

BOOK REVIEW

Joce Nuttall (Ed.). (2013). *Weaving Te Whāriki: Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum document in theory and practice*. 2nd edition. Wellington: NZCER Press. ISBN: 978-1-927151-81-5

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The second edition of *Weaving Te Whāriki* is a thoroughly welcome addition to curriculum theorising and scholarship in New Zealand. It is also a timely one. Now, 20 years since the draft of the curriculum was released for implementation in 1993 and 10 years since the first edition of *Weaving Te Whāriki*, a great deal of critical interpretive and implementation work has been taking place. As our engagements with *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) have matured, so has the breadth of possible conceptual and theoretical understandings. This book goes a long way to documenting these shifts in theory and in practice.

Weaving Te Whāriki has grown from an original 10 chapters to 14 with all the original contributions retained and, in most cases, revised, reoriented, and expanded. The book retains its original sequencing structure, beginning with historical and cultural perspectives on the curriculum, moving to more topic-based collection of chapters, before concluding with commentary on *Te Whāriki* in the context of international curricula developments and New Zealand's changing political terrain. As a collection the book touches on curriculum policy design, aspiration, and implementation.

The additions to Sarah Te One's historical chapter reflect the present-day political climate for early childhood education. It comments on the recently changed and arguably reductive policy emphases for early childhood education; and it recognises questions over the variable quality of curriculum implementation. Contestation over the strength of the curriculum is voiced. Te One notes that some describe this strength in the pejorative, as dominance. However, this emerging critique is viewed by Te One as a sign of *Te Whāriki*'s good health (p. 27). Lady Tilly Reedy's account of te ao Māori concepts central to curriculum remains

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intact. As a touchstone chapter for more fully appreciating the conceptual interplays between te reo Māori and English texts of the curriculum, this contribution remains a significant one. A chapter from Diane Mara follows; it adds perspectives from New Zealand resident Pacific communities to the discussion of New Zealand early childhood education and its curriculum. Challenges for practice therein touch on how Pasifika cultural knowledge paradigms might be accessed and made visible with early childhood education. Recognising the centrality of spirituality to Pasifika community concerns and the necessity for sustainable policy, finding approaches to early childhood education that are supportive of the pan-Pacific notion of *va*¹ is also a major feature of Mara's arguments.

The book moves from these historical and cultural accounts of the curriculum to a more issues-based focus in the next seven chapters. Carol Mutch and Bev Trim's chapter gazes through improvement, accountability, and sustainability lenses to examine how expectations of schooling and early childhood education have been and are being produced through different ideological forces. They paint a complex and sometimes conflicting picture, but return to each of the present curriculum policies (*Te Whāriki* and *The New Zealand Curriculum (NZC)* (Ministry of Education, 2007)) to argue that a sufficiently robust and rigorous platform for progressive and future looking education exists.

Jayne White and Carl Mika provide an opportunity to consider how the full range of *Te Whāriki*'s texts construe children aged under 3; and what this might mean for pedagogies and teachers' practices. By discussing the curriculum from perspectives of both English and te reo Māori texts, and arguing for a more metaphysical reading of the curriculum, this chapter offers an appreciation of the radical transformative potential of *Te Whāriki* in the context of infant and toddler education and care. A stronger focus on inclusive education as a global human right and social justice issue is advanced in Bernadette Macartney, Kerry Purdue, and Jude MacArthur's chapter about children with disabilities and their families. Here, the authors revisit teaching stories as a tool for bridging the rhetoric of inclusion to practice. A welcome inclusion to the discussion, this mode of pedagogical documentation is shown to offer educators much scope for theorising and relativising their practice. In doing so, it demonstrates

teachers, children, and families making connections that support their rights to belong.

In this second edition of *Weaving Te Whāriki* Jenny Ritchie is able to move her original discussion of how the curriculum articulated a promise of biculturalism to an account of how bicultural curriculum is being enacted every day. By examining educators' focused practices towards socially, culturally, and ecologically sustainable early childhood education, Ritchie demonstrates both difficulty and success as *Te Whāriki*'s commitment to te Tiriti o Waitangi is taken up and worked on. Karen Ramsey, Wendy Lee, and Margaret Carr's chapter extends their previous case study of teacher change to show how a learning community, over an extended period (1998–2008) was able to engage with and transform assessment for learning practices. Within the case, they theorise the professional learning that occurred relative to best-practice models and they show how the take up of formative assessment resulted in partnership models of practice within teaching and learning. The chapter foregrounds the temporal aspect of curriculum transformation and implementation; it takes time for conceptual and practical shifts to align.

Joce Nuttall's reporting of a study exploring the enacted curriculum² in a long-day childcare centre provides an opportunity to discuss aspects of the sociocultural framings of *Te Whāriki*. Attention is given to the function of particular cultural tools that teachers drew on as they explained their work; and the challenges of co-construction as a mode of pedagogy within early childhood curriculum. Sally Peters and Vanessa Paki attend to the alignments between *Te Whāriki* and NZC; specifically, how these can be used to work in the interests of children's transitions to school. Focused on principles of curriculum, and on articulating these from the perspective of a Māori worldview, the chapter recognises the important contribution of *Te Whāriki* for life-long learning in early childhood education and beyond.

Since the release of *Te Whāriki* and the first edition of this book there has been an incredible upsurge in curriculum development for early years education the world over. Accordingly, there are now three chapters in *Weaving Te Whāriki* that consider the New Zealand curriculum in the international context. Each acknowledges the immense contribution of the

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New Zealand policy to early years curriculum thinking and practice; they also ask critical questions of our policy and aspects of its implementation. Beginning with Marilyn Fleer, the provocative question of whether the New Zealand curriculum document is becoming dated is posed. Fleer's analysis compares the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of *Te Whāriki* with those of Australia's Early Years Learning Framework (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009). In Stig Broström's chapter the question becomes, in the context of the potential of early childhood education to practice a critical Didaktik,³ what kind of curriculum understanding does *Te Whāriki* express? And Elizabeth Wood ponders discourses of "play" in *Te Whāriki* and England's Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum (Department for Education, 2012). She asks, what does it mean for curriculum interpretation and implementation when multiple and contrary discourses circulate and compete for attention at one and the same time? The book's concluding chapter, written by Helen Hedges, theorises about how *Te Whāriki* might continue to promulgate positive change in early childhood education in Aotearoa within the current political climate. Hedges carries an argument across the chapter about the critical importance of skilled, knowledgeable, and expert adults, if *Te Whāriki*'s promises are to be sustained for future generations. It is a somewhat sobering message, given policy shifts and stances by the present Minister of Education and Ministry on initial teacher education and qualification standards in early childhood education.

As a collection, this book's chapters work to show how complex a field curriculum, its theory, and its scholarship can be. Centred on a single policy, there is rich scholarly engagement and wide critical debate within this book. It keeps pace with the expansive readings made possible by a curriculum that has only ever been aspirational and principled in design. I have found this second edition of *Weaving Te Whāriki* to be a much more difficult and complex text than its predecessor. I welcomed this. The book seems less an introduction to *Te Whāriki* and more an account of the diversity and complexity of policy interpretation and implementation in this postmodern era. The book seems to celebrate the multiplicity of possible readings of the texts of the curriculum. In the process it lives what *Te Whāriki* defended at the outset—a space or place upon which all can stand. This won't suit the reader who wants a simple and single

account of the curriculum and its implementations, but it will certainly help teachers, students, and scholars to attend to more complex and nuanced interpretations of the curriculum's promise.

Notes

- 1 In a description of the metaphor Teu Le Va, Mara describes “va” or “va’a”, or “vaha” as a concept reflective of “a space that transcends a physical dimension or construct ... [but which is] characterized as a place or space or site of action in which productive social relationships are enacted” (p. 61).
- 2 Nuttall explains that in the curriculum literature, enacted curriculum is explained as that which actually happens and is differentiated from that which is proposed (e.g., a policy or plan), and that which is experienced (by a learner).
- 3 Broström explains the term ‘Didaktik’ to be a German one akin to ‘curriculum’ but taking a broader liberal-political perspective emphasising children’s agency and democracy.

References

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