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# CURRICULA IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN BRAZIL AND AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND: A REFLECTION BASED ON OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

## RESUMO

This paper considers Early Childhood Education curricula in Brazil and in Aotearoa New Zealand. Propositions for children and their implications for childhood were problematized in the light of the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (2009) and the National Curriculum Basis for Early Childhood Education (2017), from Brazil alongside both versions of Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum (1996 and 2017), from Aotearoa New Zealand. The analysis demonstrates the influence of international institutions and the financial market in the curricula and the presence of a neoliberal rationality that has contributed to producing children as human capital and teachers as curricular technicians. Tensions were also identified that reveal prescriptive aims in order to prepare children to meet the demands of the market.

**Keywords:** School Curriculum. Early Childhood Education. DCNEI. BNCCNEI. Te Whāriki

## O CURRÍCULO DA EDUCAÇÃO INFANTIL NO BRASIL E NA AOTEAROA NOVA ZELÂNDIA: REFLEXÕES A PARTIR DE DOCUMENTOS OFICIAIS

## RESUMO

Este artigo trata sobre o currículo da Educação Infantil no Brasil e na Aotearoa Nova Zelândia. A partir das Diretrizes Curriculares para a Educação Infantil (2009), da Base Nacional Comum Curricular para a Educação Infantil (2017) e das duas versões do documento Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum (1996 e 2017), problematizou-se as proposições para as crianças e as implicações para a infância. A análise demonstra a influência dos organismos internacionais e do mercado financeiro no currículo e a presença de uma racionalidade neoliberal que contribui para a produção da criança como capital humano e do professor como um tecnocrata. Tensões também foram identificadas, revelando objetivos prescritivos que visam a preparação da criança para atender às demandas do mercado.

**Palavras-chave:** Currículo. Educação Infantil. DCNEI. BNCCNEI. Te Whāriki.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

This paper results from conversations that started in 2017, when we met for the first time at a symposium held at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, NZ<sup>1</sup>, to honor the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Paulo Freire's 20th death. Later, in 2019, inspired by these conversations, we met again to have a meaningful dialogue based on our professional experiences about Early Childhood Education in Brazil and Aotearoa New Zealand. We perceived that Early Childhood Education in both countries is either marked by the fight for children's rights to attend an early childhood setting where they feel safe, with skilled professionals and a cozy environment, or the aims to prepare children to start Elementary Education.

Our reflections triggered the idea of writing this paper, whose main theme is Early Childhood Education. We analyzed official documents and problematized their proposals for children and their implications for childhood. Discussions about the Brazilian context are based on the *National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education – DCNEI* (2009) and on the *National Curriculum Basis for Early Childhood Education – BNCCEI* (2018). In the case of Aotearoa New Zealand, they are based on the *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum*, in both the 1996 and 2017 versions.

We believe that curriculum can be an opportunity to share knowledge with the next generation. It is the vision of which knowledge, skills and values are considered important to the future of the members of the society. It is a form of envisioning and predicting what kind of society we desire. It is reflection upon who we want to be as a society and an imaginative practice of the present, aiming at our hope and expectations. This perspective agrees with Moreira and Candau (2007), who have related curriculum to transformations expected in schools and mentioned “values that we wish to inculcate and identities we want to construct” (p. 18).

However, curriculum may also be perceived as appropriation of the path which is needed to reach an expected future in which children are the main agents. When retrospectively analyzed, information found in a curriculum may be conceived as an archive of this perspective, a synthesis of values, knowledge, skills and understandings

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<sup>1</sup> The Symposium “Rethinking Paulo Freire’s legacy: education, politics and ethics” was hosted by the Educational Theory, Policy and Practice Research Hub in the College of Education, Health and Human Development, University of Canterbury, in Aotearoa New Zealand in July 2017.

which are considered important to the society. Besides, the image of the child projected by the document is at times the explicitness of the imaginary of the ideal one. Finally, curriculum may be a form of acculturation, an opportunity to shape individuals in a certain way which aims at specific purposes. These perspectives of curricula show not only who we are as a culture and society in the present but also what we think is relevant in the past and our hope and expectations for the future.

Thus, this paper has three sections and introduces reflections based on several authors, such as Dahlberg, Moss, Pence (2003), Ball (2006, 2009) and Apple (2004). The first section is the Introduction and the second, which is entitled Early Childhood Education in Brazil, has three sub-sections. Firstly, it deals with the political context in which documents on the topic were issued. Afterwards, it introduces the DCNEI and then the BNCCEI to problematize the perspectives of curriculum and children addressed by both documents. The third has two sub-sections to discuss the New Zealand context. The first part describes the document *Te Whāriki* 1996 which deals with the Early Childhood curriculum instituted by the Ministry of Education in New Zealand while the second analyzes its revised edition (2017), reflecting on how children are depicted in both documents.

In Final Remarks, we have argued that, even though Brazil and Aotearoa New Zealand are geographically, historically and culturally different, both countries are intertwined with a network of international influences that imposes a neoliberal agenda which is defined by documents that regulate Early Childhood Education. It is the proposal of a curriculum that presents the idea of an ideal child who needs to be prepared from an early age to meet demands of the world of work under strong influence of institutions connected to the international financial system.

## **2 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN BRAZIL**

### **2.1 An overview of the political and educational context**

Federal Law no. 9394/96 (LDB), which establishes new guidelines and bases for Brazilian Education, determines that Early Childhood Education is the first stage of Elementary Education. Therefore, the State is legally required to ensure Early Childhood Education and families may choose to enroll their children up to 6 years old in this stage.

Also in the 1990's, after the LDB, other laws were issued to regulate Early Childhood Education. For instance, Resolution no. 01/99 established the first DCNEI.

However, studies carried out by Brião (2019) show that the proposal of the federal government aligned with neoliberal policies in which “[...] Education is elected as the magic key to eradicate poverty since, by investing in individuals and providing instruction, they will be able to find their place in the sun” (ARCE, 2001, p. 254). To reinforce this perspective, the discourse on globalization as the solution to reach economic growth is established in the country but, in fact, there is “[...] a tendency towards homogenization of western norms and cultures (or, to a limited extent, North-American)” (BURBULES; TORRES, 2004, p. 18).

Based on the neoliberal globalization, there is “[...] an educational agenda that either privileges or directly imposes certain policies on evaluation, funds, standards, teacher education, curricula, instruction and tests” (BURBULES; TORRES, 2004, p. 19).

Changes in the field of Education which were made by means of the federal legislation in the 1990's reflect a historical period in which international institutions, such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), incisively associated their funds with the country's policies on Education, including the ones on Early Childhood Education. According to Lucas (2008, p. 53), “among all international institutions, the WB was the one that promoted the largest number of programs of Early Childhood Education in the world since the 1990's”. From their perspective, children were seen as individuals who needed to be prepared for the future to ensure the nation's success. Dahlberg, Moss, Pence (2003, p. 17) stated that “institutions that focus on early childhood are broadly seen as the ones that contribute to developmental and economic projects”. Therefore, children are perceived as a means of economic growth.

The beginning of the 21st century has been marked by political changes in Brazil. Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, the candidate of the Workers' Party (PT), was inaugurated as the Brazilian president in 2003. He served two consecutive terms in which his proposal was to align his government with social welfare. Regarding policies on Education, Report no. 20/009 and Resolution no. 5/2005 were issued by his government. Both revise previous documents and establish the new DCNEI.

Dilma Rousseff, who was also a member of the PT, was inaugurated as the president in 2011. In her government, the Federal Law no. 12.796/2013, which alters articles of Law no. 9394/96, was promulgated to establish changes in the country's Elementary Education. Concerning Early Childhood Education, for instance, the 4th Article determines care to five-year-old children, rather than just to six-year-olds, as

before. Another change was introduced by the 29th Article, which establishes enrollment obligatoriness for children who are over 4 years old. It also establishes that the State must offer 4-5-year-olds' parents their enrollment in this stage of Education<sup>2</sup>.

These changes were accepted with some resistance by researchers engaged in childhood, mainly the change which establishes care should be provided to five-year-olds. Their apprehension was related to advance in disciplinary routine, with strict schedules based on specific content teaching centered on teachers' work and, consequently, against the DCNEI (2009).

However, the trend towards preschool universalization has taken place in other Latin-American countries; many of them have shown high rates of preschool care (CAMPOS and CAMPOS, 2012). Thus, Brazil also takes part in the movement which results from treaties among the countries and international institutions. Campos and Campos (2012) point out the interference from institutions, such as the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture (OIE).

Despite their possibilities of cooperation and exchange, Akkari (2011) warns that internationalization processes have harmful effects and points out that they cause "[...] tension to national policies on Education, thus hampering articulation between national requirements (regional or local) and imperative ones (global) (AKKARI, 2011, p. 15). Therefore, in a context marked by strong international influence and inequality among countries, two documents are established: the DCNEI (2009) and the BNCCEI (2018).

## 2.2 National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (DCNEI)

Resolution no. 05/2009, which was previously introduced, establishes the DCNEI based on tenets, grounds and practices determined by the *Câmara de Educação Básica* (CEB) and the *Conselho Nacional de Educação* (CNE) that aim at "[...] providing guidelines for public policies and planning, developing, executing and evaluating pedagogical and curriculum proposals for Early Childhood Education" (BRASIL, 2009c, p. 1). Development of this document was preceded by public consultation with broad participation of national authorities, teachers and researchers in the field of Early Childhood Education in Brazil.

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to mention Law no. 11.114/2005, which established that six-year-olds' mandatory enrollment in Elementary School, and Law no. 11.274/2006, which determined that Elementary School would last nine years and reinforced mandatory enrollment of children at this age.

Report no. 20/2009, which deals with the DCNEI, says that “revision and updating of the DCNEI are essential to incorporate advances of politics, scientific production and social movements found in the area” (BRASIL, 2009b, p. 3). The perspective recommended for work related to Early Childhood Education in 2009 is the one of a curriculum structured on two axes: interaction and games. However, it should be highlighted that the term curriculum was a point of contention, controversy and dispute. Some researchers thought that the term was not adequate because it was associated with the form of schooling that was not the desired one in the case of children in Early Childhood Education, since it refers to directive and prescriptive teaching. According to Carvalho (2015, p. 467), “some researchers, such as Rocha (2001), Kramer (2009) and Barbosa (2009), who compose the epistemic community in the field, have shown concern for the reproduction of Elementary School practices in Early Childhood Education”. Thus, the terms pedagogical project and pedagogical proposal were suggested to replace curriculum. However, in the existing power game, even with some caveats, the term curriculum was kept and determined that:

[...] the child is the center of curriculum planning, a historical subject who has rights and develops as the result of everyday interaction, relations and practices which are offered by and established with adults and other children at different ages in his/her groups and cultural contexts (BRASIL, 2009b, p. 6).

The previous excerpt shows that curriculum planning in Early Childhood Education is based on the conception of children as historical subjects who have rights and develop in interaction with others. Dahlberg, Moss, Pence (2003) have highlighted the following perspectives of a child: “[...] as a reproducer of knowledge and culture, a blank slate or an empty vase which needs to be filled with knowledge and be ‘prepared’” (DAHLBERG, MOSS, PENCE, 2003, p.16); and “[...] as an individual who has ‘surprising and extraordinary potentiality and competence’, a co-constructor of knowledge and of identity in the relation with other children and adults” (DAHLBERG, MOSS, PENCE, 2003, p. 17).

When the DCNEI mention that the child is the center of planning, they defend the idea of a subject that experiences his/her childhood in the institution and presupposes “a rich, active and competent child who is anxious to connect to the world” (DAHLBERG, MOSS, PENCE, 2003, p. 17).

This vision of children is linked to the perspective of the teacher as a mediator, whose responsibility is to be attentive to their needs, wishes, how they experience their childhood and then, to plan actions that may help them develop individually and collectively. Therefore, this context produces the idea of a teacher who “watches

children's actions – individual and collective ones – accepts their questions and answers and tries to understand the meaning of their behavior” (BRASIL, 2009b, p. 15). Besides, emphasis is given to the fact that “in their experiences with children, teachers have excellent opportunities to develop as persons and professionals” (BRASIL, 2009b, p. 7).

However, it should be pointed out that writing a legal document does not mean that it will be implemented. Ball (2009, p. 305) explicitly states that he does not believe “[...] that policies will be implemented; thus, a linear process in which they move directly to practice is suggested. It is a careless and thoughtless use of the verb”. Besides, we observed that the new guidelines were interpreted differently. For instance, Amorim and Dias (2012) consider that the guidelines aim at ceasing MEC's centralization, based on a broad view of curriculum and pedagogical proposal. According to the authors, “decentralization is expressed in the fact that the educational institution, its professionals and the community are responsible for developing these proposals participatively and collectively (AMORIM and DIAS, 2012, p. 134).

However, Carvalho (2015) understands that the DCNEI aim at regulating teachers' actions and states that “it must be clarified that the guidelines approximate the assumptions of Childhood Pedagogy, since they attempt to structure teachers' work through their orientation” (CARVALHO, 2015, p. 469). The author adds that, there are relations of dispute and power in all curriculum proposals; thus, it also happens to the guidelines, which are a fertile field of production of meanings, as well.

It should be emphasized that despite their different assumptions, both authors show the difficulty that institutions have to follow tenets exposed by the guidelines in their routines, due to several factors, such as the complexity of the issues. Besides material precariousness, which is found in many Early Childhood Education facilities, since they have inadequate buildings and shortage of material, pre-service and in-service teacher education is not accessible to all professionals, such as teachers in rural areas. Report no. 20 (BRASIL, 2009b, p. 11 - 12) states that:

[...] facilities are precarious, material are inadequate and most teachers are not prepared to work with this population; it characterizes blatant inefficacy of execution of policies on equality regarding access to Early Childhood Education and violation of children's rights to Education.

Early Childhood Education in Brazil has several structural weaknesses and, to worsen this situation, it has gone through a political movement that creates more challenges and contradictions in the country's reality. A discourse on the need for a common basis for Brazilian Education has been defined, fostered by Law no. 12.796/2013

and encouraged by different groups, such as the *Movimento Todos pela Base*, which is headed by business groups. As a result, Early Childhood Education in Brazil has gone through changes in its proposal and perspective again.

### 2.3 National Curriculum Basis for Early Childhood Education (BNCCEI)

Before introducing the assumptions of the BNCCEI, we must explain how this document was constructed and political influences that led to changes in its final version.

The Ministry of Education (MEC) instituted an advising committee which comprised professors, Elementary School teachers and technicians of Education Departments in 2015, when they had the opportunity to discuss and carry out public consultation so that the whole population could contribute through a site organized by the MEC. The first version of the BNCCEI received several criticism, contributions and suggestions, which led to another version of the document. The second version of the BNCCEI was again made accessible for the society for evaluation<sup>3</sup>.

However, it should be mentioned that there was a great political rupture in the country in 2016, when president Dilma Rousseff (PT) was impeached and vice-president Michel Temer (MDB) was inaugurated. It implied changes in political positions, even in the sector of Education, and an agenda which was more aligned with entrepreneurial and neoliberal interests was again established, a fact that led to significant changes in the final version of the BNCCEI. The advising committee who had been responsible for developing the BNCCEI since 2015 was displaced and another group – connected to entrepreneurial corporations – took over the task of finishing the document. The third version was handed by the MEC to the National Council of Education so that it could be authorized on an emergency basis, with no public consultation. Since only five public audiences – one in every Brazilian region - were conducted, they did not enable a broad debate in the society.

Therefore, we observed rupture in both the process of development of the document and the ideological perspective. Before, there were work and discussions conducted by professional in Education; in the final version, participants were teams

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<sup>3</sup> To know more, see <http://portal.mec.gov.br/conselho-nacional-de-educacao/audiencias-e-consultas-publicas> and also Critical Reading: Maria Angela de Souza Lima Rizzi [http://basenacionalcomum.mec.gov.br/images/relatorios-analiticos/Parecer\\_2\\_Infantil\\_Maria\\_Angela\\_de\\_Souza\\_Lima\\_Rizzi.pdf](http://basenacionalcomum.mec.gov.br/images/relatorios-analiticos/Parecer_2_Infantil_Maria_Angela_de_Souza_Lima_Rizzi.pdf)



chosen by entrepreneurial groups<sup>4</sup>, a fact that shows that the public-private partnership was the option of Temer administration. Just like in the 1990's, the private sector participates in planning of policies on childhood, i. e., “public policies on Education started to be based on the standards of external economic development” (BRIÃO, 2019, p. 43).

Differently from discussions based on the DCNEI, the BNCCEI establishes a proposal which defines a minimum curriculum centered on competences and skills all over the country. According to the document:

In the BNCC, competence is defined as the use of knowledge (concepts and procedures), skills (practical, cognitive and socioemotional ones), attitudes and values to solve complex issues of everyday life, the full exercise of citizenship and the work market (BRASIL, 2018, p.08).

In this document, we can also identify the conception of a child as “human capital” since its objective is the productive worker of the future. In addition, there is strict control of pedagogical work carried out by Early Childhood Education teachers since the document prescriptively describes objectives that must be reached.

The BNCC has a structure based on general competences for Elementary Education, rights to learn and develop, field of experiences and, connected to them, objectives of learning and development. A change in paradigm can be identified between both documents (DCNEI and BNCC), even regarding the terminology. For instance, competence has its origin in the entrepreneurial field, as pointed out by Mota (2019). Proposed subdivisions show specificity and fragmentation. Rights to learn include to interact, to play, to participate, to explore, to express and to know oneself. Fields of experiences are classified into five groups: i) I, the other and we; ii) body, gestures and movements; iii) traces, sounds, colors and forms; iv) listening, speaking, thoughts and imagination; and v) space, time, quantity, relations and transformations. Objectives and resulting learning are defined in every group.

Thus, we may notice that a single curriculum is proposed for the whole country; as a result, the Brazilian population's regional and cultural diversity is not taken into consideration. The proposal described by the document shows that teachers follow previous instructions, which are applied to children in general. Therefore, there is an attempt to erase diversity, according to the document:

[...] the BNCC indicates that pedagogical decisions must aim at developing competences through clear exposure of what students must “know”

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<sup>4</sup> Among the business groups that were present, stand out Fundação Lemann, Instituto Unibanco, Banco Mundial, OCDE e Instituto Ayrton Senna.

(considering the constitution of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values) and, mainly, of what they must “know how to do” (considering the use of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to solve complex issues of everyday life, the full exercise of citizenship and the work market). Explicitness of competences offers references to strengthen actions that ensure essential learning defined by the BNCC. (BRASIL, 2018, p. 13)

With the institution of the BNCCEI, we have observed the change in perspectives, from a child that is a historical subject who has rights, experiences childhood in Early Childhood Education everyday routine and develops in the interaction with other subjects to a child who needs to be taught, instrumentalized to meet the demands of a capitalist society in which requirements of the market regulate the Education agenda from a young age.

### 3 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

#### 3.1 Locating the ‘good child’ in *Te Whāriki* 1996

At the time of the writing of *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum* (NEW ZEALAND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 1996, hereafter referred to as *Te Whāriki 1996*), a co-author of the document, Margaret Carr (1993) articulated the important role of curriculum in “making available to the next generation what we regard as the most valuable aspects of culture” (p. 35). Concurrently, an understanding of the influence of curriculum upon the citizens of a nation was identified by the Department of Education in their identification of the image of the ‘good child’ promoted through *Te Whāriki 1996* was to be the image of the “good child” (DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, cited in TE ONE, 2003, p. 22). In both of these understandings, the power of curriculum is sensed as an opening to impress upon the future through the education of children.

When *Te Whāriki 1996* was written, governmental objectives were seeking to situate the image of the ‘good child’ within the economic discourse, with goals of ‘productivity’ for each ‘learner child’. The government of the time was not unique in viewing education as a means enculturate children into their role as future producers within a wider economic society. However, *Te Whāriki 1996* was equally seen by early childhood advocates as an opportunity to promote a vision which could push against such limited visions, and refute the dominant image of the neoliberal child.

In part, the solidarity of the early childhood community (culminating in the formation of *Te Whāriki 1996*) stemmed from desires to resist the ‘push-down’ of effects of situating Early Childhood Education as preparation for school, as was occurring within the primary schooling sector, where the primary school curriculum (NEW ZEALAND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 1993) was formed with little consultation or debate, and represented a simplified version of the secondary schooling curriculum, rather than a unique representation of the educational values of primary education (AIKIN, 1995).

Carr and May's (1993a) critical analysis of the primary curriculum identify the vocational and economic positioning of children within the document. Furthermore, the wider climate produced through this revised primary curriculum sought to promote competition between schools by increasing the visibility of ‘quality indicators’ to support parents’ consumer choice within education providers. The impending ideological domination unified a diverse sector into solidarity. In order to successfully curb this threat, a single proposal was submitted to and accepted by the Ministry of Education in 1990, a proposal which comprised the interests of the early childhood groups (MUTCH, 2001). This proposal was identified to be the culmination of this solidarity.

The desire to promote ‘consumer choice’ as a stimulation for the early childhood market was equally present in this time. Identifying a lack of solidarity in the early childhood sector, the then Minister for Education, National Member of Parliament Lockwood Smith promoted unification through funding levels, where all early childhood services would receive the same levels of funding in order to support the diversities within the sector, but also to promote a market-approach to Early Childhood Education which would give “parents a genuine choice” (LOCKWOOD SMITH, 1993, p. 12). These moves highlight the aspiration of the government to reposition diversity alongside neoliberalist requirements for ‘consumer choice’ as stimulation for the market.

While lauding the benefits of a unified curriculum, Carr and May (1993b) equally expressed caution for the ways that the vision of children within curriculum can quickly be redirected by the government. Advocacy to resist this ideological domination within the early childhood, and the threats to the vision of children within Early Childhood Education was central in the movement to consolidate as a sector to promote a unified approach. An awareness of the social-political situation was also present in the minds of the authors, with Carr (1993a, p. 37) identifying the socio-cultural milieu as

[...] one of increasing polarisation, unemployment and competition for jobs [...] the new economic climate, accompanied as it is by new education directions towards measured accountability, may encourage a return to a demand for

behavioural objectives, linked to a psychology of development as stages of sequential skills and to a philosophy of competition rather than cooperation.

There was a heightened cognizance of the potential for a dramatic shift in early childhood's vision of education towards competition. The image of the child within *Te Whāriki* was seen as an opportunity to represent and advocate for early childhood's vision of the 'good child', coalescing current understandings of what the human child should be. Deeply contextualised within the Aotearoa New Zealand context, *Te Whāriki 1996* is grounded within a particular set of local views of what the 'good' child should look like (DUNCAN, 2005). These views are influenced by international movements, but are also the culmination of not only the vision of the authors but a collaboration with the early childhood community *of that time*.

The opportunity to shape the future through curriculum is an area of influence which multiple groups seek to participate in. Governmental amendments within the movement from the draft to the final version of *Te Whāriki 1996* created speculation about the re-shaping of the vision of the writers, who carefully negotiated with the early childhood sector. Te One (2013) reports that there much speculation, and little information about the direction given to the Ministry of Education from Lockwood Smith (Minister for Education at the time), but that "examination of the text suggests that the political and economic agenda of the day was accommodated by including the language of accountability" (p. 19).

As a sector demonstrative of effective alternatives to the ideological tenets of neoliberalism (in which community, collective action, altruistic endeavour, and equity as opposed to individualism, competition, self-interest, and discrete excellence have proved effectively functional and motivational – and arguably inventive – within ECE), Early Childhood Education was identified as a target to ensure that this ideological movement remained relegated to the sidelines. This quest was not insomuch a reduction of the opportunities for early childhood to extend into communities, but a means through which Early Childhood Education would only have the opportunity to continue (and expand) if the ideological basis upon which Early Childhood Education was founded – community, service, collectivism, and equity – was minimised.

An ideological war, in which neoliberalist ideologies were positioned as the only way forward. Peters (2011) writes that "Neoliberalism represents a struggle between two forms of welfare or social policy discourse based on opposing and highly charged ideological metaphors of 'individualism' and 'community'" (p. 1). This is the struggle earlier outlined by May (2009) between Early Childhood Education and the governance of the

fourth National government – the ‘radical potential’ of the early childhood sector to resist neoliberal ideologies and promote community over individualism.

In *Te Whāriki 1996*, the vision of the ‘good child’ can be claimed by diverse bodies, and/or ‘read’ in manifold ways. Visions of children within *Te Whāriki 1996* have been identified to both witness and resistance to neo-colonial and neoliberal images (TESAR, 2015), to trace a cosmopolitan/global child (Duhn, 2006), to misleadingly align feminist and neoliberalist concerns (STOVER, 2013), and to and enable a foundation for revisioning the child through countercolonial methods (RITCHIE, SKERRETT, & RAU, 2014).

Yet, a strength of *Te Whāriki 1996* is in the representation of diversities in early childhood pedagogical practices through an extensive range and depth of learning outcomes for children. With over 118 learning outcomes, spread across 5 curriculum strands and 4 principles, educators, children and families have the ability to weave a rich curriculum which is sociocultural-oriented, ipsative, and formative. Assessment is derived from situations and occurrences which are contextually appropriate, and strength based, seeking to extend the child from their interests in combination with cultural aspirations.

### 3.2 Re-vision(ing) of children in *Te Whāriki 2017*

Readings of the revised edition of *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum* (NEW ZEALAND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2017a, hereafter *Te Whāriki 2017*) must equally take into account the rich history of *Te Whāriki 1996* and the formation of this new edition, for we are grounded in a contingent past, and our “map of the future cannot be charted upon a clean slate” (MAY, 1999, p. 117). *Te Whāriki 2017* offers ways to positioned Early Childhood Education as a social investment for future economic benefit (DELAUNE, 2017; WOOD & HEDGES, 2016), with ‘Early Learning’ becoming the new moniker of ECE (NEW ZEALAND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2016b). The ‘Social Investment’ paradigm, and the designation of Early Childhood Education as ‘Early Learning’ invoke particular images of the child – a child to be measured economically.

Neither the fourth National-Led government, who spearheaded development of *Te Whāriki 1996*, nor the fifth National-Led government who spearheaded its revision are unique in viewing the child in economic terms and subsequent monetary returns.

Vandebroek (2017, p. 10) identifies the economic situation of children as an ‘early investment’ to be an internationally prominent discursive construction:

It is hard, nowadays, to find a policy document on early childhood education that does not quote Nobel Prize laureate James Heckman, often also including his famous “Heckman curve”, illustrating that investing in the youngest children yields the highest economic returns. (VANDEBROECK, 2017, p. 10).

The enculturation of individuals within society, both socially and politically, are affected by the ways in which curricular design and implementation transmit information about what is deemed to be “significant knowledge, skills, values and beliefs” (FARQUHAR, 2015, p. 56). Who constructs curriculum, and how choices are made to designate what constitutes “the most valuable aspects of culture” is a question that is pertinent to ask in a time when connections between political and economic goals seek to draw early childhood provision into more intricate relationships, as varying scientific discourses illustrate the economic ‘value’ of the early years by the government (VANDENBROECK, 2017; WOOD & HEDGES, 2016).

In December 2014 Minister of Education Hekia Parata commissioned an Advisory Group on Early Learning (NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT, 2014). Within the initial brief it was clearly documented that it was outside of the scope of the group to recommend a rewrite of Te Whāriki 1996. Instead, the major purpose of the group was to provide advice on “how to strengthen the implementation of Te Whāriki and practical ways to align curriculum planning, implementation and evaluation across early learning services and the early years of school and kura” (NEW ZEALAND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2014). To justify this call for the establishment of an advisory group, the Ministry of Education cite the findings of the OECD published document, Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care: New Zealand 2012 (TAGUMA, LITJENS, & MAKOWIECKI, 2012). Specifically that:

OECD’s country report, Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care: New Zealand 2012 suggests that New Zealand could capitalise on the strengths of its ECE system by looking at options for improving the implementation of Te Whāriki.(NEW ZEALAND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2014, p. 1).

Furthermore, within the document Terms of Reference – Advisory Group on Early Learning (NEW ZEALAND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2014) the Ministry of Education advises that the advisory group be mindful of the “constrained fiscal environment under which the government operates” (NEW ZEALAND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2014, p.

3). The terms of reference document sets the tone to those appointed to the advisory group that economic sensibilities are of value, whether they be locally or internationally driven.

The Advisory Group, was appointed by Minister Parata, and led by Joce Nuttall who edited both the 2003 and 2013 editions of the book *Weaving Te Whāriki* (NUTTALL, 2003b, 2013). One of the top recommendations of this group was to commission an update of *Te Whāriki 1996* as

Childhoods have changed since the early 1990's. Significant international and schools-sector scholarship takes account of 21st-century learning contexts, including rapid technological change, and the implications of globalisation and climate change. (NEW ZEALAND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2015c, p. 15).

From this quote it can be understood that the drive to update *Te Whāriki 1996* was in response to international directions for learning, and curriculum foci should be drawn from the schooling sector. An update of *Te Whāriki 1996* was recommended to be cognisant of these drives, and ensure that there will be the effort to make its “future-focused principles and content more explicit” (NEW ZEALAND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2015c, p. 16). Again, a publication by the OECD – Innovative Learning Environments (ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT, 2013) – is cited to support the impetus for ‘21st century learning’ within *Te Whāriki 2017*.

The updated document was released on the 4th of November 2016, with consultation being opened to the wider public from the 4th November to the 16th December 2016 (NEW ZEALAND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2016c). Yet many individuals expressed concerns in news and within social media about the rapid timeframe over which the changes to *Te Whāriki 2017* took place (DAVY, 2016a; TULLOCH, 2016). In a blog post, Kett (2016) comments “if they were looking for a robust and thorough consultation process, why not have the time-frame extended”. One teacher was prompted to promote their own survey seeking responses on whether there was sufficient time given for the early childhood community to review the draft (DAVY, 2016b). While a surge in criticisms against *Te Whāriki 1996* have been circulating for up to a decade (BLAIKLOCK, 2010, 2013), the short timeframe for the development of the update, and the minimal period of time to respond to the update suggested a sense of urgency.

In a critique of *Te Whāriki 2017*, Alexander (2016a) argues that the format for the consultation process – rushed, limited, and ill-timed, being conducted during most services opening hours – was designed to “assist policy objectives of aligning early childhood education to the school system” (p. 3). Furthermore, Alexander (2016a) raises questions regarding the simplification of language in combination with the description of all adults involved within the early childhood setting – qualified or not- as kaiako, considering the utilisation of this term as a targeted action to reduce the importance of qualified educators, and produce a document which is more ‘user friendly’ for non-qualified workers.

The Ministry of Education described the new draft as an attempt to “better reflect today’s New Zealand and developments in educational thinking and practice” (NEW ZEALAND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2016d). Major alterations to the original document have occurred, including the reduction of learning outcomes from 118 to 20, the reduction in size of the document from 100 pages to 63 including several photos which were not included in the original, and the erasure of a section devoted to the consideration of children with special learning needs.

The way in which the new learning outcomes are composed demonstrates a shift from assessing what children are developing, to what they are demonstrating. Where learning outcomes once stated “Children develop an increasingly elaborate repertoire of gesture and expressive body movement for communication, including ways to make requests non-verbally and appropriately” (NEW ZEALAND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 1996, p. 74), they now state “Children use gesture and movement to express themselves” (NEW ZEALAND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2016a, p. 27). This shift in representation requires the educator working with children to discern the demonstration of abilities in children, rather than look to the increasing complexity with which children are developing.

A further change is the inclusion of an overview page amalgamating the information within the Strands and Outcomes into a single table, omitting the Goals. In doing so, there are ramifications for the interpretation of curriculum. The strands are what is considered important for children to be learning, the substance of the curriculum. The learning outcomes show how this substance is being demonstrated by the children. But the goals are the critical interpretation and consideration by the educator of how this substance is being put into practice, and how it can be interpreted by, with, and for children. The omission of this essential aspect of curriculum within this ‘quick reference’ table raises questions about whether *Te Whāriki 2017* is encouraging teachers to remain engaged and critical in their practices with children. This is compounded by the



declaration by the Ministry of Education that the document contains “fewer and clearer outcomes” (NEW ZEALAND MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, 2016d), and presents the curriculum in a way that makes it ‘easier to navigate’. In light of the earlier concerns presented on the IELS, are educators being conditioned through subtle alteration within *Te Whāriki 2017*, to become technocratic deliverers of curriculum for children.

Revisions of *Te Whāriki* in light of the reduction of complexity within the learning outcomes, the ‘fiscal awareness’ in which the update was composed, and the lack of sufficient consultation and appointment of the people responsible to set out both the advisory recommendations and the substance of the update itself, there is significant cause to critique the nature of the ‘update’ of *Te Whāriki 1996*. As stated in the previous section, a strength of *Te Whāriki 1996* was the breadth of learning outcomes for children, with 118 learning outcomes offering educators the opportunity to weave a finely and tightly woven curriculum for children, and specialise curricular approaches due to this breadth.

Yet the reduced the number of learning outcomes for children from 118 to 20, justified to support educators to navigate the curriculum document and improve clarity connects to wider arguments about the technicist approach to education. Apple (2004) writes that within talk of ‘simplification’ and ‘plain-speaking’ “there are clear discursive strategies being employed” (p. 17) which position the views of those who seek to simplify as ‘common sense’ and critique/belittle those who seek complexity; the desire to simplify is often conducted at the expense of diversity. Questions must be raised regarding how *Te Whāriki 2017* was updated to promote particular neoliberal, neoconservative and global images of children, childhood and teaching. Discursive language used for the review of the document denotes the value being placed upon international directions for learning, and focuses upon alignment with the schooling sector. Much of the supporting information for the motivation for the curriculum change has come from OECD documentation, demonstrating the value the Ministry of Education places in educational research conducted by this international body, and the way in which the OECD’s soft governance affects nation-states.

## 4 FINAL REMARKS

This paper addressed certain aspects related to Early Childhood Education curricula in Brazil and in New Zealand, to enable us to comprehend how the child is

depicted in these documents. Analysis of the documents issued in the 1990's and revised/produced in the 2000's by both countries shows that, even though they are distant from each other, there are multiple points of alignment. The analysis of the documents led us to identify the strong influence of international institutions that impose an agenda of neoliberal rationality in which children are seen as individuals who must be prepared from an early age to meet market demands.

The text clearly shows that, even though professionals and researchers in the fields of Childhood and Early Childhood Education have resisted, there is a tendency towards simplification of the process, i. e., teachers are expected to follow guidelines provided by the documents, which are exposed in a simplistic, directive and effortless way. Since the child is seen as somebody who needs to develop competences to meet demands in the future, there is little space for diversity. All children should receive the same instruction.

Finally, it should be added that the perspective of a curriculum as the expression of "the most valuable aspects of culture" and the child as a historical subject who has rights has become very restrictive in current proposals for Early Childhood Education. Conceptions of children as human capital, teachers as technicians and curricula as determinants of objectives to be developed in a simplified and prescriptive way are found in these documents.

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