

# **Weaving *Te Whāriki***

Aotearoa New Zealand's Early Childhood Curriculum  
Framework in Theory and Practice (2nd edition)

**Edited by Joce Nuttall**



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## CHAPTER 7

# *Te Whāriki* and the promise of early childhood care and education grounded in a commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi

Jenny Ritchie

### ABSTRACT

This chapter draws on over a decade of research that has focused on the implementation of *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum*, with a particular focus on the ways in which educators have been working to uphold the commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi)<sup>1</sup> expressed within the curriculum. Through educator enactment of whakawhanaungatanga—building relationships with whānau Māori—and demonstrating the pedagogical integration of other kaupapa Māori values such as manaakitanga and kaitiakitanga, *Te Whāriki* continues to hold promise for social, cultural and ecological sustainability.

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<sup>1</sup> Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) was the document signed in 1840 between the British Crown and Māori chiefs, which legitimated British settlement while promising Māori protection of their chieftainship, resources, lands, villages and everything of value to them (such as, for example, their language, values and traditional cultural practices).

## Introduction

The ground-breaking recognition by *Te Whāriki* of the status of Māori as tangata whenua (the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand), seen in its introductory proclamation that “all children should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge and an understanding of the cultural heritages of both partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9), raised huge challenges for the early childhood care and education profession in regard to the extent, integrity and equitability of the provision of kaupapa Māori content by a largely monocultural and monolingual sector. The question for reflection from Goal One of the Belonging strand, “In what ways do the environment and programme reflect the values embodied in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and what impact does this have on adults and children?” (p. 56), is one that remains an ongoing provocation for the sector.

This chapter draws on a series of studies (Ritchie, 2002; Ritchie, Duhn, Rau, & Craw, 2010; Ritchie & Rau, 2006, 2008) to illustrate some of the ways in which early childhood educators have, in the past 17 years, been moving beyond rhetoric, mechanical checklists and tokenism to find ways to deliver with integrity the intent of *Te Whāriki* in relation to enacting Māori ways of being, knowing and doing (Ministry of Education, 2009). It also explores the ways in which the proactivity of these teachers is contributing to a counter-colonial re-narrativisation (Ritchie & Rau, 2010) that generates space for and validation of te ao Māori epistemologies. This in turn can be seen as contributing to the major shift in discourse demanded by current Māori education policy (Ministry of Education, 2008), which challenges the entire education sector to move away from pervasive, historical, racist deficit modalities to instead view being Māori as a source of potentiality, capability and success. The final section of the chapter will outline the potential of *Te Whāriki* to offer hope for cultural, linguistic, social and ecological sustainability (Ritchie et al., 2010).

### *Te Whāriki* as promise

In this section I argue that the visionary nature of *Te Whāriki*, particularly with regard to the expectations for integrating kaupapa Māori (Māori values and philosophy) and te reo Māori (the Māori language), continues to hold great potential for delivering culturally equitable early childhood care and education programmes. *Te Whāriki* was originally conceptualised by its writers as a curriculum “guideline” (Ministry of Education, 1993). The non-prescriptive nature of the final document (Ministry of Education, 1996) left some teachers initially uncertain as to how to translate its many principles, strands and learning outcomes into practice, and even more confused about how to demonstrate that this was being achieved.



The document was unusual in that it was consciously developed within a Tiriti o Waitangi framework, via a Tiriti o Waitangi partnership of writers (Helen May and Margaret Carr of the University of Waikato, and Tilly and Tamati Reedy, who were delegated by the National Te Kōhanga Reo Trust). This team of writers also consulted widely within their respective networks during the development process to ensure a broad representation of Māori, Pasifika, home-based carers, early childhood educators working with children with diverse needs, and Playcentre parents/whānau (extended family), as well as childcare and kindergarten educators and management (see Chapter One for a detailed description of this process, and Chapter Two for Tilly Reedy's articulation of the Māori underpinnings of *Te Whāriki*).

During the development of *Te Whāriki* the carefully inclusive approach taken by the writers was probably unusual, but very wise, as the input from the various dimensions of this particularly diverse sector not only informed the document, but also created a sense of ownership within the wider early childhood care and education community. In response to a preliminary review by the Ministry of Education (Murrow, 1995), the draft guideline document (Ministry of Education, 1993) was heavily revised in an attempt to make it more “user-friendly” for a sector that, aside from the kindergarten movement, was largely unqualified.

The expectation to uphold and demonstrate commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi was not new for many in the early childhood care and education sector, which has always demonstrated a progressive responsiveness to equity issues (May, 1992, 1997). During the early 1990s—the era of the development of *Te Whāriki*—many branches of the early childhood care and education sector were independently confirming their own organisation's recognition of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The kindergarten, Playcentre and childcare communities all made various statements of their commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and to the “bicultural development” that would be required in order to demonstrate that commitment (Ritchie, 2002). Both Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association and the New Zealand Playcentre Federation demonstrated their commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi by developing partnership models in their decision-making structures and organisational processes (Cubey, 1992).

My doctoral study (Ritchie, 2002), conducted during the period 1996–2002, focused on the work of an early childhood teacher education programme in relation to its stated commitment to honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi. In my interviews with colleagues lecturing in the early childhood programme, some interesting observations were made about the influence of *Te Whāriki* on their work in early childhood care and education. A Pākehā<sup>2</sup> colleague who had previously had many years of experience in the kindergarten sector was a little indignant when I asked her whether this new curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, was influencing her practice as a teacher educator:

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2 The term for a citizen of Aotearoa New Zealand who has European ancestry.

I don't think, oh in here, no, I don't. I think we would have done that anyway. We were already. This, as a team, we were pretty well already committed to that I think. *Te Whāriki* is being woven into that, and *Te Whāriki* is actually being used, but no it was happening before. (Quoted in Ritchie, 2002, p. 204)

Yet a Māori lecturer was very appreciative of the validation provided by *Te Whāriki* for her teaching of Māori content:

The other thing for Pākehā students is *Te Whāriki* makes what you do, or the Māori things you do, "real". Whatever you're doing in class and when you do link it to *Te Whāriki*: "Oh, okay it's real then." (Quoted in Ritchie, 2002, p. 317)

While clearly the kaupapa Māori content that this lecturer was offering to her early childhood education students was 'real', and in fact an integral part of the teacher education programme, her comment is indicative of the struggle faced by Māori lecturers in the face of resistance from some Pākehā students who did not necessarily value, at least at the outset of their studies, the opportunities provided to them to learn about te ao Māori (the Māori world).

During the 1990s a new generation of early childhood care and education teachers emerged that had been schooled in the discourses of *Te Whāriki*. When I interviewed a Pākehā graduate of the early childhood teacher education programme in which I worked, she was teaching in a poorly resourced kindergarten in a working-class suburb with a high percentage of Māori children and families. She identified her key programme planning resources as *Te Whāriki*, which she described as her 'bible', and an English/Māori dictionary. This teacher was aware, however, that in many centres educators were delivering programmes in which the expectations related to te ao Māori contained within *Te Whāriki* were not visible:

You can use *Te Whāriki*, it is so open, yes, it is really difficult. I have seen people use *Te Whāriki* really well, but they are not using the bicultural aspect of it. You know absolutely excellent teachers too. (Quoted in Ritchie, 2002, p. 481)

After the promulgation of *Te Whāriki*, in line with the Ministry of Education's wider Tomorrow's Schools curriculum implementation project (Department of Education, 1988; Openshaw, 2011; Picot, 1988), professional development contracts were funded to provide support for in-service teachers. As part of contract delivery, educators were provided with expertise regarding implementation of the curriculum's expectations for Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations. Māori facilitators of this professional learning noted children's receptivity to te ao Māori content:

And a really neat thing was the way kids come up and ask for te reo Māori, they'll say 'What's the Māori name for that bird?' Because we were in the bush. And I think that's choice [excellent]. It's non-Māori asking kaiako [teachers] for, 'Can you find out what that word is in Māori?' Powerful depth, it's like saying we want to know, it's valuable. (Quoted in Ritchie, 2002, p. 311)

A Māori colleague described her recent experience on a return visit to an education and care centre as part of supporting the professional learning of teachers, where she had observed children spontaneously dramatising a legend related to the Māori ancestral demi-god Māui. She described this scenario as evidence that these kinds of knowledge, once made accessible to children, were quickly “becoming part of their knowing” (quoted in Ritchie, 2002, p. 311). Participants in the study also reported the receptivity of some non-Māori parents to the Māori knowledge their children were accessing in the early childhood care and education centres committed to this kind of implementation. As a Pākehā teacher reported:

And the response we get from parents is that, yeah, [their children have begun to] kōrero Māori at home, you know, and that’s great too, because the parents will, if they are keen parents, will pick up on that and start working with that as well. (Quoted in Ritchie, 2002, p. 311)

These kinds of responses demonstrate the transformative potential of *Te Whāriki*, by giving access to and generating respect for te ao Māori, to resonate beyond the immediate early childhood care and education setting into homes and the wider community.

### ***Te Whāriki* as challenge**

In the study *Whakawhanaungatanga: Partnerships in Bicultural Development in Early Childhood Education* (Ritchie & Rau, 2006), my colleague Cheryl Rau and I employed narrative methodologies to give voice to a wide range of early childhood teachers, Playcentre whānau/educators, professional development providers, an iwi education authority, as well as specialist educators and teacher educators. This study was premised on our previous findings that: strengthening the provision of the bicultural aspirations of *Te Whāriki* within mainstream early childhood care and education settings is a central professional responsibility for educators; a key strategy for achieving this objective is for educators to build relationships with the whānau Māori of children in their settings (Ritchie, 2002); and that whanaungatanga is a Māori-preferred pedagogy that empowers Māori through collaborative learning processes (Rau, 2002).

Reflecting on the decade since the promulgation of *Te Whāriki*, Anahera, a Māori early childhood teacher educator (names reported from this study are pseudonyms), expressed her frustration at the lack of progress in implementing kaupapa Māori practices in line with the expectations of the curriculum:

I mean, we all must be a bit disappointed in the lack of progress in bicultural practices. It hasn’t really gone that fast, has it? I could ask this question to you: ‘In honesty, did we think that in 10 years’ time we’d be up to this stage or a whole lot further along the track?’ (Anahera, quoted in Ritchie & Rau, 2006, p. 22)

Katerina, a Māori teacher-educator, revealed the ways in which the hidden power effects of historical Māori–Pākehā relations continue to be experienced by Māori in early childhood care and education settings, placing her in the position of a shy Māori ‘mama’ who is seeking a sense of whanaungatanga in her first overtures to an early childhood centre:

Well, if you sit behind the desk, I’m not going to feel comfortable. If you’re teaching my babies and you have the privilege of hanging out with my babies, I need you to get away from that desk and come out in front of the desk and sit down with me and just talk as two Mamas, or two women who are having a cup of tea, and like real cups of tea too! Not when you sit there and it’s so stiff and formal that nobody wants to talk. It’s all very polite and you walk away, and the whānau walk away feeling like they’ve got nothing out of it, no real connection. I need to connect with you. Because you are in that position of power, they’re my babies, but you’re the teacher—you need to connect with me because I see you with the power. (Katerina, quoted in Ritchie & Rau, 2006, p. 15)

The explanation in *Te Whāriki* of the principle of whakamana (empowerment) requires that:

Particular care should be given to bicultural issues in relation to empowerment. Adults working with children should understand and be willing to discuss bicultural issues, actively seek Māori contributions to decision making, and ensure that Māori children develop a strong sense of self-worth. (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 40)

Effective preparation of pre-service teacher education students to become aware of their positioning in a country with a history of colonisation remains a challenge; this challenge is to offer pedagogical processes that develop in graduates forms of reflexivity that enable critical awareness of historical and contemporary privilege and the effects of power.

Consideration of all the principles of *Te Whāriki*, of *whakamana*—*empowerment*, *whānau tangata*—*families and community* and *ngā hononga*—*relationships*, as well as the strand of *mana whenua belonging* (the latter, interestingly, being the only strand to include families in its initial statement: “Children and their families feel a sense of belonging”), would suggest that the expectations of the ‘mama’ voiced by Katerina are entirely in keeping with the principles outlined in the central philosophy of the curriculum document. Yet a very experienced Pākehā kindergarten head teacher, Anne, was critical of the superficial nature of the Māori content she had observed being delivered at many early childhood care and education settings:

This often amounts to a veneer of biculturalism. It’s an outward appearance only. There is often nothing more. I suppose that’s called tokenism. (Anne, quoted in Ritchie & Rau, 2006, p. 22)

She went on to evocatively describe her personal/professional journey, tempered by frustration but driven by commitment, towards gaining the knowledge and dispositions that would equip her to move beyond a superficial tokenistic approach:

I have given a lot of thought to my analogy of becoming bicultural as similar to climbing a mountain. It's a mountain where the summit is shrouded in mist so you can't see the top. You climb very slowly, sometimes you can plan the route because you have read and thought about it, sometimes you need somebody who is familiar with it to show you the way. You have to be prepared to be a follower and be led by somebody who knows the route better than you do. You have to respect and trust other people's views and leadership. All the time you need encouragement. You also need your team to come with you. You are roped together so that you can help each other. Sometimes you will need to be the leader.

Sometimes you get knocked back and discouraged. Your travel is very slow because you are carrying so much baggage with you that needs to be discarded on the way and because in order to be safe you can't hurry. When somebody stands on the ledge you are aiming for and stamps on your fingers as you put them over the ledge, or throws a rock at you as you ascend, you could fall and never have the courage to attempt the climb again. You also take the rest of the team down with you. You will need support to keep going and to have another try.

We all make mistakes. Unfortunately these small incidents can have wide repercussions. A little push can mean the whole team landing in a heap at the bottom of the cliff and losing their confidence to attempt the climb again. It also affects their behaviour and attitude towards Māori people. Fortunately also, some people try, and succeed in getting a long way up the mountain.

In a previous "verbal outpouring" I mentioned that we need to be humble and ask for help. The trouble is that some people find it very hard to get rid of the baggage from past hurts that weighs them down and affects their attitude and behaviour. I would love to help to resolve this but don't have the skills. Is it our collective responsibility? (Anne, quoted in Ritchie & Rau, 2006, p. 19)

This demonstrates Anne's reflexivity regarding her long-term professional and personal commitment to a praxis resonant with cultural integrity. In addition, Anne highlights the need for this focus to be a shared, collective and ongoing endeavour within our sector.

### ***Te Whāriki* as inspiration**

In our subsequent study, *Te Puawaitanga: Partnerships with Tamariki and Whānau in Bicultural Early Childhood Care and Education* (Ritchie & Rau, 2008), we again used narrative methodologies, this time in giving voice to a diverse range of children, families and teachers from 10 early childhood care and education settings from around Aotearoa New Zealand. In these settings the teachers were committed to delivering

programmes that gave effect to the expectations of *Te Whāriki* in relation to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The data showed that when teachers are committed to and skilled at building relationships with Māori families in their centre, as required by the principles of *Te Whāriki*, parents are willing to articulate their expectations for their children. This can be seen in the following data contributed by Māori parents whose children attended a kindergarten. Under the heading, “What I would like in an educational institute for my children”, Amiria (one of the mothers in the study; actual names are used here with consent) listed:

- pride in themselves in everything, for example, sex; culture; colour; height; thoughts
- the ability to express themselves and their individuality
- to learn how to socialise and work with others both similar to them or different
- an education, knowledge of their history both nationally and locally
- multicultural experiences with the other children around them
- genuine caring teachers
- the embracing of whānau/families
- a kindergarten that seeks participation and feedback from families and informs them about the goings on in the kindy
- that they love where they attend.

(Quoted in Ritchie & Rau, 2008, pp. 51–52)

Amiria explained what she valued about the kindergarten programme at Belmont–Te Kupenga:

Good use of Māori language through:

- Song: Which is important because it encourages children to memorise Māori words and sentences. Children can then remember something in Māori and sing it at home, maybe even introduce it to the home which is a friendly way of parents becoming familiar to the Māori language. Quite often Māori learnt at this kindergarten will be the most a lot of families will experience, so positive learning through music and song is very important. Also memory of song lasts much longer than speech or writing
- Mihi: Which is important to show children the importance for Māori in showing respect to the mauri (life force) of all things living—Past, Animate, and Inanimate. Also to show our children that the tone of a mihi set the proceeding Pōwhiri/Hui
- Actions and Activities: Rākau and poi, waiata etc help enjoyment and [work] on motor skills and fitness etc which works in well with the mainstream education plan
- Whanaungatanga: Making children and their families feel safe and part of a big family, showing the caring and sharing aspects, both Māori and other cultures.
- Tikanga: To ensure biculturalism, proper Māori ways and rules of engagement should be taught. My belief is if this is taught alongside a mainstream education then when the two major signing cultures of New Zealand’s founding document recognise the importance of each other’s cultures then we are better equipped to move into appreciating more than two cultures and embracing multiculturalism. (Quoted in Ritchie & Rau, 2008, pp. 52–53)

Lawrence, Amiria's partner, provided the following outline of his dreams/goals for his child in early childhood care and education. He desired an early childhood service that would offer his child:

- confidence/self esteem
- social interaction of bicultural settings
- opportunities to discover his unique significance as tangata whenua
- development of positive routines and relationships with kaiako to foster healthy learning habits
- a place where they feel safe and are encouraged to express themselves
- a stable platform in which they can move on to primary school without having to overcome huge obstacles. (Quoted in Ritchie & Rau, 2008, p. 53)

Lawrence considered that the centre that his children were attending, Belmont Kindergarten—Te Kupenga in Hamilton, “fosters an atmosphere where children are encouraged to reaffirm their identity” through:

- karakia—mo te kai, timatanga, whakamutunga
- waiata which establish links with mana whenua and tangata whenua
- introduction (formally) to new children in class and establishing links with other children already engaged in class (whakawhanaungatanga)
- field trips to make connections with local rohe recognising importance of Te Taiao (e.g., Te Winika visit and Roger Hamon Bush)
- recognition of the importance of each individual child and of their contribution to the wairua and mauri of the group
- strong use of te reo and mātauranga throughout learning and non-learning situations (e.g., use of posters, pictures, puzzles).

(Quoted in Ritchie & Rau, 2008, p. 53)

Lawrence concluded that:

All of the above mentioned items have (I believe) a profound effect on breaking down perceived barriers which often hinder Māori parents' full involvement in their children's education due to being “whakamā” or shy. These points in fact reinforce kaupapa Māori by observance of tikanga and kawa whilst not impinging on the needs of non-Māori children and families. (Quoted in Ritchie & Rau, 2008, p. 53)

Early childhood educators who create such openings and receptiveness to Māori (and other) parents are realising the potential of *Te Whāriki* as a document capable of transforming the lives of all those involved in the early childhood care and education sector.

In our most recent study, *Titiro Whakamuri, Hoki Whakamua: We Are the Future, the Present and the Past: Caring for Self, Others and the Environment in Early Years' Teaching and Learning* (Ritchie et al., 2010), the focus was maintained on the inclusion of kaupapa Māori philosophies and practices, this time with an emphasis on manaakitanga/caring, as expressed in the project title. *Te Whāriki* served once again as a guiding document

for the educators involved in this project. For example, the Belonging strand states that “Liaison with local tangata whenua and a respect for papatuanuku should be promoted” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 54), and the Exploration strand affirms that “There should be a recognition of Māori ways of knowing and making sense of the world and of respecting and appreciating the natural environment” (p. 82). The teachers in this study consistently made links to *Te Whāriki*, illustrated in this excerpt from the first set of data contributed by a teacher at Richard Hudson Kindergarten in Dunedin (in this project, once again, actual names were used with permission):

We consulted with Huata Holmes, our kaumatua, for guidance, expert knowledge and inspiration. The Southern Māori perspective or “flavour” is important. Lee Blackie, our Senior Teacher, accompanied Huata and gave us a practical aspect that could sit side by side with Huata’s ideas. In order to add authenticity and depth we arranged for Huata to come and narrate his Southern mythology/stories/pūrākau to the children and whānau (Communication/Mana Reo Goal 3: hear a wide range of stories, *Te Whāriki*, p. 59) as told to him as a child by his grandmothers and great grandmothers (Holistic Development/Kotahitanga: recognition of the significance and contribution of previous generations to the child’s concept of self, *Te Whāriki*, p. 41). Huata’s kōrero was excellent and by working together we have achieved more of a shared understanding. He told of the great waka of Aoraki coming through the sky down to the South Island. He also used the waiata “Hoea te Waka” to support his kōrero. This has become a real favourite. His kōrero has supported our teaching of the importance of Papatūānuku in our lives. (Teacher, Richard Hudson Kindergarten, quoted in Ritchie et al., 2010, p. 30)

An almost organic connection is evident here, as the teacher skilfully weaves perceptive connections to the specific content of *Te Whāriki* into her narrative.

Kaupapa Māori values of manaakitanga (caring, hospitality) and kaitiakitanga (guardianship) were evident in the everyday discourse of some of the educators as they observed the ways in which children began to take on the role of caring for their immediate and wider environments:

Kaitiakitanga is looking after places, things and people. We have observed our children gain a sense of pride and respect for our kindergarten environment. We believe that when children have the opportunity to engage and care for the natural environment they will gain the skills, knowledge and desire to care for it in the future. The environment is the third teacher. There is a learning opportunity in every space. We have gardens that are sensory, edible, native and flowering. We have composting and recycling systems, including water conservation and ecosystems. Children are having a shared responsibility to look after our place and this is valued as real work, so everything we do in the kindergarten here is included with the children. (Teachers, Papamoa Kindergarten, quoted in Ritchie et al., 2010, p. 98)



The proactivity of teachers in this study was evident as they modelled the kaupapa of manaakitanga and kaitiakitanga, which was then reciprocated by the children, as seen in this example from Maungatapu Kindergarten:

The care of Papatūānuku became an individual and group responsibility and this shifted the responsibility from the teachers enforcing rules, to empowering children to take ownership for their actions and this changed the motivation for the children. We observed children peer-monitoring each other regularly and role-modelling our agreed options. The children's attitude and willingness shifted from an inward focus to starting to look outwardly—seeing beyond oneself, empowered by the importance of their contribution and responses. By creating a sense of endearment to Papatūānuku the children have an affinity and nurturing attitude, seeing and understanding the value of care and protection to Papatūānuku. The team philosophy valuing relationships has been transferred to the children in our responsibly and interconnectedness to the living and nonliving world. (Teacher, Maungatapu Kindergarten, quoted in Ritchie et al., 2010, p. 44)

Teachers from Papamoa Kindergarten shared their observations about the ways in which kaupapa Māori philosophies and practices were embedded within their praxis, being integral to their ongoing reflexivity as practitioners who pay attention to the transformative possibilities of their work:

The concept of whakawhanaungatanga, a sense of community; through the young child we have the opportunity to influence change in family and community behaviour by involving, connecting and educating them in an environment ... and environmental awareness and sustainable practices; it is so important to create a sense of belonging, a sense of tūrangawaewae, within the kindergarten community, and not working in isolation. The community has a lot to offer that we value being a part of. Whakapapa, Māori genealogy, links us with the whenua, our land, moana, our sea, and cultural concepts working with family and whānau. And our pepeha, the children's genealogy and where that comes from increased our connections, relationships and valuing who people are and where they come from. Children see adults talking and connecting with each other which gives them a sense of mana and pride. (Teachers, Papamoa Kindergarten, quoted in Ritchie et al., 2010, p. 28)

Kaupapa Māori discourses embedded in *Te Whāriki* continued to resonate throughout the data provided by the teachers.

### ***Te Whāriki* as transformative**

It is not difficult to identify examples of the ongoing legacy of our country's history of colonisation. For Māori, as for other colonised indigenous peoples, there need to be opportunities "to decolonise our minds, to recover ourselves, to claim a space in which to develop a sense of authentic humanity" (Smith, 1999, p. 23). In order to

recognise and challenge the subtle power of these pervasive discourses (Lang, 2005), it is equally necessary that those of us who cannot claim Māori ancestry also work to decolonise our thinking and ways of operating, since these may otherwise reflect patterns of 'dysconscious' racism (King, 1994; William-White & White, 2011). This has ongoing implications for teacher education providers in the imperative to foster among future students the awareness of the historicity (Freire, 1972) that underpins a counter-colonial orientation.

*Te Whāriki* has demonstrated its potential for educators, through deep engagement with the principles of *whakamana*—*empowerment*, *whānau tangata*—*families and community*, and *ngā hononga*—*relationships* to create counter-colonial spaces and positioning for whānau Māori. This transformative potential of *Te Whāriki* is potentially threatening to the status quo, since it is counter-hegemonic and radically democratic in enabling the voices of those who have previously been relegated through colonisation processes to subjugated positions to reclaim their right to influence the narratives that are reified within our educational settings (Kincheloe, 2003).

We are now nearing the end of the UNESCO Decade for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2012), with its inclusive focus on the multiple and overlapping aspects of economic issues (e.g., poverty and sustainable consumption); environmental issues (e.g., biodiversity, climate change, resource depletion and disaster risk reduction); and social and cultural justice issues (e.g., gender equity, and cultural and linguistic sustainability). It is acknowledged, however, that the notion of sustainable 'development' is problematic, oxymoronic even, in the light of the finite resources of our planet (Davidson, 2011). It is clear that dramatic changes are required with regard to the unsustainability of many current ways of living, with over-consumption evident in affluent countries, and the concerning nature of the widening spectrum of disparities, both between nations but also between affluent and struggling populations within developed nations (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). As educators we need to give consideration to how we foster in young people the skills to advocate on behalf of their own, their fellow citizens' and their planet's wellbeing (Sustainable Aotearoa New Zealand Inc, 2009). Teacher-educators have the potential to influence both current and future generations of teachers and students in their attitudes towards these issues of sustainability (UNESCO, 2005) and ancient traditional knowledge, such as that of iwi Māori, offers sources of understanding regarding localised sustainability practices (Penetito, 2009; Rose, 2005; Subramanian & Pisupati, 2010).

Likewise, the linguistic and cultural sustainability of te reo me ōna tikanga Māori (Māori language and cultural values and practices), in line with Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations, locates pedagogical work as a key factor within the domain of the multiple 'sustainabilities' outlined above. Pedagogical responses to these issues require exposing, challenging and destabilising globalised hegemonic discourses and practices, such as

those that peddle over-consumption by the rich at the expense of those living in poverty (Jucker, 2004). Collectively generating counter-narratives to dominant discourses that have become entrenched over many generations involves deep personal and social transformation of ways of knowing, being and doing, grounded in an ethic of care and a commitment to social, cultural and eco-justice (Elliot & Davis, 2009; Kahn, 2010; Noddings, 2005; Ritchie, 2011).

As I write this chapter, I am aware that the Ministry of Education has commissioned the Education Review Office to review the implementation of *Te Whāriki*. The Ministry's website states that "When the review is completed, we will make implementation activity more effective, and, if necessary, update the curriculum to reflect best practice" (Ministry of Education, 2012b). Notions of 'best practice' are dangerously problematic in their essentialist, universalising and hegemonic presumptions. It is risky to offer the possibility of reductionist, simplistic recipes for dealing with complex and ever-shifting educational contexts that call for the "wise practice" (Margrain & Macfarlane, 2011, p. 244) and leadership of qualified, experienced practitioners. Recent changes to education policy have reduced the expectations laid out by the (previous) Labour-led government's strategy (Ministry of Education, 2002) for staged movement towards a fully qualified early childhood care and education workforce, originally due to have been achieved in 2012. The back-tracking on this policy to a current ratio of only 50 percent of teachers being required to hold a 3-year-level qualification, along with the ideological shift towards 'teacher accountability' to narrowly defined parameters of 'best practice', as have already been imposed through the introduction of national standards in the primary schools sector, signal that the potential of *Te Whāriki* as a lever for social, cultural and ecological justice is clearly in jeopardy.

### **Concluding thoughts**

This chapter has discussed ways in which *Te Whāriki* continues to offer both challenge and aspiration to the early childhood care and education sector in Aotearoa, with particular regard to the commitment expressed within the curriculum to honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi responsibilities. In the years since 1996 the importance of the work of early years educators has been given further acknowledgement as neuroscience has confirmed the vital impact of early childhood experiences (Shonkoff, 2010; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Meanwhile, concern continues to be expressed about those children who miss out on attending high-quality (which includes culturally responsive) early childhood care and education settings (Ministry of Education, 2012a), and about the long-term impacts of non-participation and lack of engagement in education on children's achievement (Ministry of Education, 2011).

The glimpses from the research projects outlined above suggest that the Tiriti o Waitangi, relationship-based vision of *Te Whāriki* for respectful, responsive engagement

with whānau/families and tamariki/children; for deeply honouring the ways of knowing, being and doing of Māori and of other cultures; for upholding te reo Māori, as well as children's diverse home languages; and for caring for our planet, Papatūānuku, remains a vision that is worthy and capable of sustaining our sector into the future. Over a decade and a half since its promulgation, *Te Whāriki* continues to have relevance and hold promise as a philosophical vision for early childhood care and education pedagogies that reflect and enact a commitment to social, cultural and ecological sustainability and justice.

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