

Shaping Professional Hats

Posthumanist Affirmative Critique of Early Childhood Curriculum and Professionalism in Aotearoa New Zealand

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POSTHUMANIST THINKING CAN FRAME early childhood curriculum and professionalism to productively attend to complex ways they constitute each other. Curriculum and professionalism are powerful influences within early childhood settings, and both are concepts that are understood in diverse ways. What curriculum and professionalism do and produce matters; they make a difference in the lives of teachers, children, and their families. Posthumanist perspectives on early childhood curriculum and professionalism encompass multiple human and non-human components that co-/re-/constitute early childhood settings, teachers, children, and learning that happens. During a research study set in Aotearoa New Zealand that explored emotions in early childhood teaching, focus group participants discussed how emotions were enabled and constrained. The expression “professional hat” was used and inspired further thought about what this imaginary can do in entangled encounters with posthumanist theories, data, early childhood teachers, and researcher. This article tells a complex and messy story from some data excerpts, suggesting how enactments and understandings of early childhood curriculum and professionalism might shape each other. This introduction provides a road map to the article by briefly outlining early childhood curriculum and professionalism and then describing the research study and key methodological concepts of affirmative critique and diffraction.

Curriculum

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the early childhood curriculum is *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early childhood curriculum* (Ministry of Education - Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2017). Originally adopted in 1996 and revised in 2017, *Te Whāriki* is envisaged as a woven mat; each early childhood setting weaves its own local curriculum from a set of principles and strands of learning. *Te Whāriki* is understood as a reconceptualist curriculum

(Haggerty, 2003); rather than prescribing content of learning for young children, it defines curriculum as including “all the experiences, activities, and events, both direct and indirect, that occur within the ECE setting” (Ministry of Education - Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2017, p. 7). This expansive view of curriculum influences perceptions of early childhood professionalism.

Within the definition of curriculum from *Te Whāriki*, everything that happens in the early childhood setting can be regarded as curricular enactment. *Te Whāriki* frames teaching and learning within four principles (empowerment/*whakamana*, holistic development/*kotahitanga*, family and community/*whānau tangata*, and relationships/*ngā hononga*) and five strands of learning (wellbeing/*mana atua*, belonging/*mana whenua*, contribution/*mana tangata*, communication/*mana reo*, and exploration/*mana aotūroa*).

Professionalism

Early childhood professionalism in Aotearoa is continuously shaped within official regulating and guiding documents and processes. These include initial teacher education, qualification, registration, and certification processes, and ongoing professional learning and guidance. How professionalism is enacted in early childhood settings is also shaped by localised contexts and relationships. Within posthumanist perspectives, professionalism can be understood as “fleeting, fluid, shifting, co-constituted and produced through processes rather than fixed within human subjects” (Osgood, 2019, p. 231). When curriculum and professionalism are conceptualised as shaping each other, continuously becoming different within entangled networks of relationships among human and non-human components of early childhood settings, then opportunities are opened for thinking differently, for combining critique with creativity.

The Research Study

This article draws on research that explored how emotions and ways of becoming are shaped in early childhood teaching. Research participants were qualified early childhood teachers in provincial Aotearoa New Zealand. I am positioned within the research as teacher educator working with student teachers in the same communities, with past relationships with some participants in this role. My understandings of emotion, curriculum, and professionalism shape and are being shaped by the research processes and findings. In this research, emotions are understood in posthumanist terms as emerging from entangled relationships in early childhood settings, experienced and expressed bodily and in language, but also sensed as intensity and significance not easily articulated or explained (Warren, 2019a).

This article uses two small data excerpts from a focus group discussion where seven early childhood teachers discussed their understandings of emotions in their professional lives. All participants were practising qualified early childhood teachers in provincial Aotearoa New Zealand: one male and six female teachers from a range of early childhood settings including kindergartens, education and care centres, infant and toddler settings, and a Pacific centre. They discussed emotions in early childhood teaching generally and then more specifically considered how teachers might experience emotions in situations such as “greeting and settling children”; “professional relationships with colleagues”; and “helping children who are sick or injured.” In

this discussion, participants used the expressions “professional hat” and “professional mask” to describe how their expressions of emotions were constrained and enabled.

Affirmative Critique and Diffraction

The focus group discussions showed that participants perceived emotions, professionalism, and curriculum as entangled. Rather than trying to untangle these into their separate threads, the entanglement is explored in this article through a methodological approach comprising analytic strategies of affirmative critique and diffraction, expressed in a poetic complex and messy story. Affirmative critique is understood as combining critique with creativity, attending to issues of power and normalisation present in early childhood settings, while also asking “so what, what else, and what next?” to seek opportunities for thinking, speaking, and acting differently. Affirmative critique works well alongside a diffractive approach that takes a positive view of difference, appreciating multiple understandings rather than trying to find once-and-for-all answers to complex questions such as, “What are emotions?”, “What is curriculum?”, and “What is professionalism?” Diffractive affirmative critique will be discussed further in the methodology section, after discussion of the early childhood curriculum of Aotearoa New Zealand and early childhood professionalism.

***Te Whāriki* and Conceptualisations of Early Childhood Curriculum**

Te Whāriki has been described as a reconceptualist curriculum as it departs from positivist views of curriculum as schedules of universally agreed upon knowledge to be transmitted to learners. Haggerty (2003) links the influence of sociocultural and poststructuralist theories to the understanding of curriculum in *Te Whāriki* as contextual, constructed, contested, and complex. Such a view is supported in research by the Education Review Office (2019), which focused on how prepared early childhood services are to weave a local curriculum that responds to children’s families and local communities. The theoretical framework of *Te Whāriki* encompasses developmental and sociocultural theories, critical approaches, and Kaupapa Māori (Indigenous Māori worldview) theories. There is openness to complexity and relationality in the incorporation of multiple theories in *Te Whāriki* that makes space for also exploring what posthumanist theories can do and produce in early childhood curriculum.

Education and teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand must reflect the bicultural partnership between Māori and non-Māori established at the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. Tamati and Tilly Reedy of Ngā Kohanga Reo (Māori language nests) collaborated with non-Māori academics Helen May and Margaret Carr to design and write *Te Whāriki* with widespread sector consultation. *Te Whāriki* incorporates Māori concepts and values alongside dominant Eurocentric understandings of how early childhood education is enacted. The updated *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education - Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2017) brings increased attention to Māori values, beliefs, and concepts (Rameka & Soutar, 2019) and highlights teacher/*kaiako* responsibility to enact bicultural curriculum. However, early childhood curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand is enacted within a colonised society, and the Education Review Office (2019) notes that 51% of 362 early childhood services surveyed were unprepared to implement the updated *Te Whāriki* curriculum.

Te Whāriki has been critiqued from a position of concern for Māori self-determination and sustainability. Māori worldview frames children as socially, spiritually, historically, and materially embedded and entangled. This worldview is based on “networks of complex and delicate relationships” (Ritchie & Skerrett, 2019, p. 73) among human and non-humans (animate and inanimate), and extending over generations, a view that resonates with posthumanist perspectives. Ritchie and Skerrett (2019) position *Te Whāriki* and early childhood education within ongoing social injustices experienced by Māori and assert that these are not addressed effectively in early childhood education.

From a posthumanist perspective, early childhood curriculum is described by Sellers (2010, 2013) in terms of multiple networked processes among humans and non-humans in early childhood settings, as “(a) milieu(s) of becoming” (Sellers, 2013, p. 26). She describes curricular performativity as “[children’s] *doing* of curriculum—how they process through/with curriculum or how they go about ‘curriculum-ing’ or how they perform curriculum or how they make curriculum work for their learning” (Sellers, 2010, p. 574). Such expansive understandings are sought in this article by diffractively creating a complex and messy story of a curricular enactment in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. This curriculum story may prompt early childhood scholars and practitioners to reconceptualise their own understandings of curriculum and professionalism.

Early Childhood Professionalism

Early childhood professionalism is a complex and contested concept that is shaped within diverse discourses. Traditional views associate professionalism with qualifications, authority, and status, seen as a desirable aspiration for early childhood teaching (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007). A wish for early childhood teachers to be regarded as professionals remains in tension with historical maternalist discourses that position working with young children as gendered and unskilled work (Ailwood, 2007). The emotional aspect of early childhood teaching seems to be simultaneously valued and devalued within views on professionalism. In tension with maternalism, relational professionalism is understood by early childhood teachers as central to their professional identity (Dalli, 2008; Warren, 2014). Osgood (2012) makes the case for critically reflective emotional professionals who recognise and assert their considerable relational skillset, referred by Andrew (2015) as emotional capital based on phronesis or practical wisdom. Other discourses of professionalism that further complicate how early childhood professionalism is understood include managerial professionalism, which is focused on efficient management and accountability, and democratic or critical professionalism, which is concerned with advocating for social justice. Bicultural professionalism is an important aspect of early childhood teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand, where professionalism includes incorporating Māori values, concepts, and language in teaching practice.

The focus group discussion that provided the data excerpts explored in this article showed participants working with these complex multifaceted perceptions of professionalism. Awareness of tensions arose in discussion when participants talked about how they experienced and managed expressions of emotions when working with children. For example, one participant talked about masking her feelings of guilt and distress when a child was hurt on climbing equipment she had set up, instead focusing on presenting a calm and caring demeanour. Another participant talked about being unable to express her anger and frustration about the situation teachers, children, and

their parents face when children become ill at the early childhood setting, and parents are unable to leave their work to pick them up.

This article explores further what the professional hat imaginary can do, where the professional hat is understood as a means to manage expressions of emotions in ways that present early childhood teachers as professional. Sellers (2013) explains that an imaginary works affectively in multiple and uncertain, “unstable and contingent” (p. 10) ways, rather than reflecting *something* as a metaphor might. Participants used the professional hat imaginary to gesture towards challenges for teachers deciding how they experience and express emotions when working with children. These decision processes are often unstable and contingent and linked with negotiated and fluid processes of professionalism (Osgood, 2019; Warren, 2019b). The professional hat imaginary presents possibilities explored in this article for early childhood teachers to work within multiple discourses of professionalism and also within diverse theories of early childhood teaching and learning. The idea of having a professional hat that is shaped and re-shaped within complex networks of relationships among human and non-human components of early childhood settings offers opportunities to think differently and expansively about emotions, professionalism, and early childhood curriculum.

Methodology: Diffractive Affirmative Critique

Building on posthumanist perspectives on early childhood curriculum, professionalism, and emotions, the methodology that underpins this article works with diffraction and affirmative critique to explore two short excerpts from one participant in the focus group discussion. One excerpt responds to the general question, “In what ways do early childhood teachers experience emotions in their professional settings?” and was chosen because it describes negotiation of emotions and professionalism in early childhood teaching that summed up much of the focus group discussion. In the second excerpt, the teacher tells a story that might not usually be understood as “curriculum,” and which encompasses emotions, professionalism, and curriculum. This excerpt was chosen because of the emotional intensities experienced within the relations among teachers, child, the sting of eyedrops, and tensions in concerns about health, safety, and well-being in early childhood settings. Both of these excerpts showed participants’ understanding of complexities of emotions and professionalism. Curriculum and posthumanist theories were not discussed in the focus group discussion but were applied in data analysis processes.

Cartography is conceptualised here as a posthumanist mapping of connections, intensities, affective flows, and power relations, “a theoretically-based and politically-informed account of the present” (Braidotti, 2019b, p. 32). I present a cartography in the form of a poem that maps connections, intensities, emotions, and power relations to say something about how professionalism is shaped within a particular curricular enactment, where curriculum is understood as “all the experiences, activities, and events, both direct and indirect, that occur within the ECE setting” (Ministry of Education - Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2017, p. 7).

Posthumanist methodologies seek to go beyond the stance of an observer commenting on issues and challenge “the distant critic’s ability to explain, unmask, and separate what is right from what is wrong” (Hohti, 2018, p. 13). From a posthumanist perspective, the researcher is entangled in the research and seeks creative responses from within situations (Braidotti, 2019b; Murriss & Bozalek, 2019b; Otterstad, 2019). As researcher, I am co-implicated in the “unlikely connections between a paragraph, typed on a page, a memory, burbling up unexpectedly, and the body-

movement-expression-action” (Flint, 2018, p. 12). Such co-implication is evident in the creation of a poem that affects me and is shaped by me as researcher, which I then share with the reader, leaving space for them to be affected without imposing conclusions. This methodology puts theories, data, participant, and researcher in encounter with each other, showing how they constitute and shape each other. Four theoretical approaches are used to diffractively weave a complex and messy cartographic story.

Diffraction is positioned as posthumanist response-able methodology (Murriss & Bozalek, 2019b) that carefully attends to what happens and what is produced when diverse theories encounter data where the researcher is entangled, produced, and producing, along with everything else in the assemblage. Barad (2007) contrasts reflective approaches, which try to illuminate and provide clarity and explanations, with diffraction, which explores how components such as bodies and ideas interfere with and affect each other. Rather than synthesising theoretical approaches, a diffractive approach notices differences and how they are produced. A diffractive approach is taken here where diverse theories and a researcher subjectivity that is relational, embodied, and embedded (e.g., Braidotti, 2019a) encounter bodies, words, actions, materials, thoughts, and emotions of data excerpts. Diffractive engagement in this article draws on diverse theoretical frameworks to proliferate understandings (Murriss & Bozalek, 2019a, 2019b).

Affirmative critique critically attends to power relations, constraints, normalisation, and injustices, while also connecting critique with creativity and seeking openings for innovation (Braidotti, 2013, 2019b; Osgood, 2019). A diffractive methodology “puts care and response-ability back into critique” (Murriss & Bozalek, 2019b, p. 882) by taking an affirmative rather than negative view of difference. Diffractive affirmative critique can notice and suggest opportunities for creative innovation, such as reconceptualising curriculum, professionalism, and emotions within posthumanist theories by “staying vigilant—ever watchful, ever attentive to the slips and crack and stutters of the moment, and also ... practising a reflexive non-linearity” (Flint, 2020). Diverse theoretical approaches are used diffractively here to grow a complex and messy story of an early childhood curriculum enactment. The poem is crafted from encounters between theories and data in ways that imply critique but do not prescribe solutions; rather, the reader is invited to explore how the juxtapositions of ideas affect them and shape their thinking about emotions in early childhood teaching and about curriculum and professionalism.

Mapping a Cartography: Taking a Diffractive Approach to Affirmative Critique of an Early Childhood Curricular Enactment

This article works with two data excerpts from a focus group discussion from research into emotions in early childhood teaching using creative critique and experimentation (Warren, 2019a). Both involve early childhood teacher/*kaiako* participant Lucy (pseudonym):

Data Excerpt One

Alison (researcher): In what ways do early childhood teachers experience emotions in their professional settings?

Lucy: We’ve mostly said we experience them in a professional way and then may at times sneak in a personal way that we need to do it. You know, when we get to [those] extreme

times when we need our colleagues to support us or we are experiencing a particularly difficult situation, that personal kind of way we experience emotions might creep in. But I think mostly we've distinguished that we keep that professional hat on and push them down and do what's best for the children.

Data Excerpt Two

Lucy: I was just thinking about a child I had who was sick, and he needed eye drops. And this was so traumatic for him putting the eye drops in, but we had to do it to make him better otherwise it was just going to get worse. ... I found that I could if I was by myself and could get him to lie down and put his head on my knee and then I could put them in. That was ok, but once he got escalated, and I had to ask my colleague to come in my emotions started kicking in. ... My colleague was trying to hug him and going, "You're ok, you're ok," and I'm like, "Oh my goodness, I'm not ok." ... We just wanted to make him feel better and we knew we had to give him his eye drops, ... and he doesn't want them. ... We could get him to the point of lying down, but then he'd see you get the bottle, and he was like "Oh!" and he's off again. ... That's always stuck with me, 'cause I keep reflecting going how could I have done that better, that's what I just fall back to, I just had to get them into his eye. ... There's just no better way to do it and just get on and deal with it.

Four theoretical approaches were chosen because of what I, as researcher, thought they could do in encounter with data. They are used to diffractively weave a complex and messy cartographic story that the reader can work with in specific ways to negotiate meaning. The four approaches are: rhizoanalysis (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987; Lenz Taguchi, 2016; Sellers, 2010, 2013, 2015), radical pedagogy and metamodeling (Manning, 2020), expansive storying and tentacular thinking (Haraway, 2016), and storying using concepts of te ao Māori drawn on in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education - Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2017; Reedy, 2003).

Rhizoanalysis

Rhizoanalysis is a cartographic approach associated with Deleuze and Guattari's (1980/1987) concept of assemblage, which describes multidirectional networks of relationalities where bodies (corporeal and incorporeal) are continuously becoming within flows of affect. Affect is conceptualised as the capacity to affect and be affected, characterised by expressions and experiences of intensities (Deleuze, 1988). Affect does not freely flow in assemblages, as forces enable and constrain affective flows at macro- and micro-political levels. Rhizoanalysis enacts a doubled process of concurrent tracing-and-mapping (Lenz Taguchi, 2016). Tracings of forces that guide and regulate social practices macro- and micro-politically are plugged into mappings of affective flows in assemblages. Rhizoanalysis enables a process of affirmative critique by combining critique through tracing with exploration of creative opportunities through mapping to explore "new connections, or to something omitted, left out or silenced, which might evoke something completely new" (Lenz Taguchi, 2016, p. 45).

Radical Pedagogy and Metamodeling

Erin Manning (2020) proposes radical pedagogy with children that draws on concepts of transversality, metamodeling, and becoming. She problematizes maps that are constrained within limits of particular disciplines: “A discipline is a short-hand for what doesn’t need to be said about how knowledge crafts itself” (p. 5). For example, assessment of children’s learning is bounded within familiar concepts and theories of early childhood education and can become taken-for-granted and unquestioned. In contexts where developmental theory is dominant, assessment records what children can or cannot do in relation to developmental expectations of ages and stages, and plans teaching to close perceived gaps or to progress to what comes next. In Aotearoa New Zealand, where sociocultural theory dominates early childhood education, learning stories frame children and their learning in particular and familiar ways within *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education - Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2017) strands of well-being, belonging, contribution, communication, and exploration, and associated learning dispositions. Creating a complex and messy story using multiple theories suggests that there may be other possibilities.

A transversal approach to pedagogy entails working across disciplines and being open to unexpected connections, following children’s “wander lines” or unexpected directions of learning and noticing what “magnetize[s]” or influences these directions (Deligny, 1976, as cited in Manning, 2020, p. 2). Manning draws on Guattari to use the concept of metamodeling, understood as moving outside modeling that fits what is seen to what is already known and familiar. Metamodeling poses the question—what else—“what moves across experience that evades the frame” (Manning, 2020, p. 3). Taking such a transversal approach goes beyond familiar patterns, helping pedagogues to conceptualise children as “researcher[s] of life,” “maker[s] of worlds” (p. 6). Children create knowledge, where knowing is understood as “a verb that worlds and as such must never be reduced to a set of retrievable operations” (p. 7). Pedagogues can engage with “childing-worlding” through Deleuze’s concept of becoming-child (Manning, 2020, p. 5). Becoming-child does not involve adults returning to their childhood or pretending to be children, but rather approaching childness, for example, by “exciting [pedagogues’] sense of how else learning can happen” (p. 11).

Expansive Bag Lady Storying and Tentacular Thinking

A cartographic approach drawing on Donna Haraway’s (2004, 2016) concepts of bag lady storytelling and tentacular thinking will be woven into a messy, frayed, and tangled story of Lucy, a child, eye medication, emotions, and other human and non-human components of the early childhood setting. Haraway (2016) uses Ursula Le Guin’s carrier bag theory of fiction to inspire her bag lady storytelling approach. Rather than telling linear and coherent stories of human heroic protagonists, Haraway’s storying wanders haphazardly among unexpectedly interconnected aspects: “Engaging halting conversations, the encounter transmutes all the partners and all the details. The stories do not have beginnings and end; they have continuations, interruptions, and reformulations” (Haraway, 2004, pp. 127–128). Hohti (2018) suggests that using bag lady storying that attends to material aspects of education with young children can maintain important relational complexities: “What if teachers told strange, fragmented, and unexpected stories as a sign of their expertise—not as a sign of failing in being professional?” (p. 14).

Tentacular thinking is a concept that can be used alongside bag lady storytelling. According to Haraway (2016), tentacularity is characterised by reaching out, exploring, “cultivating response-ability” (p. 34): “The tentacular ones make attachments and detachments; they make cuts and knots; they make a difference; they weave paths and consequences but not determinisms; they are both open and knotted in some ways but not others” (p. 31). Osgood (2021) describes tentacular researchers as deeply thoughtful, curious, entangled wayfarers. In “curious research” in an early childhood setting in Australia, Duhn and Galvez (2020) explore tentacular becoming with data. They pay careful attention and becoming attuned to entanglements of becoming-with in “high intensity encounters between children, critters, soil, and existing pedagogical practices” (p. 734). They notice tentacularity of matter-energies as diverse as children’s fingers, a bird’s egg, a feast set out on a tree stump, and the Moon, and consider pedagogical opportunities offered by this thinking-with.

Storying Using Concepts from a Māori Worldview

Storying that uses concepts from a Māori worldview draws on the bicultural approach of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education - Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2017), *Te Whatu Pōkeka* (Ministry of Education, 2009), which guides assessment framed by Māori concepts, and the writing of Tilly Reedy (2003), with particular attention to the concept of *mana* (aligned with the concept of power). Māori worldview has grown over aeons as a multi-layered and multidimensional body of knowledge, subjectivities, relationalities, and practices. As a non-Māori educator and researcher, my access to this worldview is limited and partial. A Māori worldview is underpinned by ontologies of networked relationalities: relationships among human collectives present and past; relationships of humans interwoven with the natural world, including living, non-living, and material components; and relationships with the spiritual world (Ministry of Education, 2009). The 2017 version of *Te Whāriki* uses *whakataukī* (proverbs) to articulate some of these relationalities. For example: “*Tū mai e moko. Te whakaata o ō mātua. Te moko o ō tīpuna. Stand strong, o moko [grandchild]. The reflection of your parents. The blueprint of your ancestors*” (Ministry of Education - Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2017, p. 17). Connections with ancestors and with local features such as mountains, rivers, oceans, land, and *marae* are expressed through the principle of *whakapapa*, which can be understood as “lineage, genealogy, ancestry” (Ministry of Education - Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2017, p. 67).

Mana is a multifaceted concept of power deriving from the spiritual world, from *iwi*/tribe, *hapu*/kinship group, and *whānau*/family connections, and from *tūrangawaewae*/ connections with the land (Ministry of Education, 2009). *Mana* forms a central value of *Te Whāriki*: “*Mana* is the power of being and must be upheld and advanced” (Ministry of Education - Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2017, p. 18). As Tilly Reedy (2003), one of the authors of *Te Whāriki*, states:

[Children] are nurtured in the knowledge that they are loved and respected; that their physical mental, spiritual, and emotional strength will build *mana*, influence, and control; that having *mana* is the enabling and empowering tool to controlling their own destiny. (p. 74)

A Complex and Messy Story

The complex and messy story poem traverses disciplinary thinking of early childhood education, medical care of children, and Māori concepts and values. Manning (2020) recommends that we “work with what is there, listen to what is already moving. Don’t cut too quickly what might otherwise feed the process. Be sensitive to what else is moving through it” (p. 9). The reader is invited to engage with the poem in this way, to make connections with other experiences and emotions, to think in new ways prompted by these theoretical ideas, to wonder “so what, what else, and what next?” Readers might consider multiple threads of early childhood curriculum, professionalism, and emotions that weave through the poem. Matters of social justice and power relations might also come to notice. Words from the data excerpts (**the first excerpt shown in bold, the second in bold italics**) are woven with words from the text of this article that express the four theoretical approaches previously outlined. Quotes used in the story are referenced elsewhere in the text. The Māori concepts of *tapu* (sacred, set apart, prohibited) and *noa* (ordinary, unrestricted) and their relevance to the data arose in discussion with my colleague Sandra Tuhakaraina.

RE-SHAPING TENTACULAR PROFESSIONAL HATS

Shape-shifting, ragged, frayed, tangled shimmering threads trailing
Unstable and contingent imaginary

Mostly we keep that professional hat on, push emotions down, and do what’s best for the children

Hats for curious exploring
Reaching out, cultivating creative response-ability
Deeply thoughtful, curious, entangled wayfarers

We experience emotions in a professional way and then may at times sneak in a personal way that we need to do it

Negotiated and fluid processes of professionalism

That’s always stuck with me, ‘cause I keep reflecting going how could I have done that better.

Eye drops stinging
The woven mat of *Te Whāriki*
All the experiences, activities, and events
The child as perpetually becoming and not being defined once and for all
Researcher of life, maker of worlds

This was so traumatic for him putting the eye drops in, but we had to do it to make him better otherwise it was just going to get worse

Transversal spaces
Medicine, pharmacy, prescription, education, care, curriculum, teaching, health and safety
Home, *whānau*, upbringing
Responsibility

Tū mai e moko. Te whakaata o ō mātua. Te moko o ō tīpuna

Stand strong, oh grandchild. The reflection of your parents. The blueprint of your ancestors.

Care and response-ability
Materialities of tentacular hands touching, grasping, offering, refusing, caring, reassuring, restraining, resisting
I could get him to lie down and put his head on my knee and then I could put them in
Noa means ordinary, unrestricted. Emotions are calm
But then he'd see you get the bottle, and he was like "Oh!", and he's off again
Those extreme times when we need our colleagues to support us, or we are experiencing a particularly difficult situation
Trying to hug him and going, "You're ok, you're ok"
and I'm like, "Oh my goodness, I'm not ok"
Tapu means sacred, set apart, prohibited
My emotions started kicking in

Mana is power
Children are nurtured in the knowledge
that they are loved and respected
that their physical mental, spiritual, and emotional strength will build *mana*, influence, and control
that having *mana* is the enabling and empowering tool to controlling their own destiny
We just wanted to make him feel better
Knowledge is a verb that worlds
Work with what is there, listen to what is already moving
What if teachers told strange, fragmented, and unexpected stories as a sign of their expertise – not as a sign of failing in being professional?
The stories do not have beginnings and ends; they have continuations, interruptions, and reformulations
In what ways do early childhood teachers experience emotions in their professional settings?
Socially, spiritually, historically, and materially embedded and entangled.

Discussion

This cartographic story maps connections, intensities, affective flows, and power relations to engage with posthumanist perceptions of early childhood curriculum, professionalism, and emotions. Researcher subjectivity is entangled without being expressed as an “I,” and the poetic non-linear structure seeks to make thinking visible by moving “with careful attention to the worldings it activates” (Manning, 2020, p. 11). Entanglements of children, teachers, families, curriculum, and theoretical ideas produce understandings of early childhood curriculum and professionalism as fluid, negotiated processes where components continually constitute each other.

In *Te Whāriki*, early childhood curriculum is reconceptualised as encompassing everything that happens in early childhood settings. Curriculum enacted within networks of relationalities can be diffractively understood within concepts of assemblage, transversality, tentacularity, and webs

of reciprocity of a Māori worldview. Diffraction is not synthesis; convergences and divergences in the story produce uncertainty and wondering.

How the story addresses early childhood professionalism demonstrates tensions between diverse conceptualisations. Professionalism is often expressed as control of situations, including aspects like responsibility for children’s physical and emotional wellbeing (“we had to do it to make him better”) and control of what emotions are shown (“Mostly we keep that professional hat on, push emotions down”). A transversal view of professionalism in this story reminds us of Lucy’s negotiations of “the right thing to do” across medical, care-based, and learning-focused aspects of early childhood teaching (“I keep reflecting going how could I have done that better”). Human bodies (teacher cradling child, child running away) and non-human components (eyedrops that sting, medication policy) in the early childhood assemblage affect each other. The Māori concept of *mana* (power) brings professionalism as relational and reciprocal into view, where Lucy as teacher is responsible for noticing where ordinary, calm emotions escalate into upset, high emotions that threaten the child’s *mana* (“Trying to hug him and going, ‘You’re ok, you’re ok’ and I’m like, ‘Oh my goodness, I’m not ok’”). Engaging with what happens in teaching and learning situations using a diffractive approach and diverse theories opens up creative possibilities to negotiate multiple understandings of early childhood curriculum and professionalism and provides alternatives to familiar categorisations and interpretations.

A curricular enactment is presented that might normally escape notice, activating an understanding of curriculum as including all experiences, activities, and events in the early childhood setting. A creative opportunity is offered here through diffractive and posthumanist perspectives to think differently about how curriculum is understood and what learning is noticed and valued. An account of how teacher, child, infection, medication, pain, hugs, and upset and calm emotions are continuously becoming in relation to each other offers opportunities to move away from a narrow focus on what constitutes learning that children may be experiencing and consider other possibilities.

Conclusion

Early childhood teachers continually shape and re-shape their professional hats, using theoretical tools available to them. Working diffractively with diverse theories can prompt early childhood teachers to expand their understandings of curriculum and professionalism and cultivate professional caring response-ability. Early childhood scholars and practitioners across many countries might productively use a range of theoretical tools to explore other ways of thinking about curriculum and professionalism, such as following Manning’s (2020) plea to “work with what is there, listen to what is already moving. Don’t cut too quickly what might otherwise feed the process. Be sensitive to what else is moving through it” (p. 9). The complex and messy story offered here is offered as an example of what might be produced when diverse theories entangle with data, with teachers, and with researchers.

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