

Chapter 63

The Aotearoa New Zealand Curriculum Te Whāriki as a Basis for Developing Dispositions of Inclusion: Early Childhood Student Teachers Partnering With Families as Part of Their Pedagogical Practice

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ABSTRACT

Over the last 20 years Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki, has required and supported inclusive approaches to the active participation of disabled children and their families in everyday early childhood settings. The revised Te Whāriki, released in 2017, further places an onus of responsibility on teachers to resist inequity and exclusion experienced by disabled children through its focus on nurturing respectful, responsive relationships with families and honoring the knowledge parents bring with them as experts on their children. This chapter explores how Te Whāriki and initial teacher education (ITE) programs in Aotearoa New Zealand can act on each other to produce student teacher practice that is inclusive of family perspectives. Te Whāriki is a bicultural curriculum and recognizes the Crown's earlier commitment to the indigenous people of New Zealand. This also acknowledges the role of families in early childhood settings as equal partners in establishing aspirations for their children's learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last twenty years Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996), has encouraged and supported inclusive approaches to the active participation of disabled children and their families in everyday early childhood settings¹. The revised Te Whāriki, (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017) further places an onus of responsibility on teachers to resist inequity and exclusion experienced by disabled children through its focus on nurturing respectful, responsive relationships with families and honoring the kete (basket) of knowledge parents bring with them as experts on their children. Teachers are to foster an understanding of the curriculum as a 'mat for all to stand on' (whāriki is the Aotearoa New Zealand indigenous word for mat) that recognizes how children's wellbeing and sense of belonging is interdependent with that of their parents and families (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017). In this chapter, we wish to explore the possibilities for how Te Whāriki and initial teacher education (ITE) programs in Aotearoa New Zealand work together to produce practice in early childhood student teachers that is inclusive of family perspectives. This has in part been achieved by creating a curriculum that is first and foremost about offering a bicultural experience in early childhood education (ECE) settings. Another feature of the curriculum is the way it prioritises the development of children's dispositions – "tendencies to respond to situations in particular ways" (p.22) – as key learning outcomes. This same concept can be used by student teachers to think about what tendencies they have to respond to situations within their own practice (O'Neill, Hansen & Lewis, 2014).

THE AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND CONTEXT: CURRICULUM, INCLUSION, AND DIVERSITY

Te Whāriki is a bicultural curriculum underpinned by a Te Ao Māori world view (in recognition of the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand) that children are pounamu (greenstone, or treasure), a vital link between tīpuna (ancestors) and their family of now, as well as mokopuna (descendants) yet to come (Hemara, 2000; Lee, Carr, Soutar & Mitchell, 2013). Disabled children are not apart from this view of children as pounamu, and are seen in Te Ao Māori as being equally as capable and competent as their peers. Te Ao Māori also acknowledges the interplay of past, present and future in constructing the people, places, objects and practices seen as being important to children's participation and learning (Macfarlane, 2004). It demands a holistic lens be applied to this participation and learning in considering how Te Whāriki's aspiration statement of children being able to "grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society" (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2017, p.7) comes to be realized by all.

Te Whāriki as a Biculturally Inclusive Curriculum

Te Whāriki as a bicultural curriculum respects the role, right and place of Māori as indigenous people to Aotearoa New Zealand. This means a binding obligation on all members of early childhood settings to protect and promote Maori language, culture and meaning making. Te Whāriki was designed to provide a curriculum basis for making Te Ao Māori of everyday relevance in highlighting tikanga Māori

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