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Early Childhood Voices 2022 Conference Proceedings

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Edited by
Sharynne McLeod, Carolyn Gregoric and Shukla Sikder



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FURTHER INFORMATION

Professor Sharynne McLeod and Dr Shukla Sikder

ECV2022 Conference Chairs, Charles Sturt University, Panorama Avenue, Bathurst, Australia

smcleod@csu.edu.au; ssikder@csu.edu.au

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Inquiry-based project learning an approach to foster wellbeing and a culture of collaborative learning

Sarah Probine, Manukau Institute of Technology, Aotearoa (Sarah.Probine@manukau.ac.nz)

Jo Perry, Manukau Institute of Technology, Aotearoa (jo.perry@manukau.ac.nz)

Yo Heta-Lensen, Auckland University of Technology, Aotearoa (yo.heta-lensen@aut.ac.nz)

Rachael Burke, Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology, Aotearoa (rachael.burke@toiohomai.ac.nz)

Fi McAlevey, Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, Aotearoa (Fi.McAlevey@openpolytechnic.ac.nz)

Joanne Alderson, Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, Aotearoa
(Joanne.Alderson@openpolytechnic.ac.nz)

Mary-Liz Broadley, Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, Aotearoa
(Mary-Liz.broadley@openpolytechnic.ac.nz)

Background: Many children in Aotearoa New Zealand, their families and early childhood communities are significantly affected by current economic, political, environmental, and health-related issues. Inquiry-based project learning is a pedagogical approach with the potential to improve the lives of children by empowering them to lead their own learning through collaboration with peers and teachers. Inquiry-based learning gives children the space and time to explore and discover answers through representation, reflection, and dialogue. This presentation explores the initial findings from a research project that examines approaches to inquiry-based project work in early childhood settings in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Aim: The project aims to understand more about how teachers have developed their pedagogical approaches and to consider the impact this has on children's learning.

Method: The research has adopted a qualitative, interpretivist approach and is strongly informed by narrative inquiry. The project is being undertaken in two phases. Phase one comprised a survey distributed to all centres registered on the national database in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Sixty-three centres that use inquiry-based project learning as a teaching approach responded to the survey. In Phase two, 6–8 purposively-selected early childhood settings are participating in teaching team focus group interviews and classroom observations.

Results: A key finding from Phases one and two data, is that inquiry-based learning can foster an environment of well-being and sustained focus, for both children and teachers. Children and teachers in this project have found a pathway to feeling calm and focused, through collaborative inquiry-based learning experiences.

Conclusions: This research demonstrates that through adopting inquiry-based approaches that prioritise unhurried time for children to explore and develop working theories, and teachers who observe closely to respond sensitively to children's ideas, both children and teachers experience an environment of sustained focus, well-being and empowerment. These inquiry-based approaches to learning espouse a key aspiration from *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum, that children to be kept at the centre of the learning process.

Implications for children and families: In inquiry-based learning, children develop dispositions, skills and attributes that support their learning, and are enabled to research, represent and develop ideas through working collaboratively with others.

Implications for practitioners: In inquiry-based project approaches, teachers are empowered to work alongside children and other teachers as researchers and to be actively involved in children's learning.

Key words: inquiry-based project learning; children's voices, professionals' voices, innovations, workforce issues, wellbeing, education, health, policy, government, qualitative methods

This presentation relates to the following United Nations Sustainable Development Goals:

- [SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being](#)
- [SDG 4: Quality Education](#)