

---

# Comment

Each article in this issue of *Early Childhood Folio* raises questions about values and aspirations for children, and the power of beliefs, both silent and overt, to influence policy and pedagogy. Alcock and Haggerty argue that “Policy aims to steer practices towards desired futures”. They go on to offer warnings about the potential schoolification of early childhood education and care (ECEC). At a time in New Zealand when we have also fairly recently experienced the loss of funding for Centres of Innovation projects, where teacher qualification targets have been reduced, and where universal professional development has been replaced by programmes targeted to particular communities, it is heartening that the articles in this issue provide examples of teachers working critically with children, families, and communities. Authors in this issue offer thoughtful examples of ways to find out about community and family funds of knowledge, and to promote social-justice aims in ECEC practice through investigation of their own thinking, research, theoretical considerations, and analysis of practice. For policy, Alcock and Haggerty call on us to make closer, more critical analysis of developments.

In “Childhoods to be lived”, Alcock and Haggerty respond to “an increasing emphasis on early childhood care and education (ECCE) as preparation for academic success and the child as a future economic resource” which they argue is manifest in recent policy initiatives. Their analysis of Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Social Welfare websites and policy documentation shows how this is occurring despite—and in

contradiction to—the philosophical principles of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996): holistic development, openness, and plurality. One critical issue is that the principle of integration of education and care is in danger of being undermined, with the Ministry of Health in charge of *development*, the Ministry of Social Development in charge of *care*, and the Ministry of Education in charge of (a narrow definition of) *education*. The latest special issue of the *International Journal of Early Childhood* (OMEP, 2013), on national policies in a globalised world, shows how integration in its widest sense can denote “the bringing together of child and family programmes from multiple disciplines, so as to better respond to needs and aspirations of children and families and better recognise the relationship of children’s development and wellbeing to family and community context” (p. 157). The holistic framing of *Te Whāriki* seems in danger of being undermined by policies that create structural divides and that hold out a narrow conception of the child.

Two articles (Stephen & Plowman; Archard) are concerned with 3- and 4-year-old children’s use of digital technologies in early childhood and home settings. Both articles point to learning that is associated with play with digital technologies, particularly when this play is supported by a responsive adult. Stephen and Plowman draw from a series of qualitative studies carried out in Scotland to explore the preferences and usage of digital technologies in early childhood settings and home. They found that the role played by adults makes a crucial difference in strengthening the

kind of engagement and interest associated with children learning. The article elaborates on this role in early childhood settings, conceptualising it as “guided interaction”, and including planning and evaluation as well as direct “multimodal” interactions with children. Archard’s case studies of three children in a New Zealand education and care centre, their learning story documentation, and interviews with their families, are used to illustrate “the part ICT can play in supporting relational learning and how it can also contribute to democratic features of such learning”.

Warren and Perry challenge early childhood teachers to critically analyse their own practice and identify the discourses that shape their teaching. In these ways, early childhood teachers may become deeply reflective with a view to making positive change. Warren examines identity-work through reflective journal writing by three newly qualified teachers, exploring how each took responsibility for their identity as teachers. Through this process, each recognised and held on to valued characteristics, and changed others. Perry used an autoethnographic method to document learning events that included *all* participants in an ECEC setting for refugee families—

children, families, *and* teachers. She argues that autoethnography “engages teachers with their own thoughts, values, feelings and beliefs and leads to examination of the impact of each”.

Both Kahuroa (New Zealand) and Cruz (Australia) work from a commitment to social justice: Kahuroa for children to become critical in their thinking about taken-for-granted stories that are used to make sense of the world; Cruz to engender more culturally responsive and respectful learning spaces in a remote, predominantly Aboriginal community in Australia. Kahuroa’s action-research study aimed to encourage children to look at “texts” (broadly defined) through critical frames. In this article she explores children’s ideas about gender and gender boundaries, and how children’s thinking changed through “critical questions and critical conversations—because these were questions that mattered to the children and conversations that counted”. Cruz’s research asked community members about their views of the state of education and needs for change, their aspirations for children’s learning, and how they might make changes through a community vision and community involvement. These changes were starting to be enacted. This is activist research that is making

a difference through learning with communities and the engagement of local groups. It offers thought-provoking ideas for educators.

I have argued (Mitchell, 2013) that to address the challenges presented by globalisation and marketisation, and to counter those that are not in the best interests of children, we need to reclaim collective democracy in ECEC. The examples in this issue offer some ideas of how this might be undertaken in policy and pedagogy.

*Linda Mitchell*

*Editor*

## References

- Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early childhood curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- Mitchell, L. (2013). Early childhood provision: Democratic communities for citizenship and social justice? *International Journal of Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood*, 1(1), 54–64.
- OMEP: l’Organisation Mondiale pour l’Education Pré-scolaire. (2013). *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 45(2).