

Early Education



Volume 65 Spring / Summer 2019

- Politics of funding for Playcentre
- Walking the talk: Leadership in ECE
- Te Whariki and inclusive practice
- Soft skills of collaborative reading
- Joining a Kahui Ako
- Quality in ECE in China



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Editors

Prof Claire McLachlan,
The University of Waikato

Dr Karyn Aspden,
Massey University

Associate Professor Sally Peters,
The University of Waikato

Design and layout

Margaret Drummond

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This issue is the first issue of Early Education published by Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, The University of Waikato.

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 2020 editors

Claire McLachlan:
cmclachlan@waikato.ac.nz

Karyn Aspden:
k.m.aspden@massey.ac.nz

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Editorial

The beginning of a new era

Claire McLachlan

It is with a great deal of pleasure that I invite you to read the first online, open access volume of *Early Education*.

As many will know, the journal was previously available in print version and later in PDF on the AUT School of Education website. Caryl Hamer at the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand started the journal. It then moved to Massey University, where Cushla Scrivens edited it, and in 2006 it moved to AUT, where it was edited by myself and Sue Stover, who put countless hours into editing. When Sue Stover retired in early 2019, it was agreed that it would move to the Wilf Malcolm Institute for Educational Research at the University of Waikato, as an online, open access journal. Although I continue to edit the journal, Dr Karyn Aspden at Massey University and Associate Professor Sally Peters at the University of Waikato now assist me as editors. Although moving the journal was slightly trickier than anyone imagined and the current volume was impacted by my own workload as a new Dean, we are delighted to be up and running again and able to offer you the 2019 volume, albeit a little bit late. I am enormously grateful for the help and support of Margaret Drummond and Linda Mitchell at University of Waikato for getting the journal off the ground and to Karyn Aspden, for co-editing this volume.

I also want to acknowledge Cushla Scrivens, who was awarded the Queen's Service Medal in the New Year's Honours list for her contributions to history in the Manawatu region. In addition to editing *Early Education* for many years prior to my involvement, she also edited the *Manawatu Journal of History* from 2004–2017 and has made significant contributions to the local museum and other matters of historical importance to the Manawatu region. Sincere congratulations to Cushla on this significant body of work in her 'retirement'.

Also, within the theme of a new era, we have recently received news of the release of a new Strategic Plan for early childhood (Ministry of Education, 2019). I was privileged to be a member of the Early Learning Reference Group formed by

the Honourable Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education. I recently received a letter of thanks from the Minister, in which he stated that "I intend to give early childhood greater focus in the 2020 budget to enable implementation of some of the key actions with *He taonga te tamaiti—Every child a taonga: early learning 2019–29*". This is sincerely welcome news, as hindsight shows us that the promise of a strategic plan is given life or death from the decisions made at the budget-planning table. In his foreword to the Strategic Plan, Chris Hipkins states:

In the *Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy* [NZ Government, 2019] the Government has set the bold vision that "New Zealand be the best place in the world for children and young people". This vision is aspirational and will require concerted effort. We know that participation in high quality early learning is an important part of supporting young children's wellbeing and life opportunities. (p. 5)

It is relatively ironic that in the same year that these claims were made, New Zealand ranked 169 of 181 countries for children's rights on the KidsRights Index (<https://www.kidsrightsindex.org/>). The KidsRights Index is an annual global index which ranks how countries adhere to and are equipped to improve children's rights. The KidsRights Index is an initiative of the KidsRights Foundation, in cooperation with Erasmus University Rotterdam: Erasmus School of Economics and the International Institute of Social Studies. It comprises a ranking for all UN member states that have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and for which sufficient data is available; a total of 181 countries. Although New Zealand performs reasonably well in terms of life, health, education and protection, we score very poorly on the rankings for a children's rights environment. Although the Strategic Plan is a step in the right direction, the government has a lot of work to do if they really want New Zealand to be the best place in the world for children. Furthermore, although investment in the Strategic Plan is scheduled across a number of years, we know that such plans are vulnerable to

changes of government, so we have to hope that the commitments made in this plan to review funding, ratios, environments, provision and professional learning come to fruition.

The current volume gives me great pleasure in many ways, as it has such a diverse range of contributions, with some important points to raise. The volume starts with an article by Suzanne Manning on the funding regime for Playcentre, which seems very timely at a point at which equity funding is being reviewed as part of the Strategic Plan. Suzanne comments specifically on the implications of the Strategic Plan and on the impact of previous policies. She speculates on the likely success of a co-designed model of funding and offers some advice as to how this might be managed so that small and rural Playcentres are enabled to continue. She concludes by imagining a world in which funding models could accommodate both parents-as-educators and teacher-led services.

Still on the topic of management of services, Raewyn Higginson writes about a study undertaken by herself and colleagues at Te Rito Maioha on leadership of early childhood services. In particular, this article reports findings on the importance of leaders having a vision and the leaders' espoused theories and theories in use. Echoing the objectives of the new Strategic Plan and its focus on professional learning, she queries how teachers can gain leadership knowledge in ways other than 'on the job' and questions how sustainable models of leadership can be better supported.

Also related to the objectives of the Strategic Plan, but this time Objective 2 around participation in early childhood, Thecla Moffat's article comments on the changed language and guidance for inclusive practice in the revised Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 2017). Moffat comments on the inclusion of the UNCROC (United Nations, 1989) agreement in the curriculum and the implications this has for participation of all children in ECE. She also comments on the importance of government following through with the funding that is required to ensure that all children have equitable opportunities to learn. This article will be useful for centres to reflect on as they review their policies for inclusive practice.

Our fourth article, by Marjolein Whyte, is on a topic close to my heart—early literacy. Marjolein provides a practical article on how teachers can work with families to support children's reading comprehension skills from an early age. She talks about the "soft skills" of collaborative reading, offering some practical strategies for reading to

children within centres and also guidance on how to provide guidance to parents. As research tells us that most parents are keen to have advice on child development and want guidance and support (Zero to Three, 2016), the suggestions offered in this article will be useful to practising and pre-service teachers.

The next article, written by Christine Bailey, is a useful thought piece about how ECE teachers can become involved in local Kahui Ako (Communities of Learning). She reflects on the challenges she faced in establishing herself in this role, as well as talking about some of the early outcomes. I hope that we will get further updates from Christine in the future on this topic, which will be relevant to many ECE teachers.

The final article is by Dan Wan, a Ph.D student who was a Visiting Scholar with me in Australia in 2019. Dan (and her colleague Beilei) spent considerable time visiting the FedUni Children's Centres, which caused her to reflect on issues of quality in ECE centres in China. As I have visited China and several ECE centres in the last year, we have talked about the differences in curriculum at some length. This article is a result of Dan's reflection on the ECE system in China. I think her reflections on what quality looks like in the Chinese context will be of interest to many. I also highly recommend visiting ECE centres in China if you get the chance—it is fascinating!

To conclude, we have reviews of two excellent new books. The first is the tribute to Geraldine McDonald, edited by Sue Middleton and Helen May. As my review suggests, I think this book is fabulous and I know that many ECE teachers and researchers will gain insights from this edited collection. The second book, *Weaving Te Whariki* (edited by Alex Gunn and Joce Nuttall), is reviewed by my colleague, Vijaya Tatineni, who some of you will recall from her teaching days in New Zealand. Vijaya, whose field is cultural education, was intrigued by this useful collection of chapters reflecting on the revision of *Te Whāriki*. Vijaya highly recommends it for teachers, teacher educators and postgraduate students.

I hope you will enjoy this first online, open access volume of *Early Education*. I hope you will alert your friends and colleagues that it is publicly available and to be used and enjoyed by all. I urge you to contribute to the journal yourself. We offer either a peer review process or an editor review process. If you are new to writing, one of our editors will work with you to help shape and strengthen your article. We want strong stories of research and

practice that will help us to work toward New Zealand being a great place for children to live.

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Claire McLachlan
Editor, Early Education