



Nuttall, J. (Ed.). (2003). *Weaving Te Whāriki: Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum document in theory and practice*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

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In 1993 the draft version of *Te Whāriki* was published as curriculum guidelines. It was a ground-breaking document based on socio-cultural principles and was the result of a bicultural collaboration between Margaret Carr and Helen May (then both at Waikato University) and Tamati and Tilly Reedy (from the Kōhanga Reo movement) and of extensive consultation with the sector. In 1996, the curriculum itself was published, not without some changes from the Ministry of Education writers. These changes were principally intended to take it into the world of outcomes and accountability, and more detailed sections linking it to *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* were added. This process, and the process of development, have been extensively charted by Margaret Carr and Helen May in a series of articles and chapters in New Zealand and international journals and books.

Despite extensive professional development between 1993 and 1996, concerns were soon being expressed about the difficulty of implementing the curriculum. Joy Cullen, in an article in *Delta* in 1996, suggested that the variable (and at that time often low) levels of training in early childhood education made it difficult for teachers to understand the theoretical basis of *Te Whāriki*. Professional development staff reported that teachers were often using it to validate existing practices.

*Weaving Te Whāriki* was launched at the 8<sup>th</sup> Early Childhood Convention in 2003, an auspicious date ten years on from the original publication. The title, which contains the phrase 'Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum document in theory and practice' acknowledges these early concerns and celebrates the implementation of the curriculum as a statutory requirement in all licensed and chartered centres. Chapters trace the beginnings of *Te Whāriki* (Sarah Te One), investigate its bicultural origins (Tilly Reedy) and development (Jenny Ritchie), and present research on its use with children with disabilities (Jude MacArthur, Kerry Purdue and Keith Ballard). Further chapters explore research into how teachers use *Te Whāriki* (Joce Nuttall), and on the use of assessment tools within its framework (Margaret Carr, Ann Hatherly, Wendy Lee & Karen Ramsey). There is a chapter comparing *Te Whāriki* with *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* (Carol Mutch). Two chapters assess it from an 'outsider' perspective: these chapters are from Denmark (Stig Broström) and

from Australia (Marilyn Flear). Finally, Joy Cullen revisits her concerns from 1996 and in a thoughtful chapter presents further challenges for the sector.

In her introduction the editor, Joce Nuttall, notes the emergence of three themes in the book. These are: the importance of culture, 'not just in regard to fashionable theories of learning, but also in terms of its economic and political dimensions' (p.11); the importance of socio-cultural theories in understanding *Te Whāriki*; and, the difficulties inherent in implementing such a non-prescriptive document. These themes pervade the book and are not just limited to separate chapters. The pervasiveness of culture, in the sense of this being a New Zealand document, is particularly evident. Marilyn Flear comments that there is a departure from the traditional early childhood curriculum design in that there is a greater focus on the child within the community or culture. She notes, 'from a socio-cultural perspective, curriculum is based on the view that children internalise the community's tools for thinking.' (p. 256). She also points out that the perspective of the curriculum is community-based with an emphasis on wellbeing, belonging, contributing and communicating. The focus of the curriculum is thus still on the child's interests but within a New Zealand cultural framework.

We should not assume, however, that all is well or that it is easy to implement a curriculum that acknowledges a New Zealand cultural framework. Several chapters present research that illustrates the difficulties of working within this approach. Jenny Ritchie records concerns that many teachers are reported to be ignoring the bicultural requirements in favour of a theory that if all children are treated as 'individuals' all will be well, and Jude MacArthur *et al.* assert that many teachers think that if they treat children with disabilities in the same way as they treat other children, their responsibilities end there. In both cases, there seems to be a reported feeling among teachers that to single any child out, for whatever reason, discriminates against the other children. Joce Nuttall identifies several constraints for teachers in teaching within a co-constructive framework, where planning should be with the children rather than for them. A major constraint is time to meet with other staff in order to discuss pedagogical issues and to align their teaching with the ideas of the curriculum. Another, is the difficulty of varied training models and the need to explore *Te Whāriki* in more detail within a centre context.

In her final chapter, Joy Cullen identifies a series of difficulties that the early childhood sector has still to address. These include the difficulties of acknowledging and supporting diversity; the place of holism in curriculum; and what constitutes a teacher professional knowledge base. Although she acknowledges that the sector has made considerable progress in understanding its curriculum since 1996, she notes the decrease in community-based, parent-run services, such as playcentre and *Te Kōhanga Reo* and the increase in unlicensed playgroups who do not have to use *Te Whāriki*, and wonders what the future is for a curriculum that purports to be inclusive of all services but is theoretically difficult.

While there is some unevenness in this book it is a valuable addition to the ongoing debate about curriculum frameworks. It is also an important record of the development and implementation of *Te Whāriki*. The research that is reported in the chapters adds to our understanding of the use of a socio-cultural framework

within an Aotearoa New Zealand cultural framework. It is a welcome addition to personal and centre libraries and to the libraries and course material of universities and colleges of education.

## REFERENCES

Cullen, J. (1996). The challenge of Te Whāriki for future developments in early childhood education. *Delta*, 48(1), 113-126.



## About the Author(s)

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