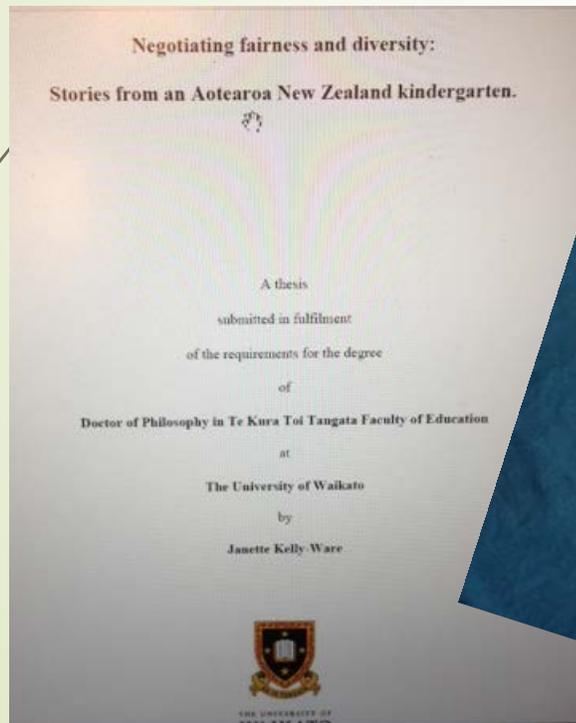


# Negotiating fairness and diversity: What can stories from one kindergarten teach us?



Inspired Kindergartens  
Conference  
Tauranga  
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Being responsive, and making a difference for children involves holding the imaginary of **a just and fair society** in mind, while we question and judge our everyday practices as well as the system (Thomson, 2002).



# Diversity - literature

- A rich resource for learning (Booth & Ainscow, 2011)
- An asset rather than a potential problem (Whyte, 2012)
- Something agentic and dynamic to be expressed or portrayed (Genishi & Goodwin, 2008).
- Something to be celebrated, albeit with a **shadow side** (Murray & Dignan, 2011);

# Shadow side

Recognition is widespread that membership of various groups carries benefits and rewards or disadvantages (Gordon Burns et al., 2012; Hyland, 2010).

Involves stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, racism, sexism, classism, ableism, (hetero)normativity et cetera (Murray & Dignan, 2011, p. 28; Rhedding-Jones, 2000).





# Research Methods



- Participatory Action Research
- Involving teachers, children and families
- Participant Observer for ten days at Beech Kindergarten (pseudonym)
- Mosaic of methods
  - Discussions / Focus Groups - teachers/ parents (Transcripts)
  - Teacher Reflections
  - Focus children
  - Assessment documentation
  - Photographs, video and audio recordings



Participants	Field texts constructed from:
Children/ Focus children	Photographs
	Video recordings (transcribed)
	Audio recordings (transcribed)
	Narrative Assessments / Learning Stories (written by teachers, and me)
	Participant Observations
	Research Journal - diary and field notes
	Reflections about individual focus children (written by teachers)
	Critical incidents/ telling examples file
Parents/ whānau	Questionnaire Responses
	Parent Focus Group (transcribed)
	<b>Parent Whānau Profiles (Focus Group attendees only)</b>
	Research Journal - diary and field notes
Teachers	Teacher Reflections
	Recorded Discussions (x4 - transcribed)
	Research Journal - diary and field notes

# Research Questions:

1. When learning about diversity and fairness in the social world, what **working theories** do children (3.5 -5 years) express? And how are these expressed?
2. How do families describe, encourage, and respond to children's explorations of fairness and difference?
3. How do teachers provoke and respond to children's **working theories** about the social world?
4. How might teachers promote an 'inclusive response' to diversity by supporting children to respect the equal worth of others regardless of their perceived differences?



A selective and thematic collection of narratives from a kindergarten community that illustrate how fairness and diversity were being negotiated in the lives of children, families, and teachers from multiple perspectives.

Four discussion chapters: fairness and friendship; gender, sex and sexuality; ethnicity and skin colour; the risky terrain



# Parent Whānau Questionnaire

- Q.5. What is the most surprising or unexpected thing your child has ever said or done about someone who is different from you and your family?
- Q.6. What is the most heart-warming thing your child has ever said or done about someone who is different from you and your family?

Heart-warming' response	Surprising response
Playing with/ alongside girls	That lady is a hippo!
Accepts friends in wheelchairs	Remembers adults' names and uses name in greetings
Wanted Dad to build boy a house	?
Easily made friends with children who have autism	Curious about people who are different. Says not PC things sometimes
Loves his friends. Comments on how beautiful people are	Blank
Discussion about 'brown faces' "Break your feelings"	<b>Coming to terms with being Māori, despite having European features</b>
Lady with no hair may be sick. Lovely hair when she's better	Not a topic that has come up yet with her
Gave clothes and old toys to a family in need	Asked if an African man had his skin painted



# Working theories

“Knowledge, skills, and attitudes are closely linked...and combine together to form a child’s “working theory” ...children are developing more elaborate and useful working theories about themselves and about the people in their lives ... [these] become increasingly useful for making sense of the world, giving the child control over what happens, for problem solving, and for further learning” (MoE, 1996, p. 44).

“The evolving ideas and understandings that children develop as they use their existing knowledge to try to make sense of new experiences. Children are most likely to generate and refine working theories in learning environments where uncertainty is valued, inquiry is modelled, and making meaning is the goal” (MoE, 2017, p. 23)



# Possible teaching strategies

Not supply direct answers, respond to, extend, complicate (Hedges, 2011) disrupt (Peters & Davis, 2011) 'unpack' (Areljung & Kelly-Ware, 2016) refute, validate, appreciate (Alasutaari, 2014), reify, make public (Wenger, 1998).

'Interrupting with social justice intent' (Genishi & Goodwin, 2008) could also be applied to children's working theories when they contravene the spirit of fairness and justice for all.



# That's a girls' song

Richie: 'No, I'm not dancing with you'

Teacher: 'What's the matter Caitlyn?'

Caitlyn: 'Richie won't dance with me'

Teacher: 'Why won't you dance with her?'

Richie: 'Cos that *Frozen* song is a girls' song, that's what my dad said'

Teacher: 'What song do you wanna dance to?'

Richie: 'Ohh, [pause] ...'



# Kissing, marriage and babies

- Teacher: Why were you going to marry them?
- Petra: 'Cos we want real babies. Who says you have to be married to have babies?
- Petra: I'm marrying actually Jack.
- Teacher: So, you're actually gonna marry him? But don't you have to be asked?
- Petra: Yes
- Teacher: Who's gonna ask you?
- Petra: We're just gonna make them marry us.
- Teacher: How are you gonna...?
- Gina: And then we're gonna kiss them for real.



**'No-one with brown faces is  
coming to my birthday party'**





**'Friends don't do that'**  
(Areljung & Kelly-Ware, 2016)



**'What's he doing that for?  
He's a boy'**

(Kelly-Ware, 2016)

# Mana Tangata Contribution strand - Goal One

Children experience an environment where there are equitable opportunities for learning, irrespective of gender, ability, age, ethnicity, or background

Learning Outcomes: Knowledge, skills and attitudes

Children develop:

- an understanding of their own rights and those of others;
  - the ability to recognise discriminatory practices and behaviour and to respond appropriately;
  - some early concepts of the value of appreciating diversity and fairness;
  - the self-confidence to stand up for themselves and others against biased ideas and discriminatory behaviour;
  - positive judgments on their own gender and the opposite gender;
  - positive judgments on their own ethnic group and other ethnic groups;
  - confidence that their family background is viewed positively within the early childhood education setting; and
  - respect for children who are different from themselves and ease of interaction with them
- (MoE, 1996, p. 66).



# Volcanoes and the seabed

- ▶ Children's surface interests, akin to **volcanoes** were highly visible and included Speedway and car racing, chickens, dinosaurs, dolls and the movie *Frozen*.
- ▶ Children were also interested in complex social issues related to diversity and fairness, obvious only when one looked and listened closely to what lay beneath the surface - the **seabed**.
- ▶ Claxton's metaphors of volcanoes or seabeds could prove useful for teachers when considering children's deeper interests in terms of diversity and fairness under the Contribution strand (MoE, 1996, 2017).



“ Central to effecting change is that negative attitudes towards difference and diversity are countered with new understandings and knowledge” (Gordon-Burns et al., 2012, p. 7).

We need to “blend rather than bulldoze new ways of thinking” (Waite et al., 2005, p.273) on hearing children’s concerns, and questions, and their developing working theories about sensitive issues.



One of the criteria for success of Participatory Action Research is whether participants have developed a stronger and more authentic understanding and development of their practices, and what changes have occurred

(Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000)



# Key realisations for teachers

Multiple perspectives were found to add depth to pedagogy and research.

On many occasions, individual stories came together to form collective pictures that provided depth and greater meaning to children's thinking.

Teachers admitted that they sometimes 'missed the boat' when it came to sharing significant information about children's learning with families.



# Key realisations for teachers

Finding genuine and meaningful ways to involve parents and whānau in children's learning was highlighted.

The relative simplicity of engaging parents, to get their input and hear their voices via a small group discussion, was a revelation to teachers.

Some parents had never considered, or were unsure what to say or do in terms of, their children's developing understandings of diversity in the world around them.



# An inclusive response to diversity

**From my perspective**, some teachers were seen to be responding more favourably (exciting trips), or differently to boys. Generally speaking, boys' verbal reactions received more attention than girls' non-verbal or 'silent' reactions.

An ongoing challenge was to treat children equitably, especially children on the margins of the group: children who were quiet; had English as an additional language; and children whose behaviour teachers found challenging.



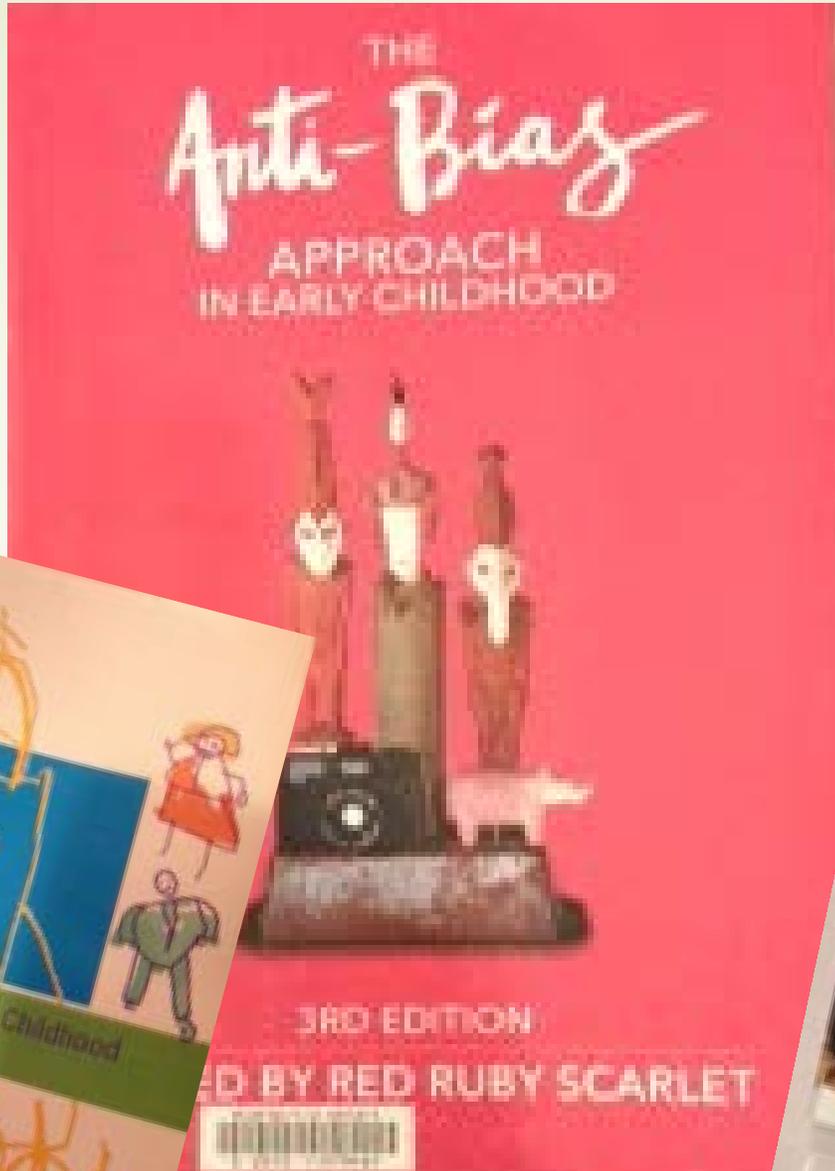
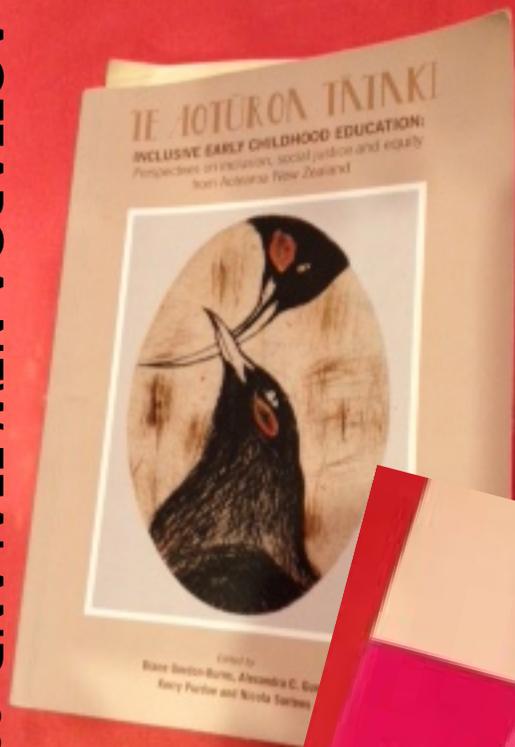
# Take home messages

- **Working theories and teaching strategies** - useful lens
- Learning related to **the Contribution strand** is fundamental for living with and alongside diverse others - **Relationships matter!**
- **Diversity** involves multifaceted learning - light and shadows
- **Multiple perspectives** add depth and richness
- **Seabeds** are the place to look and listen
- **Courageous conversations** with children, parents and each other

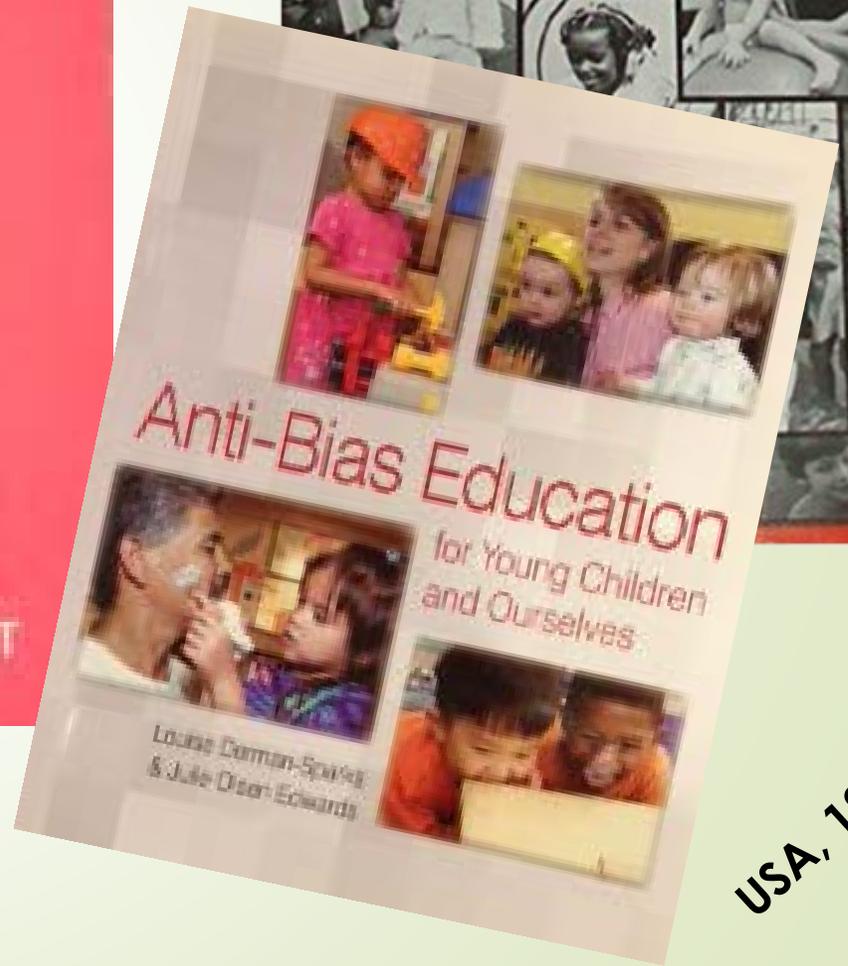
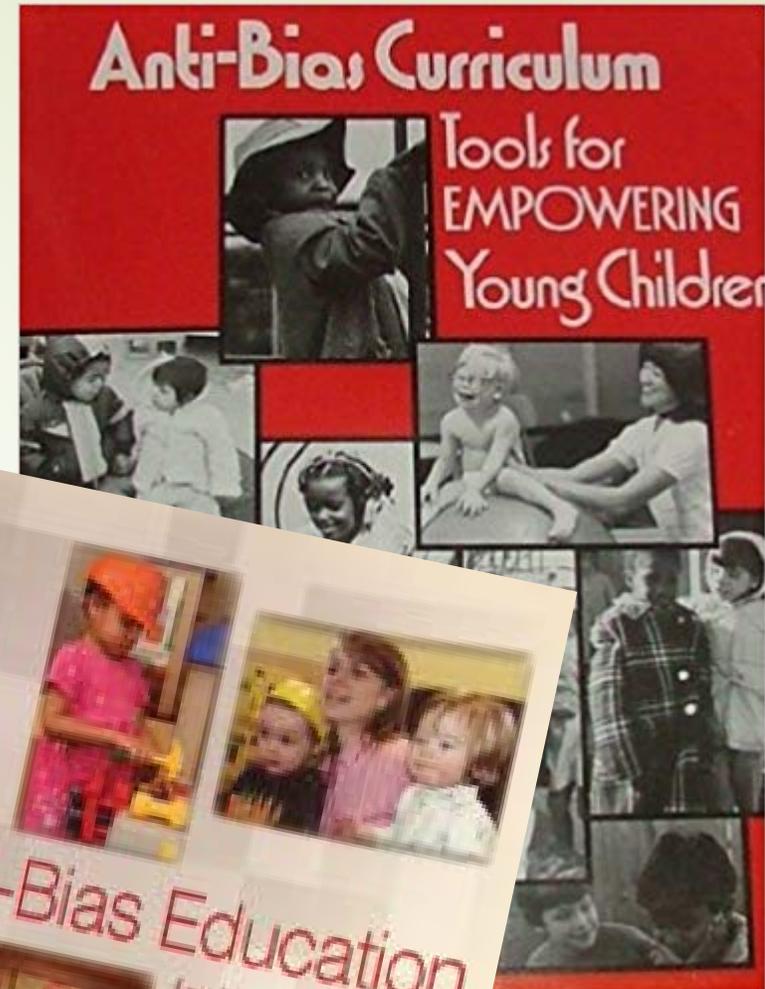


# Acknowledgements

- ▶ I am indebted to the teachers at Beech Kindergarten for walking alongside me on the early part of this journey. Without their involvement and support, this research would not have been possible. My time at Beech Kindergarten reminded me of the realities of day-to-day teaching after more than a decade away from them.
- ▶ It takes reflective and courageous teachers to investigate their own practice and allow an outsider to do likewise. I have tried hard to honour them in this work - where they were at individually, and as a teaching team, at that time.
- ▶ I feel privileged to have met the children and families who participated in this study especially the focus children, and am honoured to tell their stories. My hope is that their theorising about diversity and fairness continues to be mediated by courageous teachers and parents.
- ▶ To my Supervisors, Linda Mitchell and Nicola Daly whose support, encouragement, and expert guidance assisted me greatly on this journey



AUSTRALIA, 2001, 2017



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