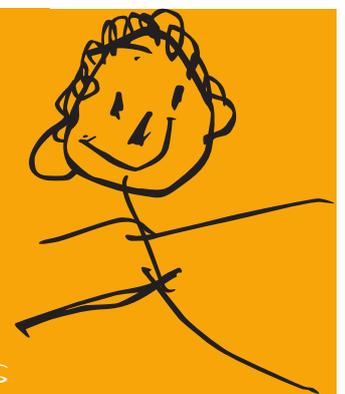


# Early Education



*Volume 67 Spring / Summer 2021*

- TLIF Round 5: The use of tools for reviewing shifts in practice and learning outcomes
- Reflections on the role of teachers in contemporary ECE: Pedagogy, leadership and engagement with fathers
- The past, present and future of rural playcentres
- ECE and COVID-emotional factors for teachers and leaders
- Supporting Associate Teachers across the years





Volume 67 Spring / Summer 2021

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Dr Karyn Aspden,  
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Associate Professor Sally Peters,  
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## Design and layout

Margaret Drummond

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## Contributions

Contributions of articles and photos are welcome from the early childhood community.

*Early Education* welcomes:

- Innovative practice papers with a maximum of 3,500 words, plus an abstract or professional summary of 150 words and up to five keywords.
- Research informed papers with a maximum of 3,500 words, plus an abstract or professional summary of 150 words, and up to five keywords.
- Think pieces with a maximum of 1500 words.
- Commentaries on management matters with a maximum of 1500 words.
- Book or resource reviews with a maximum of 1000 words.

Contributions can be sent to the 2022 editors

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

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

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# Editorial

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It is with great pleasure that we bring you this volume of Early Education, albeit a little later than anticipated. 2021 was yet another strange and disrupted year, with many people affected by rolling lockdowns, centre closures, employment uncertainties, supply chain issues and shortages of essential items, the challenges of being separated from friends and family for long periods of time, and in some cases the loss of loved ones. For those within our ECE services, you have juggled centre 'bubbles', online learning and the reality of health and safety policies during a pandemic. Your resilience and commitment to tamariki and whānau have been a testament to your professionalism and leadership. We hope that 2022 is a better year all round for everyone and that the pandemic is soon something that enters the history books, like the Spanish Flu. This volume shows, however, that there is still excellent research and reflection going on in the early childhood sector in New Zealand and we applaud the commitment that all of the authors in this volume show to quality and the pursuit of excellence in early childhood education.

As always, we want to thank Margaret Drummond from the Wilf Malcolm Institute for Education Research at the University of Waikato for her invaluable support with publishing the journal. We also want to thank our reviewers, who provide fabulous feedback to our authors and enable us to keep this journal alive. We begin this volume with the peer reviewed articles, which present an interesting collection of recent research.

In the first article, **Sarah Probine and Jo Perry** argue that there are three key issues that require examination in relation to curriculum and pedagogy in early childhood settings: the dominant interpretations of socio-cultural theories that have emerged since the initial publication of Te Whāriki (Ministry of

Education, 1996); the ongoing strengths and challenges of the early childhood curriculum; and recent debates about the purpose of education and how this can meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner. As these authors argue, there are several questions about the roles of teachers and learners that need to be answered, which include whether a teacher can be positioned only as a more knowledgeable other and exploring how teachers might shift their perspectives and practices to encompass a role as an intentional teacher which more equally positions teachers and children as active participants in children's learning in 21<sup>st</sup> century contexts. They propose that inquiry-based learning deserves a deeper look in ECE in New Zealand and to that end they propose a two-phase research study to investigate its potential to help to answer the questions that they pose. We wish them the best for this project and look forward to reading the outcomes in due course.

**Parisa Tadi and Amir Sadeghi** present the findings of a survey that they did with 100 early childhood educators examining teachers' perspectives on engagement with fathers in early childhood settings. They argue that although the involvement of fathers is important in children's lives, little is known about how much involvement fathers actually have in their children's ECE settings. As their findings show, the majority of teachers value their engagement with fathers, but there are a range of issues which prevent further engagement. They suggest some useful strategies for how fathers can be further encouraged to engage with ECE services in meaningful ways.

**Christina Egan** presents some of the findings of her recently completed PhD on leadership in ECE settings. She identified that the teachers in her study designated leadership

by a formal title, rather than actions that are displayed in practice and in collaboration with others. As she explains, if teachers' perspectives of their professional identity as a leader comes from holding a formal title of authority and the associated confidence it offers, without the title they are limited in what they believe that can and should do. She further identified that teachers in this study did not believe that their daily work practices meet the definition of leadership, perhaps due to the difficulty of separating explicit leadership actions from their everyday teaching practices, which involve guiding and leading others. As she concludes, the new framework for evaluating quality in ECE services released by the Education Review Office (2020) offers an opportunity to build a shared understanding of what educational leadership looks like. She suggests it encourages a new perspective of ECE leadership, as it promotes a leadership approach that fosters collaboration, relational trust, professional learning and development to build capacity, improvement, and equitable outcomes for all children. Although others have previously identified how problematic the notion of leadership is in ECE services, this study offers a useful way forward that integrates notions of personal and professional responsibility as working definitions of leadership in ECE, rather than the more stereotyped positional understandings of leadership.

**Janice Pennells** draws on her recently completed Masters' degree research in the next article, reflecting on the ways in which digital assessment can be used to enhance teaching and learning. As she argues, formative assessment is a complex task, especially if teachers want to meaningfully engage parents in the assessment. Although an e-Portfolio makes the assessment process more accessible for many parents, it is important that teachers understand that parents will differ in how they wish to engage with the digital portfolio. As the use of digital tools increase in ECE settings, there are some important implications of this study for teachers to reflect upon, in particular how an e-Portfolio can be considered as a two-

way information sharing portal with families, which is designed to support children's learning and their multiple skills and interests.

Also drawing on her Masters' research, **Elise James** presents an analysis of issues in rural Playcentres. Using survey methodology, Elise examined the experiences of 54 participants from 31 rural Playcentres. Many of the participants identified that without Playcentre, their children would not have regular access to ECE. Although participants valued the social interaction opportunities for their children and the importance of the Playcentre to building a wider sense of community in rural areas, they also reported the challenges of having to manage obligations to the Playcentre amongst their other commitments. Elise James argues for greater support from the government to Playcentre, particularly in rural areas, to be shown through an increase in funding, and strong policy commitments that assure the future of Playcentre as a unique ECE offering. As Claire's first Playcentre child turns 40 this year, she was quite perturbed that the issues faced in rural Playcentre 40 years ago are still alive and well. Let's hope that the government and Playcentre Aotearoa can act in this space to support ECE opportunities for rural families.

Next, building on the TLIF collection in 2020, we have two more reports of projects from the Teacher Led Innovation Fund (TLIF).

The first is written by **Anne Meade and Meg Kwan** and presents an inquiry framed around investigating teacher's support of sustained shared thinking and language competency in Daisies' curriculum. The teachers in this centre used two rating scales to assess their practice around SST and languages and literacies: the SSTEW (Siraj et al., 2015); and the TROLL (Dickinson et al., 2001). The TLIF fund requires project teams to provide evidence of shifts in teachers' practice, as well as learning outcomes for children. This project provided evidence of both. Teachers were shown to change their practice as a result of engaging with the assessment data these tools provided, as well as the inquiry provoking professional development, confirming Timperley et al.

(2007) contention that engagement with data, particularly discrepant data, can promote change in teacher practice. Usefully the study also showed an increase in children's opportunities for sustained shared thinking and literacy activity following the increase in teachers' awareness of their practice.

The second TLIF report is written by a team of teachers from **Totara Park Kindergarten, He Whānau Manaaki o Tararua Free Kindergarten Association**. This study was designed to conceptualise and implement intentional and locally appropriate teaching strategies that were targeted to help children gain the skills they need to help establish the foundations for lifelong social and emotional wellbeing, with a focus on mindfulness and care. Through a multi-phase inquiry model the team, with the support of external partners developed the Tamariki Strong framework, which outlines key areas that the team have identified as important for tamariki learning and the actions that kaiako might take to support resilience and well-being. The Tamariki Strong framework is aligned with the learning outcomes from Te Whāriki and is organised around five key areas of practice related to social-emotional learning and mindfulness, including: emotional literacy; calmness and self-regulation; being present and focusing attention; connecting with others and showing manaakitanga; and resiliency, empowerment and agency in learning. The teachers and their critical friends developed an innovative and localised range of strategies for promoting socio-emotional development and resilience, which are likely to be very useful to other centres. As the authors conclude, not only were there positive learning outcomes for children, but there were also insights into teachers' practice which made their practices more intentional, consistent and team oriented.

These TLIF reports have been such an asset to the profession over the last couple of years, and highlight the importance of funding to support local, meaningful research into effective ECE practice. Finally, we have some interesting editor-reviewed pieces on some important topics in ECE.

In the first piece **Philippa Isom** reflects on her education journey across different sectors in education, and her experiences over the past year in moving into early childhood initial teacher education. She offers some thoughtful insights into how increasing her understanding of ECE and Te Whāriki has enriched her thinking about education, and how she feels she has now 'come home'. This piece made us smile a lot and we are sure it will resonate with many.

The second piece by **Kirstine Rapson** reflects on how centres have travelled through the pandemic, based on a small study that she conducted. As a leader in ECE, Kirstine has experienced first-hand the realities of lockdown and alert level changes in the Auckland region, and wanted to reach out to the sector in her area to capture their experiences also. We are sure that her findings reflect many in the sector and offer insights into how we might better prepare the sector for unanticipated events.

Our final piece is a nice revisitation of an article that first appeared in *Early Education* in 2008, which captured the first Tāmaki Makaurau Associate Teacher Symposium. In this article, long-standing members of the Tāmaki Makaurau Associate Teacher Network reflect on the decade plus of their collective support for associate teachers in the Auckland region, and then present findings from a survey that they conducted during 2021 when they could not come together for their usual event. The findings offer some thoughtful insight into the experiences and expectations of associate teachers and the role of initial teacher education providers in offering support and training to equip teachers in this essential role.

As we move further into our third year of the COVID-19 pandemic, we hope that the research we have in this volume continues. Now, more than ever, we need to ensure that children have rich opportunities to learn and develop within the company of other children. International research shows that the constant lockdowns have been hard on children in lots of ways, so providing an enriched learning experience for our youngest children is more

important than ever. The research and reflections in this volume show the commitment is strong and we need to keep the flame burning.

Arohanui

**Claire McLachlan and Karyn Aspden**

Editors

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