

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

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

Early Education welcomes:

- Innovative practice papers with a maximum of 3,500 words, plus an abstract or professional summary of 150 words and up to five keywords.
- Research informed papers with a maximum of 3,500 words, plus an abstract or professional summary of 150 words, and up to five keywords.
- Think pieces with a maximum of 1500 words.
- Commentaries on management matters with a maximum of 1500 words.
- Book or resource reviews with a maximum of 1000 words.

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Northcote Baptist Community Preschool

Digital fluency in the presence of an intentional teacher

Elizabeth Lupton and Ann Hatherly

Northcote Baptist Community Preschool (NBCP) is a community, not-for-profit service in Auckland. It is licensed for 50 children, 43 of which are over two years old, and has been educating and caring for children in the area for over 40 years. The centre is multicultural both in the tamariki and whānau that attend, but also in the kaiako. Kaiako have had strong PLD for many years, as the service leaders believe that ensuring teachers having access to good pedagogical leadership will lead to best learning outcomes for tamariki. The service has a vision for developing future focused curriculum for all learners, and this includes kaiako as well as tamariki.

Our TLIF project — What we did

In 2017, the centre applied for and won a Teacher Led Innovation fund (TLIF) grant. The title of the project was *'Digital fluency in the presence of an intentional teacher'*.

Kaiako had been inspired by a TED Talk from Sarah Kurtis (2013) called 'Cute is a four-letter word'. In this Ted Talk, Sarah talks of 'playing in the presence of a thoughtful teacher' and kaiako began to question if they themselves were always allowing tamariki to play in the presence of an intentional kaiako. This interest in intentional teaching coincided with a growing understanding that digital technologies in the curriculum could benefit children if kaiako used them thoughtfully.

In our TLIF proposal we wrote that:

As teachers we assume that when scaffolding children's learning we are 'getting it right', and we don't believe that we always do, in fact we believe there may be a better way to improve learning outcomes for children. We think that by developing a specific 'strategy' and using it for building next steps that add complexity, rather than

activities, we will be changing our practice.

The idea behind the TLIF was to research, formulate and trial new responsive strategies when working alongside children who were using digital technologies. If we found these worked then they would be embedded as our teaching responses across all aspects of our curriculum.

We eventually settled on what came to be known as 'response stones'. These represent a set of concepts that kaiako could draw on to help guide their moment by moment responses to tamariki. Each response stone represented learning we valued for our children and therefore wanted to promote through our teaching.

The six key concepts we finally settled on were:

- communication,
- collaboration,
- critical thinking,
- creativity,
- citizenship,
- cultural and spiritual connectedness.

The process we used to arrive at these concepts was at times frustrating and messy. After failing to find a suitable existing framework in the literature, we set about developing our own. We first identified 25 potential concepts, but soon realised that retaining so many concepts in our minds while teaching was not practical. This is when a collection of river stones came in handy. With each concept represented by a stone we were able to physically move and clump concepts together until we had a number of concepts we thought was manageable and reflective of our philosophy.

Video coaching — How we went about it

In our TLIF proposal, we had nominated video coaching as a tool to help with the analysis of our pedagogical responses. It is this element of the TLIF that we wish to discuss in this article. We chose video coaching because we believed it would allow us to “learn fast”, “adapt our practice” while “exemplifying the notion of ako and the value of tuakana/teina learning” (Teacher Led Innovation Fund Guide, Ministry of Education 2017, p. 4).

Each month we met for a coaching session, bringing with us video recordings of our efforts to use the response stones intentionally with tamariki. The clips were usually self-filmed and were around two to three minutes long. We undertook the sessions with guidance from an outside pedagogical mentor who coached us in the sorts of comments and questions to use, as follows:

- Tell me what you were doing here?
- How does this response represent one of the stones?
- How might you have otherwise responded?
- What might you have said if you had your xxxx response stone hat on?
- How would it look if you were to?
- I’m wondering if
- What were you thinking about?
- What was going on in your head?
- What lens were you using?
- How were you being intentional?
- And how did you do that?
- Is there anything you’d do differently?

We also adopted a respectful, mana enhancing format for the sessions; one that ensured the right of each kaiako to review their work publicly before others had the opportunity to share their thoughts. The understanding behind this was that it is disempowering to get critical feedback on issues you are already aware of but haven’t had the chance to communicate. The steps in the structure were:

- i. A different kaiako would begin each session.
- ii. The team would watch the video brought to them, without comment.
- iii. The kaiako who had made the video would always be the first to speak to the video, explaining what the intention was, how they felt it had gone, what they thought they could change moving forward.

- iv. Then the team would have the opportunity to further clarify what they had seen and seek information about the responses they had heard.
- v. Finally, each team member had the chance to offer feed forward to the kaiako being coached.

The impact of video coaching

Wise and Jacobo (2010, p. 163) describe coaching as ‘the process used to help people reflect, find power and courage within themselves and think and act in new ways in order to bring about positive change’. Kaiako found the collaborative coaching approach initially took a lot of courage. There is no hiding from your practice when it is on video. Potentially every action and response is laid bare for scrutiny, both by the individual kaiako whose practice is recorded and by their colleagues. As we described the process in a presentation:

Video coaching has been a new concept for us this year and something that we have found challenging but very helpful. Critiquing practice is difficult at times and has pushed us out of our comfort zones to really uncomfortable spaces—but it is through these ‘uncomfortable’ spaces that we’ve had ‘aha’ moments that refocused us and allowed us to look deeper at our responses and intentionality towards children’s learning. (Northcote Community Preschool Ulearn presentation, 2018)

On reflection, there were two elements at play which helped us make the attitudinal shift towards video coaching: from feeling uncomfortable and a little vulnerable; to appreciating the power it gave us to think and act in new ways. In other words, to help us claim a sense of professional agency.

First, we were a long-standing team that always had some form of internal professional learning on the go involving reflective practice. We were well used to examining our practice as a powerful source of learning for improvement.

Second, we had a well-established professional learning relationship with our external mentor who initially led the coaching process. She had worked with the centre off and on for over 10-years and during that time we had developed a high trust model of interaction where a degree of honesty from both her and kaiako was expected and accepted. Therefore, when we took up videoing coaching it

was in one sense business as usual. This did help alleviate the anxieties that naturally arise when you are asked to share and receive feedback.

Kaiako found that reflecting on practice in a collaborative way didn't just challenge their view of teaching practice, but actually allowed them power and courage—professional agency—in ways that they didn't expect. The following examples highlight the impact of collaborative sense making afforded by our video coaching sessions.

What's my impact on children's learning?

Rose, who works with 3-year-olds, brought a video clip of a child who was playing with dinosaurs. In this video clip Rose gave the child an iPad to record the story the child was telling as she played. In reviewing the video clip for her colleagues, Rose explained that her intentionality was to support this child's growing development of a second language (English). As she sat alongside the child, she was drawing on elements of the 'communication' stone to shape her responses. She spoke of "repeating back what the child said, showing that I am listening and hearing her voice" and "modelling English words and vocabulary around what she was playing with".

Discussing this further, the team encouraged Rose to look more closely at the interactions between the children who were on the edges of the video, as this helped her to see more teachable moments. It was through the video coaching session done with colleagues that she was able to see the impact that she had had on the learning for not just one child but the others who were around it too. As Rose commented, "We often don't see if what we are doing is effective or contributing to learning, but this session opened my eyes to the strength of peers contributing to my practice".

Am I being intentional or directive?

Megan brought a video of her working with children learning how to use 'stop motion'. After sharing her clip, she spoke to the video, questioning whether her response had been too directive. "At what point does my support for her change into something like creativity", she was asking herself and others. This led to a lively discussion about the fine line between intentional and directive kaiako responses. We concluded that in some instances—such as this 'stop motion' example—a certain skill level is a prerequisite for creative responses and therefore justified. With video in front of us and the

opportunity to go back and forth between viewing and talking, we were able to discuss a dilemma that resonated for all of us. This was not only in the context of digital fluency but across the whole curriculum.

Beyond the TLIF project

One of the key components of a successful innovation is that it is able to be continued beyond the development phase. Kaiako recognised the value that had come from video coaching during the TLIF project and determined that this was a strategy that they wanted to use more widely. It has since become a key way of developing all kaiako practice across the service. The following example exemplifies where video coaching has helped a student kaiako.

Am I really modelling inquiry?

Elizabeth encouraged Daniel, a student teacher undertaking placement at the service while completing his degree, to try video coaching. He had identified his ability to support children's inquiries through his interaction as an area for further development. When Daniel shared with his team a clip of him responding to a group of children building a bridge in the sandpit, he reflected on what he saw, asking "Am I modelling inquiry?" He went on to identify parts in the video where he felt the children were more inquisitive and noted that this tended to coincide with him holding back a bit and asking fewer questions. "When I think of inquiry, I think of questioning things ... now I wonder if I ask too many questions?". He then concluded "I think I need some strategies about inquiry, do I have a broad view of inquiry?".

By sharing these reflections with his immediate team, who because of his video had the evidence before them, he was able to hear suggestions that were specific and tailored to his current practice. These included strategies such as commenting more, questioning less, sharing more stories and ideas from his own experience, and learning to be comfortable with periods when he observed and listened rather than talked.

Conclusion

As Kaiako viewed their own and other's practice through video, they began to notice subtle assumptions they were making about their practice, and the relationship that had on children's learning. Video coaching allowed kaiako to return time and time again to a teaching moment and to listen with

intent to what was being said or what was happening to all participants captured in the moment. Having the opportunity to do this as a group then allowed for different perspectives on what was seen and heard to be recognised, and the discussions around this then allowed kaiako to develop a deeper understanding of the response that was made, or could be made in that moment.

Kaiako are always busy. There never seems to be enough hours in a day or minutes in an hour for any kaiako. Video coaching brought a new perspective on how to use time more efficiently for this team. Being able to spend time viewing other teacher's practice, and then to discuss what they saw was something that the team knew was missing from their practice, and in the past had tried to implement in other ways; none of them particularly successful. Designing an approach that allowed them the ability to view others at work, with the end goal of promoting enhanced teaching and learning, was a surprising find. As one Kaiako pointed out, "The opportunity to collaboratively reflect on both my own and others responses has allowed me to

move from observing and recording children, to assessing both my practice, and what deeper learning was happening beyond the obvious for the child". Kaiako recognise they were fortunate to have teacher release time with TLIF, that allowed them to develop the use of video coaching as a tool for the growth of teachers.

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