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# Tōku mātauranga oranga

## *Making visible the learning journey from early childhood education into school*

**Margaret Carr, Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips, Caryll Resink, Michelle Anderson, and Tania Jack**

When children in Aotearoa New Zealand begin school at 5 years of age they take with them a wealth of learning. For the majority of children transitioning from early childhood education to school this learning has been documented in portfolios. In many cases, and for many reasons, these portfolios are not shared with the school. However, teachers in a number of early childhood centres and schools have explored ways in which this sharing can contribute to continuity for the child and their family across education settings, while strengthening the children's learning. The strong connections between the early childhood education curriculum *Te Whāriki* and the revised *New Zealand Curriculum* in 2007 provided one early childhood centre with the impetus to develop a meaningful way of sharing some of the critical learning of children transitioning from early childhood education to school.

### **Introduction**

#### **A curriculum shift**

Since 2007 in Aotearoa New Zealand a unique opportunity was established to construct a continuity across the early childhood education curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), and the school curriculum (*NZC*) (Ministry of Education, 2007a). The new school curriculum includes a diagram that describes a cross-sector alignment of the outcome domains of *Te Whāriki* with the array of key competencies in *NZC* (p. 42). The diagram also adds a continuity of alignment of key competencies into the tertiary sector, with a shared long-term goal of “confident, connected, actively involved and lifelong learners”. Early childhood researchers (both teacher-researchers and university-researchers) were quick to realise that this was a very significant diagram for discussions

about continuity across the sectors and transition to school (Peters, 2008; Peters, 2010a, 2010b; Hartley, Rogers, Smith, Peters, & Carr, 2012). Before 2007, research on transition had already pinpointed the discontinuities of curriculum for new entrant children as a major point of difference, emphasising the “holistic” nature of the early childhood curriculum in comparison with the fragmented nature of the school curriculum at that time (Podmore, Sauvaio, & Mapa, 2003, p. 38). The key competencies take a more holistic stance on learning outcomes, adding attitudes and values to skills and knowledges:

People use these competencies to live, learn, work, and contribute as active members of their communities. More complex than skills, the competencies draw also on knowledge, attitudes and values in ways that lead to action. (Ministry of Education, 2007a, p.12)

Key competencies encourage reflective practice in the face of the complex demands of life (Rychen & Salganik, 2003, p.74) and, by 2013, teachers in both primary and secondary schools have developed many ways of combining key competencies and learning areas in their teaching (Hipkins, McDougall, Cowie, & Carr, 2013).

### A research opportunity

In 2006 Taitoko Kindergarten was awarded a three-year Parent Support and Development (PS&D) contract as part of a government pilot programme involving eight early childhood centres. One of the objectives of the PS&D contract was to strengthen the connections for children between their home and the early childhood centre. Another objective was for the early childhood centres involved in the pilot to develop close relationships with their local communities and support services.

### The study

Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) funding was awarded to the authors, in 2007, to explore the relationships between teachers, children, and families and the impact of these relationships on families' engagement with their children's learning at the kindergarten. The interviews and observations during this research identified some entry points or gateways for family engagement and participation in their children's early childhood education (Clarkin-Phillips & Carr, 2009). One of these gateways involved the children's portfolios, or pukapuka mahi as they are called at Taitoko. The teachers purchased "book bags" for children to take their pukapuka mahi home, similar to those used at school for "take home" reading books.

Because Taitoko Kindergarten is located next to a school, the teachers prioritised strengthening their relationship with that school. They felt that this would provide benefits for all involved: teachers from the kindergarten and the school, children at the kindergarten and school, and parents and whānau. As the kindergarten teachers, new-entrant teacher, and school principal began to talk regularly about transition processes and supporting families of children at the kindergarten and the school, the question about the sharing of information was discussed. Although families might bring the child's pukapuka mahi to school for the new-entrant teacher to look at,

these portfolios contained many stories and could take a long time to read through. The idea of providing clear links to the key competencies developed from discussions with teachers and university researchers. An earlier TLRI project entitled "Key learning competencies over time and place" (see a 2011 special issue of *Early Childhood Folio*, 15(2), for some of the working papers written by teachers and professional development facilitators in that project) had begun researching key competencies in schools and learning dispositions in early childhood centres; the researchers across the sectors met together many times and shared ideas, but case studies of continuity across the sectors were not part of the study design. A Centre of Innovation project at Mangere Bridge Kindergarten (Hartley et al., 2012) has provided us with examples of the ways in which teachers in a contributing school were using the documentation of children's learning from the kindergarten in their classrooms.

In the Taitoko study, a transition portfolio—a collection of learning stories that illustrate a child's learning journey so far, aligned with *Te Whāriki* domains and the school key competencies—was constructed. Recently the teachers have consulted with their kaumātua and other appropriate whānau for a name for this transition portfolio. This consultation has resulted in the portfolios being given the title of "Tōku Mātauranga Oranga. My Journey in Learning."

Figure 1 is a template developed by the kindergarten teachers and university researchers at Taitoko Kindergarten for this transition portfolio. It sets out the links between the strands of *Te Whāriki* and the key competencies, provides some cues or indicators from the text in *NZC*, and aligns one or two (sometimes three) learning stories with each strand and key competency.

First, column 1 lists the strands of *Te Whāriki*. Secondly, column 2 lists the key competencies, aligned to the *Te Whāriki* strand. Thirdly, column 3 is a set of indicators that provide a dictionary for the relevant *Te Whāriki* strand and *NZC* key competency. In the example of the template here, the indicators have been taken from the text in the *NZC*. Ideally, these key indicators will be developed in collaboration between early childhood and school teachers of junior classes. Finally, column 4 lists the titles of the Learning Stories (taken from the portfolio of the transitioning child) that demonstrate at least some of the indicators

in column 3. A brief description of the story follows the title. Between one and three stories for each key competency provide a manageable and meaningful record for the school. These examples will ideally be chosen after a three-way discussion between teachers, children and families. The examples in the template are taken from *Kei Tua o te Pae*, books 11–15.

Copies of these Learning Stories will make up the remainder of the transition portfolio.

Along with the template and accompanying Learning Stories, the transition portfolio developed at Taitoko Kindergarten begins with a letter to the teacher dictated and signed by the child. It also contains an information sheet about the child and their wider life, filled in by families.

### Consequences of the transition portfolio

Many consequences for this specially designed transition portfolio have emerged. Interviews with two new entrant teachers at Taitoko School who have experience with Tōku Mātauranga Oranga refer to nine consequences. These are described and discussed below.

#### 1. The new entrant teacher getting to know what interests the child

In a well-known study of the lives of 91 "exceptional" people, including Nobel prize winners, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996) writes about his quest to find out what creative people are like, how the creative process works, and what conditions encourage or hinder the generation of original ideas. His interviews revealed that although these creative people may not have been precocious in their achievements in their early years, they "seem to have become committed early to the exploration and discovery of some part of their world" (p. 158). He adds that what is important is "to recognise the interest when it shows itself, nurture it, and provide the opportunities for it to grow into a creative life" (p. 182). With this in mind, it becomes very helpful if school teachers have the opportunity to find out about the interests that children have been developing during early childhood; the Learning Stories will provide a guide. The connection between, and the value of, interests and funds of knowledge in early years curriculum has been discussed by Hedges, Cullen, & Jordan (2011). Kirsten, a new entrant teacher at Taitoko School, makes this comment about the value of Tōku Mātauranga Oranga for identifying a child's interests.

I can see lots of things they've done at the kindergarten and it shows me lots of photos of them doing amazing learning at the kindergarten, their interests, these (the booklet) just give me a huge window into these children's lives.

### 2. A boundary object for facilitating "getting to know you" conversations with the child

During our research with a kindergarten located in the National Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa we wrote about "boundary objects": objects that travel from one context to another and assist children to make meaning across different places (Carr, Clarkin-Phillips, Thomas, Beer, & Waitai, 2012). In this instance, the transition portfolio acts as a boundary object for the child between the kindergarten and the school. As the two new-entrant teachers in the study comment, the portfolios provide opportunities for them to get to know the child.

I learn about their whānau and what they're interested in doing which helps me so much when I'm planning in my classroom because then I can incorporate and know what they're interested in, so what is going to help them to learn. (Kirsten)

When I'm teaching they'll bring over their booklets and show me photos from their booklets of past experiences, they're always looking back at their booklets. (Sarah)

### 3. A language and literacy artefact

Tōku Mātauranga Oranga provides children with the opportunity to "read" photographs and retell stories that are relevant and meaningful to them while revisiting their learning. The value of children telling stories to one another is well known. When children revisit and retell stories from their own lives they:

gain a sense of the continuity and discontinuity of time. They learn to order action sequences to make a whole that can be shared with another person. They learn to hear the other's version of the same event, and thereby to recognize the different perspective of the other. (Nelson, 2000, p. 192)

The following comments from Sarah and Kirsten demonstrate the literary purpose of the transition portfolio:

I have them displayed on a special shelf right at the front of the classroom and

FIGURE 1. TŌKU MĀTAURANGA ORANGA. MY JOURNEY IN LEARNING.

<i>Te Whāriki</i>	Key competencies (in NZC)	What this key competency looks like (some cues from the text in NZC)	Learning stories from [name] early childhood centre <sup>1</sup>
Contribution	Relating to others	Listening actively Sharing ideas Recognising different points of view	Becoming part of the group <sup>2</sup> This story demonstrates Hamish communicating and sharing ideas which enable him to interact effectively with his friends.
Well-being	Managing self	A "can do" attitude Makes plans Meets challenges	Finn's dragonfly <sup>3</sup> In this story Finn is making choices about his learning and the activities he engages in. It shows his strong interest in art. Finn is aware of needing to concentrate and persevere in order to achieve his goal.
Belonging	Participating & Contributing	Contributes as a group member Participates within new contexts Creates opportunities for others in a group	Suelisa's sense of belonging <sup>4</sup> This series of stories documents Suelisa's growing sense of belonging resulting in her taking responsibility for other's well-being by ensuring they are able to join in a game.
Exploration	Thinking	Problem solves Asks questions Actively seeks, uses and creates knowledge	Sabine designs a swing <sup>5</sup> In this story Sabine designs and makes a swing. She experiments using trial and error, draws on previous knowledge and asks for assistance in order to complete her task.
Communication	Using language, symbols and texts	Uses languages and symbols for representing and communicating. Can recognise & interpret language, symbols and texts in a range of contexts	Zachary's proofreading <sup>6</sup> Zachary knows about story writing and this story demonstrates his understanding of the writing process, including proofreading. Zachary knows his learning is valued through photographs and stories.

1 For the purposes of this article the examples here are not from an individual child. They are borrowed from *Kei Tua o te Pae*.

2 *Kei Tua o te Pae*. Book 15, p. 6.

3 *Kei Tua o te Pae*. Book 12, p. 16.

4 *Kei Tua o te Pae*. Book 11, pp. 18–19.

5 *Kei Tua o te Pae*. Book 13, pp. 20–21.

6 *Kei Tua o te Pae*. Book 17, pp. 24–25.

the children go and get them all the time actually—during independent activities they will go off and read their little booklets. (Sarah)

They are probably the most used books in my reading corner—they mainly love to look at the photos of them doing things and because they're full of pictures and visual things, they love to just look at the pictures. They love to get their book out and their friend will get their book out and they'll compare. They'll open them up to the same page and they'll compare what they're doing in their picture to what she's doing in her picture—they just always love to look at them. Lots of conversations come from them. (Kirsten)

#### **4. A tool for giving a sense of belonging in a new environment**

Book 11 of *Kei Tua o te Pae* outlines aspects of the *Te Whāriki* strand of belonging in relation to formative assessment. It points out that “portfolios can become an artefact of belonging, signifying the relationship between the learner and the setting” (Ministry of Education, 2007b, p. 2). When teachers at school take an interest in them, and discuss them with children and families, they then belong in both the early childhood centre and the school. Sarah and Kirsten comment as follows:

Well it's been great because you (teachers at Taitoko Kindergarten) have made your kindergarten transition folders which children bring over to school when they first start school ... and it's the link between school and kindergarten and it gives them a sense of belonging. (Sarah)

I think it's nice for them to be able to bring something of their own into the classroom. When they come in, obviously it's everybody else's classroom because they've made it their own but they're the new person in the classroom so they are bringing a little bit of themselves in to the classroom so I think it makes them feel quite welcome and included. (Kirsten)

#### **5. A clear indication for families of the learning pathway from early childhood education to school**

John Hattie (2009) suggests that parents often “struggle to comprehend the language of learning” and “can be disadvantaged in their

attempts to encourage and support their child's learning” (p. 70). This conclusion has been drawn from Hattie's synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses to do with educational achievement. Columns 1 and 2 of the template, demonstrating links between the two curricula, assist families to recognise the connections between learning at the early childhood centre and the school as well as reinforcing the continuity of learning for teachers.

I read through the stories which link *Te Whāriki* with the NZC and you can tell from the descriptions the kinds of activities they prefer doing and how that links to their learning at kindergarten and school. (Sarah)

This helps me and describes a lot of how the children contribute, their well-being, belonging and it tells me about that child and all information about how that child is and what I should expect from them, so when I'm planning and using the curriculum in my planning I can take this stuff into account and know that he or she is capable of doing. I find them very useful especially with the key competencies—like managing self, it tells me even before the child starts school, and I read this, it tells me whether this child is going to be able to cope with coming into the classroom ... you can move to the next step with the child. It helps me be a better teacher. (Kirsten)

#### **6. Evidence for families of the valued learning that their children are taking to school**

Learning Stories frequently refer to family and home, and occasionally the family will have added a comment. Liz Brooker (2002) has discussed the differences between family and institutional values, arguing that a family may be culturally “rich” but this “richness” is not recognised in an educational setting such as an early childhood centre or school. Tōku Mātauranga Oranga highlights the funds of knowledge and cultural values of children and their families thus emphasising that what has been learned at home is important in shaping the child's learning trajectory. Kirsten comments on this aspect:

They are always really proud when their parents come in as well and they always show them that my book is in the reading corner—I s'pose it's a little bit like they're famous, they have a book about themselves in our reading corner. (Kirsten)

#### **7. A reification of the competence that children are taking to school**

Reification or making things concrete (Wenger, 1998, p. 58), such as the documenting of learning episodes and the analysis of the learning in them, is a continual reminder for children and families about the achievements and the learning journey. Portfolios document and highlight children as capable, competent learners, constructing positive learner identities for individuals (Carr & Lee, 2012).

They (the children) come with these little booklets and not only do the children love to have them in the classroom—they sit in our reading corner so that they can read them and show their new peers and friends their booklet. (Kirsten)

Two other possible consequences for Tōku Mātauranga Oranga could be explored through further research. These consequences include providing an opportunity for cross-sector collaboration, and including this portfolio construction as part of the rite of passage for children as they are about to move from early childhood education to school.

#### **8. An opportunity for early childhood teachers and teachers of junior classes to get together to construct indicators that apply to both the learning dispositions in the strands of Te Whāriki and the key competencies in NZC**

This opportunity to collaborate opens up spaces for democratic practices between two educational settings and can enable greater understanding of each other's context, curriculum and pedagogy. The construction of indicators by both the early childhood teachers and the teachers of junior classes also provides opportunities for greater continuity of learning between the settings and a possible blurring of boundaries for children contributing to a smooth and coherent transition.

#### **9. Constructing the transition portfolio makes a contribution to the transition for the child (in the same way a school visit might)**

Constructing Tōku Mātauranga Oranga with the children as they begin their transition to school becomes one of the “rituals” associated with getting ready for school. This ritual is an opportunity for the child to be an active participant in determining their learner identity as a new entrant at school as they choose their favourite stories and dictate the contents of the covering letter to the teacher.

## Conclusion

Since the development of Tōku Mātauranga Oranga at Taitoko Kindergarten, other early childhood centres are thinking about and discussing transition resources that provide information about children's learning in early childhood to the school. Tōku Mātauranga Oranga calls on existing assessment for learning documentation and organises it in a format or collection that is accessible, manageable, and meaningful for the transitioning child and their family and the new-entrant teacher. These transition portfolios are designed to illustrate the children's competence in a number of areas and to support the above nine consequences for a happy transition. In this sense these portfolios have consequential validity. There is no place here for any forms of assessment or information-sharing that could jeopardise these consequences or diminish the view for transitioning children and their families that they are on a journey towards the goal of becoming confident, connected, and actively involved lifelong learners. We encourage teachers in early childhood settings to explore ways in which the rich documentation of children's learning can accompany a child on the next phase of their learning journey and open up possibilities for dialogue between teachers in early childhood settings and junior classrooms.

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# CONTENTS

Marie Bell

Responding authentically to Pasifika children's learning and identity development: Hunter's interests and funds of knowledge

Dispositional teaching in early childhood education

Principled practices: Respect and reciprocity through a linguistically responsive pedagogy

Supporting diversity: Picture books featuring same-gender parented families

Exploring ratios and group size as indicators of quality in the New Zealand and Japanese early childhood context

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Children are already learning at birth, and they develop and learn at a rapid pace in their early years. This provides a critical foundation for lifelong progress, and the adults who provide for the care and education of children from birth through age 8 bear a great responsibility for their health, development, and learning. Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8, a 2015 report from the Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, explores the implications of the science of child development for the professionals who work with these children. Young children through For the majority of children transitioning from early childhood education to school this learning has been documented in portfolios. In many cases, and for many reasons, these portfolios are not shared with the school. However, teachers in a number of early childhood centres and schools have explored ways in which this sharing can contribute to continuity for the child and their family across education settings, while strengthening the children's learning. However, teachers in a number of early childhood centres and schools have explored ways in which this sharing can contribute to continuity for the child and their family. CONTINUE READING. nzcer.org.nz. Early childhood education (ECE; also nursery education) is a branch of education theory that relates to the teaching of children (formally and informally) from birth up to the age of eight. Traditionally, this is up to the equivalent of third grade. ECE emerged as a field of study during the Enlightenment, particularly in European countries with high literacy rates. It continued to grow through the nineteenth century as universal primary education became a norm in the Western world. In recent years