
People, places and things

Implications for New Zealand's Strategic Plan for Early Learning

How starkly have we been reminded, in recent times, of the importance of the work of early childhood teachers? Shaken to the core by the terror attacks in Christchurch, and then overwhelmed with the response of aroha, inclusion, and solidarity, Aotearoa is in what we could say a new phase of determining identity, determining values, and reaffirming the strength of its communities. Without a doubt, the early experiences of very young children are crucial, for the shaping of their sense of who they are, and of their sense of belonging—to families, centres, communities. They are crucial for children's learning about ways of being themselves and ways of being in relationship with others who are similar to themselves, and different. These experiences are crucial in working through these processes, and what they might mean and hold for the future. Without a doubt, then, the development and effective implementation of *He Taonga Te Tamaiti/Every Child a Taonga: Strategic Plan for Early Learning 2019–29* is both necessary and urgent. Input from the sector and wider community is now with the Ministry of Education on this highly anticipated reaffirmation of what are seen to be critical factors in achieving high quality early childhood education for all areas of Aotearoa.

This special issue is a culmination of research and thinking through the period of drafting and consultation on the draft of the *Strategic Plan*. It follows the University of Waikato Early Years Research Centre annual teachers' conference in July 2018—People, Places and Things:

Implications for New Zealand's Strategic Plan for Early Learning—and the publication of the government's draft *Strategic Plan for Early Learning 2019–29*. The response to the call indicates the level of interest and commitment from diverse researchers to highlight implications for the development of the *Strategic Plan*. In a first for Early Childhood Folio, all articles were published online first, enabling access to them in time by stakeholders during the consultation and feedback process.

The first article of the special issue, "What Do They Do All Day? Exploring the Complexity of Early Childhood Teachers' Work", is by Linda Mitchell, Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips, Simon Archard, Sonja Arndt, and Maretta Taylor. The authors discuss findings from a pilot study of how 22 teachers in kindergartens and education and care centres in Aotearoa New Zealand spent their time at work. Teachers filled in time-use diaries, writing down details of what they did at different times over a whole working day. The diary entries were coded using a taxonomy developed by Charles Sturt University and Queensland University of Technology researchers in Australia, which identifies the types of activities and length of time in which teachers were engaged in them. The findings show that early childhood teachers' work is complex and varied, and the authors argue for the need to support this complexity through specific policy measures in the *Strategic Plan for Early Learning*.

Olivera Kamenarac, in her article "Who Am I As An Early Childhood Teacher? Who Would I Like To Be?", discusses how discourses of

democratic early childhood education and care (ECEC) as a child's right, and enterprise discourses of ECEC as a commodity, have constructed teachers' work and professional identities in Aotearoa New Zealand over the past 2 decades. Kamenarac illustrates two prevailing identity constructions of teachers emerging from these discourses: activist–advocates, and teachers–entrepreneurs. By revealing the powerful impacts of inconsistent policy directives on the sector, she offers thoughts on changes in the state and the ECEC sector in the development of the *Strategic Plan for Early Learning*, to resist neoliberal emphases and re-establish a more democratic, socially just, and equitable ECEC sector.

Next, Lisa Terreni and Debbie Ryder, in their article “Excursions in Early Childhood Contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand”, present findings from their doctoral studies. They outline how excursions (field trips) can provide new and exciting learning opportunities outside schools and early childhood education (ECE) centres, and ways in which they can add new dimensions to an education programme. The article is based on a large-scale national questionnaire which asked early childhood teachers in New Zealand about the degree to which early childhood teachers undertake excursions, where they take children, and what facilitators or barriers occur. In addition, interviews explored teacher and parent perspectives on physical activity between the home and the ECE context, and

excursions as an everyday physical experience.

Sonya Gaches and Michael Gaffney's article, “Children's Rights and the Draft Strategic Plan for Early Learning: Where Are The Children?”, is a review of the draft *Strategic Plan for Early Learning* in line with obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Using discourse analysis to identify explicit and implicit references to protection, provision and participation rights, they show that the draft plan prioritises protection and provision rights, with less emphasis on participation rights. Gaches and Gaffney suggest that the imbalance between protection, provision, and participation rights can be corrected by elevating reference to children's agency within the plan's vision statement, to establish implications for its goals.

In the next article, “Beyond Teacher/Parent Separation: Questioning the 100% Qualified Teacher Policy”, Suzanne Manning points to the draft *Strategic Plan for Early Learning* goal to improve quality by regulating for 100% teachers in teacher-led services. She argues that this proposal assumes a distinct separation between teachers and parents, and between services employing professional teachers and those with parents-as-educators. Manning uses the “What's the problem represented to be?” (WPR) policy analysis approach of Carol Bacchi (2009), to examine and disrupt the underlying problem representations contained in this policy. An alternative policy is proposed that assumes

professional teachers and parents-as-educators can work alongside one another in the same service, to mutual benefit.

In the final article, “Sooner, Rather Than Later: Addressing Leadership Development in ECE—A response to the 2019–29 Strategic Plan for Early Learning”, Maria Cooper asks what we know about ECE leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand, and what can be learnt from relevant leadership research to support change processes in ECE. She suggests that engaging with the goals of the *Strategic Plan for Early Learning* will depend on leadership at all levels of the system, and that we cannot make any assumptions about how ready, willing, and able leaders within individual services will be to address expectations yet to arise from the plan, especially since policy makers have given minimal attention to leadership development up to this point. Cooper refers to the situation of, and research on, leadership in ECE to argue that engaging with the plan necessitates revisiting the issue of leadership development for the sector. She concludes with a recommendation for policy makers, that all leaders be given equitable access to high-quality leadership development informed by relevant research, sooner rather than later.

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