

Looking back to move forward: Supporting second language learning in Aotearoa New Zealand

Chelsea Bracefield | *New Zealand Tertiary College*

Today's Aotearoa New Zealand is rich with over 200 spoken languages (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2017). Many of these multilingual speakers are children, which places an importance on language within early childhood education [ECE] settings (Podmore, Hedges, Keegan, & Harvey, 2015). Pre-colonised Aotearoa New Zealand was rich with a variety of dialects of te reo Māori being spoken by the indigenous Māori people. The influence of colonisation and assimilation which came with the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 brought with it the dominance of the English language as Māori were confronted with the 'same rights and duties of citizenship as the people of England' as outlined in article 3 of The Treaty of Waitangi (as cited in Wilson, 2016). For most of the nineteenth and majority of the twentieth century, Aotearoa New Zealand English became more widespread with the differing dialects of te reo Māori being safeguarded within the homes and communities of Māori rather than everyday society (Berryman & Woller, 2011; Ka'ai, 2009). In today's ECE setting, te reo Māori is now recognised as one of three official languages in Aotearoa New Zealand, although its use is not compulsory. Early childhood teachers are more than likely to encounter children who speak English as an additional language [EAL] as well as children speaking and understanding te reo Māori within an ECE setting. With an urgency placed at a political and societal level to redress indigenous language issues, education particularly within ECE, can be seen at the forefront to bring about change to future practice. This calls for ECE teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand to be responsive in creating rich learning environments that are culturally and linguistically accommodating for Māori learners as well as EAL learners.

Introduction

The national early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum (Te Whāriki)* (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2017) recognises and responds to the cultural and linguistic diversity within Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood settings. Teachers are required to reflect upon the history of Aotearoa New Zealand through “emphasis[ing] our bicultural foundation, our multicultural present and the shared future we are creating” (MoE, 2017, p. 2). This article reflects Aotearoa New Zealand's practices and support of children and families from EAL, including Māori learners and second language [L2] learners within ECE settings. These practices are underpinned by a holistic approach to curriculum, conceptualised through a sociocultural discourse. Policies intended to advance children and their families are considered while offering teaching strategies and support for teachers in today's rich multilingual ECE settings.

Language in Aotearoa New Zealand

The disparities amongst Māori in wanting the preservation and use of te reo Māori and the assimilation approach of Pākehā have been highly disputed since the signing of The Treaty of Waitangi at societal and political levels (Berryman & Woller, 2011; Ka'ai, 2009; May, 2002;). The dominance of the English language and western culture became embedded in post-colonised Aotearoa New Zealand after the signing of the *Treaty of Waitangi* (Ka'ai, 2009; Berryman & Woller, 2011). The nurturing and survival of te reo Māori was left to whānau and Māori communities as society placed little emphasis and value on indigenous language learning. Cummins (1997) explains that this language assimilation in both Aotearoa New Zealand and around the world was used to conform indigenous people and L2 learners to the dominant culture and language as a symbol of power. The author further adds this was seen as an equitable opportunity as an L2 was considered a barrier to education participation and success (Cummins, 1997). May (2002) explains this

assimilation approach to language acquisition that started with Māori continued with EAL children when migration began in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1987 the Māori Language Act was passed by the Parliament of Aotearoa New Zealand with its purpose to give Māori language an official status (as cited in Ka'ai, 2009). Cummins (1997) explains that although power can be shared between the dominant and subordinate people at a political level, wider society can generate barriers to this implementation.

There is no doubt that the history of the Māori language has been met with conflict. The recognition of te reo Māori to some extent was acknowledged when Aotearoa New Zealand became one of the founding countries of the United Nations in 1945 (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2014). The declaration "We, the peoples of the United Nations, are determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" (United Nations, 2018, para. 1). However, according to Jenkins (1994) "fluency in Māori was seen to be the cause for deficiency in English - therefore Māori people as well as their language were deliberately discriminated against" (p. 151).

Further, with the influx of migration from Asia and refugee countries, Aotearoa New Zealand shifted from a bicultural nation to a multicultural one as new communities established their homes. May (2002) recounts that through migration, language became largely dominated by English speaking migrants from other colonised countries like Australia, United States of America, Canada, South Africa and Britain. He noted that it was not until the late twentieth century with the migration of Pacific people and refugees from South East Asia that the diversity of languages became prominent. Ideas concerning the view of the first language [L1] as an 'educational obstacle' still excluded other languages in schools. A need to diversify language within Aotearoa New Zealand to support the immigration of first-generation children, families and communities was called for as many were learning to speak EAL. This created a further equity issue for Māori, given the response toward their language historically. Within twenty-first century Aotearoa New Zealand, the 2013 Census (Stats NZ, 2014) indicated that 18.6% of the population identified themselves as being multilingual speakers with more than one language near fluently. Amongst these, te reo Māori, Samoan, Hindi, Northern Chinese (including Mandarin), French and Yue (Cantonese) were identified as being the most common languages spoken (Stats NZ, 2014).

Policies and curriculum

During the late twentieth century in Aotearoa New Zealand, social justice and inclusion of all people, particularly children, became contested more openly. In 1982, the opening of the first Te Kōhanga Reo (Māori language nest) signalled an increased demand to redress the language crisis that Māori faced (Pollock, as cited in Tearney, 2016). This was followed by Pacific Island language nests to promote L1 use amongst children, their families and their communities (Tearney, 2016). Language within education was beginning to diversify to represent an increase in its multiplicity. This began social and political discussions regarding the position and potential of ECE settings becoming a vehicle to address such concerns. The need for Māori children to be totally immersed in te reo and te ao Māori medium was now becoming a significant movement as was multiculturalism. According to Jenkins (1994), in promoting multiculturalism, it was thought that in turn it "... would quieten Māori demands for their language and culture to be taught in schools as well as placate mainstream New Zealand and encourage tolerance and restraint" (p. 153).

As the social consciousness surrounding the quality and care of ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand grew, the report *Education to be More* (Department of Education, 1988) was published highlighting many social injustices for minority children, particularly Māori. Recommendations included that early childhood services needed to provide more equity for children, their parents and families. The importance afforded to the recognition of languages and cultures indicated a renewed view of young children (Meade & Podmore, 2002). This led to the release of the *Before Five* (Department of Education, 1988) publication and was a response which emphasised the importance of upholding and valuing the Treaty of Waitangi principles of protection, partnership and participation within ECE. This was particularly more so with Te Kōhanga Reo and the wider early childhood sector (Tearney, 2016). The Education Act (1989) that would follow soon after

accentuated the importance of recognising the official Aotearoa New Zealand languages of English, New Zealand Sign Language [NZSL] and te reo Māori. An importance was placed on education reflecting the cultural identity of Māori through language and knowledge to uphold the Treaty of Waitangi within Kura Kaupapa and mainstream education (New Zealand Legislation, 2018). In the same year, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCROC] was established. Aotearoa New Zealand endorsed UNCROC in 1993 which saw the government pledge to uphold and protect the rights of children, namely from discrimination and to provide support for those children who were from minority groups affirming the social and political discourses that prevailed at the time (The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1990).

Such discourses paved the way for the development of the first early childhood curriculum. The *Draft Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Programmes in Early Childhood Services* (MoE, 1993) was a response to educational reforms of the 1980s-1990s. The original *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) became the first bicultural curriculum document and reflected the unique place and position of Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand. The curriculum *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) are the guidelines by which ECE teachers working in licensed and chartered ECE settings would uphold. It was intended to support the preservation of the Māori language, culture and identity/ies of Māori children, their families and communities. This would also emphasise important work within Te Kōhanga Reo and recognise "... the distinctive role of an identifiable Māori curriculum that protects Māori language and tikānga, Māori pedagogy, and the transmitting of Māori knowledge, skills, and attitudes through using Māori language" (MoE, 1996, p. 12).

The first *Te Whāriki* emphasised two distinctive contexts: Māori immersion programs and Tagata Pasifika programs. Te reo and te ao Māori were embedded in *Te Whāriki* to be valued and actively used within both immersion and mainstream early childhood settings (MoE, 1996). However, with such a concentrated emphasis on te reo Māori, it might appear that other languages and cultures could potentially be overlooked. This document was used within the ECE sector for over 20 years until an updated version was needed to reflect the change in sector ideologies and societal need. With the recently revised curriculum, the current *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) encompasses and represents a more multicultural society. It validates "societal changes, shifts in policy and considerable educational research around curriculum, assessment, pedagogy and practice" (MoE, 2017, p. 7). The recognition of children's identity, language and culture are explicit within the document. Teachers are encouraged to value and foster the home language, culture and the home-life experiences each child brings with them to the early childhood services. This is while upholding the bicultural foundation of Aotearoa New Zealand through the implementation of te reo, te ao and ngā tikānga Māori. The importance and relevance of such ideas, calls for early childhood teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand to be responsive in supporting English language learners [ELL] and EAL children and families. Inclusion, equity and social justice for all learners become important considerations that should be at the heart of teaching and learning for and of children.

Language acquisition

Kim and Plotka (2016) articulate that L1 acquisition is a process that all children in early childhood are capable of. Drury (2013) contends that L2 acquisition is not a natural process for children and therefore requires active support. Key language development theorists articulate differing beliefs of how language is acquired amongst children. Skinner (as cited in Berk, 2010) takes a behaviourist approach to learning and believed that during infancy and toddlerhood, children learnt language through the imitation of a particular interaction. This was also influenced by their culture and their environment (Berk, 2010). Similarly, Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological systems (as cited in Berk, 2010) proposed that children were influenced by all interactions within and between their micro and meso systems. For language learning, the mesosystem connections between the school and families worked in relation to the child's microsystem to create a partnership with shared responsibilities for developing the child's language (Harper & Pelletier, 2010). Based on Bronfenbrenner's theory, Epstein (as cited in Lahaie, 2008) believed that three overlapping spheres between family, school and community were influential on a child's education. Epstein's theory suggested that these spheres were

largely independent of each other but overlapped to indicate how each interconnected and interplayed to influence a child's education, particularly language (Lahaie, 2008). However, in contrast, language development theorist Chomsky (as cited in Berk, 2010) believed that children were cognitively equipped from birth with a language acquisition device. Chomsky suggests a universal set of grammar rules for a specific cultural environment enables children to understand language and fosters the ability to speak. While there are differences amongst these theories, a key trend is the influence of culture on language development and acquisition.

As emphasised by language development theories, parents and families of EAL children and L2 learners play a vital role in the acquisition of language. Harper and Pelletier (2010) found that positive parental involvement within ECE settings is directly related to the academic development of a child. This idea resonates in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) which states that ECE teachers should look to establish “share[d] decision-making with” parents and whānau (p. 35). This means that teachers who seek parent collaboration and partnership can enhance the learning for child/ren within ECE settings. A particular emphasis of this partnership between teachers, parents and whānau of EAL and L2 learner families is highlighted in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017), “Children’s learning and development is enhanced when culturally appropriate ways of communicating are used and when parents, whānau and community are encouraged to participate in and contribute to the curriculum” (p. 20). However, the challenges of this should also be considered. Lahaie (2008) found that some parents from an EAL felt fear and a sense of discomfort being involved in their child’s learning due to their own education and the language barrier. Harper and Pelletier (2010) further supported this idea by highlighting parents’ and families’ own beliefs about their own language can cause barriers to their involvement within the ECE setting. In addition, they noted that L2 acquisition was greatly improved when teachers collaborated and shared information with parents and families about learning in the ECE setting while gaining knowledge about the child’s home environment. This indicates that teachers could face barriers to inclusion; however, the benefits outweigh these for language acquisition and L2 learning for children such as lack of parental involvement. Through collaboration and active engagement with parents and families of EAL children and L2 learners, a sense of community can be established to not only preserve and build upon the child’s L1 but to grow English competencies that are meaningful for all.

Research into L2 acquisition highlights an important phase that some L2 learners go through and is identified as the ‘silent period’ (Berryman & Woller, 2011; Drury, 2013; Takemoto, Tait, & Gleeson, 2017). During this stage of language acquisition, Drury (2013) noted EAL children will respond non-verbally, particularly if their L1 is not perceived as being useful within the ECE setting environment. She believed that during this time, EAL children are able to familiarise themselves with the L2 and the context in which it is used, with many practising it in private before gaining confidence to begin to communicate verbally. Lim (as cited in Takemoto et al., 2017) agrees and adds that even in silence, language knowledge and skills are constructed as children observe and copy those within the environment. However, as Gillanders, Castro and Franco (2014) highlight, when EAL children are exposed to the English language only within an environment such as their early childhood setting, their language acquisition will be specific to that context, particularly if it is not used in other environments. The authors further add that to overcome this, teachers need to value the sociocultural experiences that EAL children and L2 learners bring to the ECE setting and teach them useful language for both centre and home contexts. This means that for EAL learners to fully acquire English as an L2, teachers need to actively engage with learners verbally during this non-verbal stage to model and create a rich language environment to support L2 acquisition (Berryman & Woller, 2011).

A study of four early childhood centres in Aotearoa New Zealand identified four key attributes for successful language acquisition and learning for EAL children and L2 learners within ECE settings (Podmore et al., 2015). These were wellbeing and belonging in the environment, relationships and recognition of their identity as a learner, contribution through the concept of tuakana/teina, and providing an environment which is rich in the language and culture of learners (Podmore et al., 2015). These ideas link to traditional Māori education views that language is acquired through socialisation within the family environment (Ka'ai, 2009). It is also echoed within *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017). To establish

belonging for children, Kim and Plotka (2016) emphasise that children's L1 must be strongly developed in order for an L2 to be acquired. It is suggested that to fully support L2 acquisition amongst children, the environment, including the teachers within it, must apply a credit-based lens. This involves recognising the funds of knowledge that each learner brings from their L1 and builds upon them (Park, 2014; Podmore et al., 2015). The rich prior knowledge the child has already established must not be disregarded. This idea represents the need to recognise children's prior knowledge and validates traditional Māori pedagogy (Ka'ai, 2009). Drury (2013) urges teachers of EAL children and L2 learners to be able to recognise and hear what children do not say particularly surrounding their body language, in order to understand their needs. In doing so, this can establish trusting relationships whereby children have confidence to engage in English language learning. Through valuing the EAL children's cultural and linguistic heritage and recognising their funds of knowledge, the early childhood teachers and ECE settings will be more suitable and equipped to support and promote meaningful L2 learning.

In practice

Podmore et al. (2015) found in their research that "learners in Aotearoa New Zealand are increasingly likely to speak more than one language" (p. 2). This means that the twenty-first century teacher needs to be equipped with knowledge and training to support children, families and communities from potential EAL within early childhood settings and be willing to do so. Dobinson and Buchori's (2016) research of Australian early childhood teachers found that their respective teacher education programs did not prepare them well to support and promote L2 learning. The need for appropriate teaching strategies was absent. Drury (2013) attributes this lack of intrinsic motivation and knowledge to be the reason behind so many missed opportunities to promote language growth within today's ECE settings. Teachers need to be and feel prepared to not only support children and families but to be adequately equipped with the knowledge, skills, teaching strategies and pedagogy to embrace the myriad of languages present within today's ECE setting (MoE, 2017).

A key teaching strategy discussed in the literature to support L2 learning is the notion of co-construction. MacNaughton and Williams (2009) explain that through the co-constructing of knowledge, children and teachers work together to formulate meaning and understanding while deepening knowledge in a particular area. As highlighted above, EAL children and L2 learners will typically go through a silent period while learning another language. Park's (2014) observation of a teacher in a North American preschool found that when the teacher intentionally and meaningfully used both verbal and non-verbal communication methods within her practice, EAL children were more inclined to engage. The idea of using both verbal and non-verbal communication techniques to support L2 learners is widely acknowledged (Berryman & Woller, 2011; May, 2002; Park, 2014;). Berryman and Woller (2011) state that during L2 learning, teachers should respond to all L2 that a child says with positivity. Teachers should co-construct meaning through both verbal and non-verbal methods. This is because the authors found that when teachers say 'I don't understand' to a child's attempt in their L2, it can prolong the silent period and lower confidence for the child in using their L2 use. Hyson (2004, 2008, as cited in Park, 2014) adds that teachers should also seek to hear what children do not say and recognise the language expressed through "facial expressions... gestures, eye contact and body language" (p. 20). This emphasises the need for teachers to actively engage, support and be responsive to EAL children and L2 learners' language within their practice. Dobinson and Buchori (2016) further add that teachers need to scaffold and support L2 learning through asking questions, regardless of whether the child responds, as it further co-constructs ideas of what language means. Gillanders et al. (2014) found within their research a common misconception amongst teachers supporting L2 learners is that they should only support children's emerging interests and child-led exploration rather than directly engaging and teaching language. The authors further emphasise that in order for teachers to support and promote L2 engagement and learning, teachers must introduce children to language in a range of contexts to broaden their knowledge within the early childhood context and everyday situations. Gillanders et al. (2014) also point out that co-construction can be further developed through contextualisation of verbal language with visual aids such as pictures

to help learners understand the meaning and context of the language. This further emphasises that through co-constructing language with children, it will deepen the learners' understanding of the world around them.

Another teaching strategy that is widely discussed in the literature is community building. MacNaughton and Williams (2009) explain that through community building, the sense of belonging is created for all. Pianta (as cited in Park, 2014) found negative relationships between teachers and children were more likely to be a disadvantage towards future social and academic achievement. This stresses the need for teachers to actively seek and engage in positive relationships with EAL children and L2 learners to lay the foundation for future educational success. Such relationships between EAL children and their families are fundamental to successful inclusion and support. This means that while relationships are key with learners, teachers must also seek to build relationships with parents and families to get an understanding of the whole child. The idea of relationship building is echoed in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 2017) whereby teachers are encouraged to work alongside parents and families to gather aspirations for children's learning. Berryman and Woller (2011) encourage teachers to talk with parents and families to find out what children already know in their L1 and use this as a strategy to build upon during L2 learning. Teachers must strive to establish and maintain positive relationships with not only L2 learners but also their parents and families to support language acquisition and development within the ECE setting.

Through the facilitation of the environment, MacNaughton and Williams (2009) explain that teachers can create intentional and well-organised environments, based on the ideas and needs of children. This includes the use of language within a rich multilingual environment promoting diversity. A simple way of doing this as suggested by Berryman and Woller (2011) is for teachers to greet learners in their home languages, to welcome them into the ECE setting. This is particularly important for infants and toddlers who are still developing competency in their L1 (May, 2002). Kim and Plotka's (2016) research indicated that for children to have success in L2 learning, teachers should reach out to parents and families through using parent and families' L1 both verbally and in written form to support and promote participation within the ECE setting. This way, teachers can learn and then support L1 of children within the ECE setting through songs, books and activities in both children's L1 and L2 (Kim & Plotka, 2016).

Another way to facilitate the ECE setting is to offer a play-based curriculum. Early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand is largely based on a free play, child-led pedagogy (MoE, 2017). Takemoto et al. (2017) found within their research that peer-to-peer interactions through play positively supported L2 learners' understanding of language and context. Further, the authors' research indicated that teachers should allow time for peer interaction through free play which supports a sense of belonging as friendships are established. This also creates communities of practice among children (Takemoto et al., 2017). This is particularly achievable within an early childhood context whereby learning through play is highly valued by teachers, society and the government.

Lastly, teachers should seek to encourage and praise L2 learners within the ECE setting. MacNaughton and Williams (2009) explain that through encouragement, learners are supported and reassured to build confidence in areas they are developing. This means that teachers must shift their thinking and pedagogy to acknowledge and recognise the language needs of L2 learners to move from an isolating and exclusionary ECE setting to a more inclusive and inviting one (Dobinson & Buchori, 2016; May, 2002). Gillanders et al. (2014) explain that when teachers begin to purposefully and intentionally engage with L2 learners a sense of belonging is created. Park (2014) further explains that teachers need to recognise and respond to L2 learners with a credit base and view ELL as "capable, independent and creative learners" (p. 24). Positive attitudes of L2 learners are critical in supporting their cognitive and social development in language development and acquisition (Park, 2014). Through encouragement and praise, L2 learners are more supported to establish more trusting relationships, which lay the foundation for L2 acquisition within the ECE setting.

Conclusion

Supporting and safeguarding home language, particularly within the ECE sector, has become contested discourse within the last decade. As this article has highlighted, early childhood teachers have the varied task of supporting and scaffolding all learners in their language acquisition to promote a sense of belonging as well as embed cultural identity for each learner. A particular emphasis should be considered surrounding the importance of recognising the funds of knowledge that home language can bring for EAL and Māori children to an ECE setting. Through creating a rich, multilingual ECE setting, teachers demonstrate their value for cultural and linguistic diversity for all children, including Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand to become responsive and inclusive of the needs of all learners within an ECE setting. The research in this article has asserted that children come into ECE settings equipped with the cognitive capacity for L2 acquisition. It has also suggested intentional strategies that teachers can apply and use within practice to facilitate a rich multilingual ECE setting that places value on both verbal and non-verbal languages. Culturally responsive and linguistically diverse ECE settings can hold great value for all children, their families and teachers. The accountability is placed on teachers of Aotearoa New Zealand to learn and intentionally teach the L1 of EAL children as well the three official languages of Aotearoa New Zealand within their practice to ensure a sense of belonging for each child within today's ECE settings.

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