

# Foundations of ECD in Aotearoa/ New Zealand

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*This article provides a historical perspective on the development of early childhood education in Aotearoa/New Zealand in the context of the importance of the Treaty of Waitangi and the Maori self-determination movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The authors discuss the Te Kohanga Reo movement as well as the Te Whāriki document, which is the bilingual and bicultural national curriculum for the preschool years.*

Early childhood education in Aotearoa/New Zealand cannot be viewed in isolation from the country's colonial history, as this provides the rationale for the later development of early childhood services for Māori (May, 2001). As elsewhere, colonization has taken its toll culturally, socially, economically, and politically on the Indigenous people of the land. Colonization not only affected Māori; during the period of early European immigration, there were growing concerns about the high rates of infant mortality, infanticide, and child destitution among Pakeha (non-Māori) infants and children (May, 1998). It is here that early childhood care and education in Aotearoa/New Zealand has its beginning.

## *Colonial Period*

The colonists found the new world to be more challenging than they expected; in their efforts to establish themselves, economic survival became their major priority. Education and even the care of their children were completely overshadowed by the drive to obtain a better life and to seek opportunities that were not available in Britain. Concerns for Pakeha children in the 18th and 19th centuries led for the first time to the care of children outside the family unit. This care was at times supported by philanthropic organizations established by the wealthier members of the colony. The basis of this action had little to do with educating the young and was more about infant survival and removing abandoned and unwanted children from the street. Baby farming, rearing unwanted children in foundling homes, was the rationale for establishing free kindergartens. According to May (1998), "baby farms, foundling homes and kindergartens all emerged as products of a society that was seeking to enforce moral codes, but was also increasingly concerned to rescue children in both mortal and moral danger" (p. 25).

During the same period the scenario for Māori children was quite different. Before colonization, Māori lived in distinct tribal groupings separated by geographical landmarks that determined the areas over which they had guardianship. The collective nature of communal living ensured that ultimate responsibility for one another lay with the extended family (whānau). Although formal education as we know it did not exist, care of the young resulted in the informal transmission of knowledge. Hemara (2000) states:

While parents were often caught up in the business of providing the things that were essential to survival and economic and social wellbeing, older whānau members were often recruited to bring up young children. It was not and still is not uncommon for Māori grandparents to oversee the upbringing and education of their mokopuna (grandchild)... Kaumātua (Elders) were considered a vast information source. Their wisdom and reflection were considered essential to the teaching of practical and social skills along with underpinning esoteric and ethical principles. (pp. 42-43)

These situations, however, were under threat. With the advancement of colonization, Pakeha society strengthened numerically and economically and through land confiscations and policies of assimilation, Māori society weakened. During the 1830s many Māori supported the idea of a treaty between themselves and the British Crown. Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840 and is often called the founding document of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Like other British treaties of this era, the Treaty of Waitangi served both as a statement of permission for the establishment of a British government in the colony and as a mechanism to regulate the behavior of many settlers whose troublesome conduct was causing concern among the local tribes. It also clearly stated that Māori would maintain absolute authority over their land and possessions, as well as those intangibles such as language, spiritual beliefs, values, and practices. Despite the intentions of the Treaty, these conditions were not realized. By the beginning of the 20th century, Māori society had undergone an enormous transformation, as May (2001) describes,

Colonial society created both the need and the impetus for charitable and educational services for European children, but for Māori, it brought about the loss of population, land, mana (authority and power), and language. These factors are at the crux of later early childhood services, as Māori families lost the resources and social structures which provided the traditional contexts for rearing the very young. (p. 5)

### *Child Health and Early Education*

Recognizing that tough, strong men and healthy childbearing women would eventually contribute to the economic advancement of the developing country, the colonial government shifted its policies to fund a range of health and welfare services for young children. According to May (2001), the state was not willing to invest in education for children who were too ill to learn; however, an increasing social conscience about children's well-being formed the backdrop to this shift.

The kindergarten movement, based on the ideas of German educationist Friedrich Froebel, was established in Dunedin during the mid-1800s. It focused on how the child developed and in particular on bridging the gap between early childhood and school. In the early 1900s Truby King's work had a major influence on the national agenda for children's health. King's focus was on raising healthy babies; he coined the phrase "To save the babies, to save the nation." With the support of wealthy women and men whose main focus was on Pakeha babies, King and his wife established the Plunket Society. Their stringent health regime focused on infants and their vulnerability in the early stages of life. Their campaign was designed to educate mothers, whom he blamed for the rise in infant mortality, about the need for babies to access sunshine, healthy food, appropriate clothing, cleanliness, and rest. May (1998) believes that King's campaign, which resulted in lower infant mortality rates, was underpinned by a deeper fear: "that of the decline of the white race" (p. 141). Māori babies were not part of this political agenda; however, by virtue of association and the support provided by the state to the Plunket movement, Māori mothers eventually received the same services as their Pakeha counterparts.

Although kindergartens professed not to follow King's routines, their emphasis on health, orderly behavior, and good manners complemented the Plunket Society work. Kindergarten routines were based around group activities, timetables, and eventually progressive ideas such as free play. As with the Plunket Society work, Māori children remained separated from the world of kindergartens. It was not until the post-WWII years that education for Māori children was seen as a priority.

Education in general was based on Western theories and philosophies. By the 1960s, Western-based education was challenged by social theorists who argued that it was in the contradictions of any given society that forms of social enquiry and analysis developed that pointed to inequitable treatment based on class, race, sex, and abilities. At this time the field of early childhood was called on to rethink and broaden its purpose. According to May (2001), lobby groups were established to address concerns about Māori grievances, women's rights, and the status of early childhood teachers and workers introduced a new militancy to the politics of early childhood.

During the 1970s and 1980s, early childhood issues and the rights of women gathered momentum. Continual lobbying and demands by early childhood advocacy groups positioned early childhood education on the political agenda, which resulted in the emergence of a national constituency for early childhood. Both Pakeha and Māori women created the impetus and maintained the focus on issues of equity and social justice through early childhood education.

In current educational contexts, a key to understanding the relationship between Māori and Pakeha in Aotearoa/New Zealand is an appreciation of the renewed importance that has been given to the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi. As noted by May (2002) and others (Dalli, 1990, 1992; Meade & Dalli, 1991; Smith, 1992, 2003), the 1970s marked the beginning of dramatic changes in the economic and political arenas, with a strong emphasis on reaffirming Māori self-determination through the Treaty.

Consensus developed in the 1970s about the need for an educational component in child care centers and a more integrated system of care and education. During these years it was argued that children had a right to quality education regardless of which center they attended (Cook, 1985; Smith & Swain, 1988).

Early childhood education gained momentum in the 1980s. Two important changes occurred then in terms of administrative responsibility for child care: child care was transferred from the Social Welfare Department to the Education Department in 1986; and a three-year training program for early childhood staff was introduced in colleges of education in 1987 (Smith & Farquhar, 1996). With these reforms in place, providers of education and care services were now concerned with the need for children to have access to early childhood education. As a result, early childhood centers with specific pedagogical philosophies began to appear such as Montessori preschools, Steiner kindergartens, and centers associated with particular cultural or religious groups. In addition, there was growing concern for the need of quality care for the children of working parents. Some of these needs were addressed by the emergence of child care centers that offered all-day care, a service that was not provided by kindergartens or play centers (Education Review Office, 2000).

Following these changes, Meade's (1988) report *Education to be More* was the first attempt to reform the schools' administrative structure. The report acknowledged the importance of research-based criteria of quality child care, including staff-child ratios, group size, and caregiver qualifications. The report outlined a process to develop strategies to:

- strengthen the delivery of ECE services;
- acknowledge and recognize the work undertaken by teachers;
- include child care centers/services into the education sector, alongside state kindergartens;
- develop preservice teacher education programs; and
- establish early childhood development and professional support structures.

The Ministry's response report (*Before Five*, Lange, 1988) attempted to bring about reform in early childhood policy. The changes that followed in 1989 related to funding, structure, control over quality, and training. Like many other countries, New Zealand has been influenced by the dominant (Anglo-North American) narrative on quality in early childhood environ-

ments, which focuses on optimal child developmental outcomes (Caldwell, 1986; Holloway & Reichart-Erikson, 1989; Phillips, McCartney, & Scarr, 1987; Smith & Farquhar, 1996; Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989). As a result of the policies introduced in *Before Five*, the Ministry of Education established the process of chartering. In this process individual early childhood care centers specified how the center intended to work toward standards of quality higher than the minimum required (Smith & Farquhar). According to the Ministry,

The charter requires that you have a say in the quality and style of care and education being provided.... Each centre will develop its own charter through meetings and discussions between management, staff, parents, and whānau of the children who attend. (Lange, 1998, p. 1)

### *Te Kohanga Reo*

According to Smith and Farquhar (1996), one of the greatest challenges during the 1980s was to improve early childhood services while also maintaining a strong sense of tradition, culture, and diversity in the groups in New Zealand. Māori communities were concerned about loss of language, knowledge, and culture that had been reported since 1971. Another concern included the number of Māori children who were not attending any early childhood centers because these were not meeting the needs of Māori children and their whānau (extended family). These concerns ignited the desire in Māori communities to create spaces where Māori culture, language, and knowledge could be revitalized and passed on to future generations. As a result, the first Te Kohanga Reo (language nest) centers opened in Aotearoa/New Zealand in 1982. Kohanga Reo are administered by whānau under the direction and guidance of Te Kohanga Reo National Trust (Crown/Te Kohanga Reo National Trust Joint Working Group, 2001). The Trust has a charter document (*Te Korowai*) stating its goals, philosophies, and responsibilities. Individual Kohanga are expected to prepare charters consistent with Te Korowai.

The Trust has identified the following aims for the Kohanga Reo movement.

- Children will learn the Māori language and culture, including the spiritual dimension, through immersion.
- Language and cultural learning will be fostered and supported for all members of the Kohanga Reo whānau.
- Members of the Kohanga Reo will learn, within the whānau setting, a range of skills that supports the philosophy.
- Collective responsibility for the administration and operations of the Kohanga Reo will be fostered through whānau development.
- It is essential that all the people involved will develop a sense of acceptance and belonging.
- The content, context, and control of learning will be Māori (Te Kohanga Reo National Trust, 2003, para. 2).

Kohanga Reo educational goals apply to the education of children and their whānau, who learn the language through being involved in their children's programs. The program is characterized by frequent and close interactions between staff and children, and diverse techniques are used to foster the learning process and to enable children to take ownership of their learning.

#### *Management Structures*

The Te Kohanga Reo National Trust provides administrative support to individual Kohanga Reo and is responsible for ensuring that these centers receive the correct funding, training, and other support. The National Trust liaises and negotiates with the Ministry of Education on all matters directly related to the operations of Kohanga Reo. Through their negotiations the Trust currently provides four training courses for staff, parents, and administrators. Kohanga Reo sessions are generally led by a kaiako (teacher) assisted by one or more kaiāwhina (teacher's assistant) and any parent volunteers. Where there are many volunteers, Kohanga may have a high ratio of adults to children during sessions (Education Review Office, 2000).

#### *Challenges Ahead for Te Kohanga Reo*

The greatest challenges faced by these Kohanga are the continual struggle to achieve quality standards in language learning and mastery and the need to have more children and their whānau involved in the centers. A national study conducted by the Education Review Office (2000) researched aspects of quality in diverse early childhood settings: kindergarten, in-home care, education and care centers, and Kohanga. The aspects that were measured using various instruments (e.g., interviews, questionnaires, and so forth) were participation levels, philosophy and development, management structure, service delivery, learning and development, program management and delivery, communication and consultation, operation and administration, inclusiveness, and health and safety. The findings showed evidence of quality (according to established standards). For example, 41 of the 85 Kohanga studied presented adequate child-adult ratios and interactions, whereas 22 Kohanga indicated inadequate adult-child interactions. In addition, there were some inconsistencies in two of the Kohanga that demonstrated quality adult-child interactions but inadequate language development. Language development was deemed inadequate in 11 Kohanga that demonstrated inadequate quality adult-child interactions.

#### *Te Whāriki*

Te Whāriki, the bilingual and bicultural national education curriculum guidelines for children in the early childhood years, emerged following wide consultation by the co-directors of curriculum development (Mar-



garet Carr and Helen May) with early childhood practitioners and from a strong consultative partnership between the developers and representatives of Te Kohanga Reo Trust, Tamati and Tilly Reedy (Reedy, 1993, 1995). More recently close connections have been developed between the curriculum, children's assessment, and processes for teachers' self-evaluation (Carr, May, & Podmore, 2000; May & Podmore, 2000) as well as processes for service evaluation (New Zealand Government Ministry of Education, 2000b; *Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua: Self Review Guidelines for Early Childhood*, New Zealand Government Ministry of Education, 2006).

Te Whāriki's framework of empowerment, holistic development, relationships, and the involvement of family and community emphasize "the critical role of socially and culturally mediated learning and of reciprocal and responsive relationships for children with people, places, and things" (New Zealand Government Ministry of Education, 1996a, p. 9). Its foundational theory is that children learn through collaboration and solid relationships with adults and peers, through guided participation and observation of others, and through individual exploration and reflection. The philosophy of Te Whāriki proposes that all children should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge and an understanding of the cultural heritages of both environments. The curriculum reflects the partnership between Māori and mainstream culture in text and structure.

The name *Te Whāriki* translates from the Māori language as "a woven mat for all to stand on" (Reedy, 1995). This weaving metaphor describes a complex learning pattern that increases in complexity as the child engages with the environment and develops learning theories and understandings (New Zealand Government Ministry of Education, 1996a). This approach functions in contrast to a curriculum that works in a bottom-up mode where the child starts at the bottom and works through a series of experiences in order to reach the top and move to the next level in their development. The curriculum guidelines are based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of human development where the child's diverse environments assist and encourage his or her development. Te Whāriki is made up of principles, strands, and goals described below, which are expected to be woven into the curriculum based on the interests and aspirations of the children attending the early childhood service.

### *Philosophy and Foundations*

Te Whāriki is founded on the following aspirations for children: "To grow up as confident and capable learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society" (New Zealand Government Ministry of Education, 1996a, p. 9).

Te Whāriki is about understanding the child as an individual with complete capabilities, skills, knowledge, and attitudes. Its philosophy emphasizes the need for reciprocal and responsive relationships for children

with adults and peers, and it encourages such interactions in the belief that because learning begins at home, such experiences provide rich foundations that can form the basis of successful learning.

To understand Te Whāriki and its philosophical base, it is important for teachers and parents to understand that the weaving of the curriculum may be different for each child. Te Whāriki defines three age groups: infants, toddlers, and the young child; although it acknowledges differences between these groups, it does not suggest that children will have distinctly separate experiences in the three stages. In fact Te Whāriki emphasizes and acknowledges that children learn and grow unpredictably in the early years and that the direction and speed of development varies with each child.

In respecting diversity and honoring individuality, the curriculum acknowledges and is inclusive of children who have special needs, with activities that are designed in relationship to their development and age. These activities are offered in the Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Individual Development Plan (IDP) specially designed to meet the specified objectives and needs of children.

### *Principles*

The four principles that provide the framework for the curriculum are:

1. *Empowerment (Whakamana)*. The curriculum shall empower children to learn and grow.
2. *Holistic development (Kotahitanga)*. The curriculum supports the holistic way children learn and grow.
3. *Family and community (Whānau Tangata)*. The wider world of family and community are an integral part of the curriculum.
4. *Relationships (Ngā Hononga)*. Children learn through responsive relationships with people, places, and things.

### *Strands*

The curriculum has five strands, each of which is further defined with three or four goals that have learning outcomes for children.

1. *Well-being (Mana Atua)*. The health and well-being of the child are protected and nurtured.
2. *Belonging (Mana Whenua)*. Children and their families feel a sense of belonging.
3. *Contribution (Mana Tangata)*. Opportunities for learning are equitable and each child's contribution is valued.
4. *Communication (Mana Reo)*. The languages and symbols of their own and other cultures are promoted and protected.
5. *Exploration (Mana Aoturoa)*. The child learns through active exploration of the environment.



*Remaining Issues and Challenges*

Although Te Whāriki is considered a successful program in New Zealand (Black, Marshall, & Irwin, 2003; Meade & Podmore, 2002; Smith, 2003; Tarr, 2005), it still faces challenges about its philosophical foundations; its bicultural ideas; and its implementation, delivery, and assessment methods. Additional issues and challenges include:

- improving the coordination across the Ministries of Education, Health, and Social Development, Education Review Office, and ECD, all of which provide and/or fund services for families with young children;
- achieving even-handedness by the two government funders of early childhood education; and
- improving policy coherence for early childhood education services so that policies are equitable for sessional and full-day early childhood centers.

*Quality Approaches to Early Child Care and Education*

The development and implementation of Te Whāriki has had major implications for policy development in early childhood education. In the late 1990s the provision of early childhood services made a turn. Not long after the chartering process was established and along with the release of Te Whāriki, the Ministry released a document entitled *Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (New Zealand Government Ministry of Education, 1996b). This document provided broad quality guidelines and eliminated the commitment for the centers to achieve higher quality standards than those found in most centers. One criticism was that the new document also eliminated the relationship with the Treaty of Waitangi as well as the need for adequate staff-child ratios (Meade, 2000).

The increased participation of women in paid work and improved levels of government involvement promoted participation in early childhood education services and thus an increase in the number of child care centers operating in New Zealand (Meade, 2000). It is estimated that nearly all 4-year-olds and over 80% of 3-year-olds are enrolled in some form of early childhood education. Furthermore, approximately half of New Zealand children aged 0 to 5 years are enrolled in child care centers (Meade & Podmore, 2002). This growth in services might be perceived as a positive trend because it shows that increased numbers of children are accessing early childhood services; however, early childhood researchers, advocates, and policymakers are concerned about the effect of this growth on outcomes for children, in particular as it relates to the quality of services (Meade & Podmore).

Since 1993 several initiatives funded by the Ministry of Education have focused on issues of quality: reviews of the literature, contributions to policymaking, and examinations of the process and outcomes of ECE and children's participation in child care centers (Henricks, Meade, & Wylie,

1993; Podmore, 1993, 1994; Podmore & Craig, 1991; Smith, 1996; Wylie, 1994). In 1996 “quality funding” from the government was introduced. There was a growing interest in providing more funds for the enhancement of early childhood education, care, and services (Meade, 2000). However, as the government distributed more funds to these endeavors, quality seemed to decrease to the extent that by the early 1990s, the continual changes and modifications to the *Before Five* report brought about lower quality standards. In 1999 a working group of 31 members developed a comprehensive and cohesive policy framework that included goals and strategies for government consideration. The following two strategic goals and a third one under development framed the terms of reference for the Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education Working Group (New Zealand Government Ministry of Education, 2000a):

- To improve the quality of early childhood education.
- To increase participation in quality early childhood education.
- To facilitate communities of learning around early childhood services, where children, whānau, parents, schools, and others in the community learn alongside each other (para. 10).

The document states, “children should be able to explore and learn about our dual heritages, and about people, places, and things, in Aotearoa/New Zealand, with adults who respect and cherish them” (para. 2). Further, it affirms the need for:

- Expressive and creative children;
- Playful and caring children; and
- Thriving and competent children who love to learn (para. 2).

As part of the 20 strategies that stemmed from the consultation, the working group developed four main directions for Cabinet consideration:

- Increased participation, engagement, and access,
- Collaborative relationships (to support quality),
- Improved quality, and
- Sustainability of services (New Zealand Government Ministry of Education, 2001).

Three major themes support the proposals: (a) enhancing policies and settings to facilitate the full implementation of Te Whāriki; (b) changing systems to better coordinate the contributions of key adults to children’s early learning and development; and (c) transforming the role of government so that ECE is provided in partnership with the government. The Statement of Objectives and Trends for the 1999/2000 Vote Education Appropriations stresses the need to provide quality services through the development of quality assurance mechanisms (Education Review Office, 2000) such as:

- Legislation and regulations that set standards, primarily on health and safety issues;
- Licensing;

- Staff qualifications and ongoing training for the adequate implementation of appropriate programs (as required by the Early Childhood Regulations, and the DOPs);
- The involvement of parents who may actively seek information about the centre and its work with children; and
- External evaluation by the Education Review Office since its review reports are used by staff, centre management, parents, and government officials to inform their understanding of the quality of care and education in individual centres and the sector as a whole.

Although early childhood development was integrated into the Ministry of Education in 2003, it was in 2002 that the Government of Aotearoa/New Zealand committed to a long-term vision of “lifting the educational achievement of all New Zealand children” (New Zealand Government Ministry of Education, n.d., para. 1) by creating *Pathways to the Future: Nga Huarahi Arataki*, a 10-year strategic plan that provides a plan of action for collaboration across the sectors that offer services in the early years as well as education for Māori and non-Māori children. It is hoped that the changes that occur as a result of such integration and planning will contribute to an expanded vision and improved action plans for this country, which has proved to others around the world that “walking in two worlds” is possible.

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