

# Early Education



Volume 66 *Spring / Summer 2020*

- Teacher Led Innovation Round 3
- Teacher Led Innovation Round 4
- 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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# Working with two-year Old's

## Developing reflective practice

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Reviewer: Karyn Aspden

Brierly, J. (2019). *Working with two-year old's: Developing reflective practice*. Routledge. ISBN 9781138600645  
Price \$35.99



As a lecturer working in initial teacher education, I sometimes get a surprise parcel from a publisher sharing a new book that might become a possible text for our student teachers. I was particularly excited one day to find this book upon my desk, especially given the focus on working with two-year olds. I have the privilege of teaching a Studies of Infants and Toddlers course, and I am deeply passionate about promoting quality pedagogy and practice for our youngest tamariki, particularly in light of the statistics which see this age group as one of the fastest growing in our ECE services. Finding a good resource to support infant and toddler practice is always a happy find. With hope, I thus tucked this book into my backpack and took it with me one morning on the Capital Connection from Palmerston North to Wellington. The book is quite conversational and easy read, so I managed to read the full text during the course of the train trip (and without nodding off too). Overall, I found it to be a valuable addition to the literature in this space and could see ways in which it might be useful for both individual teachers and teams who support infants and toddlers, though perhaps most useful for those who have not otherwise engaged in study or professional development in this area. It would also make a useful addition to a centre library, and as a useful entry point for student teachers too.

This book sits within the context of growing international acknowledgement across researchers, educators, and policy makers that the first three years are a distinct developmental period, unique within the broader conceptualisation of early childhood, as established in Te Whāriki. Equally there is an increasingly strong policy and curriculum imperative for ensuring that those who teach toddlers can draw on specialised knowledge and professional practice to inform best practice. We have an increasing understanding the programmes traditionally designed for three- and four-year olds may well not best support younger tamariki, compounded by the enhanced vulnerability of this age group. The recent Action Plan affirmed the need for greater attention to the needs of two-year olds, who run the risk of being invisible in the larger life of mixed-aged services, especially without increased ratios and enhanced pedagogical practices. This book starts from the position that the second year of life is one of the most complex, as tamaiti increasingly navigate their physical and social worlds, gaining independence, mastering language and managing emotions, and thus requires highly informed, targeted and responsive teaching practices.

The book begins by establishing the importance of reflective practice for practitioners, which is then embedded throughout the book in the form of

reflective questions and prompts related to the content. In doing so, the reader is asked to consider their current beliefs and practices and to challenge underlying assumptions about young children and effective teaching practices. A nice overview of different reflective models is included, which would be of value for teacher education students. Reflective questions are designed to support kaiako to deepen their understanding, apply research evidence and then to consider how this might be made evident in their teaching practice.

The book does take quite a strong development lens in looking closely at the characteristics of two-year-old learners, though not in a prescriptive or checklist manner. Rather the broad strokes of developmental progressions that are key to the two-year old world are explored in light of research and theory.

Relationships are seen as the starting point of all practice with two-year olds, beginning with the importance of attachment-based relationships in the ECE setting. The primary role of the kaiako is seen to be in supporting social emotional well-being and the emergence of resilience and assurance. From this point of relationship, the following chapters then explore the drive to move and take risk, as well as the quest for increasing communication and connection, again providing a broad understanding of the key changes that occur in the second year of life.

Part two of the book then takes a lens in exploring the 'how' of learning for two-year olds, considering the importance of whānau, continuity of learning, and the need for a key teacher model. I found the chapter focusing on family life to be quite light; while acknowledging the importance of seeing families as competent and capable, the richness of partnerships with whānau and the significance of whānau aspirations was a missing key here. The chapter on dispositions for learning is a nice summary or introduction piece, though again the rich New Zealand work around funds of knowledge and children's working theories offers a more complex way of understanding children's thinking, problem solving and leadership of learning in agentic ways. The role of a key teacher in supporting continuity, depth and breadth of learning in the context of secure relationship is the focus of chapter seven, reminding the reader that while there is a strong drive for independence on the part of the two year, such risk taking and exploration can only successfully take place in the context of secure and stable relationships.

The final section of the book then turns to the importance of the environment for learning and the role of the kaiako in supporting individual tamariki.

The author establishes the importance of the play context and the support role of the kaiako in fostering exploration and engagement through both planned and spontaneous interactions, as well as in daily routines and regular events. A key message surrounds the importance of supporting two-year olds to have increasing agency in their learning, to construct ideas, solve problems, experiment, take risk and become more confident and resilient. A range of teaching strategies and approaches are identified, though again framed in such a way as to serve as an introduction to less experienced kaiako. Some of the reflective questions framed in this section are valuable starting point for teams as a means of identifying shared beliefs and practices and evolving philosophical and pedagogical understandings as they shape planning, assessment and teaching in the ECE setting. The chapter on schema was perhaps one of the most valuable I read, and one I would be keen to share with student teachers and those new to working with the age group, especially in some of the practical examples given.

While this book comes out of the UK, and the UK curriculum framework, readers in Aotearoa New Zealand will certainly find some resonance, especially in later chapters which make reference to dispositions for learning and the *notice, recognise and respond* model as a framework for planning and assessment. However, for me the book does not sufficiently address the importance of language, identity and culture, and it would be important for New Zealand kaiako to set the content of this book against the bicultural imperative of Te Whāriki to ensure appropriate supports for tamariki Māori and Pasific peoples.

There was much in this book to like, with strong reminders of just how capable and competent two-year olds are, and the importance of kaiako with specialised pedagogical knowledge in supporting both the learning and socio-emotional competence of our tamaiti. The opportunity to revisit the key changes that are so powerful in the lives of two-year olds and to reflect on the assumptions that may be driving practice is a valuable tool. This book may be of particular value for those who have not yet undertaken a teacher education qualification, or for mixed teams as a means of establishing shared understandings and practices. However, experienced kaiako may find this text too simplistic and not complex enough in addressing the social and cultural elements of practice to warrant the purchase, especially in light of those already writing and theorising so meaningfully in this space in the Aotearoa New Zealand context.