity, it must be remembered that each family has its own culture which may be formed by the size of the family, the place in which the members of the family grew up, religious beliefs, level of education and many other aspects. Thus, knowing about a family's characteristics can assist us in helping families settle into the new setting and avoiding incidents which might work as barriers to developing relationships. In this way we can ensure we plan with families ways in which we can support them. For instance, one new family I worked with did not believe in Santa Claus and so were not going to come to the annual Christmas party. Because I had spent time getting to know about the family and their beliefs, I was aware of the problem. I really wanted them to be able to join in the celebration with other families so that they felt they were a part of the centre and did not feel excluded. I was able to discuss the issue with them and arrange for Santa to come at the beginning of the party so that this family could come late and still be part of the celebration and get to know other families who also attended the centre.

Knowledge of the culture and society within which children and families live can give educators a richer insight into the lives of children and enable them to plan transition experiences that have relevance to their prior experience. This knowledge is also crucial to their ability to build respectful, trusting relationships with families where families feel that they are a part of the centre too. It appears that family involvement in children's education is linked to later educational achievement (Bastiani, 1997).

Helping families develop a sense of belonging and building trusting relationships in the early days is the beginning of what may be an ongoing involvement which has long term benefits for children's learning and development.

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Kisses between paragraphs

Strategies to maintain wellness during the PhD journey

Caterina Murphy

The kisses between paragraphs kept us connected. Sometimes it was just a little peck while he was digging the vege garden. I would stop a paragraph, go to the loo, pop the jug on and run out to see him.

"A quick kiss between paragraphs," I would say. He would smile and I would smile back. I could tell sometimes by the way he examined my face that it was changing. I was aware that wrinkles were starting to etch as time went by; probably due to my mind often being preoccupied with data or the wrestling of words.

I spent a lot more of my time with reading glasses perched on the end of my nose than I used to and our conversations were often focused on "my thesis this" or "my thesis that". People had given up phoning … they were tired of my "I'm writing up" response. I would wander back to my desk contemplating what it would be like to be out there in the sunshine with him, instead of indoors, looking at a screen.

At times, nothing seemed more terrifying than the blank screen. Sometimes it would remain blank for quite a while until I learnt to sit there for half an hour until something happened. For some reason, the thoughts in my head would not always travel down my arm and onto the keyboard with ease. I'd be distracted by what everyone else was doing. Were they having fun whilst I was in here? Laughing perhaps?

I had been 'studying' for 26 years … Always working on something, from the very first day of my Playcentre training. That's a story for another day. My dreams of finishing this PhD were so strong that sometimes I used to get carried away and hear 'Chariots of Fire' music playing in my head (OK I'll allow you to have a chuckle), until I realised I was the only one in this race of mine.

Dr Caterina Murphy in full PhD regalia

I was determined that this long solitary journey was not going to cost me too dearly. I was very determined to "knock it out", as I often said. I had seen others start and never finish, others who dreamt but never started, others who lost precious elements of their lives along the way…

I thought I would set one big reward for when I finished. I was going to embrace new learnings without the pressures of assessment and deadlines. Yes, that's what my new life would bring to me. And yes … I was going to read as many trashy women's magazines as I could get my hands on. I wasn't going to care if one said 'Brangelina' were getting married and if another said they were breaking up. I was going to enjoy the mind-dulling sensations of just looking at the colours and the pictures … silly little paper backs, gossip columns…. I was going to embrace the lot wasn't I? Anything but reading more literature or trying to decipher theory?

In the meantime, I was determined that to the best of my ability, I would enjoy the PhD journey as much as possible along the way. I needed strategies to survive and maintain wellness. So, the kisses between paragraphs were one small step in a much larger and calculated strategy to surviving a PhD, maintaining wellness and completing it.

I don't use the word 'calculated' lightly. I was determined that this long solitary journey was not going to cost me too dearly. I was very determined to "knock it out", as I often said. I had seen others start and never finish, others who dreamt but never started, others who lost precious elements of their lives along the way…. Then there was myself, who was often fraught with thoughts of failure, anxiety and self-doubt.

That's why I want to share my survival 'kit' of what worked for me, in the hope that it might help just one other, who is dreaming of, flirting with or journeying on their PhD.

But firstly know this:

- For every 'not so great' moment, there will be several incredible ones.

- With careful strategizing, you can achieve it and maintain wellness.

- You will learn more about yourself than you ever thought possible.

- It is an incredible, humbling and privileged experience, especially if you have the excellent supervision as I did.

- You'll need to know more than you knew at the start. Access Gardiner and Kearns (2010), find a quiet place and time and read it.

So here is my gift to you. I think of it as '20 tips to stay well and achieve your dream'.

1. Do something small to nurture your spirit every day. It might be something like pick some flowers, buy yourself a lovely new pen, phone one of your kids…. But choose something that makes you feel alive and well.

2. Walk regularly, if you can. Even short walks for 20 minutes, not only keep you physically in good shape but walking gives you important thinking time. Often my best ideas came when I was walking my dogs. Take a digital recorder with you if you can, so that if you get a light bulb moment, you can record it.

3. Stay away from anyone or anything that gives you too much negative energy and surround yourself with positive people and things that support your PhD aspirations. For me, one of those energisers was moving water, such as being by the sea, or close to a waterfall.

4. Keep a notebook and pen in the car and another by your bed. I can't tell you how many times I got my greatest ideas when driving or during the night. There is no point lying there awake worrying about whether the idea will still be there in the morning. Write it down and go back to sleep. If you are in the car, stop driving, write it down and carry on.

5. Use Google Scholar Alert. Set this up with your topic or key words and the emails will come to you with all the latest journal articles on your topic.

6. Decide what you are going to give up and what you are not going to give up. I was not going to give up any important family occasions and special quality time with my granddaughter. I was not going to give up watching Coronation Street, Master Chef or enjoying my Saturday date with my man, which involved going to Pak 'n Save and Bunnings, with a possible flat white in between. Everything else could go.

7. Never leave your work space in a big mess. Always finish five minutes earlier, write yourself a small list of what you need to do the next time you get back to your workspace. Then leave your work in an orderly fashion with the list sitting on top. It means when you return to your work, your connection with it is a lot quicker. You save time; your focus is immediate.

8. Never leave your work without saving it (labelled and dated) on an additional USB drive and store that additional USB in a separate, secure and fireproof place. Mine was in an old tin, in a metal filing cabinet. It worked for me.

9. Insert every citation you use in text into your

reference list straight away as you are typing. Do not leave it or you may feel panic when you are due to submit, have some references left off the list and you can't remember them. Despite being so disciplined about this, I checked off the references on my list against my text prior to submission and a few were still missing! It was an arduous task trying to find them.

10. Arrange little rewards for little milestones. Arrange bigger rewards for bigger milestones.

11. Write 300 words a day. Don't worry if it is great writing or crap writing, just do it. It's amazing how when you write 300 words of crap and read it again the next morning you can find a great idea or some keywords to work with.

12. Stay in your cave. Don't get side tracked with flash events and networking opportunities, especially in the final year. Conferences and such like are important, I agree, but at some point you have to say "No". Say to yourself: 'I am not going to digress down that path, I'm going to stay focused and travel on this one'. Saying no in my mind got easier. I stayed in my PhD cave, fell off the radar and kept working…. 300 words a day; crap writing or great writing.

13. Print an A3 copy of the word audit (again - Gardiner & Kearns, 2010) and put it on your wall above your workspace. For me this was without doubt one of the most motivating tools I had.

14. Know your work. Own it, claim it and be joyful about it.

15. Use the two golden hours you are capable of using to maximum potential each day (yes - Gardiner & Kearns, 2010, again). I'm not a morning person, but believe it or not, my two golden hours were first thing. What worked for me was going straight to the computer after waking. That helped me focus. My best thinking power was after sleeping, and then I could reward myself later with a nice relaxing breakfast. I can't stress enough how important the two golden hours daily are in the last phases of your thesis.

16. Be aware of your own distractedness. We all suffer with it. You know the ones…. I'll just make a cuppa, I'll just phone her, I'll just check the email, I'll just have a quick snack … again.

17. Have a water bottle and snack at your workspace. I found a bowl of nuts really good. Getting the munchies while studying is commonplace.

18. See suffering with writing block as a good thing. People don't believe me but during my PhD, I only had one major attack of it and it lasted about six days. It was in the writing up phase but I believed something great was going to happen. I instinctively knew there was a major breakthrough coming around the corner. And there was!

19. Get up and move from your workspace if you are sitting all day, but only for about 15 minutes. Try hard not to dilly dally any longer if you can help it. Move to keep healthy, breathe different air, look at something new and stretch. I had times where I was sat typing for up to 11 hours in one day, so these mini breaks were important. If I was tempted to watch Dr. Phil … I would get a piece of paper and write my own name on it with Dr. in front of it … remember now why I was sitting down?

20. Try not to argue with your supervisor. Listen and take feedback in good heart. They are the more 'expert other' than you at this point. They have been through it themselves and they are there to help you achieve success. They don't want you to fail. Enter into engaging and/or robust debate at times, yes. But do try not to argue or disagree on every point. Flexibility in your thinking is the key. Show your appreciation when they give you feedback. They have taken time out of their busy schedule to look at sections of your work and meet with you. Be kind to them.

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Consensus

In theory and practice

Sue Stover and Harriet Brown

Part 1 – The theory: Consensus by the book

Coming out of a tradition which values both consensus and democratic participation, I have for many years tried to understand the relative merits of each. Consensus resonates with the stable and the predictable; it is often recognised in indigenous societies. Consensus emphasises interconnections and shared beliefs above individual difference. However, consensus can appear to discourage difference; debate and argument may be limited. A sense of belonging may be conditional on fitting in.
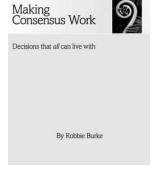
In contrast to the slow and stable, democratic practices can enable quicker decision-making and even while marginalising a minority perspective, those perspectives can remain intact. Political opponents can recognise their differences rather than forced into a consensus that hides dissent. However, democratic processes are often framed around the primacy of the individual, with limited regard for interconnections between people and even between generations.

Encountering critical thinkers like Peter Moss (2010, 2012a, 2012b) has also meant encountering his advocacy for democratic principles which he maintains are struggling for survival even in early childhood education. He points to the toxic atmosphere of neoliberal logic in which e.c.e. is a technology for economic growth. In the face of faltering democracy, neoliberalism: "… has offered markets, management and privatised solutions. Diversity has been valued, but in a very particular form of hyper-individualism and the autonomous subject, helping undermine old solidarities while impeding the creation of new ones. Injustice has thriven…."(Moss, 2010, p. 10).

So when a shiny new book landed on my desk called *Making consensus work* (Burke, 2011), I went looking to see what it had to say about consensus and democracy – which was very little. What I found instead was that consensus is framed in cultural terms as being an inclusive, participatory 'questioning process', in which group unity is foregrounded above any particular issue. Thus "a group committed to consensus is committed to listening to all its membership and finding a way forward which is acceptable to everyone" (p. 5).

Intriguingly, although aesthetically illustrated, *Making consensus work* has no images of humans working together. Instead, the images are serene photos of rocks and moving water which I presume intend the reader to recognise how a group participant might have to step 'into the flow' of decision-making 'river'; a river in which the 'rocks' are a metaphor for positions held. Thus, within consensus decision-making, a participant is required to let the 'water' of the consensus process move those 'rocks'. Ideas belong not to individuals, but to the group.

Within consensus, the role of the facilitator is a demanding one, and the author, Robbie Burke, offers flowcharts for group decision-making, as well as short sharp descriptions of decision-making roles and tools. Knowing when to use what tool is part of the art of leadership. These tools transcend consensus decision-making *per se* and make this book a goldmine for anyone who is preparing to take on the role of facilitator of a group.

Although *Making consensus work* must be relevant to Playcentre (it is, after all, published by Playcentre Publications and written by a former Federation president), its genesis and purpose are not framed in terms of Playcentre, presumably to draw in a wider target audience. Yet the alignment between consensus and Playcentre is worth considering historically. A democratic education-focused organisation with more than 60 years of history, Playcentre leaders have been well-versed in 'points of orders' 'movings and secondings' and other features of 'Renton's' rules for meetings. Learning how to move through such processes in Playcentre has been helped season several generations of women leaders and politicians (Stover, 1998).

Playcentre's decision to use 'consensus' can be traced to the sesquicentennial of the Treaty of Waitangi/Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its 1992 Federation decision to honour Te Te tiriti/the Treaty ('The greater good', 2003, p. 25). This decision led to a number of initiatives – including working towards consensus decision-making at all levels of Playcentre.

So Playcentre organisationally has 20 years of trialing consensus decision-making and what Robbie Burke has produced is a practical book both for newbies in Playcentre, and those outside the organisation.

My own experience is that consensus works best where there is a long term alliance between a group and its membership; in other words, where membership of an organisation is a complex, long term personal project. To operate through consensus requires the individuals to care fulsomely for the other members of that group as well as for the organisation's long term purpose and goals. As it says at the start of *Making consensus work*, consensus connects with both our heads and our hearts.

But to keep a group – whether an early childhood centre or any other organisation – democratically healthy, the complexity of consensus cannot give way to lazy, romantic, exclusive 'communities' where the 'learning' was all done at some point in the foggy past.

Democracy, according to the philosopher John Dewey (1916), must be reborn in each generation, and its midwife is education. How we grapple with democratic principles in our contemporary contexts – including in our early childhood settings – determines how effective we are as 'midwives'. Contributions like *Making consensus work* help remind us of our place in navigating the intergenerational flow of ideas and practices.

Sue Stover

(2) The practice: A personal journey of consensus decision making

The New Zealand Playcentre Federation uses consensus decision making. As a member of Torbay Playcentre for the past six years I have learnt about and been involved in this process constantly, but until recently it has never been put to the test for me.

Early in 2011, I presented a remit to the North Shore Playcentre Association on behalf of my centre. There was a rule that we wanted changed and many of the centres on the North Shore were in support of the change. I had the majority fully behind me and I felt very confident we would get this change through in no time at all. I got all the required paperwork done, I crossed the i's and dotted the t's, I notified all the appropriate people and I entered the first Association meeting ready to make some changes. I was met with a lot of support but a couple of centres needing a lot more time to think and discuss and suggest. The frustration began.

A short time later an email landed on my computer pointing out a clause in our constitution that called for a vote with majority rule in certain circumstances. A flashing light bulb went off for me! I could bypass this whole consensus business and get this thing through. I would not be popular, but I would get what I wanted.

I was so frustrated with the questions and barriers that the opposition centres were putting up, I went ahead and threatened the vote. This did not go down well. Playcentre is founded on consensus decision making! This just could not happen. I received impassioned emails from other centres,

and I guess they got through to me, as after a few days of threats and bravado, I decided to pull my head in and do things the 'Playcentre way'.

So discussion, and compromise, and time to think ensued. At the next Association meeting I presented a new and improved remit. Everyone was in support, I finally had it, I thought, but no! One centre had a problem. This time I surprisingly didn't feel so exasperated, I listened to their problem and it made some sense. This centre was willing to go away and work with me to come up with a solution that suited us all. I hadn't got it through this time but I could see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Over the telephone, a discussion was had and during the course of the conversation, a new solution seemed to materialise. Why hadn't we seen it before? It seemed so simple! We had it. Everyone was happy. At the next meeting it flew through.

I wonder if I could have just come up with the final solution at the beginning of the process if I had just thought about it a little more. But no, I think it was the discussion, the problem identification, having to consider EVERYONE'S view point, and the extra time to think, that gave us our solution.

I never thought I would say it, but hey - Consensus actually worked!

Harriet Brown

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Te Whāriki on an international stage

Understanding the Te Whāriki approach: Early years education in practice

By Wendy Lee, Linda Mitchell, Brenda Soutar & Margaret Carr

Publisher: Routledge: London, UK, 2012
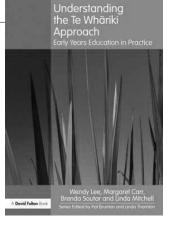
Reviewer: Maureen Perkins

Authored by renowned early childhood education researchers and writers in Aotearoa/New Zealand (NZ), this book is one of a series, which includes *Understanding the Reggio approach* and *Understanding the Montessori approach*. The authors provide detailed historical and cultural contexts for the development of *Te Whāriki*, which have not previously been well documented in one place. They explain how it supports a credit based, holistic and bicultural approach to teaching, which emphasises the value of relationships. The bicultural implications of the curriculum document are well integrated throughout the book. Although this might initially be seen to make the book less relevant outside of NZ, the information is so well considered and constructed that the book is likely to be of major benefit to teachers in any country who need to consider both the indigenous and the immigrant families they serve.

Each chapter in the book is structured with very readable short sections. Current research is cited frequently to support the authors' thinking and provide readers with further sources for information. Also included are examples of learning narratives and case studies from a range of centres, which ground the theoretical discussion in practical contexts. A list of key points and reflective questions at the end of each chapter make this an ideal text for pre-service teacher education courses here in New Zealand, as well as creating a framework for international readers who want to reflect on their own curriculum approaches in early childhood education (ECE).

The first three chapters introduce readers to the cultural, historical and political contexts within which *Te Whāriki* was developed. This is the best summary of this information that I have read although there are gaps. Links to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory are in-depth but no reference is made to Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner and Erikson who are also said to have influenced the development of *Te Whāriki* (Alvestad, Duncan & Berge, 2009). The authors also provide minimal comment on the competing influences of the socio-cultural and developmental perspectives that

exist in *Te Whāriki* and have created some confusion for teachers (Fleer & Robbins, 2007).

The next four chapters look at each of the principles of the *Te Whāriki* curriculum. These chapters are excellent descriptions of ways in which the principles (Empowerment, Holism, Relationships and Family and Community) can be used effectively to create learning experiences and environments for children. Integrated throughout the chapters is information from *Te Whāriki*, *Kei Tua o te Pae*, Centres of Innovation, as well as recent research on previously neglected concepts, such as working theories.

Chapter eight discusses developments in both assessment, documentation and planning since the implementation of *Te Whāriki* and the 2005-2010 professional development programmes for *Kei Tua o te Pae*. It is this chapter that raised some concerns for me and I will discuss these shortly.

The final two chapters look at links between professional development and the principles of *Te Whāriki* and future possibilities for *Te Whāriki* as children move into school and in response to changing political and economic climates. The authors claim resonance between the *Te Whāriki* principles, ELP's[1] four purposes for PD (passion-holism, pedagogy-relationships, positivity – empowerment and participation – community) and four key ideas in John Yokoyama's 'fish philosophy' (play, being there, choosing your attitude and making a difference). Holism is linked to play early in the chapter, but other ideas from the fish philosophy are not evident.

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1   **ELP – Education Leadership Project – A professional learning organisation which is led by Wendy Lee, one of the authors of this book.**

Perhaps this idea should have been omitted in order to avoid confusion if it was not to be fully explored. I am certain that maintaining the language from *Te Whāriki* would have served the same purpose and would have been easier for readers to remember. There are an increasing number of mnemonics used in NZ ECE discourses e.g. Carr's four D's (Describe, Discuss, Decide, Document) and three C's (Keeping it Connected, Credible and Complex) (Carr, 2001), and adding more might be more confusing than useful.

However, my major concern about this book is the presentation of the authors' vision of the learning and planning story approaches as being intrinsically tied to the implementation of *Te Whāriki*. That this assumption is widespread is evident in a quote (on p. 108) from Mary Jane Drummond which refers to the *Te Whāriki* approach to assessment being based on narrative. Although the learning stories approach was developed in order to align with *Te Whāriki*, narratives and learning stories are not mentioned at all in *Te Whāriki* and are a part of what has become an dominant discourse in ECE which is neither proven by research to be effective (Blaiklock, 2008; 2010), nor required by legislation (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Although I have seen great benefits in the narrative approach to assessment I believe it has been adopted by teachers with very little theoretical understanding of narrative approaches to assessment resulting in a surface level implementation by up to 50% of teachers who document children's activity without reference to their learning (Education Review Office, 2007; Stuart, Aitken, Gould, & Meade, 2008).

I would like to have seen the authors address the challenges for a learning stories/narrative/*Te Whāriki* approach as well as the critiques that exist. Making visible the potential weaknesses of an approach will support teachers. Readers need to understand the importance of structures that support the use of such an open-ended curriculum approach. Research has found that high teacher turnover, a lack of teachers qualified in early childhood education, and a lack of time for teachers to discuss, reflect and document collaboratively were major barriers to quality assessment in NZ ECE settings (Stuart et al., 2008).

Overall this is an excellent resource bringing together information that has developed rather organically across the sector since 1996 when *Te Whāriki* was first published in its final form. I would definitely recommend its use as a student text for both undergraduate teacher programmes as well as at post graduate level. As with any other text, it should however be used critically and provide a platform for discussion and debate.

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Assessing is more than learning stories

Children's learning and development: Contemporary assessment in the early years

By Claire McLachlan, Susan Edwards, Valerie Margrain and Karen McLean

South Yarra, VIC Australia: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013
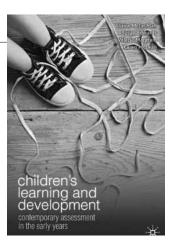
Reviewer: Monica Cameron

Something which sets this book apart from many other books about assessment is its very strong view that teachers need to be aware of, and capable of using, a range of different assessment tools and strategies. Most early childhood and increasingly school settings use 'Learning Stories' to document children's learning and development and many teachers currently rely on using informal observation as the basis for writing these. However, this book encourages teachers to use a range of techniques and to make sure that their assessments are based on strong evidence.

A key aspect of this book is the emphasis given to sociocultural theories of learning and its impact on assessment. The need for collaboration between teachers, children, families and outside agencies is promoted and emphasised throughout and this helps ensure really strong links with current theory. Two of the chapters deal specifically with the assessment of children with individual differences and additional needs. It is heartening to see this topic being discussed in a way that acknowledges the diversity apparent in all communities, and that supports teachers to recognise there is much they can do with the tools they have that will support all learners.

Each of the chapters explores a different, but well connected, aspect of assessment, including international perspectives, why, what and how to assess, and the role assessment can play in supporting exceptional learners. A strong theme is the need for assessment to involve teachers using a range of relevant, reliable, meaningful and valid tools. Assessment tools that would be useful across the early years, in both school and early childhood settings, are introduced, explained and critiqued so that the reader can develop a better understanding of them.

The role assessment should play in planning is also explored, with an emphasis on the need for assessment to inform planning and what happens next. The link between assessment and planning should be a strong one and ways of ensuring this happens are thoughtfully suggested here.

The content included at the end of each chapter is also particularly helpful for teachers. Definitions of key terms and useful resources are listed, which supports the reader to easily access additional printed and online materials. Each chapter also includes reflective questions to encourage the reader to reflect on the content being discussed and to link it to their own knowledge and experiences. The inclusion of 'Boxes', or vignettes, provides connections between the main text and examples of what this might look like in practice, which again supports reflection and deeper understandings. This approach helps make it very 'reader friendly', making links between the practical and the theoretical while also helping to make sure that this book is very accessible and useable for teachers.

Discussion of the assessment strategies and approaches used across a range of countries (including Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, the UK and USA) is evident throughout the book, meaning that a wide range of perspectives are included. However, the discussion of such a range of curriculum documents, policies and assessment practices can at times become difficult to follow, especially given the number of titles and acronyms that this involves. But having the opportunity to learn about other curriculum documents and systems and being able to compare them with how we work here in New Zealand is valuable.

This book would be very useful for those who are learning about assessment in the early years, including students and beginning teachers. Perhaps its greatest feature however is its potential for supporting and challenging experienced teachers to critically reflect on their own knowledge and use of assessment techniques to support children's learning in the early years.

Contributors

Monica Cameron is a former kindergarten teacher and professional development facilitator who now teaches in the Institute of Education at Massey University. She is very interested in the ways assessment is carried out in early childhood education and teachers understandings of assessment and planning. She has recently begun doctoral study which will focus on this area.

Harriet St Clair Brown, Bsc, DipTch ECE, is a stay at home mother of two children. She has been heavily ensconced at Torbay Playcentre in Auckland for the past 6 years, and it was here she was first exposed to consensus decision making. She is passionate about teaching and learning and alternative education models and looks forward to returning to the workforce when her youngest child heads off to school.

Aimee de Candole graduated from Massey University with a Bachelor of Education in 2010. Since then she has been working for Tauranga Region Kindergartens as a teacher at Te Puke Kindergarten. Having received the Clem Hill and Massey Scholorships, she has also been working towards a post-graduate diploma in early years education which led to a research interest in children's transitions to school.

Joanne Hayes is a senior lecturer of early childhood education at Waiariki Institute of Technology. Her earlier career in education has included working with families after training as a nanny, teaching new entrants in New Zealand and English schools and working with her own and other young children in Playcentre. She is currently completing her thesis for the Masters of Education (Early Years) with Massey University. This thesis focuses on the transition to school.

Dr Anne Meade is an education consultant specialising in early childhood research and writing. She was contracted by NZCA to coordinate the Early Childhood Teachers' Work project. **Dr Janis Carroll-Lind** is the Research Leader at Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/ NZ Childcare Association (NZCA). **Dr Margaret Stuart, Joanna Williamson, Sue Smorti and Lesley Robinson** are lecturers at four of NZCA's teaching bases around the country. They were all researchers on the Teachers' Work Project.

Dr. Caterina Murphy has been involved in early childhood education in New Zealand for 26 years. She currently works for Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/ NZ Childcare Association as a Senior Lecturer. Her PhD (Indigenous Studies) was undertaken at Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi. The thesis, "*Roots of the past in*

contemporarised kitchens: An investigation of cultural identity through cooking traditions" argues the importance of the early formative years for teaching and learning about food, wellbeing and culture, the important role of grandparents for transmitting cultural knowledge and the significance of food, cooking and their associated values as a conduit for cultural revitalisation and survival. http://nz.linkedin.com/pub/dr-caterina-murphy/28/321/847/

Maureen Perkins teaches full time on the ECE teacher education degree programme at Unitec in Auckland. She previously worked initially as a facilitator and later co-director on the Combined Universities professional development contract for the Kei Tua o te Pae resource between 2005 and 2010. Maureen was also involved for many years with the Auckland Playcentres Association of which she is a Life Member. Maureen's current research interests are in ECE assessment and curriculum and she has a particular interest in e-learning and the use of ICT to support teacher education and professional learning.

Shareen Sapsworth is currently on maternity leave from her position of Director of EC Professional Support in the Faculty of Education at The University of Auckland. Shareen is experienced in facilitating professional learning having worked in a facilitation role working with early childhood teachers since 2005. Shareen has particular interests in educational leadership and strategic development and most recently completed a Postgraduate Diploma in Business (HRM) where she explored the fundamentals of learning, development, and leadership as essential drivers to enhance performance.

Sue Stover, PhD is a senior lecturer in early childhood education at AUT University. She has been an active member of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) since her 20s and spent more than a decade involved of the parent co-operative, Playcentre. These are major influences on her thinking about the how, the when, the why and the maybe of consensus decision making. She is an editor of *Early Education*.