

Book Review

Weaving *Te Whāriki*: Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum document in theory and practice edited by Alex Gunn and Joce Nuttall

Marjolein Whyte | *New Zealand Tertiary College*

The third publication of *Weaving Te Whāriki* collates a number of critical reflections on the early childhood curriculum framework of Aotearoa New Zealand, *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum (Te Whāriki)* (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2017). This edition of *Weaving Te Whāriki* is preceded by publications in 2003 and 2013 edited by Joce Nuttall, which focussed on the first release of the early childhood curriculum framework in 1996, whereas Alex Gunn has joined as an editor discussing the revised curriculum document (MoE, 2017). Some key themes in this book are the prominence of the child's voice and participation in curriculum planning in early childhood education, and children as social actors. The book also includes a close look at the discourse of the revision and a re-engagement with the theoretical perspectives underpinning *Te Whāriki* curriculum and teaching practice.

Revisiting Nuttall (2013), I noticed some of the topics of discussion from the previous version have re-emerged, such as *Te Whāriki* being a framework with guiding principles instead of set learning outcomes and as such relying on teachers to form the curriculum together with their team, children and parents in their centre. While *Te Whāriki* was called a "model for best practice" in Nuttall (2013, p. 1), drawing on ECE task-force (2011, p. 607), many of the writers in the current *Weaving Te Whāriki*, have attempted to add further layers of reflection by looking at *Te Whāriki* through different lenses such as the Post-human lens, the Historical Cultural Activity Theory perspective, Kaupapa Māori and Te Aho Mātua lenses. Post-modern and Post-structural lenses add an interesting discussion on disability versus ableism (Macartney, 2019) and uncovering the paradox of the age categories in contrast to the vision of the child as competent and agentic (White, 2019). As such I believe this publication of *Weaving Te Whāriki* would be more suitable for postgraduate study than undergraduate students. New concepts such as knotworking, intra-action and assemblages are interesting concepts and can advance teaching practice, however may require prior knowledge for a full understanding and application.

The newest edition of *Weaving Te Whāriki* comprises 15 chapters and is organised in three sections: the development of *Te Whāriki*, *Te Whāriki* in practice and *Te Whāriki* in international contexts. The writers are hoping to add to critical reflection, enabling practitioners to further develop their practice and leadership in early childhood education. As curriculum development can be complex, and writers indicate one-off professional development sessions have been proven insufficient, collaboration with researchers is suggested (Cooper, Hedges & Williamson, 2019). To fully unpack the wide variety of complex ideas incorporated in this publication, having some reflective questions after each chapter would assist practitioners and leaders in early childhood education in the on-going improvement of their practice.

Implementation of the bicultural curriculum likewise will need expert advice as Ritchie and Skerrett, (2019) point out due to the absence of an English translation of the Māori part. Along with generalised 'Pacific Island' paradigms in *Te Whāriki*, these important portions of the curriculum seem hard to implement for kaiako without a commitment to ongoing professional development (Mara, 2019; Ritchie & Skerrett, 2019).

From an international perspective, writers point to a need to become more aware of global connectivity and while more theoretical perspectives are now considered in *Te Whāriki* (2017), it is up to teachers to engage with these and

Book Review

work collaboratively with parents to forge a learning trajectory for the child. A comparison to the Nordic system shows data on learning trajectories are gathered in more systematic ways than is suggested in *Te Whāriki* (2017) and democratic practice is more clearly informed by children's rights. Some perseverance getting acquainted with the new ideas and concepts in this book will certainly pay off and contribute to innovating and renewing teaching practice in early childhood education in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Reference

Nuttall, J. & Gunn, A. C. (Eds.) (2019). *Weaving Te Whāriki: Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum document in theory and practice*. Wellington, New Zealand: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.