Comment

The articles in this issue of *Early Childhood Folio* explore and critique pedagogical practice, and offer different possibilities for engaging with children, families/whānau, communities, and iwi. In three of the articles, written from a Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) project, relationships with the land and people are an emphasis. These authors draw attention to the significance and deep body of Māori knowledge and understandings of place, taken furthest in Tiria Shaw and Hoana McMillan's article from Te Kōhanga Reo ki Rotokawa. Experiences and practices for connecting with the land and with Māori knowledge will be of much interest to teachers/kaiako wanting to extend in these ways. Provocations for teachers/kaiako to develop a critical mindset in relation to their own thinking and practice were underlying themes of several articles: about their own cultural lens and family funds of knowledge (Irajzad), about intentional teaching (Cameron and Ransom), and about inclusion of autistic children (Higginson). The value of focused PLD, wānanga, and research involvement were highlighted. In combination, the articles signal directions that might promote challenges to taken-for-granted practice and support an enriched, inclusive, and bicultural environment for all children and families. Of course, policy frameworks that are out of sync with these directions need also to be challenged, but were not the subject of this issue.

In an article deriving from her doctoral research, Mehri Irajzad explores Middle Eastern parents' expectations and their children's experiences of the New Zealand early education system from the perspectives of four early childhood teachers. The teachers were participants in case study early childhood centres. Mehri draws on critical multiculturalism and funds of knowledge as theoretical framings for her analysis, which delves into teachers' responses to parents' expectations and the underlying factors that influence their receptiveness to those expectations. Her analysis highlights four main themes that are important to Middle Eastern parents, according to teachers. These themes and teachers' responses to them are elaborated under the headings, "Academic skill development", "Messy play", "Eating and drinking", and "Nappy changing and modest clothing for girls". Notable and provocative in the findings is that for each of the first three themes, all but one of the teachers focused on explaining the philosophy and values of *Te Whāriki* and their own practice, without showing any indication that they wanted to bridge a gap between these values and parental expectations. The exception was in respect to the theme "Nappy changing and modest clothing for girls", where these same teachers conveyed an openness to respecting parent wishes and aligning their practice to these beliefs, even though this was contrary to their own beliefs and practices. Mehri's interpretation is that teachers' understanding of the reasons for parental values offered a pathway for teachers to transform their practice in ways that respected parent wishes. Mehri juxtaposed the responses of the three teachers, with those of a fourth, who for each theme, challenged the dominant discourses, listened carefully to the parents and showed willingness to negotiate differences. This is a provocative article that demonstrates the primacy of taken-for-granted "dominant early childhood discourses and Western/individualistic notions of good child-rearing" in teacher thinking and practice. It offers a persuasive argument for teachers to 'cultivate a stance of criticality of their own cultural lens' and to incorporate families' funds of knowledge within the curriculum.

Three articles were written by teachers/kaiako who are participants in the TLRI project Renewing Participatory Democracy: Walking with Young Children to Story and Read the Land (Mitchell et al., 2019). The project explores the affordances for young children in three early childhood settings of walking, reading, and storying the land with whānau, iwi, and community members for developing reciprocal relationships with land and with people. Through local haerenga (trips), children can find out about and build on Māori and community knowledge, and experience what it means to act in a democratic community. Consistent with TLRI philosophy, teachers/kaiako were participants in planning, analysis, and writing in collaboration with the University of Waikato researchers. Most of the teachers/kaiako who authored these articles took part in a 1-day workshop with researchers as they wrote their drafts.

Te Kōhanga Reo ki Rotokawa, working within the curriculum framework of *Te Whāriki a te Kōhanga Reo*, builds and sustains connections for tamariki with ancestral whenua/hapū/iwi, including through pepeha and kōhanga whānau visiting the marae, maunga, and awa of tamariki. Strengthening mana in relation to "te katoa o te tamaiti" and affirming Māori identity, are crucial aspirations. Tiria

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Shaw and Hoana McMillan argue that "In te ao Māori our connection to our maunga and physical landmarks speak to who we are as a people. Our maunga are also a source of inspiration and direction." Their article, "Finding Ourselves: E Hoki Koe ki ō Maunga Kia Purea Koe e Ngā Hau a Tāwhirimātea", discusses the significance of maunga, conveyed through historical accounts of iwi that include messages of geography, love, and loss. Tiria and Hoana also discuss whakatauki connected with maunga that "help inspire and guide us in our journey through life. Some of these whakatauki remind Māori of who they are, and Māori ways of knowing and being." Their introduction enables an appreciation of the symbolism of maunga and some understanding of the role of maunga in strengthening identity and transformative change. The article then turns to data gathered through the research project of experiences of one whānau who joined one of the haerenga to Mauao, the ancestral mountain of two mokopuna, and who took part in subsequent wānanga. Their journey is represented through pūrākau, drawing on imagery depicting haerenga experiences, connections with land, growth and change in the journey from the base of the mountain ("te pūtake"), through the climb ("te piki i te maunga") to the summit ("te tihi o te maunga"). The article illuminates Māori understandings of cultural landmarks and the value of holding a community vision. It offers encouragement for teachers/kaiako in early childhood services to connect with the land and learn about and with others.

Teachers from Maunganui Kindergarten wrote the article, "From the Shallows to the Deep—Connecting to Mauao with Head and Heart". Their article has interesting linkages with Tiria and Hoana's article: it discusses the teachers' journey in making connections with tangata whenua, in realising the power of the natural world and connections with it, and transformations in the way teachers and children viewed and engaged with Mauao, the kindergarten's local maunga. The teachers use Durie's (1998) Māori health model, te whare tapa whā, to frame their discussion of their learning, the changes made to their practice and the impacts that they noticed. Their process of gaining understanding and making changes "did not come naturally or quickly". Teachers described coming across "conflicts of values, viewpoints, and ways of knowing that made us come face to face with our own cultural ways, thoughts, assumptions which are steeped in our colonial roots. From the initial emotion of humility, emerged a developing comfort with the notion of vulnerability and growth." Teachers reported being encouraged and "pushed" through professional development and particularly through being part of the research project. Their story exemplifies some of the attitudes of mind, openness, reflexivity, and quest for understanding that characterise the "practitioner as researcher", a term used by Peter Moss (2006, pp. 36–37).

The third article from the project, "Hidden Stories of our Landscapes: Walking and Mapping the Land with Children", discusses project work particularly involving collaborative story-telling and art-based pedagogy, that were linked to the regular weekly walks the children of Pakuranga Baptist Kindergarten take around their local Tāmaki Estuary. The teachers describe themselves as being committed to an inquiry-based approach and pedagogy of relational learning. Teachers wondered whether and how these approaches might strengthen the kindergarten as a site for democratic practice. The focus in the article is on an extended inquiry that involved children collaborating in mapping and remapping the land around the kindergarten and estuary, using a wide range of resources, arts materials, and teachers' "attentive scaffolding". The mapping project took place over several months: children were afforded time, space, and resources to become deeply involved in their investigations. Alison Clark (2023) argues in her latest book that it is "Time for slow pedagogies in early childhood education". This case study exemplifies how multimodal methods and taking time enabled children's perspectives and experiences to unfold. It illustrates how "a democratically informed inquiry-based approach helped to create a culture of investigation and active learning".

Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 59) describes the primary responsibility of teachers/kaiako as being "to facilitate children's learning and development through thoughtful and intentional pedagogy". Ally Ranson and Monica Cameron, in their article, "Te Whāriki and Intentional Teaching", note that this emphasis on intentional pedagogy marks a shift from the 1996 version of Te Whāriki that highlights the active role of the teacher in children's learning within a child-centred curriculum. Yet they note the paucity of evidence about how teachers/kaiako have responded to the update and about any impacts on practice. Their article discusses a small research project involving interviews with six teachers, carried out for a master's thesis, that explored the teachers' experiences in implementing the updated curriculum, the supports they used, their practice and understanding of intentional teaching, and their views of their role in children's learning. The authors found wide variations between individual participating teachers in their understanding of intentional teaching, confidence, and pedagogical practices. The Ministry of Education-funded PLD was not viewed positively, according to teachers in this study. However, PLD specifically focused on intentional teaching had the biggest impact on teachers' intentional practices.

The final article in this issue, Including autistic children in mainstream early childhood and care settings: what teachers do, discusses case studies in three early childhood settings and whether and how teachers include autistic children. As background, the author, Raewyn Higginson, noted research indicating that autistic children and their families/whānau "still tend to be marginalised, excluded, and disempowered despite the best intentions of teachers to be inclusive and accepting". The case study methods included observations, interviews with key teachers, managers/head teachers and families/whānau, and analysis of relevant documentation. A main point from the findings was a call for teachers to learn about autism / takiwātanga, to access relevant PLD, and to be open and critically reflective about inclusion within their practice.

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