

# Age-responsive pedagogies

*'Preschool' Teachers interrogate their dialogues with and about two year-olds*

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Project dates: 2017-2018

## Project description

Ten experienced teachers from two mixed age early childhood education settings catering for two year-olds alongside their older peers engaged in a video-based inquiry that allowed a slowing down of their pedagogical processes. The purpose of their inquiry was to understand what two year-old dialogues 'look like' in 'preschool' settings traditionally oriented to older peers as a source of pedagogical insight. According to dialogic theory, dialogues are not only central to learning – they ARE learning – and this is no less true for two year-olds, who have unique ways of being and becoming in ECE spaces. Such dialogues allow for expression of multiple ideas and perspectives which can lead to shared meaning-making – allowing teachers to see learning potential.

## Aims

1. To make explicit the specialized practices required of teachers – who have traditionally worked with three to four year-olds – in their pedagogical dialogues with and about two year-olds who are increasingly attending their services, and
2. To identify, articulate and ultimately improve the pedagogical experience for two year-olds in ECE settings that traditionally cater for older children by making explicit the dialogic relationship between teacher (and peer) interactions with two year-olds, and the significance of these for learning.

## Why is this research important?

When the dialogic efforts of teachers are held up for scrutiny, teachers are able to re-vision their pedagogies and practices in ways that are inclusive of younger learners. By appreciating the unique dialogues that comprise two year-old learning experiences in 'preschool' settings, teachers can alter and better appreciate their learning potential for all.

## Key findings

The study provided important pedagogical insights into the nature of dialogues that occurred for two year-olds in these 'preschool' settings. Two year-old dialogues were typically comprised of nonverbal and verbal language combinations or non-verbal language use only. They included watching, moving freely in the 'preschool' space and connecting fleeting language events. When recognized by teachers, these findings gave great insight into the learning priorities of two year-olds, which were expressed through encounters which pulled toward or away from shared meaning with others including older peers who were now seen as pedagogical partners. In response to their discoveries, teachers altered their pedagogical strategies - using more nonverbal-verbal combinations, less probing as opposed to clarifying questioning (offer/instruction/suggest), increased levels of demonstrating, watchfulness, and tolerance for alternative routes of inquiry based on two year-olds' strategic orientations. Two year-olds' strategic orientations became increasingly apparent when teachers recognized the importance for two year-olds in 'going against the grain'. Teachers significantly slowed down their dialogues to pay attention to two year-old priorities. They adjusted policies and assessments to reflect their revised understandings. Interestingly, teachers did not find the need to make significant adjustments to the environment as they recognized the learning potential across diverse learning contexts (genre) within the 'preschool'.

## Implications for practice

Thinking deeply about two year-olds as dialogue partners through a dialogic lens allows teachers to 'see' learning in more expansive ways – not just for two year-olds but for older peers as well as themselves. Teachers are encouraged to take the time to engage with dialogue in its broadest sense – as a series of strategic orientations on the part of two year-olds. When teachers take the time to carefully scrutinize language, through fine-tuned analysis, and are prepared to critically dialogue about its significance, there are many pedagogical riches to be found. These lead to more meaningful encounters with two year-olds and an appreciation of their agentic acts as a source of shared meaning (intersubjectivity), and, importantly dissensus of meaning (alterity) in the 'preschool' environment. In particular, this means:

- Paying attention to the nuances of language, well beyond verbal communication alone, and inclusive of embodied language; as well as responding appropriately to these
- Less talk without accompanying action (body language)
- Providing opportunities (and space) for two year-olds to negotiate meanings with people, places and things
- Recognising that two year-olds are extremely capable and competent in their relationships with teachers and peers, when given the opportunity to be seen and heard
- Celebrating learning potential in two year-old learning with their peers as co-pedagogues
- Recognising the diverse opportunities that exist in 'preschool' learning contexts, and that several of these take place in underground spaces (which teachers may not always 'see')
- Appreciating that two year-olds have their own ways of being in 'preschool' environments, and, when given the opportunity to do so, will artfully manoeuvre themselves accordingly –dependent on the spaces, resources and people at their disposal, and their priorities
- Increasing capacity for humour and fun – enjoying what two year-olds have to teach us

## Our partners:

- Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, University of Waikato
- Teaching staff at Gate Pa Preschool, Tauranga
- Teaching staff Avenues Kindergarten, and their Senior Teacher at Inspired Kindergarten Association

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