



**NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH**  
TE RŪNANGA O AOTEAROA MŌ TE RANGAHAU I TE MĀTAURANGA

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS TO NZEI TE RIU  
ROA CONFERENCE  
"COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES  
IN THE EARLY YEARS", 4<sup>TH</sup> – 7<sup>TH</sup>  
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**Border crossing. Early childhood and primary  
teachers constructing an education for citizenship**

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Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa  
Nga mihi nui ki a koutou  
E nga mana, e nga reo, e nga hau e wha  
Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena tataua katoa.

It is a privilege to have been invited to participate in this early years conference. I see many familiar friends and colleagues as I look around the hall and there is a lovely sense of being here with people from an organisation I know and respect. I am delighted to contribute to discussion of collaborative approaches in the early years. NZEI is known as a union that maintains itself as part of a wider community, wanting to learn from others as well as contribute to thinking. You have a record of dealing with the hard issues and pushing boundaries to develop new pathways. It's a tribute to you, that you have brought together teachers and support staff from both the early childhood and primary sectors to deepen understanding and influence practice about collaboration. I congratulate NZEI's early childhood national caucus and the primary classroom teachers' advisory group for bringing us together in this conference.

The conference is timely, because there is a great deal of interest in achieving coherence and continuity of education for children from birth to eight years from a policy perspective. There is also governmental interest in improving coherence and co-ordination of services for children. This political interest offers opportunities. Today I want to focus on practice in early childhood centres and schools – on ways of working to strengthen collaboration, participation and understanding among the key adults in children's lives.

## **Children's rights and interests at the heart of policy and practice**

I believe that children's rights and interests should be at the heart of policy and practice because of the importance of children to society and because young children need adults to advocate for their interests. New Zealand's curriculum for early childhood education is a good starting point. Te Whāriki is founded on aspirations for children:

*To grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society.*

The New Zealand Curriculum Framework emphasises a broad education and preparation for the future. It outlines essential learning areas, essential skills and attitudes and values based on principles that *“All young people in New Zealand have the right to gain, through the state schooling system, a broad balanced education that prepares them for effective participation in society”*.

Implicit in these curriculum principles is a desire to work from a perspective of the child as an active learner and co-constructor of knowledge, of children as citizens whose contribution to society now and in the future can be strengthened by participation in high quality schools and early childhood centres.

How can we develop an education that is based on a conception of the competent child, that welcomes and responds to diversity and the contributions of children, families and others to the

curriculum? Recent critiques of the “discourses” of education argue that the knowledge base of the field perpetuates inequalities, prejudices and positions of power, and reduces questions of value to questions of fact (e.g. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999; Cannella, 2000). In this view, a challenge for teachers is to actively create educational goals, critically examine assumptions and open their thinking to multiple perspectives so that early childhood centres and schools can create an education suitable for that time, those people and that place.

Most will be familiar with Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) description of a child’s learning environment as a set of nested systems (like Russian dolls), with the child and the immediate learning environment at the centre. This is influenced by the other levels: the major settings which the child experiences (e.g. the home and early childhood centre and the relationship between them), the adult’s environment in respect to the adult’s capacity to care and educate the child and the nation’s beliefs about early childhood education. The degree to which patterns of interaction and understanding are shared adds to the ability of each system to influence development.

Achieving coherence and continuity in children’s experiences is an issue at all levels of this framework.

I want to discuss some challenges for practice and policy within this context and describe what I have learned about collaborative approaches, by discussing two of my ongoing research studies:

- The first study is of a network of 17 kindergarten teachers who met regularly over a period of a year with me as researcher and Viv Hampton as professional adviser to explore and analyse their teaching practice. Participation in the network seemed to assist teachers to think about assumptions and values, explore teaching and learning within their own kindergartens, start to create new practices and deepen opportunities for others to contribute to the curriculum;
- The second is an NZCER study of sustainable school development in New Zealand. One part of this study was a set of ten case studies of primary schools that had been identified as improving or developing over the last three to five years. I want to highlight one case study that has developed an analytic and reflective culture where collaboration amongst staff and with outside agencies is pivotal to the school’s success in improving student learning.

Both examples illustrate ways in which teachers can work collaboratively from a rights based approach that enables children to be active participants in their own learning and that develops partnerships with families, other education services and community groups. I believe that teachers in schools and early childhood centres can work together in such a collaborative way across sector borders to construct a coherent education focused on the rights and interests of the child.

## The kindergarten teachers' network

My first example is the kindergarten teachers' network. I worked with the teachers' network from April 2000 to May 2001. The teachers were from 6 kindergartens in the Wellington Region Free Kindergarten Association and met with the senior teacher and me about once a month over this time. We used the network to experiment with tools of pedagogical documentation, plan the use and analysis of documentation, present, analyse and discuss documented examples of teaching practice, and become involved in reading and discussion of papers and other material. We were lucky also to have a special workshop with Gunilla Dahlberg, Professor of Education at the Stockholm Institute of Education, who has done similar work with a network of pedagogues in Stockholm.

This was the first phase of my PhD study, which is aimed at generating reflective, critical thinking and discussion about the role and work of early childhood centres. I'm intending to explore thinking and discussion in three sites: the kindergarten teachers' network; a focus group of government officials and early childhood organisation representatives; and participants in public forums. The focus group meetings are planned for later in the year to discuss themes relating to teaching and learning that have emerged from the teachers' network.

In this presentation, I'm going to highlight one of the themes that flowed through the network discussions and could be drawn from the network experience. This is "building a democratic learning community". I also want to talk about the value of collaborating in a teachers' network.

The starting point for the network and the foundation for our work was:

- that we would use pedagogical documentation to document teaching and learning and discuss this with others in the network
- that we would work from Te Whariki's aspirations for children and a perspective of the child as "rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and most of all connected to adults" (Malaguzzi, 1993, p.10).

We used Dahlberg, Moss and Pence's description of pedagogical documentation as a process and as a content in that process.

Pedagogical documentation as content is:

*material which records what the children are saying and doing, the work of the children, and how the pedagogue relates to their work. This material can be produced in many forms – for example, hand written notes of what is said and done, audio recordings and video camera recordings, still photographs, computer graphics, children's work itself. . . . This material makes the pedagogical work concrete and visible (or audible), and as such is an essential ingredient for the process of pedagogical documentation.*

*This process involves the use of that material as a means to reflect upon the pedagogical work and to do so in a very rigorous, methodical and democratic way. That reflection will be done by the pedagogue alone and by the pedagogue in relationship with others – other pedagogues,*

*pedagogistas, the children themselves, their parents, politicians (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999, pp.147–148).*

Pedagogical documentation provided tools to make visible teaching and learning within the 6 kindergartens. The regular network meetings offered a forum to discuss the documented practice with a wider group of teachers. At many network meetings, in addition to pedagogical documentation, we discussed articles, a video or a theme of interest. We aimed to build a critical professional community where teachers could reflect on their teaching, offering each other ideas, challenges and support. I think it took some bravery for the teachers to volunteer and be open to discussing their work with others. But the benefits were very great.

The network experience seemed to assist teachers to step out of their shoes and “see with other eyes”. As our network teachers became more used to each other and open about discussing their work, our focus on documentation and our analysis from the perspective of the child sharpened our insight into the role of early childhood education. We started to see and analyse work in kindergartens as “democracy in action” or kindergartens as a democratic learning community.

#### *Theme One: Building a democratic learning community*

Taking into account multiple perspectives and negotiation are ways in which kindergartens incorporate democratic ideals and operate as learning communities. Sue and Anne (teachers) gave an example of how this can happen. They described their kindergarten philosophy as “Whanau, tamariki, kaiako. Working together to create an environment for learning, where the mana of each child is nurtured.” The teachers value children’s opinions. They regard all children as competent and believe it important that the children see themselves as competent. They try to make the kindergarten open to the community and they believe children should be responsible for the environment. Their beliefs flow into their practice.

Within the local community are a host of people and “identities”, all of whom had been involved in the kindergarten and held significance: children, teachers/kaiako, a “carpentry tutor/builder/ interior designer,” whanau, the local garden centre staff, cleaners, council workers, the local journalist, the teachers’ families, neighbours and kindergarten “identities”, Mrs Heihei (the hen) and the guinea pigs.

One of their projects has spanned several years and become a tradition – making concrete. Concrete is a part of this kindergarten community. There is a concrete works where some of the parents are employed and quite a few kindergarten children have experienced concrete making at home. The story began in 1998 when three boys became deeply interested in making concrete in the sandpit-mixing water with sand and carting it in their trucks to pat into place.



Teachers used this evident interest to talk with children about concrete – a dad making a concrete path, a man making concrete blocks for the barbecue. How did it hold together? Teachers and children discussed. They decided to make real concrete. There was lots of talk about what they could make. It was a project that reached out into the community. Teachers and children went out looking at walls.



Children and teachers out looking at walls, photographing walls, drawing walls, asking their families about walls.

They decided to make a low wall with a wooden top they could sit on at morning tea time. A teacher had a wheelbarrow for mixing. A local garden donated tomato boxes for boxing.



They needed to measure out quantities. One part concrete, 3 parts sand and water.

Building the wall.







Parents helped un mould the blocks and others helped cement them in place.

The local reporter visited and wrote a story. Her story headlines: “The great kiwi tradition of ‘do it yourself’ is alive and well at Otaki kindergarten!”

The same kindergarten in 1999. Children were working to resolve a problem in the sand pit. There were gaps in the edging and the sand kept falling out. They had a meeting and remembered the concrete. They took two days to dig a trench.





Digging the trench.



The boxing. Max (centre) contributed a plan on how to make the boxing for concrete stand up: he had seen this done at home.

In the year 2000, a new concrete path was being built outside the kindergarten.



*A new footpath for Waerenga Road. "It goes down, down, down".*



*Just when we were deciding to do more work on our path –the Council decided to make a new footpath right outside the kindergarten. A real opportunity to see work in progress. We looked and drew pictures and talked about what was happening*



*The day we went to see the boxing that's ready for the concrete.*



*Boxing – Otaki kindergarten fashion.*



*We made some more boxing for our path. The pile of pipi shells we used to decorate it. (It had been good tides the week before and koro Moffatt gave us a big bucket of pipi – lots of children enjoyed them – some trying them for the first time).*

In the year 2001, I felt another concrete project coming on. There's a whole lot of pot-holes in the roadway leading up to the kindergarten. As Anne said, 'The children haven't talked about potholes or anything but we'll make them aware because it's part of the environment. Their cars pull up there every day. It's making the children responsible for their environment as well'.

There was lots of learning happening here. The events or projects involved mathematical problem solving, sharing, dividing, measuring and estimating quantities.

Children were teaching each other and the adults too. Remember the boy who showed how to keep the boxing upright?

Children were recollecting and going back over previous learning. We call this "metacognition" because children are thinking about their own thinking and using their thinking in a new situation. This is often non-tangible, because unless you know the past context you may not be aware it is happening. It's another reason why documentation is helpful – as something to return to – and why links between children's lives are so important.

In doing this and other projects, there's a lovely sense of interdependence as children and adults work together, collaborate and rely on each other. Children and adults listened and negotiated, coming to agreements, sharing and learning skills. Roles were shared. Some children gave ideas on how to do things, others were doers – getting into the thick of concreting. Children's theories were respected. The kindergarten itself was a community operating on democratic principles. As well, it involved collaboration with the wider community – the council workers making the concrete path, the reporter who took the photo and wrote the story, the garden shop that donated the tomato boxes, the teacher who brought her wheelbarrow from home, the parents who came and helped.

At the 1998 international conference, "The city of the possible", held in Naples, Bruner (1998) spoke about the admiration in which he held Gian Battista Vico and Vico's recognition of ways in which human beings both live in reality and create the reality in which they live. Childhood is one arena, he argued, in which we can make it possible to create a world. He reflected on views coming through the conference that "having a sense of place, knowing where you are, somehow helps you develop a sense of your own personal identity, your uniqueness, as well as your place in the world".

I was struck by the similarity here with one of the three goals for education outlined by Mason Durie at Hui Taumata Matauranga in March 2001- that education should enable Maori to live as Maori, by having access to te ao Maori, the Maori world. Access to language, culture, marae, resources such as land, tikanga, whanau, kaimoana. "To the extent that the purpose of education is to prepare people for participation in society, it needs to be remembered that participation in Maori society is also required. If after twelve or so years of formal education a Maori youth was totally unprepared to interact within te ao Maori, then no matter what else had been learned education would be incomplete".

The children at this kindergarten were creating their own local culture and building traditions that were to continue. Children were developing a “sense of agency” (Bruner, 1998, p.6), as they worked on meaningful projects that they had planned, developed themselves and succeeded in doing well.

If we look now at the first photograph we no longer see three boys mucking around with sand and water. It’s the beginning of a fantastic journey and we have the privilege of knowing about it because it’s been documented.

### *Theme Two: Network as a forum for reflective discussion*

I want to talk briefly about some of the ways in which the network was used by teachers as a forum for reflective discussion. This experience seemed to assist teachers to step out of their shoes and see with other eyes. Through the process of documentation and critical discussion in the network, teachers began to more clearly recognize and be able to take into account others’ perspectives. These were the perspectives of children, of parents and of each other. Teachers started to use those perspectives in their teaching to a greater extent than they had done before.

Documenting, displaying the documentation and talking about it with others helped teachers to critically examine children’s perspectives. As Jenny said,

*So documentation for me, it really forces me to do the thinking and documenting about who [the children] are with, what they are doing, what they are interested in.*

She said that in the past she had never really questioned how she wrote observations and how she analysed them. She said she had used categories from child development that she had learned in her training to analyse child observations. She felt that to some extent this hindered her from making new understandings and masked some ways in which less powerful perspectives were represented. She and the other teachers at her kindergarten felt that they had tended to see things from an adult perspective even though they thought they were being “child centred”.

Discussion of new ideas and support to make sense of these in relation to practice seemed to assist teachers to recognise their own biases and to encourage experimentation with new ways of acting. These insights led the East Harbour Kindergarten teacher team to work with children in “empowering” ways. Jenny described this changed approach when a new fence needed to be built at her kindergarten. The new approach had also been stimulated by discussing Anne and Sue’s work on the concreting project.

*We’re starting to get into more group projects. And I’m changing my thinking so much in that we are getting a fence built and before I’d have been ringing up a builder to get a fence built. I’ve shifted my thinking. Well actually, we shouldn’t be asking a builder. We should be asking the children to build the fence.*

Like the concrete project, this teacher team worked with children to bring in ideas from the community and home. The association builder came and was introduced to a planning group of children to hear and discuss how he could work with them and incorporate their ideas.

Jenny's thinking here about the influence of child development theories reflects some postmodern ideas that these theories can play such a dominant role they can detract from consideration of socio-cultural effects. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999, p. 36), for example, write,

*Theories used to describe children's development have a tendency to start functioning as if they were 'true models of reality, becoming a kind of abstract map spread over the actual territory of children's development and upbringing. Instead of being seen as socially constructed representations of a complex reality, one selected way of how to describe the world, these theories seem to become the territory itself. By drawing and relying on these abstract maps of children's lives, and thus decontextualising the child, we lose sight of children and their lives: their concrete experiences, their actual capabilities, their theories, feelings and hopes.*

The process of documentation enabled the teachers to delve more deeply into their own way of thinking and acting.

A common experience was to feel shaken up by the discussions and to start to re-think fundamental ideas as we see in the next example.

Jeanne said network discussions were a catalyst for the Maraeroa kindergarten team to think about the purpose of education and to take a holistic approach that brought together goals, teacher interactions and the environment.

*It got us right back to the question of "What do we think we are doing?" "What have we as teachers to contribute?" "What is the environment?" That brought us right back to square one. Not this impact, that impact. (Jeanne, Network Meeting 4, July 2000)*

There is an impression of a more analytic approach to teaching and learning founded on thinking about broad goals for education. Teachers were starting to explore for wider meaning, things that they had taken for granted. David Stewart (2000), writing about New Zealand school principals who were engaged in a principals' mentoring group, noted the importance of shifts in thinking. "It was an accepted maxim that 'You best change what teachers do by changing the way they think about what they do'" (p.149). Network teachers said that discussion of their own pedagogical documentation and that of others, and the stimulation of speakers and readings were all valuable. Some said they had not accessed readings to such an extent before. What was crucial was the talking, thinking and critiquing of ideas in respect to individual values and contexts.

Another example shows how actively seeking the perspectives of parents and analysing what is happening at kindergarten can bring new insights about the child's experiences. Hataitai kindergarten undertook a project on children's use of mobilo. The teachers wanted to understand why it was so popular and also how children were using it. They made a video, took photos, surveyed parents and asked parents to interview their children. The teachers and the parents learned

some unexpected things in the child interviews. One of the parents had asked her daughter, “Do you like playing with mobilo?” and the answer came back, “Yes but the boys won’t let me.” As Coleen (teacher) said, “That was really good because we didn’t realize, hadn’t seen it or heard it. And ... it hadn’t come up at home until the parent asked the question”.

The teachers then worked with the girl to help her become more assertive and achieve what she wanted to do.

These are some snapshots illustrating some of the value of networks and using pedagogical documentation. In summary, teachers identified a range of purposes of documentation:

- to question assumptions, values and beliefs about broader goals of education;
- to open up the process of teaching and learning for critical analysis. Teachers regarded pedagogical documentation as valuable for getting to know children because it encouraged them to focus on individuals, use understanding of children in planning, examine inequities and ensure that all children were given attention;
- to share with others and so create opportunities for others to contribute to the curriculum;
- to celebrate the kindergarten by offering a “window” for the community to see what happens in the kindergarten, programme or curriculum;
- to provide opportunities for children to reflect on their own activities.

## **School case study**

The sense of excitement I have, and of course it is not surprising, is that similar insights about developing learning communities and the value of professional development and collaboration are emerging from our work on school development in the schools sector.

The school case study shows how a broader view of education was achieved in one school. Like the kindergarten teachers network, it showed how analysis, collaboration and discussion could assist teachers to think deeply about individual students and build an education based on their interests and needs. In this school, teachers worked from a perspective of their students as co-constructors of learning.

In this school, we interviewed five teachers, including the literacy and science leaders, the principal, two support staff members, a group of parents and the board chair. We also gathered documentation and surveyed all staff and year 4 and year 6 or 8 students to get their views of their school.

The School is a decile 2 school in a suburban area. The school philosophy is described in the information booklet:

*Our first priority is to give children a solid grounding in the basic literacy, oracy and numeracy skills. Our second priority is to build on that foundation, providing activities that will challenge and stimulate children. We want our children to leave with:*



- *positive attitudes about themselves and others*
- *good interpersonal skills*
- *and the ability to operate successfully in the modern world.*

What does this school “really value?” All staff emphasised that the school values literacy. Their view was summed up by the senior teacher, “If you can read and write, the door is open to you”. Other curriculum areas singled out were numeracy, health and PE. Some staff also described the school’s commitment to skills for active, long-term learning and social skills. As the assistant principal said “In detail, giving them skills to be academics, to research information, to solve problems and to question. This is more than just teaching them to read and write. Also to have a social commitment. They are part of society and have roles and responsibilities to class, school and community”.

There was a culture of high expectations and belief that every child can learn. School values were developed through a lot of discussion. The assistant principal described development of school values as “A shift in believing not ‘Poor Sarah, I’ll give her a cuddle’, but ‘Let’s give her a cuddle, feed her, give her skills she can use’”. We saw evidence of this approach in the school’s behaviour management programme which emphasised students developing understanding and responsibility for their actions, in the approach to feedback which involved students in critiquing their own work and in work with parents which acknowledged parents’ skills and desire to help their children.

Significant change in this school in the last three or four years appears to be strengthening of its reflective culture, collaboration between teachers and a sharp focus on analysis, action and evaluation to improve student achievement. This is most evident in its work on literacy where the school has been part of the Ministry of Education’s Literacy Enhancement Project, but teacher analysis of student work and teaching approaches, discussion, collective planning and school – wide action are evident in most areas of curriculum work. I want to describe the approach to literacy as an example of the approach.

The first aspect to be critically examined and addressed was the school’s work with students with reading difficulties where the high number of students requiring Reading Recovery programmes had pinpointed the need for students to gain a higher level of reading skills early in their schooling. The literacy leader arranged for an education consultant to run two workshops for all the staff and this revealed important thing about how the school was assessing skills:

- teachers did not all have the skills to analyse students’ reading skills;
- students were scoring low on the Six Year Net writing vocabulary assessment for “recording of words”. However, after a visit and discussion with teachers in another school, the literacy leader realised that the school was administering the Six Year Net wrongly, so that students were scoring lower than their actual level. Clear instructions were not given so administration of the assessment was open to interpretation. That’s a cautionary tale.
- students’ scores depended on what book was being used.

Consideration of these issues led the school to focus on assessment and develop its own benchmarks. But as the literacy leader said, “Doing all that made a huge difference. Analysing is fine, but what do we do with the results?”

The school therefore already had a commitment to literacy when at this time it joined the Ministry of Education’s Literacy Enhancement Project. The education consultant who had worked with them for the Reading Recovery programme was also the project’s literacy leadership facilitator. The school’s first task on joining the project was “to fine tune the school’s literacy vision” in a weekend workshop in mid 2000. This led to the school’s vision statement “Student achievement in literacy will be enhanced across the school”.

Staff reviewed reading and writing across the whole school and on this basis identified writing as the priority. They developed specific aims:

- to develop a collaborative belief about what is good writing and about the strengths and weaknesses of current approaches and programmes;
- to develop a school wide approach to planning, implementing and assessing student writing;
- to upskill teaching staff so that children’s skills in writing would be enhanced.

The external literacy facilitator then recommended an initial set of goals and strategies. Staff development needs were identified through a teacher questionnaire (e.g. identify three factors that you are particularly happy with, identify three factors that you would like to work on/develop). The big issues at this time were teaching revision and editing, modeling good writing and giving effective feedback.

Teachers all understood their strengths and weaknesses and went away to work on these in the identified areas.

In 2001, the school focused on assessing student writing. The school’s approach to assessment was to:

- develop school-wide achievement objectives for written language levels and criteria. Criteria were specific, covering what most students would know or be able to do, what the best of writing would include and teaching strategies for each level. “It took a term for teachers to get to grips with this as a whole school”.
- collect data for school-wide analysis. “We think we have a problem but how do we know?” This was done through a writing task with the same set of teacher directions for all students following a common experience – a trip to the beach.
- assess work against school expectations in Term 1 2001. Work was first marked against criteria by teachers at syndicate level and then moderated by the school’s literacy leader and the external literacy facilitator.
- analyse each set of writing (271 students). This was done by the external facilitator.

The analysis showed that students in the junior school were achieving at a significantly higher level than students in the middle/senior school, especially at Years 5 and 6. Thirty four percent of students

were under-achieving at a very significant level. There were gender and ethnic differences. Although achievement results were worse at Years 4 to 6, responsibility for these results was shared by all teachers. There was an effort to take a “no blame” approach. “Every teacher contributed to the differences”.

Measures to support teachers in their teaching of written language were:

- time for talking about written language at staff meetings, syndicate meetings and in the staff room (this feature continued throughout the project and was noticeable when we visited the school);
- using a “buddy” system for new teachers so they were brought on board;
- whole school workshops on good classroom practice;
- observation by the external literacy facilitator of each teacher on the teacher’s selected aspect of work;
- discussion by the teacher and external facilitator of strengths and areas for development;
- further observations by the external literacy facilitator in the next term. “He came back and affirmed what they had moved in. Teachers couldn’t wait to show”. (Literacy Leader);
- teachers’ self-assessments;
- modeling by the external facilitator.

Through giving good feedback students were brought into the analytic process. Teachers acknowledged written work and explained to the student group why it was good. Teachers were explicit about what they expected to see at each level and what students needed to work on. The literacy leader said, “We are very clear about what is effective feedback. Not, ‘Oh cool, that is great,’ sort of rubbish”.

At the same time, a consistent approach to planning was being developed across the school through two staff workshops (led by the external facilitator) and follow up workshops (led by the literacy leader).

In the next year the external facilitator “will be weaned off”. The school plans to revise its work on written language and end the year with an evaluation. It has done some work with parents: including samples of students’ writing in the weekly newsletter and “home hints” for parents on what to do with writing. The school plans to do more work with parents and hold community meetings, develop writing portfolios for parents and ideas on activities parents can do with their children. “Parents want to help. They don’t know what to do”. (Literacy Leader).

Parents themselves echoed the literacy leader’s views. “Teachers are very positive and try to give positive feedback, but we really want to know so we can help. We don’t want teachers to be gilding the lily. As a parent I would be interested in how well my child is doing”.

The principal also emphasised the importance of a useful and meaningful approach to parent reporting. “Reports reflect on the school and on the teacher and must be done professionally. They need to be meaningful, show where the student is at and where to go. There should be a person in

there". The sample of reports that we saw were detailed with clear information about what work the school is doing in curriculum areas, the student's attitudes to learning and capabilities, achievement levels, specific strengths and goals, as well as capturing the student's personality.

In a milestone report (October 2001), the literacy leader wrote, "While it is too soon to evaluate the impact of the literacy initiatives, teachers report a noticeable improvement in students' writing ability". She thought there was also an impact on teaching methods, being critical about what resources to purchase, assessment and "knowing where every child is at", evaluating work and ensuring school funding is spent on the right things. She said that it is often now spent on teacher release for professional development.

Several teachers said that planning levels and collection of data had improved in other curriculum areas. Methods of observation of teaching, giving feedback and role modeling are not confined to work on the literacy project: they are common approaches to professional development throughout the school.

## CONCLUSION

Both the school and kindergarten teachers' network offered forums, as well as tools, processes and professional support for teachers to critically analyse, reflect on and appraise the goals of education, their own beliefs, own values and own practice. In doing this they were able to open up the curriculum for the involvement of parents, and for children to take an active and reflective approach to their own learning. At the heart of this way of working is an understanding that education is a generative activity that is constructed and re-constructed in different times and different places by different participants.

Elliot Eisner (1985, p.363) wrote that the orientation among curriculum theorists and administrators has been to "develop a scientifically based technology of curriculum and teaching". This would leave little to chance and bypass the judgements, interpretations and "artistry" that he thinks are crucial in teaching. The teachers in both these studies applauded artistry and their participation showed their commitment to exploring complexity and difference.

There seemed to be common elements in both settings that enabled teachers to collaborate. Teachers were willing to acknowledge their own and each others' strengths and learn from each other. They were willing to take risks. Teachers had opportunities within their work environment for analysis, experimentation, documentation and planning. There was time and space for critical discussion with colleagues about data or documentation, professional support from readings and opportunities to work with professional advisers. There was a school-wide or kindergarten-wide approach. It was demanding work, and teachers working in this way pushed their own boundaries.

I believe that professional renewal should be a key objective for those involved in education. This requires attention to a work environment that can offer "intellectual space" to foster professional growth and debate.

On a practical level this could mean:

- physical conditions and materials to enable documentation and data collection and discussion ;
- access to professional advisers who are able to work in the school or centre as well as with wider groups;
- a research community that engages with teachers in useful discussion of research and thinking about educational practice and theoretical ideas;
- staff to have time during the working week for reflection and discussion;
- management who take responsibility for ongoing professional development;
- teachers who place a high priority on their professional growth.

I believe that a significant challenge is for teachers in schools and early childhood centres to cross their sector borders and work together to construct an education for the child as citizen. By learning

from each other and working in partnership, we could create educational worlds that build on each other, that create continuities and coherence for children between these settings, that are enriched by the skills and knowledge that teachers from both sectors bring. This conference represents collaboration between teachers in both sectors at a national level. Teachers in schools and early childhood centres within local communities can work together to share their beliefs and goals, teaching and learning practices and curriculum and more closely match their settings. In this way they will enrich their educational programmes and enhance children's learning and well-being over the transition.

No reira, tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.

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