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# Comment

**K**a tū tātou i raro i Matariki, te kāhui whetū o te tau hou, ka tangi te ngakau mō o tātou tini mate. Kei konei a Iritana Tawhiwhirangi, kua whetūrangitia, nā tōna ringa kua wharikitia Te Kohanga Reo. E kui, moe mai rā okioki ai. E ngā mate, haere. Rātou ki a rātou. Ki a tātou, te hunga ora, kia ora tātou katoa.

*We stand under Matariki, the constellation of the new year, and we weep for those we have lost. We acknowledge and farewell Dame Iritana Tawhiwhirangi, now at rest, who has joined the heavens, and who was so instrumental for the kaupapa of Te Kohanga Reo. At this time, we farewell those who have departed. And greetings to all of us, to the living. Kia ora tātou katoa!*

## **Introducing ourselves: Raella Kahuroa and Amanda White, co-editors of *Early Childhood Folio***

Many of you will know that Professor Linda Mitchell retired as General Editor of *Early Childhood Folio* at the end of 2024, following an incredible 13 years of service to the journal. We would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank Linda for all her work and leadership, and to also introduce ourselves as new co-editors who will be stepping into Linda's huge shoes! We embark on this role with the aim of continuing Linda's wonderful legacy of sharing high quality, peer-reviewed research that is relevant for early childhood practitioners, leaders, students, and academics.

### **A little about us...**

#### **Amanda**

Amanda currently works as a Researcher | Kairangahau at the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER). Amanda is a New Zealander with Asian and European ancestry, and acknowledges her positionality as tauiwi and tangata Tiriti, in the relational space of Te Tiriti

o Waitangi. Amanda completed her PhD at the University of Auckland in 2022. Amanda's primary research interests focus on multimodal communication and early childhood languages/literacies in Aotearoa New Zealand. Prior to her career as a researcher, Amanda worked as a speech-language therapist for over 20 years, with experience in New Zealand, Scotland and England.

#### **Raella**

Raella is a lecturer in Te Kura Toi Tangata / The Division of Education at Te Whare Wananga o Waikato / The University of Waikato. Raella has iwi links to Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairoa through her mother, and Ngāti Kahungunu ki Heretaunga through her father. She completed her PhD at the University of Waikato in 2022, and has worked on a series of research projects, including Marsden and TLRI projects on belonging, and a TLRI project on engaging with the land as part of democratic practice. She is interested in teaching and learning interactions in early childhood, and building critical thinking with young children. Raella also worked for over a decade in the early childhood sector in the Waikato region.



AMANDA WHITE



RAELLA KAHUROA

## Comment

The articles in this issue of *Early Childhood Folio* foreground the strength, richness, and resilience that emerge when diverse voices are given place in early childhood education. From the visionary leadership of Dame Iritana Tāwhiwhirangi to new settler families navigating transitions, from disabled kaiako to the next generation of mokopuna shaping their own learning journeys, each piece illuminates how education becomes more powerful when it reflects the realities and aspirations of the communities it serves. At a time when the early childhood sector in Aotearoa is grappling with significant funding cuts and policy uncertainty, these contributions remind us that education is not only a site of care and learning, but also a space of transformation and resistance, offering hopeful visions for the future of early childhood education. A short summary of each article is given below.

The opening articles reflect on the extraordinary life and legacy of Dame Iritana Tāwhiwhirangi: visionary leader, tireless advocate, and a key driving force behind the kōhanga reo movement. There are two pieces here; a poroporoaki written by Kōhanga Reo National Board chairperson Rāniera Proctor, and an article setting out Dame Iritana's word in guiding the kōhanga reo movement.

The poroporoaki is a fitting farewell to Dame Iritana, given in the language she fought so hard to revitalise: te reo Māori.

The article titled “He Kōrero Mō Dame Iritana Tāwhiwhirangi” is written by Hoana McMillan, also of the Kōhanga Reo National Board. This piece traces the emergence and evolution of kōhanga reo through the lens of Dame Iritana's involvement, from its humble beginnings grounded in kaupapa Māori and collective action, through years of resistance, renewal, and reclamation. As the article moves through key milestones and challenges, it also brings us to the present, where Iritana's influence continues to shape new generations of mokopuna and kaiako. This work reminds us that the strength of the kōhanga reo movement lies in its people, its purpose, and the legacy of those who dared to dream boldly for future generations.

In the article “It's the Little Things that Make a Difference”, by Hazel Woodhouse and Sally Peters, the authors discuss the pressing issue of supporting transitions to early childhood education in Aotearoa for former refugee and migrant children. This article reports on initial findings from a study exploring the transitions of new settler children, aged 3 to 8 years, into ECE or school settings. At the heart of this research is the question of how ECE and school teams, in collaboration with Settlement Centre staff, can implement positive, responsive practices to welcome new settler families. Findings showed that it was the seemingly “little things” that made a difference in supporting families' transitions to educational settings. The article concludes with key implications for ECE teachers to consider as part of their own practice in working with new settler children and their families.

The next article, by Veronica Griffiths, Jenny Malcolm, Derek Hartley, Erin Hall, Fleur Hohaia-Rollinson, Kerry Purdue, Jackie Solomon and Donna Williamson-Garne titled “Supporting Disabled Teachers Right to Teach”, reports on findings from research focused on the experiences of disabled student-kaiako and kaiako in preservice and inservice contexts. Accommodations included listening carefully to kaiako so they could feel safe to disclose information about their disabilities. Study support, flexible working hours, and environmental equipment and resources were also practical ways that ITE providers and ECE employers were found to provide support to disabled student-kaiako and kaiako. When reasonable accommodations are in place, the rights, well-being, and belonging of student-kaiako and kaiako with disabilities are strengthened in ECE contexts.

In her article “Let People Fly,” Rachel Graves explores the enactment of distributed leadership in early childhood education, with a specific focus on the context of Whānau Manaaki Kindergartens. Graves investigates how systems, structures, and relational practices shape inclusive leadership environments. The research highlights the importance of values-led leadership that is deliberately cultivated, and shows how trust, clarity, and shared responsibility can

support teams to thrive. Graves foregrounds Māori and Pacific leadership principles, weaving in cultural responsiveness, collective agency, and the emotional realities of teaching teams, and inviting leaders to reflect on how they create space for others to “fly”. The article offers timely and practical recommendations for building sustainable leadership models that honour both people and kaupapa.

In his article, “Modelling Children's Working Theories”, Daniel Lovatt deepens the conversation about working theories in early childhood education by introducing a new conceptual framework: the spiral of working theory development. Shaped by Lovatt's doctoral research, this model provides a way to visualise the recursive, dynamic nature of how children make meaning from experience. Lovatt shows how understandings shift and reform through cycles of observation, trial, reflection, and adjustment, and offers a tool for recognising complexity and responding intentionally to the knowledge-building efforts of young learners.

In the final article, Janette Kelly-Ware, Nicola Daly, Denise De Vorms, Heke Niu, Kateata Binoka, Brenda Gautusa, Elisapeta (Peta) Faavale foreground Pacific approaches to picturebooks. The article “They are not just Stories” explores how children and teachers responded to Pacific ways of “being-knowing-seeing-doing” in picturebooks available to them in a Pacific kindergarten. This article is timely, given recent funding cuts to the Pasifika Early Literacy Project (PELP), a Ministry of Education literacy programme for Pacific children. Co-authored by teachers alongside academic researchers, this article highlights two key themes: firstly, using picturebooks as ‘mirrors of self-identification and cultural practices, and 2) using picturebooks as pedagogical tools for talking together. This research illustrates ways in which picturebooks were thus more than “just” stories, providing vital connections for children between their kindergartens and homes, including their personal experiences.

Amanda White and Raella Kahuroa  
Co-editors