

Editorial

Advocacy is woven into the very fabric of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is part of how this sector came into being, how it has been sustained, and how it continues to imagine a more just future for tamariki, whānau, and kaiako. It is woven throughout our whakapapa as a sector. The history of ECE in Aotearoa has been shaped by educators, families, and communities who organised, wrote, marched, negotiated, insisted and persisted. The development of a bicultural curriculum framework, the recognition of early childhood teaching as professional work, and the ongoing insistence that children's rights matter all emerged through sustained advocacy. Te Whāriki itself is a product of advocacy: a deliberate refusal of narrow, school-ready models of education in favour of a bicultural, holistic, and relationship-based framework. So too were the campaigns that secured the 20 Hours ECE policy, advances in teacher qualifications, and more recently, pay parity agreements that recognised early childhood teachers as part of the wider teaching profession. Each required voices willing to challenge dominant assumptions about children, care, gendered labour, and the role of early childhood education in society.

The current political and educational context gives this conversation a particular edge. We see the ways in which decisions made far from early learning settings ripple into centres, homes, and communities, reshaping funding, staffing, curriculum enactment, and professional identity. Many educators are navigating the uncertainty of shifting policy priorities, pressure on funding and staffing, and ongoing debates about the purpose and value of early childhood education. There is a sense of ground being lost and hard-won gains being eroded. In such a climate, advocacy can feel like an additional burden to an already demanding professional life.

But advocacy has never been separate from the work of early childhood educators. Long before early childhood education was embedded in national policy frameworks, it was driven by collectives of educators, whānau, and communities who believed that children mattered, that care and education were inseparable, and held carefully our shared responsibility for our youngest tamariki.

Each of the articles of this volume in their own way invite us to reconnect with a long tradition of speaking up for children and for those who teach them, and to seeking after quality in our systems and teaching practices. They also invite us to consider what

advocacy might look like now in a time of constraint, complexity, and competing narratives about the purpose of education.

This volume opens with a **tribute to Nola Harvey**, honouring a life of sustained advocacy in early childhood education. Nola's work reminds us that advocacy is lifelong, grounded in relationships, ethical commitments, and a deep belief in children's rights. Her advocacy spanned children's right to play, to language, to cultural identity, and to lives free from poverty and exclusion. This tribute situates our advocacy theme firmly within the lived history of the sector.

Natalie Tunnell's exploration of **kaiako wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic** uses Te Whare Tapa Whā to foreground holistic understandings of hauora. While grounded in a specific moment, the article speaks directly to ongoing advocacy concerns around workforce sustainability, relational wellbeing, and policy conditions that enable or undermine kaiako flourishing.

Monica Cameron, Penny Smith, and Karyn Aspden examine **leadership and curriculum implementation** through the lived realities of working with Te Whāriki across time. Drawing on qualitative data from 2017 and 2023, their article traces how leaders and teachers have navigated both the original and refreshed versions of the curriculum. The findings reveal a gradual shift away from hierarchical models toward more distributed, relational, and pedagogically focused forms of leadership. This work positions pedagogical leadership as a critical site of advocacy in mediating how curriculum intent is interpreted, enacted, and sustained in practice.

Raewyn Penman, Victoria Kees, Sherideen Lange, and Rachel Winslow invite us to **rethink age groupings in early learning settings**, challenging taken-for-granted organisational decisions. Their article asks critical questions about how grouping practices align with theory, philosophy, culture, and community context in Aotearoa New Zealand, and what advocacy might look like when pedagogical decisions are driven by values rather than trends.

Patricia Ong's opinion piece on **overseas-trained teachers** challenges deficit framings of difference and calls for more culturally sustaining induction practices. Her argument reframes advocacy as reweaving, insisting that bicultural commitments, Te Tiriti obligations, and international expertise must be held together, not in tension.

Yanan Li and Tamar Weisz-Koves continue this conversation through a focus on **international ECE student teachers on practicum**. Drawing on lived experience and professional insight, the article advocates for ethnorelative understandings that

strengthen mentoring relationships, communication, and professional growth across cultural contexts.

Paige Thomson and Gillian Postlewaigh's research note on **introducing New Zealand Sign Language within an inquiry-based assessment** offers a powerful example of advocacy enacted through inclusive pedagogy. By embedding NZSL into everyday practice, the article demonstrates how intentional teaching can support communication, agency, and belonging for all tamariki, while strengthening kaiako confidence and professional identity.

Hamidreza Niknampour and Birce Tanriguden make a case for **music as a pedagogical and advocacy tool**, highlighting its role in holistic development and inclusion. Their practical strategies advocate for widening what counts as valued learning, and for recognising the role of creativity, movement, and expression in children's wellbeing and learning.

Lisa Winiata's commentary on **evaluation in early childhood education challenges the internal/external evaluation dichotomy** and calls for approaches that are meaningful, culturally grounded, and empowering. This article speaks to advocacy at a systems level, questioning whether current evaluation practices genuinely serve the complexity of early childhood work in Aotearoa.

The volume concludes with a **book review** of *Where the Wild Things Are* by Andrea Saladin, offering a teacher's perspective on a familiar text. Through an intentional pedagogical lens, the review highlights how shared reading can support children's emotional literacy and provides a gentle reminder that advocacy also lives in everyday teaching moments; in how we read, listen, and respond to children's feelings.

The articles of this volume remind us that advocacy happens in many ways. It comes through the sustained contribution and voice of dedicated educators such as Nola Harvey. It also happens in quieter ways: in research that challenges dominant narratives, in professional conversations that refuse deficit views of children or teachers, in leadership decisions that prioritise values over convenience, and in the courage to name when policy and practice are misaligned.

As editors, we hope that this series will prompt reflection, conversation, and perhaps a renewed sense of collective purpose. Advocacy is not something only a few people do on behalf of the rest of us. It is something that has always belonged to this sector. The question is not whether advocacy is part of early childhood education in Aotearoa New

Zealand, as it always has been. The question is how we choose to take it up now, thoughtfully, collectively, and with dedication.

We hope you enjoy the volume.

Ngā mihi nui,

Dr Karyn Aspden and the EEJ Team.