

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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TLIF Data, Knowledge, Action project

West End Kindergarten's inquiry journey

Jo Ellery, Mel Kenzie, Debby Gough,
Marie O'Neil, Sue Cherrington and
Lynda Hunt

At West End Kindergarten, we are licensed for 40 children (during this research period, a maximum of 30 children attended each day) and have a team of four teachers. Our initial inquiry question grew out of our focus on our kindergarten Treaty. Our Treaty is a document that has become a core part of our curriculum. It clearly outlines our social expectations at kindergarten emphasising the following: atawhai/kindness; kawenga/responsibility; and matatika/fairness. Initially we were interested in whether our Treaty was visible in children's social play—did our Treaty make a difference to how children worked together? We wanted to go beyond whether children were using the language of our Treaty to whether children's actions reflected the core aspects of our Treaty tikanga, but we decided that it might be hard for our external teacher-researcher to be able to recognise these elements in the same way that we do, in the way that we live and embed our Treaty. So, we refocused our inquiry question to: *What social skills are our children using when playing and learning with their peers?*

We used three data systems tools for our inquiry:

- As a team, we started with the Child Profile and completed all the sections, as we wanted to get as complete a picture of children as we could. We began completing the profiles as a team and then moved to having whānau teachers complete them individually. The rationale behind this was to allow Kaiako (educators) to ask whānau (extended family) questions to fill in any missing gaps. We brought back new information to the team to share and discuss.
- Our teacher-researcher completed CEOS live tablet observations focused on the social interactions of the focus children for us.

Codes were refined to better reflect the data that we wanted to collect.

- GoPro video recordings, with the GoPro worn by the focus children in both inquiry cycles.

We also compared the data we were getting, especially from the Child Profiles, with our existing knowledge of the children and with the kindergarten 'about me' sheets that we ask whānau to complete when their child starts at kindergarten.

We selected six focus children for inquiry cycle 1. We chose children that we wanted to know more about, including children who were quieter, who had different dispositions or who were new to our kindergarten. Most of our target children from cycle 1 were included in the second inquiry cycle.

There were some challenges that we had to manage as we undertook our inquiry cycles. These included:

- Changes in our teaching team and multiple commitments over the research period. Some of our team were involved in the Ministry of Education's Oral Language and Literacy Initiative (OLLi) programme and a kaiako was involved as a trainer with the *Incredible Years* programme. These commitments meant kaiako were regularly away from kindergarten.
- We didn't have a teacher-researcher within our teaching team due to our teacher-researcher taking on the TLIF project lead role. This did lead to missing some information over the inquiry despite our teacher-researcher and the research team trying to keep us up to date with research information.

Outcomes for children

The data, especially from the CEOS graphs, highlighted some assumptions that we held about

children and their social engagement and interactions with others. We had expected that the graphs would show children having high levels of social interaction, but we were surprised at the low levels of collaboration and assertiveness that the graphs revealed. When we started to look closely at the data across the CEOS graphs, GoPro and Child Profiles and across our focus children, we realised that there was a common thread identifying a low sense of self in our children. If children had a low sense of self how could they be confident enough to enter play, or to share their ideas, so we realised we had to take a step backwards to build their sense of self, before children could even work on those other social skills. We reframed our inquiry question to: *'In what ways can teachers intentionally support individual children to strengthen their positive sense of self'* to address this common thread and learning need. This was then linked into changes in our planning (see impact on teacher practice below). We began to focus on planning specific teaching strategies for our focus children and this sparked a wider curriculum focus on building a positive sense of self for all children.

We had a big turnover of children going off to school, with lots of new, younger children joining the kindergarten. Usually, new children would be supported to learn about the social norms of the kindergarten by the remaining older children but many of these older children were ones that we had identified needed support to build their sense of self and their social competency. This highlighted to us that we needed to be much more intentional in supporting all children to learn about and uphold our Treaty, as this defines our kaupapa and social norms. As we started implementing our planning for the individual focus children, we also started using these strategies more widely across the kindergarten group. We found this approach was making a significant difference to the learning for all children.

Focus child: Tane

Our data from the first inquiry cycle in Term 2 confirmed our understandings that Tane is really social, with 87 percent of his time spent with his peers or a teacher, so it was surprising to learn that although he was spending so much time engaged in social interactions, only eight percent of this time was classified as collaborative play. The GoPro footage revealed that Tane would often support his peer group by taking the blame for something that wasn't his fault, highlighting his desire to maintain his inclusion, regardless of the truth—his friendships were so important to him. An 'ah-ha' moment for us

was that he was not always the instigator of inappropriate play because we just hadn't seen that at all. Tane seemed to follow the play ideas of others, but didn't lead ideas. He would try to be any character, such as being the dog, just to get into the play. However, the GoPro footage also provided insights into his skills of negotiation with his peers, once he was in the play, as he was able to change the direction of ideas in order to achieve a positive outcome for himself.

Our action plan for Tane focused on strengthening Tane's sense of self, so that he could have the confidence to express his views and opinions and be able to engage in greater collaboration with his peers. We spent a lot of time building up Tane's sense of self: spotlighting him as a leader; and talking about things he was really good at. We worked on building his resilience and encouraged him to share his ideas and to have a voice, because we wanted to know what he thought, not what he felt he should say. We worked with Tane on his strengths—such as showcasing his literacy skills by making signs for our vegetable garden and encouraging him to lead the kaitiaki work within the kindergarten—and encouraged him to plan and reflect on his day at kindergarten.

Our second round of data gathering confirmed that Tane was still a social learner with 93 percent of his time spent with peers or teacher and peers. It was positive to see Tane's collaboration within these interactions increase from eight percent to 17 percent, and that his assertiveness also increased. The GoPro footage highlighted shifts in his play, from following the ideas of others to leading play ideas, voicing roles, negotiating roles, using his imagination and playscripts to share his ideas, advocating for fairness and weaving pro-social skills within play. From the GoPro footage, we could see the progression in Tane's confidence, and his sense of self within the social circle. Tane no longer needed to negotiate to be the lowest denominator in the group in order to enter play; instead, he could enter and play alongside his peers, with a positive status. It was evident to us that the intentional teaching strategies that we were using to support Tane's sense of self and confidence to lead his own ideas had led to positive outcomes within Tane's learning.

An unexpected finding for us in the second round of data collection was Tane's apparent understanding that, when he was wearing the GoPro camera, that his actions would be 'captured' in some way, but when another child was wearing the camera, he did not seem to realise that his actions could also be

recorded. Thus, we were able to gain greater insights into his interactions through seeing how he behaved across both situations. For instance, we identified that Tane would not always tell the truth or might embellish a situation in order to get a favourable outcome for himself or his peers. We also got greater insights into his interactions with younger children. We saw examples of Tane redirecting younger children away from his play in a very sophisticated way so that although he was excluding them, the other child still thought they were playing the game. So instead of saying ‘Go away’—he used

verbal cues and strategies that made it appear like he was still within the boundaries of inclusion.

These insights have informed our practices moving forward. We are now ensuring that we seek the perspectives of Tane’s peers, before trying to intervene in conflict situations or solve a problem, so we have a full picture because Tane is very aware of saying what he thinks we want to hear. Our new learning focus for Tane is on the dispositions of truth and fairness, and what these look like in play.

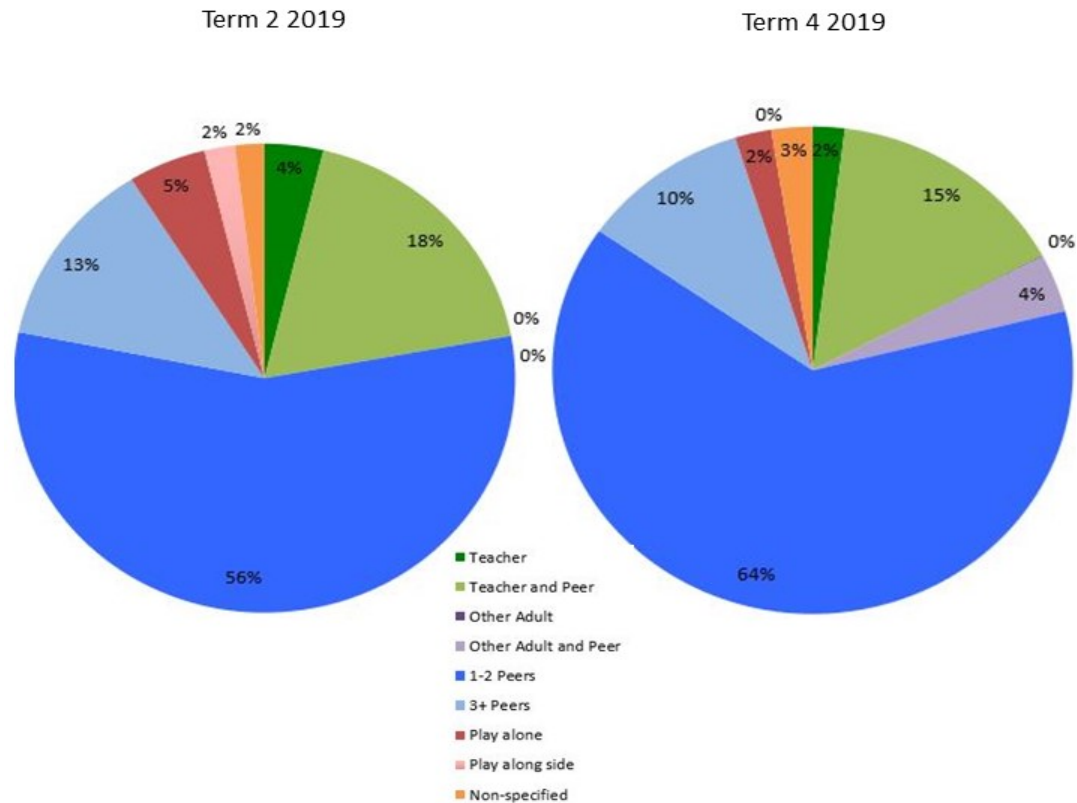


Figure 7. Term 2 and Term 4 2019

Impact on teacher practice

Being involved in this TLIF project had many positive impacts on our team.

As part of making sure that we get to know our children well, we have become much more proactive in asking whānau to complete our ‘all about me’ page when their child starts at kindergarten. Previously we had found that the sheet wasn’t always completed, and we were hesitant to push whānau for it, as we didn’t want to negatively impact on our emerging relationship with them. What we have found, however, is that the relationship is strengthened by conversations with parents and that this also helps the child’s transition. We now prioritise making time to korero with whānau during

induction. We nurture the opportunity to establish an authentic connection, to identify culturally appropriate values and practices, and establish aspirations. The key benefit is empowering tamariki to learn in an environment that represents them, their identity, culture, values and language and this all helps strengthen their positive sense of self.

When we pulled together the information that whānau provided in the ‘all about me’ page alongside different teachers’ perspectives and then the data from the graphs and GoPro, all this information gave us a really clear understanding of ‘what is the core need or next steps for this child at this point in time in order for them to progress?’

A major impact of our inquiry has been on our planning. As a result of using the full Child Profile with our group of focus children, we realised that there were gaps in our knowledge about many of the children. This was highlighted further when we started looking at the GoPro footage and the CEOS graphs. We'd been experimenting with our planning, and the insights that we were getting from the data, along with ideas from the Action Plan

template, have helped us to re-frame what we were planning for, and how we were recording our planning.

The example below is for one of our focus children—it was displayed in our office for quick reference, but a more detailed version was also held on our online portfolio system.

Plan for Action: Name: *****		Date: 22 August 2019
Goal Support ***** positive 'sense of self' as a competent and confident learner - nurturing his confidence to express his views and ideas with peers and teachers.	Curriculum Provide increased opportunity for Leadership - Encourage ***** to Lead kaitiaki roles and support and teach peers to do kaitiaki mahi. Provide ***** with opportunity to showcase his skills or expertise. Literacy - letter sounds, identifying letter name and forming letter shapes is a current interest area for ***** and skill area where opportunities can be scaffolded to allow ***** to showcase his literacy skills. Making signs for the garden could help nurture authentic participation. Supporting peers to find their nametag/write name. Phonics eye spy. ***** can teach others how to play phonics Bingo / and 'which sound' sorting game.	
Te Whāriki Contribution - affirmed as an individual: recognising and appreciating his own ability. ***** to develop his awareness of his own special strengths and confidence that these are recognised and valued.		
Teaching strategies <u>Praise</u> - Affirmation for when ***** shares his ideas and problem-solving solutions; providing ***** with positive feedback and helping to make his voice heard by others. <u>Encouragement</u> - Encourage and support ***** to voice his ideas while working alongside others, help to scaffold opportunity for him to contribute within group settings. <u>Identifying</u> - Drawing ***** attention to new ideas; Pointing out things of interest may generate areas of exploration and investigation and open opportunity for ***** to share ideas/views. <u>Spotlighting</u> - Making others aware of his skills/Knowledge/ideas	Notice, recognise and response: To nurture an increased positive self-image and opportunities for collaboration with peers. For ***** to use his negotiation skills not only as a way to enter play, but as a way to support problem solving and collaboration within play. Switching from a low participant role to a leadership role. Provide specific examples of ***** increased confidence and examples of positivity of self within learning stories.	

Figure 8. Planning August 2019

We have begun to use group planning where we could see that there were many, if not all, of the children who needed support in learning about and enacting our Treaty. Our inquiry occurred at a time when we had a large group transition to school and the overall age of our children was younger. This reminded us that we need to consciously re-introduce our kindergarten kaupapa and our Treaty to our new children. We've also shifted the focus of our planning from what we might provide within the environment or learning activities to what teaching strategies, as teachers, can use to support children's learning with an intentional teaching lens.

When we began writing Learning Stories that had a focus on children's sense of self, we initially found it difficult as we didn't want the stories to sound like they came from a deficit perspective. It became easier when we could start to see children's progress and could write about "I remember when you felt ...

and this is what you did, but now you're trialling this strategy of ... because teachers are supporting you to ...". We've found that our Learning Stories are now focused on really important issues around wellbeing and resilience and coping with difficulties, rather than more surface 'wow' moments. We are more focused on how well we know the child than on what might be quite superficial interests.

The data from different sources has helped us to see evidence of the impact of our intentional teaching more clearly than we previously did. For example, there was an episode where a kaiako had intentionally taught a child how use Sellotape, then a later episode had been recorded where the child had been encouraged to help another use Sellotape and had used language that the kaiako had introduced. Without the GoPro recording, the kaiako wouldn't have been able to see how her intentional teaching had impacted on that child.

The data, especially from the GoPro, has also helped us to see how some children might behave differently with a teacher than when they are away from them. We've reflected on how well we have known our children before we gathered data using these new systems (especially the GoPro) and how accurately we have captured children in their portfolios.

As a team we're discussing things more robustly, we're getting different insights and perspectives. A lot of the time as a teacher you plan on your feet for individual children, without talking as a team, and that's always going to happen, but for these focus children, it was great to have that time and to all be on the same page.

Insights and realisations

We conclude our story with some final insights that we have had as a result of undertaking this TLIF project:

- Teachers hold assumptions about learners, which may be incorrect. The different data sources help to challenge those assumptions and provide great insight into individual children.
- A curriculum-wide learning need may not always be visible. Looking at data across children helps to reveal these wider patterns.
- Research and inquiry are like diving into the unknown—you don't know what you don't know or where the journey is going to take you.
- Research data and findings may present something unexpected ... and unexpected is

good. Flexibility to work with what the data reveals is key.

- Intentional teaching strategies that were planned for specific learners led to a curriculum wide focus that provided positive learning outcomes for all tamariki.
- Children are clever and at times can present what they want you to see. However, the GoPro reveals a fuller picture than children might share with you and provides insights into the learning environment experienced by children.
- Improving learning outcomes within your curriculum requires a whole team approach. It was a team effort to unpack what the data was telling us. We had to dig deep, reflect, share, debate, look past what we thought we knew and focus on the data evidence to make sense of what our data was presenting. Working collaboratively to develop a shared team understanding was pivotal.

Our journey was one of initial uncertainty, followed by numerous wow moments and new realisations that have created long lasting ripple effects. These ripples have provoked a raft of positive changes within our teaching lens and practice.

The whakatauki: Mā te huruhuru ka rere te manu reflects our journey well. The whakatauki likens the feathers of a bird to new learning with the suggestion that new learning helps us to soar to greater heights. This acknowledges the way that data informed teaching changed the trajectory of not only our teaching but also the outcomes for children's learning in positive and rewarding ways.