
COMMENT

This issue of *Early Childhood Folio* is being published at a time of renewed public interest in early childhood education, as many people respond to the consultation process for New Zealand's early childhood education long term strategic plan. These articles are powerful reminders of the role of early childhood education in fostering competent children, active in their own learning, and engaged in settings that are inclusive of all children and their families. They point to the complexity of teaching and learning in the early years, the crucial importance of skilled, qualified teachers, and the difference that can be made through good quality early childhood experiences. They point to the conditions we need to support and sustain quality early childhood services and the teachers, parents, and children who work within them.

So this issue has relevance to the policy debate. But its particular interest will be for practitioners who want to find out about current research-based evidence and information, in order to contribute to their professional understanding and discussion. Cathy Wylie's article brings the latest findings from the Competent Children project on the links between early childhood education experience and children's competencies at age 10. Not surprisingly, early childhood education quality is a key factor, and her paper describes the aspects of quality which are most clearly associated with competencies at age 10. The provision of experiences which foster literacy and numeracy, and good quality interaction between teachers and children, are underlying dimensions. We can act on these findings within early childhood settings to provide rich environments for young children.

Following articles build usefully on the themes identified by Cathy Wylie, and illustrate some tangible approaches we can take. Sally Peters' article on early numeracy explores some ways in which children's mathematical skills and dispositions can be fostered in meaningful everyday contexts, using methods that sit well with *Te Whāriki*. Likewise, Val Podmore, Helen May and Margaret Carr provide a readable summary of their "learning stories" approach to assessment and evaluation, starting with the child's questions, and helping practitioners to translate the strands of *Te Whāriki* into their own programmes. The action research model they outline helps to promote reflective practice.

Creating good transition experiences is seldom studied from the perspectives of all those involved in the early childhood setting. Carmen Dalli brings together the complex experiences of children, mothers,

and teachers in her article on starting childcare. Val Podmore, Le'autuli'ilagi Sauvao, and Lia Mapa also describe their work on transition from the perspectives of children, teachers and parents. In doing so, they illustrate culturally appropriate ways of interviewing and interacting with children, parents, and others from different Pacific groups, and pinpoint implications for practice and policy.

The Folio finishes with two articles on equity. Jenny Ritchie explores the concept of bicultural development, and offers insights into what can be done in mainstream settings to promote this, as well as how teacher education providers can contribute to students' knowledge base and skills. Glenda MacNaughton writes from an Australian perspective about an innovative approach that aims to "trigger debate about how early childhood practitioners might best explore issues of social diversity and equity with young children".

Consistent with NZCER's role within the education sector, the articles in *Early Childhood Folio 5* will be of particular value to teachers and others who want to know about current research and thinking. This publication comes at a time when NZCER is taking steps to strengthen its research, publications, and advisory services within early childhood education. Our Board now includes two people with an early childhood background. Dr Margaret Carr is an Associate Professor with the Department of Early Childhood Studies at the University of Waikato. She is well known for her work on early childhood curriculum and assessment. Joce Nuttall is a visiting lecturer in the Advanced Education Programme at Christchurch College of Education.

Alongside the Competent Children project, our current research programme includes an evaluation of two Early Childhood Development services, and a project on parent and whanau involvement in early childhood education. We have decided to make the *Early Childhood Folio* an annual publication, available on subscription. We also intend to develop our role in bringing together academics, practitioners, and policy makers in seminars and conferences to generate good discussion about education and educational research. We are looking forward to this year's conference on 26 October, "Early childhood education for a democratic society". It is an invigorating time for early childhood education.

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