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# Silent policymakers in Aotearoa New Zealand: reflections on research of early childhood teacher views on policy, practicum and partnership

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## ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the importance of the stories and perspectives of early childhood education Associate Teachers (ATs) at a time when there is considerable flux being experienced in the Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood sector, due in particular to the ongoing impact of changes in government funding policy, ongoing debates about pathways into the teaching profession, and an updated curriculum framework. The paper developed out of a research project that asked Associate Teachers (AT) about their views on the impact of recent national education policy changes. The views of ATs provide an influential voice for the sector, and particularly for teacher education providers through the student teacher practicum experience. Evidence and analysis of AT views provides insight into how the triadic of student, lecturer and practitioner can work together to support student teachers with their practicum experience in relation to the recent policy changes. A very small return rate for online questionnaires left the research team with the challenge of talking about the meaning of such silence, while at the same time acknowledging and valuing the views of those who did complete the questions. The paper presents a shift in the researchers' perspectives on the subject of their research, and raises awareness of the problem of working with, and being committed to, the silent voices. The paper concludes with foundations for future research, focusing on ATs as active participants in teacher education policymaking and involving them both as researchers and participants.

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Early childhood education; education policy; initial teacher education; Aotearoa New Zealand; silence

## Introduction

In 2002 the New Zealand Government concentrated its efforts in promoting participation in high quality early childhood education (ECE) with the introduction of the *Pathways to the future: Ngā huarahi Arataki* strategic plan (Ministry of Education, 2002). This policy included working towards all teacher-led centres being fully staffed by qualified teachers (Ministry of Education, 2002), reinforcing in policy a view from research that teacher qualifications were critical to quality education (Meade, Robinson, Smorti, Stuart, & Williamson,

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2012). It can be argued that the strategic plan situated Aotearoa New Zealand as a globally recognised leader in the state-mandated and guided provision of regulated early learning experiences (Farquhar & Gibbons, 2010). However, towards the end of the 10 year period of the strategic plan, the ECE sector, and particularly the role of teacher education within the sector, experienced a significant period of questioning of its status and role. This questioning was evident in two policy directions that have implications for teaching qualification choices and pathways. In one policy development, the New Zealand Government excluded early childhood teacher education from initial discussions regarding qualification benchmarks for the wider teaching profession. In the second, the strategic plan policy regarding teacher qualification was adjusted several times, to the point where centres no longer received higher levels of funding once they reach the revised target of 80% of fully qualified staff: now called the '80+' target. The Minister of Education rationalised that a) the country could not afford to meet its earlier funding promises; and b) that the difference between 'all' and 'almost all' teachers in a centre being qualified was negligible in terms of children's experiences. A report supported by the then New Zealand Childcare Association [NZCA] suggested that these shifts in Government policy affected the quality of early childhood education (Meade et al., 2012).

The purpose of this research was to share with the wider ECE community the views and perceptions of Associate Teachers (ATs) regarding these recent shifts in Government policy. AT views were regarded as critical to the debate because of the partnership expected between ATs and teacher education providers during the student practicum. The changes in policy will impact AT-teacher education partnership and hence on the practicum experience and the overall quality of the teaching qualification. The researchers approached a sample of ATs affiliated with one teacher education provider with the intention to understand and share their views on current teacher qualification policy directions and their effect on practicum experiences. ATs were invited by online survey to voice anonymous views on the issue of changing funding and qualification policies in general. The researchers additionally regarded the research as providing ATs with an opportunity to reflect on their own role as mentors, and an opportunity, when reading the final findings and discussion, to consider their views in relation to those of their peers. The response to the online survey by ATs was extremely low. The research team's concerns around low participation led the analysis of both the data and the project as a whole to consider a theorisation of the silence of ATs in the ECE policy domain. This paper begins with a brief overview of policy developments, reports on the limited findings, and then theorises the silences apparent in these findings in relation to policy developments and a theory of silence in policymaking that problematises the role of higher education in early childhood teacher education.

## Mapping the landslide

In the last two decades, Aotearoa New Zealand ECE policy has grown in both domestic and international recognition and value. Transformations within the early childhood teaching profession are closely associated with this policy development, and have been the object of much scholarly interest (see for instance May, 2001, 2003; Meade et al., 2012; Moss, 2006; Neylon, 2015; Novinger & O'Brien, 2003; Plotz, 2001). Arguably, the incentivising of minimum levels of ECE teacher qualifications (that characterised the period from

2002 through to 2011) contributed to the growth of a strong ECE teaching profession, and a corresponding boost to ECE teacher education. In that decade efforts to increase the number of qualified teachers in centres were presented to, and acted on, by government (for an overview of the decade's policy changes see Farquhar & Gibbons, 2010).

While the original intention was to use funding as an incentive to staff centres with qualified teachers (to reach the goal of 100% qualified teachers in teacher-led ECE settings), following an election in 2011, a shift occurred in this policy. This policy shift resulted in no increase in funding for centres that surpass the target of 80% fully qualified staff: now called the '80+' target (Meade et al., 2012).

In 2010, the Government report *A Vision for the Teaching Profession* (New Zealand Government, 2010) engendered further cause for concern about the future of the early childhood teaching profession and of teacher education, with the very obvious omission of any reference to the early childhood sector in the Ministry's vision of the future of teaching. This omission was followed by a proposal to trial new postgraduate teacher education qualifications for primary and secondary school teachers. The Government received immediate lobby from some of the nation's early childhood teacher education providers with regards to the impact of this direction on the teaching profession and on the wider community. Concerns for the early childhood teaching profession have been raised in relation to qualifications, pay, job satisfaction, retention and status (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007; Gibson, 2015; Jovanovic, 2013; Neylon, 2015; O'Connor, McGunnigle, Treasure, & Davie, 2014). These discussions are likely to continue as the Government, the Education Council, and the secondary, primary and early childhood sectors continue to debate teacher qualification pathways within broader discussions and concerns regarding the profession.

Just after the visionary document overlooked early childhood teacher education, the ECE Taskforce (2011) report, *An Agenda for Amazing Children*, urged a continuation of government investment in early childhood education. It also acknowledged that the Government may be forced to make expenditure cuts during challenging economic times, and to target funds to communities that are identified as 'in need'. However, the report argued that this must be weighed against evidence that shows the high returns to society from financial investment into ECE and care. In order to situate these potentially conflicting recommendations it is important to explore and consider two interrelated elements of ECE: quality and teacher qualifications.

## The ECE 'quality debate'

Quality early education is a key element in international economic organisational discourse that influences national policy direction (see Farquhar & Gibbons, 2010). The New Zealand Government funds early childhood education services with the aim of providing 'quality educational services' to children based on a range of variables including the number of qualified staff, adult-child ratios, curriculum and programmes and group size (Dalli et al., 2011). The ECE community has also largely developed around a 'quality' discourse through which ECE community advocates, scholars and policy makers discuss education experiences before school (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2001; Moss & Dahlberg, 2008).

However quality is a contested notion. There is no consensus that quality should even be an educational aim (Dahlberg et al., 2001) let alone what it might look like. In relation to the contested nature of quality Dalli et al. (2011) suggest that:

... the number of discourses from which to view quality has grown substantially over the past decade. Studies that illustrate this growth range from positivist ones that seek to quantify the effect of discreet variables in determining quality to others within ecological and sociocultural paradigms which foreground the contextualised nature of quality within a system or activity (p. 147).

Dalli et al. (2011) reinforce the importance of contextualisation and argue that quality cannot be viewed as an observable fact on its own; but that it should rather be considered 'as a construct that is embedded in layers of meaning that are interpreted within the lived experiences of infants and toddlers in relationship with others and their environments' (p. 147). In addition, Meade et al. (2012) note that it is not easy to separate the effects of specific quality indicators, such as the direct influence of qualified teachers on the staff team. However the complexity of determining what is good quality and how quality has positive effects on learning communities continues to provide impetus to ECE research and practice. For instance (and particularly relevant here) studies attempt to show the impact of teacher qualifications on quality outcomes (Meade et al., 2012; Mitchell, Wylie, & Carr, 2008).

### The ECE 'teacher qualifications debate'

The contribution of qualified ECE teachers to the quality of ECE is considered by some as non-negotiable. Meade et al. (2012, p. 21) state that there is 'consensus in the literature that staff need to be well educated ... with qualifications directly relevant to early childhood education'. Such advocacy supports the notion that centres employing educated and professional staff, with qualifications specifically focused on early childhood education, will be able to deliver services with better outcomes focused on the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical learning and development of children (Dalli et al., 2011; Farquhar, 2003; Kane, 2005; Meade et al., 2012; Ministry of Education, 2002; Mitchell, 2011). The New Zealand Educational Institute [NZEI] (2010) reports that quality teaching practice is a result of quality teacher education. The process of teacher education provides students with the knowledge and skills to think critically about their practice, and how they can respond to and extend the learning that is taking place (NZEI, 2010; Stremmel, Burns, Nganga, & Bertolini, 2015).

There are many stakeholders involved in determining what counts as quality, and there are also many stakeholders involved in determining what counts as a quality teacher. As noted above, the New Zealand Government now takes the position that the quality of qualified teachers is not a significant variable that warrants the investment plans promoted by previous governments. This shift in Government position has recharged debates about the value and purpose of teacher education. Carr and Mitchell (2010) delineate three basic recurring assumptions that become visible in the media: (a) funding for the early childhood education sector has already reached a level of over-funding; (b) reallocations can be made to shift the funding focus from qualified teachers to increased participation; and (c) that qualified teachers and unqualified adults are doing the same job anyway (Carr & Mitchell, 2010). This last assumption brings to light the tension between valuing teachers with many years of teaching experience and newly qualified teachers with a few years of teaching practice and study. A key element to consider here is whether there is agreement that teacher education is

effective. For instance, both Novinger and O'Brien (2003) and Stremmel et al. (2015) argue that teacher education is largely the product of education policy that emphasises accountability rather than quality. They critique the use of standardised teacher education programmes, and argue that it means that 'everyone is subjected to a disempowering, regulatory (and potentially punitive) gaze in the name of higher standards' (Novinger & O'Brien, 2003, p. 3). Moreover, these arguments suggest that the influence of regulations and standards has moved beyond just being mandatory and 'boring' to being intentionally destructive, in that education programmes are becoming normalised (Novinger & O'Brien, 2003; Stremmel et al., 2015) within the broader culture of performativity that characterises neoliberal higher education in the knowledge economy (Ball, 2012, 2016).

Katz (2009) emphasises that there is little agreement and a great deal of tension in debates regarding the construction of the teacher, while Dall'Alba (2009) highlights that the element that is key to the quality of teacher education is the student's prior life experience, values and beliefs. These tensions are important for the student's practicum experience. It is in the practicum that students experience the nexus between perceived divisions of knowledge/theory and practice, as the 'talk of quality' and the 'doing of quality', in terms of their development of an identity as teachers.

### The teaching practice debate

Teaching placements, or practicums, are regarded as influential experiences that determine the quality of a student's teacher education (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Key to this experience is the AT (Crowe, 2009). The AT is responsible for the crucial role of mentoring and evaluating the student teacher during their practicum experience. Research has developed an image of the quality AT and of the impact of these qualities on the overall quality of the teaching qualification. McDonald (2004) argues that the AT should be confident in their ability to talk about their own pedagogy, their own values and beliefs, and their own reflective processes, while at the same time supporting the student teacher to reflect deeply about their own practice. An effective AT needs to motivate and inspire student teachers, recognise their learning needs, and reciprocate discussion on their perceptions of learning and the role of the teacher (McDonald, 2004; Starkey & Rawlins, 2011). McDonald's (2004) research indicated that student teachers rate the most important characteristics of an effective AT as their personal attitudes and pedagogy, role-modelling, critical reflections, and feedback. Student teachers regarded the AT's ability to model practices and behaviour as one of the most important characteristics of the AT role. Practicum experiences 'involve an interpersonal and interactional process' (McDonald, 2004, p. 86), shared by the AT and the student.

Research of student views on the experience of practicum support found that students were dissatisfied with levels of support and inspiration; and were not given adequate support in their goal development (Murphy, 2009). In a sense, students can develop the curious experience of questioning their own existence through the ways in which they experience support during the practicum. At the same time, in observing the support they receive from an AT, they are able to see the complexities of the AT's role, who is working with an early childhood teaching team, often in a team leadership or management role, and additionally supporting the student.

Research of lecturers on students' practicum experiences, and in particular the dynamics between lecturers and ATs during practicum visits, found that lecturers do not contribute freely in triadic meetings and that the lecturers interviewed doubted their own professional judgment (Ortlipp, 2003, 2009). This research recommended that stronger relationships are built between ATs and teacher education institutions and, notably, that assessment practices for practicum be more flexible to allow for this professional relationship to emerge.

However other studies have found that lecturers tended to focus on competency standards rather than professional discussion, and have recommended that students determine the focus for each practicum in order to build agency (Dayan, 2008; Turnbull, 1997, 2004). The element of agency is important in teacher qualifications in the sense that agency may be perceived as both a focus of teacher education and an element of a student's character that can be influenced negatively by the very experience of teacher education. For instance, where assessment is overly prescriptive and standardised, student teachers learn to conform. Within practicum placements, the power relations are not easy to trace, and they shift constantly. Where the practicum is regarded as a collaborative, emotional, and personal time and space (Stover, 2008), the role of the AT may be understood as very complex and requiring, arguably, much more attention from teacher education providers. This can re-position teacher education institutions in terms of how they support ATs and, from a wider perspective, in terms of what the practicum is actually for in relation to teacher qualification.

The shifts in policy noted above may have a significant impact on the ability of the AT to engage in this complex mentoring role. Any difficulties experiences can be seen, in the research on ECE teacher education, to impact on the quality of the qualification, and hence in this research ATs views on the impact of policy changes were researched in order to better understand both the possible implications for teacher education and the role that teacher education institutions might play in better supporting ATs.

## Method and results: sounds of silence

Given that the above complexities and concerns have a significant impact on each student teacher's journey as well as on the ways in which teacher education intuitions and early childhood centre communities work together as an interconnected education and care community, this research was designed to share and value the concerns of ATs. The purpose of this research was to gather AT views on shifting policy and its implication for aspects of their professional experiences. The research team gained ethics approval to recruit participants in the study. The participant sample was ATs employed by licensed early childhood centres in the Auckland region. Information sheets were distributed to early childhood centres with a link to an anonymous online electronic survey with three demographic, three Likert, and four open ended questions.

There were only two respondents to the online survey. This gave cause for some careful consideration of how to respond and analyse the data. Researchers agreed that, guided by AUT ethical research guidelines, the views of those participants who responded are vital to share. However it was also considered important to engage with those voices in ECE settings that remained silent, the possible reasons for their silence, and what the silence might offer to a theorisation of the debates around teacher qualifications. These silences



add to other silences observed and considered as important within the terrain of the early childhood profession (see for instance Ortlipp, 2003) and are theorised later in this section.

The first three survey questions were demographic. One of the respondents was an AT working at a kindergarten while the other was at full day care centre. One participant indicated that they had worked for at least ten years as an AT while the other did not indicate how long they had been an AT. When asked about their highest qualification, one had a Bachelor of Teaching degree and the other a Diploma of Teaching.

Questions four to six asked about participants' (a) interest in Government policy for funding for qualified teachers; (b) interest in policy regarding minimum teacher qualifications within licensed settings; and (c) interest in the quality of practicum experiences for student teachers. One participant indicated a high level of interest in each of these, while the other a very high level of interest.

Four open-ended questions were then asked. Firstly, the participants were asked to share their views on the current Government policy regarding teacher qualifications for ECE teachers. One respondent stated that the policy 'undervalues the importance of having a qualification for ECE teachers' while the other wrote 'I believe the current policies de value [sic] the early childhood profession. Having qualified teachers raises the quality and therefore the perceived view of early childhood as being important and valuable'. Only one participant responded to the following three open-ended questions. With regard to how policy changes have affected the quality of ECE teaching and learning, he/she stated that the 'quality is good when we have 100% qualified teachers teaching our children. Now the quality is not great as we do not have all qualified teachers in our centres'.

When asked how this Government shift in policy will impact on their role as an AT, the response was that 'We have less motivated student teachers. Many are worried about getting jobs when they have completed their studies. This impacts on their performance'. Finally when asked for comments on how the University and ATs can work together to support student practicum experiences, the participant said that 'We need to work together to ensure that they will find the jobs. We need to make them feel valued'.

These respondent views aligned with earlier research data (see Meade et al., 2012) on the importance of continuing the pathway to having full contingents of qualified teachers in ECE centres. Views on current policy indicated that the participants had concerns for their profession, articulating that being (and becoming) an ECE teacher might lose value. This is an important element to consider for the ECE profession. In addition the responses indicated the importance and value of continuing to develop partnerships between teacher education providers and centre communities.

The data also provided indications of the role of teachers in the education policy community. The analysis of the responses indicating 'levels of interest' revealed that for the two respondents interest in the direction of policy was high. However, here the very low response rate to the research invitation can be considered as an additional significant result that required analysis in the form of reflection from our positions within teacher education institutions. In this sense, the researchers need to not only consider the data that they collected, but also the data that they did not collect, in order to establish and contribute meaningfully to the debate on quality and teacher qualifications in ECE. In particular, did the response rate indicate some kind of intentional silence from teachers regarding seemingly essential policy debates?



Ortlipp (2003) argues for a post-structural analysis of silence in order to make sense of silence within a Foucauldian theorisation of power/knowledge. The impetus is on 'different ways of understanding silence' (Ortlipp, 2003, p. 29) in order to problematise existing dynamics of professional subjectivity and power. In a post-structural turn, silence is not regarded as the opposite of speaking, has multiple complex manifestations and purposes, and is regarded as productive. Ortlipp (2003) works with the idea of resistances that are evident in moments of silence; and the ways in which silence may reveal those who are not entitled to speak, or for whom speaking must take particular forms in order to be regarded as legitimate.

Silence in this sense reveals that which is political in debates on education policy (Ranciere, 2010). The role of Government as a form of policing, following Ranciere (2010), is to determine who has a say. Politics occurs where groups who have no say within the political system make evident their voice (Ranciere, 2010). The silence then produces indicators of who does not have a say – in this context, associate teachers on teacher qualification policies.

For Ortlipp (2003), following the work of Jonathan Silin, having a say can be evident in an intentional silence. Hence there is more work to do in order to make sense of the silence. For this we would like to consider just one possible dimension of this silence – that the silence can also be understood to say something about the absurdity of policy debates from the perspective of those who are silent. Camus (1991) connects absurdity with silence in the sense that it is the world that says nothing to the teacher. The silent AT is then saying to policy makers and academics, you are saying nothing to me. From this perspective, the dynamics of power/knowledge shift before our eyes. The silences that appear in this research, then invite theorisation in relation to what they are saying about policy debates, and about the relationships between teacher education and the teaching profession. The silences require that we consider whether the ATs are genuinely invited to speak on early childhood education policy, on the nature of qualifications, and on the nature and role of teacher education institutions. How then does teacher education step back from the apparent self-evidence of its own critical role (see Meade et al., 2012 above) to question the silences of ATs that are in some way produced through the relationship between teachers and teacher education?

The scholarship on qualifications and quality outlined above suggests that it is critical that ATs have something to say – this is not simply to support good policy debate, but rather critical the role of being an AT that mentors student teachers. ATs are expected to be involved in multi-layered complex meaning producing relationships, challenging the status quo, problematising the normalising tendencies of the qualifications system, amplifying the contribution of their personal experiences to policy debates, and maintaining an open and responsive space for the profession to thrive. However the last two decades of neoliberalism within both the early childhood and tertiary policy domains has arguably quite strategically undermined the value and contribution of teacher voices. Both the ECE and tertiary sectors might critically problematise the ways in which teachers are produced to see silence as the best or only option. While teacher education continues to advocate for a strong teacher voice, it does so within the context of neoliberal performativity (see for instance Ball, 2012, 2016) that at an ideological level will necessarily regard teacher silences as one condition of an effective ECE sector.

It is important to point out here that we are not presenting evidence that the profession is silent. We recognise there are many advocates using many different social and political devices to debate and influence early childhood education policy. What we are doing is exploring the implications for teacher education of the silence in this research. For whatever reason the vast majority of ATs did not reply to the survey, the silence highlights the importance of critical reflection from within teacher education of its roles and commitments in the early childhood sector. One could see the silence of 'data' as an opportunity (Koro-Ljungberg, Löytönen, & Tesar, 2017).

Professional teachers are expected to be active advocates and agents for their profession (New Zealand Teacher Council, 2007). In addition, Turnbull's (2004) research highlights that a graduate teacher should be able to speak up on matters of political importance to education. In what ways might the experience of teacher education (for instance through the experience of assessment and grading) impact on a teacher's perceptions of their own agency? How do lectures in teacher education actively work with student teachers in a way that says it is critical to see one's self as intimately involved in the profession and in the profession's future? Is it teacher educators that are the silent policymakers in their own institutions; and, if this is so, the concern for researchers is how to amplify their own contributions. The key consideration may be to ensure that teacher education is a political space where teachers can safely exercise their agency, as well as being interested and committed enough to do so (with passion and desire) to be vocal policymakers within the wider ECE sector.

One participant expressed a concern that student teachers were less motivated because they were concerned about their employment opportunities when they qualify. The AT emphasised the positive potential of the relationship between lecturers and ATs. It is this sense of partnership between the academics and the practitioners that has been an ongoing concern in debates about teacher qualifications, and it is also one of the central concerns in this research project. Stronger partnerships could support and enable ATs and ECE teachers to become more vocal policy makers. They could support ATs as active agents of policy change, and as advisors and mentors to student teachers, role modelling not only how to be 'good' teachers, but also how to fulfil their role as the 'critics and conscience of society' (New Zealand Government, 1989). They would strengthen the teacher's voice in the wider ecology of educational discourse and policy systems.

Based upon the responses received, teachers do not feel powerless about change, but they argue for the notion of being supported, and of working closely with teacher education in shaping ECE policy and contributing the ECE sector.

Hence, reflecting on the low response rate we considered the idea of silence and questioned the meaning of this silence in relation to our concerns above regarding pathways for the teaching profession, and the status of the profession in general. Here the idea of silence was considered for its meaning as a provocation to teacher education to consider its role in the production of a workforce that experiences very significant challenges (Gibson, 2015; Jovanovic, 2013; Neylon, 2015; O'Connor et al., 2014). While advocacy for the profession typically, and arguably necessarily, talks about the contribution of qualifications in terms of the quality of education and care (see Meade et al., 2012), it is also arguably insufficient to take this assumption for granted without critically addressing this assumption. Changing political and economic contexts make it problematic to presume that historical research regarding teacher education's contribution to quality continues

to be accurate, relevant, and justified. The silences in the data invite us to reflect then, on whether the experiences of teacher education were such that the ATs could be concerned about the value and contribution of being involved in the research – particularly given some of the concerns about the quality of teacher education provision, some of which are outlined above. We are not arguing against the value of teacher qualifications in theory, but we arguing that this value being taken for granted given, as noted above, concerns around the impact of the economic drivers of higher education (see for instance Stremmel et al., 2015).

## Concluding comments

Researchers always hope for the highest possible levels of participation in their research projects. Perhaps one way to achieve this is by developing a participatory model of research in an appropriate professional forum. This includes projects that enable ATs to collaborate with academics in a meaningful way, as agents, policymakers and partners with the academics, to support student teachers, and to shape the ECE field.

Perhaps teacher education could become the amplifier of voices, where ATs feel safe and empowered to speak up and communicate their ideas and notions through their strong relationships with education faculty. The silences in this research reinforces the importance of the story of the profession, and the importance of rethinking the field. It also led to a recognition of the need to focus on the relationships that are built through research between ATs and the lecturers, such as to rethink relationships between the researchers and participants, including strengthening the role of participants as researchers, in an authentic partnership between lecturers, ATs and the research. ATs are an essential cog in this partnership wheel, and as this research has demonstrated somewhat unintentionally, stronger partnerships and support are needed, in order to enable their higher participation in further research. Developing partnerships between the teachers in ECE settings and academics is not a new notion, and has been a focus, for example, through the Centres of Innovation. Yet the Centres are another casualty of the last decade of the Government's policing of the sector.

We should not however forget the two participants who chose to be witnesses. These two voices remind us about the complexities of 'quality' and 'quantity' with respect to certain knowledges, and of how the search for a single answer or recommendation can be futile. They provide us with a call to which we as researchers feel obliged to respond: for closer partnerships between academics and ATs. They seek partnerships that enable and support AT participation on projects concerning ECE, teacher education, student teachers and practicum experiences, and researchers who critically examine their stories as professionals in the ECE field.

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## Notes on contributor

**Andrew Gibbons** is an early childhood teacher educator and Associate Professor at the School of Education. He has worked in journalism, in the social services in England and in early childhood education in Auckland. Andrew has a keen interest in philosophy and politics, and these orient his research of early childhood education, and education more generally, to questioning beliefs and practices, and their impact on the experience of being human. He has published widely on topics including the early childhood teaching profession, Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood education policy, approaches to early childhood curriculum, the educational implications of the work of Albert Camus, the philosophy of education, the role of technology in education, and the future of the university.

**Marek Tesar's** research is focused on philosophical methods, childhood studies and early childhood education, with expertise in the philosophy of education and childhood. His research is concerned with the construction of childhoods, notions of place/space, and methodological and philosophical thinking around ontologies and the ethics of researching these notions.

**Sarah Steiner** is an early childhood preschool Team Leader and Masters student. Her current practice and research is concerned with early childhood in Pasifika contexts and the bicultural aspects of the New Zealand early childhood curriculum. She has a particular focus on implementing curricular strands pertaining to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and te ao Māori.

**Samantha Chan** is a qualified early childhood teacher and an associate teacher to early childhood student teachers, in Auckland, New Zealand. Samantha's teaching and research interests include the arts in early childhood education, the role of documentation in supporting learning in early childhood education, and the mentoring of student teachers on practicum.

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