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# COMMENT

This edition of *Early Childhood Folio* contributes to two cross-cutting themes that are of interest currently in pedagogical and policy debate in New Zealand.

A predominant theme is the value of undertaking action research, asking critical questions, generating debate and offering opportunities for participation of all players—children, families and teacher/educators—to bring about insights, contribute to understanding and extend pedagogical practice. This theme is also central to the book reviewed by Anne Meade in this edition: Carol Mutch's *Doing Educational Research: A Practitioner's Guide to Getting Started*.

Alison Clark refers to the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (the principle of listening to children—Article 12; and children's rights to express themselves in a range of media—Article 13) as offering stimulus to explore visual and verbal ways of listening to children. In this article she explores children's use of photographs and child-led tours of the early childhood education setting to create opportunities for talking and listening. She demonstrates ways in which use of these tools can give insight into children's perspectives of the physical spaces within early childhood education settings and describes her Living Spaces study which brings together architects, practitioners, parents and young children to help them explore how children's perspectives can contribute to planning, design and development of indoor and outdoor environments.

Claire Cameron reports on her research in UK, Denmark and Hungary using videos of practice in early childhood settings to stimulate discussions with different participant groups of "knowledgeable observers" (in this case practitioners and experts) about understandings of central concepts in early childhood education practice. Through observing cross-national videos, "any different practices are easily contrasted with known and familiar practices, which in turn facilitates questioning or confirmation of those familiar practices".

Suzy Edwards and Joce Nuttall draw from their research on teaching in early childhood settings to suggest a definition of pedagogy that foregrounds educators' interpretations, including their response to injustice. In their focus on pedagogy, they offer questions to provoke practitioners to think about curriculum and pedagogy.

Two of the first designated Centres of Innovation have contributed articles each reporting on one of their action research cycles. Both show ways that practitioners, working with researchers, critically analysed their own practice: Wycliffe Nga Tamariki through developing and using their own framework for

interpreting teaching strategies embedded within their teaching and learning stories, and in this way highlighting teachers' contribution to the process of children developing working theories; Wilton Playcentre, through using an NZCER early childhood education process rating scale and then critically analysing their own ratings to identify areas where they wanted to improve their practice. Their article shows the changes playcentre parents made in enhancing a print-saturated environment and providing opportunities for children to write, and how their knowledge of children's schema interests provided insight into children's thinking, with parents' use of open-ended questions and sustained conversations extending opportunities for children to engage in long term literacy projects and progress their thinking to higher levels.

Geraldine McDonald's article is about young children's efforts to write, and explores how and why children learn to write. She draws on a range of theories, including Piagetian theory, activity theory and Vygotskian theory, suggesting there is no one single theoretical explanation to writing acquisition.

Two articles have relevance to the policy debate around environmental standards that are currently being determined through the regulatory review. Stuart McLaren highlights evidence of noise in early childhood centres on children with special needs, showing that children with sensory integration problems appeared to be most affected. Noise is not one of the environmental standards being considered in this review of regulations: he suggests that it should be. But regulation is not the only way to act on noise issues. In a Danish early childhood education centre (Drummond, 2001), children took responsibility for monitoring changes to noise levels through observing a mechanical decibel ear located on the wall which changed from green to orange, then red when decibel proportions became dangerously high. This was a signal to the children to act by lowering their own noise. Claire Cameron's article on opportunities for discussion of independence and risk in early childhood settings may provoke questions for New Zealand practitioners and policy makers not only about how these concepts are understood, but also relevant issues regarding standards for playground safety and excursions.

## Reference

Drummond, B. (2001). *Health, welfare and education. Innovative solutions to service delivery. Impressions of a Margaret May Blackwell fellow study trip to the UK and Scandinavia*. Wellington: Unpublished report to the Ministry of Education.

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