Unpacking Te Whariki 2017
- aspirations and underpinning theory
- for Rainbow Families
- for gifted children

Towards partnerships with parents

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*Early Education vol. 62 Spring / Summer 2017*

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## Our thanks for the photos

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

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# So where were you in '96?

**Do you remember when the internet was a novelty? When Jim Bolger was still Prime Minister, Princess Diana was still agonisingly in and out of the public limelight, Bill Clinton was in the White House? When few had heard of Osama Bin Laden and no one was ready for a War on Terrorism?**

If you remember all this, then you probably remember when *Te Whāriki* was launched. You'll likely remember when we sat on the floor holding strips of coloured paper with labels such as 'Well-Being' and 'Contribution' and 'Holistic Development', and we dutifully wove them in and out, wondering: what does any of this mean to us day to day in early childhood services? What does Belonging have to do with what we would put out the next morning for children? What did Well-being mean in the sandpit? On the obstacle course? What did Contribution have to do with fingerpaint? Was someone going to tell us off for doing it wrong?

These were the days when only the wild-eyed visionary could imagine any role for the corporate sector in e.c.e. These were the days when, if there was a curriculum, it was 'free play'; when the sector was in its infancy and it was people like Anne Meade and Beverley Morris who could move across deeply entrenched divides between the services who could recognise points of shared vision. These luminaries recognised the social justice issues involved in the inequitable policies that had lurched along for decades. When unity came, when the early childhood sector itself was created, it was by virtue of the 1989 regulations; regulations which came at a cost to each of the services now part of something called 'early childhood education'.

Only a few years later and we been given the unthinkable – a curriculum for early childhood. *Te Whāriki* gave us as individuals (and as services) a place to stand in the wider early childhood sector; a common language and a common project – a project to make the connections between the whakapapa of the e.c. sector, the whakapapa embodied in Te Ao Maori and the dynamic realities of the lived experience of those in early childhood education.

While *Te Whāriki* became more familiar and new regulations became familiar and government subsidies normalised, the early sector itself grew astronomically. For early childhood services, *Te Whāriki* became part of the reassuring public voice of integrity and respect for all children and their whānau, even while the working conditions in early childhood education – for teachers and children – did not always match the public façade.

When it came, the revision of *Te Whāriki* was challenging. While the original principles and strands have proved to be robust and can be seen as the unifying glue of the early childhood sector, what those strands and principles mean in practice has been powerfully reworked. For those with eyes to see, there are profound changes.

From Sue's perspective, the 1996 *Te Whāriki* was a reform project. With its foregrounding of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development, *Te Whāriki* normalised a sociocultural approach to learning. This was a move away from any suggestion that teachers could sit back and just 'let the children play'. In *Te Whāriki* 1996 play is evident but not prominent. However in 2017, with significantly more children in early childhood services for significantly more hours per week and for significantly more years of their lives, the pendulum of reform has moved back and 'play' is now more visible in *Te Whāriki* 2017; perhaps as a reminder that the institutionalisation of children does not necessarily lead to well-being, and that children's capacity to build resilience requires risk taking.

In this issue of *Early Education*, we are grateful to the writers who have responded to our call to consider: 'What difference will *Te Whāriki* 2017 make?' The scene is set first by our former Minister of Education, who offers the official story of the revision, and Claire (who was one of the writers who revised *Te Whāriki*) explores in some depth the underlying theories that shaped it. Articles by Kath Cooper and Valerie Margrain both speak to what it means that *Te Whāriki* is an inclusive curriculum. Kath explores the new curriculum through 'a queer lens' while Valerie looks in detail at where 'gifted' education is positioned. From Sydney, Metta Booth and Janneth Ibanez pick of the challenge of collaboration with families. Finally – in his review of Pennie Brownlee's most recent book, Andrew Gibbons pushes 'play' (and Marge Simpson, among other people) into the foreground.

This year many of those graduating as early childhood teachers were born in 1996. Aged 21, they are the same age as *Te Whāriki*. In Te Ao Maori, they are understood to carry the imprint of their ancestors. Let's hope that in another 21 years' time – surely it will be revised again by then? – the imprint of *Te Whāriki*'s ancestors remains visible, robust and inspirational for that next generation.

E hara e te mea, Nō nāianei te aroha.

Nō nga tūpuna, Tuku iho, tuku iho.

*Sue Stover and Claire McLachlan*

# Letter from... Croatia

**Zdravo!**

**It was a great privilege to represent OMEP Aotearoa/ New Zealand at the 69th OMEP World Assembly on June 26 and 27 of this year in the beautiful town of Opatija in Croatia, right next to an azure Adriatic Sea. I was fortunate to have fellow New Zealanders Glynne Mackey, Kathryn Hawkes and Robin Houlker to support me.**

The Assembly was followed by a four-day OMEP world conference with more than 600 participants, where Glynne, Kathryn and I did several presentations. Apart from the usual business of the annual meeting of the organisation, it was exciting to see a proposal from Iran for a new preparatory committee. A 'preparatory' committee is a tentative national committee to become an official member of the World OMEP, which lasts for two years prior to the attainment of its full membership. It was unanimously agreed to. Venezuela was also accepted as a new national committee.

The 69th Declaration of the 69th Assembly and World Conference of OMEP, titled "*Higher investment for early childhood education and care (ECCE)*" was also unanimously accepted by the delegates. In this declaration, OMEP appeals to governments to comply with the financial commitments related to the development and sustainability of ECCE, ensuring with urgency:

• to give priority and increase public spending on ECCE;

• to allocate the necessary resources for equity and quality in ECCE;

• to ensure free and public ECCE, which guarantees the expansion of the rights of the most disadvantaged sectors;

OMEP members around the world can use the declaration to hold their governments to account/

(For the full declaration, see http://www.worldomep.org/ file/2017_OMEP_Declaration.pdf.)

Currently, OMEP has achieved Special Consultative status at the United Nations (UN). In 2015, country representatives gathered at the United Nations adopted a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim to eradicate poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all. Each objective of SDGs has specific targets in the next 15 years.

OMEP has been the main driving force for the inclusion of early childhood education in Target 4.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals. The aim of target 4.2 is to ensure that by 2030 all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education. Although many of us in Aotearoa/New Zealand would not have prioritised the focus on young children's readiness for school, but it is important to remember to establish criteria for a goal that can be accepted globally.

(For more information see: https://sustainabledevelopment. un.org/sdgs).

OMEP is now often invited to present on the views of the early childhood education sector at important global meetings. For example, OMEP is one of the three non-Government organisations (NGOs) invited by the UNESCO to serve on the International Advisory Group of the Survey of Teachers in Pre-primary Education (STEPP). OMEP is also one of UNESCO's key partners that drive the implementation of the Global Action Programme (GAP) on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). OMEP has become a voice for children that the international community cannot neglect!

There were a number of keynote addresses at the Assembly, but Maria Pia Belloni's presentation was one that stood out for me. Maria represents OMEP and the world's youngest children at the UN office in New York. She is currently the chair of the UN committee on migration. Maria said the poverty of forced migrant children is an overlooked emergency: they are poor, invisible, often not included in national surveys. At all times separation between child and mother, even temporary, should be avoided. Unfortunately, there are now many unaccompanied children in Europe. We will need to take action at local level, for example, by advocating for social cohesion.

To support quality early childhood education for all children, OMEP has successfully implemented various on-going world and regional projects, including Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), WASH from the Start, American Red Cross-OMEP Early Childhood Emotional Support Initiative, and the most recent Play and Resilience world project. Members from OMEP Aotearoa have contributed to all of these reports. Launched in January 2016, the OMEP Play and Resilience World Project aims to promote young children's resilience and potential to foster a peaceful and sustainable future through play, conducted in a safe, child friendly, and stimulating environment. The first phase, which encouraged applicants to submit their best practices, attracted 36 project teams from 18 countries. Seven projects which clearly demonstrated outstanding qualities and

**The OMEP delegation from Aotearoa NZ: Kathryn Hawkes, Lia de Vocht, Glynne Mackey**

potential were awarded special recognition and these projects' teams were invited to present at the first Play and Resilience Symposium at the OMEP World Conference 2016. One of the presentations was by Prof. Claire McLachlan and early childhood educator Sophie Foster from Aotearoa/ New Zealand. The symposium was very well-attended and has generated many ideas about the next step of the Play and Resilience World Project, which is now part of OMEP's free resource bank.

(See the OMEP website: www.worldomep.org/).

The OMEP World conference that followed the Assembly had an outstanding range of presentations, workshops and symposia. A glance through abstracts shows the huge diversity in theoretical frameworks and contexts of EC settings from all around the world. One of the main drawcards was a keynote address by Prof. Peter Moss. Peter Moss warned against what he called the dangerous discourse of readying for school. He argued that readying is more about governing and that it stifles diversity. He advocated for different metaphors, such as flowing through life rather than readying for the next stage.

Glynne Mackey and I had a chance to talk to Peter Moss and we asked him if he had heard that New Zealand had withdrawn from the OECD's International Early Learning and Well Being Study (the IELS project). Peter assured us that the news had immediately gone around the world. He expressed his appreciation for our responses to the planned IELS initiative, adding that New Zealand "kicks well above its weight". While pleased about the result for New Zealand, Peter is concerned that the IELS testing of five year olds is still going ahead in some other OECD countries.

(For more information about IELS, visit: http://www.oecd.

org/edu/school/international-early-learning-and-child-well-being-study.htm; for OMEP Aotearoa's critique of New Zealand's involvement in IELS, see deVocht, L., Mackey, G., & Hill, D. (2017). 'PISA' for 5 year olds?. *Early Education 61*, 27-28.)

Next year is OMEP's 70th anniversary. The Assembly and Conference will be hosted in Prague by OMEP Czech Republic from 25-29 June 2018. Apart from learning and participating in the highly worthwhile projects and collaborations with other world organisations, the Assembly and Conference are excellent forums to personally experience diversity in early childhood on a global scale, and to work collaboratively within the diverse global membership of OMEP to advocate for the rights of young children. I highly recommend it.

Doviđenja!

## Lia de Vocht

President OMEP/ Aotearoa

World Organization for Early Childhood Education OMEP is the oldest and largest international, non-governmental and non-profit organisation, focusing on children aged between 0 and 8. Founded in 1948, it defends and promotes the rights of the child to education and care worldwide and support activities which improve accessibility to higher quality education and care. OMEP Aotearoa/ New Zealand is one of the 70 country members (http://www.omepaotearoa.org.nz ).

# Updating Te Whāriki

## *From the Minister of Education*

**The Hon. Nikki Kaye**

**Kotahi te kākano, he nui ngā hua o te rākau.**

**A tree comes from one seed but bears many fruit.**

**Te Whāriki 2017, p. 8**

**As a nation we should be very proud of our early childhood curriculum,** *Te Whāriki*. **First developed in 1996, it was truly world leading, and with the update released this year it continues to be at the forefront of early childhood education.**

All children are born with immense potential. Quality early learning helps our children begin to realise that potential by providing rich experiences that support each child's unique interests and development. A sound curriculum and quality implementation are a key part of preparing children to start school or kura confident, engaged and eager to learn.

*Te Whāriki* expresses our vision that all children grow up in New Zealand as competent and confident learners, strong in their identity, language and culture. It emphasises our bicultural foundation, our multicultural present and the shared future we can create. It encourages all children to learn in their own ways, supported by adults who know them well and have their best interests at heart.

The development of *Te Whāriki* was originally led by Dr Helen May and Margaret Carr (University of Waikato) and Dr Tamati Muturangi Reedy and Tilly Te Koingo Reedy (Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust). As part of this process there was widespread consultation with the early childhood sector, including with kōhanga reo whānau, kaumātua and leading Māori educationalists.

A draft document was produced, trialled and evaluated by the sector. The Ministry of Education collated submissions on the draft and the final document was released in 1996.

In 2015, the Minister of Education appointed members to the Advisory Group on Early Learning (AGEL) to identify practical ways to ensure all children get the benefits of *Te Whāriki*. One of AGEL's recommendations was for the Ministry of Education to update the curriculum.

The Education Review office also indicated through their national reports that there was wide variation in curriculum implementation and in the quality of pedagogy across the early childhood education sector. All of these reports informed the update.

After 20 years it was also appropriate to update *Te Whāriki* to take into account social, cultural and educational changes, new research and shifts in policy and practice.

The update focussed on a number of key areas including:

- updating the context, language, examples and implementation advice

- strengthening the bicultural framing, focus on identity, language and culture, and inclusion of all children

- providing fewer, clearer learning outcomes

- providing links to *The New Zealand Curriculum* and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*

- creating a streamlined structure more easily navigated.

The Ministry commissioned a group of early learning academics and practitioners to develop a draft of the updated *Te Whāriki*. The writers also received advice from the original writers of *Te Whāriki* and other education experts. The leadership provided by the original writers has been highly respected by the sector. For this reason, the original writers were seen as the kaitiaki (stewards) of the document. They provided free and frank advice throughout the process and their involvement was important to maintain the overall integrity of *Te Whāriki*.

Following feedback from practitioner 'user hubs' on the early draft, an updated document was publicly released for a six-week consultation period. Through the consultation phase it became clear which aspects of the document respondents liked.

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[1]  Nikki Kaye was the final Minister of Education in the National-led government which prioritised the review and revision of *Te Whāriki* 2014-17. Her predecessor Hekia Parata was Minister of Education at the time of the launch of *Te Whāriki*.

On the basis of the feedback, guidance relating to Māori concepts and pedagogy in *Te Whāriki: Early childhood curriculum* was expanded. A stronger focus was placed on the affirmation of the diverse identities, cultures and languages of all children and more explicit references made to children who require additional learning support. The sections on infants and toddlers were revised to better reflect current approaches to pedagogy.

The draft learning outcomes were reviewed again and expanded to frame them as the development of children's capabilities over time, noting that this development occurs in a context of guidance and support.

Reflective questions for kaiako were also updated and added back into the document at the request of the early learning sector.

In April 2017 the revised and refreshed update of *Te Whāriki* was released in the form of a flip book design which gave equal status to the two curriculum pathways: *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa Early childhood curriculum* and Te Whāriki a te Kōhanga Reo.

Overall, the early childhood sector, parents, whānau and academics have welcomed the update. Copies of *Te Whāriki* have been distributed to early learning services, schools and certificated playgroups, and there has been a high level of interest and uptake in the professional learning and development opportunities provided to support the implementation of *Te Whāriki*.

The Ministry of Education is funding a $4 million implementation package to help kaiako to understand and engage with the updated document and implement a more effective curriculum for children. CORE Education and Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust are delivering this implementation support. CORE have delivered nationwide introductory workshops and are developing a series of ten webinars for early childhood education providers. Twenty-four curriculum champions have been appointed to establish and support local networks for pedagogical leaders. Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust is providing a series of regional wānanga and developing webinars to support implementation. Kairaranga I *Te Whāriki a te Kōhanga Reo* have also been appointed to work expansively across the entire learning programme to lead the mokopuna learning programme inquiry in their respective rohe districts and local purapura.

CORE have also been contracted to develop website portals for *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa Early childhood curriculum* and Te Whāriki a te Kōhanga Reo. The website has been designed to provide implementation guidance, practice examples and resources.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has been involved in the update of *Te Whāriki*. The work that's been done on this truly inspiring document will continue to benefit generations of young learners for years to come. I hope that parents, whanau and teachers right across the country are using *Te Whāriki* to inspire and support the children in their care to flourish in their learning.



**Using the 'phone' to connect with young children, the Hon. Nikki Kaye visits an early childhood centre during her time as Minister of Education.**

# 'Not business as usual'

## *Reflections on the 2017 update of Te Whāriki*

Claire J. McLachlan

**Early childhood curriculum reflects the holistic way children learn and grow.**

**Mā te whāriki e whakaata te kotahitanga o ngā whakahaere katoa mō te ako a te mokopuna, mō te tipu o te mokopuna.**

*Te Whāriki* **2017, p. 19**

**Last year I was privileged to be chosen as a member of the writing team for the update of** *Te Whāriki*. **This was challenging but rewarding work on behalf of the early childhood sector.**

Members of the writing team were all conscious of working on a curriculum document that holds a special place in the hearts of early childhood educators. We were equally cognisant of the responsibilities to update the curriculum with care to retain the heart of the curriculum, while also ensuring it provided opportunities for growth for the sector.

This article explores my perspectives on the key changes between *Te Whāriki* 1996 and 2017 and some rationale for the named theories that underpin *Te Whāriki* 2017. I also present some of the research evidence for the revised learning outcomes. Finally, some implications for curriculum planning, assessment and evaluation are considered.

## Key changes

While there have been no changes to the gazetted parts of *Te Whāriki* – the principles, strands and goals remain the same – there is much to be considered in the revision of *Te Whāriki*. This is 'not business as usual with a bright new cover'!

The revision recognises and reflects societal changes in the last 20 years, as well as shifts in government policy and considerable research around curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and practice. The further development of *Te Whāriki a te Kōhanga Reo* to become a curriculum document in its own right is a major change, reflecting important changes in the valuing of Māori immersion education.

The revised document includes stronger links to:

- *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2007);

- *Te Mārautanga o Aotearoa* - the curriculum for Maori medium schooling (MoE, 2008) and

- *Te Aho Matua* – a philosophical document that sets out principles for kura kaupapa Māori (Tākao, 2010).

There is also a significant reduction in the number of learning outcomes: from 118 to just 20. This decision was based on the advice of the report of the Early Years Advisory Group (Ministry of Education, 2015). The revised curriculum also introduces responsibilities for kaiako aligned to the practising teacher criteria (Education Council, 2015) and outlines considerations for leadership, organisation and practice and questions for reflection for each strand.

In *Te Whāriki* 2017 teachers are portrayed as 'intentional', which is a marked shift from the previous document and the guidance for teachers reflects this shift with advice about what intentionality looks like for teaching infants, toddlers and young children. Teachers are also called 'kaiako' rather than 'adults', which is arguably a more inclusive term than 'teachers', encompassing both qualified and unqualified staff and parents and whānau in Kohanga Reo, Playcentre and some language nests.

## Underpinning theories and approaches: Why these choices?

*Te Whāriki* 1996 only explicitly named one theorist: Bronfenbrenner (1979). This is probably because the ECE sector had been profoundly influenced by a visit to New Zealand in 1979 by Urie Bronfenbrenner, where he presented to the Early Childhood Convention. His inclusion in the curriculum signaled that early childhood education is integrally linked to the rights and needs of children and their families. The draft of *Te Whāriki* (1993) named a number of other theoretical influences, but these were dropped from the final version of the documents, which many of us have bemoaned for many years.

The inclusion of a wider range of theories in *Te Whāriki* 2017 provides recognition that the early childhood sector draws on a wide range of theories and research. The list of theories and research approaches chosen is not exhaustive, but does signal some major ideas that has underpinned much research and theorising in New Zealand and internationally about ECE. Bronfenbrenner's model has been updated to the more recent bio-ecological model, which includes the chronosystem – the influence of time in human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The curriculum links this wider theoretical framework to New Zealand's commitment under our United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC)

**The intentional teacher makes learning visible.**

agreement to protect children's rights and access to health and education. New Zealand ratified the UNCROC agreement in 1993, so it arguably should have been included explicitly in 1996 too.

*Te Whāriki* 2017 also refers to the growing body of research that uses neuroscientific techniques to explore the relationship between genes and the environment and the importance of high quality learning environments for supporting children's learning (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2007). The list of theories does not preclude centres using their own theories/philosophies to shape the curriculum that is offered, but it does suggest the types of thinking that are implicit in the advice given to teachers for supporting children's learning.

Drawing on the research of Vygotsky, Bruner, Wertsch, Wenger, Rogoff and others, **sociocultural theorising** provides a strong theory of learning and development in this curriculum. *Te Whāriki* 1996 used both cognitive constructivist and social constructivist theorising (drawing on the theories of Piaget, Bruner, Vygotsky and others), whereas this curriculum document takes a much stronger social cultural position (Vygotsky, 1978).

It is important that teachers understand three key and interrelated principles in this theory:

- A reliance on genetic or developmental analysis;

- The claim that higher mental functioning in the individual derives from social life; and

- The claim that human action, on both the social and individual planes is mediated by tools and signs.

These ideas have been simplified in *Te Whāriki* 2017, to make them clearer to teachers. The reason for this is that there is evidence that teachers 'cherry pick' parts of the theory, such as 'Zone of Proximal Development – ZPD', and ignore the rest, particularly the importance of understanding and recognising child development (Kozulin, 2003; Bodrova & Leong, 2005). *Te Whāriki* 2017 stresses the importance of teachers understanding children's potential developmental pathways, knowing about the importance of access and mediation in learning and understanding that children will learn through using the signs, symbols, materials and artefacts of their culture.

Kaupapa Māori theorising involves a set of principles for ensuring that Māori knowledge, language and culture are normalised and also to give voice to Māori aspirations, ideas and learning practices that help to ensure that Māori achieve success as Māori (Smith, 2012; Ritchie, 2008). All teachers need to understand the theoretical underpinnings

**Children learn to make sense of their worlds by generating and refining working theories/te rangahau me te mātauranga.**

of this approach and the implications for working within a biculturally framed curriculum document. Key authors include Durie, Ngata, Tuhiwai Smith, Bishop and Glynn, but there is also significant writing in ECE by Rameka, Ritchie and Rau, Pere, Royal Tangaere and others.

Although the term 'Pasifika' was constructed by government agencies, Pasifika theoretical and research-based approaches to education include the notions of children working between the two worlds of Aotearoa and their Pacific Island(s) language and culture (Chu, Glasgow, Rimoni, Hodis & Meyer, 2013). The notion of children learning both the familiar and the unfamiliar are key to these approaches to learning and development, which often draw on metaphors and models. The writings of Airini, Glasgow, Luafutu-Simpson, Manu'atu and Kepa, Tagoilelagi-Leota and others have influenced thinking about ECE in NZ.

**Critical theories** is a broad term used to encapsulate the large body of research which questions the assumptions about how children learn and develop:

- Children are born with rights, including the right to be consulted, heard and listened to in matters that affect them;

- Children have agency, which means they have the

capacity to make decisions and choices about their learning (Nolan & Raban, 2015).

Social transformation is supported through education for a more just and equal world. Key critical theorists include Freire, Habermas, Giroux and ECE authors such as James Gee, Nolan and Kilderry, MacNaughton, and others.

Children have complex and shifting identities as they move between and participate in different social groups. There are multiple and contested ways of knowing and learning. Key poststructural theorists include Foucault, Canella, Dahlberg, Grieshaber and others.

## The 'strands' and the 'learning outcomes'

In addition to this broad theory and research backdrop, there is also strong evidence to support the strands in the curriculum and the 20 learning outcomes that now provide a focus for learning and development in young children. This section will identify some of the key research that can be linked to the strands of the curriculum and learning outcomes.

**Children will learn to take care of this place / te manaaki i te taio.**

### Wellbeing/ Mana Atua

The learning outcomes include that children will:

- Know how to keep themselves healthy/te oranga nui;

- Manage themselves and express their feelings and needs/ te whākahua whakaaro;

- Understand how to keep themselves and others safe from harm/te noho haumaru.

There is solid research evidence that children's well-being needs to be promoted and that well-being has many components: physical, cognitive, socio-emotional and psychological. This involves practical components of learning how to independently care for themselves, but also involves knowledge of how to avoid harm. There is also research that shows that children need to be taught how to manage their feelings and to learn strategies on how to be resilient. This is particularly true for children who have experienced trauma. See Moore (2013), Goldstein and Brooks (2013) and the American Psychological Association's Resilience Guide (n.d.) for some useful sources of support for this strand.

### Belonging/Mana Whenua

The learning outcomes include that children will:

- Make connections between people, places and things in their world/te waihanga hononga;

- Take part in caring for this place/te manaaki i te taio;

- Know how things work here and can adapt to change/ te mārama ki te āhua o ngā whakahaere me te mōhio ki te panoni;

- Show respect for kaupapa, rules and the rights of others/ te mahi whakaute.

There is significant research on the outcomes of ECE and in particular to children's need to feel a sense of belonging in educational settings. There is strong kaupapa Māori theorising on the need to make connections with the wider world and to learn to care for the local environment (Rameka & Paul-Burke, 2015; Ritchie, 2008). Research on relationships, adaptability and behaviour supports the focus of *Te Whāriki* on ability to feel part of the ECE setting and know how to behave (Hemmeter, Ostrofsky & Fox, 2006). Research on self-regulation from the Dunedin

Multidisciplinary longitudinal study is relevant here (DMHDRU, 2011) and is seen to be an important social outcome of early childhood.

### Contribution/Mana Tangata

The learning outcomes include that children:

- Treat others fairly and including them in play/ te ngākau makuru;

- Believe in their own ability to learn/ te rangitiratanga;

- Have strategies and skills to play and learning with others/ te ngākau aroha.

These learning outcomes are based on three key ideas: self-efficacy, peer learning and social justice. The notion of self-efficacy, extensively developed by Albert Bandura (1977) and Dale Schunk (2011), explains how children come to believe in their own abilities in different domains of learning. The second relates to children's abilities to learn cooperatively with their peers, which is seen as a significant outcome of ECE (Mitchell, Wylie & Carr, 2008). The notion of social justice is being widely researched with young children, with capacities seen to develop much earlier than previously considered (Fennimore & Goodwin, 2011; Spiegler, 2016).

### Communication/Mana Reo

The learning outcomes include that children will:

- Use gesture and movement to express themselves/he kōrero ā-tinana;

- Understand oral language and use it for a range of purposes/he kōrero ā-waha;

- Enjoy hearing stories and retelling and creating them/he kōrero paki;

- Recognise print symbols and concepts and using them with meaning and purpose/he kōrero tuhituhi;

- Recognise mathematical symbols and concepts and using them with meaning and purpose/he kōrero pāngarau;

- Express their feelings and ideas using a wide range of materials and modes/he kōrero auaha.

Communication/Mana Reo is a large strand, which has a number of interrelated ideas. There is a considerable body of research on the importance of oral language learning in the early years (see Education Review Office [ERO], 2017) and the relationship with later literacy learning. In addition, young children who recognise the alphabet and can hear sounds in words (phonological awareness) develop the alphabetic principle more readily – they learn that sounds can be represented in print with letters of the alphabet.

This combined skill is necessary for both decoding and encoding in the primary setting – reading and spelling/ writing.

In addition, children need a large vocabulary so that they can comprehend what is said or read to them (National Early Literacy Panel, 2009). There are parallel understandings in mathematics; children need to both recognise the numeric symbols and what they stand for and use mathematical concepts for thinking about the world (Anthony & Walshaw, 2007). The last 20 years has seen enormous growth in research into language, literacy and numeracy, as these key resources suggest, which recognises that children develop fundamental knowledge, skills and attitudes in early childhood. There is also a growing interest in how children's participation in the arts intersects with all other areas of the curriculum (Rupert, 2006).

### Exploration/Mana Aotūroa

The learning outcomes include that children will:

- Play, imagine, invent and experiment/te whakaaro me te tūhurahura/te pūtaiao;

- Move confidently and challenge themselves physically/te wero ā-tinana;

- Use a range of strategies for reasoning and problem solving/te hīraurau hopanga;

- Make sense of their worlds by generating and refining working theories/te rangahau me te mātauranga.

This strand has a number of ideas in it, which include critical thinking, working theories (Hedges, 2014) and research skills in young children (Heyman, 2009), as well as a focus on physical activity (Gubbels, van Kann & Jansen, 2012; McLachlan et al., 2017) and scientific thinking (Guo, Piasta & Bowles, 2015). The body of research is growing in all these areas and there are strong links to the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007), where these abilities are built upon.

## Implications for curriculum planning

Teachers' responsibility to deliver the gazetted curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, is unchanged, although the curriculum will require rethinking by teaching teams. ERO will of course be evaluating how centres are implementing the revised curriculum in future reviews, so we will gain insights into how well teachers transition to the new curriculum. The questions for reflection are a good place to start to work out "what matters here" (MoE, 2017, p. 65) and to reflect on what changes may be required to implement the curriculum.

The question that needs to be answered is how well placed centres are to deliver a curriculum that enables children to make progress toward the 20 learning outcomes, "over time and with guidance and encouragement". Recent ERO reviews (e.g. ERO, 2016) suggest that some centres will need to critically reflect on how well they are guiding and encouraging children in each strand, as there is evidence that not all strands are given equal attention. A small study that I am currently working on shows that teachers say it is 'early days' in terms of engaging with the revised curriculum. Others suggest there will be no change in practice, which is of concern.

## Implications for assessment

> **Assessment makes valued learning visible** (*my emphasis*). Kaiako use assessment to find out about what children know and can do, what interests them, how they are progressing, what new learning opportunities are presented and where additional support may be required (MoE, 2017, p. 63).

This quote and the guidance that follows it show that teachers are expected to use a range of methods to assess in this way. The emphasis on progress over time is linked to the learning outcomes. Teachers will not be able to assess progress over time unless they use both planned and spontaneous assessment and this is a shift from the previous 'in the moment' guidance of *Te Whāriki* 1996.

Centres will need to think carefully about how they will assess children, using a range of methods, to identify learning progress at regular intervals. Although learning stories can be used in this way, it is likely that the repertoire of methods used will need to increase, to include methods such as video recording, audio recording, examples of children's work and so forth. Portfolios will still be relevant and useful, but they may include more than learning stories and will need to involve parents/whānau in more effective ways. Although there is contention around the use of online portfolios (Hooker, 2015), there is evidence that their use increases family/whānau engagement with assessment portfolios.

## Implications for evaluation

Evaluation of centres within this curriculum is still both internal and external. ERO will continue to review centres, but will evidently revise their evaluation indicators to align to the new curriculum. Centres need to continue to use a systematic approach to self-review (internal evaluation) to ensure that they are delivering the curriculum. Centres need to use both short-term and longer-term reviews to cover both implementation of the principles, strands and goals and the effectiveness of specific interventions or priorities that families have for their children.

My previous research shows that teachers who have a good grasp of a range of simple research methods find self-review easier (McLachlan & Grey, 2013). It is probably worth investing in postgraduate studies for teachers so that their knowledge of research methods increases. Most initial teacher education programmes are very light in this area because of crowded curriculum.

## Summary and conclusions

I have presented some of the research evidence for why the learning outcomes can be considered valued learning. The 20 learning outcomes will help to focus assessment of children's progress over time, with guidance and encouragement, but methods of assessment will require more thought. There are implications for curriculum planning, approaches to assessment and evaluation that teachers will need to consider as they revise their approaches to teaching and learning for *Te Whāriki* 2017.

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# Rainbow families

## *How can Te Whāriki 2017 make a difference?*

Kath Cooper

**"This update reflects changes in the early learning context, including the diversity of New Zealand society today, contemporary theories and pedagogies."**

**(Hekia Parata, Minister of Education, *Te Whāriki*, 2017, p. 2)**

**With the following question in mind – "*In what way does Te Whāriki support teachers to acknowledge and support Rainbow Families[1] within the early childhood education (ECE) setting?*" – this article uses queer theory to critique *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa Early Childhood curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2017).**

I choose to read *Te Whāriki* 2017 through a queer theory lens because queer theory asks us to focus on questioning the dynamics of power structures in particular, and how these dynamics sustain and perpetuate questions of dominance within society. Queer theory provides a lens in which everything is questioned, nothing is assumed, including dominant ways of thinking, for example, heteronormativity which is the idea that identifying as heterosexual is only acceptable way to be (Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 2000; Sumara, 2008).

## Historical context

Aotearoa New Zealand has a wide range of ECE services. These settings are required to use the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2017). It is considered an inclusive curriculum and includes an acknowledgement of the complexity of both traditional and contemporary "family structure and values" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 15).

In contrast to this, studies conducted in education sectors within Aotearoa New Zealand show that visibility of Rainbow Families is minimal (Gunn, 2011; Lee, 2010a; Shuker & Cherrington, 2016; Surtees, 2012 ; Terreni, Gunn, Kelly, & Surtees, 2010). One example of a lack of visiblity is the lack of conversations about Rainbow Families. In recent Aotearoa New Zealand-based research, it was noted that there are very few teacher-led discussions with children about Rainbow Families (Cooper, 2015). Most conversations regarding Rainbow Families occurred reactively rather than proactively; that is, were only raised when children stated heteronormative or homophobic viewpoints.

Education plays a part in all cultures; it is the channel through which "values, customs, and culture are transmitted from one generation to the next and the most potent means for bringing about change"(Lyman, Strachan, & Lazaridou, 2012, p. xiii). However, because of the perceived taboo and problematic nature of sexuality as a topic, teachers are reluctant to talk about Rainbow Families with children. There is a reluctance to address any topic related to lesbian and gay people in general, Rainbow Families or marginalisation of the LGBT*QI community within ECE settings, with many citing the child as too young and innocent to be able to process such topics (Gunn, 2015; Gunn & Surtees, 2004; Robinson, 2005). In order to maintain the alleged innocence of children, talk about sex, sexuality, or sexual choices with children is discouraged within ECE settings (Gunn & Surtees, 2004; Gunn & Smith, 2015). The image of 'the child as innocent' is drawn upon to legitimise the exclusion of discussion around sexuality (Gunn, Child, Madden, Purdue, & Surtees, 2004). In research conducted by Robinson, Smith, and Davies (2017) in Australia primary schools, an age-appropriate discourse evident noted that one third of parents "indicated that sexuality education was … not important to primary aged children" (p. 344).

However, the silencing of topics related to Rainbow Families has negative ramifications for people later on in life (Zacko-Smith & Smith, 2010). Gunn and Smith (2015) state that many "queer students or those assumed to be queer are subjected to bullying… [and] peer groups can sometimes make schooling intolerable for queer youth" (p. 11). Gunn and Smith (2013) note that any changes to the dominance of silence are very slow, despite the LGBT*QI community gaining more media exposure in recent years around events such as the Marriage Amendment Act (2013). There is still stigma attached to difference and social change in educational setting will have a positive flow on effect for youth who are queer or questioning, and is one way of minimising bullying and discrimination (Gunn & Smith 2013).

Despite the challenges, inclusion of Rainbow Families in ECE settings is increasingly important because the ways that families are constructed have changed (Pryor, 2005), and there has been a recent rise in gay people creating families, and the ability to do so has become more readily available. As well, an omission of Rainbow Families as

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[1] A Rainbow Family is one that is constructed with parents who are part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, Trans*Takatāpui, queer, questioning, intersex (LGBT*QI) community. Rainbow Families include blended, single, and extended family compositions.

a topic is a "failure to engage fully with the curriculum" (Gunn & Smith 2015, p. 229). Slowly society's views of acceptability of difference/differently constructed families have shifted. Family constructs are more varied: blended families, single parents, grandparents raising children; all have been made more visible over recent times.

## Queer theory and Te Whāriki

Following a reading of *Te Whāriki* 1996, Surtees (2003, p. 143) engaged queer theory to explore "issues related to sexualities". She found that the document lacked an open discussion about sexualities, thus assuming and supporting the dominance of heteronormativity. This analysis of the document established that *Te Whāriki* 1996 "demonstrates censorship [which] reduces the likelihood of all children achieving the goals laid out in the document" (Surtees, 2003, p. 143). Despite the lack of open discussion in and around sexualities, Surtees summarised that *Te Whāriki* 1996 was interpretive, and "as queer as you might wish to make it" (p. 150). In other words, even with the lack of direct acknowledgement of the inclusion of the Rainbow Family, there was potential.

Children have the right to experience an inclusive curriculum where Rainbow Families are acknowledged and offered the respect, with and alongside others who attend the early childhood setting (Kelly, 2012). Although Surtees (2003) determines that *Te Whāriki* "itself is not an apt metaphor for inclusion" (p. 151), it was concluded that the dominance of the heterosexually construct family can be disrupted.

In contrast, *Te Whāriki* 2017 has made a stronger commitment to acknowledging of Rainbow Families, including statements such as "Respect for a diversity of family forms" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 37).

## Four key words

To critique *Te Whāriki* (2017) with a queer theory lens, four key words were chosen:

• curriculum,

• diversity,

• family, and

• whānau.

These words were chosen because I believe they would give me the best possible overview of the Ministry of Education's commitment to including Rainbow Families. I reflected upon the aspirations of family, including diverse families, and were they acknowledged? Does *Te Whāriki* provide a framework whereby teachers might be responsive and inclusive to Rainbow Families? And, were the wishes of the whānau advocated for?

The initial search was 'curriculum' as I wanted to know if

there was a specific mention of the inclusion of Rainbow Families as a curriculum requirement. The second search was for the word 'diversity', which is often used for 'other'. 'Other' is a term used to identify things as different for example "other-than-normal" (Gunn 2015, p. 21). 'Diverse', or 'other' can be linked to Rainbow Families, e.g. Rainbow Families often come under headings such as 'diverse family structures'.

I searched the last two words, 'family' and 'whānau' separately initially. However, I quickly noted that frequently the words were mentioned in the same sentence. There are differences; family tends to identify immediate family members, such as parents and children whereas whānau is "extended family, multigenerational group of relatives or group of people who work together on and for a common cause" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 67). My search changed to 'family and whānau' together, and the upcoming section reflects this change.

Each search was conducted through a queer theory lens, which provided a specific focus on ways that social interactions, such as language use, mould and socially construct individuals (Burr, 1995). In addition, queer theory rejects the notion of binary, and questions privilege and power (Marinucci 2010), and so aligns well as a lens to view the position of a minority family structure within *Te Whāriki*. Queer theory is about the acknowledgement that no particular set of categories is necessary, and each category can shift and be revised: if you can argue that identities can be socially constructed, then they can also be deconstructed. I chose queer theory because of the ability to disrupt the taken for granted ways of being (Nelson, 2002).

## Curriculum

Because of my interest in Rainbow Families having a clear position in the curriculum, my first search focused on 'curriculum'. I was looking for ways, using a queer theory paradigm, where *Te Whāriki* included Rainbow Families within their recommendations regarding the ECE settings' planning. The document states that "*Te Whāriki* is an inclusive curriculum; a curriculum for all children" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 15). Although the Ministry of Education speaks about "A shared sense of 'what matters here'" and the ability to negotiate what is provided for children in terms of programme planning and curriculum topics, "within the *Te Whāriki* framework" (2017, p. 67), minority voices find holding equal positions of power problematic, as perceptions and realities about empowerment and power are often mixed (Burr, 1995). There is a strong emphasis on each service personalising the document to reflect "its own local curriculum of valued learning" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 10). This implies the teaching team has a collective and clear agreement about what to include/exclude, however this may not be the case. For example, there might be conflict within the team about the visibility of Rainbow Families. However, ignoring or silencing renders diverse family structures invisible for children in ECE settings (Lee 2010a, 2010b; 2008).

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¹ **Since preparing this paper for publication Rangi Ruru Early Childhood College has closed. This was due, in part, to the Christchurch earthquakes. .**

## Diversity

The use of the word 'diversity' can be thought of in a range of ways and can cover a range of characteristics within our society. When you apply a queer theory lens, it can be thought of as diversity within family structures, and for the purpose of this article that means Rainbow Families.

Within *Te Whāriki* 2017, I was able to identify several areas where a range of family structures were referred to. For example:

- "Families are accepted, their diversity is valued and welcomed" (p. 35),

- "… expectations of inclusive and responsive practices that acknowledges diversity…." (p. 14), and

- "ECE settings are places where … diversity is valued" (p. 31).

The Ministry of Education (2017) expects teachers to not only accept and welcome families, but to show "Respect for a diversity of family forms… and have knowledge of children's families so they can reflect these in the curriculum" (p. 35).

These examples are much more explicit than in *Te Whāriki* 1996 and could be used by teachers to defend their position to include Rainbow Families within the curriculum. A search of *Te Whāriki* 1996 for diversity found examples which recognised the diversity within childcare centres, and Pacific Island cultures. There is no reference to diversity within family composition. Teachers' awareness of their own assumptions will enable families to "find recognition and feel welcome whatever their legal or biological connection to the child may be" (Gunn, 2015, p. 23).

## Family and Whānau

When searching for the words 'families' and 'whānau', many of the examples spoke about teachers "working together with families, whānau and community" (p. 15) as well as "seeking input of children, their parents, and whānau when designing the local curriculum" (p. 20). These examples show a clear expectation on teachers to not only seek out parent input, but to implement ideas and aspirations of the wider whānau within the curriculum. It could even be implied that teachers are expected to work together with Rainbow Families which would extend to acceptance and understanding of family compositions. The revised edition of *Te Whāriki* also states; "respect for a diversity of family forms and kaiako have knowledge of children's families" (p. 37), potentially making a bolder statement than does *Te Whāriki* 1996 version to acknowledge Rainbow Families.

*Te Whāriki* 2017 has a strong emphasis on a partnership between teaching teams, family/whānau and the wider community, encouraging "Parents and whānau … [to be] involved in the programme in ways that are meaningful to them and their child" (Ministry of Education 2017, p. 37). This is not as easy as it seems; there is a level of vulnerability when you are a minority and you are mindful of

repercussions. For example, for parents in a two mum family may feel uncomfortable putting up a family photo up on the Family Tree at the ECE setting. This level of exposure is not the same as everyone else's and highlights difference. This potentially leaves both the child and the parents open and vulnerable. As a parent, you might be comfortable with teachers knowing your family composition, as you have established a relationship with them, and talked about your family directly. However, it is the uncertainty of how other families might react that is the risk.

## Conclusion

Using a queer theory lens, there could be a positive or negative outcome for Rainbow Families and their visibility and inclusion in the ECE setting. A positive outcome would be a responsive ECE teaching team engaging with a queer theory lens and identifying the need to acknowledge that Rainbow Families have a position within their curriculum irrespective of attendance at the centre. Despite *Te Whāriki* prescribing no particular curriculum, the 2017 version has made significant progress to acknowledge a range of whānau/family compositions. Alternatively, a centre could exclude any mention of Rainbow Families citing that it is not part of their "distinctive character" (p. 9), and is not "the cultural makeup of the community" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 11).

*Te Whāriki* 1996 discusses inclusion and promotes the idea that we should include all people (Gunn et al., 2004). However, I note that *Te Whāriki* 2017 does more than discuss inclusion; it demands an inclusive stance and sets an expectation that the ECE curriculum will reflect the actual diversity of community and whānau in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand society, which includes Rainbow Families.

Using a queer theory lens, this new document and the wording used will enable a more obvious conversation about Rainbow Families within the ECE learning environment. My wish moving forward would be for the language used in documents to be more explicit, so that visibility can be celebrated and silence diminished. Documents such as *Te Whāriki* 2017 assist teachers to keep an anti-biased curriculum in focus; however the reality of creating this in practice can still be a challenge.

Gunn (2003) suggests that it is the teacher's role to challenge the "barriers to inclusion" (p. 132), and also notes that "small acts of resistance, through queer questioning, can lead to significant gains in disrupting the heteronormative status quo" (Gunn, 2015, p. 21). When considering the environment in which you work, what features of the ECE environment help children of Rainbow Families feel that this is a place where they belong? *Te Whāriki* 2017 provides support for teachers talking about Rainbow Families and also provides the justification to do so.

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# And the gifted child?

## *A textual analysis of Te Whāriki*

Valerie Margrain

**Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi engari he toa takitini.**

**I come not with my own strengths but bring with me the gifts, talents and strengths of my family, tribe and ancestor.**

**(*Te Whāriki* 2017, p. 16)**

**Almost all gifted children attend regular early childhood education services or schools and so meeting the needs of gifted children is part of the everyday work of all early childhood teachers (Margrain, Murphy & Dean, 2015). Early childhood education in New Zealand recognises children's right to quality learning opportunities and has a long-standing discourse around valuing diversity. Therefore, in a situation where early childhood teachers intend to make a positive difference for all, how is it that application of quality practice for gifted children remains elusive to many teachers?**

Part of the answer lies in the fact that teachers say they have received little explicit pre-service or in-service education on giftedness (Margain & Farquhar, 2012). Another part of the puzzle is the continuation of common myths and misunderstandings (Margrain, et al., 2015). A third influence is the lack of explicit attention given to giftedness (or any synonyms) within *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum framework.

This article focuses on the latter issue, but takes the stance that although there is little *explicit* statement about giftedness, there is a large body of *implicit* discourse which provides a clear mandate for gifted education. Evidencing this implicit mandate is the aim of this article. The following sections provide: a brief introduction to giftedness; the approach to textual analysis used in this study; an integrated presentation of the *Te Whāriki* textual analysis findings and discussion; and some practical application.

## Why is giftedness an issue in early childhood?

Definitions of giftedness are diverse, highlighting differing concepts of intelligence, creativity, capacity, processing and performance (Allan, 2002, McAlpine, 2004; Porter, 1999). Any definition is influenced by culture, context and individual circumstances, and mediated by the purpose for which identification occurs (Harrison, 1995; Margrain, et al., 2015).

In New Zealand, a multi-categorical perspective of giftedness has been advocated for many years (McAlpine, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2012). This means that potential indicators of giftedness are broad, and not limited to traditional academic areas such as literacy, mathematics and science. Widely cited in New Zealand and Australia policy on gifted education, the *Differentiated model of giftedness and talent* includes:

- mental domains (intellectual, creative, social, and perceptual), and

- physical domains (muscular and motor control) (Gagné, 1995, 2009).

Specific examples of giftedness include:

- memory,

- inventiveness,

- leadership,

- proprioception,

- endurance, and

- agility.

Definitions can be extremely narrow; for example, that it is the top 5% of population on a specific test. Or they can be very broad, so that it is considered that every child is a gifted child (Margrain & Farquhar, 2012).

A widely cited definition for early childhood provided by Harrison (1995) draws together performance, potential, and the need for support:

A gifted child is one who performs or who has the ability to perform at a level significantly beyond his or her chronologically aged peers and whose unique abilities and characteristics require special provisions and social and emotional support from the family, community and educational context (p. 19).

Through several strategies, the New Zealand Ministry

of Education (2012) has articulated responsibility for gifted education, including for young gifted children. These strategies have included funding research and professional development, meeting with a gifted advisory group, publishing guidelines, and establishing an extensive website (gifted.tki.org.nz/). In 2009, information to support partnership with families was provided to all early childhood services through the gift of a book authored by Bevan-Brown and Taylor (2008). However, most gifted education initiatives have targeted the school sector, and early childhood teachers report that they are uncertain about characteristics, behaviour, assessment or program differentiation for gifted children (Margrain & Farquhar, 2012).

Misunderstandings often occur, for example mistaking 'intensity' for being 'anti-social', or assuming that parent 'responsiveness' to a gifted child was the imposition of forced 'hothousing' (Margrain, 2007). These kinds of misunderstandings have led to negativity towards gifted children and their families (Margrain, 2010). Giftedness is a genetic, hereditary phenomenon (Gagné, 1995, 2009) and not something forced on children by 'pushy parents' (Margrain, 2007).

Another misunderstanding is that giftedness only emerges in older childhood. This can be discounted because of several New Zealand case studies of young gifted children (Chellapan & Margrain, 2013; Dean, 2011, Margrain, 2007, Margrain, 2010, Margrain, 2011, Margrain, et al., 2015; Radue, 2009).

Without a supportive and responsive environment in which to flourish, gifted children experience frustration, despair, rejection, depression and underachievement (Porter, 1999; Sampson, 2013). Contemporary researchers, such as Gagné (1995, 2009), highlight the positive opportunity for teachers to support gifted children by providing experiences and catalysts. This article assumes that early childhood teachers work in their field with the best interests of children at heart, and aim to contribute positively to the lives of children and families. This article aims to contribute to increased understanding of the connection between *Te Whāriki* and gifted education to justify responsive action.

## Text analysis as methodology

Text analysis is a method which aligns to social constructivist epistemology (Burr, 1995; Crotty, 1998) and interpretive theoretical paradigm. The purpose of textual analysis is to describe the content, structure, and functions of the messages contained in texts (Frey, Botan & Kreps, 1999). As such, textual analysis examines more than words on a page, but aims to consider meanings and relevance of these words, including in terms of socio-cultural-political issues of power and negotiation (Gee, 1990).

As a curriculum framework for children and families, the text and messages in of *Te Whāriki* 2017 provide an agenda for practice and advocacy, including those who are marginalised and disempowered.

With its focus on "How can *Te Whāriki* make a difference?" in this paper, the text analysis involved the following steps:

1. Review of *Te Whāriki* 2017;

2. Identification of significant phrases of relevance to giftedness and inclusive practice.

3. Categorising key words, coding these words and chunks in terms of how the document's text implicitly and explicitly connect to giftedness and gifted education practice.

**Table One:** *'Giftedness' Text*

| Text | Frequency 1996 | Frequency 2017 | Representative quotes from *Te Whāriki* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gift | 0 | 2 | *I come not with my own strengths but bring with me the gifts, talents and strengths of my family, tribe and ancestor. (2017, p. 14)* |
| Talent | 0 | 2 | |
| Competent | 6 | 13 | *… competent and confident learners … secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society. (1996, p. 9; 2017, p. 2).* |
| Competence | 6 | 4 | |
| Ability | 38 | 33 | *Language and resources are inclusive of each child's gender, ability, ethnicity and background. (1996, p. 67; 2017, p. 39)* |
| Abilities | 3 | 15 | *The programme provides activities for children to develop their strengths, interests and abilities. (2017, p. 39)* |
| Capable | 2 | 18 | *… whānau and parents will be included in discussions about their children's progress and achievements. They will contribute knowledge of their children's capabilities at home and in other settings and will be seen as 'experts' on their children's interests. (2017, p. 64)* |
| Capability | 1 | 1 | |
| Capabilities | 8 | 17 | |
| Strengths | 13 | 16 | *The whāriki woven by each service recognises and builds on each child's strengths, allowing them to make their own unique contribution. (2017, p. 36)* |

In a future paper, I plan to consider two additional analytical steps shifting from 'text analysis' to 'discourse analysis':

4. Identifying discourses which described children; for example, the capable child, the reflective child, the developing child, the unique child, the participating child, the resourced child, and the supported child.

5. Identifying theoretical perspectives informing the discourses such as maturational, critical, engagement and psychological.

## Invisible?

*Examining what Te Whāriki **explicitly** says about giftedness*

In this section, the explicit use of the term 'gift' within *Te Whāriki* is reported. The use of synonyms to 'gifted' and 'giftedness' is provided, and compared between *Te Whāriki* 1996 and *Te Whāriki* 2017.

There are two references to the word 'gift' in *Te Whāriki* 2017. One is contained within a whakatauki:

*Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi engari he toa takitini*

*I come not with my own strengths but bring with me the gifts, talents and strengths of my family, tribe and ancestor* (p. 12).

Specific Māori conceptions of giftedness, including individual exceptionality are acknowledged (Bevan-Brown, 2009, Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2016), though always within the context of culture and tradition. However, in interpreting the whakatauki, an inclusive perspective of competence of all children is presented in *Te Whāriki*, aligning to a specific notion of every child being a 'gifted' child. This is the second time there is reference to 'gifted':

In Māori tradition children are seen to be inherently competent, capable and rich, complete and gifted no matter what their age or ability. Descended from lines that stretch back to the beginning of time, they are important living links between past, present and future, and a reflection of their ancestors. These ideas are fundamental to how Māori understand teaching and learning (p. 12).

## Table Two: *'Diversity' Text*

| Text | Indicative quotes from *Te Whāriki* 2017 |
|---|---|
| Different | *Children have opportunities to interact with a range of adults and with other children (of the same and different ages). (p. 45)* |
| Developmental | *Activities, playthings and expectations take account of the fact that every toddler differs in their development, language capability and mastery of skills. The programme builds on the curiosity and passions of each toddler. (p. 38)* |
| Genetic | *Genetic, developmental and environmental factors interact, enabling and constraining learning. (p. 61)* |
| Diverse/Diversity | *Inclusion goes beyond gender and ethnicity to include diversity of ability and learning needs, family structure and values, socio-economic status and religion. (p. 13)* |
| Individual | *… the reciprocal individual–environmental influences … drive learning and development (p. 61)* |
| Need/Needs | *Internal evaluation considers how effectively the service is providing for the strengths, interests and needs of all children, and how their learning is progressing … (p. 65)* |

## Table Three: *'Expectations' Text*

| Text | Indicative quotes from *Te Whāriki* 2017 |
|---|---|
| Expect/Expectations<br><br>(children's expectations, *whānau* expectations, kaiako expectations, educational expectations, learning expectations, and high expectations) | *Kaiako seek to develop mutually positive relationships with mokopuna and to work with whānau to realise high expectations. (p. 50)* |
| | *Toddlers can become bored or frustrated if learning expectations are set too low or too high. (p. 14)*<br>*[Author's note: this point does not only apply to toddlers!]* |
| Progress | *.. parents and whānau will be included in discussions about their children's progress and achievements. They will contribute knowledge of their children's capabilities at home and in other settings and will be seen as 'experts' on their children's interests. (p. 64)* |

While there is acknowledgement that "A fundamental expectation is that each service will offer a curriculum that recognises these rights and enables the active participation of all children, including those who may need additional learning support" (p. 12), there is no additional specific use of the words 'gift','gifted', or 'giftedness' in the remaining body of *Te Whāriki*, for example within the detail around principles and strands.

This invisibility of giftedness and absence of instruction to teachers contributes to giftedness and gifted education being largely invisible in curriculum documentation. It is also unfortunate that a powerful and reflective question which was specifically connected to exceptionality has been removed between the 1996 and 2017 versions of *Te Whāriki*, which asked: "In what ways, and how well, does the programme provide for children with unusual interests or exceptional abilities?" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 68).

Nevertheless, the inclusion of 'gifted' in the whakatuaki is of great significance and mana. A whakatauki offers readers the opportunity for reflection and insight. It could thus be argued that gifted education is given great honour through the inclusion of the whakatauki.

For the purposes of this article, several other synonyms of 'gift' were reviewed across the 2017 and 1996 versions of *Te Whāriki:* competent, competence, ability, abilities, capable, capabilities, capability, talent and strengths. The frequency counts of these have been listed in Table 1 from 1996 and 2017 versions of the curriculum, with indicative quotes to illustrate how the words may be applied to contemporary pedagogy.

The data indicates an absence of specific reference to giftedness as the synonyms are largely used in broad contexts of all children being perceived as capable and competent rather than with specific attention being drawn to children of high ability. The data in Table One also show that there has been no substantive shift in the explicit language use of synonyms relating to giftedness within New Zealand early childhood curriculum documentation in the last 20 years, despite awareness of gifted education issues by the Ministry of Education.

## Responsibility?

*Exploring what Te Whāriki **implicitly** says about giftedness*

Despite the absence of explicit recommendations for gifted education practice, throughout *Te Whāriki 2017*, there is a mandate toward positive pedagogical practices which have strong potential to support young gifted children. Recommendations and philosophy within *Te Whāriki* reflect commitment to quality early childhood education for *all* children, and include six specific practice-based textual groupings that can be connected to gifted education:

- Acknowledging individual diversity and difference

- Holding high expectations and aspirations for *all* children

- Specific provisions that provide challenge and extension

- Issues of equity and children's rights

- Respect for *all* children and families

- Partnership with whānau, particularly around assessment.

Each of these six practice-based textual groupings are evidenced in the sections that follow with indicative quotes from *Te Whāriki* 2017 and a brief discussion of the importance of each issue for gifted children. The purpose for integrating findings and discussion is to consider the meaning behind the words in *Te Whāriki*.

**Table Four:** *'Responsivity' Text*

| Text | Indicative quotes from *Te Whāriki* 2017 |
|---|---|
| Challenge / Challenging | *Experience new challenges …* (p. 17) |
| Differentiate | *…actively respond to the strengths, interests, abilities and needs of each child and, at times, provide them with additional support* (p. 151) |
| Extend | *Expand their capabilities, extend their learning repertoires …* (p. 15) |
| Identify | *(Kaiako are) knowledgeable about children's learning and development and able to identify their varied abilities, strengths, interests and learning trajectories* (p. 60) |
| Opportunities | *(Kaiako are) providing opportunities for them to experience new challenges* (p. 15) |
| Challenge | |
| Promote | *(Kaiako are) knowledgeable about and able to try alternative ways to promote and progress children's learning* (p. 59) |
| Progress | |
| Respond | *… kaiako listen to, observe, participate with and respond to children…* (p. 61) |
| Stimulating | *The programme is stimulating* (p. 29) |

## 'Diversity' text

The examination of diversity text acknowledges individual diversity and difference amongst children. *Te Whāriki* has held a long-standing commitment toward teacher responsivity to children's individual and unique dispositions, backgrounds, strengths and interests. This teacher responsivity acknowledges that individual children learn in different ways, with different trajectories, and have different levels of potential achievement. Diversity text applies to gifted education by acknowledging that giftedness is genetic, and that gifted children have learning and social-emotional characteristics and needs that may differ from other children of their chronological age. Table Two illustrates connection between diversity text and *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017).

## 'Expectations' Text

Western early childhood teachers are often wary of expectations *on* and *of* children which place them under pressure. Childhood is perceived as a time for play-based learning, socialisation and exploration. Pedagogy which imposes unreasonable stress and performance expectations on young children is often discouraged in Western society.

However, the opposite experience is also stressful for children: low expectations and pressure that results in children 'dumbing down' to 'fit in' (Margrain, 2007). *Te Whāriki* acknowledges that it is important to have expectations that all children will learn and that the programme will support them according to their individual capability. This *expectation for* children means that if children

## Table Five: *'Equity' Text*

| Text | Indicative quotes from *Te Whāriki* 2017 |
|---|---|
| Bias | *Confidence to stand up for themselves and others against biased ideas and discriminatory behaviour.* (p. 37) |
| Discriminatory | |
| Disparities | *Critical theory perspectives challenge disparities, injustices, inequalities and perceived norms. The use of critical theory perspectives is reflected in the principles of Te Whāriki and in guidance on how to promote equitable practices with children, parents and whānau.* (p. 14) |
| Inequalities | |
| Equitable | |
| | *There are equitable opportunities for learning, irrespective of gender, ability, age, ethnicity or background.* (p. 24) |
| Equity | *Equity of opportunity on children's learning and development.* (p. 62) |
| Fairness | *Kaiako accept children's different ways of doing things as part of their developing sense of self. They are given opportunities to discuss their feelings and negotiate on rights, fairness, expectations and justice.* (p. 34) |
| Justice | |
| Rights | |

## Table Six: *'Respect' Text*

| Text | Indicative quotes from *Te Whāriki* 2017 |
|---|---|
| Accept | *All children need to know that they are accepted for who they are and that they can make a difference.* (p. 31) |
| Respect | *Parents and whānau trust that their ECE service will provide an environment where respectful relationships, encouragement, warmth and acceptance are the norm.* (p. 23). |
| Enhance mana | *(Kaiako are) attentive to learning and able to make this visible through assessment practices that give children agency and enhance their mana.* (p. 59) |
| Welcome | *All children and their families are accepted, their diversity is valued and welcomed, and they are actively supported to participate and learn.* (p. 35) |
| Value | *Awareness of their own special strengths, and confidence that these are recognised and valued.* (p. 37) |
| Negative attitudes | *Language and resources are inclusive of each child's gender, ability, ethnicity and background. Children have opportunities to discuss bias and to challenge prejudice and discriminatory attitudes* (p. 39) |
| Prejudice | |

already have advanced levels of competence and ability, they must be supported to *continue* to learn according to their own potential and trajectory. Table Three provides connection between *Te Whāriki 2017* and the text describing 'expectations'.

## 'Responsivity' Text

*Te Whāriki* 2017 encourages the use of teaching practices which adapt or differentiate the lived curriculum and programme so that it is accessible for all children with special learning needs. Children who are gifted also have special learning needs and require programme differentiation. They require extension and enrichment (e.g. challenge, stretch, extension, and stimulation). This extension and enrichment can build on the children's interests and strengths in the same way as with planning for other children. However, the specific interests may be more specialised and the content more advanced (Margrain, et al., 2015). Table Four indicates references to text within *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) which specifically refers to responsivity.

## 'Equity' Text

The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) acknowledges the right of all children to have their individual learning needs met. Research indicates that gifted children do not have equitable educational support. Because they are deemed 'already capable', they are more often left alone and the assumption made that to support their learning would be to result in 'privilege' (Margrain, 2007). Other children are deemed as needing 'more'.

However, resources need not be fought over as if in limited supply. Many individual children need a little more support at various times, whether for emotional, behavioural or cognitive learning, and at other times, less. The point is that gifted children have the right to support when needed.

Therefore, the text related to equity, as illustrated in Table Five, is important to support advocacy for gifted education.

## 'Respect' Text

Few teachers would argue with the text documented in Table Six, as being core to early childhood practice. *Te Whāriki* not only advocates for children's rights, fairness, justice and equity. It also provides specific direction to teachers that a critical theory perspectives is required, to counter injustice, bias and prejudice. However, critical analysis of how this discourse is applied is necessary for practitioners to engage in, because gifted families report that they experience negativity, rejection, marginalisation and exclusion (Chellapan & Margrain, 2013; Margrain, 2010).

## 'Partnership' Text

Although partnership text documented in Table Seven aligns to the text illustrating respect, it merits attention because of the connection to assessment. While *Te Whāriki* 2017 supports partnership with families for all children, this is especially important for gifted children. Research indicates that parents are more accurate at identifying giftedness in young children, and that they do not 'over-nominate' (Margrain, 2010; Porter, 1999). Conversely, research indicates that teachers frequently miss and misunderstand characteristics of giftedness in young children.

Thus, it is critical that teachers consult parents who often know more about giftedness as a phenomenon, and certainly as applied to their children. Additionally, giftedness is not static, so parents and teachers can work together to share examples of behaviour and achievement from their different experience and contexts. A key resource supporting the partnership discourse with whānau is the text by Bevan-Brown and Taylor (2008).

**Table Seven:** *'Partnership' Text*

| Text | Indicative quotes from *Te Whāriki* 2017 |
|---|---|
| Listen to parents<br>Share decision making<br>Discuss with parents<br>Family viewed positively<br>Dialogue with parents<br>Reciprocal interactions<br>Reciprocally<br>Reciprocity<br>Relationships | *(Kaiako) provide opportunities for parents and whānau to engage with their child's learning journey and contribute their own observations and suggestions.* (p. 63) |
| | *(Parents and whānau) will contribute knowledge of their children's capabilities at home and in other settings and will be seen as 'experts' on their children's interests. Whānau expectations are significant influences on children's own expectations and aspirations; collaborating with kaiako can in turn influence the expectations of whānau.* (p. 64) |
| | *It is important that kaiako develop meaningful relationships with whānau and that they respect their aspirations for their children, along with those of hapū, iwi and the wider community.* (p. 20) |
| | *When planning, kaiako draw on their own pedagogical knowledge and on their knowledge of the children. This is gained from informal and formal assessments, dialogue with parents, whānau and others working with the children and from other sources such as parent surveys and internal evaluation.* (p. 65) |

## Connections to practice

The primary purpose of this article has been to share the findings of a textual analysis of *Te Whāriki* (2017), in terms of connection to gifted education. Sharing the textual analysis evidences the responsibility of kaiako in early childhood to notice, recognise, record and respond to gifted children, in partnership with families.

The specific *Te Whāriki* text references and practices which connect to gifted education are also those which benefit all children. Teachers are already engaging in ways that positively support children and families and could readily adapt their practice to explicitly support gifted children and families; for example, documenting children's strengths and interests narratively (Ministry of Education, 2004/2005/2007/2009). Curriculum documents assert that the role of education in the early years is for *all* children to be competent, confident and capable learners (Ministry of Education, 2017, 2007). By drawing on broad principles of quality practice which *Te Whāriki* provides teachers, the six textual groupings identified in this paper evidence uncontested responsibility which teachers have for all children, while addressing the specific group of gifted children.

Acknowledging that gifted children are a heterogeneous group with diverse learning strengths and needs, it is beyond the scope of this article to give any comprehensive suggestions of how to implement gifted education in diverse settings. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that readers may appreciate some initial ideas and suggestions for how to differentiate assessment and practice, and Table Eight provides a beginning.

## Conclusion:

*How will Te Whāriki 2017 make a difference?*

*Te Whāriki* 2017 provides the opportunity for "a shared sense of 'what matters here'" (p. 65), but only if we engage in deep critical reflection on the meaning behind the words in the curriculum document. It is critical for all teachers in the early years to understand giftedness, and to acknowledge that responsibility for gifted children is part of effective pedagogy.

In the absence of explicit text referring to giftedness, it is important to highlight the implicit text in *Te Whāriki* 2017 which supports gifted education: diversity; expectations; response; equity; respect; and partnership. Discussion of the textual analysis examples provided in this article can aid insight on equity of children's learning opportunities, and consideration of quality practice and program differentiation. Critical reflection also highlights that invisibility of text can result in lack of teacher awareness of responsibility, and limited response and support to children.

*Te Whāriki* 2017 has great potential to support advocacy and transformational practice for teachers, who all potentially work with gifted children. Engagement in deeper critical reflection on the explicit and implicit text of *Te Whāriki* 2017 affords positive opportunity for teachers to consider ways in which their everyday work includes working in gifted education, for gifted children, and as gifted educators.

**Table Eight:** *Practice Strategies and Support Resources to Support Gifted Children*

| 'Responsibility' Texts *Te Whāriki* (2017) | Key Practice Strategies | Support Resources |
|---|---|---|
| Acknowledging individual diversity and difference | - Expect to find gifted children.<br><br>- Draw on a range of assessment methods which allow high ability to be recorded.<br><br>- Be aware of characteristics of giftedness | - Allan (2002) (characteristics & rating scale)<br>- Silverman (2012) (for characteristics)<br>- Portfolio documentation<br>- Consultation with primary schools<br>- http://giftednz.org.nz/ (professional association for gifted education with an ECE special interest group http://gifted.tki.org.nz/ (Ministry of Education website including ECE)<br>- Wong (2013) |
| Holding high expectations and aspirations for *all* children | | |
| Specific provisions for challenge and extension | Curriculum differentiation:<br>- Enrichment & extension<br>- Offer 'something different' | - NZCER Press professional handouts at http://www.nzcer.org.nz/nzcerpress/giftedness<br>- Breen (2008)<br>- https://nzcge.co.nz/ (Centre for Gifted Education) |
| Issues of equity and children's rights | - Add 'giftedness' to special education needs register.<br>- Use IP/IEP/IDPs | - Radue (2009)<br>- Ministry of Education Inclusive Education website http://www.inclusive.tki.org.nz/<br>- UNCRoC (United Nations, 1989). |
| Respecting *all* children and families | Critical staff reflection and review | Feedback, review and appraisal systems - https://www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/ |
| Partnership with whānau, particularly around assessment | Consultation with families, recognising their expertise in gifted education | - Bevan-Brown & Tayor (2008)<br>- Margrain (2007, 2010, 2011)<br>- New Zealand Association for Gifted Children, see: http://www.giftedchildren.org.nz/ |

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# Bridging the gap

## *From relationships to partnerships with parents*

**Metta Booth & Janneth Ibanez**

**We have relationships with many people in our lives: families, colleagues, peers, friends to name a few. However, we do not always develop partnerships with them. Trusting and positive relationships are the building blocks for successful, long lasting partnerships. Relationships will only turn into partnerships when the people involved share a common goal and share the responsibility for reaching that goal.**

Different early childhood settings embark on their own journey and will be in different stages of building partnerships with their families. Some settings may be at the initial stage of getting to know each other. A few early childhood settings may already have the relationships but have not yet developed partnerships. Some may already be in their pathways of building strong partnerships. Through the journey, each early childhood setting may stumble upon various challenges and conquer successes which will be unique between one another.

In reality, families choose to be involved in early childhood settings in different levels. Some families are keen to be involved in things such as decision making process, being part of a committee/ group, or becoming an active participant in maintaining the quality of the educational programs. Some families, on the other hand, might prefer to have a more superficial level of involvement. Building partnerships with families take time and an ongoing effort, but will it be worth it? Definitely.

The relationship that we build and establish with each family is, and will always be, unique. In saying that, successful partnerships have some common features. Anne Stonehouse (2012) identifies these as:

- Mutual trust

- Respectful communication

- Openness to others' views, values, and perspectives

- Shared decision making

- Appreciation of each other's knowledge and experiences

- Willingness to negotiate and compromise

- Commitment to resolve tensions and conflicts

- Shared aims or goals—what is best for the child (p.1).

Mitchell (2006) contends that partnership is all about maximising opportunity; it presupposes that there is a potential for greater achievement, more satisfactory and satisfying outcomes, and a more concreted effort to elicit various positive results. Partnership is intended to foster a more nurturing environment in which our shared intentions support the common goals.

For early childhood professionals, there is always the need for us to continually reflect upon ways to empower others in going beyond involving families from the operational level of the early childhood settings and reporting **to** families on their child's learning, to collaborating **with** families to support children's learning. Children thrive when families and educators work together in partnership to support young children's learning (DEEWR, 2009).

## Who are the partnerships for?

One of the main question to ask ourselves would be, 'Who are the partnerships for after all?' – Who will benefit the most if we are to put a lot of effort and energy in establishing long lasting partnerships with the families in our settings? In our experience, children benefit, but so do parents and teachers as well.

**Children**

According to Keyser (2006), children whose families are involved in their education demonstrate greater social and emotional development including greater mental health, social competence, and more positive social relationships with these advantages continue from childhood through to adulthood.

Through partnerships, families share their knowledge with educators and educators share discussions about how their children are doing and how to best meet their needs both in the home and educational environment. Partnerships allow children to see that important people in their lives work well together. This gives children the insight that there is a continuity of care and ongoing communication between the people they encounter on a daily basis.

The positive impacts on healthy partnerships to children's learning are endless. Children are far more likely to feel safe and secure around educators who are valued and supported by their families. Furthermore, children will feel valued and recognised when educators and families work together in finding ways on how to best support their needs and to ensure that their voice is heard.

# *Through partnerships, families are able to better understand the everyday challenges and difficulties that educators face on a daily basis*

**Educators**

Family partnerships do not only benefit children, but also brings benefit for educators. Prior and Gerard (2007) acknowledge that educators who encourage family involvement are more likely to have a greater understanding of the cultures of the children and recognise and value families' interests in helping their children.

Families are children's first and most influential educators. Families spend most times with their children – they know and understand their child's personality, strength, weaknesses, behavior, and characteristics very well. Families are the first few people whom educators go to in building their very first understanding and knowledge about a child which later on will be important foundation in building a secure and trusting relationship. Can you imagine getting to know a child without knowing his/her family?

Well established partnership allows educators to feel comfortable to be around the children's families:  initiating conversations, engaging in discussions, and sharing ideas and knowledge about the children. Having a holistic picture of a child allows educator to relate to children in a way that makes them feels understood which then strengthens relationships (KidsMatter, 2016).

**Families**

It is not easy for any families to leave their children with anyone for 6 to 9 hours a day if they do not trust that someone to be with their children. It is very important for educators to recognise that for some families, bringing their children to an early childhood setting may not have been their first choice; therefore, treating the family as equal partners will assist families to establish positive relationships and most importantly, trust.

Each family wants the best for their child. Partnerships enable families to influence and give input to the educational program and practice. Opportunities such as family surveys, family reflections, educator – family interview, and daily conversations (to name a few) will assist both families and educators to reflect on current practice and establish pathways for ongoing communication.

Conversely, being involved in educational program and practice gives families the insights on the dedication and hard work that educators put in to maintain the quality of education and care which families and children receive. Through partnerships, families are able to better understand the everyday challenges and difficulties that educators face on a daily basis, thus developing families' sense of

appreciation with regards to educators' commitment as early childhood professionals.

## Our Story

With a roll of 84 children, Blackfriars Children's Centre is located on the historic Blackfriars campus of University of Technology Sydney. At Blackfriars Children's Centre, we believe that:

*"It is a privilege to partner with families in raising authentic children. We continually strive to provide high quality care that gives families peace of mind and reassurance. We respect each family's uniqueness and encourage collaboration and experiences that aim to respect this diversity and challenge stereotypes and biases. We aim for every child and family to feel a sense of belonging."*

For us, creating a culture of involvement that is enduring takes time – it is an ongoing process which entails advocacy and persistence from everyone involved. We strongly feel that open communications and respectful relationships are cornerstones in creating long lasting partnerships.

Our journey to establish ongoing communication with our families is not always smooth. As leaders at the centre, we often daydream about all these perfect 'what if' scenarios – 'what if each one of our parent is able to give feedback to our program each time we ask them to?' or 'what if every single educator at the centre can be on board with our vision to create an effective community involvement?' or something cliché like 'Imagine if there is no time limit for us to go off the floor and plan the best action plans to increase family involvement at our centre!'

It's long been said that 'thoughts become things' and our imagination is the drive that make things happen. Our centre has a vision to create and maintain a partnership that is ideal for our community of learning. To begin with, we reflected on what could be making it hard for families to be involved in our partnerships as we hoped they would be.

Barriers to effective partnerships exist for both educators and families themselves. Some barriers occur as a result of limited resources, some barriers originate from the attitudes and perceptions of families, and other barriers happen due to the lack of understanding and knowledge. Below are two of the main barriers that we faced as a team and some of the things that we have done (and will continue to do) to overcome them.

## Challenging the controversial views

The concept of *'we (educators) know what is best (for children)'* is one common misconception that families often have. This often results in families feeling uncertain as to how far they could go making suggestions or asking questions. One thing that we learned from our families is that the lack of knowledge about how to help or contribute cannot be equated with the lack of interest.

Often educators feel that it is their job to provide and meet every single requirement from families and children.

Teaching, to some extent, does involve helping and caring for young children. However, teachers themselves won't be able to meet all of the needs of children and families. Our drive to 'do it all' does not always end well especially when we are trying to create and establish a long lasting partnership.

The process in creating the foundation of partnerships starts as soon as families and their child are enrolled in our setting. At the time a new family walks into our centre for their orientation day, we let them know that we are committed in building a strong foundation for partnership with them is so that they are able to see the value in participating and realising that their involvement will result in meaningful changes. Our philosophy in regards to working together with families is clearly outlined in our family orientation handbook and we find that our family handbook acts a wonderful conversation starter.

A strong foundation in building partnership can only occur when educators and families feel confident and comfortable to approach each other. On one hand, educators do have the responsibilities to build families' awareness that there is no right or wrong ways to participate. A contribution is a contribution, no matter how small it is. On the contrary, families do need to realise that they also play an important part in advocating for their children. Annual surveys, regular parent-teacher interviews, and family information sheets are some of the things our centre does to bridge the gap between the families and us to maintain effective communications.

Another view that we have challenged within our team is in regards to believing that *there is only one or two right ways in getting families to be involved in our program*. We encourage our team of educators to think outside the box – to engage in critical reflections about all aspects of experiences and considering different perspectives; to reflect upon how can we increase our family involvement beyond an operational level.

One of the questions that we reflected as a team is, 'What does it take for families to be meaningfully involved in our early childhood setting?' With this, we also asked ourselves the question: 'How well do we know our families?' The answers varied. Some educators knew the families on a superficial level (such as by knowing their names). A few educators felt fairly confident that they know the families more deeply (such as knowing their core values and family circumstances).

To further reflect to our main reflection, we decided to create an action plan. This action plan is a work in progress. A few things that we noted down on our action plan so far include:

- Reflecting on our familiarities within our families. How much knowledge is enough?

- Getting to know the demographic of our families (for example, our families are mostly professionals and academics. Most of them have high computer literacy

and thus respond well through emails and phone conferences).

As a team, we are aware of the need in being honest to ourselves in regards to how well we do things. Through recognising our limitations, we are able to form mutual and collaborative partnerships with our families. In addition, we utilise our connection within our wider community and try to network with other educational and non-educational institutions to continue supporting the ever changing needs of our Blackfriars families.

# *Open communications and respectful relationships are cornerstones in creating long lasting partnerships*

## Making the time and increasing visibility

Time is one of the most precious commodities that families and educators need to create and maintain partnerships. Our drop-offs and pick-ups often happen in a flash with barely any times for educators and families to engage in in depth conversations about the children's day. This is the reality that we believe is faced by many early childhood settings. Lack of time is the major reason given by both families and educators for why their partnerships are not working.

One ongoing challenge for us is to have in place effective strategies to involve our families and educators who are busily occupied with their day-to day life expectations. Knowing the demographic of our families really helped us in deciding what we needed to look at when we reviewed our family involvement programs.

We decided to revisit the way we engage and approach our families. One recent example: moving from writing a daily question for our families in our daily diary to an ongoing fortnightly reflection. We noticed that parents pay more attention to our fortnightly reflections for a couple of reasons. Firstly, a fortnight's timeframe gives them the opportunity to think, reflect, and write their responses. Secondly, the reflection is more noticeable by families as it is placed on the space where they sign their child in and out on a daily basis. Thirdly, we send out these reflections through our weekly email to make it easier for some families to respond. It has been nearly three months since we implemented this change and the level of our family participation on our program has increased significantly.

In a nutshell, family involvement does depend upon the time factor. There are just simply not enough hours in the day to accomplish everything. Therefore, there has to be an ongoing reflection on how efficient our current strategies are in meeting everyone's needs to contribute and to continually

seek improvements to find ways to engage families in efficient and meaningful ways.

## 'Partnerships' – from the perspectives of our families

Often what we believe are important in creating a successful and long lasting partnership may not necessarily be the same things our families have in mind. We sent out three reflective questions for our families to answer and their responses have given us many more opportunities to reflect upon our current practice and to plan our next steps.

We collated the answers we received from our families as such:

**How does an 'ideal' partnership between educators and families look like to you?**

*An ideal partnership between educators and family is the one that is mutually respectful and where there is open and honest communication between the child, parent(s), and educators. This would mean frequent communication between the educators and the families; asking families about what matters most to them in their child's education as well as seeking ideas and feedback on the program.*

**What are some of the challenges that hinder educators and families in building effective partnerships with each other?**

*Some of the challenges through our perspective as families include unrealistic expectations or lack of responsibilities that some parents have towards the partnership, the expectation of the sector itself which often leads to educators having to spend more time on their paperwork rather than being with the children, and the reality of our daily lives which means the lack of time from both parties to engage with each other.*

**How do you think we can better foster our partnerships in the future?**

*We can build strong and long lasting partnerships by respecting that we all play vital roles in educating and caring for our children – through engagement that makes families feel that they are part of the educational environment and educators feeling that they are valued, critical partners.*

## Where do we go from here?

To conclude, we believe that the success in engaging families starts by going beyond the narrow definition of 'involvement'. We don't just count the number of families who attend our Mother's Day Breakfast or volunteer at the working bees. Instead, we want to start with a belief that children's success is a shared interest of both educators and families. Effective partnerships can be created through envisioning families as partners in the learning process.

Being educators is truly a privilege as we have the opportunity to be a resource to other people, by providing help and guidance, but also we can be the ones who empower others to make connections and contribute to our expertise –

all for the best interest of the children. At the end of the day, we need to remember that the strength in our early childhood settings lies in the collaboration of our community of learning and not in the knowledge of one expert.

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# Provocations to last a lifetime

*A review of: 'The Sacred Urge to Play: Unfolding your child's intelligence, imagination, creativity and joy for life'*

**Pennie Brownlee with Kimberley Crisp**

**Published 2017 by Good Egg Books**

**http://www.goodeggbooks.co.nz/catalogue.html**

**Cost: $45**

**Reviewer: Andrew Gibbons**

**Is it possible to write a book review for a Pennie Brownlee book and keep within the traditional review word count? Nope. So what to do? Give some description of the structure; share some key points; make some suggestions about why this is a good book to read and more importantly to *use*; engage in some serious debate about the very serious issue of play; and then with what little room is left make a connection to wider issues that the early childhood sector experiences (including the context of the update to *Te Whāriki*).**

To begin, however, I would like to reflect on some thoughts that occurred *before* even opening the book.

Back in the early 1990s when I was an early childhood student teacher, Pennie Brownlee's *Magic Places* was required reading. At the time I can remember feeling uncertain and challenged by Brownlee's direct style and ideas around the role of the adult in a child's creative exploration of expression through visual media. A careful reading of *Magic Places* reveals the importance of thinking reflectively and critically, about childhood, adulthood, society, the world, learning, and play. The reflection is, also, deeply practical and applicable. Brownlee's work provides strong guidance as to the ways in which adults can and should understand their impact on a child's experience of creative expression.

It helped me to question the tendency to 'educationalise' learning. Early childhood centre communities, and the sector as a whole, still have a lot to get from *Magic Places* because educational 'cookie cutter' approaches still hold sway in early childhood curriculum and pedagogy. 'Cookie cutter' approaches still abound in the ways in which we do music and movement, literacy, assessment, dispositions, events and so on. The argument, coming from the Ministry of Education, that the update to *Te Whāriki* was necessary to avoid variability in curriculum experiences, adds further significance to this debate about prescriptive curriculum.

So, the provocations in *Magic Places* have stayed with me throughout 27 odd years of studying and teaching and continue to help with the complex challenge of working with the early childhood curriculum in early childhood centre communities and in early childhood teacher education.

This means, before even opening *The Sacred Urge to Play*, there's a sense that there is another quarter of a century of provocations resonating from these new pages. There is also a sense that these pages will offer another significant resource to support teaching teams in their work with the updated *Te Whāriki* as an open, sensitive, flexible, holistic, integrated, and woven approach to learning and teaching.

## Two key points to take from the book (of many)

*Point 1: Put away any paraphernalia that creates a passive, spoon-fed, instructional, constrained, learning environment full of discretely assessable and measurable educational tasks*. This is an issue that has regularly challenged early childhood education programme development, but has yet to really reach a broader school audience because of some significant errors in thinking about what counts as academic work, and academic achievement. The idea that some so called traditional subjects are academic and some are not is an ongoing educational disaster that has significant impact on children and on wider society.

The problem does not stop there, as it has a pedagogical dimension. These traditional subjects, subjects that often appear in early childhood centres as 'little scholar' moments of the day, have traditional pedagogical approaches that are distinctly prescriptive and teacher led. If, for example, we think that you need to sit at a table and do a mathematic activity in order to be doing mathematics – to be doing

proper academic learning – there's an narrow understanding learning and of academic work. In other words, play is not disconnected from those apparently academic subjects and, as Brownlee shows, is actually a critical element in their development for children and adults.

I would like to take as one example the case of mathematics homework. Teachers and parents are so accustomed to the idea of children going home from school with more work to do, sitting them at more desks and tables, giving them more study. Society is convinced of the importance of this bringing school home for the benefit of the child's intellectual development. An idea has developed that children who do not work on their schoolwork at home, and parents who do not require and support this, are regarded as a significant problem to their own lives and futures, as well as that of the whole nation and economy. Well, that's clearly an error if we take into account Brownlee's thorough explanation of what is going on within the domain of 'learning' and 'education' when engaged in play. According to Scott Duncan, schools and teachers need to reconceptualise homework so that it becomes: 'go home and be active, go home and play'. (If you don't know who is Scott Duncan, you should! Google him…. he's an advocate for children's risky play and an expert on children's health and well-being.)

Playing is still homework in the sense of learning because of all the holistic benefits (many of which are explained clearly in *The Sacred Urge to Play*). So, the health sciences have recognised the problem of traditional forms of academic instruction, when will the school system properly catch on to this idea?

***Point 2: Unplug the kids from the electronic society***. Brownlee is very clear on the impact of new electronic media. Devices such as tablets and smartphones are regarded as having no place in a child's play. Brownlee explains that the activity demanded by these devices does not even count as real play and provides a range of arguments for this view.

I was visiting friends a few months back. The two children were hankering for their devices. At the same time, you could see that they were conscious that any time spent on the device was eating up their device rations – there was an anxiety associated with access to the device. So one could argue that they were learning about how to ration their fun, could we not? Well, not according to Brownlee who makes a convincing argument that use of devices is not actually fun, it's dependency, and so adults should be advocating to the child for zero 'screen time'. Arguably, adults should also reflect on their own screen time and social media behaviours. What is being modelled by adults who find that their smartphones are constantly accounting for more and more of their attention, and what's happening to the adult-child relationships? So in this book, adults have a prompt to 'wake up' from their devices….

I would like to point, paradoxically, to a television show to support Brownlee's point here. In the second season of

*The Simpsons*, Marge observes the violence of the children's television animations and succeeds in mobilising parents against the show *Itchy & Scratchy* which is forced to be rewritten without any violence (the unimaginative show writers sit the pair down on a veranda drinking lemonade as if that's the only thing that's possible once there's no dismemberment going on…). The kids do not approve of the revised show and so, turning off their televisions, they head outside to play.

## The audience and structure

So while we are on the topic of Marge and her mobilised parental group, it's worth turning to the matter of the audience for whom this book will be of interest, benefit and inspiration. I am confident to say the audience is 'Everyone' – no matter what background, role, philosophy, and aspirations. To be a bit more precise and local…. As someone involved in teacher education and in working with early childhood centres in a range of contexts, I'd like to recommend to every student teacher, every teacher, and every centre leader, owner, manager: Read This Book.

That doesn't mean you have to agree with every point that is made in *The Sacred Urge to Play*, I certainly don't (more on that later), but it does mean that there is no doubt in my mind that this book will enrich each and every centre with a stronger, more reflective, more sensitive, more holistic and integrated, and most importantly more play-full world. How does it do this?

*The Sacred Urge to Play* brings together research on brain development, socioemotional development, curriculum and pedagogy, centre design, literacy, and philosophy. It follows a challenging pathway because the knowledge shared operates less like a path and more, (which is apt for the content) – like a whāriki.

In other words, you can open up the book at any point, and be connected to all other points in the book. For instance, I might look at Brownlee's concerns about living in an anxiety ridden risk society, and at the same time there will be clear connections to neuroscience, relationships, the child's play urges and inclinations, teacher dispositions, assessment, the organisation of indoor and outdoor space, the use of good junk and bad plastic junk and/or electronic devices, and to the ways in which an early childhood teaching team can put all of these ideas together practically.

In practically working with and through this book there is an opportunity to engage in shared debate and meaning making. Avoid, in other words, using this book to cut more cookies. As already noted above, the Ministry of Education began the process of reviewing and updating *Te Whāriki* by claiming that the variability of its implementation was a problem to be fixed by producing a clearer, leaner, document. Variability might also be understood as variability in confidence. Centre communities vary in the ways in which they feel confident to *do* early childhood curriculum. So, one might also consider this book as a possible tool for confidence building rather than as a tool for building some kind of generic approach to a pedagogy of play.

As there are some progressive points to engage with, I recommend first reading the book from front to back. Most importantly, there's the progress that the reader is invited to engage in. Structurally, the writing offers a number of activities for the reader. The purpose of this is (I think) a clear message about the purpose of the book: to invite adults into the world of play (or perhaps, to bring adults back to the work of play). In this sense the very structure of the book invites deep reflection upon one's own identity as a player, as an advocate for play, and also at times as a more-or-less well-intentioned obstacle to play.

This is not a surprise for readers of Pennie Brownlee's work - be prepared to be provoked, challenged, accused and berated. So the book, and in particular the progressive tasks that invite reflection and action, make it clear that the book is written for YOU (and that means YOU collectively).

I would like to return to the idea that the ECE sector's leaders engage with this book. Each leader and/or manager – however you understand leadership, whether a policy maker and implementer, an owner of a corporation or lobby group, union representative, supervisor in a centre, or associate teacher for student practicum, should be asking, through reading this book: *What do I do to support the play of the children and adults with whom I work in early childhood education?*

These are challenging questions in bulging institutions that have multiple managerial levels and often complex systems for quality assurance. The university is one such institution and so teacher education is an audience that can address the gist of this book. The gist that they should understand is one concerning not just the content of teacher education curriculum (for instance, learning about the different connections between play and development) but also the well-being associated with the study of play. If all of these great ideas in this book get 'taught' and 'assessed' in a way that heightens anxieties for students, is disconnected with the principles of play being explored, then they are working against a pedagogy of play.

## The issues, concerns and questions:

Ok, now on to a few issues with the book. These issues largely orient around the idea of it being dangerous to take the value of play and the connections between play and development for granted – and to think that there is no alternative. No alternative kind of thinking legitimates all kinds of interventions into children's play in the name of progress, so it's vital that talk about play doesn't play the same game regarding assumptions, values, and beliefs. Just as a child's exploration of the world gives her so much because it's not the handed down, authoritarian, prescribed, pre-cut, story of the world, it's her story, so too as adults who think about the nature and value of play, it's important to explore this nature and value and keep open to it, rather than to take it for granted… Let's return to Marge Simpson of evidence of this problem.

Having done something powerful for the children in terms of their play in the world, she unwillingly allows them to plug back into the television because she refuses to associate the censorship of children's animation with the censorship of The Statue of David when it arrives in Springfield. This is an excellent analogy of the complex moral and ethical ground in which ideas about play and harm are situated. Morality, for Marge, becomes a problem when ideas about what are good and bad childhood experiences cross a line – and that line is different for everyone. The line in relation to what counts as a 'hygienic' play environment and what counts as good play, is not static, and not universal. It is full of cultural complexity and changes over time. Writers on play including Brian Sutton-Smith have long recognised this ambiguity.

Historians have also long recognised that many stories we tell ourselves about childhood and about play are myths. This does not make them less important, but it does require that we think carefully about what is being forgotten in the urge to imagine the myth as reality.

One myth that operates in *The sacred urge to play* is that there was once a time when everyone in every culture and community allowed their children to play naturally and in nature. However history does not support this myth. In Aotearoa New Zealand, this myth us challenged by our nation's colonial past and present.

According to historian Jamie Belich, in colonial New Zealand, the children of the new British settlers were left to their own devices, and became known as the 'wild colonial child'. The child went, essentially, bush. Imagine this, you've left Victorian England where the majority of children are only beginning to be recognised as beings at all, let alone playing beings, for whom employment starts as soon as you can get down a mine, work on the floor of a loom factory, or get up a chimney… That's the history for working class children, not one of play. This is a history that is deeply connected to many influential precursors to the early childhood sector.

For the families that made the trip to Aotearoa, it's little wonder the children went wild in the new found freedom (although do keep in mind this is still a story, and not a universal one). Now, ironically, at around about the same time, new methods of education are coming out of Europe that argue that children's best education is actually back in nature. This is coming from people like Rousseau and Froebel. The former is listening to stories of travellers and probably admiring the impressions of painters who were at the same time employed to paint paintings that specifically promoted travel to the colonies – and comes to the decision that children need to play in order to unfold naturally, like the happy 'savage', in nature. The latter is widely known for elements of his educational system brought to this country. These elements helped establish the identity of the kindergarten movement. It is important to note that many important elements of his system were not brought over as they were regarded as too radical, so what we got was a watered down set of technologies that are disconnected to the universal method that Frobel developed.

Okay – so over time the colonial settlements become established enough that parents ask, at least according to Belich, 'Hey! Where are the kids?' and then recognise the children have gone back to nature; gone back a bit more than their Victorian colonial aspirations can cope with. The result was the establishment of educational settings to reprogramme the children into civilised beings.

What's the point of telling this story? Children being pulled 'in and out of nature' is not a new thing. The norm is not children's natural play. The norm is the child being industrialised in a technological society. Technology is not an evolutionary anomaly. Brownlee's idea of the evolution of the playing child as being our true human destiny is essentially a hope that evolution of technology is an error that can be interrupted – but perhaps the idea of evolving into some higher planes of humanity is not helpful here.

I am all for switching off the machine. However not on the grounds of an appeal to the same kind of evolutionary thinking that has justified the very same industrial society that has placed immense pressure on producing a particular kind of normal and good child.

Writers like Jayne Osgood (google her!) recognise that thinking about play should move beyond ideas of 'good and bad'. So, while Brownlee is arguing that there's a scientific reason for our morality, Osgood is arguing that there's an aesthetic reason to be sceptical about any universal laws and norms regarding play.

The point here is one what science fiction writer Ursula Le Guin (who is cited in *The Sacred Urge to Play*) recognises in her work: that a society's ideals and norms, when normalising, have a tendency to become forms of oppression. Punishment meted out by inquisitors who have a strict model of utopia in their mind.

Another writer on education and learning worth listening to here is Gert Biesta. He argues for weak rather than strong ideas, recognising that, in this instance, ideas about the nature of play are too complex to be explained by models of brain development (models that tend to avoid the important questions concerning our aims of care and education).

*The sacred urge to play* also highlights another well-known complexity for parents: the search for perfection in which children's live without pain or fear. This is not only an impossibility – it's not entirely desirable. Brownlee highlights the problems of helicopter parenting in a risk society. A paradox becomes evident when we consider that we risk a child's proper development if we do not recognise the value of risk and if we, as the cliché goes, 'bubble wrap the child'. In Aotearoa 'bubble wrapping' has long been a dirty word and perhaps calls on the legacy of that wild child mentioned already. However for other cultures and communities, many of whom who now are important and valued members of Aotearoa New Zealand society, bubble wrapping isn't negative, it's a duty, and not one that is considered to be an abusive restriction of opportunities for development.

It's for this reason that Brian Sutton-Smith talks about play as culturally ambiguous, and necessarily so. Necessarily so, also, because coming up with universal laws regarding' child development and play' runs the risk of exerting the same kind of cultural repression that British colonisation of Aotearoa has been very very very guilty of and has yet to fully recognise, let alone properly address.

Finally, the problem of working conditions is evident in *The Sacred Urge to Play*. Brownlee recognises that economic thinking and economic goals have not been and are not healthy for play. The book provides an argument and recognition of this concern through exploring issues around centre design in particular.

With worldwide concern about the working conditions of teachers in early childhood centres (for instance, this is evident in some of the policy advice coming out of the OECD's Starting Strong research), it's very telling that at the same time there are concerns recognised regarding children's play.

More than this, it's also ironic. There's an irony here because the kind of work environment that resembles the environment advocated for in Brownlee's work, should be an environment in which working conditions enrich the soul, heart and mind. For teachers whose job it is to engage with children's play, we might reasonably imagine them being highly satisfied with their paid employment. But it's quite clearly not the case.

So – is employing this book for a whole centre engagement with children's play also a means to address the issues of teachers' wellbeing and working conditions? I think so.

## Conclusion:

What Brownlee's provocations clearly offer is a comprehensive set of questions and reflections with which to engage in the question of what it means to be an adult, what we want for children, and how our means and our wants impact on the lives of children. As such I think the text is an amazing resource for making sense of our practice, from the perspective of working in an early childhood centre.

*The sacred urge to play* contains a suite of ideas that will enrich any centre from centre design and staffing, to the ways in which planning and evaluation are applied to each child's experiences. I advocate for this book being in the hands of each and every student teacher and I trust that each and every student teacher will, like me, still be thinking about these ideas and values in 25 years' time.

# Contributors

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**Kath Cooper** is a lecturer working for Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand, and based in Wellington. She has a wife, four children, and three mokopuna. Her Master's degree explored the visibility of lesbian early childhood teachers in their centres. Kath is interested in disruptions of discourses, sustainability, infants and toddlers, and learning new things.

**Lia de Vocht** (PhD) is currently the national president of OMEP Aotearoa/ New Zealand. Lia lectures in early years education at the University of Canterbury. Her research interests are social justice, children's agency, teacher-child dialogue and Reggio Emilia approaches.

**Andrew Gibbons** is an early childhood teacher educator and Associate Professor at the School of Education at Auckland University of Technology. He has worked in journalism, in the social services in England and in early childhood education in Auckland. Andrew has a keen interest in philosophy and politics, and these orient his research of early childhood education, and education more generally, to questioning beliefs and practices, and their impact on the experience of being human.

**Janneth Ibanez** has nearly 17 years of experience as an early childhood educator and has a double major in teaching and psychology. Currently Janneth is the Early Childhood Teacher and Second in Charge at Blackfriars Children's Centre, Sydney. Janneth is passionate about utilizing different strategies to effectively engage families and local community in her educational program.

**Dr Valerie Margrain** is a New Zealander who has been an employee of Australian Catholic University since 2012 and wrote this article while employed as a Guest Researcher at Karlstad University in Sweden. Valerie has been a teacher in many capacities, including early childhood education, primary, special education, and pre-service teacher education. Her research interests focus on strength-based assessment in the early years, including inclusive and gifted education, and early literacy.

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