

AOTEAROA-NEW ZEALAND: AN OVERVIEW OF HISTORY, POLICY AND CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT. This paper provides an historical perspective of early childhood policy in Aotearoa-New Zealand and outlines some rationales for key policy shifts during the past 50 years. A summary of early childhood participation trends is provided as well an insight into the political, cultural and pedagogical context of the 1990s development of a national early childhood curriculum.

SOINS ÉDUCATIFS À LA PETITE ENFANCE EN AOTEAROA-NOUVELLE-ZÉLANDE : APERÇU HISTORIQUE, POLITIQUE ET PÉDAGOGIQUE

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article présente un aperçu historique des politiques en matière de soins éducatifs à la petite enfance en Aotearoa-Nouvelle-Zélande ainsi qu'un aperçu des facteurs à l'origine des grandes réorientations opérées au cours des cinquante dernières années. L'évolution des taux de participation aux programmes d'éducation des jeunes enfants est brièvement analysée. Le contexte politique, culturel et pédagogique dans lequel le programme national d'éducation préscolaire a été élaboré dans les années 1990 est examiné.

INTRODUCTION

The archipelago of Aotearoa was discovered by Maori who sailed in canoes from the Western Pacific. The arrival date is debated but was approximately 1,000 years ago. A tribal society was established. From the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, European exploration in the Antipodes led to colonisation by Britain in the nineteenth century (Salmond, 1991). During early contact, the use of the terms 'Maori' (defined by Maori as being 'ordinary') and 'Pakeha' (defined by Maori as 'extraordinary' and 'white') emerged. The founding document between Maori and the Pakeha Crown, the Treaty of Waitangi, was signed in 1840 (Orange, 1987). This was intended to protect tino rangatiratanga (governance), taonga (treasured sites and objects) and land for Maori, and to establish British rule for Pakeha settlers. The Treaty was soon breached when more Pakeha settlers arrived than there was land available that Maori were willing to sell (Belich, 1996; Salmond, 1996).

By 1940, Maori had little land left, and their language was in decline. During the post-war years, these issues became pertinent to early childhood education, as Maori preschoolers and their families became increasingly visible in suburbs and cities and the occasional kindergarten. Early childhood institutions established over the latter part of the century, both for Maori, and by Maori, were at the forefront of struggles over power and powerlessness, land, language and culture for Maori and Pakeha. Issues of European colonisation and *tino rangatiratanga* were still at the heart of the argument. Immigration from Europe accelerated during the post-war years and came to include people from the various Pacific Island nations and, more recently, migrants from Asia and Africa. Issues of biculturalism between Maori and Pakeha are now combined with the realities of multicultural diversity. This paradigm of diversity characterises early childhood provision in Aotearoa-New Zealand.

Early childhood institutions were first established in the late nineteenth century. These were charitable kindergartens for the colonial urban poor, and the occasional charitable creche. Government interest was limited to kindergartens, whose programs fitted with the rationales for emerging state investment and/or intervention in the lives of children such as moral reform, child rescue and child health (May, 1997). Early childhood care and education underwent a dramatic transformation during the second half of the twentieth century. By the 1950s, those children not attending preschool came to be regarded as unfortunate; by the 1960s deprived or disadvantaged; by the 1970s-80s disenfranchised; and by the end of the century, 'at risk' and a potential problem to society! Such perceptions reflect shifts in political, educational and social opinion regarding the best place for the rearing and education of young children and the changing role of the state in its support of early childhood education (May, 2001).

This two-part paper presents, firstly, an overview of the historical and policy context of state interest in early childhood provision and participation during the post-war years to the present. The second part outlines the political and pedagogical context of the national curriculum *Te Whariki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) which illustrates further some key aspects of early childhood policy development throughout the 1990s. Attached is a summary framework of the Principles, Strands and Goals of *Te Whariki* (see Figure 1).

PART ONE: PARTNERSHIPS WITH GOVERNMENT

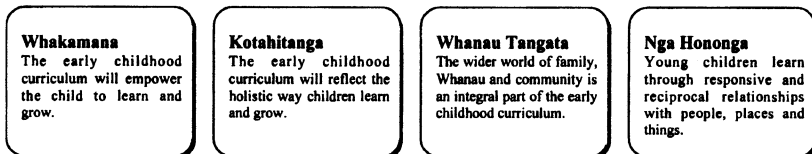
The Second World War was a catalyst for change to the state's role in early childhood care and education. The government promised more support for mothers at home, and its progressive education policies promoted preschool for 3 and 4 year olds as a social and educational benefit for children as they approached school entry at 5 years. The post-war years were characterised

TE WHARIKI

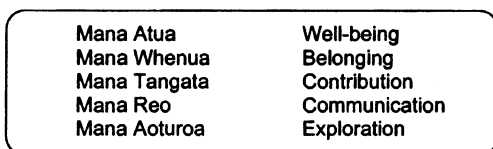
Te Whariki Matauranga mo nga Mokokpuna o Aotearoa

Early Childhood Curriculum

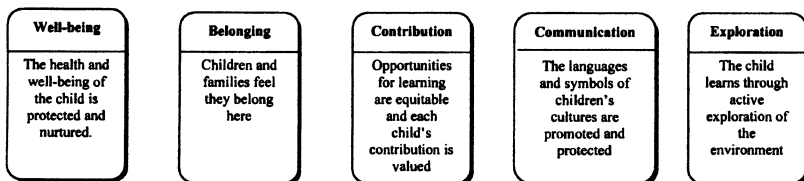
PRINCIPLES



STRANDS (Aims for Children)



GOALS FOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT



Children experience an environment where:

Well-being	Belonging	Contribution	Communication	Exploration
Their health is promoted	Connecting links with the family and the wider world are affirmed and extended	There are equitable opportunities for learning, irrespective of gender, disability, ability, age, ethnicity or background	They develop non-verbal communication skills for a range of purposes	Play is valued as meaningful learning and the importance of spontaneous play is recognised
Their emotional well-being is nurtured	They know that they have a place	They are affirmed as individuals	They develop verbal communication skills for a range of purposes	They gain confidence in and control of their body
They are kept safe from harm	They feel comfortable with the routines, rituals and regular events They know the limits and boundaries of acceptable behaviour	They are encouraged to learn with and alongside others	They experience the stories and symbols of their own and other cultures They discover and develop different ways to be creative and expressive	They learn strategies for active exploration, thinking and reasoning They develop working theories for making sense of the natural, social, physical and material worlds

FIGURE 1. Te Whariki

by huge growth in the early childhood sector and political constraint to contain and/or manage the demand. In 1944, there were 2,301 children attending the 49 half-day free kindergartens that received a government subsidy, representing 3.4% of 3 and 4 year olds. By 1999, there were 170,090 children attending 4,148 early childhood centres receiving government funding, representing 59% of children under the age of 5 years (Ministry of Education, 2000). No early childhood services in New Zealand became fully incorporated into the state sector. A partnership of community or private management and government support and regulation was the model.

By the end of the twentieth century, the pattern of provision had changed. Kindergartens catered for only 25% of children in early childhood programs. There was by then a range of licensed services such as playcentres (run by parents), kohanga reo (Maori language immersion), Pacific Islands early childhood centres, home-based services and a Correspondence Preschool (by distance). There were also diverse kinds of all-day, part-day and casual childcare centres, including specialist programs like Montessori and Rudolf Steiner. Each service emerged to meet a new need, usually through 'do-it-yourself' activism. Each brought a new rationale for broadening the state's investment in the early years. Some challenged the dominant ideology of the time, before eventually becoming incorporated into the mainstream.

Three broad political gazes have cloaked government rationales for interest and investment in early years care and education in the post-war years. Each brought a new kind of political and pedagogical language, but the gazes are not exclusive and each was layered alongside previous rationales (May, 2001).

Age of psychology

From the 1940s, a broad psychological paradigm deemed the mental health of children as important. 'Understanding' parents and teachers, and the playful participation of children, were now the crux of successful learning. A description of school by the Minister of Education in 1944 shows the strong influence of psychology:

Nothing short of a revolution has taken place in the infant room during the past twenty years. It has my full support . . . we must all agree that in the infant room the learning of formal intellectual skills is of secondary importance. What is of supreme importance is that the young child should be healthy and happy, that he should learn to work and play with other children, that his mind should be kept lively and eager and full of wonder, and that he should lay the basis of good habits and attitudes from which all healthy growth in later life must spring. (Mason, 1944, p. 16)

In 1947, the government released its post-war blueprint for early childhood education, the *Report of the Consultative Committee on Preschool Education*

Services, known as the Bailey Report after the chairperson, Colin Bailey. The benefits of preschool were perceived to provide:

- companionship for children
- stimulating play environments
- parent education

and assisting:

- transition to school
- health supervision.

The benefits were not just for children and provided:

- relief for mothers from the emotional strain of full-time parenting
- time for mothers for shopping and appointments
- support for mothers to have more children.

Overall, the 'stabilising' life of the kindergarten was viewed as a benefit to the mental and physical health of the community (Department of Education, 1947, p. 6). Developmental psychology advocated full-time mothering. Preschool institutions were positioned as a support for mothers at home, a site of expert advice and a backup where mothers failed. Mothers and preschool institutions were portrayed as key agents in socialising children into well-adjusted citizens. Perceived disorders such as illegitimacy, delinquency and working mothers were 'understood' in psychological terms. Early childhood services were classified as acceptable or unacceptable by the state, according to whether they were deemed to cause or cure such disorders.

By the 1960s, optimism was such that a 'headstart' at preschool was advocated as a cure for poverty and disadvantage (Zigler & Valentine, 1979). The ideas were applied in New Zealand in the context of preschool education for Maori children, but with considerable support and resourcing from Maori communities (Pewhairangi, 1983). However, unless the new Maori preschools categorised themselves as kindergartens (and none did) or playcentres (which many did), they were not eligible for government funding. Many of these fledgling initiatives later closed.

Age of equity

Ideals of an orderly socialisation of children through early psychological intervention were not sustainable. The diversity of culture and life styles, behaviours and experiences of families could not always fit within the defined boundaries of normality and adjustment. So-called psychological disorder was symptomatic of wider social and economic issues. From the late 1960s, older understandings of childhood were overlaid by sociological and political insights, particularly in relation to the rights of minority groups, women and children. Educational institutions were perceived by some as

tools of an oppressive state, but also the basis for liberation. Programs and early childhood institutions should be empowering, for children, their families, and/or their culture and for teachers. In Aotearoa-New Zealand, for example, there were:

- views that the state and men should shoulder more responsibility for childcare;
- campaigns for funding for childcare centres with the view that quality childcare was an education, not a welfare, service. In 1985, early childhood services were combined under the auspices of the Department (now Ministry) of Education;
- campaigns concerning the rights of women that politicised mothers and early childhood teachers to demand a better deal;
- campaigns for indigenous rights, in which Maori language and land concerns spilled into the arena of early childhood education. From 1982, Maori communities established kohanga reo, supported by Te Kohanga Reo National Trust. These programs were positioned outside of the existing education agencies and organisations, which were deemed to have failed Maori children;
- concerns and politicisation within immigrant Pacific Island communities over their status and place in New Zealand. From 1986, different Pacific Islands groups established early childhood language centres where their children could retain their homeland language and culture alongside the broader cultural environment of Aotearoa-New Zealand.

Early childhood institutions were a testing site for the possibilities of intervention and investment. There was optimism that inequity in society could be overcome.

Almost two decades of activism and persuasion culminated in the *Before Five* report (Lange, 1988) which was the government's response to *Education to be More* (Department of Education, 1988), known as the Meade Report, after its chief author, Anne Meade. The Meade Report provided a significant philosophical statement on equity issues and, like the earlier Bailey Report, outlined the benefits of early childhood for children, their families, their communities and society. Myths that had long constrained early childhood policy development were finally buried. The report emphasised the holistic nature of early childhood care and education and presented the argument that investing in early childhood education was about the present as well as the future. Essential elements of the proposed model comprised features addressing the interests of children, the interests of women as caregivers, teachers and workers, and the interests of cultural survival. The authors argued that a substantive injection of funding would ensure

affordability, access and quality. The Prime Minister of the time, David Lange, called the report “timely”, stating that, “This Government sees early childhood education as having a priority among its social policies” (1988, p. iii). The promise of *Before Five* was that, “At all levels of education, the early childhood sector will have *equal status* with other education sectors” (p. 2).

Overall, the *Before Five* reforms were intended to:

- acknowledge the diversity of services in terms of philosophy, culture structure and ownership;
- improve participation, access and affordability;
- integrate care and education;
- support quality for children;
- improve the status of teachers; and
- enable women to work in paid employment with improved childcare support.

Despite resistance from the Treasury, early childhood won additional funding. Anne Meade wrote that the reforms enabled, “Women and young children [to] gain a foot in the door” (1990, p. 96), and that, “A temporary wedge was driven through the hegemonic barriers constructed by male power holders and the so-called ‘captains of industry’” (1990, p. 106). Disappointment followed as the ‘wedge’ was closed quicker than expected. The ‘odds’ had changed and the 1990s were characterised by barriers preventing the full implementation of *Before Five* (Dalli, 1993; Wells, 1991). A change of government, a lack of political courage and a philosophical shift in the role of government were reasons.

Age of quality

By the end of the century, the political gaze on early childhood institutions, staff and children in Aotearoa-New Zealand was framed by a discourse on quality. At issue were questions of the responsibility and recipe for, and the costs and measures of, quality experiences for children. In the absence of significant increases in early childhood funding, the emphasis from government was to encourage and/or require centres to establish policies, systems and processes for achieving ‘quality outcomes’ for children. Those centres which employed more trained staff and/or had higher staffing ratios were rewarded with a higher ‘quality funding’ level. The uptake was not large as the costs were not recompensed by the ‘reward’.

Government agencies became proactive in shaping the experiences of children in early childhood programs, relying less on the profession or provider organisations to take the lead. A raft of publications from various agencies

detailed measures for auditing quality (Early Childhood Development Unit, 1996; Education Review Office, 1996, 1997a and b, 1998a and b; Ministry of Education, 1997, 1999). All titles contained the word 'quality'!

The state became more active in shaping constructions of childhood linked to global economic agendas. National curricula were promulgated across the education sector, with nationally defined 'learning outcomes' and 'essential skills' required to participate in a new 'enterprise society'. A culture of audit and assurance, imported from the world of business management, became operative throughout government agencies and also affected early childhood centres. Audit trails required evidence. The tools of child observation were co-opted towards sighting the measurable outcomes of learning in the minutiae of children's daily activities.

Outside of government, professional groups, organisations, activists and academics launched various campaigns and/or projects; mainly in the belief that government policies were undermining quality. The argument was that early childhood services were insufficiently resourced and that government measures of quality were too low (or for some too high), or not always inclusive of the diverse sector.

'Windows' for change

Early childhood policy in New Zealand is characterised by periods of effective and cohesive advocacy that have not been afraid to take their case to the streets, alongside the usual strategies of persuasion, personal presence and the pen. There have been two 'windows' for substantive policy shifts in the government's investment in the early years: the late 1940s and the late 1980s. In 2000, another possible 'window' for change emerged (Strategic Plan Working Group, 2001a, 2001b). Each 'window' has been the culmination of sometimes decades of persuasion and been broadly (although not always neatly) framed by the political gaze of the time.

To understand the dynamics of early childhood policy shifts, it is useful to look further at the respective reports that heralded the suggested 'windows'. Firstly, the 1947 Bailey Report and the 1988 Meade Report. Their key differences can be summarized:

- The Bailey Report called for the state to take over early childhood education with the view that "The voluntary principle is generally repugnant in that it carries overtones of charity" (Department of Education, 1947, p. 9). This did not occur. Government took over many funding and regulatory responsibilities but the services remained (and still do) in the community-private sector. In contrast, the *Before Five* policies were linked to wider education reforms devolving educational management from the state to parents and communities.

- The Bailey Report was concerned with part-day preschool education for 3- and 4-year olds primarily in kindergartens taught by trained teachers, but there was also support for the idea of playcentres operated by trained mothers who were claimed to be the best teachers of children. Playcentres and kindergartens became the two 'acceptable' models. Childcare services were perceived as mainly unnecessary in a country where welfare policies promoted the ideal of 'at home' responsibilities for married women. The later Meade Report recommended a much broader policy framework for early childhood services and proposed equitable government funding for children across the services.

Despite the 40-year time difference, the reports have similarities.

- Both reports received strong support. The governments of the day were urged to move swiftly to deal with perceived crises at hand.
- The reports tapped into a political mood for educational reform and early childhood issues were able to 'catch onto the coat tails'. In both eras, early childhood was positioned as a priority for social policy to support women and families, and both reports were optimistic concerning the impact of the state's investment in individuals, families and the nation as a whole.
- The recommendations of neither report were fully implemented, although many of the principles survived. Both were introduced with staged plans that never got beyond year one.
- Both initiatives were under Labour governments on the political 'left of centre'. In both cases, a National 'right of centre' government came to power soon afterwards, in 1949 and 1990. The impetus for action was slowed and finance curtailed. Nevertheless, there was still an upturn in provision and participation in the years that followed.

The years between were not lacking in development. Numerous innovations demonstrate that much was achieved. The frustration for those working in the field was managing the demand, development and delivery of services with insufficient funding, along with incomplete and, for some groups, restrictive policies.

By the year 2000

A brief description of the current situation will provide the clues underlying the possible third 'window' for change. By international standards, participation rates in early childhood education in Aotearoa-New Zealand are high. It is useful to identify some trends. As stated earlier, 59% of all children under the age of 5 attend a licensed institution compared to 46% in 1992 (Ministry of Education, 2000). The extent, the regularity and the

quality of provision are not so certain. The statistics for separate age levels are more revealing: 96.5% of 4-year-olds and 90% of 3-year-olds attend, compared to 56% of 2-year-olds and 14% of 1-year-olds. The lesser rates of participation are due to less demand by parents, but cost and availability also prohibit access.

Overall the participation rates during the past decade have been moving upwards. Between 1990-1999, the number of early childhood centres increased from 2,890 to 4,148. However, participation has not been even throughout the community. Geographic location and culture have always affected access. Participation by Maori and Pacific Islands children is lower than that of other children, although the existence of the Kohanga Reo and Pacific Islands early childhood centres has boosted participation rates. Thirty-eight per cent of all Maori enrolments in early childhood attend a kohanga reo. Half of the Pacific Islands children enrolled in early childhood programs attend a Pacific Islands early childhood centre. There are still barriers, with both Kohanga Reo and Pacific Islands early childhood centres reliant on considerable voluntary commitment. Childcare provision dramatically increased over the decade. *Before Five* had its roots in the advocacy of childcare, women's and union groups. By 1999, 43.4% of all child enrolments were in childcare centres that accounted for 83% of the growth of early childhood provision during the previous decade. Half of these centres were private and for profit. This has been a sensitive political issue in New Zealand where there is little government policy discrimination between the private for profit and community provision.

Access and participation were major planks of the *Before Five* reforms, and increased government funding increased the places available and the choices of some parents. However, the costs of quality and issues of affordability have been a constraint. There has been an almost total reliance on the marketplace of community and private endeavour for provision. Beyond participation is the issue of rights: the rights of children for a quality environment, the rights of parents to make choices for their children, and the rights of access to appropriate services particularly in the context of culture and geography. These were the issues that forged the campaigns to persuade the government that new strategic directions were needed (Early Childhood Education Project, 1996).

A new 'window'

In 1999, a Labour-led government came to power. A strategic plan for early childhood was an election promise. Firstly they introduced a policy of 'equity funding' for centres in relation to a formula of factors such as rural location, low income areas, and/or children with special needs and/or cultural and language needs. The funding was linked to an election policy of

“closing the [economic] gaps”. In 2002, the government appointed a working party to develop a 10-year plan for early childhood (Strategic Plan Working Party, 2001a). The focus was on achieving quality participation for all children, and to reduce the disparities between the Maori and non-Maori child, and Pacific and non-Pacific child. This was an acknowledgement that some of the tenets of the *Before Five* policies were flawed and not working equitably for children, the staff or the early childhood services themselves. It was also a tribute to the tenacious work of the teacher unions, academics, activists and many organisation leaders who documented and monitored the shortcomings of the implementation of the *Before Five* policies (Dalli, 1993; Davison, 1997; May, 1999; Meade, 1990, 2000; Mitchell, 1996; Wells, 1991).

Anne Meade was again appointed to chair this working group. Initially, the expectations for the Plan were of reform rather than revolution, but the balance soon tipped. The final consultation document restated much of the vision of the earlier Meade Report, but gave new emphasis to the Articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Treaty of Waitangi, and the principles of the new national early childhood curriculum, Te Whariki. The Strategic Plan document outlined what New Zealanders might expect when these key principles and articles were fully enacted in early childhood provision and practice. This involved such strategies as pay equity between early childhood and primary school teachers, proactive government policies for provision, higher proportions of qualified staff in centres, improved ratio and group size regulations, and significantly higher levels of government funding.

The Working Group stated that, “Our long term vision is for whanau and families to have a universal entitlement to a reasonable amount of free, high quality early childhood education” (Strategic Plan Working Group, 2001a, p. 5). This would clearly position the early childhood sector alongside schools. The Minister of Education’s early reaction was that the vision and proposed strategies were “blue skies thinking” (Trevor Mallard, speech notes, 10 July 2001). Some trimming to ensure a more “fiscally responsible” document was urged and undertaken. The Minister then claimed that the “blue skies objectives” . . . “have [been] refined down to what is practical and within some reasonable fiscal limits [that] we could do in a decade” (*NZ Education Review*, 2 November 2001). The final version, however, restated the vision that, “Early childhood education . . . be positioned to become part of the wider education sector – alongside schools – where children are accorded a universal entitlement to free (or almost free) education” (Strategic Plan Working Group, 2001b, p. 4.) It was argued that this would position New Zealand alongside most of its OECD partners.

Whether the 'window' is lost or becomes an opportunity for change is not yet known. 2002 is an election year. We do know that any change of government will stall the plan. At least, the collective vision has been clarified and the resolve of the early childhood community for policy changes has been strengthened. The government's political will to implement this vision is not assured and the early childhood sector will need to be tenacious.

PART TWO: WEAVING TE WHARIKI'

For the early childhood sector the decade of the 1990s was dominated by issues arising from the incomplete implementation of the *Before Five* reforms by a conservative National government. During these years too, as argued earlier, rationales for government investment were increasingly influenced by economic agendas and framed around the discourse of quality. The concluding part of this paper outlines the political and cultural context of the development of the early childhood national curriculum. The government's agenda was to develop an early childhood program parallel to the New Zealand School Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1991), whose framework of seven learning areas and essential skills had been released in 1991.

In 1996, the Prime Minister, Jim Bolger, launched the final draft of Te Whariki, the national early childhood curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996). This was the first time a Prime Minister so explicitly stamped government approval on what children might do on a daily basis in early childhood centres. The development and wide acceptance of Te Whariki as a curriculum within the early childhood sector was a surprising story of careful collaboration between a National government and the sector. There was both accommodation and resistance to government agendas.

Margaret Carr and I became part of this story in 1991 when we were contracted to co-ordinate the development of a curriculum that could embrace a diverse range of early childhood services and cultural perspectives, articulate a philosophy of quality early childhood practice and make connections with a new national curriculum for schools. The story of this development spans the 1990s (Carr & May, 1993, 1994, 1997, 1999, 2000). This was a policy development that the government wisely did not rush. The draft of Te Whariki was released in late 1993 followed by some selective trialling. Professional development programs to support staff in understanding and working with the document began the following year. The Ministry subsequently funded four research projects towards developing frameworks for evaluation and assessment based on Te Whariki (Carr, 1998; Carr, May & Podmore, 2000; Mara, 1998; Podmore & May, 1998).

The development of a national curriculum framework for both early childhood centres and schools was part of an international trend to strengthen connections between the economic success of the nation and education. So-called progressive approaches to curriculum that relied on child interest and ideals of individual growth and development were under attack. Governments had not previously been concerned with curriculum in the early childhood sector. Each of the different early childhood services had their own approaches. Early childhood organisations were wary at the idea of a national curriculum, concerned that it would constrain their independence and cut across the essence of their diversity. The alternative, of not defining the early childhood curriculum, was a dangerous one: the national curriculum for schools might start a downward move. The involvement of the author and Margaret Carr was a response to these concerns.

The development of Te Whariki involved a broad consultative process with all the services and organisations. More specifically, the writers wanted the curriculum to reflect the Treaty of Waitangi partnership of Maori and Pakeha as a bicultural document, and grounded in the contexts of Aotearoa-New Zealand. This was a challenge. There were no New Zealand or international models for guidance. This became possible due to collaboration with Te Kohanga Reo National Trust and the foresight of Dr Tamati Reedy and Tilly Reedy who developed the curriculum for Maori immersion centres (Reedy, 1993). The theme of empowerment was important for Maori, and “empowering children to learn and grow” became a foundation Principle. Tilly Reedy emphasised the maxim for Maori that “Toko Rangatiratanga na te mana-matauranga – knowledge and power set me free” (Reedy, 1995, p. 6). A set of parallel Aims for Children (later named Strands) was developed in Maori and English, not as translations but as equivalent domains of empowerment in both cultures.

Mana atua	Well-being
Mana whenua	Belonging
Mana tangata	Contribution
Mana reo	Communication
Mana ao turoa	Exploration

Each Aim was elaborated into Goals for Learning which were expanded to illustrate what they might mean in a variety of contexts: for infants, toddlers and young children; for Maori immersion programs (including children with special needs, home-based programs and Tagata Pasefika settings); and for management and adults who worked with children. This contextual elaboration was considerably reduced in the 1996 document with government favouring a more integrated approach. We opposed and regretted this.

The title Te Whariki, suggested by Tamati Reedy, was a central metaphor. The early childhood curriculum was envisaged as a whariki, translated as a

woven mat for all to stand on. The Principles, Strands and Goals provided the framework, which allowed for different program perspectives to be woven into the fabric. There were many possible 'patterns' for this depending on the age and interests of the children; the cultural, structural or philosophical context of the particular service; or the interests of parents and staff. This was a curriculum that provided signposts for individuals and centres to develop their own curriculum weaving through a process of talk, reflection, planning, evaluation and assessment.

The conceptualisation of Te Whariki around aims for children was different from the traditional developmental curriculum map of physical, intellectual, emotional and social (PIES) skills, which dominated Western curriculum models. Te Whariki also made a political statement about children: their uniqueness, ethnicity and rights in New Zealand society. Jenny Ritchie described Te Whariki as "about countering racism" (Ritchie, 1997). For people from the Pacific Island Nations (and other cultures), Te Whariki provided a curriculum space where language and cultures could be in the foreground and not an add-on (Mara, 1998). For Maori, Te Whariki was about self-determination. Tilly Reedy told a mainly Pakeha Auckland audience:

Our rights are recognised and so are the rights of everyone else . . . Te Whariki recognises my right to choose, and your right to choose too.
(Reedy, 1995, p. 16)

Transforming a national curriculum into practice to make a difference for children was a challenge. By 2000, the visual presence of Te Whariki was apparent in most centres but implementing the document was complex, partly because it resisted telling staff what to do, by 'forcing' each program to 'weave' its own curriculum pattern. Research trials highlighted the sector's support for Te Whariki but indicated that a lack of time and resources put pressures on staff. There would need to be on-going professional development in a sector that had large numbers of untrained or poorly trained staff. Professional development programs, however, were limited in coverage. It was apparent, too, that staff turnover and staff-child ratios were significant factors in the success, or otherwise, of Te Whariki.

The government's Education Review Office (ERO) was critical of Te Whariki. The holistic Strands, Principles and Goals were not easily understood or measured by the ERO's mainly school sector reviewers. Their report referred to its "complexity", noting the high levels of training and/or guidance expected, and then ERO's 1997 survey found that 16% of centres reviewed were lacking in confidence to implement it. Another 38% needed to improve (Education Review Office, 1998b). This was, however, only a year after the final document had been released. Centres needed time and support to reflect on what Te Whariki mean in their particular context.

This was not a quick process. Diane Mara's study of this process in the different Pacific Islands communities was illustrative of both the barriers and possibilities (Mara, 1998).

There have been ongoing challenges. Firstly, the assumption that early childhood centres would have the funding and the trained staff capacity to operate quality programs has not been fully realised. This mismatch undermined the implementation of Te Whariki. Secondly, the holistic and bicultural approach to curriculum of Te Whariki, inclusive of children from birth, was a challenge to staff who were more familiar with the traditional focus on play areas and activities for preschool aged children in mainstream centres. Thirdly, a political climate of accountability made increasing demands on early childhood staff particularly in relation to assessment. Much of this was a new language for staff and parents. Margaret Carr subsequently undertook research to develop frameworks for assessment linked to the Strands of Te Whariki that were part of the everyday practice in the centre and not a complex or separate add-on process (Carr, 1998, 2001). Carr suggested five learning dispositions relating to the five Strands as a focus for recognising and describing children's learning. With this knowledge, staff could more effectively support and direct its pathway. Like Te Whariki, Carr was drawing a 'line in the sand' from deficit models that dominated school assessment practice.

It is 10 years since the national curriculum development across schools and early childhood settings began in New Zealand. The process is on-going. To ensure that early childhood staff are skilled and confident with a new language of learning development and culture provided by Te Whariki, it has been important that curriculum development be accompanied by research, professional development and training. There are still many challenges ahead. The Strategic Plan has taken a bold move to recommend that Te Whariki become mandatory for all centres and that it also underpins learning in the early school years. Other recommended strategies are designed to support a fuller implementation of the Principles, Strands and Goals of Te Whariki.

It is ironic that the idea of a national curriculum, originally imposed by a National government, has become a tool of advocacy to persuade a Labour-led government that the 'blue skies' vision of the Strategic Plan is both necessary and possible. The metaphor of Te Whariki has become symbolic and powerful. The key factor underpinning successful policy collaborations with government has been the necessity and ability of the diverse groups within the early childhood sector to find some common ground – a whariki – 'a mat for all to stand on', but with the possibility of different patterns. Despite its differences, the sector has again found a formula for unity. The harder task is to persuade governments to demonstrate the kind of political courage that gives real substance to political rhetoric of putting children first.

NOTE

1. Margaret Carr and I were co-directors for the development of the national early childhood curriculum. This section is culled from joint writing.

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