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Cultivating whanaungatanga and collaboration: Exploring the impact of inquiry-based project learning on kaiako and tamariki in early childhood education in Aotearoa

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of collaboration in inquiry-based project work in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. It draws upon findings from a research project exploring how inquiry-based project learning has been interpreted and undertaken in early childhood settings in this context. Inquiry-based project learning is a collaborative approach, underpinned by sociocultural theories, that supports a democratic view. The study is positioned in an interpretivist qualitative paradigm and is informed by sociocultural theories. A narrative inquiry approach informed the study design. Phase One of the project, which comprised a national questionnaire sent to all early childhood centres registered on the national ECE data base was completed in 2021. Phase Two, underway at the time of writing this paper, has involved a small number of purposively selected early childhood settings. At each of these settings, data collection has comprised an interview with the teaching team about their pedagogical frameworks, key influences and teaching practices, and a period of classroom observations focused on a current inquiry. Analysis of the data suggests that collaboration is cultivated when kaiako (teachers) prioritise whanaungatanga (sustaining connections and relationships) and have spent time developing pedagogical practices resulting in shared understandings surrounding inquiry-based project work. The impact of collaboration on the learning of tamariki (children) is demonstrated by a series of vignettes from the Phase Two data, demonstrating that developing a collaborative learning culture of inquiry fosters reciprocity, connection, theory making and problem solving.

Keywords: Inquiry-based project learning, early childhood education, collaborative learning

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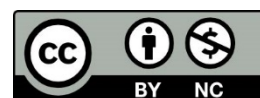
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