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# Comment

Three of the articles in this issue of *Early Childhood Folio* offer theoretical concepts, ideas derived from research, and examples of pedagogical strategies that will offer valuable insights for practising kaiako/teachers in early childhood settings. These include a literature review of theory and research around children's working theories; ways in which teachers purposefully integrated the sounds, smells, tastes, sights, and textures that were known to the child, and new sensations for the child to affirm and extend the child's sense of belonging; and case studies of four teaching and learning episodes where "everyday democratic practice" is enacted. A fourth article offers a thoughtful analysis of preservice teacher professional identity and whether and how Initial Teacher Education (ITE) enables the development of advocate activist identities. The final two articles raise issues that lend themselves to policy solutions in particular: an article on the impact of noise in early childhood education (ECE), and an article on integrated ECE service provision that is related to initiatives formulated in *He Taonga te Tamaiti. Every Child a Taonga. Early Learning Action Plan 2019–2029* (Ministry of Education, 2019).

Helen Hedges is well known for her pioneering research and ongoing scholarly interest in defining, theorising, and undertaking practice-based research on children's working theories, which she conveys here as encompassing "every aspect of human living and ways of knowing and being". As several Aotearoa New Zealand studies have found, including those by Helen Hedges, working theories have been neglected as an outcome of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2017). It was only recently that kaiako were offered professional development on working theories. This article provides a clear and comprehensive review of a body

of literature on working theories, mostly from Aotearoa New Zealand. It encompasses early scholarly literature on children as theorists and current work to define and theorise the concept of working theories. The article then turns to research literature exemplifying working theories and exploring pedagogical knowledge and strategies to engage with and respond to children's interests and theorising. An emphasis is on the importance of kaiako and researchers knowing children, families, and cultures well. Deeper understanding of theoretical underpinnings and access to this research-based literature will be helpful for kaiako wanting to understand working theories as a *Te Whāriki* outcome and to engage with children's working theories in their curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment.

Bronwen Cowie and Linda Mitchell draw on data gathered early in the 2-year Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) project, *Strengthening Belonging and Identity of Refugee and Immigrant Children through Early Childhood Education* (Mitchell et al., 2020). The project was a partnership between University of Waikato researchers and practising teachers in four culturally diverse ECE settings, who set out to research a range of pedagogical strategies to enable refugee and immigrant families to develop a sense of belonging in Aotearoa New Zealand and consolidate their belonging in their home countries. Data used in this article were gathered early in the project from teacher focus group discussions and presentations, teacher interviews, and pedagogical documentation in the four settings. A strong thread in this teacher data was that, as part of their daily routines and practices, teachers purposefully integrated the sounds, smells, tastes, sights, and textures that were known to the child, and new sensations that were from a wider world. In these ways, children's sense of belonging in both their home country and in Aotearoa New Zealand

was affirmed and extended. The authors provide valuable reference to research on the five senses, noting that, until recently, talk has been the predominant research focus and only limited research attention has been paid to the interplay of the five senses for children's sense of belonging. This research and practice implications around finding out about and focusing on the five senses will be of value to readers of *Early Childhood Folio*.

Raella Kahuroa writes from her doctoral study about four teaching and learning episodes in an ECE setting in Aotearoa New Zealand that highlight “everyday democratic practice”, whereby democracy as a value is becoming embedded as part of the lives of young children. Video recordings were made of extended episodes of teaching and learning over a 4-month period, and analysis of video transcripts and discussions with teachers revealed how democratic practice unfolded through real-time interactions. The context for each episode is carefully described, followed by presentation and analysis of selected video transcriptions of interactions. Each account ends with a discussion of how the episode connects with democracy. The author argues that ECE can be a site for democratic practice “where children are supported in their journey towards being active citizens of their communities and countries, enabled to act with purpose and compassion”. This is original work that will be interesting for teachers and might well encourage teachers to read references and try out these strategies.

Olivera Kamenarac's article also connects with ideas about the democratisation of ECE. Her article draws on qualitative data from a small study exploring the ongoing teaching practices and preservice teachers' experiences

on the BTchg(ECE) offered by an ITE institution. The aim of the study was to ask how and whether ITE can support preservice teachers to “build a critical mentality to engage with robust professional discourses (e.g., social justice, inclusion) and construe themselves as advocate-activists for a socially just, equitable, and inclusive ECE and world”. The topic of early childhood teacher professional identities is very relevant in a contemporary world where inequities abound and where purposes of ECE are frequently portrayed in narrow and instrumental terms. The ideas will be of interest not only to teachers and teacher educators, but also to a broader constituency, including ECE managers, ITE providers, policy analysts, and politicians.

The article by Susan Bates, Wyatt Page, and Sue Stover discusses findings derived from a 2017–18 survey of ECE teachers and a review of a body of New Zealand and international literature on impacts of noise in ECE settings. A key conclusion—exemplified in detailed findings from the survey and literature—is that excessive noise levels in ECE settings are detrimental to children's learning and adult wellbeing. The findings are discussed in relation to New Zealand's regulatory requirements where the authors' main conclusion is that “regulating for the creation of quieter environments for the benefit of teachers and learners, the adults and children in early childhood settings” is required to address the issues.

*Working with Others: An Investigation of Early Childhood Education and Care Centre Relationships with External Organisations* reports on findings from an online survey of ECE providers and follow-up interviews with four selected providers about their service relationships with external organisations. The article provides a

picture of current practice and barriers to greater collaboration, while offering some implications for practice and ways forward. While lip service is paid to the value of integrated service provision, there have been few national policy initiatives that support collaborative inter-agency provision. Authors Joanne Alderson, Donna Kenny, and Rick Fisher spell out implications of their findings and relate these to initiatives recommended in the *Early Learning Action Plan 2019–2029*, which they support.

Linda Mitchell, Editor

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