

Alternative understandings: A view from Aotearoa New Zealand

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Two early childhood documents developed in Aotearoa New Zealand have influenced our understandings of learning and teaching

The first of these is

Te Whäriki

The national early childhood curriculum

Four principles of curriculum and assessment

Whakamana

The early childhood empowers the child to learn and grow

Kotahitanga

The early childhood curriculum reflects the holistic way children learn and grow

Whänau tangata.

The wider world of family and community is an integral part of the early childhood curriculum

Ngä Hononga

Children learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people places and things

**Implications for practice:
alternative understandings
about valued outcomes:
learning dispositions
and
working theories**

Learning dispositions

Te Whariki p.44:

In early childhood, holistic, active learning and the total process of learning are emphasised. Knowledge, skills and attitudes are closely linked. These three aspects combine together to form a child's "working theory" and help the child develop dispositions that encourage learning.

An example of a learning disposition is to be curious. It may be characterised by:

- An inclination to enjoy puzzling over events
- The skills to ask questions about them in various ways; and
- An understanding of when is the most appropriate time to ask these questions.

The second early childhood document developed in Aotearoa New Zealand that has influenced our understandings of learning and teaching

is

Kei tua o te pae

Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars

New Zealand Ministry of Education (2005 & in press) *Kei tua o te pae. Assessment for learning: early childhood exemplars.* Wellington: Learning Media. Available from orders@learningmedia.co.nz

Professional development for early childhood teachers is available from the Ministry of Education contracts for implementing Kei tua o te pae

“Examples are best seen and used as provocations. They should surprise us, make us think, ask critical questions, appreciate the peculiarity of what we have taken for granted, illuminate implicit understandings and values, make narratives stutter, open us to new possibilities”

**Implications for practice:
alternative understandings
about learning teaching and
assessment:
noticing recognising responding and revisiting
by teachers, families and children**

A progressive filter:

n o t i c i n g

r e c o g n i s i n g

r e s p o n d i n g

r e c o r d i n g

r e v i s i t i n g

**Noticing recognising responding
recording and revisiting**

by teachers

Where's Kirsty? (from Kei tua o te pae Book one)

There are two teachers named Kirsty at this childcare centre. One of them is away. The interaction began with Zena asking Margaret (the visiting researcher) a question. Jade and Kirsty are teachers.

Zena: [to Margaret] Where's Kirsty?

Margaret: Where's Kirsty? Zena: Yeah.

Margaret: I don't know.

Zena: [Calling to Jade, a teacher] Where's Kirsty? Um, Jade, where's Kirsty?

Jade: [From across the room] Who, sorry?

Zena: Kirsty at my daycare.

Jade: Kirsty Smith?

Zena: No, Kirsty.

Jade: Can I ask you which Kirsty you mean? Can you come and have a look at the board and show me? [They go together to look at a photo board of all the teachers.]

Zena: [points] That.

Jade: Oh, she's not here today.

Zena: Why?

Jade: She's got Friday off. She'll be at home.

Zena: Sick?

Jade: No, she's not sick. She's just having a day at home doing some jobs. Are you missing her?

Zena: Yeah.

Jade: She'll be in next week on Monday, though, when you come on Monday.

Noticing

The teacher listens to Zena’s first question carefully and takes it seriously

Recognising

that the way to clarify this question was to call Zena’s attention to something she could “read” - the photo display of staff

Responding

The teacher responded to each of Zena’s questions “Why was Kirsty away?” “Was she sick?” and invites Zena to reflect further: “Are you missing her?”

Time: one minute and twelve seconds

Looking back through your portfolio

Here is Alice and I taking a browse through her portfolio.

“I know the words,” Alice keeps saying to me. We look at each page, “in the family corner I like to play with my friends Finn and Taylar,” says Alice running her finger along the line of words.

The next page is an old story of when Alice was beginning to write her name, “I do it now and I already have my birthday and I know how to do it.”

Revisiting Maria's portfolio

(Kei tua o te pae: Book seven)

..... Maria looked at the sketches and recalled when she had drawn them...observed the similarities of the designs she had drawn - kowhaiwhai panels..... Went on to examine her photos and noticed the photo of one of her paintings. She noted that she had “coloured it all in”.....

A parent comment

Well ever since Maria has started to draw kowhaiwhai patterns, she has started to recognise them everywhere e.g. when she came to my work one day she noticed some kowhaiwhai stencils on the desk and straight away knew exactly what she was looking at I quote “This is what I draw at kindy, they’re kowhaiwhai patterns”.

Maria is not only interested in kowhaiwhai patterns she is developing her artistic skills quite well at a young age. I do believe that this is one of her greatest talents and skills and will try to encourage her in every way. As Maria becomes older she will be a great artist.

**Noticing recognising responding
recording and revisiting**

by children

Damien loves to "read" his portfolio. He is so enthusiastic in searching out the stories he loves the most that I have to hide away on my own to read the stories carefully and thoroughly, to make sure that I am not constantly interrupted and asked to look at the next one.

When we look at it together he turns the pages over and over until he gets to his favourite story about the dinosaur T' Rex and 'Long Neck'. He reads out the words that are written about T' Rex eating 'Long Neck' and he says, 'Those are the exact words I said Mum, that is exactly what I said!"

Robyn, Damien's teacher, added.....

Damien left for school five weeks ago. His assessment portfolio is still one of his most loved books,

See also Kei tua o te pae Book four:

Children contributing to their own assessment

“Self-assessment by the student is not an interesting option or luxury; it has to be seen as essential”.

Paul Black & Dylan Wiliam (1998) p.55



Portfolios of learning stories are accessible to children. They can revisit their stories and share them with each other and the teachers

**Noticing recognising responding
recording and revisiting**

by families

“Children have individual episodic memories from infancy, but it is only in the light of *social sharing* that both the enduring form of narrative organisation, and the perceived value to self and others becomes apparent”

Katherine Nelson, 1997 p. 111 (her emphasis)

PARENT VOICE

Charlotte is very proud of her folder...

She took it home and couldn't wait to show her sister as soon as she got out of school and then all the family who came to visit at the weekend. She wanted to talk us through every aspect!!

It is amazing how the smallest thing can be amazing. I was so excited with Kian's story that I went out and bought a bottle of wine to celebrate.

I can't tell you how amazing it is to have some one else tell you what your child 'can' do instead of all of the 'can'ts'.

The processes that the centre uses to encourage Kian to communicate are very good and since learning these things I am looking at Kian in a different light and attempting to talk with him rather than at him.

Thank you so much Sue, for taking the time to write down Kian's experience.

Kei tua o te pae. Book nine

It is through narrative that we create and re-create selfhood, and self is a product of our telling and re-telling. We are, from the start, expressions of our culture. Culture is replete with alternative narratives about what self is or might be.

Jerome Bruner 2002, p. 86

Bruner, J. (2002) *Making Stories: law, literature and life.*
Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press.