**Empathy and Resilience: Key Issues for early childhood teachers**

**Paper one:**

**It begins at the beginning - Nurturing empathy in infants and toddlers**

Anita Homewood

The aim of this research was to create a curriculum for infants and toddlers, with particular interest in the disposition of empathy. This included identifying and making visible this learning, and looking at teachers’ own practice when working with children up to two years.

Our research led to the work of Magda Gerber (1979). We explored Erik Erikson’s (1959) stages of development. We also looked at current brain research and its relevance to infant and toddler learning and development. We recognised that a curriculum needed to be designed supporting infants and toddlers in developing basic trust and autonomy respectively, the foundations for empathy. We wove these ideas into Te Whāriki, taking into account the context and culture of our centre. Data was collected via discussions and reflections, as well learning stories and planning documentation, supporting infants and toddlers in shaping their identity as learners. All teachers and families have given their permissions for this research.

Our research revealed that a curriculum for infants and toddlers, strongly set in supporting the sense of well being and belonging, paved the way for empathy. By acknowledging emotions and offering support, infants and toddlers felt safe to explore these emotions, and to develop ways of working through them in partnership with their teachers. This led to the practice of tuakana teina, where they began to support their peers.

Teachers recognised the important role they played in creating an emotionally safe environment. Teachers developed mindfulness, through the language they used, and role modelling how we want infants and toddlers to be. Teachers were able to articulate this through learning stories, self review and planning documentation.

There is increasing concern that children are growing up missing out on these social emotional dispositions. Therefore it is important that teachers create environments which support the whole child - mind, body and soul - acknowledging the social emotional.

This was a year-long Action Research, with ongoing research on an individual basis. This is non refereed research.

**Paper two:**

**Building Resilience and the Important Place of Empathy**

Marianne MacPherson

We began our research with a particular interest in exploring teaching practices that share with children learning that is valued, in particular learning dispositions and supporting children’s growing perception of themselves as capable and competent learners. Through this research the disposition of resilience in supporting children’s learning was an area of interest that grew from researching the Building Learning Power framework by Guy Claxton.
Our research led us to experience the powerful transformation empathy can bring, through children developing understandings of each other as learners with different learning paths and that this is strengthened through a shared understanding in which children’s differing paths is respected.

Like Te Whāriki, the woven mat with the strands and goals of socio-cultural learning and teaching interwoven, so too are the many intrinsic and external values and practices that build and support resilience in learning. Some of the considerations that were woven into our mat included the language we use and modelling we provide encouraging children’s ‘learning power’, the concept of ako - teaching and learning, the importance of Whanaungatanga, Manaakitanga and an environment that believes in play as a foundation for learning providing opportunities for rich exploration and revisiting over time.

All teachers, families and where possible children, have given permission for this research.

This action research happened over 5 years, with the last year looking at the importance of empathy in supporting resilience in learning. This is non-refereed research.

Paper three:

Learning Stories: Making Empathy and Social Relationship Visible

Wendy Lee

This paper is about the ways in which assessment can influence children’s empathy and thereby strengthen their social emotional and relational dispositions in early childhood settings. We will illustrate how teachers’ work on assessment has the power to strengthen children’s identity around empathy and improve social relationships. Any curriculum approach is useful but only if teachers adapt and recontextualise the ideas into their own context. This paper is part of a suite of research around assessment and curriculum in NZ including Centre of Innovation projects, the Kei Tua o te Pae Assessment Research Project and action research projects explored by teachers. The Educational Leadership Project (ELP) uses an action research approach, in which the focus is on the practitioners researching and investigating their own practice in order to make changes and improvements. Learning Stories (Carr 2001) provides the platform to challenge and explore assessment through the four principles of Te Whāriki as per Carr and Lee, (2012). This demands a holistic approach to learning and teaching which views curriculum as being co-constructed between teachers and children (Lee et al 2013).

We present data collected from teacher’s interviews, documented assessments, written reflections, and self-review documentation. All teachers, families and where possible children, have given their permissions for this research to progress. We will present results focussed on teachers’ reflections around pedagogy in relation to empathy and social relationships. This is work in progress.

Current research indicates that the children around the world are less empathic today and this has huge ramifications for their learning and for humanity. Teachers now need to provide children with opportunities to develop and strengthen dispositions like empathy as part of the pedagogical outcomes in early childhood settings. We will show through examples, how this can be achieved by strengthening assessment documentation and the revisiting of this documentation by the learning community.