

COMMENT

This issue of *Early Childhood Folio* comes at a time of considerable interest by practitioners, politicians, and policy advisers in research and thinking about early childhood education settings as contexts for participation, learning, and collaboration. The Government's strategic plan for early childhood education emphasises the value of strong connections with family and community, and early childhood education services as forums for parent support and development as well as children's learning. These themes are also evident in *Kei Tua o te Pae. Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2005). Many of the articles in this issue offer research-based examples of, and explore thinking about, how early childhood education centres can encourage active participation and learning for children, families, and communities, and develop and strengthen meaningful connections with the wider world.

Jo Colbert, head teacher at Westmere Kindergarten, worked with five children whose great interest in storytelling was enhanced through the use of Internet and communication technology (ICT). Offering these children the opportunity to create multimodal representations of their own stories appeared to contribute to more complex storytelling and more complex use of ICT. Complexity and continuity were supported through children's active participation and by encouraging them to share their stories with the wider community.

Supporting participation and learning for all children is a theme of Kerry Purdue's article. Her research challenges the belief system of special education, which she sees as contributing to a culture of exclusion where children with disabilities are seen as having different curriculum and teaching needs from others. She highlights ways in which teachers can support inclusion: making the early childhood education environment a welcoming place; respecting and valuing the contribution of all families and children; enabling participation in the curriculum of children with disabilities alongside their peers; removing barriers; and challenging exclusionary stereotyping and practices.

Three articles explore potential for, and challenges to, creating greater coherence and continuity between settings in which children participate:

- Jenny Ritchie and Cheryl Rau examine strategies for building relationships with, and encouraging participation of, whānau Māori within early childhood education settings, and for implementing understandings of Tiriti-based commitments within *Te Whāriki*. Many teacher/educators in NZCER and Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust's recent evaluation of the strategic plan (Mitchell, Royal Tangaere, Mara, & Wylie, in press) said they found it difficult to promote or build collaborative relationships with Māori

communities (with the exception of kōhanga reo kaiako). Ritchie and Rau's article offers a timely analysis of how educators in their Teaching and Learning Research Initiative project went about building relationships with Māori families within early childhood centres and communities in ways that went beyond the use of superficial cultural icons and included deeper signifiers, for example, philosophical concepts and culturally-specific patterns of interaction.

- Margaret Carr's article suggests that the curriculum reform proposed for the school sector provides opportunity for a "new continuity between schools and early childhood education settings" when the proposed key competencies are put into place. Her wish list for continuity across the sectors is: closely aligned learning dispositions and key competencies; closely connected learning environments, relationships, and images of the learner, across which the dispositions and competencies are distributed; and learners who are ready, willing, and able to critique and redesign the curriculum and the world.
- Continuity of learning between home, the early childhood education setting, and the new entrant classroom is the focus of the article by Carolyn Jones. She examines the value of drawing on funds of knowledge from the home environment, and how funds of knowledge might be accessed through conversations and documentation.

Other articles contribute to discussion of topical issues: Carmen Dalli provides new evidence from a "ground-up" perspective of the core components of a definition of professionalism; and, finally, Judith Duncan explores notions of quality through discussion of examples from Norway and Japan.

This is the tenth issue of *Early Childhood Folio*, which started in 1983 as an irregularly-produced publication featuring mainly school-based articles, and is now an annual publication focused on early childhood education. The development of *Early Childhood Folio* parallels the growing interest in "teachers as researchers" and pedagogy that draws on theory and research evidence.

References

- Ministry of Education. (2005). *Kei tua o te pae. Assessment for learning: Early childhood exemplars*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Mitchell, L., Royal Tangaere, A., Mara, D., & Wylie, C. (in press). *Locality based evaluation of Pathways to the Future—Ngā Huarahi Arataki. Phase 1. Baseline report*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

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