
Comment

This issue of *Early Childhood Folio* includes several articles with a focus on the arts, picturebooks and storytelling, including Māori arts encompassed by the term *toi Māori*. There is also emphasis in some articles on fundamental issues confronting our time, from climate change to poverty to equity, fairness, and democratic participation. How to engage children, teachers/kaiako and whānau in ways that deepen understanding and promote critical thinking are themes. Four of the articles are written from research undertaken for master's or doctoral studies, and one has come from a Teaching and Learning Research Initiative partnership.

The issue begins with an article by Joanna Williamson and Amanda White, with Helen Hedges. A tribute to Joanna is expressed in the poroporoaki for Joanna, who sadly passed away in December 2022. The article was initiated by Joanna, who wanted to share ideas from her doctoral study in co-authorship with Amanda White, and who asked Amanda and Helen Hedges to act on reviews on her behalf. The article discusses key findings from Joanna's and Amanda's doctoral studies to "highlight common themes around the role of stories in supporting relationships, identities, language, and other conceptual learning". A strength of the article is the bringing together of the two separate studies, one focused on naturally occurring teacher-child storybook interactions in ECE settings (Joanna's) and the second exploring how 1-year-olds from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds experienced stories (Amanda's). This article offers a clear summary of the role of teachers in fostering and extending learning and relationships within everyday story interactions. The final table, setting out the key findings alongside possible practice exemplars and reflective questions from the *Communication / Mana reo*

strand of *Te Whāriki* will be a valuable resource for teachers/kaiako.

"Making Sense of *Te Whāriki a te Kōhanga Reo* through Toi Māori: A Whānau Approach" discusses findings from a Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) project carried out from 2021 to 2023. The project had two aims: to explore how whānau give expression to the mana (enabling power) of mokopuna through their knowledge of the kōhanga reo curriculum *Te Whāriki a te Kōhanga Reo*, and to offer opportunities to deepen whānau understanding. During the COVID-19 lockdowns whānau turned to toi Māori as a collaborative sense-making process. The authors, a university researcher and six kaiako from the kōhanga reo, explain and exemplify some of the wide range of Māori arts encompassed by the term *toi Māori*, the significance of symbols and metaphors within toi Māori and te ao Māori, and the capacity of representation to make deeper connections to cultural identity. They explain the principles, dimensions and taumata whakahirahira (cultural settings) of *Te Whāriki a te Kōhanga Reo*. Artwork and pūrākau depicting the five taumata whakahirahira were created through whānau working in one of five groups, discussing ideas through Facebook and passing the canvas from house to house. The article offers striking representations of whānau understanding of the taumata whakahirahira and describes ways in which the process generated collaborative critical thinking. The authors' call "to consider the ways in which toi Māori and the arts can benefit whānau in a similar manner" will resonate with teachers/kaiako interested in exploring and deepening understandings of curriculum.

The article by Chedly Fernando and Janette Kelly-Ware will be a useful resource to teachers/kaiako in directing them to a selection of picturebooks focused on kaitiakitanga, and

offering ways to foster ongoing discussions with tamariki as they explore different storylines. As the authors suggest, the underpinning research from Chedly's Master in Education study, relates to young children's awareness of pollution, global warming, and deforestation and children's capacity to learn how to be agents of change. In this article, nine Aotearoa New Zealand picturebooks, chosen because they contained explicit themes of sustainability and kaitiakitanga are analysed. Then two picturebooks are featured, curriculum links are proposed, and feedback from a small sample of teachers is reported. The authors write, "The power of picturebooks should not be underestimated and these stories beautifully crafted by authors and illustrators from Aotearoa New Zealand include rich te ao Māori themes and represent a growing body of children's literature on kaitiakitanga and sustainability".

Raella Kahuroa's article, "A Space for Critique: Opening up the World Through the Possibilities of Critical Pedagogy", written with four teachers from an East Auckland community kindergarten, offers a timely focus on equity, fairness, and democratic participation. The article presents "illustrative glimpses" of the endeavours of each teacher to "deeply enquire with children into issues of significance to those children" and to support children to "pursue meaningful transformational change

to the problems they encountered". The article skilfully explains and makes accessible concepts of critical pedagogy. It discusses four elements of a critical enquiry framework, adapted from the work of Freire, and suggests possibilities for using the framework for "opening up the worlds of young children". This article will be of great interest to teachers/kaiako wanting to use a critical pedagogy approach to engaging with young children about our actions in the world.

One of the pressing issues of our time is child poverty and the gap between rich and poor. The KidsCan ECE programme was designed to remove barriers for children to participate in ECE through the provision of raincoats, shoes, socks, nit treatment products, daily fruit, and cooked lunch. Sally Peter's article discusses findings from a mixed-methods evaluation of the KidsCan ECE programme, in which 24 ECE centres participated, with seven of these taking part in qualitative case studies. There were benefits for children through good nutrition and keeping warm and dry, and these were associated with further benefits linked to children's participation and engagement. The quotations from families and overall findings, while positive for many children and families involved, make for sobering thinking that we do not as a whole society ensure that every child has access to the provisions they require. As Sally concludes, "we have to fight for policies that

enable whānau to have sufficient incomes to address material hardship, without reliance on charity".

In the final article for this issue, Foneska and Kelly-Ware consider the hypothesis that a focus on "spirituality" offers an alternative approach that challenges deficit thinking about children with additional learning needs and which values the strengths and rights of all children. The research underpinning the article was completed by Fonseca as part of a Masters of Disability and Inclusion Studies qualification with Kelly-Ware as her supervisor. A main conclusion for interviews with the seven teacher participants from five diverse ECE settings, was that looking through a spirituality lens enabled teachers to recognise values, human attributes, and traits of a child's positive identity. They viewed spirituality as integral to the development of the whole child. The topic of spirituality itself is not widely researched despite it being an important topic for teachers in ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand to know about. Hence, this article will be of potential interest to student teachers, teachers, and teacher educators in this country, as well as practitioners in other countries.

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