The Social, Economical and Cultural Context of Education in Aotearoa New Zealand

January 2013
“Families and early childhood education services are now jointly involved in the socialisation, care, and learning of young children. Early childhood education services are committed to ensuring that learning opportunities are not restricted by gender, locality, or economic constraints. There is a growing understanding of the links between culture, language, and learning, and an increasing commitment to addressing the issues faced by children growing up in a society with more than one cultural heritage.”

Education in Aotearoa New Zealand: The Media’s Perspective

The following are a random selection of by-lines from media for the month of November 2012, which indicate some of the issues in Early Childhood Education that are confronting our society today.

Early Childhood subsidies used to pay for housework

Radio New Zealand

The Ministry of Education has warned the Government its subsidies for home based early childhood education are paying for housework and informal child-minding that do not need to be subsidised. It says the Government needs to reconsider what the $90 million… Link

Early childhood education ‘brings social drawbacks’

Voxy

Under the new Social Security (Benefit Categories and Work Focus) Amendment Bill, which is now being considered by a select committee, beneficiaries will be compelled to send their preschool children to early childhood education (ECE) for at least 15… Link

Teachers rewarded for stellar leadership

Taranaki Daily News

The recipients, two of only 10 around New Zealand are Aroaro Tamati, of Te Kopae Piripono, Taranaki’s only Maori immersion early childhood centre, and the principal of Hawera’s Tawhi Primary School, Chris Riley. At separate ceremonies yesterday the… Link

Expert help to reduce child poverty in NZ

Voxy

Childhood poverty in New Zealand will be under the spotlight over the next few weeks with the arrival at Victoria University of an American academic who has spent three decades researching the issue. Distinguished Professor Greg Duncan, … Link

Early childhood education survey begins

Voxy

The New Zealand early childhood network, ChildForum, is conducting a national survey on young children’s care and education in New Zealand and the current state of the early childhood sector. The survey is the only research independent of the… Link

Concern over compulsory pre-school education for children of beneficiaries

Radio New Zealand

New Zealand Kindergartens Incorporated and the Early Childhood Council say children from disadvantaged backgrounds reap huge benefits from early childhood education, but there is disquiet about it being compulsory. The ECC says the change could… Link

World Teachers’ Day ‘time to celebrate NZ education system’

Voxy

Unfortunately, the current Government has reversed a target of achieving 100% qualified and registered teachers in early childhood education and has just introduced legislation permitting unqualified people to act as teachers in charter schools. Link
Research within New Zealand Early Childhood Education

At a national level since the government funding for the Centre’s of Innovation Project was withdrawn, research in early childhood education has become less visible. Research conducted by Mangere Bridge Kindergarten examined transition experiences for children and families moving from Kindergarten to School, using the analogy of crossing borders.

They particularly looked at

1. Crossing borders between the kindergarten and the local school: How can these relationships be strengthened?

2. Crossing borders across languages and literacies: How can the portfolio books strengthen and support languages and literacies, especially for children for whom English is an additional language?

3. Crossing borders between Te Whāriki and the New Zealand School Curriculum: In what ways can we develop continuity from learning dispositions to key competencies?

Mangere Bridge Kindergarten have published their findings and early childhood practitioners have been keen to see how this could strengthen our practice with young children as they approach the transition from Early childhood to school.

Also on a National level, Margaret Carr and Wendy Lee’s research on how forms of narrative assessment can foster children’s learning and help children to construct life long learner identities is continuing. The focus of this research is on how children author their own learning, and how pedagogy and assessment can combine to strengthen this capacity. This year they will looking more closely at connecting aspirations for children to professional learning for teachers, and how teachers focus on agency and dialogue empowers learning.

At a more local level one of our RE Provocations committee members center’s will partner this year with The University of Waikato to examine culturally responsive teaching and learning in early childhood settings. This research will examine the ways in which the values and practices of diverse families are understood by learning communities and integrated into the learning environment. The research will look at ways in which teachers might develop a richer approach to culturally responsive teaching to enhance learning for the children in early childhood education. This will be a joint research project with four centers in the Auckland area who have richly diverse ethnic communities.
RE Provocations 2012 Journey

Another year has unfolded in Aotearoa, New Zealand, with various Professional Development opportunities being organized for an ever-increasing demand for seminars on the Reggio Emilia Approach.

We have found that there is still an extreme interest in our - “Introduction to Reggio” days and therefore have been offering these more frequently throughout the year to smaller groups of participants.

One of our key aims for the year has been to offer participants the opportunity to partake in more in-depth discussion and debate at the seminars & courses we have run, so therefore we have been organising these as smaller events. We feel that this allows them to deepen their own understanding of the Reggio Approach but also allows them to develop a culture of collaboration with one another.

The idea of looking more closely at the various aspects of the Reggio Approach led us into running specific seminars, for example “The Role of the Atelierista”. It has always been important for us to keep our own country’s identity evident throughout our professional development opportunities and so we were lucky to have two New Zealand artists being part of this programme. Also through the wealth of our natural resources as well as the influence of recycled materials we are able to provide a very strong interest in the meaningful possibilities and potential of these materials. This will most definitely be a focus that we will repeat in 2013.

Another aspect we wished to share with interested participants was that of investigations and so our seminar on “How it all began...” was very well received. One of our RE Provocations committee members who works closely alongside teachers in their daily practice and participates in programme planning meetings chose an Infant and Toddler investigation to share. The focus of this work was "A hundred possibilities and a hundred more — different ways of exploring and discovering recycled materials”.

Many participants have revisited various Centres for further information and understanding and have even brought along other interested and sometimes international groups.

We were fortunate once more to have several International speakers come to Aotearoa, New Zealand and share their knowledge and experiences with us.

We welcomed Per Bernemyr back for his third visit, where he spent two weeks working alongside us in a programme of “Reflective Practice”. He once again challenged our practice, provoked our thinking and “tossed us the ball”.

We ran two very successful evening seminars, which were well attended by a wide variety of people ranging from Early Childhood teachers and Primary School teachers, to University lecturers, Centre Owners and Managers. Many who attended the first evening wished to attend the second as they felt invigorated and excited about what they heard.
Per also worked closely with a group of teachers, Supervisors and Owners in a more in depth collaborative dialogue and spent time visiting a variety of early childhood facilities ranging from community based centres, privately owned centres to church owned kindergartens. On all of these visits he generously shared, observed and partook in their daily programme.

Gillian McAuliffe, from Bold Park Community School, Perth also visited us once again and ran a very exciting seminar on the use of technology within an educational programme for young children. This was very well received with lots of hands on workshops to support her presentation.

Other methods of professional development that RE Provocations planned in 2012, in the hope of promoting a richer understanding of the Reggio Approach, were group trips overseas to both Reggio Emilia to attend the April International Study Group, and to Perth in September to attend the “Conversations with Bold Park Community School” Conference. Both groups benefited from these experiences greatly and the in depth evening discussions that were had most certainly enriched everyone’s learning. Also keeping the group network going once everyone returned home has been integral to the participant’s ongoing growth and understanding.

The offering of Scholarships is still at the backbone of our organization where we annually support a participant to attend the Reggio Study Tour. This has become even more popular as recent financial cuts over the past few years from the NZ Government means that there is no longer any specific training incentive allocation given to centres.

Overall there is still a very strong interest and belief in the Reggio Approach and what this wonderful set of principles and values offer us. It so easily inter weaves itself within our own early childhood curriculum, Te Whaariki.

Our challenge for 2013 is to keep the professional development opportunities happening but to also travel throughout the country more often, offering more seminars in the South Island as well as the North Island. Our commitment remains to ensure that the message in regards to the Reggio Approach is presented in a respectful and truthful manner.