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# Comment

The revised early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, is still relatively new and there has been little research on how teachers are responding to it. Four of the articles in this issue explore curriculum issues, and in doing so, raise challenges and highlight possibilities for extending pedagogies in the interests of children. The other two articles in this issue concern associate teachers' motivation and teacher professionalism.

Claire McLachlan discusses findings from her survey of a cross section of teachers and key informant interviews with leaders to explore how teachers are implementing *Te Whāriki*, and specifically the *Communication / Mana reo* strand. As background, she points to ERO reviews reporting inconsistencies in implementation of *Te Whāriki* and the Advisory Group on Early Learning (AGEL) report recommending improvements in implementation. Crucially, the findings "confirm that the teaching, learning and assessment of literacy is dependent on the knowledge of the teacher to recognise learning and development and respond with intentional teaching to extend children's learning" (p. 7). On the basis of her findings, McLachlan argues that literacy pedagogies and appropriate assessment need to be a focus within initial teacher education and professional support.

Silky Sharma and Carol Hamilton's article, "Understanding Ableism: A Teaching and Learning Tool for Early Childhood Education Practitioners", presents an important issue regarding early childhood inclusion for children with disabilities. The authors highlight that despite policy and international conventions around the rights of disabled children to equal participation and achievement in all areas of their lives, research highlights exclusion and marginalization experienced by these children. The article draws on Silky's doctoral study to

examine whether the concept of ableism could be used as a tool to promote understandings that will counter the operation of exclusionary norms and customs. Three examples drawn from Silky's pilot research bring the ideas alive. The article should generate deeper reflection about thinking and practices that impact on early childhood teachers' ability to provide a quality early childhood education for children with disabilities and their families.

Janette Kelly's "Open Letter to Teachers" makes reference to the explicit encouragement in the revised *Te Whāriki* for teachers to use "critical inquiry and problem solving to shape their practice" (p. 15) and in particular to challenge "disparities, injustices, inequalities and perceived norms" (p. 15). She draws on findings from her doctoral research, carried out over 7 months in a New Zealand kindergarten, to make a strong argument for teachers to consciously question power imbalances, trouble diversity, and reject and disrupt normalising and limiting discourses, including children's working theories related to stereotypes and prejudice. Her article ends with a series of challenges for teachers that could support critical thinking about diversity and difference.

The value of collaboration between teachers in ECE settings and schools, particularly about pedagogical approaches, is promoted in research literature as important for ensuring continuity of learning for children in their transition from one education setting to another. However, the process of collaboration is made complex by the two different curricula and traditionally somewhat different teaching practices. Lisa Bond, Jo Brown, Jenna Hutchings, and Sally Peters present initial findings from their Teacher-led Innovation Fund (TLIF) project in which eight ECE services and six schools in the small town of Dannevirke worked within their *kāhui ako* to explore and support transition to

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school. Observations of pedagogical practice in one another's settings, a survey of teacher understandings of *Te Whāriki* and *The New Zealand Curriculum*, the collaborative development of action plans, and interviews with tamariki and whānau were some of the methods used to set goals for action plans and find out about views of transition experiences. As a result of their research and discussions, teachers in both sectors have changed their thinking and pedagogy to some extent. In schools, play-based pedagogies have been trialled. In the ECE settings, teachers have placed greater emphasis on improving children's self-help and independence skills as a means to enabling tamariki to become more confident in the school environment. There is greater understanding of the respective curricula and an enthusiasm by teachers across the sectors for working together in collaboration.

The final two articles in this issue both concern teachers as professionals. In "Understanding the Motivation of Associate Teachers in Early Childhood Education", Debbie Woolston discussed findings from her MEd study about what motivated associate teachers to become associate teachers and also to remain in this role. A main motivation was altruistic: to assist student teachers in developing their understanding of theory and practice. A secondary motivation was the benefits for the associate teacher in keeping up-to-date with developments within the ECE field. The article will be of particular interest to ITE providers and centres that offer practicum placements.

Alison Warren's article, "Professionalism in Early Childhood Teaching: A Posthumanist Perspective", discusses some common discourses of professionalism, including professionalism as characteristics of individuals

associated with qualifications and professional standards. She then turns to posthumanist ideas from Deleuze and Guattari, suggesting these offer opportunity to rethink professionalism "as continuous productive processes" (p. 30) that are continuously negotiated, rather than properties within individuals. The article uses these ideas to discuss excerpts from a focus group discussion with early childhood teachers, which was conducted as part of a research study on emotions and ways of becoming in early childhood teaching. Warren concludes by arguing for the exploration and understanding of the complexities of professionalism "as everchanging contours produced in fluid and shifting processes in everyday happenings of teaching in early childhood" (p. 33).

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