

## Chapter 6 – Reflections on life long learning

‘I will always carry on what I learnt by incorporating my knowledge into wherever I teach.’ (Carolyn Adams, teacher researcher)

### Introduction

This research project has nurtured life long learning through the interactions of teachers, parents, and children within a learning community. Teacher practice is guided by the principles of Te Whāriki and therefore experienced as the community participates in the life of the centre. Participation in the innovative practices of visual art and project work has contributed to learning for all participants in the centre. Ways in which learning manifests itself is not always immediately evident within the early childhood environment however, we have gained some insight into how our practices nurture the foundations for on-going learning. The story shared by a parent in this chapter provides a strong sense of how valuable participation in a community of learners can be for children and adults alike.

### *Te Whāriki as curriculum for a learning community*

The chapters of this report have been structured around individual identity, relationships, community identity and empowerment. If another set of lenses were over-layered on these chapters it would bring into focus the principles of Te Whāriki, the early childhood curriculum. Individual identity has all the hallmarks of the principle holistic development, community identity is strongly embedded in the beliefs that underpin the principle family and community, while the principles of empowerment and relationships are clearly evident.

- Individual identity – Holistic development
- Relationships - Relationships
- Community identity – Family and community
- Empowerment – Empowerment

This learning community considers that the intent of Te Whāriki, the early childhood curriculum, is applicable to every member. An empowering curriculum enables all community participants to have access to the valued areas of learning contained in the curriculum. It would be disempowering to participants of this community to assume the early childhood curriculum principles are applicable to children only.

New Beginnings Preschool exists and lives as a community of learners as the principles of Te Whāriki are enacted for all members of its community. The underpinning aspiration of this description is that all participants of the community, as ‘ready, willing, and able’ learners, will enrich their learning through participation in the early childhood environment and that this learning will equip them with knowledge, skills and dispositions that will enable them to continue learning in other contexts. This holistic view of learning is not always visible within the early childhood setting within the timeframe of the child and families’ attendance. Teachers can notice aspects of learning; however, the true significance does not necessarily show itself until the learner displays his/her competence in other settings. During the final stages of this research project the teacher researcher team gained some insights that affirmed and supported the view that children and adults benefit from participating in an early childhood learning community. The following reflection from a parent, Rachel Barrie, is one example of this understanding. More often than not parents share their experiences through informal conversation. Teachers gain a general sense that experience in early childhood is benefiting their community but this cannot easily be substantiated.

Rachel had shared her interest in visual art during the first year of the research project at which time she was puzzled as to why she saw such a difference between approaches in early childhood and school. Her older son had just begun schooling. She made a comment about her younger son at that time, *“I can only hope that what he (Cole) is learning now will stay with him even when he is told to paint a picture a certain way.”* Eighteen months later Rachel documented the following story for this report after firstly excitedly telling the teachers. The story illustrates that it is not only the child’s prior learning that supports his confidence to participate competently in another setting but also the parent’s. Rachel has confidence in her knowledge to be able to participate by sharing her knowledge with another.

### **Rachel’s story about Cole at school**

**Author Rachel, February 2006**

When Cole had been at school for about two months, his classroom's topic was dinosaurs. One day they were to sew around a Dinosaur outline on material with a needle and thread. Cole had finished his quite a bit ahead of the rest of his class mates and wanted to go and show his other teacher (his class had two teachers) who was in another part of the school at the time. As he seemed quite proud of his work and had finished early he was allowed to go and show her. The next day when I went into school his teacher was quite excited about his sewing and was commenting on how he

had been so quick to grasp the concept of it. This was my opportunity to tell her all about Cole's old preschool and how they were part of COI. I explained all about it and that we had an art teacher, Libby. I told her all the really neat things that the children did with Libby and that Cole had already done sewing with Libby among other things. Cole's teacher was really interested in this and wanted to know all the things they had done. I felt really proud to be explaining this to a school-teacher, and also excited that Cole had been able to experience doing art with Libby, as she allowed the children to explore their creativity. In my experience (with having an older child at school) once they go to school, they are all told how to do their paintings, build their buildings etc. and all their pictures look the same as their classmates'.

Cole really enjoyed his time at preschool and his creativity has continued to show and I hope it always will.

Rachel.

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