ABSTRACT

This chapter describes the context for the development of Te Whāriki, and gives an account of how the document was written. Links are made between the initial design and development of the document, and some of the ideological, educational, and cultural issues of the time. The chapter concludes with some voices from within the sector today, as they reflect on the development and early impact of Te Whāriki.
Introduction
On 15 September 1990, the *New Zealand Education Gazette* advertised for proposals for a contract to "develop curriculum guidelines for early childhood education" (Ministry of Education, 1990, p.4) and invited interested persons or organisations to apply. Part One of this chapter describes the contexts in which *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum document for Aotearoa New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 1993, 1996), was developed in the early 1990s. The ideological, educational, and cultural agendas of that time led to the emergence of an idea that was, prior to the late 1980s, almost anathema to the early childhood sector – that of national curriculum guidelines.

Part Two describes how the draft version of *Te Whāriki* was developed (Ministry of Education, 1993), and provides new perspectives on this exciting time for early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Part Three is based on responses to questionnaires and interviews with some of the people who, from 1990 to 1993, were involved in the working groups that drafted *Te Whāriki*, and in the Ministry of Education. The section ends with comments from people working in the field on the impact of *Te Whāriki* when it was first released.

PART ONE
Contexts for the development of *Te Whāriki*

The ideological context
The education reforms of the late 1980s – variously described as "technicist", "ideologically new right", and "monetarist" (Willis, 1994) – focused first on administration and second on curriculum and assessment. During the 1980s there had been growing criticism of the administrative framework of the Department of Education, from both the political left and the right (Boston, 1990;
Grace, 1990). The education system was considered over-centralised and unresponsive to community needs, and to have failed to deliver social and educational equity; indeed, the educational failure of Māori had become a "statistical artefact" (Benton, 1990).

Change was inevitable, given the agenda of the fourth Labour government. Almost every aspect of the public sector underwent some form of restructuring, driven by an economic ideology that devolved responsibility for service delivery yet retained fiscal control. Advisers to the government argued that the "cradle to the grave" ethos of the welfare state did not work; instead, a bold social experiment was introduced, based on a philosophy of individualism and the supremacy of the market (Kelsey, 1995).

The 1987 briefing papers to the incoming government (New Zealand Treasury, 1987) advocated the market-driven provision of government services, including education. The role of the state was to provide minimal backstop services for people who were unable to exercise choice. Liberal ideals of social equity and equality of opportunity were replaced by a consumerist approach that presented education as discrete packages available for anyone to purchase. It was argued that, since having children was a personal choice, educating them was a private responsibility; it followed that the provision of education also belonged in the private domain.

This argument created tension between two conflicting assumptions: first, that families were ready, willing, and able to exercise choice; and second, that communities were in a position to provide them with choice. Little was done to address the concerns voiced by education organisations, other than the clear message from within government to hasten the process of reform. The views of teachers, union representatives, academics, researchers, and parents were considered biased because they
clearly had a vested interest in the outcome – children’s education (Douglas, 1993).

In 1988 the Labour government established a working group to “provide a short restatement of the purpose, place, form and function of early childhood education” (Department of Education, 1988, p.iv). The resulting document, *Education to be More: Report of the Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group* (Department of Education, 1988a), was based on the five themes identified by the 1987 Royal Commission on Social Policy as underpinning all areas of social policy reform in New Zealand:

- Implementing the Treaty of Waitangi
- Improving the social and economic status of women
- Providing a legislative environment which safeguards basic human rights and freedoms, and works towards the removal of discrimination
- Recognising the needs, contributions, and traditions of Pacific Island peoples and other minority cultures residing in New Zealand
- Enhancing the family unit in New Zealand society. (Department of Education, 1988, p.v)

The release of *Education to be More* (“The Meade Report”) was followed by *Before Five: Early Childhood Care and Education in New Zealand* (Lange, 1988), written concurrently with other policy reforms in the state education sector. *Before Five* gave early childhood education the same status as primary and secondary education, and was sanctioned by David Lange, who was both Prime Minister and Minister of Education. Although its policy blueprint was not universally welcomed (Mitchell, 1996), its longer-term vision had been supported by early childhood educators in both community-based and privately owned services, during wide consultation with the sector.

When the National Party won the 1990 election, Labour’s
policy initiatives to improve the quality of early childhood education were quickly rescinded. The influential private-sector lobby challenged well-established indicators of quality, such as qualified staff and reasonable pay and conditions. The lobbyists argued that the increased costs of qualified staff would be passed on to families and thereby undermine another plank of the reforms, namely access to early childhood services. This pressure led to changes to the licensing regulations governing centres, and polarised the ensuing debates between state-funded and privately owned services as to what quality early childhood education was and how it might be achieved. Ironically, at a time when many aspects of quality in early childhood services were under threat, the professional status of the sector was to be enhanced by the development of a national curriculum.

The educational context

Alongside the administrative reforms began a process of curriculum reform. While the development of Te Whāriki was not the beginning of debate on early childhood curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand, there had been no national agreement on the issue. Childcare centres, the kindergarten movement and Playcentre associations had developed their own distinct approaches to curriculum, but these were generally not formalised.

During the late 1980s, the Department of Education ran week-long residential courses at Lopdell House in Auckland to help develop its policy initiatives in early childhood education. Those invited to participate were broadly representative of the sector, and reports based on their discussions and recommendations were cited in the Te Whāriki proposal document as significant initial influences (particularly on the issues of infants and toddlers, Pacific Island curriculum, and home-based care). One
such report contained a statement on early childhood curriculum, which included a list of principles to underpin any future development of a curriculum document (Department of Education, 1988).

These reports reflected a concern that “downward pressure” from the school curriculum was a threat to the early childhood sector’s concepts of what made a “good child” (Department of Education, 1988). Carr and May (1993, 1996) argued that Te Whāriki was developed as much to protect the interests of children before school as it was to promote and define a curriculum for early childhood education, especially since the proposed New Zealand Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, 1993a), by prompting more systematic assessment in early childhood, was potentially dangerous (Carr and May, 1993). They also acknowledged, however, that the sector could gain additional strength and status by having clear links with the Curriculum Framework:

The issue here is that such dovetailing or interconnecting will now need to be a two way street ... initiatives in curriculum and assessment for the early school years, for example recommendations on the collection of information at school entry, will from now on need to take into account the curriculum for the first five years. (May and Carr, 1993, pp.43, 49)

Cultural contexts

The cultural make-up of Aotearoa New Zealand added further complexity to the educational and economic reforms. The country’s colonial past, and its traditional ties to the United Kingdom, were no longer the sole influences on the population in the early 1990s. Successive waves of immigration, particularly from Pacific nations, had created an increasingly pluralist nation that was demanding recognition. This trend was coupled with
a Māori renaissance epitomised by the Kōhanga Reo movement, which aimed to create "language nests" for young Māori children.

For decades, Māori had been arguing against assimilationist policies which had fuelled growing discontent among their people. During the 1980s, Māori throughout Aotearoa New Zealand supported the development of kōhanga reo as a serious attempt to save te reo Māori (the Māori language). Hailed as a grass-roots revolutionary movement (Irwin, 1990), kōhanga reo focused on babies and young children as the future speakers of te reo Māori. Immersion in te reo and in Māori tikanga (customary conduct) would empower these children, along with their parents and extended families, to maintain the language and thus ensure its survival. Although the movement was located in the early childhood sector, it did not identify itself as an early childhood movement. Its leaders argued that it was a social justice movement, in which Māori were exercising their right to tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) under the Treaty of Waitangi.¹ Māori activists and academics alike were clear that the existing education system disadvantaged Māori. The Kōhanga Reo movement was a solution developed by Māori, for Māori.

In response to concerns expressed by Māori, the Minister of Education appointed an advisory body to the Ministry of Education, known as the Runanga Matua (Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association Archive, c.1989). Its role was to oversee the implementation of the reforms from a Māori perspective. Among its members was Tilly Reedy, who was to be one of the two Māori lead writers appointed to the

¹ The Treaty of Waitangi is the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand. Based on the principle of equal partnership, it is a contract between some Māori chiefs and the British Crown, signed on 6 February 1840 at Waitangi, in the Bay of Islands.
early childhood curriculum development project by Te Kohanga Reo National Trust (along with her husband, Tamati Reedy). Even before work on Te Whāriki began, the Runanga Matua had identified concepts central to the promotion of mana Māori in education. Seeing Te Whāriki as a guide to “fulfilling the intent of the Treaty of Waitangi”, the Rununga proposed “an infusion approach ... whereby mana tangata, mana atua, mana whenua and mana o te reo are considered as key factors” (Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa/New Zealand Childcare Association Archive, c.1989). Thus the final form of Te Whāriki had its beginnings in Māori pedagogical and philosophical beliefs.

From the outset, the writers of Te Whāriki were committed to producing a document that honoured the Treaty of Waitangi. Compared with other early childhood services, kōhanga reo had a well-defined curriculum, based on the survival of te reo Māori and nga tikanga Māori. Helen May and Margaret Carr, as the two Pākehā (non-Māori) lead writers of Te Whāriki, challenged the way in which previous government-funded curriculum development in early childhood “has not so far addressed the need for a Māori curriculum, although it has looked at Taha Māori in the mainstream curriculum” (Carr and May, 1990, p.19). This shortcoming was something they intended to redress.

Te Whāriki went on to represent and reflect Māori politics and pedagogy. “I have a dream ...,” said Tilly Reedy (1993) at the launch of the draft version of Te Whāriki. This dream, articulated in the document’s framework for curriculum, drew all early childhood services in Aotearoa New Zealand into the wider world of social and political contribution and participation. Traditional approaches to planning and programming for play, which focused on activities such as collage and play-dough, were being challenged by broad educational ideals about democracy and social justice.
PART TWO
Writing Te Whāriki

The contract

The Request for Proposal (Ministry of Education, 1990) called for tenders from potential contractors “to develop curriculum guidelines for developmentally appropriate programmes for early childhood education” (p.4). Under “Responsibilities: Contractor” were the requirements to:

6 direct the development, review and evaluation of curriculum guidelines for early childhood education to produce a final draft. This process of development and evaluation should involve meetings with a consultative group of approximately 10–12 early childhood practitioners and persons with special expertise;

7 select the reference group to achieve appropriate geographical, gender and cultural balance, including representatives of experienced primary, intermediate and secondary teachers. The names shall be approved by the Ministry;

8 consult with ... organisations\(^2\) during the development of the final draft. (Ministry of Education, 1990, pp.6-7)

The proposal

Helen May, then Senior Lecturer and Chair of the Department of Early Childhood at the University of Waikato, had signalled her intention to spearhead a proposal from the Waikato region, and received support from the sector to do so (Wells, 1990). When May and Margaret Carr drew up a process for the contract proposal, it represented a re-conceptualisation of the curriculum development process, previously dominated by Western models (May, personal communication). This new model treated

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\(^2\) The organisations that were listed here represented national early childhood organisations, unions and training providers.
content, process, context, and evaluation as interdependent features, an idea that could be traced back to the “Basic Principles for an Early Childhood Curriculum” developed at Lopdell House (Department of Education, 1988).

The task was now to present this ambitious and complex vision in a format that would be acceptable to the Ministry of Education. The proposal used the metaphor of a native forest to illustrate both the model’s strengths and the potential barriers to curriculum development. Key theorists Piaget, Erikson, Vygotsky, and Bruner were likened to kauri trees, famous for their great height, but “because of the immaturity of very young children, and the non-compulsory nature of the services, the forest is also strewn with ideological disputes and conflicting beliefs” (Carr and May, 1990). The kauri were signposts for a pathway through these “dangers”, but they were also representative: “[We] were concerned with the whole child and a developmental framework (Piaget and Erikson), and with learning in a social and cultural context (Bruner and Vygotsky)” (Carr and May, 1990, p.10).

The writers claimed it was “concern for high quality early childhood care and education that prompts us to put forward this proposal” (Carr and May, 1990, p.11). Two arguments were especially significant. One was a challenge to the dominant view that childcare was a “second best” option:

We do not subscribe to that theory, and would like to set another in its place ... the child who has good quality care at centre and at home has a richer “tool-kit” of learning strategies, friends and interests for making sense of the world than a child who is mostly cared for in one environment. (p.11)

The second argument was that cultural sensitivity and equity were factors in the quality debate. Citing research which demonstrated that “the child who is bilingual has a cognitive
advantage, in comparison with a mono-lingual child” (p.11), the proposal indicated that the bicultural context was separate from the European curriculum and distinct from the Māori curriculum. The Pacific Island context was a further consideration:

We wanted to present an inclusive framework in which Pacific Island language nests were able to negotiate statements about curriculum. At that time they were the only cohesive immigrant group. Our contact, Iole Tagoilelagi, was able to negotiate with PIECA [Pacific Island Early Childhood Association] on behalf of Pacific Island centres. It was a strategic endeavour to recognise a different type of context. (May, personal communication)

The issue was indeed strategic. By highlighting these discrete philosophical positions, the proposal enabled the sector to “negotiate from a position of power. We wanted to reveal issues, not silence them” (May, personal communication). Previous debates about early childhood curriculum at a national level had established a positive dynamic, and broad philosophical agreement was possible. “It was really important to have a vision for children – what made a ‘good’ child” (May, personal communication). This vision became part of Te Whāriki’s founding aspirations for children:

To grow up as 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. (Ministry of Education, 1996, p.9)

The proposal also covered the development of specialist curricula for home-based care and special education. The final proposal offered inclusive guidelines, designed to enable a diversity of services to strategically position their own beliefs about “what made a good child in the warp and weft of the framework” (May, personal communication).
The relationship with ngā Kōhanga Reo

The proposal indicated a clear commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi and to a separate Māori curriculum. The principle of equal partnership embodied in the Treaty of Waitangi required that “any proposal for early childhood curriculum must include a specialist and separate Māori curriculum, developed by and for ngā Kōhanga Reo” (Carr and May, 1990, p.12). It was proposed that the development of the curriculum guidelines be a “joint endeavour between ourselves and Te Kōhanga Reo Trust” (p.12). As the writers explained:

Nga Kohanga Reo has consolidated a lot of previous work towards the establishment of a Māori curriculum and it is intended that there be an identifiable Māori curriculum as well as a curriculum which reflects our growth towards a bicultural society ... our proposed contracting of Te Kohanga Reo and our budget considerations reflect this viewpoint. (Carr and May, 1990, p.19)

The implications of this were profound. The Māori curriculum was not to be an “add-on”; nor was it to be “integrated”. It was to be separate. This fundamental shift gave new status to Māori pedagogy within early childhood education. A decade later, May wrote:

This was a challenge. There were no New Zealand or international models for guidance. This became possible due to collaboration with Te Kohanga [Reo] National Trust and the foresight of Dr Tamati Reedy and Tilly Reedy who developed the curriculum for Māori immersion centres. (May, 2002, p.31)

In an interview for this chapter, May added:

We had discussions with Te Kohanga Reo Trust and we were clear that the Māori context was separate. We worked with Maureen Locke and Rita Walker on the bicultural curriculum, not on the Māori immersion curriculum for Kohanga. Tamati and Tilly Reedy worked on that with Rose Pere. Margaret and I often
met with Tamati and Tilly to discuss how to weave the Māori and Pākehā concepts together. (May, personal communication)

In addition, the proposal established a set of reciprocal arrangements between the writers, researchers, working groups, and people working in the sector, and suggested there were longer-term implications for research and the production of resources. It included recommendations for professional development to support the implementation of the curriculum guidelines, and proposals for research on assessment guidelines as part of the future development phase.

**The contract – a Ministry perspective**

The contract for developing the curriculum was the first early childhood contract managed by the Curriculum Division of the newly formed Ministry of Education. Caryl Hamer, previously employed in the Early Childhood Division of the Department of Education, was one of seven curriculum facilitators within the Ministry who were responsible for developing curriculum documents across the education sector. A background in early childhood education gave Hamer extensive networks, including in Playcentre and childcare. She described the curriculum development process as

... culture shock for us in early childhood. We were suddenly in the big wide world and that made it impossible not to have a curriculum or a framework. Right from the start *Te Whāriki* was a political document. (Hamer, personal communication)

After consultation between the Ministry and the sector, a contract selection panel was set up to consider the proposals. Hamer recalled the panel’s reaction to the Waikato proposal:

We were just blown away ... We had never seen anything like it in early childhood. It was very detailed and clear. I remember our main concern was the working groups – the Ministry was
concerned that the contractors would end up with several curriculum documents. (Hamer, personal communication)

The status conferred by her position within the University of Waikato was well understood by May. Moreover, the tertiary sector was used to preparing tenders for research, and this experience was helpful in writing the early childhood proposal. University funding was also available:

There was a budget for travel for the working groups and, while not enough, paid release days were allocated for meetings to discuss initiatives and directions, and we budgeted for meetings with the Ministry in Wellington. (May, personal communication)

The Ministry of Education, however, was new to the tendering process. Its curriculum facilitators were not contract managers. According to Hamer, “the universities taught us about contract negotiations”:

We had no idea about costs. But it was an excellent proposal and we felt it would work because it was unaligned to any early childhood group, being based in a university, but also Helen May had childcare experience and Margaret Carr was from kindergarten. So we felt they would be acceptable to the sector. (Hamer, personal communication)

May agreed that being non-aligned strengthened their proposal: “We didn’t choose organisations. We deliberately chose people we knew we could work with” (May, personal communication). The contract was signed in December 1990, and the process of developing Te Whāriki started in earnest.

Background discussion papers, working documents, and working groups

Once the contract was signed, the writers embarked on an ambitious, fourteen-month consultative exercise that aimed to reflect existing discourses on early childhood in all their
diversity. The contract was based on specialist working groups in the areas of infants and toddlers, pre-schoolers, special education, home-based care, Pacific Island, and Māori, who were to develop guidelines that could be trialled, moderated, and then reworked for the Ministry’s Advisory Group.\(^3\) They would also contact their networks for selective feedback on the early drafts of the guidelines.

A critical component was the set of discussion papers or working documents prepared by the co-ordinators of the working groups. While these have not been published in their original form, most of the ideas they contain have appeared in subsequent writings on *Te Whāriki*. During 1991 and 1992, May wrote several papers (May, 1991a, 1991b; Early Childhood Curriculum Project, 1992a, 1992b) outlining the considerations for a curriculum for infants and toddlers. These papers “acknowledge the international heritage of the early childhood curriculum as well as noting the distinctive features of early childhood education in Aotearoa – New Zealand” (May, 1991a, p.2). In the conclusion to the same paper she wrote:

One of the tasks of the curriculum project will be to demonstrate a continuity of learning, caring, and development (i.e. curriculum) from infancy to school age, but it will be important to ensure that within the common goals, the arrangement of the curriculum guidelines can articulate the distinctiveness of different developmental stages as well as different philosophical approaches to meeting these needs. (p.7)

Carr (1991) identified several sources of curriculum:

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

\(^3\)The Ministry of Education appointed its own Advisory Group, which was to some extent representative of the sector. Originally chaired by Caryl Hamer, it met regularly for two years to discuss the draft versions submitted by the Early Childhood Curriculum Project as part of its milestone reports to the Ministry. Several of these meetings were with Helen May and Margaret Carr, who presented material for consideration.
She also identified three broad issues for consideration in the curriculum project. The first was the range of influences that had changed societal perceptions of the roles of the family and of early childhood centres (or home-based care services) “that can provide a rich and responsive learning environment” (p.3). The second issue was the complexity of an urbanised democracy: “We may still see ourselves as a democracy with unlimited social mobility and equality of opportunity, but the reality in the 1990s is one of increasing polarisation, unemployment, and competition for jobs” (p.4). The third issue was the pluralist nature of a multicultural society with “a diversity of belief systems”. Because a national curriculum rarely acknowledged that diversity, it was “a challenge” to try to do so (p.5).

These issues did not create “technical questions (how to do it); they create philosophical questions (what are the goals)” (p.2). Consequently, Te Whāriki would not be about content, but would provide a framework for action guided by philosophical principles. Underpinning these principles were universal goals and beliefs about the well-being of children and the culture of Aotearoa New Zealand as it affected early childhood care and education.

By the end of 1991 there was a set of draft principles and aims. May recalled an early meeting where the Māori working group, and Māori members of other groups, joined together as one:

Tamati and Tilly Reedy presented the Project with a Māori curriculum framework based on the principle of empowerment.

I can remember Tamati Reedy spent a day explaining ... the concepts and their origins in Te Ao Māori [the Māori world]. It was a complete framework and included the five “wero” – aims
for children. Margaret and I then worked with this framework to position the parallel domains for Pākehā, which later became the goals. These were not translations. (May, personal communication)

May (2002) also explained the origin of the document’s final name:

The title, *Te Whāriki*, suggested by Tamati Reedy, was a central metaphor. The early childhood curriculum was envisaged as a whāriki [which] translated as a woven mat for all to stand on. The Principles, Strands and Goals provided the framework which allowed for different programme perspectives to be woven into the fabric. (p.32)

Subsequent discussions among the four lead writers focused on pedagogical assumptions, coupled with cultural and political aspirations. The curriculum for kōhanga reo focused on empowerment, contribution, and participation in society, and encompassed tino rangatiratanga (self-determination); it also went beyond a focus on the child to include whānau, hapu, and iwi. The final version of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) reflects these discussions. As Carr and May (1999) explained:

The principles and aims of the curriculum are expressed in both the Māori and English languages, but neither is an exact translation of the other: an acceptable cross-cultural structure and the equivalence was discussed, debated and transacted early in the curriculum development process. (pp.57-58)

*Working Document One: The Framework* (Early Childhood Curriculum Project, 1992) set out the guiding principles, aims, and goals for the curriculum document, with a rider that “further elaborations will be added to show what this means in the following contexts or settings: Māori Immersion; Tagata Pasifika; Infant Programmes; Home-Based; Toddler Programmes; Special Needs; Preschool Programmes; Bicultural” (p.1). During 1992
the working groups developed these "elaborations" in their own specialist areas, and critiqued and trialled them within their networks.

Jill Mitchell (1991), co-ordinator of the Special Needs Working Group, wrote that the project appeared to recognise "the right of all children to participate in a national curriculum irrespective of the extent or degree of their special needs" (p.1). The group's role was to elaborate on "... what the curriculum statements and aims might mean in relation to children with special needs" (Early Childhood Curriculum Project, 1992c, p.1). Each of the working groups was doing this work, "firstly to test out the appropriateness of the framework and secondly, to provide a resource for the final document which will have a section on children with special needs" (p.1).

The section on special needs made it to the draft curriculum document (Ministry of Education, 1993), but was removed from the final version (Ministry of Education, 1996). Statements in the revised aims and goals about inclusion were seen by the Ministry as compensation for the omission. Not everyone saw this as adequate, arguing that the effect was to conceal (as opposed to reveal) the status of children with special needs.

The theme of a curriculum that merged developmental and socio-cultural theory continued in Carr's Working Document Six and Working Document Seven (Early Childhood Curriculum Project, 1992f, 1992g, 1992h). These examine the learning issues affecting preschoolers, as identified in the contemporary literature and by the Preschool Programmes Working Group. These learning issues were categorised as: knowledge about people, places, and things, and "know-how" (skills and strategies); and attitudes towards learning.

It was envisaged that the two categories would be combined in the final curriculum document:
The idea that children are developing more elaborated and useful “mini-theories” or “working models” about people, places and things in their lives is a useful one: such working theories contain a combination of knowledge-about, know-how, strategies, attitudes and expectations. (Early Childhood Curriculum Project, 1992f, p.1)

This concept was expanded in Working Document Seven (Early Childhood Curriculum Project, 1992h). Working theories were regarded as

... increasingly empowering: useful for making sense of the world, having some control over what happens, problem-solving and further learning. Many of them will retain a magical and creative quality, and for many communities, such working theories about the world will be infused with a spiritual dimension. (p.1)

The draft guidelines

Te Whāriki: Draft Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Programmes in Early Childhood Services (Ministry of Education, 1993) was finally released in November 1993 and sent to all early childhood programmes and centres for trial. May and Carr (1996) recalled that the Minister would not allow it to be called a draft curriculum because “it looked so different to the national school curriculum documents” (p.63).

The Ministry was also making a significant political statement in presenting two parallel documents that were “married” but retained their distinctive identities as Pākehā and as Māori. Hamer recalled that this wasn’t a problem at the draft stage:

But when [the Māori document] went to the Minister before its final re-write, he refused to sign it off and demanded a translation. Well, it was sent to [the publishers] Learning Media who reported back that it was neither easy, nor appropriate, to translate
because the concepts were deeply Māori. (Hamer, personal communication)

Eventually the Māori version was accepted, and *Te Whāriki* became the first Ministry of Education document to be published in both Māori and English. It also broke new ground internationally: here was a national curriculum whose conceptual framework was based on the cultural and political beliefs of the minority indigenous people.

**What happened between the draft and the final version?**

Questions remain about what happened to the text of *Te Whāriki* once it had been trialled and evaluated by the sector. Hamer described the final part of the process:

> Once the Ministry had collated the submissions on the draft, *Te Whāriki* then went to the Minister who set up his own advisory group. We didn’t know who was on this group. After that, the Ministry contracted a writer who worked on the final draft. (Hamer, personal communication)

There are marked differences between the draft and the final version, the major changes being the deletion of the curricula developed by the specialist working groups, a description of a developmental continuum, the references, and the addition of “learning outcomes”. These changes were regarded as a loss, and were opposed by the writers (Carr and May, 1999, p.63). However, “the early childhood community was relieved and somewhat surprised that the integral philosophy and framework of *Te Whāriki* survived the long complex political process from draft to final document” (p.62).

One can only speculate about the direction the Ministry of Education received from its Minister, Lockwood Smith, during the final rewriting process. Examination of the text suggests that the political and economic agenda of the day was accommodated
by including the language of accountability (Grace, 1990). The inclusion of learning outcomes had implications for assessment, a highly contested area that pits accountability and achievement measures against beliefs about reflective teaching and qualitative understandings of children’s learning.

PART THREE
Voices from the field

The Ministry of Education had allocated funding for research and professional development contracts to support the early childhood sector during the trial period for Te Whāriki. As a result, an unprecedented number of in-service courses were run for practitioners and wider interest groups. These were principally designed to encourage educators in all early childhood services to explore the principles, aims, and strands set out in the draft guidelines.

Kate Thornton, a Playcentre parent at the time and the Wellington Playcentre Association’s Information Officer, attended one of these courses:

I remember thinking that what we were hearing about actually fitted in very closely with Playcentre philosophy. I remember doing a weaving of the principles and then the aims and goals to make our own whāriki based on what we thought was important. Two of us from our Playcentre attended the course and it was the first time we had mixed with people from other services. My main memory ... was that there was nothing inconsistent with Playcentre in Te Whāriki. (Thornton, personal communication)

But the leap from exploring the document to putting the ideas into practice proved problematic. Some centres were overwhelmed by the number of ideas and by the open-ended nature of the curriculum, which provided only a framework,
not a recipe. Jenny Hayes, a Senior Kindergarten Teacher in Wellington, recounted:

The release of *Te Whāriki* was a proud moment in New Zealand’s early childhood history. It was mind-blowing. There were elements of familiarity but the terminology was really different. I kept thinking, “Am I going to remember all this? Can I do this?” I had an overwhelming sense of responsibility that I had to share what I was being taught as I listened, just beginning to understand it, just beginning to see what it was. It validated many things we wanted, but it took months to get beyond feeling overwhelmed. I knew we had to go back to work and quickly develop training sessions. (Hayes, personal communication)

The professional development seminars run by the Wellington Free Kindergarten Association were well supported by resources that explored the concepts of *Te Whāriki*. But as Hayes observed:

... the difficulty was that they pre-supposed [that] teachers would a) access the professional development and b) understand it. At that time people were still thinking about what they were going to put on a table, how they were going to keep children occupied. And their measure of successful teaching was keeping control of forty children on the mat. (Hayes, personal communication)

Jean Simpson, then Head Teacher at Seatoun Kindergarten, remembered:

If a child couldn’t hop, you taught it. Now with *Te Whāriki* we were focusing on what they could do – working from where children were at. *Te Whāriki* had a huge part in changing how we worked with children. (Simpson, personal communication)

The gap between theory and practice was a major issue, as Simpson went on to explain:

Big conflicts in kindergartens were caused by changes in the pedagogical understanding of teachers within a team. Teachers
college graduates coming out of college had a totally different training to ours – it was theory based, compared to our background which was practically based. (Simpson, personal communication)

Many teachers found it difficult to implement Te Whāriki in a way that was not just a confirmation of existing practice. Simpson attributes this to the “lack of a cohesive approach” to supporting teachers in understanding Te Whāriki, despite the best efforts of professional development providers.

We really grappled with how to record the programme using Te Whāriki. We went through phases of looking at Wellbeing and saying, “Yes, it’s happening, but so what?” We tried mapping things on a grid, and then colour-coding the observations. And at the end of the year we had a “deficit muddle”. That’s when we had to look at how to make a change – we moved into the “where to next” idea and began building on what we knew about the child. We got into making posters and using photographs to explain to parents about the curriculum – and that made us think. The whole thing was about reflective thinking about learning. What is happening here? We were watching a lot more. (Simpson, personal communication)

However, as Hayes commented: “Many teachers felt that they weren’t working if they were watching and they still regarded planning as a special event” (Hayes, personal communication).

For childcare services too, the introduction of Te Whāriki presented many challenges. In 1993 Maggie Haggerty and Pat Hubbard undertook a study of five early childhood centres (including childcare centres) that were involved in a Ministry of Education trial of Te Whāriki (Haggerty and Hubbard, 1994). They found that teachers varied in their level of engagement with the document. Later, Haggerty described the response to the 1993 trial of Te Whāriki as “overwhelmingly positive”:
There was a sense that “this speaks for us in early childhood”. But I think that challenges began to emerge as people grappled with what it was saying. How do you work with it? People tried to come to terms with it in a step-by-step way but they were working with an older notion of what curriculum was – they wanted content. (Haggerty, personal communication)

Haggerty recalled an article by Joy Cullen (1996), which attributed this challenge to the theoretical complexity of Te Whāriki. “Her comment about the curriculum being an overlay meant that people hadn’t really climbed into it” (Haggerty, personal communication). She continued:

I was interested in the language used at the time. People would say they were “doing Te Whāriki”, and some would call it “implementing Te Whāriki”. There was a lot of difficulty with the language. Later Margaret Carr called it “engaging with Te Whāriki”. So much of it is about teacher judgment and reflection. (Haggerty, personal communication)

Jean Sunko was the co-ordinating supervisor of the Victoria University Crèches when the draft was first released. She reflected:

I was at an advantage really because I was part of a very large group in Wellington that attended a consultation meeting with the Infant and Toddler Working Group. I was invited by the Ministry of Education and I remember the room was packed – there would have been about thirty of us with an interest in infants and toddlers.

I remember thinking it was great! It looked at babies. It looked at toddlers, and it looked at younger preschoolers. It wasn’t “dumbing-down” the curriculum for infants. They were recognised as a group in their own right who had unique needs in regard to their care and education. If babies aren’t receiving good care, their educational needs are not being met.
I thought “Yay!” At last we have got a curriculum. Here are some broad goals to get us all there so the outcome for children will be all good. (Sunko, personal communication)

Sunko saw Te Whāriki as significant not only for improving the status of infant and toddler care but also for empowering parents:

Te Whāriki really emphasised consulting with parents about their aspirations for children. Parents had a right to be informed about their child – it is especially important for babies. Te Whāriki articulated a lot of things that people in good early childhood centres were already doing. (Sunko, personal communication)

As a manager, Sunko was responsible for the employment and professional development of her staff. She arranged for her staff to attend in-service courses on Te Whāriki, and recalled:

We took it bit by bit and worked through it. You couldn’t really sit down and read the whole thing. We used the chart with the principles, aims, and goals to help us come to terms with it. We don’t have to keep reinventing the wheel – here was something that gave us really clear, well-thought-out guidance. We didn’t all have to do it in the same way – each service is different, but hopefully we would all have the similar aspirations that would mean good outcomes for children. (Sunko, personal communication)

**Conclusion**

Since its final release in 1996 as the official curriculum document for early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Whāriki has gained widespread acceptance throughout the early childhood sector. This chapter has presented an overview of the socio-political environment at the time Te Whāriki was developed and first released. The draft version reflected the idea that curricula need to be culturally and nationally appropriate.
Internationally, this notion has been widely recognised and supported, and *Te Whāriki* has become a model for other countries faced with the challenge of developing curricula for early childhood.

Despite its widespread acceptance, there has been a remarkable lack of critical discourse on *Te Whāriki*, apart from expressed concern that its theoretical aspects may still not be well understood in practice. It is also hailed as one of a range of subversive, collaborative initiatives from within the early childhood sector at a time when, along with other sectors, it was suffering badly in the 1990s (Dalli, 2002). *Te Whāriki* created a point of solidarity in an unsympathetic and at times adverse political climate. The material that was cut in the rewriting process remains lost, and the stories of home-based care, special education, and Pacific Island curriculum are still untold.

In 2002, early childhood has come back into political view. With the release of *Nga Huarahi Arataki: Pathways to the Future* (Ministry of Education, 2002), the Ministry has signalled its intention to make *Te Whāriki* mandatory. The curriculum will become one of the measures assessed for compliance with the regulations governing licensed early childhood services. However, the early childhood sector in Aotearoa New Zealand would do well to remember that previous governments have overturned widely agreed longer-term policies, as the experiences of the late 1980s and early 1990s show.

With or without administrative sanctions, *Te Whāriki* is on the educational map. Its durability lies in a conceptual framework that interweaves educational theory, political ideology, and a profound acknowledgment of the importance of culture. Further stories about the development of *Te Whāriki* remain to be told, especially those from within the bureaucracy. They are worth seeking, if we are to understand how *Te Whāriki* can be upheld.
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