
Comment

An overarching theme in this issue of *Early Childhood Folio* is the challenge for teachers of responding to the growing diversity of Aotearoa New Zealand society. Demographic changes have been sweeping: as Nola Harvey points out, the percentage of international migrants in the total population in Aotearoa New Zealand is the third highest in the OECD. A staggering one-in-two teachers and children in licensed early childhood services in Auckland name a primary ethnic association other than European/Pākehā. Janette Kelly points to growing diversity of family composition, arguing that changes in family structures call for these to be acknowledged in inclusive curriculum resources. All the articles are relevant to exploration of ways in which teachers might respond to these challenges of family and community diversity.

Nola Harvey's article on linguistically responsive pedagogy offers a thoughtful analysis of how five bilingual teachers used home languages in English-medium early childhood settings to front up to the challenge of negotiating access to, and use of, home languages for learning and teaching. Nola illustrates her findings with carefully selected quotations from the bilingual teachers in her study and makes well-documented linkages to the four principles of *Te Whāriki*. A challenging message is for linguistically responsive pedagogy that goes beyond culture and a feeling of belonging. Nola's discussion of her research is embedded within contemporary literature, making her article a scholarly and readable account that provokes thinking about

how to construct "a 'curriculum' that promotes and protects the languages and symbols of home languages such that each child is confident that her or his home language and the national languages are valued and used".

The article by Janette Kelly reports on an interesting piece of research that invites readers to think about diversity in family composition and how this is reflected in curriculum resources within early childhood services, and more broadly, how children's responses might be explored through working theories. Specifically, Janette's research explored the views of a team of early childhood teachers who also report children's responses to a set of picture books featuring same-gender parented families. It seemed children were open to the possibilities of non-traditional families in their play, treating the presence of same-gendered families as the "wallpaper" in all the stories. Janette argues that picture books can offer a way to reflect family diversities within curriculum resources and that these are valuable in promoting inclusiveness.

Two articles about assessment and documentation of learning are reminders of Cowie and Carr's (2009) argument that documented assessments can be described as impacting on community, competence, and continuity. Margaret Carr and Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips, and teacher researchers Caryll Resink, Michelle Anderson, and Tania Jack show ways in which the documentation of children's learning undertaken in early childhood services can be brought together in transition portfolios that travel with the child to school. These portfolios create space for meaningful dialogue between families, children, early childhood teachers, and

new-entrant teachers at this transition time. The portfolios contribute to continuity for children during transition to school, and they strengthen learning. In this study, opportunities to use the documentation of children's learning and engage in dialogue were made more possible by the alignment between the early childhood education curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, and the revised New Zealand curriculum for schools, reinforcing the need for enabling policy frameworks that support pedagogy.

Maria Cooper, Helen Hedges, Daniel Lovatt, and Trish Murphy used an interesting vignette to explore how teachers in mainstream centres might be supported to interpret Pasifika children's interests and inquiries. They illustrate the power of drawing on families' "funds of knowledge" through finding out about everyday experiences and cultures to help interpret a child's interests.

Amanda Bateman and teacher researchers Timothy Bennett, Sharmila Cairo, and Nadine MacMillan also reinforce the critical value of understanding the interests of the child and family. They argue that it is also valuable to

be aware of the teachers' interests. They report on some findings from their TLRI project investigating how teaching and learning occurs in early childhood education through everyday conversations between teachers and children. Through detailed analysis of these conversations, the authors show how teaching was shaped by personal interests of both teachers and children enabling pedagogy to be co-constructed.

The question of what constitutes good-quality early childhood education has provoked discussion, debate, and a range of research over recent years. An understanding of "quality" as being culturally constructed is clearly demonstrated in the article by Rachael S. Burke. Ratios and group size are examined from perspectives of Japanese and New Zealand kindergarten teachers, using methodology pioneered by Tobin, Wu, and Davidson. Differences in viewpoints are related to differences in values held by these groups of teachers, such as the Japanese teachers' preference for larger group sizes to enable children to resolve disputes themselves,

compared with the New Zealand teachers' preference for smaller groups to enable sustained, meaningful interactions between teachers and individual children. While not a new idea, this article encourages a broader understanding of how our beliefs, values, and aspirations influence early childhood pedagogy and policy.

In this issue, tribute and commentary is paid to Marie Bell as an inspirational educator and advocate. Authors in this issue argued for teachers to critically examine their own values and practices and keep informed about current theory and knowledge. These sentiments align well with Marie's staunch views that teachers need "to understand and keep up to date with knowledge about the way young children learn and develop and grow".

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Cowie, B., & Carr, M. (2009). The consequences of sociocultural assessment. In A. Anning, J. Cullen & M. Fleer (Eds), *Early Childhood Education: Society and Culture* (pp. 105–116). Sage: London.