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Special Section on Theorising Pedagogy

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A PHILOSOPHICAL ANCHOR FOR CREATING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: ANTI-BIAS PHILOSOPHY AND *TE WHĀRIKI: EARLY CHILDHOOD CURRICULUM*

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ABSTRACT *The basic premise of this paper is that inclusion in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand is a worthy focus of early childhood education curriculum and that an anti-bias philosophy assists in developing curriculum that is inclusive. It is claimed that the early childhood curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand is an emancipatory one, and arguments for activism and anti-bias principles in support of curriculum implementation are made. Drawing on anti-bias principles, the current curriculum statement (*Te Whāriki: Early Childhood Curriculum*) is examined to ascertain what support for anti-bias foci exists. Teaching strategies based upon discussion, critical thinking and an awareness of diversity themes/difference are considered in support of active anti-bias work in early childhood education.*

INTRODUCTION

Creating early childhood education that is inclusive and welcoming to the teachers, children and families who make up the community of an early childhood centre is no easy task. All early childhood communities are unique and many strive to reflect Šapon-Shevin's (1996) image of inclusion; communities "in which all members feel they belong and feel that they can make a contribution" (p. 255). Groups in New Zealand-based early childhood education that realise this image of 'community' resonate with a unique message of inclusion; "*welcome to all, haere mai ki te whakahotahi tātou i a tātou, let us join together to build a community*" (Source unknown).

In Aotearoa New Zealand there exists a legislative and philosophical framework that provides structural support for the design and delivery of inclusive early childhood education. The *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* [DOPs], (Ministry of Education [MOE], 1996a); *Te Whāriki: Early Childhood Curriculum* (MOE, 1996b, hereafter referred to as *Te Whāriki*) and *Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations* (New Zealand Government, 1998) each reflect inclusive ideals. They contribute to the creation of community oriented, welcoming and inclusive early childhood services.

Even with such structural support, however, it is a challenge in my experience in early childhood education to attain and sustain a state of inclusivity. Programmes that enable children 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"

(MOE, 1996a, 1998, p. 14) are difficult to negotiate and achieve. Nevertheless, it is this challenge, and these difficulties, to which I am committed and with which my current research is concerned. The prime aspiration articulated above encapsulates my belief in the emancipatory purposes of early childhood education. It reflects my conviction that an activist approach towards creating inclusive early childhood communities is necessary in creating education for positive social transformation and change. It opens me to deliberation in this paper about the possible merits of using anti-bias education foci as a way to strategise inclusive teaching in early childhood education.

TE WHĀRIKI: A TRANSFORMATIVE STATEMENT

“One has to constantly realise that all educational policies and practices have social implications. They either perpetuate exclusion or injustice or they assist us in constructing the conditions for social transformation” (Friere, in Apple, Gandin & Hypolito, 2001, p. 129). Designing early childhood education that assists in constructing conditions for social transformation requires clear guidelines, strong conviction and real support for the teachers and family/whānau involved. Contributing to the creation of conditions for social transformation, early childhood services can provide support in the lives of young children and their families/whānau to counter injustice and exclusion, a worthy aim according to Shiraj-Blatchford (1996) and one which is reflected in the current curriculum statement (MOE, 1996b).

The early childhood curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand has, at its very core, a theme to empower. The impetus to create curriculum that supports children (and, by association, families) to develop skills and abilities to access that which is necessary for independence and to direct their own lives (Carr, May & Ministry of Education, 1992), is reflected in the principles, strands and goals of the curriculum. This theme of empowerment resonates with Ritchie’s (1995) notion of education as a “political act of hope” (p. 81): the act of hope being the empowered child, an image echoing Habermas’ recognition of the need for an emancipated society (McGee, 1997).

A clear commitment to inclusion and equity existed in the development process of the early childhood curriculum document. It was, however, an acknowledged challenge for the curriculum development project members (Carr, 1991). Turning equitable and inclusive aspirations of the curriculum into practice remains, in my experience, a challenge. Strategising a progressive direction that supports teachers’ attempts to create inclusive settings is the focus of my current deliberations about early childhood education. Anti-bias principles may provide a pathway towards inclusivity. Carr (1993) suggests “a curriculum contributes to making available to the next generation the knowledge, skills and attitudes valued by the culture” (p. 15). She goes on to explain that different people make sense of their worlds, communicate and live their lives in different ways. Communicating and teaching with the support of anti-bias principles creates educational communities where individuals and groups can contribute their perspectives to the whole to make their educational experiences inclusive, equitable and empowering.

ANTI-BIAS EDUCATION: AN ACTIVIST STANCE

Reflecting the relevance of anti-bias ideas to a broad audience, anti-bias education has been conceptualised in almost as many different ways as there have been articles published on the topic. Derman-Sparks (in Dau, 2001) reveals the international relevance of anti-bias discourse, saying that the “goals of anti-bias education transcend national and cultural boundaries” and adding that “educators must pay careful and respectful attention to the cultural contexts of the children and families they serve ... each caregiver and teacher must recreate the specifics of anti-bias education within their communities” (p. ix). It is unlikely that there could ever be a unitary view on an application of anti-bias principles in an educational context. This would be contradictory to the cause. What might exist, however, is a collection of standpoints on the application of anti-bias principles that foreground and background various anti-bias objectives in particular contexts. It is, as Derman-Sparks (in Dau, 2001) suggests, for each community to interpret and apply anti-bias principles according to their own needs and contexts.

There are, as I indicated above, a number of perspectives on anti-bias education: as a philosophy (Davey Zeece, 1998), an approach (Wardle, 1996), a programme (Hall & Rhomberg, 1995), an environment (Barta & Winn, 1996), and a curriculum (Derman-Sparks, 1989; Hohensee & Derman-Sparks, 1992; Swadener & Marsh, 1995). All these perspectives associate anti-bias with actual educational settings at the practical level. They also centre anti-bias within diversity and equity discourses. Combined they present an image of education in which children and teachers are both challenged to counter oppression and asked to examine its personal consequences. These perspectives reveal an activist approach to education that asks teachers to work against negative effects of bias on children, themselves and their communities.

Activism and inclusion are familiar aims of several educational philosophies, including, for example, equity and multicultural education. Anti-bias philosophy, however, goes beyond traditional multicultural and equity education philosophies and includes consideration of broader forms of bias, stereotyping and misinformation such as classist stereotypes or heterosexist bias (see, for example, Almeida, 1996; Byrnes, 1996). Social justice themes have long been intertwined with early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Fairness, inclusion and equity are commonly articulated values in the field (Early childhood education strategic plan working group, 2001; May, 2001; May, 1990; Meade [Report of the early childhood care and education working group], 1988; MOE, 1993, 1996b; Smith & Swain, 1988). In the draft early childhood curriculum statement (MOE, 1993), there was a clearly articulated message that early childhood curriculum included experiences which were “humanly, nationally, culturally, developmentally, individually and educationally appropriate” (p. 13). There is, I think, a far less visible concern in the presently adopted curriculum (MOE, 1996b) with those ideas. However, the image of the “empowered” child suggests that they remain in focus.

A good deal of contemporary literature about anti-bias education is seen in North American, Canadian and, more recently, Australian contexts. Related research concerning equity and multicultural educational foci are more commonly found in the literature of Aotearoa New Zealand and the United Kingdom. There are direct references to anti-bias foci in our early childhood philosophical and legislative guidelines (MOE, 1996a; MOE, 1998), yet, conceptually, anti-bias has stayed at the edges of theoretical deliberations. This is perhaps a consequence of

its perceived North American beginnings which lead some to question its relevance to the Aotearoa New Zealand context, or perhaps in Aotearoa New Zealand we have simply been more focused on our own curriculum development and implementation processes. Anti-bias philosophy has featured somewhat in the teacher education programmes in my workplace since before I became involved, and has somehow seemed too significant to 'let go' amongst the process of continual course review and revision. Perhaps more national debate and consideration will eventuate as recent anti-bias literature finds its way into our educational discourse. This paper sits for me as an invitation to investigate the potential of and justification for active anti-bias work in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is not my intention to 'sell' an anti-bias programme but, rather, to use the concept of anti-bias philosophy to firm up a potential worldview (an anti-bias lens, so to speak) with which to view inclusive early childhood education. This paper is an invitation to consider an image of inclusive early childhood settings and an opportunity to strategise curriculum to support this.

A CONTINUUM OF ANTI-OPPRESSIVE PHILOSOPHIES

There are clear similarities amongst multicultural, equity and anti-bias philosophies and I would not consider them exclusive to each other but, rather, as positions on a continuum of philosophies concerned with discrimination, oppression and social justice. Rodriguez (1986) identifies fair and just treatment of all members of society as features of both equity and multicultural education. This too is a central notion of anti-bias curriculum (Derman-Sparks, 1989). Equity, multicultural and anti-bias philosophies all work to address access to and inclusion in education settings. Working within an anti-bias philosophy, however, requires teachers to go further than arguing for access to and inclusion in education settings. Maintaining an activist orientation, it compels teachers to question and work towards removing the barriers to inclusion that existed in the first place.

Anti-bias philosophy asks teachers to move towards actively uncovering and examining bias in education and society and examining the forces that enable discrimination to occur. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the call for such activity is reflected in literature that ascribes to an image of early childhood teachers as altruistic advocates (see, for example, Early childhood education code of ethics for Aotearoa New Zealand, 1995; Smith, Gollop, Marshall & Nairn, 2000). Here we see teachers as people who can contribute to "recognising the rights of all children, and responding by changing systems, policies and individuals to ensure that they are given the opportunity to reach their potential and improve the processes which affect their daily lives" (Smith et al., 2000, p. 191). The methodology of activism that permeates anti-bias philosophy and challenges structural inequity (Almeida, 1996; Byrne, 1996; Pelo, 2002; Swadener & Marsh, 1995) is that which I consider makes anti-bias philosophy unique in relation to equity and multicultural education initiatives. By default, working with an anti-bias philosophy requires a dynamic approach to confronting diversity issues at individual, institutional and societal levels (Adams, Bell & Griffin, 1997).

A PHILOSOPHICAL ANCHOR FOR ANTI-BIAS WORK IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

I have, through my reading of the literature, centred upon what I think of as a philosophical anchor from which anti-bias work can support solutions for countering discrimination and promoting equity causes in early childhood education. My anchor's principles serve less as guideposts to practice (or objectives for programming) and more as processes for thinking about discrimination, oppression and anti-bias philosophy in early childhood education as it relates to Aotearoa New Zealand. They resonate with other writers' ideas about anti-bias work (Corson, 2000; Dau, 2001; Derman-Sparks, 1989) and allow operational curriculum (McGee, 1997) in New Zealand-based early childhood programmes that supports teachers to question oppression and exclusion, and to critically examine effects of discrimination on both those who perpetuate and those who experience it. My philosophical anchor is built around four principles that enable teachers and children:

- to challenge the oppression of individuals and groups on the basis of ethnicity, gender, ability, religious conviction, sexual-orientation and socio-economic status;
- to acknowledge, respect and value individuals and groups, thereby nurturing a positive sense of identity;
- to challenge exclusion and to establish curriculum in which all populations of a centre's community are included and represented; and
- to critically examine discrimination and oppression in order to minimise their negative effects on individuals and groups.

Anti-bias Philosophy and Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education centres are often the first significant educational institution outside of the home that children and families encounter, and they provide an ideal context for the transmission of education anchored to anti-bias principles. Vandebroek (2000) asserts that early childhood educators can help children experience negotiation between different reference groups because they "represent the first new milieu that a child experiences outside the home environment" (p. 5). Corson (2000) draws attention to the early role that early childhood teachers can fulfil in countering bias, saying that early childhood programmes play a critical role in children's learning and socialisation processes because they link children and families between home and school. Further support for anti-bias philosophy is given by Swadener and Marsh (1995) who point out that anti-bias curriculum "challenges existing prejudices, stereotypes, and discriminatory behaviour and attitudes in young children's development and interactions just at a time when they are being internalised" (p. 176). Early childhood education settings are potentially useful institutions in which the principle of inclusion can permeate the foundation of young children's educational experiences. As was alluded to in the introduction to this paper, in Aotearoa New Zealand we find legislative and philosophical support for inclusive early childhood settings. In part, this support comes through *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 1996b), the current early childhood curriculum statement.

To construct inclusive early childhood education, we need curriculum that meets the specific needs of individuals and groups within a frame that acknowledges and works against ideological oppression in broader society:

It is necessary to go beyond content coverage of such topics such as cultural diversity, human rights, tolerance and prejudice and consider ways to engage children in rethinking any prejudice and misinformation they may possess. We must involve students in discussions that help them to justify, express and reconsider their view in light of new information. (Wade, 1994, cited in Byrnes, 1996, p. 16)

Curriculum is a multi-faceted concept, with its meaning negotiated differently in a range of contexts. In this section of the paper, 'curriculum' is being used to describe the 'product' variety of curriculum: *Te Whāriki: Early Childhood Curriculum*, the statement of curriculum published by the Ministry of Education (1996b). It is a prime intent of this article to ascertain what support this document lends to anti-bias philosophical directions. Several anti-bias principles have earlier been proposed and, in this section of the paper, each is used to 'read' aspects of the curriculum statement with an anti-bias lens.

In order to investigate the support that *Te Whāriki* (MOE, 1996b) lends to anti-bias philosophy, I have chosen to examine the preamble to the document's principles and the actual principles themselves. The principles provide a foundation upon which the rest of the curriculum strand and goal statements are built. If anti-bias foci are to be found in the curriculum, they will first be embedded in the principle statements. In examining the preamble (Part A) to the curriculum strands and goals, I am seeking to interpret what support for anti-bias foci exists in the parameters of the curriculum, the section of the document in which the Government's Ministry of Education explains the context and application of its curriculum aims. It is within 'Part A' of the document that an interpretation of intent with regards the curriculum as an inclusive document should, I think, be situated.

Te Whāriki and Anti-bias Principles

The first principle within my anti-bias philosophical anchor was:

- to challenge the oppression of individuals and groups on the basis of ethnicity, gender, ability, religious conviction, sexual-orientation and socio-economic status.

My reading of the curriculum statement reveals direct reference to most of these diversity themes. Disability, ethnicity, relationships (in particular) between Māori, Pakeha and Pacific Nations peoples (MOE, 1996b, p. 10); gender, economic status (ibid, p. 17); and spirituality (a potential reference to religious diversity) (ibid, p. 41) are all directly mentioned. No specific mention of challenging heterosexism is 'read' in the text. In one sense this is not surprising, and it parallels the non-inclusion of this diversity theme in early anti-bias literature. The curriculum statement was developed in the early 1990s and much anti-bias literature was developed around the same time. It has been only recently that concern for heterosexist bias or homophobia has begun to enter into our educational discourse, and our anti-bias one (see, for example, Carter, 1998; Dau, 2001).

Within the document there is reference to the contribution that early childhood services make “towards countering racism and other forms of prejudice” (MOE, 1996b, p. 18). Whilst no direct anti-stereotyping messages were interpreted from the examined sections of the document, there is an implied expectation that stereotyping shall be countered, and this is linked to the notion that in order “to learn and develop to their potential, children must be respected and valued as individuals” (ibid, p. 40). These curriculum directions are supported by DOPs’ expectations that teachers model non-discriminatory behaviour and include strategies to include all children as part of their teaching practices (MOE, 1996a).

The second principle was:

- to acknowledge, respect and value individuals and groups, thereby nurturing a positive sense of identity.

Identity development is a feature once more in the DOPs (MOE, 1996a) where we see teachers with a responsibility to implement curriculum and assessment practices that enhance children’s sense of themselves as capable and competent learners. *Te Whāriki* shapes this position further by outlining specific directions for supporting children’s identity development in the New Zealand context.

Te Whāriki (MOE, 1996b) is the first example of a bi-cultural curriculum that has been developed in Aotearoa New Zealand. This, coupled with the aspiration of the curriculum that focuses on concepts such as competence, belonging and making valued contributions to society, suggests concern for the level of respect children are afforded in society and for their identity development. The curriculum aims to preserve the cultural heritages of both partners to Te Tiriti O Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi whilst broadening its perspective to recognise the particular contribution that living in Aotearoa New Zealand makes to children and families from Pacific Islands nations.

The curriculum document takes account of the range of environments surrounding children that impact on their learning. The notion that the quality of the relationships between children’s significant settings, such as home and early childhood centre, will have a direct impact on the quality of learning opportunities that are offered to children is raised. Such a strong focus on partnership with families shows concern in the curriculum with nurturing children’s sense of identity. Through creating learning settings that are connected to broader contexts (home, neighbourhood, community) and using these to help plan programmes for children’s learning and development, the curriculum recognises the role early childhood education can contribute to the development of individuals’ identities in their cultural context.

With respect to culture (noted specifically in relation to ethnicity), “the early childhood curriculum supports the cultural identity of all children, affirms and celebrates cultural differences and aims to help children gain a positive awareness of their own and other cultures” (MOE, 1996b, p. 18).

The curriculum principle of empowerment highlights the role of early childhood curriculum in assisting children to develop an enhanced sense of self-worth, identity, confidence and enjoyment. In striving for this principle within early childhood settings, teachers plan programmes where children are “respected and valued as individuals [and] they have rights to personal dignity, equitable opportunities for participation, to protection from mental, physical and emotional

abuse or injury" (MOE, 1996b, p. 40). Few of these hopes could be realised without a commitment to respect and children's identity development.

The third principle in my anti-bias anchor set out to:

- challenge exclusion and to establish curriculum in which all populations of a centre's community are included and represented.

Within the curriculum statement, the opinion that early childhood services are jointly involved (with family/whānau) in the education of young children is stated. This supports an expectation that partnership in early childhood education between early childhood services and their populations is paramount. Through partnership, potential for the development of a sense of belonging (a curriculum strand) for children and families is nurtured through connections between centre, home and the broader community. The DOPs (MOE, 1996a) also takes up this cause – containing an entire section of requirements relating to the way early childhood teachers communicate and consult with their communities.

Inclusion is clearly an aim of the curriculum statement. This is interpreted particularly in relation to working with families and children with disabilities. "It is assumed through the curriculum that the care and education needs of children with 'special needs' are encompassed within the principles, strands and goals set out for all children" (MOE, 1996b, p. 11). Within the principle of 'family and community' there is an acknowledgement of the interdependence between the well-being of children and the well-being of whānau/family. "Children's learning is fostered if their family, culture, knowledge and communities are respected and if there is a strong connection and connectedness among all aspects of a child's world" (ibid, p. 42).

Recognising the need for connectedness between many aspects of children's worlds' highlights the idea that early childhood curriculum is based on presenting world-views negotiated between the significant adults in children's lives (teachers, parents, caregivers, whānau). Multiple interpretations of and points of view relating to curriculum must co-exist in early childhood settings and the curriculum statement draws our attention to this proposing a vision of education that is inclusive and representative and connected.

The final principle anticipated:

- a critical examination of discrimination and oppression in order to minimise their negative effects on individuals and groups.

Key curriculum requirements for young children identified in *Te Whāriki* include the need to have caring adults in early childhood centres who can engage children in sustained conversation that encourage complex thinking "including concepts of fairness, difference and similarity" (MOE, 1996b, p. 26). The curriculum document emphasises socially and culturally mediated learning processes whereby children learn with and alongside adults and peers, and it uses relationships between people as a central organising focus of curriculum. As a consequence, this implies a potential for teachers to challenge children's positioning within discriminatory discourses and to counteract inequity when it arises. This idea is supported in the DOPs (MOE, 1996a) when they refer to the important role that teachers play in extending children's thinking and actions through informed and sensitive

guidance and support. The curriculum's contribution to countering prejudice can be seen in its aim to provide "equitable opportunities for all learning regardless of gender, ability, age, ethnicity or background" (MOE, 1996b, p. 16). A commitment to creating equitable opportunities to learn reflects the anti-bias idea of minimising negative effects from discrimination and oppression.

This support *Te Whāriki* lends to anti-bias principles in early childhood education has been interpreted through my content analysis of aspects of the document's text. This interpretation argues a 'reading' of the curriculum statement that offers significant possibilities with respect to inclusive education and activism based upon anti-bias principles. The current curriculum statement for early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand suggests ways in which teachers can create educational environments within which they, along with children, can safely examine and counter negative bias, discrimination and oppression. My attention now turns to consideration of three practical strategies or teaching emphases that support an active anti-bias focus in early childhood education.

STRATEGIES FOR ANTI-BIAS PROGRAMMING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Four activist based principles centred upon an anti-bias philosophical anchor have been proposed as a pathway to inclusive early childhood education in this paper. Turning this argument into practical activism is crucial for supporting positive change in education that is concerned with emancipatory outcomes. Three strategies are interpreted from the anti-bias literature that suggest ways for teachers to take positive steps towards creating inclusive programmes with children and families. These are critical thinking, an awareness of difference/diversity themes and discussion.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is strongly featured in anti-bias education (Corson, 2000; Derman-Sparks, 1989; Hohensee & Derman-Sparks, 1992). Small steps towards supporting children to examine social situations critically are included in the everyday activities, experiences and events in early childhood centre settings. An assumption, for instance, that all families have two parents/caregivers may be 'unpacked' if children with one parent/caregiver are encouraged to contribute to a discussion of 'what constitutes family'. In identifying divergent opinion and helping children to verbalise alternate points of view, we ask young learners to examine multiple interpretations of phenomena and to situate their own understandings within this context. Understanding that the world is not experienced in any one particular way is central to anti-bias education philosophy. It is also reflected in the aspiration of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand that suggests young children will develop a sense of the contribution that they give to our society (MOE, 1996a, 1996b).

Difference and Diversity

Writers on anti-bias education identify the concepts of diversity and equity as central to the philosophy. These are highlighted through an emphasis on identifying and valuing differences between people and through examining oppression and the effects of discriminatory behaviours and attitudes about

oneself and others (Byrnes, 1996; Derman-Sparks, 1989; Hohensee & Derman-Sparks, 1992).

Well-meaning adults often teach children to ignore differences and to focus only on people's similarities. However, just as common experiences bind communities together, understanding and respecting differences are essential for inclusion and the construction of successful communities. In order to legitimise diversity as a strength of society (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995), respect for and awareness of differences must be embraced in educational discourse. This is not to say that difference should drive education but, rather, that education should be open to and aware of the potential impact that differences have on individuals' experiences of it.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, we are supported in legitimising difference and diversity by legislation that holds that it is illegal to discriminate against individuals in various situations on the basis of several diversity themes/differences. The legislation targets sex, disability, marital status, age, religious belief, political opinion, ethical belief, employment status, colour, family status, race, sexual orientation, and ethnic or national origin (New Zealand Government, 1993). Anti-bias principles reflect several of the diversity themes included in this legislation; gender, ability, sexual orientation and religious diversity, ethnicity, economic status. Discrimination between children on the basis of these differences, or stereotyping in relation to these aspects of individuals' life experiences, are arguably the most likely to show up in young children's curriculum experiences in early childhood programmes. In light of this, encouraging children to recognise and counter the stereotyping to which individuals with diverse experiences and differences can be subjected, are legitimate strategies for teachers in early childhood education.

DISCUSSION

Through discussion and reflection, young children are guided into using thinking skills that enable them to explore, interpret and question their own assumptions about the world. We might see this in action when, for example, a teacher mediates children's experiences with stereotypical behaviour such as gender-based exclusionary play (see, for example, MacNaughton, 2000; Yelland, 1998). According to Shor (1992) "education can socialise students into critical thought or into dependence on authority, that is, into autonomous habits of mind or into passive habits of following authority, waiting to be told what to do and what things mean" (p. 13). This passive conceptualisation of education is certainly not congruent with the vision of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand which asks teachers to provide curriculum for children that is empowering. Discussion is a primary strategy in any early childhood teacher's repertoire and, through sensitive and informed interactions, teachers can do well to support anti-bias principles.

Finally, there is a principle in *Te Whāriki* that centres on 'Relationships'. The principle states that "children learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places and things" (MOE, 1996b, p. 43) and resonates with a theory of learning and development that is based in social and cultural contexts. Carr and May (1993) explain the significance of a social and cultural context in relation to early childhood curriculum when they discuss Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner as theorists who helped guide the deliberations of the early childhood curriculum development process. The sociocultural perspective on

learning and development is one that brings to the fore interpersonal relationships as a vehicle for learning. Discussion is a tool of relationships and is central to weighing a philosophical anchor in early childhood education based on anti-bias principles.

In *Te Whāriki* children are seen as competent and active learners able to construct knowledge through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places and things. Davey-Zeece (1998) reminds us that anti-bias programming involves a mind-set that creates a permeating sense that everyone has value. Measured change in supporting the development of this sense of value in relation to this country's diverse communities in early childhood education is an ongoing area for policy and theoretical consideration. Anti-bias philosophy requires a commitment in education settings to reasonable, fair and sensitive attitudes and actions by people towards people. It is my belief that such a view of education is consistent with the aspirations of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Moreover, it leads us in the direction of constructing inclusive education settings. As New (1999, p. 8) asks, "what should adults do to ensure that children learn those skills, knowledges and concepts that reflect their individual needs, interests and capabilities; promote their inclusion and full participation in a democratic society; and protect their rights as citizens so that knowledge will enhance their current and future lives and productivity". This question is central to deliberations about anti-bias philosophy in early childhood education. A philosophical anchor built upon anti-bias philosophy provides adults with a framework upon which answers to these questions can be based.

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