



## Editorial

### Well-being in early childhood education

Christoph Teschers  
New Zealand Tertiary College

Shirley Harris  
New Zealand Tertiary College

Kaye Kara  
New Zealand Tertiary College

The pursuit of *happiness* and subjective *well-being* in everyday life has been and continues to be a strongly held desire of human beings. This view has been articulated in philosophical history from Aristotle to John Stuart Mill, and more recently, it has gained increasing attention in social sciences and humanities from psychology through to sociology and education (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004). Current global, political, social and environmental developments further emphasise the importance of considering people's well-being on national and international levels. The current conflicts in Syria and the Middle East through war and terror have started a refugee movement that affects many countries around the globe. Besides the important question of how the political situation in the Middle East and other parts of the world can be stabilised and people's well-being can be restored in areas currently torn apart by conflict, many countries have opened their doors and are supporting refugee families and children. An important question in relation to children's well-being, therefore, is posed by Olivia Paul in this current issue: Olivia asks what we can do to support children with a refugee background in early childhood settings in New Zealand and elsewhere.

Beyond these current challenges for educators supporting refugee background learners, the continuing challenges of considering well-being of children in busy (pre-)school curricula and every day educational settings remain (see, for example, Peters, Gaches, & Swadener in this issue). Aristotle, in the *Nichomachean Ethics* (n.d./1996), claimed *eudaimonia* [ultimate happiness] to be the utmost goal of human beings, and educators in all settings should support their children/students in their pursuit towards *eudaimonia* and personal well-being. Although well-being is not the same as what Aristotle considered *eudaimonia* to be, well-being could be argued as a prerequisite for it. Ryan and Deci (2001) refer to Waterman to situate well-being in an *eudaimonistic* model, "conveying the belief that well-being consists of fulfilling or realizing one's daimon or true nature" (p. 143). Well-being in this regard connects more strongly with the notion of *flourishing*, which is a fundamental aspect in a holistic view of education, as is apparent, for example, in the German understanding of education consisting of socialisation [*Erziehung*], self-cultivation [*Bildung*] and flourishing [*Entfaltung*] (Liebau, 1999).

In the New Zealand educational context, well-being is an important concept for curriculum and teaching practice, especially in the context of the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*. Here, well-being is represented as one of the main five



strands of the curriculum, and it is interwoven throughout the curriculum and the other strands (see, for example, Teschers & Harris, and Ramekain this issue). However, well-being is seen here as more than merely physical and mental health, but rather in a holistic manner, incorporating notions of physical, mental and emotional well-being, trust, relationships, belonging, cultural identity and spirituality. *Te Whāriki* offers a view that fits well into the eudaimonic understanding of well-being and can be seen as exemplary in its effort to promote well-being for children in New Zealand.

This issue of *He Kupu* features a range of articles in the Practitioner Researcher and Special Edition sections that speak to well-being and other aspects of early childhood education. The Practitioner Researcher section starts with an article by *Anna Niles*, who offers insights into forms of assessment used in early childhood education with a focused discussion on narrative assessments. Anna has based her article on a qualitative ethnographic research project she has recently undertaken, investigating teachers' understanding and enactment of assessment using social constructionism as her key theoretical framework. The second article by *Sara Murray* builds on her initial findings from her doctoral research. Sara considers success of ECE student teachers in placements and how successes can be defined differently from one student to another. Issues involving time and equity are raised and discussed.

The first article responding to the theme of well-being in ECE is presented by *Olivia Paul*. Olivia picks up on the current geo-political situation and the impact on ECE practitioners in New Zealand centres with 750 Syrian refugees being expected in New Zealand over the next two years. Olivia presents a brief review of the literature on the complex needs of refugee background learners in education settings and makes suggestions for teaching practice. On the notion of diversity, *Rebecca Kendall* reviews critical multiculturalism in ECE, commenting that diverse students need varying support from knowledgeable teachers who can provide support in pedagogically appropriate ways. The meaning of critical multiculturalism is explored within the context of *Te Whāriki*, partnerships and pedagogy and linked to children's well-being.

The Practitioner section concludes and transitions into the Special Edition, further exploring cultural perspectives with two commentaries by *Ra Keelan* and *Heleine Feki*. Ra and Heleine reflect, in the form of personal narratives, on the meaning of well-being from a Māori and a Pasifika perspective. Ra reflects on the importance of *tamariki* [children] for the well-being of *whānau* [wider family], but also on the changing role of *whānau* for the well-being of their children. Heleine explores well-being based on her Tongan upbringing and reflects on her experiences in relation to Tongan children raised in New Zealand. Their considerations are intended to raise awareness for diverse cultural perspectives and needs of children and families in New Zealand ECE centres.

The Special Edition opens with *Laura D'Olimpio's* discussion of *Trust, well-being and the community of philosophical inquiry*. Laura argues that trust is essential for individual flourishing and well-being in a community. Drawing on an Aristotelian framework, trust is identified as a virtue and Laura emphasises the importance of cultivating trust in children. An Australian case study is presented to support the argument and connections are made to *Philosophy for Children* and the *Community of Inquiry* as a tool to promote trust and a democratic



dialogue. This also creates a sense of belonging, which supports well-being for children in the classroom as well as in life.

The next article by *Lacey Peters, Sonya Gaches and Beth Swadener* considers international discourses on children's well-being and their rights to provision, participation and protection. This collection of three narratives combines the authors' research projects with their professional experiences and links well-being to partnerships between teachers, children and families. The article argues for a re-consideration of the notion of well-being, its meaning and importance, in policy, programming and practice for ECE in the US.

*Christoph Teschers and Shirley Harris* explore *The notion of well-being in the New Zealand education system* by comparing how well-being is understood and incorporated into the two mandated New Zealand curriculum documents, *Te Whāriki* (ECE) and the New Zealand Curriculum (years 1-13). Different meanings of well-being are explored philosophically to inform the analysis of its implementation in both curriculum documents. The article aims to consider the importance of well-being in respect to educational policy and practice and to provoke further thought on methods of implementation.

*Lesley Rameka* begins by highlighting the recognition given in New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, to the importance of spirituality for the overall well-being of the child. She then explores well-being from a Māori perspective by placing spirituality/spiritual beliefs at the core of this concept. This important article makes strong links to the spiritual dimensions of traditional Māori ways of knowing and being for understanding the well-being and development of the child, not only conceptually but also for early childhood practice.

The final article by *Andrea Delaune and Louise Tapper* focuses on the well-being of gifted young children as a result of the beliefs and understandings held by teachers and those in the wider society. It argues that societal and culturally constructed perceptions of giftedness held by teachers and significant adults can affect the self-concept and subsequent well-being of gifted individuals from an early age. The article investigates ways of counteracting this trend in detail both at micro and macro levels.

This issue of *He Kupu* concludes with three book reviews, featuring *Early childhood education and care: An introduction*, written by Sheila Nutkins, Catriona McDonald and Mary Stephen, reviewed by *Kaye Kara*; followed by *Maxine Dyer's* review of *Inequality: A New Zealand crisis*, edited by Max Rashbrooke; and finally Vicki Carpenter and Sue Osborne's edited book *Twelve thousand hours: Education and poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand*, reviewed by *Trish Thomas*.

As always, we close with an invitation to submit articles for upcoming *He Kupu* issues. The next issue will be themed *Philosophy and Early Childhood Education*, with a closing date of 20 January and publication at the end of April 2016. The second issue next year will focus on *Emotional, Social, Relationship Development in Early Childhood*; the closing date for this issue will be 20 July and publication will be at the end of October.



## **References**

- Aristotle. (n.d./1996). *The Nicomachean Ethics*. London, United Kingdom: Wordsworth Editions Limited.
- Helliwell, J. F., & Putnam, R. D. (2004). The social context of well-being. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 359, 1435-1446.
- Liebau, E. (1999). *Erfahrung und Verantwortung. Werteerziehung als Pädagogik der Teilhabe*. [Experience and Responsibility. A virtue based education as participatory pedagogy]. Weinheim; Munic, Germany: Juventa.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001). On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Annual Reviews of Psychology*, 52, 141-166.