

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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Riverdale Kindergarten's TLIF journey

**Coralie Stanley, Jules Greenfield,
Nicki Walshe, Megan Philpott and
Tara McLaughlin**

Riverdale Kindergarten is situated next to the beautiful Manawatu awa (river), and a short walk from the most amazing natural reserve. Our journey started many years ago, when we decided to make links into our community with a focus on Ahimate Reserve. This is our local reserve, filled with native trees and bush, tucked away secret forts, climbing frames, ladders and balancing beams, with an enchantment of fairy houses throughout. Ahimate Reserve is now embedded within our philosophy under the title of Adventure, giving children the opportunity to explore mother earth and all her beauty.

As a team, it is our passion to extend the learning of tamariki (children) about their community and provide opportunities to engage with nature. We knew there was valuable learning happening on these trips, but we didn't really know how to describe this, and we wanted to know more about the learning. Joining the TLIF research project provided us with the opportunity to focus on the Reserve and look deeper using a research approach and a range of different tools to gather information. Our inquiry question was: how do tamariki engage at Ahimate Reserve?

Initially our team decided to focus on data collection tools that looked at children's sensory learning. The information gathered in our first data collection cycle told us that touch and sight were the prominent senses used. Whilst this provided opportunities to plan for one of our tamariki, it did not provide as much information as we wanted for others. After robust team discussions, it became evident that we needed to make some changes to our focus and our data tools in our second data gathering cycle. We were discovering that the role of physical play, risk-taking and challenge was multi-faceted at the reserve and we were keen to explore this in greater depth.

We made changes to our codes, moving away from senses to risk and resilience, focusing more on the physical aspect of our excursion. We also developed two new child profiles, one which we linked to our philosophy and the other was linked to risk and resilience.

Each week we took a different group of tamariki on a 2-hour excursion to Ahimate Reserve. The teachers took turns to go on these trips. The teacher leading the excursion chose a focus child for each trip. With the first cycle (Term 1) we had 10 focus tamariki and the second cycle (in Term 3) we had nine. Each and every data collection revealed new and exciting discoveries about the focus child and provided new opportunities for further planning.

Focus child: D

We chose D as a target child and initially noticed that on the day of her trip to Ahimate she held on to Mum's leg, didn't want to put the vest on and Mum said that she had struggled to get her to come to kindergarten. When we got to Ahimate she decided to wear the GoPro, but she held the teacher's hand for the duration of the trip.

Our researcher followed D using the Child Experience Observation System, or CEOS, to gather data on the variety of experiences and interactions that took place on the trip. This included the percentage of time spent with others; and the number and type of teacher-child interactions. It wasn't until we watched the GoPro footage that we really became aware of how worried, anxious and concerned she had been for the whole two hours.

The data gathered for D was revealing. The graph data told us that D spent 66 percent of her time WITH the teacher and peers, plus an extra six percent with JUST the teacher; this means that 72 percent of the excursion was spent closely alongside and engaging with the teacher—a much higher percentage that we had encountered on any of our excursions. Also, 18 percent of the time, D was 'not

engaged,' but observing, which was also noted by the researcher in the Observation Notes.

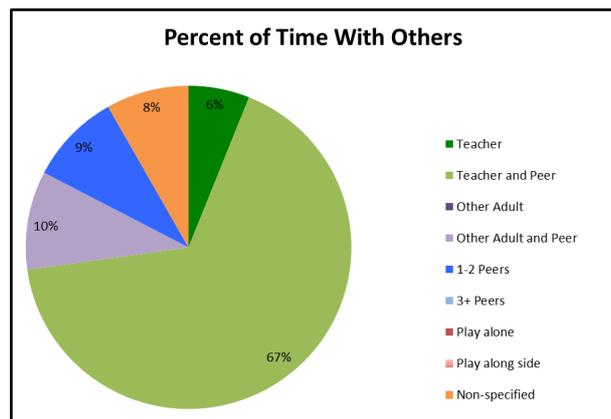


Figure 6. Percent of time with others

On the bar graph, D revealed a high care/nurture/support type of Teacher/Child Interaction, with 29 recorded occurrences. Again, a very high statistic indicating D needed a lot of extra support from the teacher during this excursion.

The Go Pro footage disclosed the way a teacher held her hand for almost all of the excursion. D would say "I can't ..." and responded to her friend who said it was easy, "but it's not easy for m". This was common dialogue for D throughout the excursion, which the GoPro captured, even when the teacher missed it when she was focused on the group or other individuals. This is the value of the GoPro footage—two solid hours capturing one child and their interactions with others and the environment!

The team then discussed and created a Data Knowledge Action plan for D. This included the key findings from the data and identified the learning outcome—to support D to develop a 'CAN DO' resilient approach to new learning.

Teaching opportunities arose, such as being able to put on a rain jacket independently without needing support or getting upset and stepping up to help Tim from Life Education Trust in front of the whole centre. Her 'CAN DO' attitude to new learning was highlighted for D and her peers when footage taken of her successfully going down the tyre ladder was re-visited and shared back at kindergarten.

When D returned to Ahimate in Term 4 we noticed a huge shift in her confidence. She confidently went down the tyre slide saying, "I can do this". She then began to teach her peers how to go down the tyre slide. Reviewing the video footage, we noticed that D's self-talk incorporated the language of resilience that we had been modelling to her as we had been implementing her action plan.

Impact on teacher practice

Being involved in this TLIF project had a positive impact on our practice in a lot of different ways and on many levels:

- Our involvement in TLIF has increased our confidence and our skills to analyse and use data. As one teacher commented: "We now know what the data tools give us and we are a lot more confident in using them or coming to our own conclusions now as a team".
- We were amazed how much extra knowledge the data provided. Some feedback includes the following:
 - "I wasn't quite expecting to be bombarded with so much factual stuff of what is actually happening that we can use and do stuff with."
 - "This allowed us to run on data. This allowed us to see the facts and that this is actually what is happening. Sometimes it was a surprise, sometimes it was confirmation. It surprised me how well we got to know the children as a team and how we could link that with whānau."
- We found discussing our trip experiences in more depth as a team gave us a much better understanding about the range of different activities and learning experiences we engage in with children at the reserve. Previously we had little knowledge about what other teachers were doing at the reserve.
- Our TLIF involvement has brought us together as a team. The team conversations that now take place about children's learning are at a much deeper level. We feel we are "all on the same page" as a team as a result of these robust discussions.
- Over the inquiry we strengthened the links between learning we could see happening at kindergarten and learning that took place at Ahimate. We developed photo books with photos taken on our trips, reviewed video footage on the learning screen at kindergarten for children to re-visit their learning and set up wall displays. These initiatives all provided opportunities for children and teachers to re-visit and discuss experiences that had taken place at Ahimate with tamariki.
- Through discussions with whānau and sharing happenings at Ahimate on Educa dashboard, we encouraged families to visit

Ahimate with their children. We were aware that many families began to visit Ahimate in the weekends. This has integrated and strengthened the links between learning at kindergarten and home and built on learning that was sparked on Ahimate trips.

- The action plans provided us with a structure that helped make our planning more focused, in-depth, manageable, immediate, authentic and organic.

Insights and realisations

We conclude our story with some final insights that stood out for us over our TLIF inquiry. We noticed:

- We became aware of how important it is to slow down and take time to observe children. *“Sometimes the little things are the big things.”*
- We found each tool provided a different lens. “Different children responded strongly to some tools but have revealed nothing in others so having the cross-section of tools has been quite important.” [i.e., Different tools provided different information that may or may not have been relevant to an individual child].
- We were surprised to find out *“how much we run on assumptions”* about children and how often these assumptions were proven to be wrong through the data.
- “For every child the data has provided something valuable. There has not been a child where we have thought—I don’t know or what is this telling us.” Sometimes you do have to look deeper and draw on more than one data source.
- We noticed *“How many key learning moments that you miss”* especially when you are taking responsibility for leading the trip to the reserve. This was particularly noticeable though the GoPro or teacher-researcher observation notes.
- GoPro footage gave us feedback about our own teaching practice. This is something that we don’t often get as teachers. Once we got over the initial feeling of being confronted by footage of our teaching this was positive experience. *“Now I have more belief, because you see yourself in those clips and how you are talking to children and you are like—yeah, I am doing this, and I am doing a really good job. So yeah, those tools are really good for self-assessment.”*

- Committing uninterrupted team time to plan for children’s learning is key. Team discussion added depth and insight and enabled us to achieve a shared team understanding about how we would support children’s future learning.
- Forward movement for the inquiry flowed better and faster with the collective energy, wisdom and insight of the full team *“because we bounce off each other and so much happens when we talk together”*. When workloads were heavy it became increasingly difficult to prioritise full team time to progress our inquiry as a team.
- The ability to learn about how to use data and work through it as a team was supported through the project-based data review meetings and the ongoing support the critical friend and project lead. *“Thank goodness for your (critical friend) guidance and support and I think that has been pivotal.” “Yeah, we would have foundered otherwise had we not had a little bit of a prompt or a lead from someone with knowledge and reassurance to lead us along the way.”*
- One surprising thing was “how much children self-talk and how much you don’t actually hear”.
- GoPro footage gave us a real sense of the child’s experience from their perspective. “You could actually see from a child’s point of view, them running through the grass and hear them huffing and puffing and how much ground was actually covered whereas as an adult, you are just walking around from here to there and you don’t really get the sense from the child’s point of view.”
- There was no way we would have got the results that we achieved over the inquiry in outcomes for children’s learning without the data tools that we used. *“It would never have happened.”*

SO, how do tamariki engage at Ahimate Reserve? THEIR WAY; there is no singular answer to the question of inquiry. Every child is unique in the way they engage at Ahimate and no two trips are the same. There are many different variables which can contribute to the excursion, but everyone enjoys themselves and we all make the most of our natural adventures down at Ahimate Reserve. Our TLIF inquiry made us all aware that by using a range of data tools we are able to gather more information to help us recognise and respond to each tamariki and their unique experiences.

Where to next, we will continue our visit to Ahimate and will be getting the Go Pro back out to

support the planning, assessment and evaluation of our curriculum and learning for our tamariki.