

Early Education



Volume 66 Spring / Summer 2020

- Teacher Led Innovation Round 3
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- Peer learning in ECE
- Privatisation in ECE
- Children, families in prison and ECE practice
- Reflexes and support early learning



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Contributions of articles and photos are welcome from the early childhood community.

Early Education welcomes:

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Ngā reo e toru

Trissessment listening to whānau, tamariki and kaiako voices to make learning visible through assessment

Sue Werry, Eric Hollis and Roberta Skeoch

Abstract

The Ole Schoolhouse (Rotorua) kaiako and researchers from the Early Childhood Education (ECE) team at Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology worked together for eighteen months on a Teacher-Led Innovation Fund (TLIF) project. This project sought to recognise and nurture the mana of the tamaiti (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2017) by formalising the process by which tamariki and whānau were able to participate in assessment. The project's purpose was to use action research to evaluate how the trissessment model (Cown et al, 2016) might support The Ole Schoolhouse's tamariki, whānau and kaiako to collaborate and amplify both the tamaiti's and the whānau voice in the assessment process. A key finding was the shift in whānau understanding of their role in the assessing of their tamaiti's learning. The whānau began to see that they were experts in their tamaiti's learning and that their perspectives would profoundly deepen kaiako understanding of tamariki interests, dispositions and skills.

Whānau voice in early childhood education curriculum design through assessment

The Aotearoa New Zealand curriculum *Te Whāriki* states the wider world of family is an integral part of the local curriculum of an early childhood education service (MoE, 2017, p. 20). When kaiako are able to involve whānau in curriculum design through collaboration in meaningful ways, tamariki learning is enriched (Mitchell & Furness, 2015). For many ECE services, learning stories are a key part of

their curriculum design. As a socio-cultural assessment tool, they can enable whānau to contribute meaningfully to making learning visible, document their aspirations for their tamaiti, connect kaiako to funds of home knowledge and “clarify kaiako interpretations” (Cowie & Carr, 2009, p. 108).

Stuart et al. (2009) found most services reported close relationships with their families and valued parental contributions to the assessment process. However, centres found it challenging to capture parental voice in a way that was visible within the assessment narratives (Education Review Office [ERO], 2009, 2013). Much of the sharing between kaiako and whānau happened during informal conversations as tamariki are dropped off or picked up and thus was not easily documented. The documentation of these conversations became reporting of? whānau rather than working with whānau in partnership (Booth & Ibanez, 2017). Thus, although ECE services believed whānau engagement in learning stories was important, there was not a great deal of evidence of whānau voice in their assessment stories.

There are multiple ways to include whānau voices in assessment. ECE services have used different strategies including parent nights, making portfolio scrapbooks available to whānau, and more recently the different e-portfolios like Storypark™ and Educa™ with spaces for whānau comments (Pennells, 2018). However, the comments collected are often single words or brief phrases like ‘awesome’, and ‘thanks for this story’ and are added once the story has been completed by the kaiako.

One model which asks for parent voice before the learning story is written by the kaiako is Whyte's (2010) the initiating parent voice (IPV) model. IPV invites parents to talk to their tamaiti about photos

taken of the tamaiti's play and record the tamaiti's verbal and non-verbal responses (Whyte, 2010, 2015; Whyte & Scanlan, 2017). The IPV can be then included in the learning story as a "documentation of an assemblage of learning" (Whyte, 2015, p. 39). The IPV format was adapted by Hunt and Rawlins (2016) as a learning snapshot. The rich conversations provoked by these learning snapshots strengthen the connections between home and centre and supported families to build on tamariki interests at home and then shared these experiences with kaiako. However, the responsibility for writing the assessment narrative remained with the kaiako.

Ngā reo e toru — Trissessment framework

This TLIF project was based on Roberta Skeoch's Ngā reo e toru—trissessment framework (Cown et al 2016) where the tamaiti and whānau are expected (not just invited) to be involved in the writing of the assessment. The framework is based on the kaupapa Māori framework of Tau utuutu, the Te Arawa and Tainui tikanga for whaikōrero (speech making). The tamaiti is seen as the tangata whenua where they are the person in charge of the learning journey with the assessment cycle starting with their story (Werry et al., in press). Trissessments reflect the Tau utuutu process by first capturing the tamaiti voice either by writing the words used by a during play or by writing the tamaiti words as a kaiako discusses a series of photos of their play with them. These words, sometimes with photos, are given to whānau who are asked to respond to the tamaiti ideas. Thus, whānau are like the first speaker for the manuhiri, responding not to the kaiako interpretation of the learning, but directly to their tamaiti words. Whānau responses are usually handwritten notes, sometimes addressed to their tamaiti. Kaiako are the second speaker for the manuhiri and they respond to both the tamaiti and the whānau words. The story is then returned to the tamaiti, so they have an opportunity to respond to these interpretations of their learning. Like Tau utuutu, the process continues until the tamaiti indicates the narrative has come to an end. Thus, trissessments preserves the mana of both the tamaiti and the whānau (MoE, 2017) and authentically involves them in the assessment and curriculum design process.

As a sociocultural approach, trissessments sees learning as occurring within the interactions of a learning community (Karpov, 2014). Trissessment offered one way to describe the mōhiotanga, "what a tamaiti already knows and brings with her/him"

(MoE, 2009, p. 49) as they make space for both the tamaiti and whānau voices to be heard and thus allow the mōhiotanga to be included within the narrative. The ongoing dialogue that trissessments create shapes the tamaiti, whānau and the kaiako understanding of the tamaiti's interests, dispositions and skills.

Context

The research project was conducted at The Ole Schoolhouse, a privately-owned early childhood learning centre in Rotorua. Three kaiako and three researchers from Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology worked with fourteen tamariki in the three- and four-year-olds room and their whānau. Although all tamariki in the room were potential participants, those who participated were the tamariki who were happy to tell their stories, share their drawings, and other artefacts constructed as part of their play. The Ole Schoolhouse strives to foster the notion of a learning community, where every stakeholder; tamaiti, whānau or kaiako has a voice that is heard and acknowledged. If one regards learning as a social phenomenon (Rogoff, 2005), then paying attention to the social context and nature of social interaction is important. To create a learning community kaiako need to create the "relationships with families [that] form the bridge to gaining deeper insight" into the tamaiti world (Ritchie, 2014, p.115) and create "social participation" (Wenger, 1998, p. 4). The trissessment framework offers kaiako the opportunity to use wānanga as a relational pedagogy where knowledge is co-created through equity, shared visions and ako and there is no distinction between the expert and the learner (Tangaere, 1997; McLachlan et al., 2013). Thus, the trissessment framework acknowledges every person has expertise to contribute but requires Kaiako to have "an open mind to explore differing views and reflect on their own beliefs and values" (MoE, 2011, p. 6).

The research project design

The purpose of the TLIF research project was to explore what the trissessment framework would look like, for The Ole Schoolhouse. and how assessment for learning using the trissessment approach could amplify tamariki and whānau engagement and participation in tamariki learning and how can trissessment could deepen kaiako understanding of tamariki learning dispositions and inform planning. Before the action research cycles began, professional development was held to support kaiako (as the kaiako-researchers) understanding of the

trissessment framework. Learning conversations discussed the journal article written about the first pilot of trissessment, *“Trissessment”—from invitation to expectation*, (Cown et al., 2016) and the trissessments written during that pilot. Roberta Skeoch worked alongside the kaiako both demonstrating and supporting the capturing of tamaiti voice. Then, each Kaiako was mentored by one of the researchers as they developed their first trissessments.

Action research was chosen as the methodology for the project as it facilitates the collaboration of researchers and kaiako to create knowledge (Levin & Greenwood, 2011). The action research cycle was an iterative, spiral process where kaiako planned how to use the trissessment framework to write assessments with the tamariki and their whānau, then met to discuss the trissessments, evaluate the process and revisit the trissessment framework. Adjustments were made to the processes and then another set of trissessments were written (O'Hara et al, 2011). The evaluation step was informed by data collected from semi-structured interviews with participating whānau and kaiako, meeting notes and kaiako reflective commentary notes.

Thirty-four trissessments were written during the project. Some tamariki and whānau were involved in a series of stories, while other tamariki and their whānau participated in only one or two trissessments. There were various reasons for this limited participation including leaving for primary school or time pressures. At the beginning of the project there were 10 whānau interviews and three of these participants were re-interviewed at the end. Thematic analysis (Menter, et al, 2011; O'Hara et al., 2011) of the interview transcripts, meeting notes, kaiako reflective notes and the trissessments was used to find the themes in the experiences of tamariki, whānau and kaiako.

Findings and discussion

One of the key findings of the project was a shift in whānau understanding of and participation in the assessing of their tamaiti learning as they became more involved in the trissessments. This shift did amplify whānau engagement and participation in tamariki learning and thus deepen kaiako understanding of tamariki learning dispositions.

Whānau role in assessment at the beginning of the project

In the initial interviews whānau identified that they had a role in supporting their tamariki learning. Whānau had a variety of different views on their role. Most parents knew that they could add comments in response to learning stories but did not see their comments as assessment. When asked the types of comments they made, they responded with “it’s usually great thanks, thanks for sharing [parent M] or “well done” or “that’s a nice story” [Parent E]. Kaiako confirmed that these were the common responses. One kaiako [2] stated “there are parents who will send you a thank you or somebody will put in a comment too you know but you can’t really rely on it, it’s a rare thing”. Another kaiako [1] estimated that they only got comments 20 percent of the time “probably just because everything has already been said.” However, every person we interviewed wanted to be more involved in their tamaiti assessment. Parent M commented that she was “definitely interested in participating more. You want the best for your kids, so yeah, absolutely”. Another said “my voice is not loud enough; I need to make it louder” [Parent T]. Her conversations with the kaiako were about ‘behavioural things or did he have a good day,’ unlike her conversations with her tamaiti which were about what he was learning. She wanted to be able to talk to kaiako about learning with this kind of “flow” [Parent T]. Only one parent was aware of the importance their role in identifying the tamaiti interests and supporting their learning. This parent commented that her role was to “stretch him and see if I can help him find different ways to do things or encourage his interest and query him” [Parent K].

Types of involvement whānau wanted at the beginning of the project

In the interviews, whānau indicated that they wanted other ways to be involved in assessment. Parent B stated “I know there’s an opportunity to provide feedback on them [learning stories], but it’s not like there’s an expectation and, to be quite honest, I often read them [learning stories] and think ‘oh that’s nice’ and move on. But potentially if there was a more formal [opportunity] to formally share and for you both to be a bit more cognisant about what you are observing [it would be useful], whereas often you really only provide feedback when there is a problem”. When asked what whānau involvement in assessment might look like two parents suggested one-on-one interviews “when

there is something key to discuss” [Parent C] or when “he’s having some difficulties, you might want to talk with the kaiako about it” [Parent H]. However, given that all parents saw having time as an issue, these comments may indicate a desire not for interviews but for a more authentic and reciprocal way of being involved. Trissessment offered whānau who participated in the TLIF project the opportunity a more reciprocal way to be involved as trissessment does not just invite participation but expects responsive participation by whānau and kaiako.

Changes in whānau understandings of their role in assessment

Participating in the project helped parents to understand that their input was important. Before the project whānau did not know that Kaiako valued whānau input. “I thought where is it [the comment] going to go after [I write it], what happens when I leave a comment, who is going to read it, does it matter but now doing the project with L and doing the assessments and things I have realised that kaiako do read it and any feedback is good” [Parent H]. The whānau participants realised that their ideas mattered and were read by the kaiako. “I’ve been writing responses, it’s been a good exercise especially getting kaiako feedback, from your own perspective and then their perspective of what they [the kaiako] see” [Parent L]. Another parent commented that “our input as parents is just as valuable as the kaiako ...so it was good for me to actually see that as well, how important we are.” [Parent C]. Whānau began to see themselves as experts of their tamaiti knowledge, dispositions, interests and skills (Mitchell & Furness, 2015).

Strengthening connections between home and centre

Both kaiako and whānau stated connections between home and The Ole Schoolhouse were strengthened. Kaiako felt that the interactions were a “better, [with a] deeper level of conversation” [Kaiako 2] and the trissessment process was a “whole massive collaborative process” [Kaiako 3] which gave kaiako more insight into whānau aspirations, influencing kaiako assumptions about what was being learnt during tamariki play. The tamariki “were taking ownership of their learning. They know what they are doing, they are sharing it with us [kaiako] and when the story goes home, they [the tamariki] are equally able to share it with their parents, explain[ing] to them what they [the tamariki] were

doing, how they did it, which helps parents to give us relevant feedback on the stories” [Kaiako 2].

Parents also felt the connection kaiako were making with whānau. “So, what [Kaiako 2] has been doing is writing these stories and we write back about how it kind of connects us with home and that’s been really cool to see; he [the kaiako] brings a lot of what’s at home into day-care and its vice versa.... So, it’s good to see the flowing together” [Parent L]. Whānau commented that the change to the way the stories were written had made a difference to the whānau experience. Before “sometimes they are just really long, a little bit cumbersome, so you just went [and said] oh look there’s a story and there was that much in [it], it was a bit much. [Now] I think it is more, it looks like there is lot less information in it but it is just more concise, more information” [Parent C]. Parents perceived that this sense of connection enhanced kaiako understanding of each tamaiti mōhiotanga (MoE, 2009). Parent L noted the stories were written in “a more intimate way because you see the kaiako sitting down learning about them [the tamariki] and writing these really nice stories”. Perhaps the most profound comment came from a mother who said with great emotion “the best learning story I’ve ever received only because you can tell it was her [the tamaiti] voice. It’s exactly how she talks at home, its exactly the same words, it just warmed my heart that a kaiako took the time to really listen and just note it down. Oh, it was the best [Parent E].

The processes used for trissessments mattered

Trissessments are not posted as a completed story to an electronic platform or pasted into portfolio but start with a hard copy (often hand written) of the tamaiti narrative which is handed to whānau personally with a request for them to respond. Participants commented that having a paper version was important and allowed them to share the stories with their tamaiti in way they had not done before. “I always find it easier to have a hard copy. I try not to be on the screen all the time especially for L who say’s Mummy, you on the i-pad, can I watch this” [Parent H]. Another said “I read the story, every single story on the kitchen bench” [Parent L]. Whānau felt the nature of the conversations they had with their tamariki changed. “I would say he would not ordinarily tell me [about his learning]. And that has changed. If you have the paper copy and you say shall we read this story together and [by] doing this [he will say] “oh look Mummy, that’s

me” and I did this. Whereas before we wouldn’t normally have an in-depth conversation about his learning specifically” [Parent H]. For another parent trisessments became part of dinner time. “We usually do read them at the dinner table with L and he talks about the everything that comes from this little scenario, [everything] in his day starts popping up” [Parent T].

Unlike the IPV (Whyte 2010) and Hunt and Rawlins (2016) there were no instructions about what the response should include or how the response should be formatted. Whānau were simply asked to respond to the tamaiti voice. Whānau responded in different ways but the content of whānau response always included valuable assessment of the tamaiti dispositions, interests and/or learning. Some people addressed their whānau story directly to the tamaiti. “Dear J. I am so proud of you; I know you concentrated hard” [Parent J] and “Dearest M. You are showing a lot of confidence to voice your ideas and share your story” [Parent E]. Although other parents started with comments like those previously seen before the project, like “thank you”, they then always added assessment information. “Thank you for helping L. with his Lego plane project. It’s great to see L. using his imagination and see it come to life mixed with real events and experiences” [Parent A]. “Thanks for this story! She loves talking about Daddy’s work at home so I think she admires her Daddy. Daddy had told her helmets are important to protect heads” [Parent C].

Whānau seeing themselves as experts about their tamariki learning

Kaiako felt that having the whānau voice before the kaiako voice and the “lack of kaiako lingo gave the whānau the confidence to provide more meaningful responses” [Kaiako 1]. Whānau started to feel they were knowledgeable about their tamariki learning and that their expertise was worth sharing (Mitchell and Furness, 2015). The length of responses varied from just a few sentences to a closely typed whole page. But, no matter the length of each whānau response to their tamariki words, all gave examples of prior knowledge, dispositions and/or interests that could feed directly into The Ole Schoolhouse’s planning. “[Trisessment] allowed parents to give us insights, it helped to join the dots, and added context to the seemingly insignificant [moments]” [Kaiako 1]. Often the whānau response indicated what was important to the whānau. In response to a tamaiti narrative about rocket building, the parent wrote a long and detailed description of the whole

family’s fascination with space, the planets, NASA, and the tamaiti long-standing love of the television programme, ‘Thunderbirds’ [Parent C]. Kaiako, also, learnt about whānau aspirations for their tamaiti. “Positivity, understanding to love and build a happy kid” [Parent of L]. Other times the whānau response was about the links between home and centre. “It is lovely to see the crossover of imaginative play that B has from home to day-care” [Parent C]. One whānau enjoyed the process so much they began to write their own trisessments with the tamaiti and whānau voice and then send the narrative to The Ole Schoolhouse for kaiako to complete. When more than one member of the whānau responded, this offered different perspectives on the tamaiti learning. In the trisessment called ‘The Boat’ one parent commented on the science learning she had seen in the water play at home while the other parent commented on L’s imagination and his hut construction [Parents L & T].

Some tamariki added to their parents’ comments with their own home contributions. When C’s story about fixing a bike at The Ole Schoolhouse was returned from home the whānau contribution included a picture and a story by C about a time when his father fell off his bike. His mother noted that he was “drawing comparisons from this (programmes he watched on his tablet) to real life” [Parent L]. C’s response when this completed trisessment was given to him was “I want to do another story” [Tamaiti C]. Another tamaiti, J, told a story about taking the family boat to the lake. The story came back to the kaiako with the parent’s comment and a picture drawn by J. This led to a discussion between J and Kaiako 2 which was added to the trisessment.

Contributions and limitations

The project showed that the concept of trisessment can be an authentic method to involve tamariki and whānau in the ECE assessment process when kaiako unpack the framework from the pilot (Cown et al, 2016) and adapt the trisessment framework for a different early learning centre context. However, a limitation of the research is the number of trisessments that were able to be completed. Despite whānau being very interested in the project, some were unable to find the time to write their section of the trisessment. More research is needed to understand what processes would enable whānau to contribute more easily to trisessment.

Conclusion

The (TLIF) project set out to recognise and nurture the mana of the tamaiti (MoE, 2017) by creating a trisessment framework for tamariki and whānau which facilitated their participation in the assessment processes of the service. Kaiako at The Ole Schoolhouse had identified concerns about the implicit power dynamics created when kaiako control of the learning narratives, leading to the potential silencing of tamariki and whānau voices within the assessment process. The service's community entered into a wānanga, sharing responsibility for assessment for learning, framed by the trisessment framework, and thus embracing and empowering belonging within the community. The result was a shift in whānau understanding of the nature of assessment and the importance of their participation in the assessing of their tamaiti learning, a key finding of the project.

When we care, we receive the other in an open and genuine way. As dialogue unfolds, we participate in a mutual construction of the frame of reference, but this is always a sensitive task that involves total receptivity, reflection, invitation, assessment, revision, and further exploration. (Noddings, 1995, p. 191)

Glossary

Kaiako—teacher

Tamaiti—child

Tamariki—children

Tangata whenua—hosts

Wānanga—forum

Whaikōrero—speech making

Whānau—family group

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