

Teaching in a diverse world

Napier Kindergarten teachers explored the influences on teachers in the current social, political and cultural context at our annual Conference held on July 5th and 6th 2010.

During the first two days of the July term break we welcomed 85 participants to our annual conference held in Napier. By morning tea time on Day One the spirit of kindergarten was alive and well with teachers laughing and engaging over coffee by warm fires sparked by the brilliance of our opening international speaker Ngahihi o te Ra Bidois.

Ngahi gave teachers some key messages about leadership by sharing his own journey and subsequently prompting them to ask themselves the same questions: Who am I and what are my values? Who are my mentors? What are my life dreams and goals? For what was I born?

Ngahi invited his audience to practice the hongi, a Māori form of greeting.



Captured here are Tangi Phillips & Leanne Hill.

Another thread to the leadership message came from Anna Anderson and Hayley Jones who are Wellington based directors of the People Power training academy.

One of their key messages was: 'Most of us never figure people out. We just ricochet through life getting along with some people and dealing as little as possible with others because they are so different from us.' Anna and Hayley presented a theory of four main personality types that define our strengths, weaknesses, likes and dislikes. They presented a positive message that there is no right or wrong type to be. In ECE we work so closely in teams that understanding and adapting our own behaviour to accommodate others makes a

lot of sense. Teachers had a huge amount of fun sharing their similarities and differences as the Owls, Doves, Peacocks and Eagles fluttered, strutted and swooped forth.

Dr Judy McGregor who works as the Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) Commissioner spoke about her recent NZ based research on workplace issues. She gave us challenging ideas for the future including:

- Consumer/parental choice will increase
- Increasingly people will make choices on reputation—we need to focus on quality and promoting ourselves more
- There will be increasing technology in the workplace
- Vulnerable groups in society will have increased barriers
- We must invest in ourselves as workers to remain valid

She also had some surprisingly optimistic messages such as her findings that most people, even in humble employment, take great pride and enjoyment in their work.

Jill McGill, Parents as First Teachers Co-ordinator for the Napier Kindergarten Association, shared a display about the PAFT programme.

Bruce Hammond works as an independent education adviser from his base in New Plymouth. He urged us to preserve the child's sense of wonder. Throughout his presentation Bruce gave us a treasure trove of academic references that have helped shape his thinking on the learning process.

Bruce also enjoyed hearing Robin Christie's presentation later in the day and there was a great deal of resonance in the messages of both Robin and Bruce to empower children to engage with nature.

Robin Christie, ECE teacher and playground designer spoke of providing authentic experiences for children who are often losing their connection with the natural world.

Robin is a lively presenter whose passion for connecting with nature bursts forth over the group like an irrepressible spring. He illustrates his dialogue with pictures of creative playground environments he has helped develop or seen in his travels in Europe and United States. The recently developed playground on Matakana Island was a highlight. Not all

ideas would be suitable for our kindergartens (we heard inward drawn breath when Robin spoke of the value of lightning fires with children). How wonderful to explore ideas that don't always fit and ponder on what might be possible. Robin believes children will only protect what they know and experience. This means we need to keep children's curiosity alive and help them feel confident explorers of the natural world.

Catherine Delahunty, Green Party Spokesperson on Education and Sustainability, spoke of how ECE needs to be valued by politicians in a meaningful way. She promoted the need to actively teach 'sustainable education' at all levels in education. She made the interesting point that at present the Education Review Office do not actively report on sustainable education and noted that generally ERO reports on areas of learning that are valued.

Catherine shared our disbelief and outrage at the governments recent and seemingly irrational announcements that deems 80% of ECE trained teachers as 'good enough.'

Catherine spoke of her dismay at the savage cuts to those ECE services such as kindergartens who have always worked with 100% trained teachers. Our teachers were heartened to know that such a vibrant advocate for early childhood is active in parliament challenging the current attacks on quality and vision.

Like all good professional development the collective experience with these six speakers fed the soul of our teachers who live and teach in a diverse world. They certainly inspired us to go back to our professional lives with increased vigour.



Teachers Barbara Berkahn & Kay Race enthuse over a new "There was a Princess Long Ago" puppet during a break.