

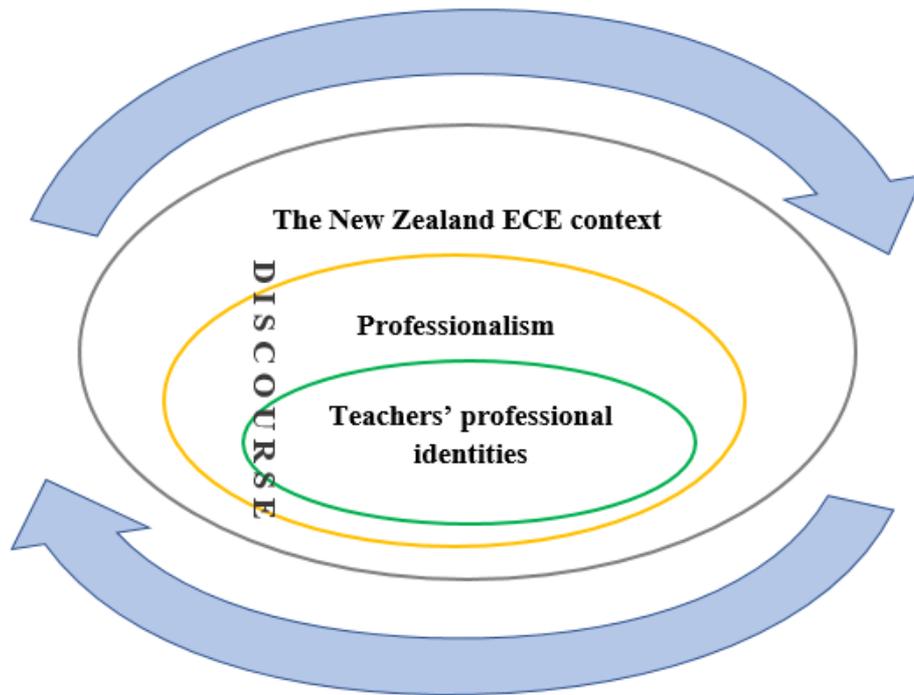
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**Re-thinking ways of being a teacher and doing
an early childhood project:
A critical examination of discourses and
identity constructions**

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Language, discourse and subjectivities through a feminist poststructuralist lens



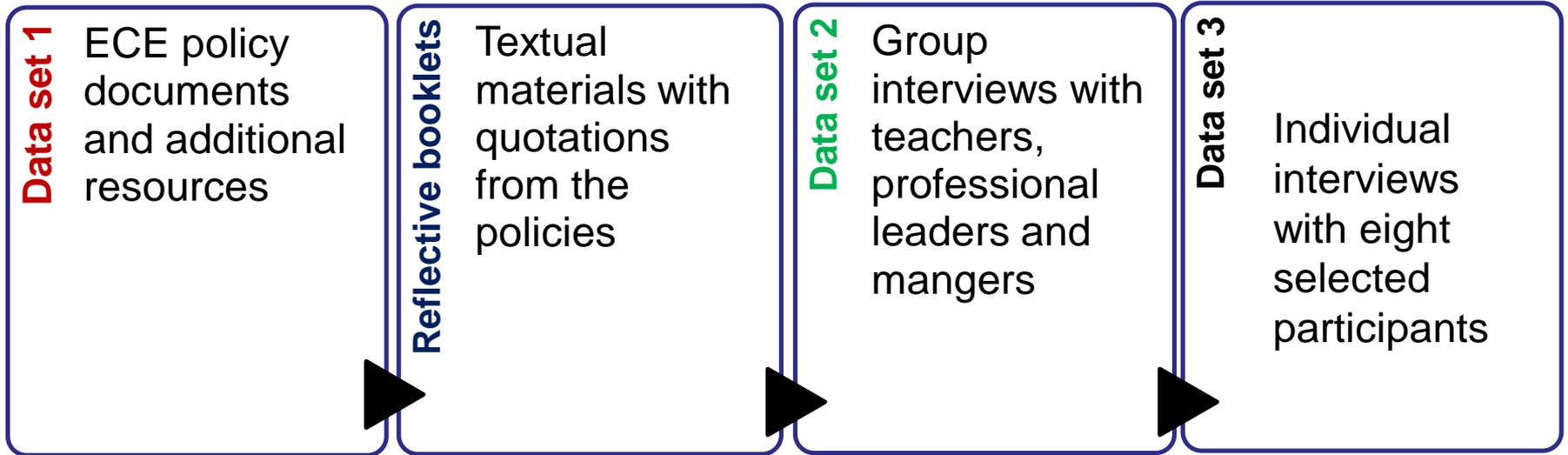
Four main reference points
(i.e. theoretical concepts):

1. discourse
2. professional identities
3. professionalism
4. the New Zealand ECE context

(Bacchi 1999; Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016; Baxter 2003; Weedon 1997)

Figure 1. The conceptual and theoretical framework
(Kamenarac, 2019, p. 9)

Methodology



- **Discourse-analysis approach** (more in Kamenarac, 2019, Kamenarac, forthcoming)
- Detailed information on ethical procedures, protecting the participants' rights and privacy, data and analysis process are available via the University of Waikato Research Commons permanent link
<https://hdl.handle.net/10289/12363>

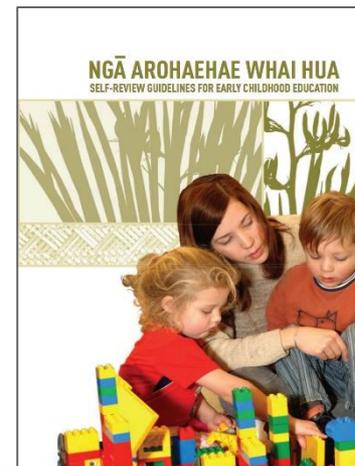
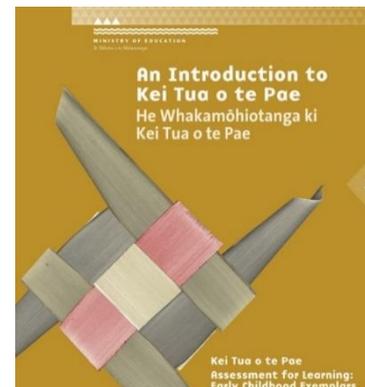
Discourses and identity constructions in ECE policies

ECE as the right of a child and a collaborative workshop

- Early Childhood Curriculum *Te Whāriki* (1996, 2017)
- Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua. Self-review Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (2008)

ECE as a social intervention for 'saving vulnerable' in society

- Vulnerable Children Act (VCA) and A practical guide for ECE Services, Ngā Kōhanga Reo, Playgroups, Schools and Kura (2014)



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Early Childhood Curriculum *Te Whāriki*

Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi engari he toa takitini.

I come not with my own strengths but bring with me the gifts, talents and strengths of my family, tribe and ancestors.

In Māori tradition children are seen to be inherently competent, capable and rich, complete and gifted no matter what their age or ability. Descended from lines that stretch back to the beginning of time, they are important living links between past, present and future, and a reflection of their ancestors. These ideas are fundamental to how Māori understand teaching and learning.

Competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society

This curriculum acknowledges that all children have rights to protection and promotion of their health and wellbeing, to equitable access to learning opportunities, to recognition of their language, culture and identity and, increasingly, to agency in their own lives. These rights align closely with the concept of mana.

(Ministry of Education 2017, pp. 2, 5, 12)

‘Relationships as a source of learning, empowerment and identity for all of us’

Self-review guidelines for early childhood education

Relationships are a source of learning, empowerment, and identity for all of us. This is reflected in the concept of whanaungatanga. Paul Hirini (1997) describes whanaungatanga as “a value, which reinforces the commitment whānau members have to each other”(page 44). Such commitment is expressed through a process of caring, sharing, respecting, helping, assisting, relieving, reciprocating, balancing, nurturing, and guardianship. Hirini goes on to suggest that involvement through whanaungatanga “generates observable behavioural processes through which whānau functioning is promoted and enhanced”. Whakawhanaungatanga, building a collaborative learning community, establishes an environment of trust and reciprocity as an essential base for effective review.

(Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 39)

Discourses of Vulnerability in ECE Policies

- UNICEF (2012) suggested that 30 percent of New Zealand children lived below the official poverty line.
- The Green Paper (2011) and the White Paper for vulnerable children (2012)
- Vulnerable Children Act (VCA) and A practical guide for ECE Services, Ngā Kōhanga Reo, Playgroups, Schools and Kura (2014)

In 2020, New Zealand Census showed that 1 in 5 children in New Zealand lives in poverty, equating to approximately 235,400 children living in a household experiencing material hardship (Stats NZ Tauranga Aotearoa, 2020).

New Zealand's most shameful secret: 'We have normalised child poverty'

One-third of the country's children, or 300,000, now live below the poverty line - 45,000 more than a year ago



▲ Emily Saitu and her family inside their motel room in South Auckland. Photograph: Eleanor Arce Bay

For 14 days and 14 nights Elijah Saitu, 15, has lived in a damp motel room, bordered by KFC to the left and a Denny's 24-hour takeaway to the right.

He spends his days watching music videos on television and eating white bread, tinned sardines, fizzy drinks and packets of chips.

"He's suffocating," says Elijah's mother, Emily Fiame Saitu, who has been begging the government to help her family.

"It's cut-throat in New Zealand. If you're struggling you get left behind."

The Saitu family are a tragic portrait of New Zealand's most shameful national secret: an epidemic of child poverty that belies the image of a Pacific haven offering equality of opportunity and a prosperous, clean, healthy life of plenty for all.

Roy, E. A. (2016, August 16). New Zealand's most shameful secret: "We have normalised child poverty." *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/16/new-zealands-most-shameful-secret-we-have-normalised-child-poverty>

Minister Anne Tolley (2016, paras. 33-37)

This new name makes it crystal clear that it exists to support and protect vulnerable children. That is its only job. We cannot shy away from this. We can't hide it and dress it up as something else. We are determined to tackle this head on.

And I've heard a lot about stigma. Well, stigma comes when you've been in care and end up in prison, or on a benefit, or don't have any qualifications. And too many young people who leave our care system end up in that position. We are going to change that. Other people can focus on the name – I'm going to focus on producing a system that gives our children the lives they deserve.

1 APRIL 2017

New Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki launched

Anne Tolley

Children

Minister for Children Anne Tolley has welcomed today's official launch of the new Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki.

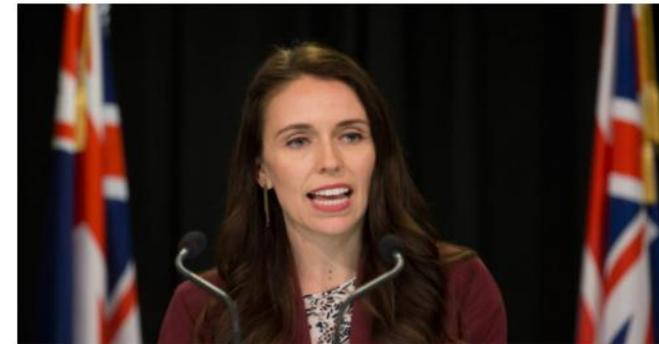
... 12 months later...

NEW ZEALAND | Politics

Ministry for Vulnerable Children to be renamed

11 Dec, 2017 04:58 PM

© 2 minutes to read



The Ministry for Vulnerable Children will be renamed and would over time extend its reach beyond just the 5600-odd children in state care, PM Jacinda Ardern announced this afternoon. Photo / Mark Mitchell

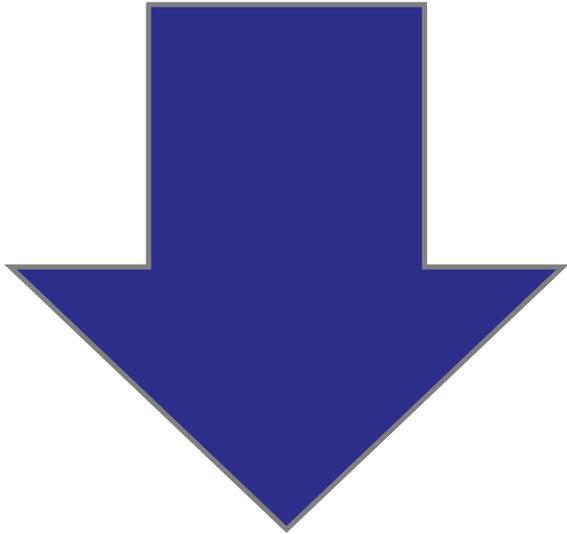
NZ Herald
By: Derek Cheng



Retrieved from

<https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/new-ministry-focus-solely-vulnerable-children>
<https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/new-ministry-vulnerable-children-oranga-tamariki-launched>
<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/ministry-for-vulnerable-children-to-be-renamed/BXXCS37HH2BJCSFJYAVSAC24R1>

Confronting, and yet co-existing discourses in ECE policies



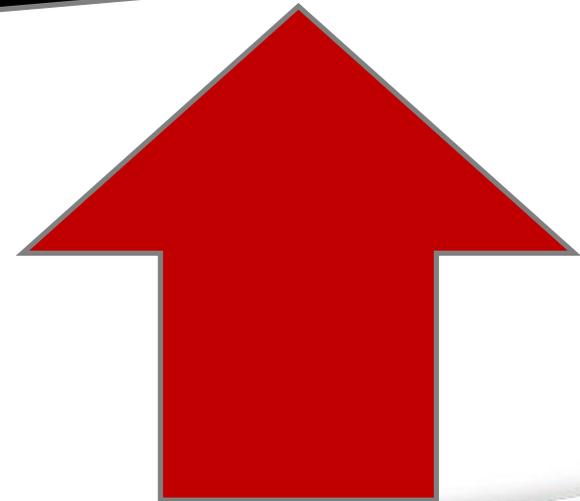
Discursive windows of democracy

- ECE as democratic space and collaborative workshop
- Focus on *all* children, families and communities no matter their circumstances
- Teachers as kaiako and partners with parents and whānau, as children's first teachers

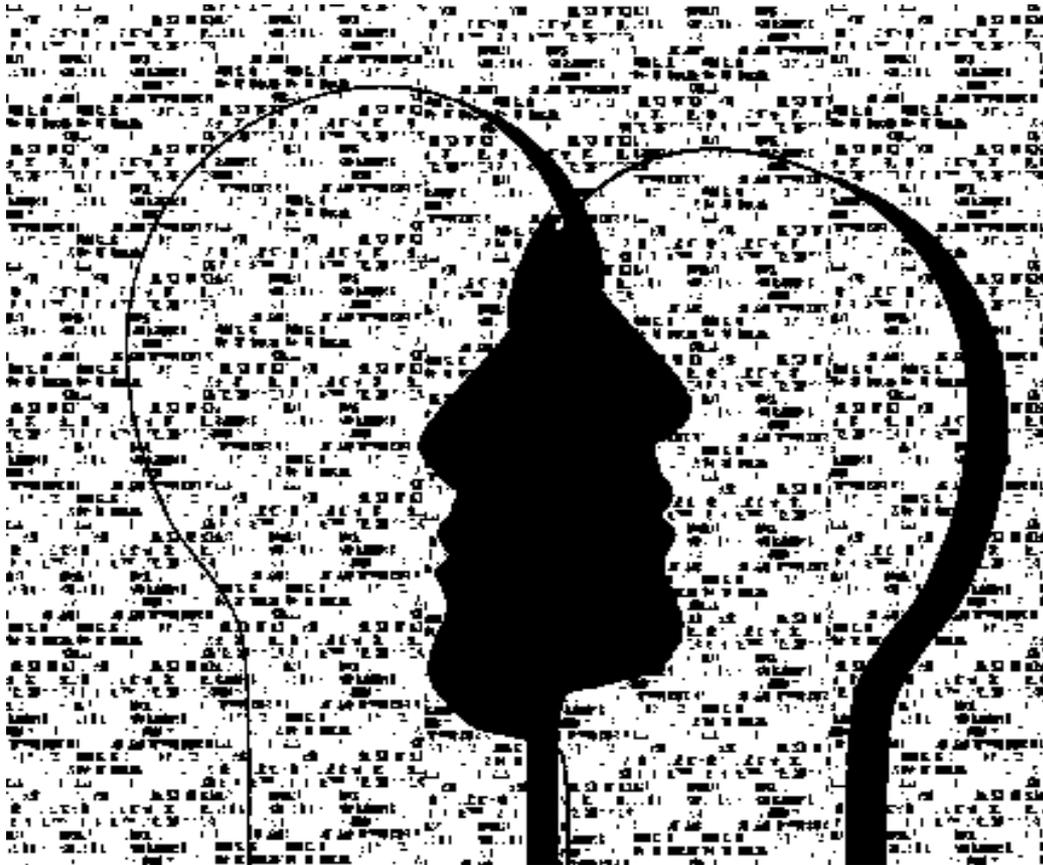


Discursive windows of vulnerability

- ECE as a social intervention for improving statistics of vulnerability in society
- Focus on children 'at risk of not succeeding now and in the future'
- Teachers as saviours of the 'vulnerable' in society



Identity constructions in ECE practice



- How have policy discourses been translated in specific ECE institutional contexts (i.e. 'extremely vulnerable')? What are their effects?
- What identities have been constructed in the 'extremely vulnerable' contexts, and why?
- What is left unproblematic in the identity constructions on offer?

Translations of policy discourses in ECE practice

Teacher – ‘a catalyst for preventing vulnerability’

“[...] with all these [referring to the emphases on vulnerable children, VCA and statistics of vulnerability] it is ideally our place [referring to ECE] in the society to help them. We seem to be that catalysts to avoid that vulnerability, don't we? [...] The fact is that they ['vulnerable' children] are with us and that we hear about the stuff that can be a problem [...]. So, we need to jump on that before it happens. [...] We are the catalysts to avoid that vulnerability, aren't we?”
(ECE Teachers, FG 2)

“[...] when I look at our teachers now, they are more on alert. They are more tuned into parents' actions and words, children's actions and words, and then their confidence is growing by knowing that 'although I may see something that I really don't like I know that I can say something. There is someone else from whom I can get support'. So, it is not as they were ignoring”.
(ECE Teachers, FG 2)

“It has been a huge shift towards supporting parents in those social areas”. (ECE Teachers, FG 2)

Teacher – ‘an expert’ in ‘extremely vulnerable contexts’

“... We got one little boy that just continually escapes from the centre [to goes back home]. One day he climbed to a driveway to his dad's house. His dad returned from jail to home on that day. The little boy escaped to see his dad I told his dad that we need to follow up this event face-to-face. I explained to him what had happened. The dad was stoned for a starter, and then he told [me] ‘He came home, so it is all fine’ Then, he went inside. We got a back story that the dad was in jail for beating up the mum.... [Centre managers provided detailed background information about the family, which remains confidential].

...You [referring to teachers] know this child is surrounded by this atmosphere at home, and you hear all these stories... Sometimes you need to teach children what is right and wrong because you know that their families may not do so We have to be up there to direct that child down a different path. Because we know that he is in the culture of a gang ... [Participants continued to talk about families’ ‘challenging behaviours and the vulnerability of children’]. It is where the little one will go to if we [teachers] don't do anything ... The more they are in the centre with us, the more we can teach them socially acceptable behaviours. The more they are out of the centre, the more they are learning other behaviours “. (ECE managers, FG 3)

Shifting positions and views of relationships in ‘extremely vulnerable contexts’

Concluding thoughts: What is left (un)problematic in the identity constructions on offer?

- Constructions of teachers as 'saviors', 'a catalyst for preventing vulnerability' and 'experts in vulnerable contexts' provoke the ECE sector to consider if/how they may have given voice to discourses of vulnerability in a way that promotes the social-interventionist and neoliberal framing of ECE as a vehicle for producing 'successful' earners and consumers in the future.
- The idea that ECE and teachers can 'save vulnerable children' masks the fact that teachers alone cannot address issues of structural vulnerability (e.g. poverty) without the determination of the Government to put in place measures (e.g. redistributive taxation, proactive labour and housing policies) to reduce causes of the vulnerability in society (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009).
- Instead of viewing early childhood education as a complex, ongoing, multi-dimensional negotiation with all children, families and communities, teachers may promote ECE as a set of social interventions that are "done to young children [instead of with] in the hope of (re)shaping their future" (Penn 2013, 13).
- The purpose of ECE narrows to reproducing 'productive citizens' that govern themselves by so that the "state remains strong despite appearing to dissolve" (Dahlberg & Moss 2005, 133).

“[...] if the imagery we hold of Māori children [or indeed of any child], or of interaction patterns, is one of deficits, then our principles and practices will reflect this, and we will perpetuate the educational crisis for Māori children [or indeed for all children]”.

(Bishop & Glynn, 2000, p. 7)



A red pen is shown in the upper right corner, writing the words "Thank you" in a black, cursive font on a white background. The pen is angled downwards and to the left, with its tip touching the end of the word "you".

Thank you

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