



Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa
NZ Childcare Association

Ngā Karekare Oranga

Anne Meade

When adults join children in playful learning

Early Childhood Winter Research Hui,
Victoria University of Wellington, 22 June 2013

Background: *Early Childhood Teachers' Work* study

- For a few years, education and care centres were subsidised by government at a level that made a 100% qualified-teachers' profile possible
- From 1 February 2011, the 100% qualified teacher funding band was withdrawn, and the funding for the 80-100% qualified teachers was reduced
- NZCA was interested in capturing the features of 100% centres whilst these existed/ could be found
- The 2011-2012 project focused on 100% qualified teachers was completed in mid-2012.

(Meade, Robinson, Smorti, Stuart & Williamson, et al, 2012)

Early childhood teachers' work: research methods



Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa
NZ Childcare Association

- Collective case studies in 10 randomly-selected education and care centres in five locations in NZ
- Five centres, referred to as 100% centres, were in 100% qualified teachers funding band, in Jan 2011
- Five centres in the 50-79% funding band, Jan 2011
- In each centre ten randomly-selected children were observed interacting with staff
- Centre quality was rated using an NZCER tool
- Centre documents, including a sample of Learning Stories, were analysed
- Staff and 95 parents were interviewed.

Relevant research questions

- What quality teaching practices feature in centres with 100% qualified teachers and those with fewer qualified teachers? (For this session, the focus will be on sustained shared thinking.)
- How do the profiles, patterns and purposes of teachers' work differ in the two categories?



Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa
NZ Childcare Association



Centre contexts



Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa
NZ Childcare Association

- All centres were full day or at least school hours
- Most were in city locations, one in a town
- At least two 50-79% centres were in low-income communities; majority of this set charged lower fees
- 100% centres were rated as having better resources
- Two centres were described as bicultural
- Centre licences ranged from 24 to 100 children.

Extending knowledge and understanding through ‘sustained shared thinking’



Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa
NZ Childcare Association

- Socio-cultural theory and research demonstrates the powerful influence of teachers as mediators of children’s learning (see, e.g., work by Vygotsky, Fler, Rogoff, and the EPPE team)
- Teachers need both relational and pedagogical knowledge to contribute to playful learning and to engage in deep and meaningful inquiry with children
- The positive outcomes from intentional teaching involving ‘sustained shared thinking’ in playful situations include social development *and* complex cognitive learning. (Siraj-Blatchford, 2012)

Moving beyond short exchanges to interactive dialogue



Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa
NZ Childcare Association

- Sustained shared thinking (SST):
 - is defined as *‘instances where two or more individuals “work together” in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, or extend a narrative’* (EPPE)
 - positions teachers as facilitators of children’s cognition, who tap children’s funds of knowledge
 - entails adult-child co-construction of understanding
 - boosts children’s creative and critical thinking.

The construct on ‘sustained shared thinking’ in our research



Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa
NZ Childcare Association

- The EPPE researchers (Sylva et al, 2010) found that teachers and children engaging in ‘sustained shared thinking’ (SST) in ECE settings had strong predictive value for positive child outcomes later
- The Teachers’ Work researchers decided to include event sampling of SST in our mixed method design for gathering data. The event samples were part of our time-interval observational data of 10 children in each of the ten case study centres.

Findings from our research observations



Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa
NZ Childcare Association

- In the 100% education and care centres we found:
 - Rates of adult-child short interactions were higher
 - Rates of ‘conversations’ (defined broadly) were higher
 - Episodes of ‘sustained shared thinking’ involving more intellectual challenge were far more numerous. Nearly two-thirds of all episodes of SST were in centres with 100% qualified teachers (QT).

Episodes of SST by age group, 100% QT vs 50-79% QT centres

	100% QT		50-79% QT	
	QT	UQ	QT	UQ
Toddlers	13	3	20	2
4 years +	40	3	14	6
Total	53	6	34	8

Note: UQ in 100% centres were supernumerary, relievers and/or student teachers. In 50-79% centres, they were more numerous as they included regulated staff, relievers and/or student teachers.

Who participated in SST?



Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa
NZ Childcare Association

- Looking at who initiated SST episodes ...
 - 73 of the 101 episodes between a teaching staff member and a child were initiated by a qualified teacher (QT)
 - 9 of the total episodes were initiated by unqualified staff
 - 19 were initiated by children. The majority of these were with qualified teachers, indicating children's recognition of the expertise of QT
 - Instances of SST occurred across the curriculum, including during tidying up and re-setting.

SST scenario – sticky Sellotape



Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa
NZ Childcare Association

A toddler was discovering how to use a tape dispenser without tangling the tape in her fingers. The teacher stepped the child through the process verbally and by modelling until she managed it on her alone. The child repeated the dispensing of tape and sticking tape onto paper for some time further with great concentration.

Scenario – fossil hunting



Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa
NZ Childcare Association

- A student teacher, taking on the role of palaeontologist, took a group of children on a journey through the playground using a map designed by the children. This led to an ‘excavation site’ to dig for fossilised bones, using palaeontologist tools, before cleaning and investigating bones in a table-top ‘laboratory’ that the children had designed.

Note: Few episodes were observed where teaching staff intentionally planned to frame the play (Fleer). It built on children’s inquiries into dinosaurs, Her planning considered what might be a playful, motivating and conceptually-engaging activity.

Scenario – bracelets in boxes



Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa
NZ Childcare Association

- The family corner had open shelves on which were placed a range of boxes; some had smaller boxes nested in them, while others had a range of small objects in them. A toddler – not yet speaking - went and picked up a round container. The teacher moved alongside and said, “You do the small one. I’ll do the big one.”
- *For the rest of the 8-minute observation period and beyond it, the teacher played alongside the toddler, both of them opening and shutting boxes, & fitting lids or objects inside them. All the while the teacher reflected the child’s actions in conceptual language.*

Conclusions



Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa
NZ Childcare Association

- Sustained shared thinking differs from co-construction in that the adult, while sharing power, may have a ‘direction’ in mind; hence there is typically a degree of instruction with SST episodes that extend children’s conceptual knowledge as they play
- The Teachers’ Work research showed that those who do this in meaningful and playfully-engaging ways had professional expertise and socio-cultural understandings of learning
- Notwithstanding, there were low rates of SST in 100% centres (consistent with EPPE’s low rates).

Acknowledgements



Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa
NZ Childcare Association

- With a special thank you to the staff, parents and children from the 10 centres who accepted the invitation to be part of this research.
- With appreciation to NZCA research colleagues, and to Edith Hodgen, Patricia Meagher-Lundberg and Sissie Te Whau for specialist contributions.

Publications from NZCA's Teachers' Work study



Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa
NZ Childcare Association

Meade, A., et al., (2012). *Early childhood teachers' work in education and care centres: Profiles, patterns and purposes*. Wellington: Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/NZ Childcare Association. Download an e-copy from www.nzca.ac.nz.

Meade, A. (2012). Centre-parent communication about children's learning, *Early Childhood Folio*, Issue 2.

Meade, M. Stuart & J. Williamson (2012). A study in teachers' work in providing quality care and education for infants and toddlers, *The First Years*, Volume 14, Issue 2.

Meade, A., Stuart, M., Williamson, J., Smorti, S., Robinson, L., & Carroll-Lind, J. Adult-child sustained shared thinking: (2013, in press). Who, how and when. *Journal of Early Education*.