
Comment

The articles in this issue of *Early Childhood Folio* offer provocative discussion of research-based findings on a range of issues and topics. Children's rights to belong and participate, and equity aims take a prominent position in the article by Li, O'Hara-Gregan and MacArthur, on understanding disability as socially and culturally constructed and its implications for inclusive education, and in Xu and Ritchie's article on teachers' views of young children's citizenship in Aotearoa. Three further articles discuss analyses of teacher-child interactions and children's learning potential, each based on research undertaken in different contexts, and each centred on a different area of exploration—namely, young children co-constructing stories with teachers, teachers supporting children's scientific investigation through intentional teaching, and an investigation of the Sustained Shared Thinking (SSTEW) Scale in an ECE setting. Teachers and researchers interested in teacher practice and reflection will find the focus of these articles useful. The final article is about modification of a practicum assessment process at the Manukau Institute of Technology, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Understanding Disability as Socially and Culturally Constructed—What does this mean for Inclusive Early Childhood Education?" is a timely article that will help promote critical reflections and discussions around disability, diversity, inclusion and equity in early childhood education, and action at levels of practice and policy. The article is based on findings from research carried out by the first author, Shihan Li, for her Master of Education thesis. The case study research in an ECE centre, explored teachers' and parents' understandings of inclusive practice, focusing on what parents of children with disabilities and teachers considered has been and is being done well. The potential

of this appreciative inquiry approach, is that it enables thinking and action directed towards transformative possibilities. Four key themes related to how teachers and parents from the ECE learning community understand and respond to disability were identified: "Disability as part of human diversity is constructed as "ordinary" and as a resource; the ECE community promotes a positive understanding of differences within the ECE environment; differences are responded to meaningfully; and the way to success is through collaborative relationships".

"Teachers' Views of Young Children's Citizenship in Aotearoa: Discourses and Power Complexities" offers valuable insights into teachers' understanding of children's enacted citizenship in their daily lives. The article draws from research carried out by the first author, Peng Xu, for his doctoral study in kindergartens in Aotearoa and China. The research findings from the 12 Aotearoa teacher participants are discussed in this article. The methods, using focus group interviews and selected edited video clips of children's citizenship actions in kindergartens in both countries, used as "interview cues", were particularly valuable in eliciting fruitful conversations with teachers. The study is theoretically based and interviews are analysed in relation to Foucault's notions of discourse and power. Two key themes are discussed in respect to children's power as citizens: children as powerful and children as powerless citizens. Notably, teachers drew on several discourses—including equal status, the rights of the child, and the construct of *whakamana*—to construct the child as powerful. Within this theme, Te Tiriti o Waitangi was referenced as "enabling teachers to uphold commitments to Māori as per the Treaty, while still affirming the ethnic diversity present in their kindergartens". On the other hand, discourses of being responsible citizens, where a focus was on social rules and

responsibilities, may result in children being powerless citizens. In a useful link made to practice, pedagogical strategies are identified alongside exemplars of different constructions of the child as citizen.

“Young Children Co-Constructing Stories with Teachers” was written by international collaborators who explored the social and cultural knowledge demonstrated by children of different ages as they co-construct meaning multimodally during stories with teachers across two early childhood education settings, in Canada and New Zealand. The authors’ emphasis on multimodality gives value and prominence to the oral, auditory, visual, tactile, gestural, written, and spatial ways that children and teachers create stories together. The use of images alongside text brings the findings alive for the reader. Overall, this article offers useful understanding of the value of close observation and pedagogical strategies for teachers when engaging with children over everyday story interactions.

Two articles were written by or with teachers, who were supported by academic researchers to systematically explore an aspect of their teaching practice and children’s learning. Teachers from Newtown Kindergarten undertook their own small research investigation of how to support children’s scientific investigation through intentional teaching. They were participants in a Marsden-funded research project about supporting belonging with refugee and immigrant children, which also coincided with their own strategic internal review of their teaching practice. Pedagogical practices found to be of particular importance were: the importance of slowing down, the value of repetition, the depth of child engagement in scientific activities and the significance of sensory learning. These teachers had been somewhat wary of taking an “intentional teaching” approach, which initially, they equated with “teacher-led”

activities, but after engaging in the work and understanding the approach better, they came to realise they acted in a child-centred way and saw tangible benefits for children.

Anne Meade and Meg Kwan discussed an investigation of the use by teachers of the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Wellbeing (SSTEWE) Scale in an early childhood setting. The scale was developed as part of the longitudinal Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) study in the UK, where sustained shared thinking is defined as:

An episode in which two or more individuals work together in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative, etc. Both parties must contribute to the thinking, and it must develop and extend (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010, p. 157).

The EPPE study found positive effects of participation in ECE in settings, described as “good quality” in terms of adult–child interactions that are responsive, cognitively challenging, and encourage joint attention and negotiation or “sustained shared thinking”. The teachers trialled using the SSTEWE scale to enrich and expand their teaching and evaluation practices. Their overall aim was to strengthen children’s communication, thinking, and exploration competencies. The article discusses shifts found in teachers’ planning and pedagogy. Readers wanting to understand more about sustained shared thinking and use of the SSTEWE scale will find this article interesting.

In the final article in this issue, Jo Perry and Sarah Probine discuss ways in which they modified a practicum assessment process at their institution, the Manukau Institute of Technology, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. They argue that the imperative to do things differently through “virtual meetings” and an online triadic discussion, was associated with some positive outcomes reported by students

in an online questionnaire. The article provides insights for teacher education providers who are interested in providing useful and authentic assessment processes under a variety of conditions.

At a time when the Ministry of Education is developing its Education Research Evaluation and Development Strategy, the value of funded research undertaken by university thesis students and with practitioners at a setting level is worth noting. Two of the studies were derived from research for university theses. In three projects, contestable funding was awarded to support the research endeavours. The international collaboration between Canada and New Zealand on co-constructing stories with teachers was funded by the Royal Society New Zealand Catalyst Seeding network and a Partnership grant from Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada. Meade and Kwan were supported with funding obtained from a Teacher-led Innovation Fund (TLIF) available through the Ministry of Education to support teams of qualified teachers to collaboratively develop innovative practices that improve learning outcomes. Teachers at Newtown Kindergarten were supported by funding from the Royal Society Marsden Fund for investigator-initiated research.

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Note

Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2010). A focus on pedagogy: Case studies of effective practice. In K. Sylva, E. Melhuish, P. Sammons, I. Siraj-Blatchford, & B. Taggart (Eds.). *Early childhood matters. Evidence from the effective pre-school and primary education project* (pp. 149–165). Routledge.