

Pathway to the future? Doing Childcare in the Era of New Zealand's Early Childhood Strategic Plan.

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Abstract:

I have always been interested in teachers' work in groups, partly because of my background as a teacher in centre-based childcare and, more recently, as a facilitator of in-service teacher education. When I turned to the literature on teacher decision-making with respect to curriculum I found, however, that existing studies were almost all drawn from accounts of individual teachers. It seemed to me to be one thing to examine individual teachers at work, investigating their beliefs about curriculum and their articulation of their practice (e.g., Ayers, 1989; Burton, 1997; Hseih & Spodek, 1995; Paley, 2001). But what if several such teachers were put together for several hours, in a single teaching space, with a large group of children aged from birth to five? How would they make it work?

As I contemplated this research focus, it was evident to me that the curriculum was a key construct around which teachers' shared decision-making might be explored. A milestone in New Zealand education during the 1990s was the development of the early childhood curriculum framework Te Whariki: He Whariki Matauranga mo nga Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996a). This document was the result of extensive collaboration and consultation across the early childhood sector (Te One, 2003) and had been greeted enthusiastically in form by early childhood teachers (Murrow, 1995). But, as I embarked on my doctoral research in late 1998 a persistent question troubled me: What did early childhood teachers mean when they used the word 'curriculum'? Several years had passed

between the release of the draft version of Te Whariki (Ministry of Education, 1993) and the beginnings

research, but there had been very little investigation of this question in New Zealand. The combination of interest in teachers' work in groups and this conundrum about early childhood curriculum generated my principal question: How do groups of early childhood teachers intersubjectively construct and enact their definitive curriculum?

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