

Editorial

The 14th issue of NZ Research in Early Childhood Education provides perspectives on assessment, inclusive practice, parent partnerships, and more. As a collection of papers it presents a range of views on the nature and purpose of early childhood education, and on the myriad of relationships. An ongoing commitment to the community is evident in the breadth of empirical research conducted for the benefit of early childhood communities.

It begins with an invited paper on the challenges for the early childhood education sector in Ireland. In *From Vision to Practice Are Children at the Centre or Clinging on at the Periphery of Practice within Early Childhood Care and Education Provision?* Mary Moloney talks to data from her own research on the coherency and implementation of education policy. She “highlights the contradictory nature of policy: while policy demands the highest possible standards of care and education, it fails to address the critical issue of teacher education.” Moloney presents a thorough critique of the contradictions through the voices of a wide range of adults involved in the sector in Ireland. Her study additionally draws upon 175 hours of child observations in order to determine the nature of these issues in practice, particularly in relation to the goals of early childhood play-based, child-initiated, pedagogies. She writes about disillusionment with pay and conditions in Ireland which may lead teachers to “look to countries like New Zealand for recognition and job satisfaction”.

It follows with Karen Turnock, Diane Gordon-Burns, Kerry Purdue, Benita Rarere-Briggs, and Robyn Stark presenting data and discussion on the experience of children with disabilities in early childhood education. In *‘I’m Scared of That Baby’* the authors report on one dimension of a wider project on practices and experiences of inclusion. Kerry Purdue “spent 10 months actively involved in the daily programmes of both settings observing how disability, inclusion and exclusion were viewed and experienced.” The team of writers reveal and challenge practices of inclusion with a particular emphasis on the ways in which children learn to discriminate ability through their relationships with parents, teachers, teacher aides and each other. In this way the research asks teachers to question whether discrimination occurs because of a failure to intervene in the socio-political environment, or because of the very interventions that express disability as ‘other’ than the ‘norm’.

Brent Mawson’s research concerning *Playcentre Parent Educators’ Assessment Practice* shifts the focus to the Playcentre environment and the experience of assessing children’s learning. With reference to *Kei tua o Te Pae*, Mawson examines the views and experiences of 16 parent educators. His data reveals that, given the expectation that the more-or-less socio-cultural Learning Story model be applied in Playcentre, the teacher education for parent educators is significantly influenced by the placing of assessment in the programme. In other words, if socio-cultural assessment is considered essential, it needs to be part of a teacher’s development at an early point of their education. This article additionally highlights the value of a ‘community of practice’ as is evident in the data gathered.

In *The Intricacies of Mentoring and Teaching Assessment in Field-based Early Childhood Teacher Education* Caterina Murphy and Jenny Butcher critically analyse student practicum for field-based teacher education students with a particular focus on the experience of assessment. The research is based on data gathered from an AKO Aotearoa funded project that is influencing the ways in which the triadic of student, associate teacher and visiting lecturer work together during the student teacher’s early practicum experiences. The students, interviewed in two focus groups, reveal a wide range of experiences that affect the quality of practicum. The data reveals the fragile nature of a triadic relationship when considering the notion of equal contributions to assessment of student teaching practice.

Field based teacher education is also under the spotlight in Cheryl McConnell's article on *Dynamic Ways of Knowing - Not Just in Our Heads: A Study of a Continuous Practicum in Field Based Teacher Education*. Graduate teachers were asked to reflect on their time studying and learning whilst working in an early childhood service and perspectives from teacher educators and peer support teachers were included in the data analysed. A clear advantage of field-based teacher education is that "Students get to 'see' the whole enterprise of teaching over time as opposed to becoming a 'guest' for some weeks on a block practicum". A continuous practicum during the time a student is training "provides highly contextualised learning in specific social and cultural early childhood contexts".

Elspeth McInnes and Susan Nichols provide a focus on *Partnerships in Integrated Early Childhood Centres: Getting from Policies to Practices* in order to reveal the experiences of partnership in integrated early childhood settings in Australia, and to promote goals and strategies for enhancing partnerships. The article reports on data from a wider research project that included policy analysis, two case studies, and three workshops that "included childcare workers, preschool and kindergarten teachers, community nurses, social workers and others involved in providing services to families with young children." McInnes and Nichols provide evidence of the tensions that occur for all early childhood services when addressing the twin expectations of protecting children and protecting and supporting their families. They describe a range of strategies for navigating these tensions.

The experiences of infants and toddlers are the focus of the next article. In *The Aesthetic Responses of Babies: Paintings That Captivate Their Interest* Kathy Danko-McGhee reports on international research on infant responses to presented abstract and representational artworks in order to understand the kinds of preferences infants display. Danko-McGhee's research involves "a diverse sample of 115 infants (59 males and 56 females)" randomly selected from the US, Australia, NZ, Romania, and England. The article emphasises the value of understanding infant preferences for the ways in which early childhood settings are resourced and the ways in which adults promote the aesthetic engagement of infants, given evidence of the value of this engagement for the child's development.

The perceptions of teachers regarding happiness and early childhood education are central to the final article *Discourses of Happiness in Infant-Toddler Pedagogy*. Jean Rockel and Janita Crow explore discourses of happiness in terms of both theoretical positions on the nature and value of happiness, and the experience of infant and toddler teachers in relation to talk of, and belief in, the experience of being happy. The authors argue that "understandings of happiness" are complex and as such should be incorporated within a teacher's critical reflection on their practice. In addition the article highlights that experiences of unhappiness, and the ways in which teachers respond to an unhappy infant or toddler, require careful analysis, particular in relation to how adults respond to the crying child.

Through these questions concerning happiness, aesthetics, ability, narrative, partnership, and authenticity, this issue evidences the complexity of the roles of children, parents, teachers, specialists, teacher educators and policy makers. The authors present a collection of glimpses into everyday lives and reflections upon which the early childhood community can continue to explore and further unpack its founding principles. Such unpacking is what engenders early childhood education as a vibrant ontological and epistemological collection of spaces, whether immersed in the lived experiences of children in a New Zealand Playcentre, or deconstructing the tensions between policy and practice in Eire.

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