

# Comment

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What are the current important topics and issues in early childhood education? Anne Meade interweaves a wide range of them in the opening article of the policy and practice issues section of this new *Early Childhood Folio 3*. Policy issues are concerned with: funding and support of early childhood education, chartering, licensing, developing curriculum guidelines, and ensuring appropriate and adequately resourced early childhood services for Maori people (a Treaty of Waitangi responsibility). Good practice initiatives also include codes of ethics, quality assurance systems, training and qualifications, and reflective practice which is influenced by the findings of scholars. Research on several of these topics is explored in this Folio. In her article, another major keynote address, Arapera Royal Tangaere raises important policy issues related to the kohanga reo movement in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

It is interesting historically to note that the lead article in *Early Childhood Folio 2*, published in 1986, was on Jean Piaget. A number of articles in *Early Childhood Folio 3* show the influence of Vygotsky and some mention Bruner. Teachers and parents will find useful research-based information about extending children's thinking and children's language and literacy experiences in this new collection. Underlying all of the articles are the ideas or research findings of scholars. These ideas can enhance practice.

Curriculum guidelines are a current topic, with the implementation of *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum in New Zealand. In *Te kōhanga reo: More than a language nest*, Arapera Royal Tangaere describes how the strands and goals of *Te Whāriki* are not new to Maori. "Exploration—Mana aotūroa", a strand of *Te Whāriki*, underpins Anne Meade's discussion of children's development of schemas in *Good practice to best practice: Extending policies and children's minds*. The article by Margaret Carr, *Persistence when it's difficult: A disposition to learn for early childhood*, shows a holistic connection with the five strands listed in *Te Whāriki*: well-being, belonging, contribution, communication, and exploration. A recent Weaving Webs conference held in Melbourne demonstrated a trans-Tasman emphasis on early childhood curriculum, and included New Zealand papers on *te whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum. Ongoing research projects on *te whāriki* are currently underway in New Zealand, including one on assessment (by Margaret Carr)

and one on evaluation (jointly co-ordinated by Helen May and Valerie Podmore, with Diane Mara).

Policies which promote quality assurance are topical in New Zealand and Australia. Research from a range of countries continues to show how the quality of early childhood education influences the outcomes for children. The article by Anne Smith and Shane Barraclough, *Quality childcare: Do parents choose it?*, explains why policy makers need to look beyond parental choice to ensure that high quality early childhood services are provided. The processes contributing to quality include the type of interactions that take place between adults and children. Work by Laurie Makin in Australia, "Would you like to pack away now?": *Improving the quality of talk in early childhood programs*, suggests how to improve the quality of interactions in early childhood centres.

All of the papers in this new collection are based on New Zealand and Australian research. The selected articles address some of the important current topics in early childhood education. They also point practitioners, parents, and researchers to further early childhood projects and publications.

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**International research which shows how the quality of early childhood education influences the outcomes for children is found in:**

Ochiltree, G. (1994). *Effects of care on young children: Forty years of research*. AIFS Early Childhood Study Paper No. 5. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Podmore, V. N. (1993). *Education and care: A review of international studies of the outcomes of early childhood experiences*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research/Ministry of Women's Affairs.

Podmore, V. N. (1994). *Early childhood education and care: A summary review of the outcomes of inadequate provision*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research/Ministry of Women's Affairs.

Wylie, C. (1994). *What research on early childhood education/care outcomes can, and can't tell policymakers*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

**The New Zealand early childhood curriculum document is:** Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te whāriki: He whāriki matauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa. Early childhood curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media Ltd.