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2

Democratic and learning-oriented assessment practices in Early Childhood Care and Education in New Zealand

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in Early Childhood Care
and Education in New Zealand

Linda Mitchell and Margaret Carr
University of Waikato, New Zealand

About the authors

Linda Mitchell is an Associate Professor and Associate Director of the Early Years Research Centre at the University of Waikato. She has led several longitudinal evaluations of national early childhood education policies and undertaken research on teaching and learning on multimodal literacies, aspirations of Congolese refugee families, and parent involvement in early childhood education. Recent publications include Mitchell & Ouko (2012) Experiences of Congolese refugee parents in New Zealand: Challenges and possibilities for early childhood provision (*Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*), Mitchell (2013) Early childhood provision: Democratic communities for citizenship and social justice? (*International Journal of Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood*), and Lee, Carr, Soutar & Mitchell (2013) *Understanding the Te Whāriki Approach* (Routledge).

Margaret Carr is Professor of Education in the Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research and Director of the Early Years Research Centre at the University of Waikato. She was a co-Director of the Curriculum Development project that developed the New Zealand national early childhood curriculum; research projects since then have included assessment in the early years, museum education, and learning dispositions in early childhood centres and schools. Recent publications include Carr & Lee (2013) *Learning Stories: constructing learner identities in the early years* (Sage) and Lee, Carr, Soutar & Mitchell (2013) *Understanding the Te Whāriki Approach* (Routledge).

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Abstract

This paper focuses on approaches to assessment in early education and the consequences for assessment of national views about child development, the image of the child and outcomes for young children. It uses the New Zealand experience of assessment to argue that a sociocultural approach contributes to a curriculum that is open to contribution from children, families and community and enables teachers to draw on their funds of knowledge. Valued outcomes include learning dispositions and working theories that contribute to lifelong learning. New Zealand's experience suggests that such an approach can be supported by government policies that sustain a qualified and professionally supported early childhood workforce.

Introduction

This paper is an exploration of democratic and learning-oriented assessment practices in early childhood care and education (ECCE). Assessment practices will reflect dominant cultural views and national policies about child development, the image of the child and desirable outcomes for young children. These practices can also construct cultural views and images of the child and desirable outcomes. The paper argues that approaches to assessment that have democracy in mind will include the views of those being assessed, develop a culture of success and engage families. These approaches can open and enhance learning opportunities. New Zealand's early childhood assessment practices are used to outline an approach designed to emphasize and construct a democratic educational culture. New Zealand's experience shows how this approach can be supported by a curriculum that is open to contribution and government policies that sustain and support the early childhood workforce.

Cultural views and national policies about child development, the image of the child and outcomes of ECCE

Recently, key international instruments, and in particular, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, have prompted interest in citizenry rights as a goal for policy development in ECCE. While children are biologically immature, cultures decide how childhood is understood and this has repercussions in many spheres. Images of the child are linked to views about the value, purposes and outcomes of ECCE and the roles of children, teachers, families, communities and government (Mitchell, 2010; OECD, 2001, 2006; Rigby, Tarrant and Neuman, 2007). Images of the child are also reflected in policy design and in curriculum and assessment practices. Drawing on Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), cultural and national views about child development are accompanied by practices, beliefs and expectations that influence the curriculum and assessment practices.

ECCE is one arena where analysis of debates about the image of the child, cultural priorities and desirable outcomes for children will contribute to understanding how curriculum and assessment practices might support democratic provision. An image of the child as citizen highlights that the child is a co-constructor of knowledge, identity and culture (e.g. Ebbeck, 1996; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999). This image portrays children as having agency and members of a social group and community; they are shaped by society but also shape it through their experiences and interactions with others. Within this construction, ECCE

provision is a participatory forum that builds social networks, support and cohesion. Families and communities play a crucial role in education and teachers need to be open to their diverse viewpoints and 'funds of knowledge'. These are hallmarks of a democratic community. Phillip Woods (2011) writes:

Democracy is about participation of all in the creation of their social environment and in the decisions which affect them. In holistic democracy, however, it is not the sole purpose. Integral to it is striving towards a way of living which aspires to values that represent the best of human progress (p. 9).

Some of the attitudes, qualities and behaviours that are valued in a democratic community are 'plurality, respect for difference, dialogue, listening, deliberation, shared enquiry, critical judgment, cooperation, collective decision-making, individual freedom, the common good, participation' (Moss, 2009, p.1). In a curriculum with democracy at its heart, teachers will pay attention to the following balances: belonging to the community and focusing on individual interests, authoring one's own learning and co-authoring with others; children sharing ideas and exploring together and teachers providing information; listening to another perspective while being prepared to express one's own point of view and change one's mind; taking responsibility

for one's learning and having an eye on the common good.

We know that assessment drives curriculum, and although this is especially the case in regimes of high accountability, all assessment documentation influences family expectations, directs a teaching pathway and dominates a child's perception of the learning journey either opening or closing doors, enhancing or diminishing possibilities. In a curriculum founded on democratic values, teachers document learning while having an eye on a longer-term trajectory (the past and the present: Lemke, 2000) of citizenship.

Māori are the indigenous people in New Zealand. *Kōhanga reo* are Māori immersion whānau (family) programmes for young children from birth to six years of age to be raised within their whānau Māori, where the language of communication is Māori. In one *kōhanga reo*, a key vision for the future is *raukura*: a graduate who will sustain the language and the culture. The following comments emphasise the role of the *whānau*, the wider family, in this. (Brenda Soutar with Te Whānau o Mana Tamariki, 2012, pp. 36, 38):

During those foundation years, we actively sought a greater understanding of sociolinguistics. We embraced key international theories, in particular the work of Joshua Fishman (1991) and Bernard Spolsky (1998), both of whom confirmed the whānau development model as essential - in other words, children and their families as active participants and leaders in the revitalization of their language and culture. ... The Mana Tamariki (research) project has been built on the notion of te tamaiti hei raukura - the child as a high achiever who exemplifies the hopes and aspirations of their people.

Susan Grieshaber and Felicity McArdle (2010, p. 113) pose some provocative questions designed to 'trouble' the desirable

discourses associated with learning through play. One of their questions is 'What if children really did set the rules?' They comment that inviting children's collaboration and input in defining classroom rules is often common practice in many early childhood settings:

This has long been a strategy favoured by those who consider it to be part of their work to model and teach democratic principles and ideas about freedom and responsibilities. ... but we have rarely seen this enacted in any genuine way in the settings we have been associated with. ... imagine if young children really did compose the rules for their setting.

These comments all raise challenges for constructing assessment practices that are democratic and learning-oriented.

Approaches to assessment that have democracy in mind

The literature on formative assessment and assessment for learning is extensive. Gordon Stobard discusses how assessment can 'constructively shape learning and our identities as learners' (p.144) in an influential 2008 book entitled 'Testing Times'. The book clearly articulates the underlying image of the learner. Stobard refers to Carol Dweck's work to point out that Assessment for Learning (AfL) takes an *incrementalist* approach to learning and the learner, emphasising effort and the improving of competence. It assumes a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006). This contrasts with an *entity* approach and a fixed mindset which attributes learning to ability and is focused on proving competence through grades and comparisons. It puts the focus on what is being learned and the quality of classroom interactions and relationships. Stobard sets out five 'deceptively simple' key factors for Assessment for Learning (pp. 145–146; (we have replaced 'pupils' with 'children'): (i) the active involvement of children in their own learning, (ii) the provision of effective feedback to children, (iii) adjusting teaching to take account of the results of assessment, (iv) the need for children to be able to assess themselves, and (v) a recognition of the profound influence that assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of children, both of which are crucial influences on learning. We would add a sixth factor, and not only for the early years: (vi) a recognition of the profound influence that assessment has on the expectations and confidence of children's families.

The influence of families in assessment discussions is an omission in much of the Assessment for Learning (AfL) literature yet parent aspirations are a key factor for ECCE provision and schooling (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010; Hattie, 2009), and assessment is a key influence on family expectations and aspirations. The AfL approach became influential in English language discussions after 1998 following research on English language assessment literature by Paul Black and colleagues (the UK's Assessment Reform Group; Black and Wiliam, 1998a). This research has been published in a number of booklets with teachers as the target audience (for example, Black and Wiliam, 1998b; Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam, 2002; Assessment Reform Group, 2002). The only booklet that takes cognizance of the early years is 'Assessment for learning in primary and early years classrooms' by Christine Harrison and Sally Howard (2009), which focuses on primary schools. The authors emphasize the value of: the role of dialogue, rich questions¹, encouraging children to respond, responding to or using pupils' contributions, feedback for feed-forward and self- and peer assessment. AfL has an influence on learners becoming autonomous in their learning: 'a skill which is developed through self-assessment

¹ Discussions about questioning in this project are explored in detail in Black, Harrison et al. 2003 pp.32-42, 'Rich' questioning included questions designed to elicit student understanding, to promote shared learning, to challenge common misconceptions and to explore ambiguity (p.39).

and classroom dialogue' (p. 145). Self-assessment and classroom dialogue are democratic assessment practices.

The following learning stories exemplify children's assessment in a school setting:

Thomas has written a story about his costume-making. In a section labelled 'What does this mean for my learning in the future?' he writes: 'I learned it was important to learn from my mistakes. I accidentally cut the sleeves of the first top I made, so I had to make it again. When I made the next top I was really careful about how I cut it. I will keep trying'. (Carr and Lee, 2012. p. 51) . . .

[In the next story], a younger learner Zac is highlighting his new competence and explaining the role of observation and imitation in learning.

In one early childhood centre Delwyn (the teacher) is revisiting his portfolio with Zac, and they discuss a story in which Zac has drawn a STOP sign for the road play. Zac makes a connection with his earlier observation of a 'workman' and reminds Delwyn of why he is 'clever'.

Zac: I drew that. It means Stop. (He is referring to a very large STOP sign he had written for the road play one day. We made it into a sign. Zac had copied my letters from a small piece of paper).

Delwyn: How did you learn to write those letters.

Z: I clever. I learned that by myself - because I saw a workman doing that so I thought I could do it. (Carr and Lee, 2012, p. 55)

The research with teachers on *assessment for learning* in the school sector deserves to be re-contextualised in the light of interesting work in the early childhood sector especially in contexts that emphasize the opportunities to document learning to

reflect and construct cultures of democracy and agency in early years provision such as New Zealand, Sweden and Italy's Reggio Emilia (Carr 2008; Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999, 2007; Rinaldi, 2006). In the early years' discussions the phrase 'pedagogical documentation' is often used rather than 'assessment'; in New Zealand, *assessment for learning* has been retained. It is our view that early childhood research has provided some helpful models of *assessment for learning* for consideration and critique by both early years' policy-makers in a range of countries and schools.

Interest in narrative has grown steadily in the last decade or two, particularly in the power of the story form to shape our conceptions of reality and legitimacy (Bruner, 2002, p. 111).

The New Zealand assessment approach was developed in response to the national curriculum's aim for children 'to grow up ... secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society'. These outcomes are described in the document as 'indicative'; teachers use them as a dictionary and are given responsibility to develop appropriate constellations of outcomes that fit with both the curriculum in their particular community and mandatory goals. Teachers, children and families, together and separately, are in the best position to recognize and respond to: the active involvement of children in their learning, opportunities for children to assess themselves, appropriate moments for effective feedback, teaching to enhance long-term learning, the monitoring of motivation and interest, connections with the wider community and expectations and aspirations at home.

The New Zealand experience of assessment in early education

Two metaphors

This image of the child as citizen, co-creator of knowledge identity and culture, underpins the early childhood education curriculum in New Zealand which is known as *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). The curriculum itself was developed from the diversity of voices that make up the complex early childhood landscape in New Zealand. The title, *Te Whāriki*, was gifted to the curriculum project by Tamati Reedy and Tilly Reedy (Reedy, 2003), partners in the curriculum development team and representing the Te Kōhanga Reo Trust and Mōri immersion early childhood 'language nests'. It is a permeable curriculum, built on democratic principles:

The early childhood curriculum has been envisaged as a whāriki, or mat, woven from the principles, strands and goals defined in this document. The whāriki concept recognises the diversity of early childhood education in New Zealand. Different programmes, philosophies, structures and environments will contribute to the distinctive patterns of the whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 11).

All four curriculum principles reflect an emphasis on agency, attending to the wider community, reciprocal relationships and cultural identity:

► Empowerment/*Whakamana*

The early childhood curriculum empowers the child to learn and grow. Children will have the opportunity to create and act on their own ideas, to develop knowledge and skills in areas that interest them, and to make an increasing number of their own decisions and judgements (p. 40).

► Family and community/*Whānau tangata*

The wider world of family and community is an integral part of the early childhood curriculum. The curriculum builds on what children bring to it and makes links with the everyday and special events of families, whānau (extended family), local communities and cultures (p. 42).

► Relationships/*Whānau Tangata*

Children learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people places and things. There are active and interactive learning opportunities, with opportunities for children to have an effect and to change the environment (p. 43).

► Holistic Development/*Kotahitanga*

The early childhood curriculum reflects the holistic way children learn and grow. The early childhood curriculum takes up a model of learning that weaves together intricate patterns of linked experience and meaning rather than emphasising the acquisition of discrete skills (p. 41).

It is also a bicultural curriculum statement, making many connections to the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi between the Crown and Māori, which granted them the rights and privileges of British subjects. In spite of countless serious breaches of the treaty (Walker, 2004), there have also been genuine attempts to ensure that legislative documents, government policy and practice are consistent with its principles. *Te Whāriki* was the forerunner of such efforts in the education sector (Lee, Carr, Soutar & Mitchell, 2013, chapter 3; Nuttall, 2003, new edition in press).

A second metaphor described the assessment that followed this curriculum: *Kei tua o te pae*. It is translated from the Māori as 'beyond the horizon', and comes from an *oriori*, a Māori lullaby composed by Hirini Melbourne which invites the baby to sleep well until the rising of the sun beyond the horizon. A major assessment resource of 20 booklets entitled '*Kei tua o te pae*' was developed to support the curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2004, 2007, 2009). In the first of these booklets the comment is made that:

In an ever-changing world we know that young children's horizons will expand and change in ways that cannot be foreseen. Children will travel beyond the current horizon, and early childhood is part of that (Ministry of Education, 2004, Book 1, p. 5).

This state of change promotes a key outcome for learners: the courage to articulate their own views even if they are uncertain about them; and the modesty to listen to others

and a diversity of ideas (Gresalfi, 2009). The curriculum responded to this 'uncertainty' by describing learning outcomes as working theories and learning dispositions (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 44). Working theories are tentative, possible; they emphasise the process of meaning-making that includes trying ideas out with other people and maybe changing one's mind. Learning dispositions as outcomes can be described as situated learning strategies plus motivation (Carr, 2001, p. 9). They are seen as combinations of ability, inclination and sensitivity to occasion by Perkins, Jay, and Tishman (1993), Rychen and Salganik (2003), and in *Te Whāriki*. Learning dispositions that focus on the development of identities that are positive about, and support further, learning are explored in Dweck's and Leggett's (1999) work on self theories, and Dweck and Leggett's (1988) work on mastery orientation. Siraj Blatchford (2004) describes mastery orientation as children tending, after a setback, to 'focus on effort and strategies instead of worrying that they are incompetent' (p. 11). She argues that in order to address the problem of orientations that can lead to lower outcomes, educators are required to 'take an active role in planning for, supporting and developing individual children's identities as masterful learners of a broad and balanced curriculum' (p. 11).

Learning dispositions are dynamic; they are habits of mind that need time and facilitating environments to develop; they include the affective. How are assessment practices to respond to these ideas?

Assessment practices that have responded to these metaphors

Following on from the curriculum assumptions outlined above, the response to *Te Whāriki* led to narrative being used as the unit of analysis for *assessment for learning* practices (Carr, 2001; Carr and Lee, 2012; Ministry of Education, 2004, 2007, 2009). Narratives can be authored by the children, include the responsive and reciprocal

relationships between people, places and things, provide a site for the engagement of family and community, and reflect the intricate patterns of linked experience and meaning rather than emphasising the acquisition of discrete skills. Research has indicated that young children engaged in story-telling and story-sharing from a young age, and having conversations about past events, develop personal memories that contribute to identity construction (Nelson, 2000; Bird and Reese, 2006). Narrative assessment draws on the literature of qualitative research as well; the authors of the first chapter of Jean Clandinin's Handbook of Narrative Inquiry comment that: 'What fundamentally distinguishes the narrative turn from 'scientific' objectivity is understanding that knowing other people and their interactions is always a relational process that ultimately involves caring for, curiosity, interest, passion, and change' (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007, p. 29). Lorraine, a teacher in a practitioner

research project that explored the role of narrative assessments in assisting to develop a culture of questioning by both children and staff comments:

I think from the increasing body of narrative examples and reflections in our centre, that we are becoming a great deal better at 'figuring out' just what it means to be immersed in a culture that values investigative research as a way of uncovering meanings and building working theories. For a long time now we have shifted the power base to a place where children are in charge of their learning within the parameters of a socially connected group. (Carr and Lee, 2012, p. 30)

The following is adapted from a Table summarising two kinds of outcome and their associated models of assessment (Carr, 2001, p. 3).

Table 1: Two models of assessment and associated outcomes

Assumptions about	Assessment Model One	Assessment Model Two
Outcomes of interest	A list of fragmented skills and items of knowledge that describe competence, often with a reference to school entry.	A list of 'life-long learning' strategies and dispositions. A longer term vision of a citizen in a democratic society.
Focus for intervention	Deficit-oriented. Gap-filling is emphasized.	Strengths, disposition-enhancing, are emphasized.
Units of analysis	Skills and items of knowledge.	Episodes of learning as narratives.
Validity	Objective observation.	Interpreted observations and dialogue.
Progress	Hierarchies of skills and knowledges, an accumulation of valued knowledge.	Increasingly complex participation in a learning environment.
Value to practitioners	Surveillance by external agencies. Planning for filling gaps in skill or knowledge.	Communication with four audiences: children, families, other staff and self (the practitioner writing the story, perhaps for or with the children). Planning for strengthening participation repertoires.
Who does the assessing?	The practitioners.	A democratic process. The <i>children</i> dictate stories and take photographs, the <i>families</i> contribute comments, the <i>practitioners</i> add stories, and revisit the collection with the child or children, enabling re-telling, re-cognizing, and the collaborative construction of trajectories of learning.

Model One can be a contributor to Model two, but in New Zealand Model Two is the primary model. This narrative assessment approach, Learning Stories, follows the precept of the four principles of the national curriculum: defines context as underlying responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places and things (relationships), engages with families and *whānau* (community), enables children to be authors of their own assessments (empowerment) and keeps together the constellations of outcome in what have been called 'significant chains of learning episodes' (Carr and Lee, 2012, p. 88) in portfolios (holistic). It is interesting that Caroline Gipps (2002, p. 74) lists the following four key aspects of Vygotsky's ideas that relate to assessment since these have strong parallels with the four *Te Whāriki* principles: (i) community, (ii) holistic, (iii) relationships, and (iv) empowerment.

First is the critical role of tools in human activity and the implications of offering assistance and guidance during the course of an assessment. Second is the inseparability of the social, affective and cognitive dimensions of action and interaction and hence the implication that learners should be assessed, not in isolation and in competition, but in groups and social settings. Third is the relation between expert and 'apprentice' around which individual intellectual development hinges, and the implications of this for the assessment relationship. Fourth is the role of assessment in identity formation.

The portfolios enable a referral back to prior learning episodes and the stories outline the planning for new possibilities and opportunities. Ann Hatherly and Lorraine Sands (2002) have identified five characteristic premises underpinning the Learning Stories framework which cement the links to the *Te Whāriki* principles and distinguish Learning Stories from more traditional approaches to assessment. These are: the emphasis on writing in a narrative genre; the use of multiple voices

to establish validity; the foregrounding of learning dispositions as valued learning; paying attention to children's strengths and interests; and making what teachers do in the teaching-learning context visible.

Assessment practices have also responded to the bicultural nature of the curriculum. During the construction of the *Kei tua o te pae* resources, *kaupapa Māori* assessment practices were also developed (Ministry of Education, 2009; Rameka, 2011). The introduction comments that:

A Kaupapa Māori approach to assessment privileges and empowers Māori children and puts the concept of an empowered Māori child at the heart of understandings about learning and assessment. It acknowledges and values Māori children's cultural capital and celebrates their learning achievements. ...Our principal focus in this project is the assessment of Māori children in a Māori early childhood setting. We want to ensure that the culture and the voices of the children are heard throughout, rather than those of the adults or the organisations (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 47).

Readiness for school

The dispositional strands of outcome in *Te Whāriki*, together with initiatives in a 2007 school curriculum, have reconceptualized the notion of 'readiness for school'. There is a growing understanding of the ways in which subject 'disciplines' in a curriculum can be the context for these learning habits or dispositions. In New Zealand, school teachers are beginning to explore this connection. The 2007 curriculum includes 'key competencies'; dispositional outcomes that derive from an OECD project (Rychen and Salganik, 2001, 2003). The project, Definition and Selection of Competencies: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundation (DeSeCo), focused on competencies that contribute to a successful life and a well-functioning society. Dominique Rychen and Laura Salganik describe key competencies in both economic and social terms. They comment in the 2003 volume (p. 5) that DeSeCo:

approaches the question of competencies via the perspective of a successful life and a well-functioning society, conceiving the potential societal benefits of a well-educated citizenry

as including a productive economy, democratic processes, social cohesion, and peace. At the individual level, the potential benefits of competencies entail successful participation in the labour market, in political processes, and in social networks; and meaningful interpersonal relations and general satisfaction with one's life.

Their key competencies also include important noncognitive factors 'such as attitudes, motivation, and values, which are not necessarily or exclusively acquired and developed in the domain of formal education' (p. 5). The DeSeCo project developed an 'umbrella' concept of reflective practice and critical thinking, and three categories of key competencies: acting autonomously, using tools interactively, and interacting in socially heterogeneous groups. The New Zealand Curriculum added 'thinking' and divided interacting in socially heterogeneous groups in two. Five key competencies were developed as: thinking, managing self, using language symbols and texts, relating to others, participating and contributing.

Table 2: Relation between DeSeCo competencies, school curriculum key competencies, and working theories and learning dispositions of Te Whāriki early childhood curriculum

DeSeCo Key Competencies	New Zealand (school) Curriculum Key Competencies	Te Whāriki early childhood national curriculum strands of working theories and learning dispositions
Reflective practice (umbrella concept)	Thinking	Exploration Mana aotūroa
Acting autonomously	Managing self	Well-being Mana atua
Using tools interactively	Using language symbols and texts	Communication Mana reo
Interacting in socially heterogeneous groups (i)	Relating to others	Contribution Mana whenua
Interacting in socially heterogeneous groups (ii)	Participating and contributing	Belonging Mana tangata

The DeSeCo volume points out that these key competencies will combine together as ‘constellations’ (p. 104) stressing the interrelated nature of competencies and combinations that vary with the context or situation in which they are applied. A *constellation of key competencies* is described as a sociocultural construct, making connections to context and

relationships: ‘The central point is that cultural, situational, and other contextual factors that frame any given situation shape the specific nature of the demands that must be met’ (pp.104-105). A number of schools are including Learning Stories in students’ portfolios and school students are writing their own.

Policy frameworks that facilitate and support democratic and learning-oriented assessment practices

The pathways taken by democratic and learning-oriented assessment practices are never prescribed or unidirectional. Assessment practices based on democratic principles require an ability and willingness to make practice visible through documentation and communication with children, families, other staff and oneself. The documentation itself is the subject of critical reflection, interpretation and discussion. National and local policy frameworks and mechanisms provide conditions that can foster and support such practices. In this section we have identified 3 such frameworks as follows.

1. Values and beliefs about ECCE as a democratic forum are upheld and debated

Views about children and values and beliefs about the nature and purpose of ECCE underlie policy approaches. When a policy primarily emphasises the purpose of ECCE as 'readiness for school', as compensation for 'vulnerable' children, as childcare that enables paid employment, or as a private good, the potential to enhance ECCE as a democratic learning community is often inhibited. One of us (Mitchell, 2010) has shown how assumptions held by government officials in New Zealand about children and childhood and the purposes of ECCE were directly related to favoured policy mechanisms. A construction of the child

as *dependant* positioned children as reliant on decisions made by families. Favoured policy approaches were mainly concerned with the 'poor' child (Moss & Petrie, 2002) and resources targeted to 'vulnerable' groups whose home backgrounds needed compensation. Outcomes such as paid employment for which there is a direct return to government through taxation and productivity, were also seen as legitimate reasons for government intervention. A construction of the child as *citizen*, however, was concerned with all children, not a select group, and conveyed broader views of possible outcomes at a child, family and community level. Universal policy approaches, entitlements to access good quality ECCE and supportive conditions for teachers to investigate pedagogy were favoured.

One principle we can take from this is the value of having explicit societal goals as the basis of ECCE policy. Childhood is a 'local and negotiated order' (Prout, 2005, p. 69) and democratic values also need to be debated locally within ECCE settings. Stig Bröstrom (2003), writing of New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, argued that:

... society, parents and pedagogues/ teachers need to engage in constant debate on societal and educational issues, and the outcomes need to be expressed, in their turn, in the curriculum in order that they may

influence the thinking and actions of future educators. (p. 237)

Peter Moss (2008) gives examples of values that need to be shared among the early childhood community for democratic and experimental practice to flourish. He identifies these as respect for diversity, recognition of multiple perspectives and paradigms, welcoming curiosity and uncertainty, and critical thinking. While the New Zealand examples provided in this paper pertain to a particular historical and cultural context, we argue that engagement by governments, parents, teachers and children in dialogue on the goals and approaches for ECCE would enable these to be developed to suit local situations.

2. A professionally qualified and educated workforce is supported to engage in analysis of theory and their own practice

In practice it is often difficult to encompass such values and to generate critical thinking, defined by Nikolas Rose as:

... partly a matter of introducing a critical attitude towards those things that are given to our present experience as if they were timeless, natural, unquestionable: to stand against the perceived maxims of one's time, against the spirit of one's age, against the current of perceived wisdom. It is a matter of introducing a kind of awkwardness into the fabric of one's own experience, of interrupting the fluency of the narratives that encode the experience and making them stutter. (1999, p. 20)

New Zealand provides interesting examples of the ways in which development of a coherent set of policy initiatives aimed at supporting 'quality' and collaborative relationships during the first decade of this century interacted to support and sustain more open and democratic practice. In

particular the policies 'provided conditions for teachers' engagement with theory and pedagogic discussion with others - including parents, teachers and external academics'. (Mitchell, 2011, p. 1)

The policies were developed as part of a 10-year strategic plan for early childhood education, *Pathways to the Future - Ngā Huarahi Arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002). Under the strategic plan's goal of enhancing quality, a stepped implementation occurred for strengthening curriculum and assessment. One provision was a requirement that by 2012, all staff in licensed teacher-led ECCE services would hold a 3-year ECE teacher qualification and would be registered by the New Zealand Teachers Council. More recently this has been lowered to an 80 per cent target.

Twenty booklets of assessment resources described earlier (Ministry of Education, 2005, 2007, 2009) were published as part of this plan. These were congruent with the sociocultural framing of *Te Whāriki* and contained narrative assessment exemplars gathered from diverse ECCE settings. Government-funded professional development related to the exemplars was offered. During this time, the government designated 20 ECCE settings as Centres of Innovation because of their innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Practitioners in these settings worked with research associates to build their use of innovative approaches, facilitate action research and share their knowledge with the sector. Teachers identified with the exemplars and Centres of Innovation because they saw them as being authentic and directly applicable to their own situation. (Meade, 2006)

One impressive finding from a longitudinal evaluation of the strategic plan (Mitchell, Meagher Lundberg, Mara, Cubey and Whitford, 2011) was the way in which these policy initiatives supported and reinforced each other. Settings that had high ratings for the quality of their provision made use of the policy initiatives to the fullest. The

curriculum in the settings became more permeable and open to contributions from all comers (Carr et al., 2001, p. 31). Teachers were better able to work with families' 'funds of knowledge'. The evaluators argued that these policies were influential because they were universally available and coherently organized around an understanding of children, parents and communities as participants. In combination the policies supported democratic practice.

3. ECCE teachers/educators have access to tools and opportunities for documentation and discussion

If practitioners are to undertake assessment practices in the ways highlighted in this chapter, they will need tools and opportunities for assessment documentation and discussion. In the examples discussed in this chapter, teachers have used a variety of materials for making observations and records including cameras, audio-recorders, video-recorders, scanners, photocopiers and computers. Also necessary is a comfortable work environment where adults can work individually and collectively. If early ECCE centres are to be learning communities for teachers as well as children, parents and others, there needs to be time and opportunities within the work environment for reflection, experimentation, documentation and planning. Narrative assessments began with a camera and a pen. The visual picture enables children to 'read' and revisit their learning.

Conclusion

The experiences from New Zealand and the extensive literature on assessment for learning highlighted here offer a model of exploring democratic and learning-oriented assessment practices. This exploration is urgently needed in order to counter a growing trend in many countries to focus assessment on measurable, technical and predetermined learning outcomes to the neglect of learning dispositions and working theories that equip children for lifelong learning.

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