

Kia Ora Koutou

Welcome to the Lockdown issue of ecARTnz.

With COVID19 we often face challenges when we look for ways to stay connected with young children. The theme of this issue examines early childhood art in the isolation era by looking at connections and creativity, and provides three unique insights into such experiences. It also provides ideas that may be useful for educators and parents that may help them connect with children when in strict lockdown conditions at home or when socially distanced.

Kathy Danko-McGee, who lives in Indiana in the USA, shares her ideas for developing boat making that can keep young children motivated to learn new things.

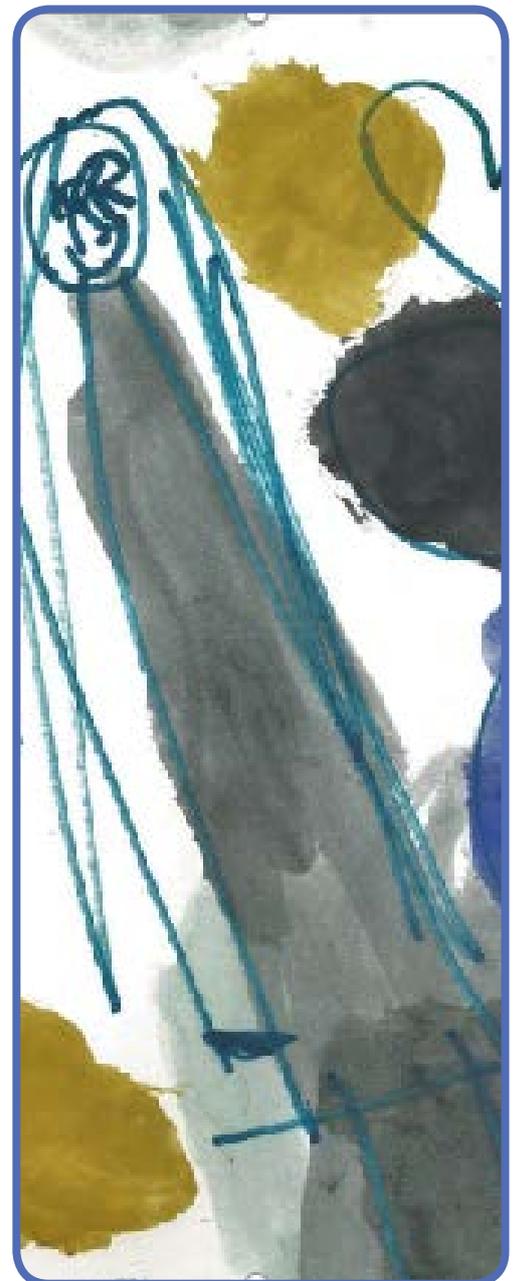
Michelle Johnston, who lives in Aotearoa New Zealand in Auckland, shares the journey that her early childhood centre went on in 2020 as they connected with children and families through lockdown. Her frank account of their experiences may resonate with many early childhood educators and provide some inspiration.

Margaret Brooks, an artist and educator from Armidale in New South Wales in Australia, shares some insights into the many virtual playdates that she has had with her grandchildren who live in other places and countries. This article showcases how technology, coupled with the arts and human interactions, can sustain ongoing projects and interpersonal relationships.

I hope these articles inspire and encourage you. Enjoy!

Rosemary Richards

Guest Editor





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emagazine of professional practice
for early childhood educators
in Aotearoa New Zealand

Stories

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by Kathy Danko McGee

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by Margaret Brooks

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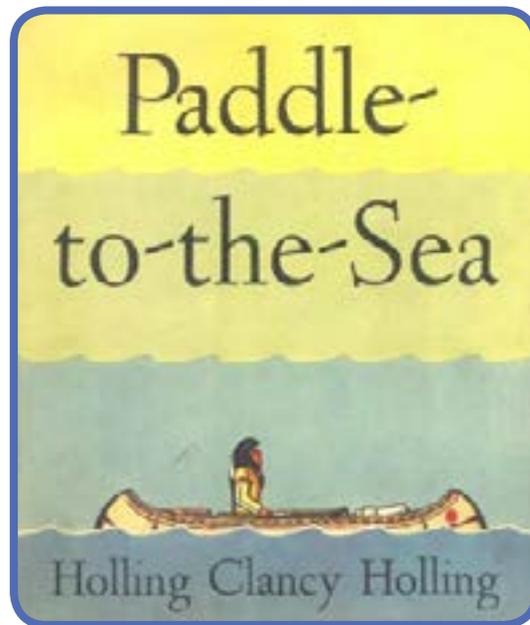


Young children are intrigued by water. When my daughter Caribbea was around 3 years of age she would stand up on a chair placed in front of the kitchen sink. We would plug up the drain and let the water run. Sometimes we would add some bubbles or food coloring. Placed on the kitchen counter were an assortment of items from which she could choose to play with – plastic cups and bowls, eggbeaters, corks from wine bottles, the list goes on. She would spend what seemed like hours experimenting with the different materials and how they reacted to water. Some would float, others would sink. All the while, I was there to scaffold the learning process by asking lots of questions. In the end, she used all different kinds of materials to make little floating vessels. During this creative play in a home-based ‘makerspace’, Caribbea was drawing on a range of modalities that incorporated movement, gestures and facial expressions. Out of this experience grew an idea that can be replicated in other people’s homes, particularly during lockdown periods, as well as being implemented in the early childhood classroom.

Boat making is suitable for children of all age levels. This sort of makerspace experience lends itself to cross-curricular explorations that includes science, language arts and maths. Related skill development includes: problem solving, critical thinking, fine motor, and visual discrimination. A makerspace involves “... participants of different ages and levels of experience who work with varied media, but a commonality is that these spaces all involve making – developing an idea and constructing it into some physical or digital form” (Sheridan, 2014, p. 507). Therefore, boatmaking can be a great makerspace activity at home where everyone can be involved.

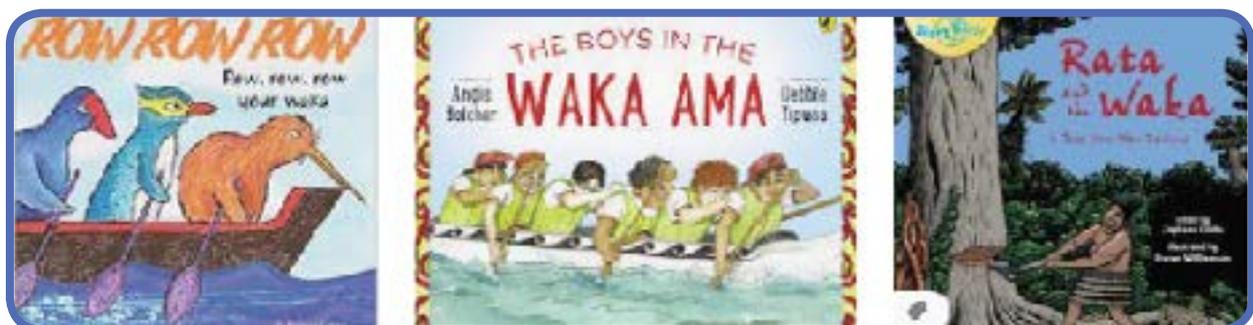
You can prepare for this makerspace experience by checking for a variety of materials in your respective setting, such as recycled cardboard, wood scraps, paper scraps, cork, pipe cleaners, wire, clay, plastic pieces, found objects, etc. The more diverse materials that you offer, the better the experience for the child and the more problem solving can be provoked. You will also need to make available scissors, glue and any other materials that can be used for connecting items together.

You can also get a collection together of a variety of boat renderings by traditional artists such as Homer, Monet, Derain, and Van Gogh. But it would be best to look for work by local artists and how they have created paintings and drawings of boats that reflect the culture of your location. For example, looking at depictions of boats and different water craft that indigenous people have created and/or what contemporary artists from your country have created. The internet is a good resource for finding images to look at with children but children's picture books can also be a useful resources.



When you examine these visual images with the children, encourage them to look at the similarities and differences and discuss these with them. Pose questions such as: How are these boats the same? How are they different? How do you think boats float? What kinds of things would you need to make a boat? What makes the boat move? How do sails help boats to move better? There are many more questions to ask, so this is just a start. Let the children take you where they want to go with their interest about boats. I'm sure that some of the children will have stories to share about their experiences with boats and developing working theories, so take the time to listen as this can help with a deeper dive into this topic.

Incorporating books about boats can further enrich the learning experience. There are many available. *Jennifer's Rabbit* by Tom Paxton is a good one. Don't let the title mislead you. The story is about a little girl who takes a boat ride in the middle of the night because she can't sleep. It will keep your little ones entertained. *Paddle to the Sea* by Holling C. Holling and *Time of Wonder* by Robert McCloskey are good options as well. Try to include stories about boats from the cultures represented in the group of children that you are working with. This may take time to research, but the children may already have favorites that they can suggest.



After you have looked at images of boats and read stories, then the children should be well primed to create their own boat. Encourage them to explore the variety of materials that you have provided, but you should also have them gather additional items as well. Take a walk outside and look for materials together that might work, such as sticks, leaves, feathers, etc. You may even have a container of water available for them to test the floating qualities of their chosen materials. At this point, you could have great discussions about why some items float and others sink. Conversations and experimentation about this could take several days, depending on the interest of the children. Let the children guide this discussion as it may take you to places that you never thought about.

Once the children have gathered their materials, they can start constructing their boat. They can work individually or in teams. The makerspace experience is typically participatory, democratic, and with a common-oriented vision (Vasili et al., 2017). Let them choose how they would like to work. Social interaction and language used by the children can increase their understanding when supported by the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). In fact, you as the educator/facilitator can join in where you and the children become co-creators (Veale, 2000). Through tinkering and playing, children develop maker knowledge and they bring to the site of learning their previous experiences of making things at home or their EC centre (Marsh, et al., 2019). As children are working, they can also listen to music inspired by the sea, such as *Echoes of Nature: Ocean Waves* by Kim Wilson. There are a lot of options available to choose from. Once again, choose music from the local culture if possible.

After the boats are completed, have children test them to see if they will float by putting them into a container of water - a sink, a bucket or the bath. You can simulate storm conditions by blowing a fan over the water to make ripples. If you have a stream nearby you could take the children there but you may have to have the boats tethered so that they don't escape. This is a great opportunity for children to engage in dramatic play. So encourage the children to tell stories about their boat. You can see that this makerspace art experience is chock full of learning opportunities. I'm sure your head is spinning with other possibilities to try at home or in your classroom. Happy sailing!



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Lockdown (2020) at St Andrews Epsom Early Childhood Centre: Unexpected connections and creations

Michelle Johnston and Rosemary Richards



On 28th February 2020 New Zealand confirmed its first case of COVID-19 and on the 25th March the government announced a nationwide level 4 Lockdown (rāhui) that closed all educational facilities and, in order to combat the spread of the virus, everyone was instructed to stay at home.

It was a very weird feeling packing up our early childhood centre for the lockdown. We didn't have the anticipation of Christmas or summer holidays and we didn't know what was going to happen or when we would be seeing each other again. However, it turned out to be a very exciting period of unexpected connections for our Kindy community!

In the first week, at one of our many virtual face-to-face meetings on our new staff messenger group, we decided to throw out a challenge to our four-year olds and their families. This involved creating an obstacle course that had to include certain elements such as: walking along a line, climbing over, climbing under, throwing a ball into something etc. Setting a challenge, rather than a series of simple tasks, was consistent with our centre's play-based pedagogy that responds to children's interests and aims to extend them, and where we actively encourage children to creatively express ideas and feelings through the arts. The challenge, which provided opportunities for children to collaborate with family members, was emailed to the parents with the request that they film their experiences and post these into our newly formed COVID Kindy WhatsApp group.



(from <https://www.beafunmum.com/2017/01/backyard-obstacle-course-ideas/>)

Wow! What a response! Not only did the four-year olds do it but also the teachers and children of all ages. Parents became collaborators with their children as the obstacle courses were created, filmed and edited, getting fancier as time went by culminating when one of our techy Dads put all the videos together in a fun You Tube video.

While the children undoubtedly had playful learning experiences with their whānau, the lockdown provided a new home-based learning experience that was very much linked to our EC learning community at the same time. The challenge of the obstacle course set by the teachers turned out to be the only one needed to get families engaged. All our families rose to the occasion and posted challenges or activities that they picked up elsewhere into the WhatsApp group, and everyone responded to whatever caught their fancy and shared what they were doing. Connections with real people, with parallel tasks and experiences, can be very motivating and while we were expecting the posts to cease over the weekends they continued throughout the weekends and into the evenings as well.

But it wasn't only the children and their families that were given a challenge! Lorraine, our supervisor, set the staff an art challenge. She got us to fold an A4 piece of paper into 24 squares (which provided a challenge for some of us!) and each day she gave us an object to find and draw in one of the squares. At times we found this challenge too much as we struggled with COVID related family issues but we all agreed we enjoyed having something that we were working on together as a team, even though we were apart. It was cathartic to do something art related just for ourselves. Like our families were encouraged to do, we also displayed our drawings for all to enjoy (see below).



We believe that the arts are integral to children's play and learning and how children can communicate, make meaning and develop a sense of belonging. This was evident as children and their families responded to the challenges and ideas that the parents posted in our WhatsApp group. Drawings of various subjects appeared as well as a variety of constructions using a range of media and resources. For example, cardboard box dioramas (see below) and Duplo and Lego constructions.



The teachers responded to these posts with warm words of encouragement which resulted in more participation. We had a concerted effort to let children and their parents know we were available to them and the teachers each had a list of families, who they rang, emailed and texted and, if necessary, dropped physical resources in to their letter boxes. Just as we might have in the usual way of things, we tried to tune into what each child and family needed and respond accordingly. Creativity over this period took many forms. We had a footpath chalk challenge, lots of cooking, an ANZAC challenge, and a rainbow scavenger hunt, to name a few. While we had started the challenge we also stepped back as the children and parents took leadership roles in suggesting challenges and sharing ideas and images. Looking back, we can see that, in response to the momentum that the challenges created, we adopted a 'start-it-up, step-back, and stay-connected' approach.

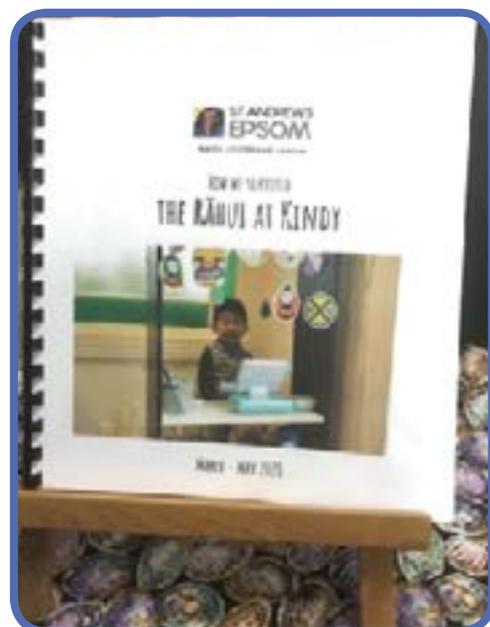
Home-based art also provided a range of possibilities, some of which that were less likely to happen in an early childhood centre, but may happen again in children's everyday lives. Children were inventive in their choice of 'canvases', which included walls, paths and bodies and families were into these projects together.



To celebrate this extra-ordinary time of community, collaboration and co-construction Michelle made a *How we Survived the Rāhui at Kindy* book from some of the many photos that were posted and had it ready for the children on their return to the centre, along with a display of photos from the WhatsApp group. Our return to Kindy was accompanied by a strong feeling of community that had been fostered and nurtured by the animated actions of children and families in the inanimate digital tool of WhatsApp! We all felt the very special connection that had been created during this time, not only with the children but also their parents.

As we move forward in the era of COVID and, perhaps, experience more lockdown situations, early childhood services may find that their collaborative relationships with parents and children will be central to the sustainability of their decisions made around early childhood education, particularly in virtual spaces.

While this is novel to many of us, for young children coming through our care this may be their new 'normal' so staying connected, fostering creativity (the children's as well as our own), and providing new and interesting challenges will be vital for their learning and development.



A playdate with Gramma

Margaret Brooks

When my children were very young we migrated to Canada and left all their grandparents and relatives behind. My three boys longed for grandparents - so much so that one of them actually adopted the grandparents of a friend as his own. Back then (in the 70's and 80's) there were no iPads or internet and international calls were expensive. Letters did not mean much to my young children even though my dad sent drawings and stories too. The Grandparents visited only once and, consequently, never really knew my children.

However, I treasured the close relationship I was lucky enough to have with my grandmother. As a child I stayed with her most summers and we would do art and nature study together. So, when my grandchildren were born I was determined to have a close relationship with them. It takes some effort, imagination and time. But it is so worth it!

The benefits that come from a bond between grandchildren and grandparents have been well documented for face-to-face relationships but not much has been written about long distance relationships. I live in a rural town in New South Wales, Australia but my grandchildren live in many different places - Japan, New Zealand and in a large Australian city. Consequently, long distance relationships are something I have to work with. I know I am not alone and many other families are scattered all over the globe. I want to share a few of the things I do with my grandchildren, and talk about some of the ways we can build strong connections even when working at a distance.

Gabrielle

When my first grand daughter Gabrielle was born I was living in Australia and she was living in Canada. The usual stream of emails and photos and video clips from her parents kept me up to date with all her news. Then one day my son Face-Timed me so I could watch her in real time. He was playing with her while her mum was cooking supper. He was fascinated by how she tried to balance the different blocks she was playing with. We watched her together on Face-Time and talked about some of the different ways he could extend her play.



This came to be a regular event and Gabrielle realised she could join in the conversation. She began making things for Gramma with her blocks and would save them to show me. I began to make things to show her and an on-going dialogue was created between us that transcended the distance between us.

Gabrielle was quick to understand how an iPad worked and how to set it up and hold it so we could both see. She would take me to see the things she was doing around the house and garden (see image below).

We both love art and making things so we would often paint and draw together and make models for our wooden figures to play in (see image below). We each have our own family set of small wooden dolls that we use in the play scenes. They all have names and personalities and travel with me when I visit New Zealand. We also make story books about the dolls adventures and much of life is reflected through the dolls.



At 8 years-old, Gabrielle understood that I can get lonely in the lockdowns that the COVID19 virus has created, so she initiated special events for us. For example, I got an email with an invite to a special tea party with all her friends, Kanga, Wally wombat and the two mice, Lily and Oliver.

She had made doughnuts and cookies and borrowed her mom's special cups and saucers. She poured tea for all of us and ate my doughnut for me. Another time I had to help her tidy her room and then meet her friend who came to play. She was beginning to move on from block play to discussing different aspects of her life and looking for advice as to how best to navigate growing up. She sometimes discussed things with me that she did not want to discuss with her parents or friends!

Maya

iPad sessions with Gramma have become something I do with all my grandchildren. Each child has their own way of doing it. For instance, Maya, who lives in Japan, likes to draw and make things from cardboard boxes. So here we are making a book together (see image below). I help her make a book plan by doing a story board. Then we each take two pages to illustrate. Here we are writing about three small boys who climb a mountain. The boys are her father and his brothers and she elaborates what she knows about them in her drawing. As she drew she chatted away about her own mountain climbing adventures.



Every so often we stopped and showed our drawings to each other to make sure they matched. We tried out different art media. Here she used her watercolour pencils I had taught her to use last time I visited. I scanned my drawn pages and sent them to her dad. Together they make up the book and Maya Face-Timed me to read it to me. Making books also includes re-visiting things we have done together and anticipates things we might do next time.

Maya read her book so proudly and held it in just the right place so I could follow along with story. This event spawned a whole series of books and an investigation of picture books and different kinds of illustrations. The time I spend with Maya is appreciated by her parents who often take the opportunity to cook supper or catch up with some paperwork while we play. Sometimes we hook her cousin Gabrielle into the play date and we all work together, so now they know each other's houses and toys and can play well together. We have also discovered we can share the whiteboard on Zoom and do collaborative drawings together (see <https://blogs.otago.ac.nz/zoom/how-to-collaborate-on-a-whiteboard/>).

Oliver

When my youngest grandchild Oliver was two years old I introduced him to play dates with the iPad. Although he lives in Sydney the lockdown means I do not see him much either. He loves the play sessions we have and will happily join in. In the photo below Oliver is looking at a scene that I set up with toy animals. The kangaroo has jumped on a tree and is stuck and Oliver had to tell it to jump. He shouted “Jump kangaroo jump!” But the kangaroo was too scared. “Come on kangaroo – you can do it” responded Oliver.



Reflection

I like to build the play scenes with the children. Following their interests keeps them engaged. Having props to play with makes it easier to talk to each other and problem solve. For example, one of their play figures might play the naughty pupil at school and we might resolve their issues together which I think may help the children in real life situations.

They like the bigger iPads best because this allows them to see what is happening more easily. They also have solid cases that helps the iPad stand up and keeps it stable. I find that an iPhone is too small. Gabrielle and Maya have now learnt to call me themselves. They have got an app that shows them where I am and they can only play when I am at home! Each child has favourite songs, music and books we share together. We dance (like no one is watching) and we do silly things and laugh together. We try to make surprises for each other, like leaping into the picture frame dressed as a unicorn. We can also just sit by the fire and talk about the things their parents did when they were young. “Tell me about the time daddy fell through the ice” or “tell me about when daddy collected caterpillars in his pockets” they say.

They love to hear stories about the olden days and say things like “Tell me about when you were little Gramma”. So I try to remember some of the funny events from my life as a child. For me, these sessions are often the highlight of my day. They pick me up and give me a reason to live like no other.

I share bits of my life. Once I made a photo book called *What does Gramma do all day?* and it took them through a day in my life from breakfast to bedtime. I sent a copy to them and read it with them, comparing what we both do. This helps them see that their Gramma has a full and interesting life and that when you grow old you don't have to slow down. In turn, I get to see what they do all day and I can see they too have full and happy lives.

My grandchildren keep me active and engaged with life. To be able to see the world as they do is life affirming. I am thankful for the technology that allows grandmas like me to carry the best bits of our relationships with our grandchildren around on our phones - to be whipped out and shared with anyone who will listen!

Most of all I am grateful for the technology that bridges the distances and allows me to have these strong connections with my grandchildren.



The children's favorite Australian picture books

Gabrielle's favourite picture book (we cry each time we read it) is *Koala Lou* by Mem Fox. This is the tale of a koala who trains for Olympic stardom to try to get attention from her parents.

Maya's favourite (she loves the art work) is *Where the Forest Meets The Sea* by Jeanie Baker. This book is a masterpiece of mixed media in illustration. It is a story which highlights the incredible natural world around us, both present-day and historical, whilst also showing kids the importance of caring for the environment we have.

Oliver's favourite (his favourite place to play is on the beach. He spends a long time looking at all the detail) is *Magic Beach* by Alison Lester. Anything can happen at Magic Beach if it even existed in the first place. Fun and busy images make for a captivating book for pre-readers.

Recommended books and articles

These picture books, resources and articles may give you further ideas for your own teaching and learning at this time.

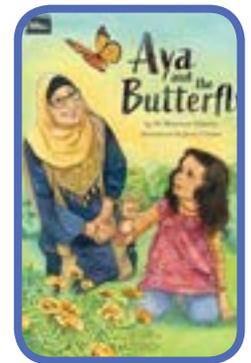
Bear Goes into Lockdown

Carol Mutch, a professor at the University of Auckland, has put her educational and story-telling skills to work to tell the story of a toy bear's time in lockdown. Bear's adventures have gone global and they are available as a .pdf that can be read on an electronic device at this link: <https://theeducationhub.org.nz/bear-goes-into-lockdown/>.



Aya and the Butterflies

This is a new picture book to help children come to terms with grief, cope with change, and build resilience. The book is written by Dr Maysoon Salama who lost her beloved son, Atta, in the mosque attacks in Christchurch New Zealand. Dr Salama said she wrote this story for her granddaughter (Aya) and for other children dealing with loss and trauma. The download is available at: <https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/content/download/169222/1249150/file/Aya%20and%20the%20Butterfly.pdf>



Jennifer's Rabbit

Tom Paxton's lyrics from a lullaby are used as the basis for the text of this story which is illustrated by Elizabeth Miles. Published by Harper Collins, this is an enchanting dreamland of a book.

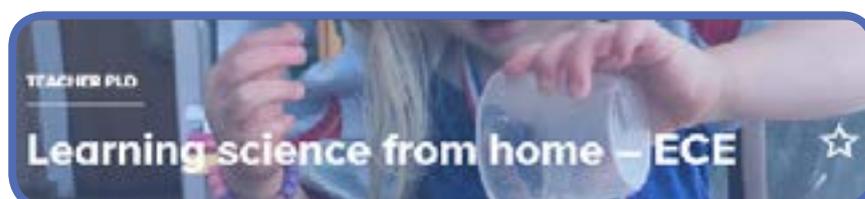


Useful tips for ECE practitioners to stay connected during lockdown

Mitchell, L., Hodgen, E., Meagher-Lundberg, P., & Wells, C. (2020). *Impact of COVID-19 on the early childhood education sector in Aotearoa New Zealand: Challenges and opportunities. Initial findings from a survey of managers.* https://www.waikato.ac.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/547568/Impact-of-Covid-19-on-ECE-Sector-report_FINAL.pdf

Learning Science from Home- ECE

<https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/2902-learning-science-from-home-ideas-to-deepen-learning>





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**emagazine of professional practice
for early childhood educators
in Aotearoa New Zealand**

Contact details

Editorial Board information

ecARTnz, an emagazine of professional practice for early childhood educators, is a publication that has been developed to generate new interest in visual art education in Aotearoa New Zealand. The intention of the editorial board is that ecARTnz will showcase examples of teaching and learning, literature, and conferences that may be of interest to those involved in early childhood education.

Members of the editorial board are: Lisa Terreni (VUW), Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips and Janette Kelly (UoW), Rosemary Richards (Toi Ohomai) and Lesley Pohio.

The board is responsible for promoting the magazine, writing, reviewing and editing contributions, and ensuring that the emagazine is of a consistently high standard. The views in this journal do not necessarily reflect those of the editorial board members.

Contributions are invited for the next issue of ecARTnz. Submissions of 1000-2000 words accompanied by up to 8 photographs sent as .jpgs are welcomed.

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