
Comment

The articles in this issue of *Early Childhood Folio* offer differing perspectives on a range of issues and topics—data collection and data use in early childhood education (ECE) can be read alongside an article interrogating changes in policy language in ECE, including the language of “progress tools” used in the draft strategic plan; and mathematical problem solving alongside consideration of children’s problem solving in social disputes. Another article investigates the affordances provided by the learning environment of an infant and toddler ECE centre. The final article is an investigation of the mental wellbeing of early childhood leaders—a topic that is highly relevant in this COVID-19 world.

A team of university researchers and practitioners from Ruahine Kindergarten Association are currently working together on the Data, Knowledge, Action research programme which is aimed at designing and trialling data systems that can guide positive change in pedagogy and children’s learning. In this article, Tara McLaughlin, Sue Cherrington, Claire McLachlan, Karyn Aspden, and Lynda Hunt explain how the programme proposes taking a different and more systematic approach to data collection and data use in the ECE context in relation to the revised curriculum, based on the notion that it indicates an increased focus on intentional teaching. This article presents an overview of their work with the Data, Knowledge, Action programme of research, and includes conceptual processes and supports for teams to use different data sources in meaningful and relevant ways, and build a culture of data use. The article is being published at a time when the Ministry of Education has contracted with Massey University in conjunction with Victoria University of Wellington Te Herenga Waka (VUW) for a project team that includes three of these authors, to begin initial work to

implement action 4.2 of *He Taonga te Tamaiti | Every Child a Taonga: Early Learning Action Plan 2019–2029*. This action involves the development of a range of valid, reliable, culturally, and linguistically appropriate tools to support formative assessment and teaching practice.

Andrew Gibbons, Marek Tesar, And Pasley, and Georgina Stewart interrogate the change in policy language from “early childhood education” to the “early learning system” that is evident in the early learning action plan 2019–2029, *He Taonga te Tamaiti | Every Child a Taonga*. A main argument is that the change “ushers in a new era of thinking about the governance of early childhood education” and that the languages of the plan must be explored, questioned, and critiqued. These include the languages of the concept *he taonga te tamaiti*, diverse gender, early learning and progress tools (a term used in the draft strategic plan and modified in the final plan). By drawing attention to the power of language to produce particular ways of saying and thinking about things and of being, the authors take a critical look at not merely the words in a language of the strategic plan for education, but also at where those words come from, how they are used, by whom, and for what purposes.

Judy Bailey and Jane McChesney analyse *Te Kākano*, an early childhood resource for mathematics that is set out in Book 18 of *Kei Tua o te Pae* (Ministry of Education, 2009). They argue that problem solving, which is a generic integral aspect of *Te Whāriki*, could be positioned more centrally within *Te Kākano* as a key mathematical practice. The authors then turn to discussing two vignettes of mathematical problem solving from a new entrant school context and draw links to generic problem solving in *Te Whāriki* and mathematical problem solving in *Te Kākano*. The vignettes illustrate that mathematical problem solving is evident in the first

year of school and that connections can be made between mathematical problem solving in the early childhood and school settings.

Another consideration of problem solving, this time of children's problem solving in social disputes, is explored by Julie Treweek and Janette Kelly in their qualitative case study at Glenshea Kindergarten in Putaruru. Five episodes of conflict between peers were captured on video by the researcher, mostly around possession of resources and spaces. In this article, one episode is analysed in some depth. Approaches that supported children's social problem solving were identified and will provide teachers and teacher educators with valuable insights. These included "stepping back and questioning whether to intervene or not; recognition of the agency children have to find their own solutions to problems/disputes; the importance of time and space for children to problem solve; deciding which approach to use; and the implications for children's learning". Video proved to be invaluable as a tool to support teacher discussion and critique of their own practice.

Katrina McChesney and Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips' article accompanies a portrait (written by Katrina) of the complex learning environment of one infant and toddler early childhood centre, Greerton Early Learning Centre in Tauranga, not only in its physical dimensions and aesthetics, but also in its affective and interpersonal dimensions. The authors use a Reggio

Emilia lens to consider the learning environment as the "third teacher" and its affordances. In so doing, they point to aspects of Reggio Emilia that are highly compatible with *Tē Whāriki* and the New Zealand context. The article maps the specific affordances associated with the learning environment that were evident in the portrait. Furthermore, it compares the learning environment as reflected in the portrait with the list of features of high-quality learning environments identified by Reggio Emilia researchers. The article offers teachers and leaders a framework they can use to inform their inquiry into how their own learning environments afford positive opportunities for children. Useful questions that could provide other practitioners with a framework for self-review and inquiry are offered.

In a timely article during this COVID-19 pandemic, Sandy Radford reports on findings from her online survey of early childhood leaders relating to workload, overall health and wellbeing, levels and sources of work-related stress, and supports available and utilised for managing stress to maintain health and wellbeing. The survey found ever-increasing workloads, workplace stress, and a lack of resources and support that all impact on the mental wellbeing of early childhood leaders. Radford argues persuasively for systemic support to be put in place for leaders and teachers/kaiako in the early childhood sector. Addressing this need is of particular urgency as early childhood leaders and teachers

are called on to play a key role in supporting families and children during the COVID-19 pandemic. A recent survey of the impact of COVID-19 on the ECE sector (Mitchell et al., 2020) showed "anxiety about returning to the service" was a key issue for staff, a finding that aligns with worries expressed by participants in the Ministry of Health COVID-19 Health and Wellbeing Survey (Ministry of Health, 2020).

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References

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