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# Comment

The articles in this issue of *Early Childhood Folio* offer theoretical concepts, ideas, and strategies that will be of practical value to early childhood practitioners. They address a diversity of topics—mathematical learning, children’s “real questions”, building leadership capacity, supporting social emotional competence, children’s creativity in natural settings, and learning English as an additional language. The issues canvassed are highly relevant in contemporary early childhood education settings and the articles carefully spell out implications for practice, making them a useful resource.

“Mathematics in Early Childhood: Nourishing and Nurturing Te Kākano” is a reminder of the existing resources to support mathematics learning in early childhood education. In the context of the updated *Te Whāriki*, Jane McChesney revisits the framework for identifying mathematical practices, Te Kākano, and background mathematics-oriented professional support materials for teachers, *Te Aho Tūkūtu*, to identify threads of mathematical learning. This is a timely article that justifies the value of revisiting rich resources that have already been developed and used, and examines these in relation to the revised curriculum document. An example is given of how a shared gardening activity can be used to engage children in “a repertoire of mathematical practices”. The example highlights rich mathematically oriented communications, the use of symbol systems to “re-present” mathematical activities that become long term resources “for extended conversations, explorations and possible problem solving”, and the opportunities to embed important cultural and social practices. This article will have appeal to teachers in

primary and early childhood settings, and offers a salutary warning about not limiting the range of practices. It is an article of hope holding out examples of ways in which teachers can use existing resources to build on and extend mathematical practice.

Helen Hedges, Tamar Weisz-Koves, Maria Cooper, and Daniel Lovatt’s article distinguishes the activities children play with, like playdough, sand, and collage, from the “real questions” that children ask, questions which represent the fundamental issues and topics that are of importance to them. Their main argument is that by attending to these questions and funds of knowledge from home, teachers are able to build a curriculum that responds to children’s interests more deeply. This article draws on findings from a Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) study in which teacher researchers worked in collaboration with university researchers to research pedagogy in two early childhood centres. It examines a fundamental question underlying children’s interests: “How can I build personal, learner, and cultural identities as I participate in interesting, fulfilling, and meaningful activities with my family, community, and culture?” from which were derived subquestions. The focus in this article is on one child, 4-year-old Zoey, with analysis of data in response to three of the subquestions. 1) How can I make special connections with people I know? 2) How can I make and communicate meaning? 3) What do intelligent and responsible adults do? Time was found to be a key factor, pointing to the need for teachers to observe closely, listen to children, and note their recurring play over time. The process of documentation and reflection, by teachers alone, and with others enabled deeper insights to be gained. The article offers valuable ideas about observing and listening to children

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and making curriculum decisions based on children's interests and questions.

"Leading from a Distance: Adopting a Heterarchy for Building Leadership Capacity" is another study that was undertaken within a teacher researcher and academic researcher partnership. In this article, Gail Pierce and Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips explore the role of the professional leader addressing challenges of supporting teachers within kindergartens and early childhood centres that were geographically dispersed. This is a not uncommon situation in New Zealand. The authors argue that a model of shared or distributed leadership disrupts hierarchy, and is especially relevant in a context where face-to-face contact is difficult. The model enables responsibilities to be dispersed and capabilities to be shared. The article offers valuable insights from interviews and a questionnaire of teacher views of the effectiveness of the model of leadership and the strategies identified to help build their own leadership capacity. Interestingly, the kindergarten association is reported to be exploring the concepts of a heterarchy that demonstrates a merging of hierarchical and heterarchical modes of ordering responsibilities, and is making changes based on these. This is food for thought for early childhood organisations facing similar challenges.

Strategies for teachers in supporting children's social emotional competence is the main focus of the article by Tara McLaughlin, Karyn Aspden and Linda Clarke. These authors identified

teaching practices in five key areas: (1) emotional literacy, (2) social problem solving, (3) calming down, (4) social skills and friendship, and (5) prevent/address challenging behaviour. The teaching practices were derived from practices observed, reported and validated by a range of kindergarten teachers and early childhood education stakeholders. The article offers a range of practical and contextually appropriate teaching strategies for supporting social emotional competence, and will be of direct relevance for teachers in early childhood education.

"Young Children's Creativity in Natural Outdoor Settings" contributes to the small body of research around creativity and natural settings as stimuli for children's innovative play. It responds to a concern that children have fewer opportunities to experience natural outdoor environments because of lesser access to outdoor spaces in urban environments, greater time spent by children interacting with technology and a fear by adults of risk-taking. Kathleen points to great benefits from children accessing outdoor environments in the three early childhood settings in her study, including less challenging behaviour and less need for teacher intervention. She attributes this to "the combination of space, time, and the abundance of natural resources". She argues that children's freedom to initiate and engage in play and exploration creates endless possibilities for children's creativity, improvisation and innovation.

The final article by Katina Beauchamp, Corrina Tucker and Peter Howland, "Learning

English as an Additional Language in Early Childhood Settings: How do Educators Support Young Children?" responds to the challenges arising from New Zealand's increasingly heterogeneous population for teachers to work with children who do not speak English as a first language. They point to the support for English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provided in primary and secondary education, and note there is no similar support in early childhood education. Their study, based on interviews with 11 teachers in diverse early childhood settings, found teachers had limited access to resources and theoretical understanding, and held a belief that children learned a second language largely through "osmosis". This study is a valuable first step in investigating teachers' understanding of their roles and work with children who do not speak English as a first language. The article points to the need for both focused research and well-informed support for early childhood teachers and children.

The first issue of *Early Childhood Folio* for 2018 will be a special issue drawing from papers presented at Victoria University of Wellington Institute for Early Childhood Studies (IECS) Spring Research Seminar *Tē Whāriki 2017: New realities and possibilities*, which offered chances for practitioners and researchers to explore some of the possibilities and realities of the revised *Tē Whāriki*. Articles for subsequent issues are welcomed.

*Linda Mitchell, Editor*