
Comment

This issue of *Early Childhood Folio* ranges from a big-picture and readable review of the main debates within the literature about play in Western settings, to a small, qualitative, in-depth case study of a single child and the use of narrative inquiry to explore concepts of wellbeing and its link to personal identity. All of the authors draw out clear and sometimes challenging implications for the role of the teacher, making the collection highly relevant to practitioners and those working in teacher education and professional development.

Karen Guo draws on her doctoral study looking at the perspectives and experiences of Chinese immigrant families in New Zealand early childhood settings. She analyses the disconnections between home values and practices and those of the centre and reveals “facets of cross-cultural conflicts that remained invisible beneath the surface of the parents’ visible behaviours” (p. 8). These are strong findings for teachers working with children and families in multicultural settings. They are particularly important in a globalised society where migration is a source of ethnic and racial diversity among children, and have direct implications for early childhood settings where culture-bound ideas are inadequate to do justice to the diverse realities of children’s lives. Guo leaves readers with an urgent message to work towards building a cross-cultural community of practice through addressing these issues of differences and conflicts first, and building on families’ funds of knowledge.

A key feature of the sociocultural philosophy of teaching and learning in *Te Whāriki* is

that “children learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places, and things” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 14). The curriculum emphasises belonging, participation and community. University researchers, Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips and Vanessa Paki, and Tai Tamariki teachers, Lou Frean, Garth Armstrong and Neil Crowe, explore how Tai Tamariki, located in New Zealand’s national museum, Te Papa, used the museum to afford opportunities for understanding of kaupapa Māori values, tikanga Māori practices and taonga Māori on an everyday basis. It is rare for centres to be located in a museum, but the authors identify pedagogical strategies and the use of boundary objects such as photos and images that any centre can use to develop connections with local museums. Such connections can enhance and deepen respectful engagement with and enactment of tikanga Māori.

Two articles are by Australian writers. Yeshe Colliver provides a scholarly and readable review of the range of literature associated with the play-based curriculum in early childhood education in Western settings. He adeptly tackles the main debates about play, enabling the reader to get to grips with conflicting and competing discourses within early childhood with regard to the place of play in the curriculum. By doing this, he makes visible the main debates in ways that invite teachers to think about and investigate them within their own curriculum and in academic literature.

Joy Goodfellow, the second Australian writer, uses findings from the Infants’ Lives

in Childcare research project to investigate what life is like for infants in group care from the perspective of infants themselves. This fascinating study used a frame-by-frame analysis of video data to demonstrate how infants strategically engaged with objects, educators and peers in the play environment. The article is timely in New Zealand where there are concerns about the quality of care and education for infants and toddlers. An advisory group was recently set up to make policy recommendations to the Minister of Education. The Ministry of Education-commissioned literature review on quality early childhood education for under-2-year-olds argued for “sensitive and responsive caregiving that is attuned to their subtle cues, including their temperamental and age characteristics” (Dalli, White, Rockel, & Duhn, 2011, p. 3). Such sensitivity requires consummate professional judgement, and the time and conditions to enable educators to “look, listen in and make meaning”, as Goodfellow shows. The study from which this article draws its data is an innovative and highly significant one for infant and toddler practice.

Again, in Sandy Farquhar’s article, a rich depth of understanding is offered through a single case study, this time exploring wellbeing and its integral connection with a strong sense of identity. The analysis is set within a theoretical frame showing that wellbeing can be constructed in a variety of ways. The stories told by teachers, parents and children are particularly interesting and captivating. They demonstrate the capacity of narrative to unpack complexity and to gain insight into the child’s lived experiences, and own sense of identity and wellbeing.

Working theories as learning outcomes have been neglected in research and teachers’ practices, while learning dispositions have been overemphasised. This point is made by authors Helen Hedges and Sarah Jones in their article investigating working theories. It is very helpful to see a body of empirical research starting to emerge to help redress this imbalance. The research comes from a Teaching and Learning Research Initiative project, “Inquiring minds, meaningful responses: Children’s interests, inquiries and working theories”, and is another fruitful partnership undertaken between university researchers and

practitioners. The article provides much vivid data from within the early childhood settings to explore theoretically informed understandings of working theories that will help teachers to “notice, recognise and respond to the ways children represent their thinking, learning and making sense of the world around them through working theories” (p. 38).

New to this issue and to become an enduring feature is an interview with a researcher whose work has made a difference in the area of early years education. In this issue, Emeritus Professor Jane Ritchie is interviewed by New Zealand Council for Educational Research Communications Manager, Sarah Boyd.

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References

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