

# 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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## Editors

Prof Claire McLachlan,  
The University of Waikato

Dr Karyn Aspden,  
Massey University

## Design and layout

Margaret Drummond

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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.

Contributions can be sent to the 2021 editors

Claire McLachlan:

[cmclachlan@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:cmclachlan@waikato.ac.nz)

Karyn Aspden:

[k.m.aspden@massey.ac.nz](mailto:k.m.aspden@massey.ac.nz)

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# Hokowhitu Kindergarten's journey

## TLIF data, knowledge, action project

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Susan Hildred, Heidi Burden, Kylie Clayton, Julia Jones, Wilma Aldridge and Sue Cherrington

At Hokowhitu Kindergarten, we are licensed for 40 children and have a team of five teachers. Our inquiry question was: *In what ways are our children interacting with peers and adults at kindergarten?* This inquiry question arose out of the work that we had been doing with children to support the development of their social competencies, as a result of our involvement in the *Incredible Years* programme. We wanted to know whether the strategies we were using were being effective in supporting children's social engagement with their peers and adults at kindergarten.

We used three data systems tools for our inquiry:

- We completed the *Child Profile* focusing on the social competency section. We completed this as a group, so we could pool our collective knowledge and understanding of the individual children we had selected to focus on.
- Our teacher-researcher completed CEOS live tablet observations focused on the social interactions of the targeted children for us. An initial set of social interaction codes that had been developed were further refined during the first inquiry cycle and re-used in the second cycle
- GoPro cameras were worn by the focus children in both inquiry cycles and by two of our team towards the end of our second inquiry cycle.

We selected 10 target children for inquiry cycle 1. These children had been part of the group that we have been specifically working with during the *Incredible Years* programme. Four of our target children were included in the second inquiry cycle, together with one new child.

We had to manage several big challenges as we undertook our inquiry cycles. These included:

- Developing and refining the social interaction codes for the CEOS live tablet observations. Our teacher-researcher and the external partners initially adapted a set of codes developed in a prior pilot study to better fit our inquiry question. However, the first few days of data collection revealed that the codes were too hard for our teacher-researcher to use in the live situation and several weeks were spent revising and simplifying these. This resulted in the cycle 1 data collection not being completed until the end of week three in Term 2.
- Changes in the teaching team. A team change, ACC leave and *Incredible Years* training meant relievers were frequently used over the inquiry period. This had a significant impact on the amount full team time for project work available.
- Preparing our self-review document for an ERO visit in Term 4 required significant time and energy during Term 3.

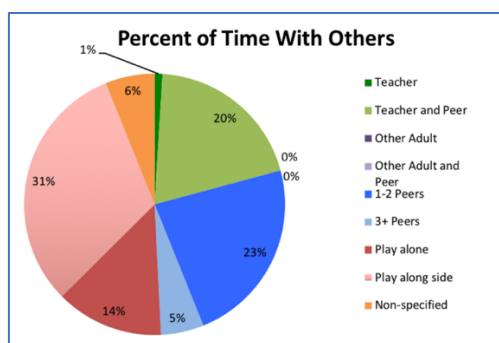
### Outcomes for children

In this section we focus on one of the focus children to illustrate the outcomes for him from our involvement in the project. A pseudonym has been used for this child.

#### *Focus child: Nate*

Nate was selected as one of our target children because we were really concerned about his ability to join social groups at kindergarten. We had identified him as one of our priority—we felt that he had quite a negative self-image and had observed that when he tried to join in groups that he would be rejected, or the other children would run off. We had already started working with him as a result of our learning from the *Incredible Years* programme, focused on social coaching around joining groups, before we began data collection. The first big 'Wow' moment for us came when we viewed the GoPro

video clips from the first time that Nate wore the GoPro. In one clip, he was in on the edge of the playground, doing a lot of self-talking—we already knew that he used self-talk a lot, but had never had the chance to hear what he was saying. In the video, he was coaching himself, saying “play nice, play fair, don’t play angry, play safely” before he went and tried to join in with a group. We were blown away with his efforts to remind himself of how to play with others, but it was sad to see how he was perceiving himself. We knew that the phrases he was using were not ones that we used at kindergarten and so we shared the video clip with his parents and found out that Dad coached him all the way to kindergarten each day. Sharing the clip has really helped to strengthen our relationship with his parents—they were over the moon at how hard he was trying to do the right thing at kindergarten. The CEOS data also gave us some really useful information about how and with who he spent his time at kindergarten, along with the types of social interactions he was having.



**Figure 1. March 2019**

As a result of the data we had collected on Nate, we developed an Action Plan for him focused on building up his self-esteem and sense of mana, supporting him to be able to enter groups and to calm himself when upset. Our action plan included the following specific actions:

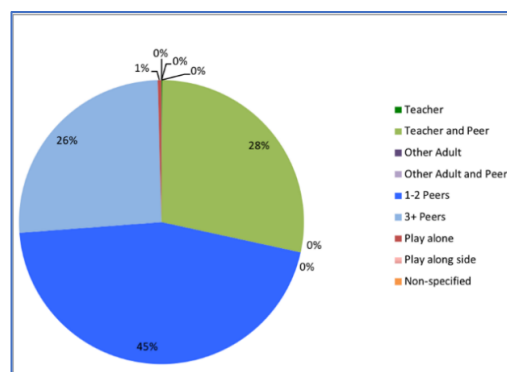
- Praising him when making good choices.
- Acknowledging his strengths and celebrating these in front of his peers.
- Celebrating positive moments with his whānau.
- Supporting and giving him the tools to enter groups and interact socially on his own and to approach a teacher if needing help.
- Supporting him with the tools to identify and manage his emotions.

We did a lot of work with Nate over the following months, spending a lot of time building up his self-esteem and confidence and helping other children to

recognise his strengths. We would shadow him so that we could help him to recognise and manage his emotions and do some social coaching to help him have the words to be able to enter play with other children. We talked a lot about having and recognising feelings and taught him strategies for calming his body down. By the time he went to school, he had moved from being a child who at times got really angry, lashing out, punching and hitting to being able to take himself off to calm down and then coming and talking to us when he needed help—the difference was huge. When Nate started school, we shared some very specific information with his teacher: that he still needed help read social cues, that his friends were really important to him so he sometimes got into a space where he made some poor decisions in order to keep in with his friends, and that at times he needed space in order to calm his body down when his emotions were high.

When we did the second round of data collection, the GoPro videos showed Nate joining in play with other children more, both by asking to join and by being invited by other children to join. His self-confidence had increased, and he was engaging in a lot of wordplay and rhyming that other children were noticing and joining in with too—we were having a lot of fun with him. We noticed that at times he still needed help to recognise more subtle social cues—for instance, in one clip he had asked a child if he could play; when she didn’t respond verbally but moved equipment so that there was room for him to join in, he misread the cue and left. A teacher noticed this, explained to Nate what the other child had done and encouraged him to try again—which he did successfully.

A second big ‘wow’ moment occurred for us when we looked at the CEOS graphs from the data collected in March and August. There had been a significant increase in the amount of time that Nate spent playing with peers in small or larger groups, as shown in the graphs below:



**Figure 2. August 2019**

At the end of our second inquiry cycle, we completed the evaluation for Nate's action plan—this is presented below:

## 22 October 2019

**Child profile:** When comparing these profiles from the start of our research to the end, we have seen a change in the way we view Nate around his behaviour in social situations. It showed an increase in using his words and seeking help from an adult and a decrease in anger and lashing out. He was included more with his peers.

**Graphs:** The first lot of graphs show approximately 50 percent of play was on his own or working alongside others. There was approximately 28 percent social interaction and the rest involved teacher interaction. The second graphs show a big increase in his interactions with peers sitting at 71 percent. The rest was teacher and peer interaction. Time spent in social engagement within a two hour observation was 94 percent.

**Video clip:** The second round of recording showed how Nate was able to enter groups, seeking support from a teacher if needed. He was able to stand up for himself in situations involving right and wrong. There was no self-talk. There was a lot of evidence of joining groups although he is still unsure of how to read some social cues sometimes. Nate modelled the language we have been using with him, i.e., “can I have a turn?”. He is able to self-calm now and can seek help from an adult.

**Evaluation:** (How effective was our plan? Did the child achieve the learning outcomes? What was the effectiveness of the teaching?)

This plan was around spending more time with Nate, building his mana and confidence which would enable him with his social interactions, being able to manage his emotions so he is successfully able to enter and work collaboratively with others. We feel this plan was a success. Through the tools we used we have seen growth in all these areas.

## Impact on teacher practice

Being involved in this TLIF project has impacted positively on our practice in several ways:

- Initially, we didn't see ourselves as researchers and were a little nervous about gathering and using the data from the different tools. It was really helpful to be able to work through the CEOS graphs and other data with our teacher-researcher and external partner to help us make sense of the data. Looking

across all the CEOS graphs of our focus children to see trends across the group gave us new insights that we may not have had if we looked at them on our own.

- The data tools added another lens to our teaching and helped us to gain information about individual children that we didn't typically get from our usual assessment processes. For instance, we found that the Child Profile asked a set of questions that wouldn't get answered through our Learning Stories so that made us think more deeply about what we did, and didn't, know about our children.
- We have got very excited about using the GoPro and have now bought one for the kindergarten. Two teachers have worn the GoPro and analysed their own teaching practice from this footage. We are hopeful that wearing and using the GoPro will become part of the kindergarten culture so that most, if not all the children are comfortable wearing it.
- The GoPro video footage gave us greater insights into each focus child and their interactions with others. This changed how we saw certain children and helped build stronger relationships. The level of detail revealed in the videos helped us to pick up on subtle cues in children's interactions giving us greater understandings about individual children and enabling us to step in with appropriate supports and interventions in the moment.
- We have made changes to our planning systems, adapting sections from the Action Plan template such as the 'teacher action' steps. We are now much more intentional in our planning and teaching and, because we are doing this planning together, we are all contributing ideas more than we might have in the past.
- How we talk to children has changed as a result of being involved in this TLIF project, alongside what we have learned from the *Incredible Years* programme and together this has had a huge impact on the culture of the kindergarten. Deeper discussions during our data and team planning meetings led to us to more consistently using teaching strategies across the team with children. We are also able to support each other better in the moment making our practice more collaborative.

- Our interactions with children have shifted – we are conscious of positioning ourselves where we can support children when we can see that social situations are starting to escalate so we can step in if we need to but not before giving the children time and space to try and work out things on their own. We are doing a lot more social coaching with children, including using the language for emotions and building up children's mana amongst the group so that other children shift their perceptions of them.
- Finally, the project has changed our way of thinking about research – it's fun and amazing. Despite our initial nervousness about being involved in data research, we embraced the journey and the learning and growth of us as a team has been significant. The year we spent on this project went really quickly and has inspired us to engage in further future inquiries.