

Early Childhood Care and Education in Aotearoa - New Zealand: An overview of history, policy and curriculum

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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 are provided as well an insight into the political, cultural and pedagogical context of the 1990s development of a national early childhood curriculum.

The archipelago of Aotearoa was discovered by Maori who sailed in canoes from the Western Pacific approximately 1000 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 establish British rule for Pakeha settlers. The Treaty was soon breached when more Pakeha settlers arrived than there was land available that Maori was willing to sell (Belich, 1996, Salmond, 1997). By 1940 Maori had little land left, and their language was in decline. During the postwar 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 postwar 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 programmes 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 a summary of the policy context of early childhood provision and participation and an overview of the national curriculum Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996). Attached is a summary framework of the Principles, Strands and Goals of Te Whāriki).

POLICY OVERVIEW

Postwar historical context

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 three and four year olds as a social and educational benefit for children as they approached school entry at five years. The postwar years were characterised 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 forty nine half day free kindergartens which received a government subsidy, representing 3.4% of three and four year olds. By 1999 there were 170,090 children attending 4148 early childhood centres receiving government funding, representing 59% of children under the age of five (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 programmes. There were by then a range of licensed services such as playcentres (run by

parents), kohanga reo (Maori language immersion), Pacific Islands centres, home-based services, a Correspondence Pre- School (by distance), along with diverse kinds of all day, part day and casual childcare centres, including specialist programmes 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 its eventual incorporation into the mainstream.

There were 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 ‘window’ for change occurred. The context of this will be outlined (Strategic Plan Working Group, 2001). Both earlier ‘windows’ were the culmination of decades of persuasion. Early childhood policy in New Zealand is characterised by periods of effective and cohesive advocacy that has not been afraid to take its case to the streets, alongside the usual strategies of persuasion, personal presence and the pen. In 1947 the Government released its postwar blueprint for early childhood education, the *Report of the Consultative Committee on Preschool Education Services*, known as the Bailey Report. In 1988 *Before Five* was released as government’s response to *Education to be More* (1988), known as the Meade Report. The key differences can be summarised:

- 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’ (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 three and four year olds primarily in kindergartens taught by trained teachers, but there was also support for the idea of playcentres operated by trained mothers who claimed that, mothers were 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 reports 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.

Political rationales

Three broad political gazes have cloaked government rationales for interest and investment in early years care and education in the postwar 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).

The benefits of preschool, outlined in the 1947 Bailey Report, 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 (1947, p.6). Developmental psychology advocated fulltime 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 and 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 kindergarten (and none did) or a playcentre (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 was 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. Programmes and early childhood institutions should be empowering, for children their family 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.
- 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 programmes 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.

The 1988 Meade Report was a significant philosophical statement on equity issues and 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* (Wells, 1991; Dalli, 1993). 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 programmes, 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; Ministry of Education, 1997, 1999, Education Review Office, 1996,1997a, 1997b,1998) All titles contained the word ‘quality’!

The state become 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 which 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.

A new 'window'

In 1999 a Labour led Government came to power. They introduced a policy of 'equity funding' for centres in relation to a formulae 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'. The Government also appointed a working party to develop a ten year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood (Strategic Plan Working Party, 2001). 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 (Meade, 1990, 2000; Wells, 1991; Dalli, 1993; Mitchell, 1996; Davison, 1997, May, 1999). 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 Childhood, the Treaty of Waitangi and the Principles of the new national early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki. The Strategic Plan document outlined what New Zealander's 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 and 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, 2001, 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. At the time of writing the final plan is still under government consideration. Whether the 'window' is lost or becomes an opportunity for change, is not yet known. The government is moving into an election year. We do know that any change of government will stall the plan. Irrespective of the political outcome the collective vision and resolve of the early childhood community for policy changes will have been strengthened.

Current participation in early childhood

By international standards participation rates in early childhood education in Aotearoa-New Zealand are high and have been increasing. It is useful to identify some trends. As stated earlier, 59% of all children under the age of five attend a licensed institution compared to 46% in 1992 (Ministry of Education, 2000). The extent, the regularity and the quality of provision is not so certain. By age the statistics are more revealing. 96.5% of four year olds and 90% of three years olds attend compared to 56% of two year olds and 14% of one year olds. The lesser rates of participation are due to less demand by parents but cost and availability also prohibits 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 kohanga reo and Pacific Islands centres has boosted participation rates. 38% of all Maori enrolments in early childhood attend a kohanga reo. Half of the Pacific Islands children enrolled in early childhood programmes attend a Pacific Islands language centre. There are still barriers, with both Kohanga Reo and Pacific Islands language 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 which 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 market-place 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 issues are on the agenda of the new Strategic Plan.

PART TWO: WEAVING TE WHĀRIKI¹

In 1996, the Prime Minister, Jim Bolger, launched the final draft of *Te Whāriki*, 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 Whāriki* 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.

The author became part of the story in 1991 when, with Margaret Carr, 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 and May, 1993, 1994, 1997, 1999, 2000). This was a policy development that the government wisely did not rush. The draft of *Te Whāriki* was released in late 1993 followed by some selective trialling. Professional development programmes 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 Whāriki* (Carr, 1998a, 1998b, Podmore and May, 1998, Mara 1998, Carr, Podmore and May, 2000).

¹ Margaret Carr and I were co-directors for the development of the national early childhood curriculum. We have written extensively on this topic. This section is culled from joint writing.

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 Whāriki 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) in Maori and English were developed, 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 programmes, (including children with special needs, home-based programmes, 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 Whāriki*, suggested by Tamati Reedy, was a central metaphor. The early childhood curriculum was envisaged as a whāriki, translated as a woven mat for all to

stand on. The Principles Strands and Goals provided the framework, which allowed for different programme perspectives to be woven into the fabric of the weaving. 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 Whāriki around aims for children was different to the traditional developmental curriculum map of: physical, intellectual, emotional and social (PIES) skills, which dominated Western curriculum models. Te Whāriki also made a political statement about children: their uniqueness, ethnicity and rights in New Zealand society. Jenny Ritchie described Te Whāriki as 'about countering racism.' (Ritchie, 1997). For people from the Pacific Island Nations (and other cultures), Te Whāriki provided a curriculum space where language and cultures could be in the foreground and not an add-on (Mara, 1998). For Maori, Te Whāriki 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 Whāriki 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 Whāriki was apparent in most centres but implementing the document was complex, partly because it resisted telling staff what to do, by 'forcing' each programme to 'weave' its own curriculum pattern. Research trials highlighted the sector's support for Te Whāriki 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 programmes, however, were limited in coverage (McGaffney and Smith, 1997). It was apparent, too, that staff turnover and staff-child ratios were significant factors in the success, or otherwise, of Te Whāriki. The Government's Education Review Office (ERO) was critical of Te Whāriki. 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 what Te Whāriki might 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 programmes. This has not been fully realised. This mismatch undermined the implementation of Te Whāriki. Secondly, the holistic and bicultural approach to curriculum of Te Whāriki, 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 that 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 Whāriki 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 Whāriki, Carr was drawing a 'line in the sand' from deficit models that dominated school assessment practice.

It is ten 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 Whāriki, 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 Whāriki 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 Whāriki.

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 Whāriki 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 whāriki – '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.

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