

# Early Education

Volume 46 *Spring / Summer 2009-10*



- Collaborative relationships •
- Using visual images •
- Communities of learners •
- Children and drawing •

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# From the editors

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Kerry Bethell – Guest Editor

**Welcome from Palmerston North and to my first ever editorial. Being a novice editor, I sought advice and guidance. One source said to keep the topic relevant, use clear, active language, and ensure my facts are correct - and attributed. I can use personal opinion, am free to use emotion, (but in a limited way) and should try to be entertaining (Shepherd, 2009). Sound advice I thought, I can attempt that. Furthermore, I am not alone. My youngest grandchild, Amélie Louise Madeleine Cooke, present in images on the cover and throughout the volume, accompanies me in my task. And for assistance I can call upon Claire McLachlan, an expert and very patient peer.**

Two key themes emerge from within the articles in this volume of *Early Education*. The first concerns the significance of the social context for children's learning. The second explores the changing role of teachers and the need for new and different approaches and tools when working with children.

The promotion of socially cultural philosophies and theories in education over the past decade has brought renewed focus on the significance of the roles played by teachers and others in children's learning. The key principle that the learning is embedded in social and cultural contexts gives rise to the importance of authentic learning and the social interactions and relationships in which learning occurs. Children are viewed as confident and capable learners and communicators: a powerful vision. The introduction of curriculum documents such as *Te Whariki* and *Kei Tua o Te Pae* have been – to quote Joy Cullen – ‘a catalyst for change’ (Cullen, 2003).

This general shift highlights the agency of the teacher as part of the child's learning context and need to examine the complex role of teachers as pedagogical leaders and change agents. Within a sociocultural framework teachers are viewed less as passive recipients of change but argued to be ‘creative strategists whose theories-in-practice are products of their own agency’ (Middleton & May, 1997, p. 10). In a soon to be published paper Alison Sewell and I urge teachers to recognise their agency and to see their individual and collective efforts at curriculum innovation as being important (Sewell & Bethell, 2009).

Such changes have brought both challenges and opportunities for adults working with children in both teacher-led and parent led settings. The frequently made claim that teachers make a difference may be true but research evidence is needed to support such claims as John Hattie and others argue to help determine the attributes of excellence in teaching. Joce Nuttall (2003) refers to the fundamentally interpretative nature of teaching in early childhood and need for teacher education providers to equip teachers and parents with tools for interpreting *Te Whāriki*. Multiple voices and perspectives are

important; shared dialogues critical, debate necessary. We each need to contribute to such conversations; to have our voices heard and experiences recognised.

This edition of *Early Education* presents a range of voices speaking about teaching and quality provision for children from across a broad community of learners. Common across the articles is the notion that learning is socially constructed and emphasis on the significance of reciprocal and responsive relationships between adults, between adults and children and between children and of dialogic interactions.

‘*The letter from ...*’ series continues to bring global as well as national perspectives on early education. This time, Australian Susan (Suzy) Edwards from Monash University writes of her experiences of being on sabbatical leave in Oxford, UK. Of particular interest is the system of professional accreditation offered which provides opportunities for practitioners to be awarded Early Years Professional Status. (Suzy Edwards' new book is reviewed in this issue).

The significance of collaborative relationships on multiple levels is emphasised in the first article. Sue Mitchell explores the place of informal playgroups in the lives of young families and in communities. Mitchell emphasizes the value of collaboration on multiple levels between parents, teachers and children and across agencies. This theme will be expanded in 2010 in a special edition of *Early Education* edited by Dr Kim Powell and Dr Jenny Ritchie, to which you are welcome to contribute!

Relationships between children and adults in another parent led setting are explored in the next article. Suzanne Manning and Judith Loveridge bring a sociocultural lens to explore the experiences of adults in playcentre and in particular the notion that adult's level of involvement may be a key component of quality teaching. They argue teachers, like children, bring to the early childhood setting a fund of knowledge. Allowing teachers' interests to be present in the curriculum has potential to increase adults' level of engagement and children' funds of knowledge, benefiting both.

The next two articles each take as their focus, a specific curriculum focus. Helen Wrightson uses a sociocultural lens to consider effective teaching strategies that promote rich relationships and dialogue between teachers and children. In the article that follows Tara Fagan and Ngaire Taal outline and discuss what has become an annual event for the Massey childcare community – the renting of an apple tree and the associated right to pick and keep the fruit. Children have the opportunity to participate outside the childcare centre in the adult community. Both articles stress the significance of teacher reflection, dialogic interactions and the value of authentic experiences for children.



In the final article, 'Paparazzi or pedagogy' Maureen Perkins asks some challenging and relevant questions concerning the use of photographs in assessment and the need to address issues around constructing images of identity, social roles and power. A must read for everybody who uses photography as an assessment tool.

If these articles wet your appetite for more information on sociocultural or cultural historical approaches to learning, you will be interested in Judy Watson's review of Susan Edwards newly released book '*Early childhood education and care: a sociocultural approach*' Judy Watson describes this book as accessible, positive and open.

It is 'dippable' a reader could open the book at any page and find something readable and comprehensible – quite disarming in a book about theories and themes of early childhood education! certain that pre-service teaching students, as well as practicing teachers, will heave a sigh of relief (p.26).

Lastly, given all that is known about how competent and capable teachers contribute to positive learning experiences for children and families, it is of concern to note the recent government changes in policies re professional development provision, caps on teacher education intakes and more recently the shifting of the 80% timeframe for qualified teachers in early childhood education from 2010 to 2012. Such shifts need to be managed carefully as regrettably they have potential to impact negatively upon teachers' work and in turn on the opportunities for children's learning. It is imperative that we keep the conversations that we are involved in going and to invite policy makers in to these so that they too can recognise and respond to the value of sociocultural practices for children and teachers' learning.

Arohanui,

**Kerry**

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# Letter from Oxford

Dr Susan Edwards

**In late August 2009 our family of four packed our bags and travelled to the University of Oxford in England. The trip has formed part of my sabbatical leave from Monash University. The flight with two young children (Noah, four years and Walter, 20 months) went quite well and we finally arrived in Oxford, a little tired and jet lagged but very excited to be here.**

After a few weeks, we were able to get Noah enrolled in a local school for 'reception' class. 'Reception' forms part of the *Early Years Foundation Stage* (EYFS), which is the curriculum framework which covers all children from birth to age 5. The framework applies across a range of settings including Childminders (Family Day Care), Nurseries (Long Day Care), Reception (early school entry from 4 years) and Playgroups. All children age 3-5 years are entitled to up to 15 hours per week of fully funded early years education in any one of these settings. This is part of an initiative in England aimed at supporting learning in the early years and is intended to help children in their transitions to more formal education.

The EYFS is based around four themes, which include: 1) A Unique Child; 2) Positive Relationships; 3) Enabling Environments; and 4) Learning and Development. Each theme relates to the main stages in which they are to be enacted. The stages roughly divide children into age groups, such as birth – 11 months, 8-20 months, 16-20 months, 22-30 months, 30-50 months and 40-60 months. Each stage and theme then contains detailed information about children's learning, development and growth and provides information that supports practitioners in planning play based pedagogies for children.

A recently released document '*Learning, Playing and Interacting: Good Practice in the Early Years Foundation Stage*' provides guidance to teachers about how to implement play based pedagogies in relation to assessment in early childhood education. I found this document very interesting to read, because it outlined some key ideas from recent research and interfaced these with examples from practice, so that teachers could see how they might approach play based learning in relation to the EYFS and their assessment practices. What really captured my attention was the way the document explored questions about how play is used in early childhood education and went on to consider the role of adults in children's play.

During our travels I have had the opportunity to speak to many teachers, students and researchers and I have really enjoyed the sense of energy and engagement that these people bring to their work in early years education. I have had a number of conversations about how teachers think

about and use play in their classrooms and also talked to others about how they understand ideas derived from different theoretical perspectives, including the works of Vygotsky, Piaget and Foucault. I think it is intriguing the way people are engaging with ideas from a range of perspectives to inform their thinking and the way they are working with young children. For example, in one situation I spoke to a teacher who was interested in the tensions between open-ended play and structured play. She said she really valued open ended play for the capacity it offered children to follow through on their own ideas, but could see how sensitive and timely teacher interactions could work to help children build their knowledge through play at the same time.

Another important development is the work being conducted by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) which is intended to support the professional development of the field. The CWDC offers the opportunity for practitioners to be awarded Early Years Professional Status which positions them as leaders in their institutions and communities. What is important about this is that the focus is on leadership and mentoring colleagues, as well as on the provision of quality provision for children and families. I think this is a really useful way of moving forward with professional accreditation and it will be interesting to see the impact of this approach on the field into the future, as I think it helps empower the field to grow its own professional capacity and skill base.

In addition to having visited and spoken to many early years teachers, students and researchers we have also had a wonderful time sightseeing and enjoying as many museums, castles, palaces and restaurants as we can possibly manage!. Most of the museums have free entry and many of them have sections which are specifically designed for young children to participate in activities such as dressing up in the clothes of a particular area, or using materials similar to those that were used by the people of a particular period. As a family this means that there is usually something for all of us in a visit and it is a wonderful way for the children to experience what the displays, artifacts and images are all about. The digital camera has been busy and we already have over 400 photos on record with still a month of travel to go!

*Suzy Edwards*

(Monash University, Melbourne, Australia)  
The University of Oxford

# Worth a closer look?

## *Playgroups as community participation for parents and children*

Sue Michell

### Abstract

**A small-scale qualitative study carried out in 2007 among the members and supporters of a newly formed license-exempt playgroup in a suburb of a provincial city looked at how it functioned as a support system contributing to a community's social "glue". A highlight of the study was how the playgroup's participants and supporters did not necessarily agree on their purpose. The playgroup appeared to meet multiple purposes, being both educational for children and a forum for better parenting.**

### What are playgroups?

Licence-exempt playgroups as they are now known, operating under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education, began in New Zealand in the mid-1960's, and at first were in isolated rural areas, often attached to a church or marae. They offered play experiences for children and social contacts for parents. The numbers of playgroups increased steadily. In 1994 there were 440 playgroups, and by 2004, this had grown to 599 with over 17,000 infants, toddlers and young children involved (Mitchell, Royal-Tangaere, Mara & Wylie, 2006).

Although considered informal in the sense that they are parent-led and may operate in community venues rather than designated premises, license-exempt playgroups can access grants for running expenses from the Ministry of Education when they meet the requirements for play provision, parent involvement and health and safety (Mitchell & Mara, 2001). Membership must be open to all families in the area, and parents are involved in the daily sessions, as well as the management of the group.

### The role of playgroups

Reporting on a study of collaboration between some New Zealand early childhood centres and their local community support services, Judith Duncan (2006) suggested that locally situated early childhood centres may be taking a central place in their communities formerly occupied by services such as Plunket. Being based in the local community and having a shared interest in young children seemed to be the two criteria for developing effective

support for families to have the "social capital" required to manage their children's needs. Citing one parent who stated that "what was important was that parents had some form of external support" (p. 17), Duncan's study outlined the changed form of family support that has developed in this country. Thirty years ago, according to Duncan, early childhood services would be likely to call on professional assistance from a government agency to inform and support their work and provide advice for them and for the parents of children in their services. Currently these services seem to be less accessible to families in the suburbs, particularly if they lack transport.

Lero (2006) has suggested taking a 21st century view of education that moves away from seeing children as in need of care because their parents work, or in need of education to prepare them for later schooling. Acknowledging that collective benefits could be accessed for the wider community, an alternative discourse involves conceptualizing early childhood services as situated within settings offering multifunctional community resources offering social, educational, health and recreation opportunities. Rather than being seen as addressing "needs", participation in the education and social activities is seen as building up children's and families' "social capital". Social capital is used here to include the strengths and capabilities each family has to draw on in their daily life, including their economic resources, family and neighbourhood relationships, and their educational background. Similarly, Mitchell et al. (2006) linked the interest in parents socializing with other adults to urbanization, as families are less likely now to live close to extended family and whānau. They also mention the work of Jack and Jordan (1999) on social capital, which documents the connection between a lack of social support and the incidence of child abuse and neglect.

Margie Whalley, the director of the Pen Green Family Centre in England, found that where parent education was viewed in what she described as "a vertical fashion", there was little interest in uptake of seminars or courses (Whalley, 2003). Reporting on studies among parent and toddler groups in the 1980's in England, the English Pre-school Playgroup Association, warned that attempting to include "parent education" in a largely "club-like" group is at risk

of being seen as interfering with the members' priorities of socialization for their children (Pre-school Playgroups Association, 1981). Seeing the relationship between professionals and parents as a matter of "teaching among equals" (p. 101) was recommended to reinforce the concept of parents being the experts on their children.

In a study of the effects of membership in a playgroup for refugee families in Sydney, Jackson (2006) found that socializing in a situation where adults and children were present gave parents a chance to "share experiences and talk about their feelings" (p. 4). Jackson's study supports the view that social and educational benefits can be mutually supportive and compatible in a playgroup environment that emphasizes the importance of the interactions between the members.

## The playgroup in the present study

This study took place when Playgroup V was in development. Sessions had begun six months earlier and the group had just become eligible for Ministry of Education funding. The group met at a recently built community centre situated in the grounds of the local primary school. This school had the lowest decile rating in the city (decile two), in a suburb with the highest deprivation rating in the South Island (Nielsen, 2007). Three census area units in the area had a deprivation index of 8 to 10. A discussion paper prepared for the V Community Health Committee which manages the community centre stated that "there is widespread agreement that the people in this area are disadvantaged compared to the rest of the city's population" (Douglas, 2007, p.1). Māori children and those of European descent each made up about 40% of the school roll, with the remainder being of Asian and Pacific Island origin (Nielsen, 2007).

An initial community development project operating for over two and a half years in the community then focused attention on the facilitation of a wide range of health and social services and recreational programmes offered through the community centre, of which the playgroup became a part. Having the community centre based at a school is not common in New Zealand, but this provision had recently been described as the focus for "bringing the community together" (Nielsen, 2007, p.15). The initial coordinator of the playgroup worked closely with the Primary Health Organisation Access Nurse, based at the community centre, whose role was pivotal to the circulating of information about the proposed playgroup during home visits. She aimed to reach and involve families not already participating in the nearby kindergarten, Playcentre, childcare centre, or home-based care service, particularly young parents, Māori and Pacific Island families, refugee and migrant families, families with low incomes, and first time parents (Douglas, 2007).

## Results: what did participants value in the playgroup?

The study involved asking parents and social service

representatives about their impressions of the playgroup, with the aim of ascertaining whether it was in fact fulfilling a relevant function alongside the other services in the community centre. Questionnaires were prepared using some broad themes from the Ministry of Education's Playgroup handbook (Early Childhood Development, 2001). Eleven group members and six social service representatives completed questionnaires, which included questions about the quality of the programme, location, membership, and philosophy.

Parents were asked to describe what they saw as the strengths and limitations of the programme, along with any suggestions they had for the future. Questions for social service professionals were aimed at ascertaining if the playgroup was meeting the interests and needs of the people they met with, and to see how it was used by the targeted groups.

*Parents frequently mentioned the ease with which adults were able to meet each other and have time to talk as well as interact with their own and other parents' children.*

## Parents' perceptions of the playgroup

Parents' views of quality were expressed as having a variety of play activities and the encouragement of children's thinking. Parents valued having:

- time to talk with other parents,
- children about the same age as others so they could learn from each other, and
- a safe place for them to play.

The routines such as having hand-washing and karakia (prayer) before the morning kai (food) were positively rated. Parents felt it was important to teach children about sharing food with others from a collective source. Comments such as "great having variety of things to play with" and "just showing different ways to teach and learn" were common.

Parents frequently mentioned the ease with which adults were able to meet each other and have time to talk as well as interact with their own and other parents' children. Socialization ranged from informal chats between pairs of parents as their children played, to whole-group discussions when the coordinator and a volunteer interacted with the children, allowing the parents to have time to explore mutual interests. These discussions were mostly concerned with parenting issues and the challenges faced by bringing up a family in this community. Several parents mentioned

that they disliked the way some parents had unpleasant interactions with children, and anecdotally it was reported that one family had ceased attending because their children felt frightened by the way one parent shouted at children.

The suburb in which the playgroup is located is a hilly area and several parents made positive comments about having the flat area outside for children to play in and also that there was an easy outdoor/indoor flow, so children could choose where to play.

***As the group members gained confidence and became well known to each other, it was important to keep in mind the newcomers and to allow them also “to feel safe and comfortable”.***

### Agencies' perceptions

Positive aspects mentioned by members of agencies meeting with the families were:

- having trained staff developing warm relationships with families, being inclusive and welcoming;
- having the session at an appropriate time;
- being locally accessible and affordable; and
- using resources, such as books to get children off to “a good start”.

Support for young families was identified as a strength of the group, along with the friendly atmosphere and the opportunities to access the other activities and the social and health services at the community centre.

Comments such as the following were typical:

- Local people are able to meet and develop friendships.
- To socialize with other parents and to receive informal support.
- Reduce people's feeling of isolation.

Agencies also identified the role-modeling opportunities for parents; seeing educators and other adults interacting with their children.

For agency representatives, an important consideration was that incoming members to the group were made to feel welcome. As the group members gained confidence and became well known to each other, it was important to keep in mind the newcomers and to allow them also “to feel safe and comfortable”. Some agency representatives reported that they were encouraging parents to participate in the

play activities with their own and other children. There was a sense that this was important for developing “ownership” of the group and also for the parents to learn about child development and management by being involved alongside other adults and children.

### Discussion

The value placed by parents on having a chance to talk informally with each other as well as with early childhood support service representatives, and being able to interact with their own and other children, corresponds to the recent findings about parent/whānau-led services (Mitchell et al., 2006). Mitchell et al. (2006, p. 43) stated that “some rich conversational exchanges and positive, responsive interactions drew on parents' understanding and knowledge of their child”. Similarly, “good interaction with other parents and kids” was how one playgroup member in this study expressed satisfaction.

Some parents wanted to have contact with other early childhood groups, including visiting them and encouraging them to visit the playgroup. This resonates with the surprise expressed by Mitchell et al. (2006) at finding that many early childhood services had no direct relationships or communication with each other. Two of Playgroup V's families had children attending the local kindergarten while attending the playgroup with their younger children. Two others attended a playgroup organized by one of the service agencies. Another family attended the local Playcentre. The opportunities for fostering and maintaining ongoing contact are therefore numerous and as they are taken up they will hopefully be able to establish “a real possibility for collaborating on a local basis rather than just competing” (Mitchell et al., 2006, p. 31).

The results of this study also highlighted the question of whether playgroups are primarily a social and educational event for children, or primarily about promoting better parenting. A report to the Community Health Action Group stated that the playgroup was seen as a chance to offer information informally rather than offering formal “parenting” courses (Douglas, 2007). It was interesting therefore to note that “more tips for parenting” were mentioned by parents among the suggestions for improving the group. This may suggest that parents appreciated hearing others pass on tips incidentally, while their children were playing, preferring to participate in this way of sharing information, rather than more formal ways of “parent education”.

In contrast to studies showing a lack of involvement in parent education, Mitchell et al. (2006) noted that where parents were actively engaged in interacting with children, such as taking the role of the leaders in the playgroup, they were more likely to be involved in some form of parent education. Similarly in the study of Playgroup V, agency members referred to possibilities for parents to “take ownership of the group”, while parents seemed to place more value on having activities provided and taking the chance to socialize with each other. As it becomes

more widely known and as it defines its own aims and philosophical approach Playgroup V will need to address these differing perceptions about its purposes. The site of Playgroup V in the community centre has been by parents as being important as it allows access to the services there.

The principal of the school in which Playgroup V is situated has emphasized that supporting parents as their children's first teacher is fundamental to the fostering of learning among children. Where parents see their children having opportunities that they didn't have themselves, he considers that they tend to become more likely to participate in the community. In the area surrounding the school there has been a reported reduction in family stress and crime since the development of the community centre with its focus on inclusion of local families, and its provision of social services such as Playgroup V (Nielsen, 2007).

Playgroup V could be seen as contributing to the community links and local networking for families that Duncan (2006) identified as providing a buffer of support during the financial, social, education and relationship transitions that families go through.

## Future directions

Since the publication of the Ministry of Education's ten year early childhood strategic plan in 2002, there has been a move towards promoting collaborative relationships, especially with families from minority groups. This collaboration is aimed at improving relationships between families in early childhood settings, and also between families and social and health services (Ministry of Education, 2002). This study emphasizes the value of collaboration on multiple levels: between agencies; between parents and agencies; between parents and other parents; between parents and children.

One insight gained during this study was an appreciation of the considerable number of children and families involved in non-licensed, parent-led, community-based early childhood education. Each school week approximately 34,000 people, adults and children, attend a playgroup somewhere in New Zealand (Mitchell & Mara, 2001). Evaluating their experiences might have implications for community developers about the place of informal groups in the lives of young families.

Specifically, what place can a playgroup take in the holistic, multifaceted approach to community development that fosters the kind of human capital and collective empowerment that could result in a healthy, thriving neighbourhood? What is the ideal relationship between parent involvement and professional input? Do community centre facilities adequately serve playgroup needs? How do young families benefit from group experiences? What about the opportunities for developing leadership? Does the promotion of informal education empower parents to investigate settings that suit their aspirations and lifestyles? Paying more attention to license-exempt groups might help to answer some of these questions, and so enhance the possibilities for the long-term benefits of early childhood education that have inspired the developers of the *Strategic Plan*.

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# Me Too!

## *Teachers' interests as a curriculum resource*

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Suzanne Manning and Judith Loveridge

**The Te Whāriki principle of Relationships/Nā Hononga has quality interactions at its core. Linda Mitchell, Cathy Wylie and Margaret Carr (2008) have shown that while children learn through “reciprocal and responsive relationships with people, places and things” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 14) the best outcomes for children are reached when these teaching relationships are of high quality. It has also been shown that children being fully engaged with their activity can be used as a measure of their learning (Kitchen, 2000; Laevers, 2003). In this article we suggest that adults' level of involvement may be a key component of quality teaching. Where adults are fully engaged in the interaction they can be responsive, guide the children through the activities and add complexity and challenge where appropriate. This level of involvement can be enhanced by tapping into the adult's own interests.**

Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005) emphasise the knowledges that children gain through participation in the daily life of their families and communities. They call these “funds of knowledge”, defined as “knowledge and skills gained through historical and cultural interactions that are essential for individuals to function appropriately in his/her community...including knowledge about any activities or interactions that take place in homes...” (Moll & Greenberg, 1990, p.326). Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005) suggest that school teachers should build on these knowledges to enrich the curriculum and make it more relevant to children. Helen Hedges (2007) has also used this framework to investigate the funds of knowledge that children in Aotearoa/New Zealand bring to the curriculum in early childhood centres. She found that children acquire expertise and develop interests partly based on the activities and interests of the adults with whom they have close, positive relationships, for example their parents and grandparents. But it also means that the funds of knowledge that the *teachers* bring to early childhood communities will be important. Allowing teachers' interests to be present in the curriculum has the potential to increase adults' level of engagement and the children's funds of knowledge, benefitting both the children and the adults in the community of learners. The potential for this is persuasively expressed by Sergio Alati, an American early childhood teacher:

The things I enjoy teaching most are almost always connected to my own passions and values. I found that during fascinating, teachable moments the most novel thing happens: I am able to fully captivate the

minds and spirits of my students. ... A theory began to emerge: perhaps teachers' interests as well as those of children could inform and mold curriculum. (Alati, 2005, p. 86)

In the previously dominant Aotearoa/New Zealand child-centred discourse teachers were rendered close to invisible. Although teachers and researchers now commonly use a sociocultural lens for thinking about children's experiences it much less common to apply a sociocultural lens to the experiences of adults in early childhood settings. In this article the connections between adults' level of engagement, their funds of knowledge and the quality of teaching relationships are explored through a sociocultural lens, looking at data generated in a study that was focussed on teachers' interests as a curriculum resource.

### *A study of teachers as a curriculum resource*

The data for this study were generated in an urban Playcentre, a sessional early childhood education service where the parents take on the role of educators in the centre. The teaching team comprised a different group of parents for each session of the week (so that each parent was only 'on team' once a week), and the teams were carefully arranged so that there was a mix of experienced and trained parents working with newer parents. Each team decided on its own rostering system to make sure that all routine jobs were done, but on most sessions a parent would expect to be rostered on for one specific activity (often near the beginning), and be free to choose the other activities they participated in throughout the rest of the session.

The study investigated the way that the parents as educators used their life experiences, skills and knowledges in their teaching practice, by observing and interviewing four parents during the course of one school term (see Manning, 2008, and Manning and Loveridge, 2009, for more details of the complete study). Examples were found where the parents used their prior “funds of knowledge” to complement their teaching, but more examples were found where the parents bypassed their own interests to focus solely on providing for the children. An interesting finding was that when the parents used their own interests in their teaching, they showed a far greater involvement in the activity and increased quality of interactions with the children in terms of complexity of language and extension of ideas. The following examples from two of the case studies illustrate these contrasts.



## Kim: constructive versus creative activities

Kim had one boy (3 years old), had been at Playcentre for about 2 years, and was currently the Welfare Officer. She had few qualifications beyond Secondary school, and had completed Course 1 of the Playcentre training. She had previously been a salesperson, and enjoyed creative activities and singing. At the start of one session, she had been assigned to set up an activity of her choice in the corner for manipulative play:

*Kim has set up a train set, as she knows that the children enjoy this. It is not something she has a personal interest in. She sits on a chair nearby, mostly sitting quietly but occasionally making comments such as "Mind the trees." Another teacher passes and she has a discussion about which children are here today. Her attention is brought back to the activity when one of the children gives her a train and she says "What do I need to do with the train? Paint it?" and laughs. She gets up and helps a child put a train back on the track then sits down again, and looks around. She calls over to a child across the room "Can't you find it?", then gets up, goes and writes something on a clipboard, returns to sit down. "Hi" she says to a passing child.*

In this observation, Kim was easily distracted by other people (both children and adults), and she did not initiate conversation with the children involved in the activity. Although she responded to the children's questions and requests, she did not extend their thinking, give suggestions as to what else they could do, or offer more information. Perhaps the one exception is when she made the joke about painting the train, which was the one time her own interests (in creative and artistic activities) showed through. In contrast, when Kim was asked to do face painting, she remained intensely engaged with the activity for over half an hour, invoking a far wider range of language and concepts as she enthusiastically interacted with the children:

*Jason (3 yrs) comes up to Kim and asks her with words and gestures to have his face painted. Kim goes with Jason and sets up the face painting on a table. Jason sits down and Kim starts by saying "Okay Mr Tiger". As the painting continues the concept evolves, and Kim verbalizes this: "A silver lion are we? I think silver is going to look great." When she finishes she says, "All done. That's the best silver lion I've ever seen." Jason leaves without saying anything to go outside. A boy (2 yrs) who has been watching comes over for a turn, and Kim sits him down and paints his face. Two bigger boys (4 yrs) come in from outside and wait for their turn. They want to be lions like Jason. As Kim works, she talks with the child who is having their face painted, and with the children watching. One discussion is on colours and paints: "What colour do you want your lion to be? Yellow? I wonder if we have yellow?" She talks about the paints and her problems as she looks for specific colours, commenting that some of the paints are quite gluggy and she can't find yellow. Kim ends up spending at least half an hour face painting.*

Here Kim gently questioned the idea of what colour a lion had to be, whilst still complying with the children's requests to be whatever colour lion they chose. She also drew their attention to the range of colours available, and to the technicalities of painting with different qualities of paint. The children had Kim's undivided attention for an extended period of time, something that did not happen when she was present at the train set activity.

## Sally: the supervisor versus the geographer

Sally had two boys (one almost 5 years and one just 1 year old), and she had been at Playcentre for about 4 years. She had previously held the position of President, and was currently the Equipment officer. She had a Master's degree in hydrology, and had completed Course 3 of the Playcentre training. She had worked in administrative jobs, travelled overseas, worked as a chef, and was currently interested in

photography and scrapbooking. Sally was a team leader on this session. It was centre policy to have an adult at the table when a child is eating, so when one girl decided she wanted to start morning tea early Sally took it on herself to make sure the policy was followed:

*Sally seats herself at the table, opposite Charmaine (3 ½ years) who is eating, and starts writing on a piece of paper. Johnny (4 yrs) comes over to show her his picture and she writes his name and the date on it, listens to his explanation and makes a comment, and hangs it up. She goes to the kitchen, talks to team members, then brings a drink with her as she sits back at the table. Charmaine starts a conversation with Sally. Sally's main response is to reflect back Charmaine's words:*

C: "I got nothing on my t-shirt."

S: "You've got nothing on your t-shirt? ... It's a nice stripey jersey... Who made it?"

C: "muffled"

S: "Thought so. She's very clever, your mum."

C: "nanny"

S: "Oh, your nanny."

*Then Sally asks a teacher about the heaters and answers a question from another teacher, before sitting quietly until Charmaine asks another question. This is the pattern for the next ten minutes – adults coming to talk with Sally, and Sally responding to Charmaine when she asks a question.*

Charmaine appeared to want to have a conversation, but she had to continually re-gain Sally's attention which was easily distracted. Like Kim in the previous observation with children and the train set, Sally is not initiating conversation but mostly reflecting Charmaine words, although she does make an attempt to extend the conversation slightly, for example by asking who made the jersey. In contrast, Sally in the sandpit was far more initiating and engaged with the children, and again there was a far wider use of language and concepts. Sally, with her degree in hydrology, was always interested in sand and water:

*Sally is in the sandpit with two boys (Johnny, 4 yrs and Paul, 3 yrs). They are digging a channel, and there is water in the channel. Sally says "Oh, those are camel humps. So, are they part of the pond, or the channel?" But Johnny is more interested in the colour of the water in the channel, and says "it's full of milo." They dig some more channel, and as the water starts flowing Paul says "Yay, it's working." The three of them carry on digging. The call comes for morning tea, but no-one in the sandpit moves. Sally and Johnny discuss the water and the roundabout that has been made before they all go in for morning tea. Fifteen minutes later Sally heads back out to the sandpit, as she had promised the children. There are now five children and they are trying to get water to flow along the channel right to the end, but it is a race to get enough water in to make it flow before it sinks into the sand. Sally digs a hole to put a water wheel in the middle of the channel, while children look on with interest, but the flow of the water is too sluggish to turn the wheel. She says "It's not working, my plan's*

*not working," and turns instead to see what other children are doing. To one child she says "What have you unearthed in the sandpit? Do you know what this makes you? It makes you an archaeologist." Then, seeing Johnny with the hose directed at close quarter to the edge of the channel, she squats down and says "Your hose is making new channels and then it's going to make a landslide, just like the one up at Kelson. (This landslide has been on the news recently.) There it goes. (The edge of the channel crumbles). That's just how a landslide happens."*

In this observation Sally was fully involved in the imaginary world being co-constructed between her and the two boys, and was not easily distracted, even by morning tea. She used a variety of technical language such as 'channel' and 'pond'. She deliberately chose complex language, such as 'unearthed' instead of 'dug up', and referred to the child as an 'archaeologist' (a concept which she defined). The children gave every indication of understanding her conversation, and being interested in it. Sally also made links to recent current events in the children's lives, connecting their play to the wider world.

## Child-centred or a Community of Learners?

The common thread with these two examples is that when the adults were involved in activities that connected with their own personal interests and experiences, they were more engaged with the children at the activity, and their conversation moved from being descriptive and reflective to being more informative and complex. In short, the quality of teaching improved in terms of the factors that studies have shown to be effective in producing beneficial outcomes for children (Mitchell et al., 2008). This highlights a real tension in the quality debate. On one hand, it is necessary that certain routine activities are carried out in a session to ensure its smooth running and to meet the centre's philosophy of how best to provide quality ECE. Rostering new parents onto different activities have also shown to be a good way of supporting them to participate in the session. But on the other hand, this data shows that in some ways, rostering parents onto activities in which they have little personal interest results in poorer quality interactions.

Apart from facilitating quality teaching, there is another argument for teachers to use their interests as a resource for curricula. Margaret Brennan (2007) has highlighted how much children want to be part of adults' lives and how motivated they are to learn about activities that are culturally valued by their communities – even more so than the specifically 'educational' activities that might be arranged especially for them. How then are children likely to react to those things that are obviously their teachers' personal interests? We are suggesting that where children can discern that a teacher has a passion for the subject or activity, in the context of an established warm and caring adult-child relationship, children will be predisposed to take an interest as well and the interactions that ensue are more likely to be engaging and extending for both adults and children.

In this way a community of learners can be built up that includes the teachers' interests and experiences as well as the children's. Joy Mepham (2000) showed how much these experiences contribute to the professional development of teachers by analysing how both the formal and informal learning in a personal sphere influenced their teaching. However, there are factors that work against teachers bringing their own 'funds of knowledge' to the early childhood setting (see Manning & Loveridge, 2009). The adults themselves need to feel a part of the community, and to have agency within that community, in order to feel comfortable in bringing their personal experiences purposefully into the curriculum. The philosophy of the centre needs to allow - and indeed encourage - a teacher to express and use their interests alongside of the children's interests. Children want to be part of a community, not separated into their own child-centred space. For an early childhood centre to be a true community of learners, the adults have to be involved in the learning and to be able to bring their own 'funds of knowledge' to the community. "Me too!" applies not only to the children.

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## Further Reading

The literature review carried out by Mitchell, Wylie and Carr (2008) found that for early childhood education, good quality was more important for positive outcomes for children than other aspects such as duration in years or hours per week. Positive outcomes such as increased cognitive abilities, positive learning dispositions and low levels of antisocial behaviour were found to be associated with:

- the quality of staff-child interaction;
- the learning resources available;
- programmes that engage children; and
- a supportive environment for children to work together (p. 5).

Quality of staff-child interaction was more explicitly defined in the report:

"Positive effects of ECE participation were found in settings described as good quality in terms of adult-child interactions that are responsive, cognitively challenging, and encourage joint attention and negotiation or 'sustained shared thinking'." (p. 42)

Prof. Ferre Laevers, from Leuven University in Belgium, has developed a framework for assessing the quality of early childhood programmes, based on children's well-being and involvement. Well-being refers to the child being at ease in the setting, as seen by involvement in activities. Full involvement, characterised by intrinsic motivation, concentration and persistence, is seen as necessary for deep and long term learning. Laevers (2003) and his team have published an assessment tool for measuring involvement, which is discussed in Kitchen (2000).

Another programme quality rating scale has been used by Mitchell, Royal Tangaere, Mara, & Wylie (2006) in their Ministry of Education report *Quality in parent/whānau-led services*. This rating scale was originally developed for the *Competent Children* study, and has also been used in other NZCER studies, with further amendments. To get a quality rating for the service, trained observers focus on six categories: Adult: Child interactions, Adult: Adult interactions, Child: Adult interactions, Child: Child interactions, Education programme and Resources.

# Children's drawing

## Exploring the teachers' role

Helen Wrightson

*This research identifies how two early childhood teachers supported children in their early childhood communities to extend their thinking and learning through drawing experiences to successfully communicate ideas. Central to this research is the view that through drawing opportunities teachers can support children to construct meaning, communicate their understanding of ideas and develop their sense of identity (Anning & Ring, 2004). Evidence shows that children tell rich stories about themselves, their families, everyday experiences and knowledge of the world through their drawings. Research has identified drawing as a visual language but this requires nurturing if it is to provide children another mode to communicate their stories and understandings of the people, places and things in their lives.*

### Introduction

**This small scale research project was completed in 2008 as partial fulfillment for my Master of Education degree. It was inspired by the work of Anning and Ring (2004) and previous study into children's artwork. I remain in awe of children's artwork from infants' earliest marks to the recognisable drawings of older children. I recognise the skill and control it takes for an infant to hold an art tool initially and how with exposure to these tools, maturation and time to manipulate them cognitive understanding and skills develop together with confidence to create more controlled marks.**

I have been fascinated by children's potential with art medium and capabilities with expressing ideas of their world through artwork. Children deserve exposure to high quality art resources, opportunities for mutual dialogic engagement with adults who value their creativity and have the ability to extend their use of art tools, encourage exploration with opportunities for expressing ideas and understandings of their world through art mediums.

Children have probably always drawn, but it is only since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, with paper more readily available, that children's drawings have been collected and analysed (Foks-Appelman, 2007; Gardner, 1980; Kellogg, 1979). Analysis has ranged from understanding children's personalities, cognitive maturity, and emotional status to understanding concepts and aesthetics of children's art. Whilst children's drawings have been extensively researched, there is little research on the teacher's role in supporting young children's drawing. My fascination with children's potential for expression through art and the role of the teacher prompted two guiding research questions:

- Are early childhood teachers using children's drawings as a mode for constructing meaning, communicating understanding and developing a sense of self?
- How are early childhood teachers developing a pedagogy of drawing to scaffold children's thinking and learning?

### What does the research literature tell us?

Gardner (1980) questioned whether children were dependent on instruction from teachers to develop drawing skills or if drawings reflected a natural progression of skills and ability. Currently, the best pedagogical approach to children's artworks is a dilemma for many early childhood teachers in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Visser, 2005). Teachers adopt either a child centred approach in which the child experiments with minimal intervention from the teacher or they use a more sociocultural approach, advocated in the Reggio Emilia approach, which nurtures art experiences (Zimmerman & Zimmerman, 2000). Visser (2005) believes that the dominant visual arts education paradigm presently adopted in Aotearoa/New Zealand focuses on "developmental, progressive and psycho-analytical theories" (p.1) although there has been a slight shift in praxis influenced by sociocultural theoretical perspectives and the Reggio Emilia approach.

Researchers such as Brownlee (1991), Gardner (1980), Kellogg (1979), Lowenfeld (1957, in Walker, 2007), Lowenfeld and Brittain (1975) and Luquet (1913, 1927, in Richards, 2007) identified that children pass universal developmental stages of drawing depicting similar images to represent aspects of reality at similar stages. Luquet (1913, 1927, in Richards, 2007) studied the developmental stages of children's drawings; however the validity of his research was challenged as his findings were based on only one child, his own daughter.

Piaget's developmental constructivist theoretical perspectives continue to influence current pedagogy (Visser, 2005). His research into children's drawings was to inform his understanding of children's cognition, in particular spatial concepts (Richards, 2007). However he studied the distinct stages of drawings identified by Luquet rather than examining drawing as a domain of learning in its own right. According to Piaget, infants' and toddlers' first marks and early scribbling often occur as sensory exploration when playing with their food or in the sand (Berk, 2003; Gardner, 1980; Kellogg, 1970). He believed children progressed to the preoperational stage of cognitive development where

they use symbolic forms to represent their ideas; drawing being one form of symbolic representation (Berk, 2003). More recently, such developmental perspectives have been challenged for underestimating the capabilities of young children when supported by more experienced people when learning within their zones of proximal development (Brooks, 2004; 2005; 2006; Davey, 2002; Frisch, 2006; Jordan, 2004; Pohio, 2008).

Vygotsky (1978) argued that children's learning is a socially constructed process and that learning was limited to maturation without the assistance of more experienced people to enhance knowledge and understanding. He believed that children learn in a shared context before internalising new information (Vygotsky, 1978). Sociocultural theories identify that children learn from the significant people within their lives and the cultural context they experience (Anning & Ring, 2004; Davey, 2002; Pohio, 2007; Knight, 2009). Vygotsky also emphasised the inseparable nature of an individual's historical, social and cultural contexts in advancing learning (Frisch, 2006).

Another important aspect of sociocultural theory is the development of mental tools critical in cognitive abilities such as attending, remembering and thinking (Vygotsky 1934, 1962, in Bodrova & Leong, 1996). Vygotsky saw the acquisition of mental tools as essential in assisting children to develop skills required for abstract thinking (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). Adults therefore have a responsibility to support children in acquiring mental skills essential for learning. Vygotsky placed importance on children learning higher mental functioning and stressed language as a critical tool for learning (Berk, 2003; Bodrova & Leong, 1996; Rieber & Robinson, 2004). This was because he viewed language as a symbolic tool for thought and argued that "tools, whether practical or symbolic, are initially "external," used outwardly on nature or in communicating with others. But tools affect their users: language, used first as a communicative tool, finally shapes the minds of those who adapt to its use" (Rieber & Robinson, 2004, p. 11).

Using this theory and the notion that learning is socially constructed this research considered the critical role early childhood teachers have in encouraging young children to construct meaning of their world through the use of drawing, a visual language. Many authors emphasise the importance of the teacher's role in extending children's drawing and understanding of concepts (Anning & Ring, 2004; Davey, 2002; Brooks, 2004, 2005, 2006; Frisch, 2006; & Knight, 2009) and the importance of children's involvement in a 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998). Here learning is understood as a shared experience that occurs through social participation whereby children come to understand the cultural context in which they are immersed.

## The research project

To adhere to the parameters set for a small scale research project I limited the scope by considering drawing only and restricted the age range of children to three to five year olds.



The project used ethnographic case study research design with qualitative data collection methods. The intention of this research method is to study a group of people with the purpose of gaining greater understanding of something specific (Cresswell, 2008). The primary objective of the study was to observe two early childhood teachers in their early childhood centres as they engaged with children in drawing experiences. Analysis of the data then identified the teachers' pedagogy in supporting children's drawing experiences as a mode for constructing meaning, communicating understanding and developing a sense of self.

## Participants and their early childhood centres

The two early childhood teachers, Rebecca and Kate, work at different early childhood centres in the Greater Auckland region. Rebecca works in an urban community based early childhood centre. At the time of the study she had 11 years early childhood experience and held a Diploma of Teaching (ECE). Her early childhood service had 37 children aged three - five years enrolled, but only 30 could attend each session. Many of the children were from diverse cultural backgrounds with a high percentage being of Maori or Pacific Island ethnicities. Kate works in a privately owned, semi-rural early childhood centre. She had 25 years experience as an early childhood teacher and held a Bachelor of Education, as well as a Higher Diploma

of Teaching that includes two art teaching papers. Her early childhood centre had 90 children aged two – five years enrolled, with the majority aged three – five, but only 34 attended each session. The group was predominately mono-cultural with a small percentage of Māori, Chinese, Cambodian, Indian, Russian, Hebrew and European new immigrants. The families from both services were mainly in the middle socio-economic group.

## Data Collection

Data collection methods included observations of the teachers for approximately 90 minute periods, 5 times over a 2 week period engaged in a range of drawing experiences, interviews with teachers and critique of the early childhood services' philosophy statements. Using a range of data collection methods enabled triangulation and increased validity of the results. The observations included contextual information such as, provision of resources, presentation of the art spaces, and whether the experience was self-initiated by children or teacher initiated.

## Results

The data were analysed using thematic data analysis and revealed five themes. A sociocultural lens was used to consider effective teaching strategies that promoted rich relationships and dialogue between teacher and children that supported children's construction of concepts through drawing experiences.

### Promoting meaning and understanding

The first theme related to teaching strategies that encouraged children to construct meaning when they engaged in drawing experiences, that is, the promotion of thinking and understanding of ideas. Kate was observed engaging with children when drawing a landscape of their outdoor environment, drawing on teaching strategies such as scaffolding and co-construction. MacNaughton and Williams (2004) identify that scaffolding techniques support children to work at a higher level with assistance from more experienced peers or adults to enhance knowledge and understanding. As competence develops the scaffold is slowly withdrawn. In contrast, Jordan (2004) refers to co-construction as more collaborative, placing more emphasis "on teachers and children together studying meanings" (p.7) through sustained dialogue, with the teacher really understanding the child's funds of knowledge.

Kate encouraged the children to observe what was visible to them in their local environment and they were making discoveries together. She scaffolded them to observe perspective, how things were positioned and possibilities for representing these ideas in their drawings. She used technical language with explanations, such as foreground and background, as she encouraged the children to observe finer detail in what could be seen and where it was positioned prior to drawing it. Kate challenged the children to think about more technical aspects of their drawings.

Pelo (2007) advocates the use of technical language as this extends children's art vocabulary and encourages proficiency in engaging with others in rich dialogue to discuss "detail and specificity" (p.9).

As the children drew images of objects that appealed to them Kate offered further support. She encouraged analysis and additional observation, such as noticing patterns on a corrugated iron roof, the power-lines and hill range in the distance. Kate used language as a means for extending the children's thinking, offering additional suggestions, or asking further questions. As the children drew their representations of objects they discussed these with Kate, demonstrating their understanding.

### Communicating understanding

The second theme related to teaching strategies that encouraged the children to communicate their understanding of the world through their drawing experiences. This included dialogue the teacher and child engaged in about emergent drawing ideas. This was particularly evident in both Kate and Rebecca's practice.

An example was Rebecca encouraging a child to attempt drawing the television character 'Sponge Bob Square Pants' herself despite another child offering to draw it for her. The child initiated this experience and was being encouraged to use drawings for symbolizing this character and demonstrate her understanding of it. Lambert (2006) refers to this as the use of multimodal texts, such as television and other technologies, written text, and graphic art forms that children may be exposed to in today's western society. Children are learning to use multiliteracies both to encode and convey information. Rebecca explained that the character looked like a square shape and suggested the child commence by drawing this shape. Rebecca scaffolded this child in drawing a character using a geometric shape that she understood. Gardner (1980) emphasised that children of three years regularly use geometric forms for representing people or things that are familiar to them. This appears to be a strategy teachers often used to scaffold drawing representations.

### Developing identity

The third theme explored teaching strategies that encouraged the children to develop their sense of identity through drawing experiences. Kate and Rebecca constantly encouraged the children's sense of 'self'. In all observations Kate spoke to the children about being 'artists' and the importance of them including their names on their drawings, promoting a sense of ownership and pride.

Both teachers praised the children's efforts with drawing and constantly acknowledged aspects children had noticed and included in their drawings. Kate often accompanied the praise with a further question that encouraged the child to think about another aspect that could be included in the drawing. This was particularly evident in a self-portrait drawing experience where children observed themselves closely in a mirror and explored how to portray their own

image. Another strategy Kate used to promote children's sense of 'self' was acknowledgement of the children's self-portraits and other drawings and a request to take photocopies of these to display in the early childhood centre. Rebecca also photographed children's drawings, particularly some done on whiteboards so that there was a record of the image which could be revisited or shared with family.

## Promoting talking and drawing

Theme four related to teaching strategies that promoted talking and drawing. Researchers such as Coates and Coates (2006) and Wright (2007) identified the importance of drawing and talking or telling as significant in assisting children to communicate their meanings of people, places or things. This theme was not so evident in the observations of either teacher possibly because the focus was on the teacher's role rather than on the process of individual children's drawing. What was more evident in the observations of Rebecca and Kate with numerous children was the dialogues that they and the children engaged in that contributed to achieving intersubjectivity about the drawings. Wright (2007) describes 'drawing-telling' as a powerful means for children to share their understanding of ideas by using two modes; that is, a graphic representation and a narrative about the drawing. Coates and Coates (2006) discussed the importance of the dialogue and social interaction that often accompanies the mark-making process. They consider that although the end product provides evidence of a symbolic representation that can be viewed by others, what is "not portrayed is the thinking, talking, social interaction and mark-making that formed a fundamental part of the process" (p. 222). They recognise that while many children talk as they draw, not all children do this and some concentrate without engagement with anyone else.

## Drawing skills and tool use

The final theme related to teaching strategies that promoted the development of drawing skills or use of drawing tools, such as teachers scaffolding children using drawing tools. The scaffold often occurred through the use of strategies to assist thinking, such as modelling and imitating (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990).

Pelo (2007) explains that it is the teacher's role to extend children's understanding of and skill level with the tools associated with different media as this enhances confidence too. There were many examples in every observation of both teachers doing this. Generally the scaffold occurred in response to individual children's skills with specific tools or to extend techniques with the tools. This also occurred when new tools were first introduced. Rebecca scaffolded numerous children when using a new set of propelling pencil-like crayons where the crayon was extended by twisting the end. She modeled or explained the crayons function as this was different to other pens or pencils the children had experienced previously. In other observations Rebecca and Kate modeled using crayons in different ways

by pressing hard to create a dark line and lightly to make a light line. Pelo (2007) states it is an important role of the teacher to coach children in the use of tools and to provide other ideas should they get stuck with their artworks or how to use the tools.

## Discussion

Kate and Rebecca took a proactive stance in supporting children's thinking and learning through drawing experiences. They engaged in respectful dialogues with children that allowed them to understand children's thinking but challenged them with new ideas. Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2002, in Anning, Cullen & Flear, 2004) identified five points associated with effective pedagogy, which include the following two significant points: "the quality of shared, sustained thinking and dialogue between adults/children and children/peers" (p. 3); and "encouragement for children to represent their understandings in a range of modes" (p. 4). Examples of these effective pedagogical strategies were evident throughout this research.

Kate and Rebecca both promoted 'mastery' and 'persistence' with drawing by creating opportunities that were fun and pleasurable, but also challenged thinking. They offered encouragement, really listened to children's ideas, empowered children to problem-solve and extended their ideas, praised achievements and celebrated their success with drawing. They were both passionate about offering children drawing experiences where they could experiment, but also feel a sense of success as they believe this contributes to children's sense of 'self' and confidence in using drawing as a visual literacy.

## Final thoughts

Children deserve teachers who are passionate about drawing, who celebrate the processes of drawing and children's creations, from their very first marks to their more realistic representations. It is important that teachers understand the developmental continuum of drawing that occurs from early mark making to more explicit visual representations, but also how they can support children's expression of ideas through drawing.

Consideration of sociocultural perspectives and adopting a more 'hands on' approach to children's drawing experiences is a starting place. Mutual dialogic engagement between teachers and children needs to occur to stimulate discussion about children's drawings, encourage reflection on drawing processes and stimulate further thinking and learning. Understanding children's prior knowledge and current interests is critical plus how these can be enhanced with support from more experienced people in socially mediated situations.

Consideration needs to be given to the teacher's role that encompasses the provision of high quality drawing tools presented aesthetically to inspire children to draw. In addition teachers need to make themselves available to children, to have time for sustained engagement with them and encourage their graphic representations.

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# The Apple Tree

## *An authentic learning experience*

Tara Fagan, CORE Education and Ngaire Taal, Massey University Childcare Centre

In February 2008, the Kiwi and Kea sections of Massey University Childcare Centre 'rented' an apple tree each from AgResearch Grasslands in Palmerston North. The annual renting of fruit trees is an opportunity that is offered yearly to the general public and the first time the centre accepted the opportunity. The renting of the apple tree led to a yearlong project for the Kiwi and Kea sections. Ngaire Taal, a teacher with the Kea Section tells Tara Fagan the story.....

It was not long before the apple tree became a part of centre life. The children visited the tree, observing the buds forming on the tree. As the fruit developed, the orchardist met with the children talking to them about the tree and the growth of the fruit. The children learned that fruit is tested for sugar levels before it is considered ripe, which is when the fruit can be picked. They inspected the rotten fruit that had fallen on the ground from nearby trees. They heard how water is needed for the fruit to grow and they enjoyed seeing the equipment used for watering. They explored the orchard noting and discussing the similarities and differences between trees. The windbreak too evoked interesting discussion. Before leaving, the children spent some time to sit and draw 'their' fruit tree. Finally, the children sampled fruit from a tree that was ripe and ready to eat; yummy.



*“We started with a tree and finished with apple shortcake.”*

In the days and weeks that followed, the children regularly asked about 'their' fruit and when it would be ready. Finally the orchardist said the fruit was close to being ripe and a day was planned to harvest the crop. Over the course of one day, small groups of children and two teachers went to pick the fruit. The children took turns to climb the big ladder to get the fruit right up the top of the tree – a highlight for many. The fruit was collected and placed into bags to take back to the centre. Every hour another group of children and teachers returned to the centre with the van full of fruit – what a lot of harvesting occurred over this day!

Over the next few days, the fruit was prepared for sale. Ngaire set up an area for sorting the fruit. The children who wanted to sort fruit into groups of damaged fruit and fruit for selling. They counted the fruit and bagged it up to sell. \$1 for 5 apples; \$2 for 10 apples. They then wrote the prices on the bags. While sorting and bagging, fruit was compared

in terms of the colour and size of the fruit. They also looked for the biggest and the smallest apple collected.

The children made a sign advertising the fruit for sale. The fruit was then delivered to other Massey centres, which were selling them on the children's behalf. Some fruit was put aside to eat. Fruit became the children's preferred morning tea and the snack of choice throughout the day.

The damaged fruit was kept aside for baking. Families were asked for their favourite apple recipes. As the recipes came in, teachers and children started the baking. Soon the centre was filled with lovely aromas and lots more yummy food. An upside down apple cake was beautifully glazed with apples on the top.

As part of International Family Day, the children and teachers decided to have a family day event centered on the apple recipes. The children helped to make the morning tea as well as plan for the event. They sent out the invitations, set up the room, did the baking, reminded their families, and rehearsed songs, which were sung on the day. The baking and sharing of apple recipes enhanced this magnificent experience.



A year later, the centre ‘rented’ another apple tree. This time, an organic apple tree was selected. Again the centre completed the cycle of harvesting, selling and baking apples. When visiting the orchard, the children showed their recollection of their events from last year as they went running to look at the names of the ‘owner’s’ tree - “is this one ours?” they would ask as they ran to look at the label. The Kea tree was found and the children continued their discussion about their learning from last year; about the need for watering, the need to pick and the need for the apples to be ripe.

The teachers too had more awareness of what was involved and set aside more time for children to both explore the orchard and to document their exploration through drawing and writing. Instead of counting the apples, the fruit was weighed. This year, children brought in bags of other fruit from home to add with the apples so there was more varied baking such as apple and feijoa crumble and apple and feijoa juice. Again the aromas of fresh baking wafted through the centre. Experimentation of different uses for the fruit took place including drying it with a dehydrator and using a juicer to get juice.

The apple tree experience is firmly grounded in the centre and recognised as a true success by all involved.

## Learning through the Apple Tree

The ‘Apple Tree’ project has enhanced the children’s learning. Children’s continued interests formed the basis for the teaching teams’ careful planning. The teaching team carefully planned the expanding project in response to the children’s continued interest and desire to be involved. They reflected on what the children were learning so that they could further plan and extend on children’s ongoing interest in the project.

Ngairé sums up the experience to say,

Instead of just having the apples delivered to the centre, which could have happened, it turned into a real learning experience that was also a fund-raiser - one that involved the whole centre community including children, teachers and parents. Even little things like the signs on the doors where it would have been faster for us to whip something up rather than have the children involved but it was their involvement that gave more meaning to the experience. It permitted a series of experience covering the curriculum. Children can learn holistically. As teachers, we can see the journey of learning. We started with a tree and finished with apple shortcake. It was the learning that happened in between the two points that covered the whole curriculum.





Strands from Te Whāriki were evident throughout the story. For example:

**Well-being**

Healthy food was a topic of conversation. Good health practices such as washing before baking were reinforced.

**Belonging:**

Links with families were strengthened through inviting them to bring in recipes and by the centre apples being taken home and shared. International Family Day saw the families' recipes being produced and shared on the day and the children knew which family's recipe they tasted.

**Contribution:**

Children participated and were actively involved in the process of harvesting and preparing the apples for both selling and baking. They shared their thoughts about the processes in group discussions and in their documentation.

**Communication:**

The children talked, planned and communicated both verbally and non-verbally throughout the experience. They increased their understanding of the need to provide signs to communicate non-verbally as they advertise their products.

**Exploration:**

Children were able to explore new environments and concepts, testing out theories and learning strategies as they strengthened their understanding.

Subject content outcomes were also evident. For example:

**Mathematics**

The children estimated the number of the apples on the tree sharing how they got this figure. When sorting the apples, again a specific math lens was used as we counted, sorted, compared, discussed money and fruit was cut into  $\frac{1}{2}$ 's and  $\frac{1}{4}$ 's. The baking process again saw many mathematical features as children measured and further developed time concepts as they timed the cooking.

**Science**

The children gained experience with the environment including the seasons and the ebb and flow of nature. They learned water was needed to help the apples grow, sugar content was needed for the fruit to be considered ripe and how baking transformed raw ingredients.

**Literacy**

Literacy acquisition was evident as the children read the Kea label on the tree, made the signs to sell the apples, wrote the price and the amount of apples on the bags and read recipes.

**Marketing**

The marketing of the fruit tied the processes together as the children developed real world concepts of needing a product, preparing for sale, advertising and selling.

The above story is part of a team contribution at Massey Childcare Centre in Palmerston North. The Kiwi and Kea sections of Massey are involved in the ECE ICT PL programme, a 3 year pilot programme is funded by the NZ Ministry of Education and facilitated by CORE Education Ltd, a not-for profit educational research and development organisation based in Christchurch.

# Paparazzi or pedagogy?

## *A review of the literature about photography in assessment*

Maureen Perkins

**During my last four years as a facilitator on the *Kei Tua o te Pae* Professional Development programme at the University of Auckland, I have seen a broad range of ways that teachers and educators have been using photographs in assessment documentation. At one end of the spectrum teachers are simply picking up a camera and ‘snapping’ without any specific pedagogical intent; they are simply capturing the ‘moment’ for a learning story they will write later. At the other end of the range are teachers who are reflecting critically on ideas around learning, power and identity and who are making thoughtful choices before, during and after taking photographs. Regardless of where teachers are on this continuum, there is the potential for new learning but this requires an increase in the evidence-based information that is currently available.**

I began to wonder what information there was in the literature to support teachers who choose to be critically reflective about their use of photographs. To paraphrase Mary Jane Drummond’s (1993) oft-quoted words, I wanted to be able to *recognise* and *respond* to what I was *noticing* in the practices and discourse around the use of photographs in assessment documentation and to consider implications for teaching in early childhood. As a part of my postgraduate study I seized an opportunity to review the literature in this area and made some interesting discoveries, particularly when I began looking outside of the domain of education into the wider social sciences.

The questions that framed this review were:

- What does the literature suggest is current practice for the use of photographs in early childhood educational assessment?
- Do teachers need to understand technical aspects of using photography for assessment documentation and how do they get this information?
- What are the implicit expectations of the use of photographs in Ministry of Education support publications?
- What could we gain by crossing borders into other domains of knowledge?

### Current uses for assessment

The use of ICT tools to support assessment documentation is prevalent with 96% of teachers in early childhood centres in New Zealand using photographs as part of their assessment documentation (Bolstad, 2004; Education Review Office, 2007; Mitchell, 2008). The range of practice here is wide, with some teachers arguing that the photographs can stand alone as data and others seeing them as only a part of the information needed to tell the story.

The literature showed that most teachers and researchers were using photographs to support the written text or as evidence for information in the text (Dunleavy & Menzies, 2007; Meade, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2004). For the most part, they agreed that analysis and interpretation needed to be added in a written form alongside the photographs and with the understanding that this needs to be available for revisiting and reinterpretation over time. Narelle Lemon wrote about how photographs can slow down a moment in time so that the voices and memories behind the photographs can be reflected upon. Over time these meanings change as the viewer brings new insights and experiences to the memories (Lemon, 2006). This may have implications for those teachers who like to keep the children’s portfolios neatly chronological and may be unwilling to add directly to stories already in portfolios. Some teachers also feel a strong sense of ownership over their stories and do not want others to add their own perspectives or to append subsequent learning events to a story.

For some groups, photographs are being used as cues for ongoing conversations with children and their families as a part of the assessment, planning and curriculum processes as well as to invite and encourage family participation (Delany, 2007; Dunleavy & Menzies, 2007; Wright, Ryder, & Mayo, 2006). This has included documentation of families participating in the everyday life of the centre – fundraising, working bees, parent help – as well as outside of the centre – families on holiday, at sporting or cultural events.

### Crossing borders

Keeping the discussion of the use of photographs within the context of educational assessment can create boundaries



that exclude some concepts simply by describing the practice and philosophy of teachers (Edwards & Fowler, 2007). A broader approach, gathering information from disciplines other than education, became important in my quest for literature that might challenge current thinking.

It became apparent that there were close links between the use of photographs in assessment in early years education and the practices and findings of visual anthropologists, sociologists and visual ethnographers. These are relatively new disciplines which may be of interest in any future research on this topic.

Visual anthropologists and geographers are using photographs as a focus for reflective, critical discussions and to problematise and complicate views of everyday settings, relationships and experiences (Banks, 2001; Goldman-Segall, 1998; Prosser, 1992; Rose, 1996). Their work suggested some obvious implications for education. If we were to follow their example, taking photographs of a centre during the day for the purpose of discussing them as a team, what would we find? What do the photographs already being used in our centres say to others? It might be particularly interesting to use the framework of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) for this analysis. What would such photographs say about the use of space, sharing of power and sense of identity in the centre? What would they say about family and community and belonging? Would this challenge our espoused views of the children, of the teachers and family roles? What impact would this have on our assessment practices?

### Technical skill and decision making

The technical skills referred to are less about how to use the settings on the camera and more about the choices teachers make in choosing or framing a shot. Photographs have been seen as chunks of data that have been encoded

and decoded by the people taking and viewing the photographs (Hansen & Perry, 2007; Moran & Tegano, 2005; Rose, 1996). This stresses the importance of critical reflection. How often do we critique our choices when taking photographs? Teachers do not have time to go through this process with every photo they take, but perhaps occasional time spent in team discussions with a sample of photographs might create an awareness that would impact on subsequent practice, asking questions such as:

- Why did you choose that child and that moment?
- What difference would it make if you had waited?
- Does this link to earlier photographs and will it change the story if these are included?
- Are you using close-up shots?
- What have you left out of the frame and why?
- What story is told by the spaces between the people and things in the photographs?
- Would the story be better told with a series of photographs from the same learning experience or from different days but showing the child exploring the same interests or theories?

Although photographs have been identified as a visual tool that offer alternative communication methods to children and families where language is a barrier (e.g. very young children or families with first languages that differ from the teachers'), opinions differ as to whether or not photographs can be seen as a language with grammatical rules (Banks, 2001; Moran & Tegano, 2005; Rose, 1996).

If the verbal languages used by people differ, so too might the cultural references used to decode what is happening in the photographs. What you as a teacher are trying to convey

in the photographs might be read differently by the families or by the child.

Research reveals that photographs have a role not only documenting but also in constructing images of identity, social roles and power (Dragan, 2008; Lemon, 2006; Rose, 1996). For instance, Gillian Rose considered gender differences in who is behind the camera and what implications that has for identity, claiming that “the powerful are those who are culturally constituted as looking, as being able to represent, while the less powerful are constituted as those who are looked at, represented” (Rose, 1996, p. 288). We might consider this when we investigate issues of power and identity in centres; not just who is using the camera but also who is being photographed. What does this say about espoused versus actual theories around communities of practice?

## *Research reveals that photographs have a role not only documenting but also in constructing images of identity, social roles and power*

There is a role for those in teacher education and professional development in creating opportunities for teachers to become more critically reflective about their use of photographs for assessment purposes. More research is needed to develop a framework of appropriate and relevant content. Interestingly there is little or no official guidance for teachers in how they use ICT for these purposes, either in guiding resources from the Ministry of Education or in pre-service courses. This is in contrast to some teacher education programmes in other countries where students are not only required to use a range of ICT tools, they are required to reflect on and discuss their choices (Edwards & Branch, 2004; Pollman, 2000).

### **The Ministry of Education's implicit position**

In the New Zealand education sector, teachers are being encouraged to consider issues of power and identity as they move towards a more sociocultural approach to teaching and learning (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2004, 2007a, 2007b). It is interesting that although photographs are being used so often by teachers and are almost seen as essential to quality documentation, there is little information about the use of photographs in the regulatory and guiding documents published to date by the Ministry of Education.

In spite of the fact that *Kei tua o te pae* (Ministry of Education, 2004, 2007a) sends a message that photographs are an important part of assessment documentation, there is a lack of information in this resource about ways in which photographs can be used pedagogically, or discussion about tools and techniques. Although there are many examples

of the use of photographs it is left to the reader to identify the different reasons behind how photographs are used, although there is detailed analysis of other aspects of the assessment process.

*Foundations for Discovery* (Ministry of Education, 2005) is a framework for the development of ICT in early childhood. Although it identifies a range of ICT tools in the text of the document, the illustrations send a different message, as they are predominantly photographs of children and adults using photographs or cameras for varying purposes. Yet there is still little that is specific about the critical use of photographs. The document reminds readers that ICT needs to be considered in the context of a socio-cultural approach to learning which includes the Principles and strands of *Te Whāriki*. As a guide to the Early Childhood ICT framework it could be a useful tool for critical investigation of the use of photographs and would be an excellent starting point for future research in this area.

*Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), *Quality in Action* (Ministry of Education, 1998) and the new draft Licensing criteria (Ministry of Education, 2008) do not address issues around photographs although there is some information around ethics and privacy within some of the ICT resources being developed by the Ministry of Education, which are currently in draft.

### **Limitations and implications for further research**

Although there is a great deal of literature addressing ICT in the early years, there is still no cohesive body of information that specifically informs the practice around photographs used for assessment purposes. Findings are not yet available from the many projects currently underway (e.g. recent Centres of Innovation and the ECE ICT Professional Learning contract held by Core Education). Given the numbers of teachers using this technology and the visual emphasis of the early childhood assessment exemplars (Ministry of Education, 2004, 2007a), it would seem urgent that some guidance is provided that will support ethical, thoughtful and meaningful practice.

It would be useful to identify through survey or case study the social norms and conventions that have developed in New Zealand early childhood centres around the use, taking, presentation and content of photographs, especially for assessment purposes. These have developed in an almost ad hoc way and it would be useful to clearly look at what we are doing and why. This would provide a base on which to build the development of a set of guiding principles to use when using photographs for assessment purposes in early childhood. It might also support an understanding of a range of both technical and philosophical possibilities so that teachers and researchers can make clear, informed and transparent choices.

The areas left out of this review are many. The influence of the Reggio Emilia approach is not addressed and nor is the use of photographs in the curriculum and support of

children with special needs; as this literature is less focussed on assessment. This review has not covered the ethical and equity issues surrounding the use and availability of photographic technology in early childhood, particularly in lower socioeconomic and rural areas; a possible barrier requiring further investigation.

Although I have gained information and a great many provocations to offer teachers regarding their use of photographs in assessment documentation, there is still insufficient evidence for adopting any particular approach. Although the literature offers embryonic ideas for a pedagogy of photography in early childhood, there is considerable need for teachers, researchers and those involved in professional development to debate and explore the possibilities and examine current practice. Perhaps realisation of the gap in our knowledge has to be considered the first step towards better practice in this area.

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*The references that follow are all useful; I have asterisked those that are particularly informative or challenging.*

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# 'Dippability' - making theories more-ish

*A review of Early childhood education and care:  
A sociocultural approach by Susan Edwards (2009)*

Castle Hill, NSW: Pademelon Press.

Cost: AUD \$39.95

Reviewed by Judy Watson

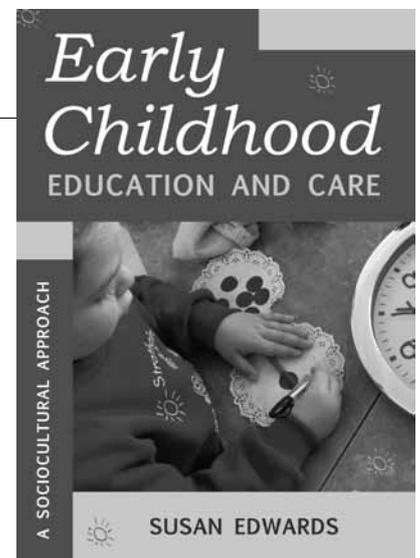
**What an engaging little book this is! From the cheerful cover to the samples of learning stories in the Appendix, *Early Childhood Education and care: a sociocultural approach*, is accessible, positive and open. It is 'dippable' – a reader could open the book at any page and find something readable and comprehensible – quite disarming in a book about theories and themes of early childhood education!**

Susan Edwards documents a research project that focussed on the professional learning and development of a group of early childhood educators from the City of Casey in suburban Melbourne. The teachers gathered regularly over a year to reflect on their practice and understanding of young children. In doing this they examined their existing beliefs and values about early childhood education, and identified the theoretical frameworks they were most likely to use in their day to day work. As they were introduced to the ideas of sociocultural theory, their reflections and examples open the reader to their real-life attempts to view their work with children from a different perspective. Edwards writes sympathetically, understanding the reality of teaching and affirming teachers, many of whom work very hard and with children's best interests at heart within developmental theory.

A strong point of this book is the simple, clear explanations of the various theories that are foundational to early childhood education. For many practicing teachers, theories have become far less important than the day to day demands of the kindergarten or centre. Consequently they can feel fearful and threatened when confronted with questions about their theoretical understandings. Edwards demystifies the terminology gently and without fuss. It is inevitable that communities of practice, such as the early childhood community, will develop their own terms and jargon. However, community members need to be aware

that this jargon can be a barrier to participation. Edwards has done us a service in her straightforward, plain language definitions and explanations and I am certain that pre-service teaching students, as well as practicing teachers, will heave a sigh of relief as they read this chapter!

Other topics that developed out of the data generated by the research participants were organised into four Principles of Practice: development and learning; observing for learning; planning, pedagogy and play; and professional learning and reflection. These are useful divisions and further explore the educators' personal experience into changing their practice. Of particular interest was the work the educators did on observations. Observation has long been the backbone of early childhood planning and assessment and has generally been based on children's skills within domains of development. The teachers' reflections about their attempts to gather data reflecting children's participation in group interactions and the inclusion of some of the methods they trialled is fascinating. Samples of two diagrammatic methods are included, although the discussion centres on finding methods that suit the teachers' own strengths and situations. Edwards is not saying how observations should be done, but is allowing the teachers' voices to explain how they came to the methods they chose, and how these observations improved their understanding of children's learning.



Another challenging idea arising from the Principles of Practice is a questioning of the value of play for children's learning. A significant legacy of traditional theories of early childhood education is the set of assumptions we hold about play – that play is children's work and that children learn through freely-chosen, open-ended play activities. Edwards makes the point that play is not fun for all children, that open-ended play does not always result in deep learning and that different cultures may see and value play differently. Whilst she certainly does not advocate no play, she suggests that we need to think about and question the use of play in teaching – what do children gain from play-based experiences in early childhood centres?

One of the Principles of Practice is "Planning, Pedagogy and Play" but there is very little in this section specifically about planning. Planning from a sociocultural perspective is hard to pin down and it would have been helpful to read how the teachers changed their planning systems to meet the new observation methods they developed. Is planning something that we also need to see in a completely new light? This is something that could be very usefully covered. In New Zealand the use of learning stories as a platform for planning is one answer to this challenge but these have their own limitations. It will be interesting to discover the Casey teachers' response.

An outstanding feature of this book is its structure. Along with the clearly defined chapters there are many insets in different fonts and colours. Excerpts from interviews with teachers and reflective diaries, well-chosen quotes from theorists and researchers and reflection points at the end of each section break up every page creating the impression of 'dippability'. There is a freshness and immediacy here which is appealing and draws the reader in. It was with some puzzlement, therefore, when an Appendix was discovered. It contains delightful learning stories which use the child's voice to say what they thought they had learned – really interesting and great to read. But how are they connected to the story? Are they a forerunner of another edition? It may have been less disruptive to include them in a *Where to next?* chapter.

*Early Childhood Education and care: a sociocultural approach* is a most enjoyable and useful book. In following the teachers' growth, the book provides a possible framework for other groups looking to examine their own theoretical understandings and the implications of these for their practice. It also provides a highly accessible discussion on early childhood education theories and raises a number of important questions for the early childhood community as we look to sociocultural theory to foster children's early learning and development.

 **Early  
Education**

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## Special Issue

### *Family and Community – Whānau Tangata: Current Approaches and Practices in New Zealand Early Years Settings*

Early Education welcomes research articles, reports of community-based practices in early years centres, and commentary pieces on the incorporation of family and community into New Zealand early years community-based initiatives, centres and teacher education programs.

Contributions that highlight the practical and theoretical implications for early years professionals in adopting a family and community approach to service provision will be welcome.

Contributions will also be encouraged that illuminate the ways in which early childhood programmes have sought to extend their philosophy outward, generating positive impacts within their local or even wider communities.

**For more information, contact the guest editors: Kimberley Powell (k.powell@massey.ac.nz) or Jenny Ritchie (jritchie@unitec.ac.nz).**

# Contributors

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**Susan Edwards** is a Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education in the Faculty of Education at Monash University. She is interested in examining approaches to early childhood curriculum and the role of ICT in learning and development.

**Tara Fagan** is a former early childhood teacher and lecturer, who is currently working as a consultant for Core Education in Christchurch. **Ngairé Taal** is working for Massey Child Care Centre in Palmerston North and is completing her training through the New Zealand Open Polytechnic. The joint paper in this volume is one result of a three year Foundations for Discovery ICT project that has been running at the centre, for which Tara Fagan has been the facilitator.

**Judith Loveridge** is a Senior Lecturer at Victoria University of Wellington where she teaches in papers concerned with young children's development and learning, foundation studies in education, diversity and research methods. Her recent projects have focussed on early childhood teachers' responses to diversity, transfer of learning in professional development networks, and research that involves children and young people.

**Suzanne Manning** has been a member of Playcentre for 15 years, and is currently the NZ Playcentre Federation Education Convenor. She has recently completed a Masters of Education, and tutors on a part time basis for Victoria University of Wellington.

**Sue Michell** has been a lecturer with Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa since 2002, and a supporter of playgroups and early intervention initiatives. Currently she is on a VSA assignment for two years at Patandi Teachers College, near Arusha in Tanzania.

**Maureen Perkins** is currently national co-director and a facilitator on the Combined Universities Kei Tua o te Pae Professional development contract. She has wide interests across ece curriculum and assessment, adult education, Playcentre and currently a particular passion for meaningful ways to integrate ICT tools into all of these areas.

**Judy Watson** teaches in the Early Years pre-service teacher education programme at Massey University College of Education. She has had a varied career in childcare and tertiary teaching and has particular interests in early childhood professional practice and early literacy.

**Helen Wrightson** has been working in early childhood education for 34 years, the last seven years as a lecturer for Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association. Previously she was the centre Supervisor at Rutherford Preschool for 23 years. Helen is passionate about high quality early childhood experiences for the tamariki of Aotearoa/New Zealand which stemmed from her early involvement with her own daughters at Playcentre. This led to her commitment to teacher education. Her other interest is children's art and how teachers can support children's learning through art experiences. She explored this as a research project for completion of her Master of Education. “



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