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Early Education vol. 59 Autumn / Winter 2016

ISSN 11729112

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'Early Education' is a professional journal for people involved and interested in early childhood education. A partially peer-reviewed journal, it is published twice a year by the School of Education, AUT University.

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Our thanks for the photos

Many thanks to Prodigy Preschool, Forrest Hill, Auckland and to the kaiako, tamariki and whānau of Dinsdale Kindergarten, Waikato Kindergarten Association. Ngā mihi aroha ki a koutou!

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Deadline for contributions to volume #60 is 15 August 2016.

Note: Volume #60 is a themed issue on '20 years after Te Whāriki, what do we know now about assessment'.

Contributions are welcome on other topics, but may be held over for a later issue.

Subscriptions

Annual subscriptions are as follows:

- Students: \$20 (please supply a copy of current student ID)
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- International subscribers are asked to add a further \$10.

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Subscriptions run for a calendar year. Late subscribers receive back issues for that year (this may be supplied digitally – as .pdf files).

Back issues available for \$10 each.



Themed issue:

**20 years after Te Whāriki,
what do we know now about
assessment?**

Contributions welcome:

Deadline 15 August 2016

Looking backwards into the present

***Early Education* has been produced for nearly 25 years. In its early issues, it is described as an ‘independent’ journal for ‘people interested in early childhood education’. Its originator, Caryl Hamer, brought an insider’s perspective to national issues (she had worked in both the Department of Education and moved into the new Ministry of Education in 1989) and the clarity of the journalist’s eye – as that was her background as well.**

Early issues of *Early Education* document both major developments (even breakthrough technologies) in e.c.e., as well as the recurring areas of reflection and engagement. For example, the second issue (published in 1993) promotes the assessment possibilities of using cameras, while cautioning against just documenting what is ‘pretty’. Other articles provide a critical perspective on external reviews by government agencies (e.g. ERO), introduce the fledgling e.c.e. Pasifika-languages initiative in Tokoroa, and draw on US sources to encourage cross-sector solidarity and savvy use of the media in advocating for children. And as consumers of media, readers of *Early Education* were encouraged to look beyond the headlines, which were in 1993 apparently indicating that centres were ‘falling down’ in the area of planning for ‘the individual child’. Does any of this sound familiar? In this issue of *Early Education*, we are opening with an invitation to look critically at new technologies, in this case – eportfolios and especially those that offer templates for assessment. Janette Kelly and Jeanette Clarkin Phillips note a strong movement towards online assessment tools and query whether this is the best interests of children’s learning.

While it was emerging into visibility in 1993 in the form of the new Pasifika services, in 2016 language diversity is now a major feature of teaching and learning in e.c.e. Susan Bates considers the challenges to home languages when young children are immersed in English-medium e.c.e. services. The role of teachers in children’s fantasy play is reconsidered by Chloe Chen with a smorgasbord of options – not just opting in or opting out.

Similarly, other articles in this issue pick up the role of the teacher. Sara Murray reflects on her own experience as an Associate Teacher accused of racism. Her research findings on the importance of intercultural understanding are relevant to Associates, student teachers and children. Personal growth, willingness to change and constructing (acknowledging?) a teaching identity are further explored by Alison Warren. Another tool in the identity development of teachers is the importance placed on ‘critical thinking’: Rikke Betts reports on a recent AKO New Zealand research project using a ‘learning and sharing circles’ methodology to consider ‘critical thinking’ across several teacher education programmes. Both Rikke Betts and Alison Warren also acknowledge their own personal development under the mentorship of the late Professor Judith Duncan. Her legacy of critical engagement with topical issues continues.

Local publishers are strongly evident in our two book

reviews. The NZCER’s ambitious collection of contributions on ‘mentoring in e.c.e.’ is applauded by Penny Smith, while Carla Tunnicliffe finds fresh insight and energy in the latest edition of Pennie Brownlee’s classic *Magic Places*. That it first appeared about the same time as the first issue of *Early Education* provides another connection between the now of 2016 and the then of the early 1990s. There are others. While the early 2000s was an era of significant support for professional learning, teacher education and research in e.c.e., in 2016, we are again dealing with very restricted resourcing – not unlike the early 1990s.

Although the sector does need to engage with the challenge posed by the chief science advisor in the *Herald* on the outcomes of early childhood education, this can only be done if teachers have clear understandings of how to be intentional in their teaching and how to evaluate the effectiveness of their practice in relation to children’s learning. There are challenges ahead but these are manageable if the sector engages in ongoing critical reflection on practice. We need to support those spaces where those reflections can be heard and considered.

In terms of publishing research, there are new technologies and ways of sharing research, reflections and providing space for the sector to talk. But we believe there is still a place for bringing quality (often peer reviewed) local research into the hands of early childhood teachers, and to encourage those teachers to contribute as well.

This is important for many reasons, including the fact that tertiary level academics are often pushed to publish internationally which can mean that local readers have limited access to local research. Local publishers are also struggling to survive, and within the last few months, Ako Books – the social enterprise business which was created to carry on the work of Playcentre Publications – closed up shop with an announcement on Facebook that it had finally run out of financial options.

In line with its original vision, *Early Education* continues to showcase ‘independent’ voices in e.c.e. Administratively, ‘Early Education’ may be firmly grounded in the tertiary sector, but it remains a significant channel for both reflective teachers and researchers to make their voices accessible to others in this country. There is much to be said. And much to be listened to, as well.

As we are going to press, news has come through of the death of Anne B. Smith. Helen May has kindly provided us with a tribute to this extraordinary woman who has done much to shape the early childhood sector with her research, her writing and her advocacy.

Anne - we will miss you.

Claire McLachlan and Sue Stover
Editors

Letter from the Waikato

Kia ora to our colleagues in e.c.e. centres

Because 2016 is the 20th anniversary of *Te Whāriki* and 12 years since the publication of the first 10 books of *Kei Tua o te Pae* (Ministry of Education, 1996; 2004), we have been reflecting on developments in teaching, particularly in assessment practices in early childhood services.

From our observations and conversations with teachers during our regular practicum evaluative visits we hear disturbing news. Increasingly teachers are reporting that hard copies of children's portfolios are being phased out in favour of online ePortfolios using platforms such as Storypark or Educa. We have been discussing it in the corridors and the staffroom at our workplace, hence our motivation to write this letter to you.

As we have mulled over this growing phenomenon, a number of questions and issues have arisen for us. We are not arguing against ePortfolios *per se*, rather we are advocating for the continued provision of hard copy portfolios (alongside them). But we do encourage teaching teams who are thinking of discontinuing hard copy portfolios to think carefully about their decision to do so. Especially, we suggest that teaching teams explore the rationale behind the decision. Is it based on sound principles of sociocultural assessment practices? Is it a cost-driven decision? Or is there some other reason why teachers/managers think that this is a good choice they are making?

Portfolios are designed to be a record of a child's learning demonstrating progression and continuity. They generally contain narratives known as Learning Stories. Learning Stories document children's learning, intending to make visible significant aspects of children's learning as it occurs. Learning Stories contain feedback to children about their learning. They focus on skills, knowledge and attitudes that encourage learning dispositions and working theories. Learning Stories are based on the principles of formative assessment including: the provision of effective feedback; informing and forming teaching responses; the profound influence of assessment on children's motivation; acknowledgement of multiple cultural lenses; and the opportunity for revisiting and self-assessing (Wiliam, 2011; Carr, 2001; Carr & Lee, 2012; Ministry of Education, 2004).

Easy access to portfolios enables young children the freedom to choose to revisit their record of learning and build their learner identity without adult facilitation. It

is crucial that children are enabled to 'read' their stories (from memory and/or through photographs), recount the strategies they used to accomplish something and talk to others about their learning.

These aspects help shape a positive learner identity and robust learning dispositions. Having hard copies of portfolios readily accessible and available to children fulfils aspects of formative assessment more effortlessly than via an electronic device that may not be easily accessed.

There are other significant reasons why retaining hard copies of portfolios is important, in our shared view. These reasons include:

- portfolios can provide a strong sense of belonging;
- equity of access for families who may not have technology readily available to them;
- the social aspects of sharing stories and talking about learning with interested others; and
- portfolios are powerful literacy artefacts (at a time when early literacy is a key social goal).

Infants and toddlers in particular can engage more easily with a hard copy portfolio. Perhaps you've seen this yourself? To visualise this, have a look at the image on page 139 of *Learning Stories: Constructing learner identities in early education* (Carr & Lee, 2012). This image shows three siblings ranging from a few months to approximately eight years lying on the floor all 'reading' and sharing their portfolios.

Another image in *Kei Tua o te Pae* Book 1 (Ministry of Education, 2004) shows a mother and baby looking at the infant's portfolio (p.3). These tangible artefacts provide opportunities for building identity, relationships and competence. The intimacy we see and feel viewing these images is based on the sharing, which we are doubtful would be easy to replicate with ePortfolios.

Hard copy portfolios are a valuable resource for children and families who have English as an additional language. Stories abound about how having a portfolio to carry around, refer to at every opportunity and share with others has been instrumental in a child's sense of belonging, and their successful transition into a new environment (Ministry of Education, 2004, 2009; Davis et al., 2015).

Possible ethical issues exist related to the ownership

of and purpose of ePortfolio platforms. The developers of ePortfolio platforms are business owners who provide resources for early childhood education. However unlike companies that market products for physical environments, providers of online assessment platforms can influence the ways in which assessment is documented. This is important. Although the online platform may be designed with the best intentions, unless there is a deep understanding of the pedagogy of formative assessment, the authenticity of thoughtfully capturing significant learning for a child is at risk. There is also the risk of 'standardised' assessment using online platforms where the analysis of learning comes from a drop-down menu rather than deep engagement with the learner.

There is more work to be done. So far research has largely focussed on parent/whānau engagement with ePortfolios (Goodman & Cherrington, 2015; Higgins, 2015; Hooker, 2015) with little exploration of the impact of ePortfolios on children. We concur with Goodman and Cherrington (2015) who suggest that further investigations are imperative including children's use of ePortfolios to revisit, communicate about and engage with their learning individually and collaboratively. After all, it is their assessment which needs to benefit their learning.

Ngā mihi nui,

Janette Kelly and Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips

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Photo courtesy of Dinsdale Kindergarten, Waikato Kindergarten Association

Portfolios can provide a prompt for children's thinking – including their engagement with literacy practices such as intentional writing.

Finding the third space

Successful intercultural practicum

Sara Murray

Once upon a time I considered myself a pretty good Associate Teacher. I prided myself on being able to quickly assess where the student was in terms of their pedagogy. I then gently but firmly guided them onwards and upwards.

But my pride was rather abruptly shattered when I met Susie. She was a second year student, and had been born and raised in Malaysia. As a caring and professional Associate, I of course spent time on our first day trying to get to know about her and her background further. I became concerned when she told me that her previous Associate Teachers had all been racist. This bombshell shocked me into silence.

From my perspective, this initial encounter paved the way for a practicum fraught with difficulty. From the beginning, Susie was reluctant to plan and work with children. She seemed to want me to tell her exactly what she should be doing, whereas I was waiting for her to demonstrate initiative. When she finally did plan and implement an activity, she was upset that the children had not followed her instructions correctly. Instead, they had run off to play with the resources themselves. I spent a long time explaining how, even though her activity had not gone according to plan, that it was still very successful because the children worked with the resources in a different way. They had taken control of their own learning. But Susie did not appear to accept or agree with my feedback.

By the end of the placement, I think I was just as frustrated as Susie. From my perspective, she just didn't seem to 'get it'. From her perspective, I suspect she thought I was just as racist as her previous Associate Teachers.

I wish I could say that this story ended with a happily ever after. But it did not. We parted ways upset and exasperated. But, from that moment nearly ten years ago, I began my own journey of discovery. Not long after this experience, I became an early childhood lecturer. I had the opportunity in my new career to visit not one, but many, many other Susies. Her story was reflected time and time again. Asian-born student teachers, who had been born and educated in their home countries, often seemed to have difficulties acclimatising to working in New Zealand early childhood education centres. Practicums became times of great stress,

high emotion, and frequent failure. So begins my research story.

What the research says

I found out that existing research shows that Associate Teachers in general tend to treat all students, irrespective of their cultural background, the *same*. Associates have clear perceptions around their role. Generally they consider it to be to provide encouragement, support, pedagogical experiences, and evaluation of performance (Hamilton, 2010). But they view their *own* teaching practice as normative and a benchmark against which to assess students, rather than the guidelines provided by the initial teacher education provider. Associates tend to think that there will be no difference in mentoring a student from an ethnic minority compared to a student from the dominant, white majority (Martinez, McNally, York, Rigano, & Jose, 2001).

So assumptions are made that all student teachers, no matter what their cultural orientation, have the same access to information on the education system and on subtleties in how to behave (Campbell, O'Gorman, Tangen, Spooner-Lane, & Alford, 2008). Associates also tend to position the student solely as a learner, and expect them to show initiative (Campbell, et al., 2008; Ferrier-Kerr, 2009; Haigh & Ward, 2004). Indeed, success is often measured in terms of how well the student assimilates and conforms to existing school discourses and cultures (Erben & Wyrer, 1997).

But there is also a large body of research which documents the emotional turmoil that immigrant students face when learning how to teach in an education system that is not their own. They enter practicum expecting to be treated with respect and as professional colleagues (Haigh & Ward, 2004; Martinez, et al., 2001). Indeed, minority students expect they will be given additional, specialised guidance during the practicum. This includes guidance on how their new educational system operates (Spooner-Lane, Tangen, & Campbell, 2009). Students new to New Zealand enter practicum with perceptions about their own role, based upon their own personal educational experiences. They may expect their new educational system to mirror their own life-experience, being teacher-led and

with disciplined, compliant students (Myles, Cheng, & Wang, 2006). None of these results were surprising, given the teacher-led Confucian model of teaching used in many Asian countries (Guo, 2006).

An intense cognitive struggle is reported repeatedly in the literature on practicum for ethnic-minority students across a wide range of disciplines; not just early childhood (Campbell, Tangen, & Spooner-Lane, 2006; Duchesne & Stitou, 2010; Lu, 2005). All studies report a profound upheaval in students' perceptions, values and beliefs as they encounter an educational context completely at odds with their own. Universally, this has been reported to manifest itself as significantly high levels of stress, depression, anxiety and exhaustion. So Susie and I were not alone in the emotional turmoil that we experienced.

My research

As a result of these research findings, I wanted to view practicum from a wider perspective; something happening for both Associate *and* student, rather than just one or the other. I also wanted use a positive lens and focus on success, rather than simply continuing to document the issues that arose for ethnic-minority students. My doctoral research project therefore focussed upon the main research question, "What makes for a successful practicum for immigrant Asian early childhood teaching students and their Associate Teachers?"

I used a qualitative multiple-case study design and followed the journeys of three student teachers and their three Associate Teachers. In this article, I focus on the experience of only one of these pairings, Jiao and Lucy. Jiao was a young Chinese woman, with two young children of her own. Her Associate Teacher, Lucy, was a Pākehā New Zealander and an experienced head teacher. Before their practicum began, I interviewed both of them individually about their expectations, past supervision experiences, and perceptions of success. During the practicum, I visited the centre and videoed Jiao's practice. From this video, both Jiao and Lucy identified whether key interactions Jiao had with children were successful, and how they could be made more so. After the practicum had ended, I again interviewed both participants to understand whether their views had changed as a result of their time spent together.

Tensions

It became apparent that there were some clear differences between Lucy and Jiao throughout the practicum. These occurred in two distinct areas; their expectations and how they defined successful teaching practice.

Jiao came to the practicum expecting to be treated with respect and to be acknowledged as a professional:

As a student teacher I wish to make contribution to the centres. I mean - if a student teacher is willing to learn things from you, or makes you feel acknowledged in the centres that would be most successful for me... The Associate Teacher is willing to ask what you are thinking, or ask what have you learned in your university to make a contribution

to the centre, or the life experience you can contribute to the centre. That makes me feel acknowledged.

But at the same time, she wanted to be treated as a learner. She wanted to receive immediate support and feedback.

The most common thing I have learnt is [the Associate Teacher] provides a suggestion where you need it. So if I ask them questions or they can see what I feel, even though I don't ask them, they can feel I have some questions in my mind. They will answer me, you know, answer me automatically.

This contrasted with Lucy's expectations. She expected to supervise students at a distance, giving them space to demonstrate their initiative.

I think that they need support, but I think they need to also be able to make their own choices and be able to lead as well. Like if you're telling someone what to do all the time, well you can't really see what they know. Like if you're telling someone, OK you're doing that, now you're doing this, you never get to see them actually using their initiative.

These differing expectations in terms of their own role and that of the other person in the practicum led to tensions in the relationship over time.

In terms of practice, Jiao emphasised the child's happiness and the transmission of important knowledge as being the determinants of whether an interaction was successful. But Lucy instead assessed successful practice from a wider perspective, using a more holistic sociocultural lens. In the following example, both are discussing the same interaction with children at a painting activity. Jiao thought it successful because she introduced new language skills to children.

Yes, I think it's successful because I know the toddlers especially, they are very sensitive to language... And then children learn language quickly, very quick than adults. So I just feel the opportunities to introduce more Chinese words and language to the children.

In contrast, Lucy looked at the child more holistically, rather than focussing only on language development.

I know that [child] knows her colours, she knows her numbers, she knows every letter... Her big thing is bringing herself out, just talking and communicating, building her confidence... It's a lovely activity but it's just too many not extended questions, closed questions: What colour is it? What do you want?

So with such fundamental differences existing in their expectations and perceptions, it was apparent that there was a high chance that this practicum would have problems. It did.

'The third space'

Some of the issues highlighted in Jiao and Lucy's relationship mirrored my own when supervising Susie. However, neither Lucy nor I were aware of these differences

in understanding or expectations during the course of the practicum. We simply didn't ask the right questions of the student, or come to the supervisory relationship with a critically reflective mind about our own practice.

As a result of the findings in my research project, I have developed a model of what a successful intercultural practicum could look like (see Figure 1). The model recognises that both student and Associate Teacher have their own personal identities which have been built as a result of previous life experiences, which include culturally-based norms. I also suggest that our *professional* identities are built upon our personal senses of being. In Associate Teachers, these are secure as they have had the opportunity to develop and be reinforced over time. Both professional and personal identities are in alignment. But the newly-developing professional identity of the student may fundamentally clash with their personal values and beliefs.

Conversations between Associate and student may fail to address these fundamental, but sometimes invisible, differences. I suggest that one theoretical framework for effective intercultural communication is that of 'the third space' (Bhabha, 1994). In his work, Bhabha theorises that the third space is the threshold space between two individuals from differing cultural backgrounds. It is a place in-between, where culturally-based understandings can be temporarily suspended, discussed and reflected upon. Beginning from two different positions, a third, new space

can be negotiated. This is not a compromise; instead it redefines a whole new position (Flessner, 2014).

But this threshold position can be a strange place with strong feelings of instability and lack of clarity about where you belong and what you should be doing in such a position (Kalscheuer, 2008). It is as a result of the tension from this sense of in-between that cultural differences are unpacked, negotiated, and reimaged. It is in this place of discomfort and not-knowing that both the Associate and student can come together to explore their own perceptions and values in relation to the other. Practicum can then become a transformative experience, supporting the development of professional identity in *both* participants.

Third space discussions are neither easy to engage in nor to maintain. They represent a conscious effort to acknowledge the unconscious values and expectations each participant has. Both must step outside of what they think they know, and be prepared to be challenged. The emotional impact of these challenges on both participants must be acknowledged and therefore supported accordingly.

Compounding the difficulty of conversing and reflecting within the third space is the added complication of language difference. Findings in my study strongly indicated that a language barrier between Associate and student did exist. All participants recognised that language barriers made communication challenging, yet none entered the third space where they truly sought to understand the view

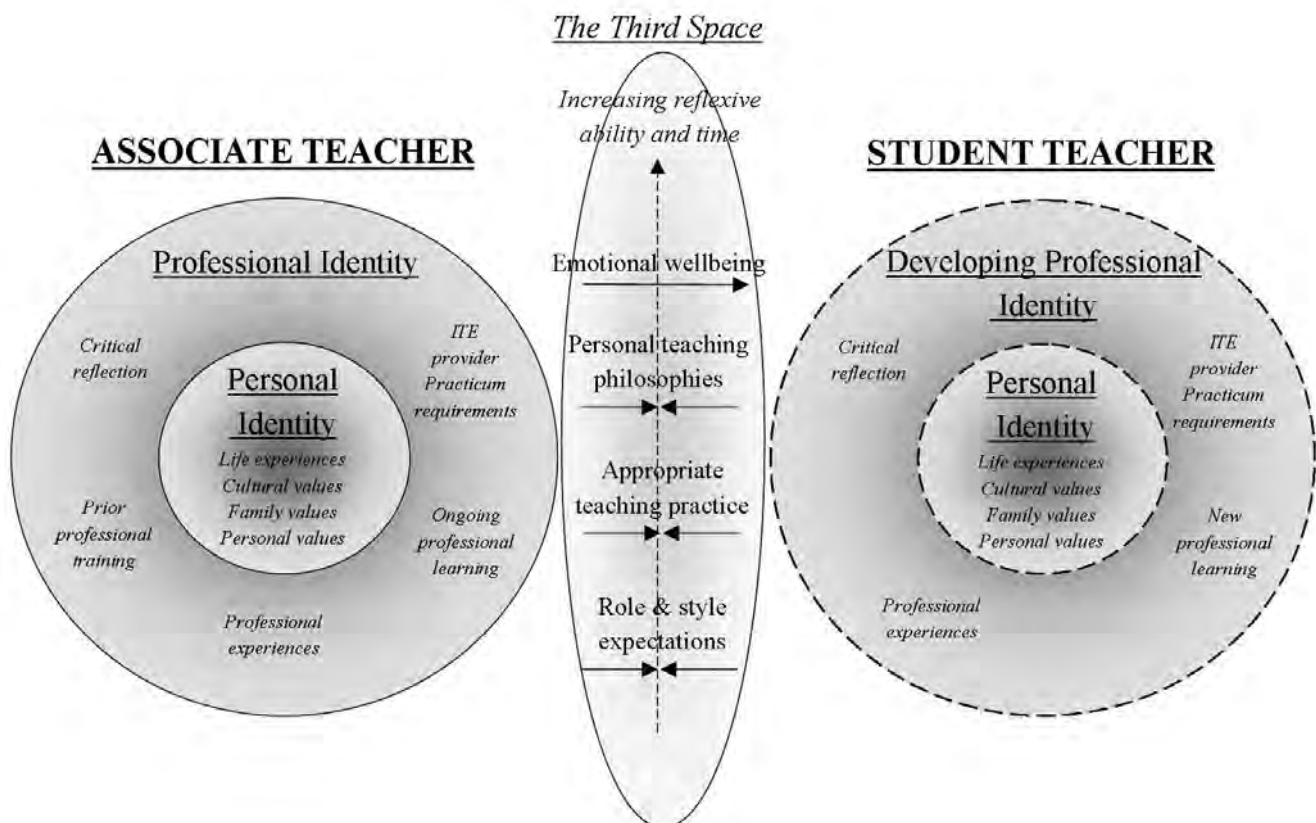


Figure 1: Model of successful intercultural practicum

of the other. It could have allowed Jiao to learn about the values and beliefs that underpin the New Zealand education system, as well as how Lucy interpreted these in her practice. Correspondingly, it could also have allowed Lucy to appreciate the basis upon which Jiao based her practice, learn from it, and consider alternative perspectives in determining its success, rather than comparing it to what she herself would have done.

Finding 'the third space'

I wish I could provide a simple list of what to do to find this elusive place. But of course it's not that easy. The onus of finding the third space lies with the Associate Teacher. Just as we all recognise our teacher education as an ongoing journey of critical reflection, so too is the journey to finding the third space. Deeply critical reflection is the key. As an Associate Teacher, the most fundamental step in finding the third space is to critically reflect upon your own deeply-held values in regards to teaching. Many of our everyday practices are founded on unconscious assumptions. For instance, consider your reaction to seeing a four year old child refusing to feed themselves, but waiting instead for an adult to do so for them. I know that as a teacher, I would have been encouraging the child to pick up that spoon. But Susie would have likely seen the situation in a completely different way. Instead, she may have seen it as a way to demonstrate love and care by providing for the child. Such simple practices are laden with culturally-based assumptions.

One useful way to really reflect on what you do on a daily basis is to video your own practice. Seeing yourself working with children, and discussing it with others, you will become aware of the many unconscious decisions you make. Ask yourself, why did I do that? Digging deep into your beliefs will often uncover memories of your own childhood.

Another step may be for the Associate Teacher to position themselves as a learner. I certainly used to say this all the time, recognising it every time I went to a professional development course. But what if what we are learning about ourselves challenges everything we think we already know? I suspect we're more likely to either ignore it, or discredit it. Our automatic tendency is to label a challenging practice as wrong. Hence this is a possible explanation why previous research shows that Associate Teachers position their own practice as normal and right. So looking at Susie's practice, it was automatic that I failed her based on her teaching practices. They simply weren't what I myself deemed to be acceptable teaching standards.

Finding the third space requires empathetic participants. Associate teachers need to work hard to understand how the student is feeling, and their beliefs around teaching and education. Again, this is not in order to change these or to explain why they are somehow wrong. Their beliefs are simply different to your own. It is instead to find a place of mutual respect and understanding.

The student will need gentle and compassionate support during this process. They are already studying in a new country, trying to assimilate to new ways of being.

But they have the added pressure of being assessed to a standard of practice that is unfamiliar and uncomfortable. Their wellbeing and sense of belonging are likely to take precedence.

Associate Teachers need to recognise that to effectively supervise a student who is new to New Zealand may take a considerable amount of extra time. Intensely reflective discussions take time. They are based on respectful relationships which are also likely to take longer to establish. Entering into a supervisory arrangement like this without consciously thinking through these issues is likely to do more harm than good.

Assessing students within the 'third space' framework can take on a new dimension if done effectively. Rather than simply using the lens of their own practice to frame success, Associate Teachers may broaden their lens and come to a new understanding of what successful practice could look like. This is certainly imperative, given the increasing diversity in our population.

Rethinking Susie

Looking back now at my Susie experience, it seems obvious that many of my practices as an Associate Teacher stemmed from my own beliefs about what a student should and should not be doing. I expected to see initiative, never realising that this is a learnt experience. In some cultures other priorities are more valued, instead focussing upon the wellbeing of the group. I also expected Susie to understand the value of child-directed learning. But how could she when it was such a foreign concept to her? Her whole life up until that point had positioned teaching as a one-way transmission of knowledge. I tried to explain to her the New Zealand 'way of doing', expecting her to completely change her way of knowing. I never respected her beliefs or understandings, simply categorising them as wrong. I was naïve.

I wish I knew then what I know now. I wish I was mature enough to reflect critically upon my own beliefs and to discuss these with Susie. I now realise that I needed to understand myself and my teaching practices a lot deeper in order to be able to appreciate alternative perspectives. I still strive to find the third space with international students. It will be an ongoing process but one which I continue to challenge myself with.

I considered myself an effective Associate Teacher, never realising that I instead needed to become the student.

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Acknowledging Anne B. Smith

1940-2016

By Helen May

Anne arrived back in NZ in late 1974, with her husband John and two preschool aged children, appointed to the University of Otago as a lecturer in education in the field of human development. She had been on a Commonwealth Scholarship at the University of Alberta where she had obtained her doctorate, as did John. Thus began a whirlwind career and an adventurous journey over more than four decades, using the resources of academia, through research, writing, presentation, conferencing, film making and travel, to present the research and policy arguments for quality child care, and more broadly for quality early childhood.

This was a journey played out on many fronts. Firstly within the university where career advancement for women and particularly women with children was a rocky road. Secondly, on the local front Anne was part of the Dunedin Women's Collective that got funding through the 1975 International Women's Year fund to establish a childcare centre that demonstrated in its practice, how quality for children and support for women could be realised. These were heady days that spilled onto national political fronts linking early childhood education and women's rights. Anne has been a figure of national renown ever since: advising, chairing, and working with multiple government agencies on various taskforces, think tanks, committees and working groups.

Back in the mid 1970s Anne was the first academic in New Zealand to actively support the idea that quality childcare could be a good thing for children and families. She became involved in the advocacy work of the NZ Association of Child Care Centres (now Te Rito Maioho Early Childhood NZ) undertaking leading work around qualifications for staff working in childcare and, through her research, challenging older myths of maternal deprivation to promote new understandings of the components of quality childcare. Anne's advocacy work for early childhood was always grounded in research, a field in which she gained both national and international recognition. Her book *Understanding Children* went through many editions and has been a standard text for so many New Zealand students of education and teaching. In 1995 Anne was appointed the foundation Professor and Director of the Children's Issues Centre. This opened another front as a leading advocate for children's rights; posing new research questions and confronting key issues for children including New Zealand's 'anti smacking' legislation. Anne's stage was truly international, and with colleagues from the Children's Issues Centre and other like centres of scholarship, the new discipline of Childhood Studies was founded.

Anne died 22 May 2016, after a brief illness.

Bilingual children?

Or just pre-schoolers learning English?

Susan Bates

The issue of how to best support bilingual children in early childhood settings is multifaceted and fraught with problems for mono and bilingual teachers alike. In New Zealand, early childhood teachers must hold in one hand the obligations under Tiriti o Waitangi to promote Te Reo, in another hand, teach literacy in English, which is also the primary *lingua franca* in NZ, and in a third hand, encourage children to hold their home languages as ‘first’ languages.

The question of how to do this is a daily reality and challenge in early childhood services in Aotearoa New Zealand. This is especially true in Auckland, which is being described as ‘super diverse’ because it has an exceptionally high percentage of people born abroad (Tan, 2016). Early childhood teachers are often the first local educators that immigrant families meet. What will guide teachers in their relationships with families who bring a new language into the early childhood community?

While it is clear that bilingual children have the right to experience educational environments where their home language is maintained, (see for example UN Charters of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966; UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989), this does not mean that those rights are honoured. However, a high level of proficiency in the dominant language of economic and social life, is essential for movement out of what, for many additional language learner’s families, is perpetual poverty through lack of access to employment (May, 2014).

In addition to a brief literature review of language acquisition and how bilingual children are served (or underserved) whilst in institutional education settings, this paper offers tools for early childhood teachers. Foundational to these tools is the sociocultural construct of ‘funds of knowledge’ (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005) which positions teachers within a community of learners where a new language to learn is an asset; an area of further inquiry. Such openness to new directions is basic to democratic education, especially for teacher education (Apple, 2011).

Language learning – some basics

Humans prefer the language of their mothers at birth. Part of language learning for humans is copying what they see. Babies form their mouths and tongue to shape words being spoken to them, mirror neurons are fired in the first

few hours of life when newborns imitate adult actions. (Goddard Blythe, 2010).

The arrangement of sounds (phonetics) and awareness of words and word strings (lexical) abilities are highly predictive of later abilities to arrange words into grammatical sentences (Alcock & Krawczyk, 2010). Growth in vocabulary enables learners to make meaning and express it. When children experience density of new vocabulary, rare words and introduction to abstract ideas, (Dickinson & Porche, 2011), then children are able to think critically and express themselves coherently. These steps must be traversed in whatever language children are born into.

Despite the research evidence that speaking more than one language is a cognitive advantage and should be an indication of intelligence (Bialystok, 2007), international statistics indicate that bilingual children are over-represented in the long tail of educational underachievement (Hughes, 2013). Girls at pre-school tend to be more socially motivated and therefore more language motivated than boys. Bilingual boys from poor homes are at the most risk of underachievement in education globally, from early childhood onwards (Hughes, 2013).

Many bilingual children do outperform their monolingual peers, but the fact remains, many bilingual children do not achieve the same language skills (Hoff, 2013). Proficiency in a second language depends on factors such as age, time spent, time allowed, programme, starting points at school, home environment, socio-economic status, parental education and style, teacher training, the child’s community, siblings, and personal traits. The role of a teacher, especially an early childhood is important in establishing attitudes regarding the relative value of home languages.

Capability in the home language largely determines the capability in all subsequent languages (Bialystok, 2007; Cummins, 2007). In other words, if the first language (L1) is curtailed or devalued, the result is that the second language (L2) will also be affected adversely. And conversely, if L1 is extended, valued and deepened, the child’s capacity to learn and think deeply in L2 is more likely to be enhanced. This starts to explain why bilingual children are over-represented in underachievement academically (Hughes, 2013).

For children learning two languages at the same time, the danger is that one language, usually the societally dominant one, becomes the language of greatest proficiency, and the mother tongue is gradually lost. Although a level

of receptive comprehension is retained, sophisticated and fluent expression is lost. They can also become at risk bilinguals, not being proficient in either language (Podmore, Tauoma, & Tapuosa, 2006). Immersing bilingual children in an English medium e.c.e. service puts their home language at risk; at risk of losing linguistic identity, self-esteem and global citizenship (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013).

In Europe, 'Content and Language Integrated Learning' has been adopted in various forms, in order to achieve the European Commission Action Plan 2003 objective of children learning the mother tongue plus two other languages. As Sylvén (2015) has pointed out, this is happening at various rates of success depending on nation specific factors such as research, teacher knowledge, the age of the children, and the social makeup of each country.

Without such a plan and widespread public support, the pressures to abandon a minority mother tongue can be strong. Arguments against retaining minority languages include ghettoising, as well as restricting children's social mobility. In the context of fitting into a new country and new culture, the loss of minority languages is seen as natural and inevitable, a Darwinian survival of the fittest (May, 2014).

A recurring explanation for the early introduction of children to English in the early years is parental anxiety that unless English is introduced very early, the child will be held back in achieving their potential success in an English-dominated social and cultural context. Seeking out early childhood settings as 'full immersion' is seen as the way to ensure success, while home language retention is solely the responsibility of the family. This can place children as 'at risk' bilinguals.

Language proficiency

Because language is relational and social, relationships and social factors will provide motivation, a major factor in language acquisition. However, increased use of English in an otherwise non-English speaking home does not improve vocabulary or literacy (Dixon et al., 2012). Speaking the home language in naturalistic settings reflecting the child's interests has been cited by bilingual adults as the most useful means for retaining the first language and facilitating second language transfer (see Dixon et al., 2012; Sakamoto & Morales, 2016).

Language status also affects the motivation of the learner. Children starting school with limited English proficiency are much more likely to stay in the vulnerable group throughout their school life (Goldfeld, O'Connor, Mitchen, Sayers, & Brinkman, 2014; Hoff, 2013). In a US study, the researchers noted that children were sensitive to the status their society, classroom, adults and peers conferred on different languages in the pre-school classroom. Children equated unequal presence as unequal value (Rowe & Miller, 2015).

This can happen through assumptions or even requirements placed on bilingual teachers. At the beginning

of an action-research project in Auckland, bilingual teachers in one e.c.e. service indicated that they used their first language to help settle children where appropriate. However once the child was settled, the teachers spoke in English (Podmore, Hedges, Keegan & Harvey, 2015). There is anecdotal evidence of bilingual e.c. teachers being required to speak only English, with both children and parents.

Along with motivation, aptitude is an equally important contributor to individual success. Memory for text is the strongest predictor for early immersion children, but this is not significant for older children. For them, it is analytic ability that predicts success (Ebert et al, 2013; Gathercole & Adams, 1994).

Tools for teachers

For early childhood teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand, a starting place is to consider the actual setting – both its physical attributes and its social organisation, including the language that teachers use. For centres with infants, it is important to consider how the environment supports or impedes infant language acquisition. Background noise for infants is a hindrance to learning language; they learn to switch off or tune out. Similarly, when children are in large groups with only minimum staffing, then it is difficult for teachers to respond promptly and empathetically to infants. If they do not spend one-on-one time watching closely, listening carefully, and being praised for their own efforts, infants' language development will suffer (Goddard Blythe, 2010).

When it comes to the social environment, teachers and management can recognise how immigrant families are referred to, and how much time and effort is invested in engaging with them. Referring to children as 'bilingual' or 'emerging bilingual' is a more positive way to describe a child, than focusing on the child (and family) in deficit – as 'lacking English'. Podmore et al. (2016) advocate for an 'additive model of bilingualism' which, dependent on adequate resourcing and support, focuses on building the 'capability of young children to learn effectively in more than one language' (p. 2). 'Subtractive bilingualism' occurs when the home language is replaced by another language, (usually English).

A willingness for teachers to move outside their linguistic 'comfort zone' is needed to enable relationships which can build on the e.c. centre communities 'funds of knowledge'. 'Funds of knowledge' is an approach to curriculum based on the simple premise that "People are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge" (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti 2005, pp. ix-x). Within such an inquiring approach, what is opened up can be called an 'arena of engagement' (Moss, 2008, p. 14) – a willingness to encounter, to talk, to consider. The outcomes are not predetermined. And as such, in the arena of 'learning English as an additional language' in an early childhood setting, the parents may be active advocates for an English immersion experience for their child. Or they may be advocating for their children to hear as much of their

home language as possible (Podmore, et al., 2015).

So in this arena of engagement, early childhood teachers have a responsibility to understand the importance of building confident, articulate, analytical bilingual children, so that they can confidently be open to children and their families.

Here are some tools for early childhood teachers:

1. Work on the quality of relationships between teachers and children.

This is a cognitive and emotional investment. Teacher's emotional involvement can be a catalyst for children's emotional development (Ostrosky, Gaffney & Thomas, 2006). Children with insecure relationships with teachers have a harder time facilitating relationships with peers, and this reflects directly on oral language development. Responsiveness will enhance motivation (Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002).

When teachers understand their classroom as a site of power and children's perceptions, they are more likely to create a space in which equity and justice are implicit and explicit in the curriculum. Teachers communicate in conscious and unconscious ways and must choose what they illustrate to children with regard to culture, language and therefore the children themselves (Cummins, 2009).

Curiosity, empathy and intellectual excitement foster a joy in learning about the children in the classroom, rather than an obligation. Equal status of languages in the teaching environment is crucial for motivation and self-esteem. These factors, along with self-efficacy, and reflexivity, indicate a desire to teach well, which may be the single biggest factor for children's success (Dixon et al., 2012). The trusting, reciprocal relationship between teacher and child may be the most powerful tool for learning in the early years.

2. Engage with the language and culture. Teachers must have skill at delivering instruction and language within the child's background (Cummins, 2009). One-to-one and small group relationships are critical for joint attention and encouraging dialogue for listening and speaking.

Teacher knowledge in the child's home language is an important skill. Even using just a few words displays



Opportunities for multi-literacies are not restricted to those whose first language is English – such as is the case with this child trying his careful hand at Chinese characters.

willingness and builds trust. Beginning with greetings, animals and foods is a great way to bring a language along with its culture into the curriculum.

3. See the unique child. Know the child. Recognise when frustration, health, or behaviour change. Children don't learn when they are distracted, sick, angry, or unhappy. Recognition that each child is different, and the importance of family relationships, is essential to fostering language development for bilingual children. It may be necessary to support parents in home language expansion, just as much as the child's second language. Language development is also affected by motor control, visual, auditory and vestibular factors. Difficulties at birth can have long lasting effects on children's language (Goddard Blythe, 2010).

While these conversational topics may be difficult to facilitate with parents, teacher knowledge is a great asset. To know the child requires the teacher to ensure that children can take initiatives and sustain their



Photo courtesy of Prodigy Preschool, Forrest Hill, Auckland

When they share a language with a child who is already fluent in a language other than English, bilingual teachers have a unique contribution to make both to the education of young children and also to the relationships that develop amongst the adults in the centre's community.

interests through equitable access to resources – people, places and things (Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002; Cummins, 2009).

4. **Expand conversations.** True conversations are reciprocal and encourage complex thinking. For very young children, this involves both verbal and non-verbal communication, especially for children aged under two, and children who are 'emergent bilinguals' (Goh, Yamauchi & Ratliffe, 2012). Using a variety of questions, waiting for a response, encouraging turn taking, scanning for children not participating – these are all tools teachers must become skilled at.
5. **Tell stories, not just read books.** Interactive story telling – and story book reading – stimulates vocabulary and print knowledge (Mol, Bus & de Jong, 2009). Joint attention can also be facilitated through photos and personalised stories using iPads and cameras. Children can create their own books using technology to incorporate home languages, stories and pictures, encouraging home/centre dialogue (Rowe & Miller, 2015).
6. **Engage fluent home language speakers.** Linguistic parents, grandparents and other whānau are the best way to bring the language into the centre. They can provide cross-over for the child, enabling them to build on prior knowledge through direct reference to their home life (Cummins, 2009). It is also useful instruction for other children and teachers. It is parents and whānau who can provide a window into a child's language development. Parents are able to identify the child's 'real' language practices, oral, conceptual and written (Michael-Luna, 2013).

7. **Value bilingual teachers.** Bilingual teachers must be allowed to teach to the fullest extent in children's own languages, to encourage cognitive, social and emotional development in both languages, to encourage family and whānau input and experiences. Teachers too must have their linguistic rights recognised within early childhood education Aotearoa.

All teachers need metalinguistic knowledge (Dixon et al., 2012), yet this is not a feature of current e.c.e. teacher education. It is not an exaggeration to say that current policy for entry into e.c. teacher education is discriminatory against bilingual e.c. teachers, unless they have significant academic success already in an English-speaking country.

It is important to remember the multi-factored nature of children and their environments prohibits single 'best' strategies for education, particularly in language. Just as children employ multi-modal strategies and tools, teachers must also look to a wide range of strategies and pedagogies. But the starting place needs to be a willingness to engage with the child that is in front of them.

Discussion and conclusion

Although there are three national languages in New Zealand, English is privileged above the others – Te Reo Māori and New Zealand Sign Language. However, in early childhood settings, Te Reo is given greater status than Sign. The many languages of our multicultural communities can be relegated to 'other'. However, even with its greater status, Te Reo rarely has more than simplistic and tokenistic influence within early childhood education (Jenkin, Broadley & Burgess, 2015).

Where there is sufficient population to support them, immersion e.c.e. services exist and help to explain the recent expansion of home-based services. Fluent speakers of say Hindi, or Mandarin, or Arabic, can work as caregivers (under the supervision of a visiting teacher), and provide a language-rich environment for children whose parents want them to learn the caregiver's mother tongue. Centre-based immersion services also exist. The prime example of this is te kohanga reo which has provided a model internationally for sustaining endangered languages. However, when Māori families bring their Māori-speaking in tamariki into English-medium e.c.e., they face the same challenge that presents immigrant families: will attending e.c.e. add to or subtract from their children's home languages?

Research into language acquisition shows that children learn a second language best when firmly grounded (expressing abstract ideas both verbally and written) in their first language, ideally at around age 10 years old (Dixon et al., 2012; Hoff, 2013). To help children in the current environment of early childhood education in New Zealand, there are four factors which I argue need urgent attention and further research.

1. Early childhood services must find ways to bring home languages into centres in a meaningful way. Community contributions encourage equity in language status and motivation for children, as well as providing various forms of instructional and social language. Monolingual children also benefit from exposure to other language forms and sounds.
2. While the socialisation of immigrant children with local children is important, children benefit most from using language for social and relational reasons. However, this must not replace the ethnic peer language conversations, invaluable for fostering L1 language vocabulary and meaning (Dixon et al., 2012).
3. Teacher knowledge of children's dispositions, interests and home environment are crucial for learning. Bilingual teachers have the best opportunity to find out what home is like – to understand parent aspirations and knowledge, and how each child ticks (Dixon et al., 2012).
4. Teachers' ability to show leadership and establish community connections may be the most valuable skill of all (Hughes, 2013).

Protecting languages has benefits for culture and language diversity, providing models that are not monolingual and mono-minded. This helps invigorate a learning community and wide society that ensures justice, identity equity, and real democracy (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013). A democratic education will only eventuate when every voice is valued. This means that every voice must be given space and time, while achievement 'scores' and unrelated curricula must be relegated or modified. The number of bilingual lecturers in teacher training does not reflect the number of bilingual children in early childhood. Taking resources from the real and lived world of early childhood education, including its

Two myths about learning an additional language:

Myth 1: Younger is better.

Research says differently: older children (over 12) show greater proficiency and efficiency at learning. They have a greater number of literacy, social and conceptual skills to draw from, and many of these older children will still achieve native like pronunciation. Younger learners do usually attain better pronunciation and grammar, although few attain native like skills (Genesee, 2015).

Myth 2: Instruction is critical.

Research says differently: time spent using L2 in social situations helps speed of acquisition and proficiency. While time in L2 reading instruction is positively related to learning L2, it is negatively related to L1. Cross linguistic transfer does not happen immediately or automatically. Also, time must be allocated for these children to process their language experiences (Genesee, 2015; Hoff, 2013).

communities, back into the tertiary training environment is essential to provide an actual democratic education which reflects the "kind of society we want and (the) kinds of politics will help us get there" (Apple, 2011, p. 23).

For teachers to best support children to retain fluent home languages, they must break barriers for themselves, for parents and children, for centre culture and for societal expectations. They must be better prepared with training in linguistics, the importance of language, and the benefits for multilingual children in New Zealand.

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Discourses at work

What shapes EC teacher identities?

Alison Warren

‘Who am I as a teacher?’ is a complex question. Answering it requires consideration of how others view teachers, as well as teachers’ subjectivities; that is, how teachers themselves understand who they are when they are teaching. Looking particularly at the journeys into professional status of newly qualified teachers, this article identifies three discourses shaping teacher identity: an authority discourse, a relational professionalism discourse and an identity work discourse.

The research study is framed by poststructural theories, especially Michel Foucault’s theories of discourse and discursive practices, and how they shape the ways people identify themselves within particular roles, such as teaching. Foucault (1980b) described discursive practices as “continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviours” (p. 97). Individuals positioned within discourses may be disciplined, or govern themselves, or seek power associated with status and pleasure. They may also negotiate tensions and conflicts in a variety of ways.

Dominant discourses are sets of values, beliefs and knowledge that shape individuals’ subjectivities (self-understandings) by determining what is ‘known’ and what is ‘true’, and what are regarded as ‘normal’ ways to think, speak and act in particular social groups. Power circulates within social settings through discursive practices, which shape how individuals understand themselves. MacNaughton (2005) advocates for early childhood teachers engaging in deconstruction and critical reflection so that they can offer some resistance to power and knowledge within discourses, negotiate subjectivities, and even change discourses.

Early childhood teacher identities

An individual’s personal identity is often interpreted as a ‘true self’, or authentic identity. *Āhuatanga* reflects te ao Māori perspectives on identity. Ways of being are passed down from ancestors/tūpuna and the spirit world of atua, as expressed in *Te Whatu Pōkeka* (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Early childhood teachers’ identities are understood in many ways. Teachers’ roles and expectations appear in their job descriptions, in professional standards such as *Graduating Teacher Standards* and *Practising Teacher Criteria* (educationcouncil.org.nz), the curriculum framework *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), and guidance documents, such as *Tatāiako* (Ministry of Education & New Zealand Teachers Council, 2011).

Data from the research participants show different ways of understanding identity. Naomi (all names are pseudonyms) claims a ‘true self’ identity:

You have to hold on sometimes to your identity of who you are, to your values and beliefs but also hold true to your identity and knowing ... what you believe in, what you think is right .

In striking contrast, Poppy sees multiple identities:

If you, say, meet me outside of work, I don’t think you would even know I was a preschool teacher, and if you met me at work you’d probably think that I wasn’t what I am outside of it. I think that it’s just that I try to adapt.

Ruby sees her identity as developing:

I honestly think I’m forever changing. And improving what I’m doing, and the more knowledge and experience I get, the more I know.

Teachers may negotiate their personal and professional identities in complex ways. Cohen (2010) describes identity development as “an ongoing dynamic process in which individuals negotiate external and internal expectations as they work to make sense of themselves and their work as teachers” (Cohen, 2010, p. 473). Perceptions of early childhood workers have changed over time, reflecting changing views of society. This is particularly true for childcare workers in Aotearoa New Zealand. Helen May (2007) describes how their role changed from ‘minding’, to ‘working’ and then to ‘teaching’. How early childhood teachers work to make sense of themselves and their work as teachers is influenced by various understandings of early childhood professionalism.

Early childhood professionalism

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the early childhood teaching workforce has been increasingly professionalised since the education reforms of the 1980s. In 2013, 75% of early childhood practitioners in early childhood centres were qualified registered teachers (educationcounts.govt.nz). Early childhood teacher identities are linked to early childhood professionalism which in turn shapes ideas of how ‘good’ teachers should think, speak and act.

Traditionally, professionalism has been associated with qualifications, specialised skills and knowledge, and respected status. In contrast, working with young children has historically been associated with mothering, and workers seen as instinctive maternal carers. In Aotearoa New Zealand, education reforms in the 1980s contributed to professionalisation of early childhood teaching when all early childhood education services became the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, and a common three-year teaching qualification was established. Professionalisation has continued with introduction of *Te Whāriki*; Education Council teacher registration and certification processes; and a 10 year strategic plan (Ministry of Education,

2002) that aimed to have 100% qualified and registered teachers in early childhood services by 2012. This target was set aside in 2009, but other government initiatives emphasise expectations that teachers are knowledgeable, skilled and effective in their work of educating young children. For example, the Advisory Group on Early Learning (Ministry of Education, 2015) linked effective implementation of *Te Whāriki* to a qualified workforce and continuing professional development and teacher inquiry.

Early childhood professionalism is a complex and contested concept. Besides traditional professionalism, other 'professionalisms' include managerial professionalism associated with accountability and efficiency; relational professionalism associated with professional caring relationships with children and their whānau/families; critical professionalism associated with advocacy and activism for social justice; and culturally responsive professionalism associated with sociocultural approaches to teaching and learning. Early childhood professionals in Aotearoa New Zealand are expected to engage in bicultural teaching practice as responsible partners (Māori and non-Māori) to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. These complex perceptions of early childhood professionalism form the background to the research presented here, where participants consider 'Who am I as a teacher?'

The research methodology

The research is a qualitative case study which was conducted for a Masters thesis (Warren, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2014a, 2014b). As a teacher educator, I became interested in how student teachers negotiated their sense of themselves as teachers through writing reflections and discussing their teaching. As the reflective writing and discussions had occurred within the assessment framework of an initial teacher education provider, there were power relations and professional expectations involved. A poststructural theoretical framework based in Foucault's theories of discourses and discursive practice provided research tools that took account of power relations.

The five research participants were newly-qualified teachers with a field-based three-year diploma qualification. They were purposefully selected as having a range of professional and personal experience. All are female; four are Pākehā New Zealanders, and one is a European immigrant. As field-based student teachers, they had worked or volunteered at least 15 hours each week in early childhood centres. At the time of the research, all were employed in education and care centres as provisionally-registered teachers.

Participants' understandings of their teacher identities were explored through transcribed focus group discussions and individual interviews, a selection of assessed reflective journal entries from their initial teacher education (ITE) course, and reflective writing about these reflective journal entries. The first focus discussion explored participants' thoughts about what 'identities' are, and introduced the focus question 'Who am I as a teacher?'

In the second phase, participants selected three assessed reflective journal entries from their ITE course work. They wrote responses to reflective questions about each journal entry, and then wrote further about how they understood themselves as teachers. Semi-structured individual interviews then drew on

preliminary analysis of the first two phases to explore participants' understandings of their teacher identities. The final group discussion revisited the focus question informed by the research experience. During each focus group discussion, one participant was unable to attend, and had a separate interview covering the same topics.

Data analysis firstly involved reading transcripts and reflective writing data closely, and carefully listening to the audio recordings. I used a coding approach (Mukherji & Albon, 2010) to highlight phrases, sentences or paragraphs that seemed to refer to the same topic, and grouped similar codes into themes. To effectively use Foucault's theories to explore participants' subjectivities (self-understandings), I needed to go beyond codes and themes. I used analytic questions to 'think with theory' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012), imagining Foucault reading over my shoulder and prompting me to ask questions.

I wondered:

- What is regarded as normal, known and true by these teachers?
- How do these teachers negotiate their subjectivities (self-understandings) within dominant discourses of early childhood teaching?

Three dominant discourses became evident through data analysis: the authority discourse, the relational professionalism discourse, and the identity work discourse.

Findings and discussion

The three dominant discourses are underpinned by values and beliefs regarding early childhood teaching and offer positions within the discourse that represent 'good' and 'normal' ways of being early childhood teachers. This section will briefly describe each discourse, and then discuss some ways that two participants negotiated tensions and conflicts within these discourses.

The authority discourse positions teachers as claiming and being claimed by authority. Participants *claimed* authority through status as qualified and registered teachers; feeling knowledgeable and competent; and feeling responsible and trustworthy. They are claimed *by* authority when they comply with professional standards; meet qualifications requirements; and work in teams with colleagues who have power over them.

The relational professionalism discourse values teachers skilled in warm and positive relationships. This discourse includes some values of the historical 'mothering' view of early childhood work, such as nurturing and caring. Relational professionalism goes beyond instinctive biology-based caring, to include 'ethic of care' principles as advocated by Nel Noddings (for example, 2012) and integration of love and care into early childhood professionalism (Dalli, 2006). All participants see this discourse as central to their teacher identities.

The identity work discourse positions teachers as responsible for shaping their professional identities through identity work, including reflective practice. They take responsibility for shaping themselves into 'good' teachers. Within this discourse, teachers make decisions about changes they wish to make to their identities, and aspects they wish to hold on to, sometimes in the face of challenges.

Tensions and conflicts within teacher identities

These three dominant discourses of early childhood teaching provide three sets of possibilities and constraints on ways of being early childhood teachers. Sometimes participants describe tensions and conflicts within particular discourses, and also between discourses. For example, a teacher positioned as having authority over colleagues may use a commanding relational style, which conflicts with expectations of warm, positive relationships within the relational professionalism discourse.

According to Foucault (1980a), power circulates within social relation; it “doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but [...] traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse” (p. 119). Within discourses, teachers experience discipline and govern themselves to meet expectations and seek ways of being that give pleasure. Teachers may accept, resist, or negotiate their positions within discourses when they experience tensions and conflicts.

Within this study, the research data shows that all participants negotiate tensions and conflicts in their teacher identities across the three dominant discourses. In the interests of clarity, this article discusses data from Poppy and Sally.

Poppy

At the time of the research, Poppy had been working as an early childhood educator for about six years. During her time as a student teacher, she was employed with the same responsibilities as qualified teachers in her early childhood centre. She had been unsure about the value of qualifications when she started working in early childhood education:

I [thought], I don't have to be trained, I reckon I'm better than her [qualified colleague] anyway.

The authority discourse offers positions for teachers with credibility and status associated with qualifications, knowledge and skills, and categorises unqualified teachers with lower status. As a student teacher, Poppy experiences tensions in her teacher identity as she lacks confidence to share her knowledge with colleagues. At the same time she achieves success in ITE written assessments.

Poppy negotiates this tension by finding literature to support her ideas:

It seemed I could finally confidently articulate my beliefs if asked and could explain reasoning behind my own practice if ever asked. Having numerous readings to back up what I was implementing was fantastic.

In her reflective writing, Poppy describes two interactions with colleagues with authority over her, where her positions within the authority discourse and the relational professionalism discourse are in conflict. When her colleague directs her to act in a way that Poppy regards as unfair to a child, Poppy’s position as subject to authority conflicts with her position as relational professional.

Poppy calls on her subjectivity as relational professional to challenge her colleague:

I think it shows that through building trusting relationships with

these children and their whānau, I can trust my gut feeling and read the cues I see.

In the second interaction, a colleague criticises Poppy, and she feels “*ridiculed and underestimated*”. Poppy reflects on the situation, drawing on the values of relational professionalism to describe herself:

Maybe being so hurt by ... this teacher reflects my own nature of being, I hope, an empathetic, honest and trusting teacher.

Poppy negotiates positions within these three discourses of early childhood teaching, gaining a sense of herself as a teacher. She enters early childhood work unsure of the value of qualifications, but comes to accept positioning within the authority discourse as she experiences teaching practice and ITE study. When she experiences hurtful interactions from colleagues in authority over her, she asserts an understanding of herself as relational professional, a subjectivity that she values.

Sally

Sally had been an early childhood educator for over 20 years. She had entered ITE to attain a recognised qualification to allow her to remain in a teaching role at a time when there was a government target (since discarded) of 100% qualified teachers in licensed early childhood centres by 2012:

And then it got really serious, and I wasn't going to be able to work in the centre, ... I wouldn't have a job, and so then I retrained.

Sally negotiates tensions within the authority discourse as she reflects on being disciplined to re-enter ITE if she wants to continue being an early childhood teacher. She describes initially resisting authority discourse discipline:

I said 'No', and I put my foot down and if they don't want me the way I am, that's it.

However, her pleasure of achieving a recognised qualification reconciles the conflict between resistance and acceptance of discipline:

Now that I have my Diploma and I am in a head teacher position, I can hold my head high. I hope that I radiate my new confidence; I know that I deserve it.

Sally experiences tensions between her subjectivities as student teacher, subject to authority of the ITE provider, and as an experienced practitioner. She must negotiate expectations of teaching practice, written work and attitudes:

I sort of felt, in particular, that sometimes I challenged ideas that ... I ... thought afterwards maybe I should have shut my mouth.

Sally negotiates her teacher identity as she is observed during teaching practice assessments:

In the end I thought if I don't speak like her and I don't use the same language as her and I'm not in that box, I'm not going to get anywhere.

Sally negotiates her teacher identities when she considers assessment of reflective journal entries. Within the authority discourse, she must accept assessment of her reflective writing, but resists:

I perceived them almost like a 'dear diary'. They were really personal,

and they weren't actually to be marked.

She can reconcile this conflict if her reflective writing is assessed by teacher educators she knows and trusts, and she imagines a reflective conversation. However, when she reads feedback from an assessor she does not know, Sally reacts strongly:

I nearly called it quits right then and there. And how important it is to know people before you can mark a reflection, and reflections shouldn't be [assessed] outside in my opinion.

Sally experiences considerable tensions and conflicts within her teacher identities as she negotiates her ITE experience as an experienced practitioner reluctantly entering teacher education. She recognises teacher educators' power to assess her as she negotiates relationships with them. She reconciles her identity conflicts through pride in how she has changed:

I am also becoming a teacher who can stand back and watch, listen, learn and have input without taking over the event. I have not always taught this way, and I like what I have become.

Conclusion

When viewed from a post-structural perspective, the ways teachers understand themselves are complex, multiple and changing. Understanding subjectivities as shaped within discourses and among circulating power relations may provide helpful insights to early childhood teachers. The discourses of authority, relational professionalism and identity work reflect historical and contemporary influences on early childhood teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as the ITE programme and assessment requirements experienced by these participants. However, Foucault's theories can be applied to other teachers and settings, informed by understandings that discourses shape ideas about 'normal' ways of being teachers, that power circulates within social situations and that discursive practices work through power as discipline, self-governing, seeking pleasure, and negotiations of tensions.

I suggest that early childhood teachers could use insights from this research to consider identity conflicts they may experience. Through understanding how discourses shape ideas about 'normal' ways of being teachers and how power circulates within social situations, they may become aware of ways they are disciplined and how they govern themselves to be regarded as 'normal' and 'good' teachers. Teachers with such awareness may be able to negotiate the ways they understand themselves as teachers, and resolve identity conflicts.

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge the support and encouragement of my Masters supervisors, the late and sorely missed Professor Judith Duncan and Ms Glynne Mackey, and the generosity and openness of the participants. I am grateful for financial support and research leave from Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand, and for the William and Ina Cartwright Scholarship 2011.

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'It underpins everything'

Critical thinking in e.c.e.

Rikke Betts

“Fully certificated teachers use critical inquiry and problem-solving effectively in their professional practice.”

(Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2015, section 12)

Both early childhood qualified teachers and student teachers share the challenge: to inquire – that is, *to think* – critically. For qualified teachers, critical thinking underpins the requirements for ‘critical inquiry and problem-solving’ amongst practising teachers. In teacher education, critical thinking is commonly used in assessments asking students to – ‘*critically reflect on xyz*’. However, critical thinking is often not taught nor explained to students (Moore, 2013) and it is assumed that the lecturer/teaching staff know what critical thinking is.

This paper reports on a small research action project working collaboratively with third year early childhood student teachers to explore critical thinking as a key aspect of their teaching practices. The project also sought to counter the systematising of ‘right and wrong ways to teach’ (Duncan & Conner, 2013). Thus when entering the teaching profession, graduates are expected to be able to reflect on curriculum choices and to make critically informed pedagogically sound decisions.

The project

“Facilitating critical thinking in initial teacher education (ITE) early years student teachers”¹

With funding through Ako Aotearoa, a small action research project was conducted on how to foster critical thinking skills in third year students studying early childhood education at two initial teacher education providers.

The ‘learning and sharing circle’ method was adopted from research projects in Canada (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Pence, 2011) and Sweden (Dahlberg & Bloch, 2006). The ‘learning and sharing circle’ method allows participants and researchers to learn together. The methodology does

not rely on an ‘expert’ but does require a person who takes responsibility for the implementation which could be in the form of a pedagogical leader (Penman & O’Connell-Sutherland, 2015) with a topic that has relevance for the teachers involved.

In this study, 15 participants from the third year cohorts were recruited from two initial teacher education (ITEs) providers in the same urban area. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym. During semester 2, 2014, the participants met six times in ‘learning circles’ at the respective ITE provider and four times for the ‘sharing circle’. A final ‘sharing circle’ took place in June 2015, six months after the majority of the participants had graduated.

Each ITE provider had a different topic to discuss in their respective ‘learning circles’; one ITE provider focused on ‘colonialism/biculturalism’ and the other focused on the ‘subjectivity of being a student teacher in a field-based setting’. The different topics were deliberately chosen to have relevance for each specific ITE provider as it was never the intention of the research to be comparative. The intention of the ‘sharing circle’ was to discuss themes, topic and ideas discussed in the ‘learning circles’. In the ‘sharing circles’, all participants, researchers and the research assistant from the two ITEs came together and the format was the same as a ‘learning circle’. The movement from the familiar ‘learning circle’ into the cross-ITE ‘sharing circle’ was facilitated by each ‘circle’ (whether ‘learning’ or ‘sharing’) following the same format: karakia, kai, discussion and ending with a karakia.

The ‘learning circles’ took place at each ITE provider with the researcher located there. In the first ‘learning circle’ specific questions were asked by the researcher about the participants’ understanding of critical thinking. The same questions were also asked at the last ‘learning circle’ in order to have a reference point in relation to the participants’ knowledge, so as to gauge what learning had taken place over the duration of the project for the participants. All ‘learning and sharing circles’ were audio and video-taped and transcribed, and the data was coded by categories and themes.

¹ This research was carried out 2014-2015 and was funded by Ako Aotearoa (Southern Hub) and the two initial teacher education providers. For a full report on the project, see Summers & Betts, 2016. Tools from the project will be available later in 2016.

Findings

As a format for research, the 'learning and sharing circles' proved to be both a powerful basis for shared inquiry, but also were pragmatically challenging to sustain in the midst of other commitments, especially when students were also on placements in early childhood settings. The meetings in the 'learning and sharing circles' were time intensive and scheduling adjustments had to be made to accommodate this.

Understandings about 'critical thinking' changed during the 12 months of this study. Each participant was encouraged to explore their own understandings of 'critical thinking' prompted by Jennifer Mulnix's (2012) article which considers critical thinking from different theoretical viewpoints. The focus question - *what is critical thinking?* - which was asked at the first and last learning circles' - showed that the participants' understanding of critical thinking had shifted from the start of the project and at the end. For example, *Beth* observed:

I believe critical thinking is just being aware of your thinking process because I think a lot of the time we are discussing reflecting or critically thinking about something without being aware that we are doing it It is just happening throughout the day. So putting a critical lens on it is to would be including other people's perspectives ... values and beliefs and how it is going to affect other people.

The participants recognised a greater sense of confidence in their teaching alongside as well as a willingness and capacity to change both their thinking and their practice. Careful listening to and constructive responsiveness to criticism are key to learning to change as a teacher, and especially as a student teacher. *Nicole's* last practicum - which was particularly challenging - illustrates this:

... If I'd had that (practicum) last year or in my first year I probably would have just given up.... I was quite upset at the time about what she had said. Later I could go back ... and rather than going back to her and saying like 'what do you want me to do?', I was able to think about it and think about what I could do to improve ... and I actually quite valued that.

Kim recognised that she had developed a stronger sense of personal integration between values, beliefs, theory and teaching practices. To be a better teacher, she suggested, requires both critical thinking and knowing what is '*in your heart*':

Otherwise there is no point: it's like learning and then you are never using it in your life. There is knowledge to be used and to be implemented.

That this all takes time, is illustrated by *Kim's* reflection:

I can think of a stage in my teaching where I was quite stunted; where I got all these different views and ideas and I was really trying to act them all out all the time. I think for me now it is a bit more of a balance of being your authentic self but having those ideas as well, there is others theories

and views and just a finding a way to incorporate them and finding the ones that sit well with your teaching practice so that it is just natural.

Arguably, the major findings of this study point to the importance of personal and collective opportunities and dispositions that enable and encourage critical thinking. The participants' experiences indicate that critical thinking requires 'open mindedness, and engaged critical relationships.

To explain further: *open mindedness* suggests a willingness to take on new ideas and to listen to other people's experiences and insights. By having an open mind the participants engaged with situations differently and their thinking changed over the duration of the project. *Edith* recognised that personal openness can encourage others to share openly:

Showing that willingness, listening to them and then asking them questions so you can feed off each other. So again that relates back to your practice and staff meetings and I believe it's how you approach things in person - in what way you do it (and) so you are not shutting them down. You want them to open up to you and tell you why.

Importantly relationships impacted on the development of critical thinking and the quality of these supported the journey of challenging assumptions and practice. As *Cindy* recalled, critical professional conversations can become normalised. Whilst she was participating in the research project, she found that other teachers at her work became more willing to enter into discussions:

... And they seem willing to look at different opinions. Which is a nice way to introduce this sort of thinking into the centre without it being a focus on one particular person. That's sort of something I'm doing here that I can share as a learning experience. So it has been received really positively at my centre at the moment... It's been good!

The relevance of critical thinking in early childhood education

The teaching profession is under threat to maintain ownership of the body of knowledge associated with the profession (Benadé, 2011) and with the market-driven commodification of education in Aotearoa the risk of adopting a 'technicist' - or overly simplistic - approach to teaching was an impetus of the research (Betts, 2014). Thus 'critical thinking' can be understood as intentionally keeping professional teachers focused on understanding more deeply their practices and intentions. If critical inquiry is to systematically part of a teacher's daily practice, it is important to recognise the importance of working conditions. This study suggests that critical thinking requires leadership, time and supportive critical relationships.

Within this small study, critical thinking was deliberately under-defined. Those participating in this study offered a more constructivist and relational understanding of 'critical thinking' than Mulnix (2012) who emphasises the logical

soundness of an argument. She concludes that:

Critical thinking is the same as thinking rationally or reasoning well. In order to reason well, a thinker must be able to give reasons for what she believes, and these reasons must actually support the truth of the statement or belief they are claimed to support (p. 477).

Despite the challenges of sustained commitment to meeting regularly, the 'learning and sharing circle' methodology was successfully implemented in this research and offers a model especially for centre-based professional learning 'circles'. For example, having groups (e.g. teaching teams) as a 'learning circle' and a full staff meeting as 'sharing circle'. Similarly, teachers in one e.c. service could meet as a 'learning circle', and come together with other centres (in a neighbourhood cluster, for example) in a 'sharing circle'.

In conclusion, this small-scale research project shows that critical thinking can be fostered and can impact significantly on teaching. This is illustrated by *Cindy's* reflection:

... I think it's really important to identify what critical thinking is and how you do it, and it comes through in your teaching and your relationships with others ... it really does underpin everything that you do, because you do it for a reason and what is that reason that you are doing that particular activity with the child? or why do you think that about a family or everything is happening for a reason and what is that reason? I think critical thinking is that deeper understanding and it is really important.

What *Cindy* describes is a recognition of a personal capacity to understand and articulate professional knowledge and rationale for pedagogical choices. What the 'learning and sharing circle' model offers is a tool for professional learning that foregrounds inquiry also being a collaborative project. The goal is a profession that benefits children, their whānau, and the wider community.

Finally, this study suggests that critical thinking requires leadership, time and supportive critical relationships. If critical inquiry is to be systematically part of a teacher's daily practice, it is important to recognise the importance of working conditions that support both professional inquiry and the foregrounding of professional spaces for that to happen.

Acknowledgements to:

Professor Judith Duncan who instigated this research project and supervised until she passed away in April 2015;

Tui Summers who was the co-researcher on this project, and last but not least,

All the participants.

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Flexibilities and possibilities

Exploring teachers' roles in children's imaginative play

Chloe Chen

"I don't know what to talk about with the children and how to talk with them," a student teacher told me during her first field practice. She was not the only student teacher saying this; I had the same thoughts when I first started my training. In fact, even experienced teachers will ponder the question – "How should I interact with children?"

This is a short question, with many answers. Within sociocultural approaches teaching and learning, adults are an integral part of the curriculum and teacher-child interactions carry pedagogical purposes. Thus the question of "What to talk about with children and how should I talk to them?" becomes transformed into "What do I want children to learn and how do I enable them to learn through the interactions?"

Siraj-Blatchford (2009) argues that every learning episode has both pedagogical and curricula content. In the context of children and teachers in an early childhood setting, imaginative play has powerful influences for children's cognitive, social, emotional, and language development. This is due to the thinking process it involves and its highly social nature. In examining the role of teachers in young children's imaginative play, this article considers possibilities and risks of a teacher's choices when interacting with children at play.

What is imaginative play?

Early forms of dramatic behaviour start when infants try to imitate the adult, and at between 10 to 13 months, symbolic play often appears. Symbolic play is a term used by Piaget (1962) and involves representing reality through symbols in which one thing stands for another (Hughes, 2010). For example, a baby at 11 months may pretend a piece of toast is a truck.

As the child develops capabilities for symbolising and representation, expanded imagination, and extending social skills, the level of sophistication increases – the pretend play stretches beyond the child's own actions by including other people and objects, and begins to combine more elements and themes (Smidt, 2006).

Imaginative play can be viewed as a thinking skill that requires mental capabilities to recall previous experiences along with aspects of children's surroundings, which are then combined and represented in a symbolic form to create a new imaginative world. In this world, children can act in situations of 'as if' and consider 'what if'... So the flax in the garden may become vines that constrain the princess; a stick in hand may be the sword for fighting the monster; several pieces of Lego may be able to walk around and talk to one another; the children can be mum, dad, baby at this moment and then transform into firefighter, police, and a police dog in next play episode. Thus, imaginative play is a distinctive kind of play that provides children with contexts to develop awareness of possibilities and flexibilities along with representation skills, which stimulate divergent problem-solving, creative thinking, and counterfactual reasoning (Mullineaux & Dilalla, 2009; Robson & Rowe, 2012; Gopnik & Walker, 2013).

When more than one child is engaged in shared imaginary play it is referred to as sociodramatic play, which is characterised by group interaction and verbal communication (Smilansky & Shefatya 1990, cited in Evans & Rogers, 2008). During such play, children are empowered to vocalise their thinking, express, co-construct and extend ideas, negotiate roles and scripts, and to try to understand others' perspectives. These experiences become a breeding ground for diverse thinking and social skills as well as learning dispositions. Imaginative play is full of possibilities and uncertainties. It is created through dialogue based on negotiations and decisions of possible themes and concrete forms of expression (Cecchin, 2015).

What are possible roles for teachers' roles in children's imaginative play?

Let us look at the following scenario:

Child A is playing with a figure toy of a gingerbread man while singing: 'Run, run, run as fast as you can, you can't catch me I'm a gingerbread man.' Child B, who is playing beside Child A, is attracted by this theme and decides to join his play. She moves the dog figure in her hand towards the gingerbread man while saying: "I'm going to catch you". Child A responds

by moving his gingerbread man around and keeps singing the song. The play evolves further when Child A decides to become the gingerbread man himself and begins to run. Child B chases after him. They run around the playground, where more and more children join in to chase the gingerbread man.

Where the play may lead and how it develops are uncertain. Teachers who notice what has been happening may start to evaluate the situation and they may have a lot of questions and concerns in mind:

- What learning can be generated through this experience?
- Do I need to get involved? If I do, when and how?
- Will my intervention be so huge that if I am called away to other children or to talk with a parent, the imaginative play collapses?
- There are so many children running and what if they fall down? Shall I intervene and tone down the risks?

The dynamic, flexible and complex nature of imaginative play makes it challenging and even confusing for teachers to capture appropriate teachable moments, decide whether and how to intervene.

However, being an effective and playful teacher means ‘embracing the mystery of uncertainty and ambiguity’ (Stover, White, Rockel & Toso, 2010, p.11) while clearly knowing the influences and implications of the teacher’s actions upon children’s play.

Based on who initiates the action (teacher? child?), and whether the teacher opts to engage or hold back, Stover, et al. (2010) proposed four broad possibilities, but I suggest five options for teachers:

1. Child starts the play – teacher curtails it;
2. Child starts the play – teacher redirects it towards a learning outcome;
3. Teacher sets up and controls the play, encouraging children to participate in particular ways;
4. Child starts the play – teacher follows the child’s lead;
5. Child starts the play; teacher plays no direct role.

Inspired by these possibilities, we are going to explore a range of decisions that a teacher may make and the possibilities and risks of each option using the prior scenario of the gingerbread man.



The complex art of teaching is evident when deciding how to be present with children engrossed in imaginative play.

Option 1: Child starts the play – teacher curtails it

This kind of intervention is usually based on safety, health or social concerns. The play can get out of hand; some of the children may start to scream; the actions may become rough and someone could get hurt. However, simply giving instructions like “Slow down!” or “No screaming!” may not work well to prevent the potential risks, as children will likely carry on. This can result in teacher taking further actions to interrupt or curtail the imaginative play.

This kind of intervention may effectively stop children from being hurt and demonstrate for them ‘appropriate social behaviours’. What is appropriate reflects the teacher’s cultural beliefs and values. Therefore what is likely to concern teachers in one culture may be of little concern in another. For example, in a Japanese school, American researchers observed a group of children engaging in a physical conflict. However, the Japanese teacher saw this as appropriate behaviour and did not intervene: she saw the children as socialising each other (Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009, cited in Bateman, 2011).

Clearly a likely outcome of this approach will be that children’s imaginative play will be interrupted or denied.

Further, children can receive implicit negative messages about the value of their ideas and play (Stover, et al., 2010).

Option 2 Child starts the play – teacher directs it

Often when a teacher has a clear learning goal that she/he thinks can be met through children's play, the teacher may try to steer the play towards that goal. For example, if the goal is to extend children's language and literacy, the teacher may try to encourage the children to talk more about their play and characters, link it with the story of gingerbread man, or mix match different stories with the imagination.

To provoke creativities and imagination, the teacher may ask children to imagine and discuss what will happen to the gingerbread man and maybe later on draw about it. If the teacher wants to add numeracy dimension to the experience, she/he may suggest the children to count how many people are chasing the gingerbread man and how they are going to share it. In the scenario of the gingerbread man, the teacher may join in the children's chase and make suggestions about different ways to chase the gingerbread man, such as running slowly, tiptoeing, or jumping.

However, the 'learning' can get in the way of the imagining. Trawick-Smith and Picard (2003) observed a teacher interacting with children in a pretend post office, and the main focus of the play became writing letters. The authors judged the interactions to be overly literacy-focused at the expense of imaginative play. However, the authors argued that it does not mean teachers should stop integrating literacy into imaginative play; rather, learning goals need to be infused into the play to further support play theme. Thus the play remains meaningful for children, as does the learning.

But the attempts to meet learning outcomes can be more subtle and less intrusive when a the teacher aims to construct learning and provoke children's thinking through sustaining, suspending, and mentoring in partnership with the child (Cremin, Burnard & Craft, 2006, cited in Craft, Matthews & McConnon, 2012).

Option 3: Child starts the play – teacher follows the child's lead

A teacher acting as a co-learner in children's imaginative play does not necessarily have predetermined learning goals. Such a teacher is flexible and open to ideas, possibilities and alternative viewpoints. Through developing a shared perspective with children, the teacher can act as an equal partner in terms of decision-making, negotiating and co-constructing scripts and scenarios, extending conversation to become richer and go deeper, and guiding the process to constantly challenge and review concepts and ideas. Therefore, the educator is able to 'add dimensions that children may be unable to sustain for themselves' (Hendy & Toon, 2001, p. 99).

Co-construction in imaginative play is based on a sense of trust and playfulness. How does this possibility of co-construction develop? Curiosity and respect are keys here

because teachers and children are likely to have different identities and personalities with different intentions and goals. Cecchin (2015) suggested dialogical ways to mediate these differences. To ensure the teacher's involvement will be in tune with the children, teachers need to listen to the children and get to know the imagination, before intervening. Then the teacher may use playful words, stories and scenarios to join children's play.

Siraj-Blatchford, Silva, Muttock, Gilden, and Bell (2002) argued that effective cognitive co-construction requires mutual motivation and involvement from both children and teachers. This kind of interaction encourages involvement and enjoyment for both teachers and children and enables teachers to share values and beliefs with children through discussion and communication and develop deeper understanding of children's thoughts, ideas and things that they are interested in learning.

While teachers try to respect differences and avoid prejudgments, it is important to be aware of their own perspectives, otherwise children's interests can be over-emphasised. After all, interest does not necessarily equate to learning. Taking the scenario of the gingerbread man as an example, a child may enjoy running around and chasing the gingerbread man. But we cannot assume that the child's learning is going to be extended through allowing this experience to repeat again and again.

But we also cannot assume that teachers know how to extend children's thinking through co-construction. In a British study, Siraj-Blatchford and colleagues (2002) found that while sociodramatic play provides a particularly useful context for 'sustained shared thinking' (SST) between teachers and children, however, such interaction does not happen frequently. Suggestions for this include that SST and co-construction need time and concentration from both the teacher and the child.

This requires the teacher to suspend other tasks and routines. In some cases that the teacher's influences become huge which makes children's thinking dependent on the intervention, so when the teacher is called away, the imaginative play may collapse. Therefore, teachers need have an idea of how much time is needed in order to participate long enough in children's imaginative play for significant learning – especially dialogic learning – to occur.

Option 4: Teacher sets up and controls the play

This works particularly well for introducing new experiences to children. For example, the teacher who observes the imaginative play of the gingerbread man decides at mat time to read the story out loud, or to arrange a little drama play with children acting different roles in the story of gingerbread man. Or the teacher may offer the children baking experiences by making real gingerbread man with the children.

Children are exposed to new experiences and are able to discover new capacities and dispositions; they can also learn new skills and attitudes (Stover et al, 2010). While

teachers should be aware that too many planned activities will limit children's independent choices and capabilities of spontaneous play, it is also important to draw children into learning that is socially and culturally valued, even if not necessarily directly reflecting a child's immediate interests.

Option 5: Child starts the play - teacher plays no direct role

When the teacher believes that the children are capable and competent to lead their own learning, she/he may decide to give them time and space for uninterrupted play. While the gingerbread scenario with multiple children chasing each other could potentially lead to an accident, it could also lead to children taking ownership of the situation so that risk is managed by children. The gingerbread chase could also lead to unexpected new possibilities: the 'gingerbread man' could decide to hide – leading to 'hide and seek'; or the children could decide to work on a proper river together in the sandpit that the gingerbread man might (eventually) need to cross. So a chasing game could become an exercise in co-operative engineering in the sandpit.

Children develop ownership of their learning through exploring in their own way, interacting and building relationship with others, and persevering towards their own goals. In addition, standing back allows the teacher to observe for a while. This could of course lead to the teacher taking an initiative later that builds on what has been observed.

The risk in standing back is that teachers can start to neglect children because they are (or were once) 'settled and engaged'.

Discussion and conclusion:

Children's imaginative play is fluid and complex; it makes teaching extremely dynamic and demanding. An episode of imaginative play can offer a teacher a range of opportunities and combined options. It requires sensitivity, insightful observation, fast evaluation and planning, frequent reflection, and skillful intervention. An effective teacher who enriches imaginative play and provokes possibilities knows when to step in, when to stay back, when to take the lead and when to follow the flow.

Returning to our question of: "what to talk about with the children and how to talk with them?", I think it is similar to cooking good food and wondering 'what ingredients shall I put in and how do I cook it?' If we have knowledge about a variety of ingredients and cooking processes and are mindful of the perspectives of the people who are going to taste it, I believe we can cook amazing food with balanced taste and our own uniqueness.

Similarly, as teachers of young children, we have the chance to be creative with children who are engaged in sustained imaginative play. We don't have to do the same thing over and over again. We can try different ways to engage with children's play, and learn from the children. And the gingerbread man doesn't have to meet the same fate

each time. We can exercise our own imaginations as well.

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Accessible and provocative gems

A review of Mentoring in early childhood education

Edited by Caterina Murphy & Kate Thornton (Eds).

Publisher: NZ Council for Educational Research

Cost: \$44.95

Reviewer: Penny Smith

Delving into this book is reminiscent of looking through a kaleidoscope. As the view finder shifts its focus through the various chapters, different perspectives and world views around the topic of mentoring come into focus.

This publication provides inspiration and strategies for those working in mentoring roles in the early childhood sector. Inspiration comes in the form of gems that are revealed as contributors tell their stories of mentoring and coaching both in Aotearoa New Zealand and in Australia. Strategies and tools for teachers are woven throughout the chapters, making this book a must read for those who wish to grow the capacity of the teachers they are working alongside.

The book takes the reader through five distinct topics which ensures it is easy to focus on specific areas of interest. The topics range from framing the notion of mentoring as part of teachers' professional learning to exploring Māori perspectives and working alongside student teachers. The teacher registration and appraisal processes are explored from a New Zealand perspective and future directions are outlined in the last section of the book.

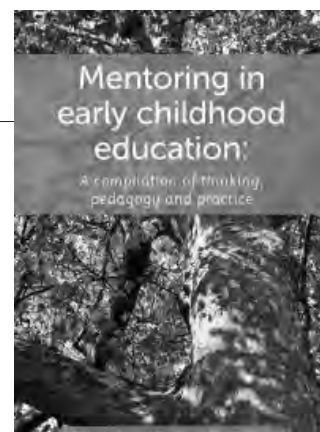
Drawing together narratives from no less than 49 contributors must have been a complex job for the editors. However, it is the presence of different voices that ensures there will be something for all teachers to reflect upon and put into practice.

The first chapter by Kate Thornton sets the scene by defining mentoring and coaching and then placing these concepts into an early childhood context. She makes important connections between mentoring and leadership and this theme continues throughout the rest of the publication. Thornton concludes by bemoaning the lack of support for leadership development in the early childhood sector. Her call for the Ministry of Education to prioritise this aspect of teachers' development had me nodding my head in agreement. Barbara Watson's discussion of effective mentoring follows and she provides a clear and considered presentation of the concept of 'educative mentoring'. Fostering an inquiry mind set is important for

effective mentoring and I liked the way Barbara Watson emphasised the key skills, knowledge and dispositions of an educative mentor. However her doctoral research tells us that mentors are modelling their mentoring practices on those that have mentored them and this is a warning for the sector to prioritise professional development in this area. For those who are familiar with mentoring and coaching, these opening chapters will provide a summary of current thinking rather than anything new.

I was excited to discover a chapter which recognised the value of peers as mentors for each other and Raewyn Penman and Kathryn O'Connell-Sutherland's chapter does it beautifully. My current doctoral research investigates teachers' beliefs about peer learning so this chapter held real appeal. Their discussion of a peer mentoring initiative for their head teachers was inspiring as the programme created tangible shifts in practice and thinking. Teachers engaged in pedagogical discussion and were challenged to adopt new ways of doing things, no mean feat when you have been doing something the same way for a lengthy period of time! As one teacher said "It was just a tiny spark that changed me suddenly" (p. 58). Application of the ideas expressed in this chapter have the potential to be transformative in a mentoring context.

Te Whāriki has had much attention in the literature and I nearly skipped over the chapter by Viv Shearsby which applies the curriculum document to the notion of mentoring. Fortunately I did not! The chapter gave me a different view of the curriculum, providing a strong starting point for the mentoring journey. Viv Shearsby identifies 'Principles, positions and possibilities' which could be applied to the mentee in your teaching team. For example, 'wellbeing: mana atua': for the mentee this means "when struggling with a professional issue, mentees can benefit from reflecting on the wellbeing of those involved



in the situation. Mentors prompting consideration of the mentee's own wellbeing can take the discussion directly to the seat of an issue" (p. 44). This chapter clearly describes the possibilities for building a mentoring relationship in a relevant format that can easily be applied by teachers.

There is a group of chapters focused on Māori mentoring experiences and these will be valuable for teachers working in this context. In a chapter about Māori considerations of mentoring, Carol Smith details aspects of her own mentoring experiences. Her narrative was a fascinating insight into mentoring that is grounded in te ao Māori. Further on, my colleagues at Te Rito Maioha explore the challenges of mentoring student teachers into the world of research. They have recounted their stories in narrative style and I found myself immersed as they retold their experiences working alongside student teachers. The chapter provides practical guidance for mentoring relationships

within a diverse cultural context.

I am currently teaching a postgraduate leadership paper and have found this book to be a very informative resource to draw from. It is a fantastic collection that offers many different viewpoints, all soundly supported by current theory and research. Easy to digest and well organised it will appeal to teachers and researchers in the early childhood sector plus those working in tertiary settings.

Caterina Murphy and Kate Thornton are to be congratulated for presenting us with a rich compilation of research, theory and practice which is both accessible and provocative. I recommend it to anyone who is looking for practical and theoretical guidance for their mentoring practice.

More than magic!

A review of Magic places: The adults' guide to young children's creative art work

By Pennie Brownlee

Published: 2015 by Ako Books, Auckland. Available from Good Egg Books:
<http://penniebrownlee.weebly.com/books.html>

Cost: \$24.95

Reviewer: Carla Tunnicliffe

For more than 30 years, *Magic places* has been the 'go to' book for parents and teachers of children. *Magic places* sends the message that all children are born creative and it is our job as parents and educators to make sure that creativity is nurtured and not stolen from the child.

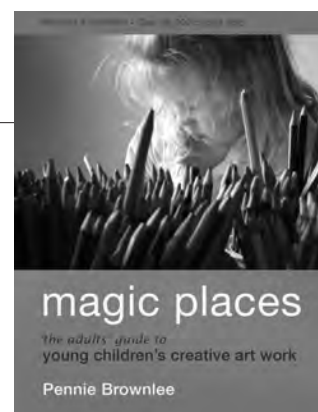
As with the earlier editions, the 3rd edition (2015) shows Pennie Brownlee's love and respect towards the children and their environment. She takes creativity a holistic step further and looks at how the brain functions within creativity and gives a deeper understanding of how children download and process information.

The current 2015 edition not only acts as a guide for children's art development and creativity but also touches on our own creativity and highlights the importance of experiences as key to creativity. This book challenges us to look at our creativity, our 'Creation' story and how we can give children their own 'I Can' creation story. Although it is a book for parents and teachers of children up to the age of 10 years old, when you read the 'I Can Story', I think that it can also apply to any age especially adults.

The book is broken up into three parts – creativity, setting the stage for creative play and developmental stages of children's

art. Much of the information is similar to previous editions but with more relevant and meaningful information added as new research has become available. Part one has a section called 'Creativity'. Pennie says we are all born creative; if we can breathe then we are creative. But it depends on which story you are led towards. Keeping our creativity depends on who we meet along the way and whether our creativity is supported or squashed. When we support children in their creativity they can fly. We give them the wings to be creative, inventive, to experiment and to lead innovation.

The 'Creation Story' is the story which adults write for children. It consists of the 'I Can Story' and the 'I Can't Story'. Pennie says we can help write their "I Can Story" but if we don't support them, then we are helping to write their "I Can't Story". It is our comments and how we act which help create the "I Can" or "I Can't" stories. If we can set a child's default setting to be an "I Can Story" then we can set them up to be successful in their creativity and life.



■ Book reviews

After I had read this section, I could see how easy it is for adults to rob children of the 'I Can Story' as a lot of us follow the 'I Can't Story'. I feel this section is probably the most valuable section of the book as creativity hinges on the 'Story' we give to children.

The 2015 *Magic places* has been updated and revised not only in information but also in the presentation of the book. The layout of the book is easy to follow, easy to read, the headings are bold and there are beautiful photos to capture children engrossed in their creativity and experiences. Throughout the book Pennie uses a digital form of language in the way of talking about downloading experiences and opening files of the child's experience which in this digital climate more people will be able to relate as they know this type of language through their own experiences.

Pennie holds strong to positioning the child as the creator. As teachers (and as parents) we don't make or model for them. We encourage the child to draw upon their experience and create how they see it. She tells us that if the experience is not relevant to the child and is adult led, or an adult draws for the child this will rob the child of their own creativity. She also talks about real learning and fake learning. She notes that fake learning is creeping into early childhood centres and becoming embedded in our schools. I think it is relevant that she talks about this in her book as there is a lot of current research backing this up.

There are many quotes throughout the book from respected creators and educators. These add more dimensions to the knowledge being passed to us. These quotes give you food for thought and reinforce Pennie's message. In particular I think using quotes and current knowledge from Sir Ken Robinson's research into creativity sends a strong message to adults who are responsible for our young children and who are concerned about the loss of creativity in our centres and schools. Hopefully it will make educators (and parents) think and keep creativity alive.

Magic places is a valuable book full of current knowledge which should be read by all educators. Pennie says that "sometimes I think we talk too much when children are trying to concentrate and create". Maybe we should take a step back and think about this, let the child relive experience and give time to create and retell the experience.

We are the guardians of our children and their creativity and with a little positive guidance we can set them on the path to write their 'I Can' story.

I would highly recommend this book as it is full of useful and insightful information to help teachers and parents nurture creativity in our children.



He korero, he kaupapa, he Whāriki Kia tipu whakaritorito
Re-weaving theories and practices to re(construct) critical questions, new imaginings and social activism

24th International Reconceptualizing Early Childhood Education Conference

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Registration is now open for the 24th International RECE Conference.

This annual global network meeting of early childhood teachers and scholars arrives on the shores of Aotearoa as our national curriculum *Te Whāriki* enjoys its 20th birthday.

The conference theme, *He korero, he kaupapa, he Whāriki Kia tipu whakaritorito Re-weaving theories and practices to re(construct) critical questions, new imaginings and social activism* provides a shared focus on working together to celebrate, collaborate, critique and reconstruct early childhood education for children, whanau, and communities. The RECE conference is an excellent opportunity to work with early childhood teachers and scholars from around the world, to weave lasting friendships, and to amplify the many voices of early childhood education.

To learn more about RECE go to
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Contributors

Susan Bates is an ece teacher and independent researcher who is deeply interested in social justice and quality education for all children. She has written on health, cultural competence, literacy and bilingual children in ece.

Rikke Betts is a lecturer at Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand. Rikke has a particular interest in Infant and Toddlers; government policies implantation and implication for early childhood education; treaty issues in education and the professional teacher's status.

Chloe Chen - I'm a part-time postgraduate student in education from AUT. I've been working as an early childhood teacher for several years (mainly with young children). I enjoy exploring our world with children, and I'm quite interested in science and in children's thinking skills.

Janette Kelly and the new **Dr Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips** are lecturers at The University of Waikato in Hamilton. Together they have more than 20 years experience teaching in ECE settings experience, and more than 20 years lecturing in teacher education. Both are passionate about formative assessment and making learning and teaching visible for young children and their families.

Before beginning her career in early childhood education, **Sara Murray** worked in both the advertising and IT industries, and completed her Masters research on the prosocial behaviour of very young children. She is a lecturer at New Zealand Tertiary College and for her doctoral qualification, is currently researching what constitutes a successful practicum for Asian-born students.

Penny Smith has been involved in tertiary education for twenty years and is currently Leader Education Delivery of the Palmerston North base of Te Rito Maioha, Early Childhood New Zealand. She is presently immersed in writing up her PhD findings – an investigation of early childhood teachers' beliefs and practices around peer learning.

Carla Tunnicliffe is a mother of three children and has nearly 10 years Playcentre experience behind her. She has recently graduated from AUT University after completing a Bachelor of Education in early childhood and is currently teaching in a community crèche in Auckland.

Alison Warren is an early childhood teacher educator who holds the position of Leader Education Delivery at the Nelson teaching base of Te Rito Maioha, Early Childhood New Zealand. Her early childhood experience started with involvement in the Playcentre movement alongside her own children. She also has experience as a visiting teacher for a home-based early childhood provider, and in childcare centres. Alison is a doctoral student at University of Canterbury, researching the topic of teachers' emotions. Her research interests are teacher identities, professionalism, bicultural teaching practice, and poststructural and posthumanist theories.

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