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# Comment

## Navigating change in early childhood education

### *A resource for reflection and dialogue*

Early childhood education (ECE) in Aotearoa New Zealand is facing a period of significant review and reform. Recent proposals affecting teacher qualifications, regulation, funding structures, and the place of te reo Māori in learning environments have all come under discussion in recent times, particularly through regulatory reform of the sector. Responding to this context, this special issue of *Early Childhood Folio* offers timely, evidence-informed perspectives on key issues shaping the future of early learning through the lens of regulation and policy.

The articles, all written by experienced researchers and educators, speak to different facets of the current developments. While each brings its own focus and disciplinary lens, the collection collectively offers critical insights into the values, assumptions, and effects embedded in current and proposed policy changes. These pieces do not seek to speak for the whole sector, nor do they claim ideological neutrality. Rather, they represent grounded perspectives from those long engaged in the daily realities of teaching, policy, and research in early childhood settings.

Alex Gunn's article "Economics Trumps Child Rights" examines recommendation 10 of the 2024 ECE Regulations Review. It raises questions about the consequences of relaxing qualification requirements, suggesting that workforce challenges are being framed in ways that may compromise children's rights to high-quality, professionally led education. Gunn calls for ongoing scrutiny of how policy shifts are justified and whose interests they ultimately serve.

In "Early Childhood Education as a Public Good", Linda Mitchell, Vida Botes and Olivera Kamenarac explore the growing influence of corporate providers in the ECE landscape. Drawing on comparative case research, they argue that a recommitment to public, not-for-profit provision is needed to protect equity, quality, and democratic oversight in the sector.

Jenny Ritchie's contribution, "A Call for Investment in High Quality, Culturally Sustaining Early Childhood

Provision", highlights the intersection of public investment, Treaty commitments, and culturally responsive education. It urges renewed attention to the role of ECE in affirming children's identities, languages, and whakapapa, particularly for Māori and Pacific communities.

Through an interview titled "Revernacularisation of te reo Māori and Critical Pedagogies in Kōhanga Reo", Mere Skerrett shares her perspective on language revitalisation and resistance in kōhanga reo. Framed through a critical pedagogical lens, the interview offers a first-hand account of efforts to protect te reo Māori, challenge recolonising tendencies in regulation, and uphold Māori leadership and aspirations in early learning.

In her article titled "Policy Settings for Infants and Toddlers in NZ Early Years Services: Will we ever get it right", Carmen Dalli recounts the movements of policy for children under age 3 since the 1980s, making the point that high-quality provision for this age group continues to be a concern, and to require action in the policy space, as part of laying solid foundations for lifelong wellbeing.

The final article, written by Amanda Coulston, chief executive of He Whānau Manaaki o Tararua Free Kindergarten Association, examines the proposed regulatory reforms through a practitioner lens. Titled "He Mana o te Tamaiti: Upholding Integrity in ECE Regulatory Reform", the article critiques the reform intentions for the ECE licencing criteria, the recent review of funding, and teacher qualifications.

Together, these articles providing a resource for educators, whānau, policy analysts, and advocates. As the conversation on reform continues to unfold, we hope this collection can support open dialogue and critical reflection on the future of early childhood education in Aotearoa.

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