

Collectively Kids is a small centre in Pt Chev. I (Marina) own and teach at the centre. We are licensed for 30 children, up to 10 under twos and we are a team of 7 qualified teachers.

## Marina

### Context

The title of this presentation is a quote from one of our children. It was a contribution to a key note presentation for a seminar day on Environmental Sustainability at Victoria University that Kate and I took part in earlier this year. When we were preparing for that we asked the older children what they would like the teachers at the Seminar to do to make sure that the world is a good place for them to live in when they grow up.

This is a bit of a puzzling comment from one of one of our tamariki but also a lovely summary of the work we had already started within our exploration gender neutral curriculum. This child loves stories and was initially quite sceptical about our tampering with traditional tales but has become a champion and innovator in this field! I think the meaning of the quote is - you can be whoever and whatever you want – don't let stereotypes limit you. It's a wonderful and hopeful phrase...

Engaging with issues of gender has been part of CK culture for most of the 25 years we have been operating. I was a parent of young children when we opened and my involvement in the feminist movement strongly affected my parenting. I very consciously tried to bring up my kids in a more gender neutral way, often to the exasperation of my father, and of course that spilled into my teaching practices. In addition we have welcomed many rainbow families into our community and children and families have always been very accepting of diverse family arrangements and of gender issues such as transgender people. More recently a family whose parents identify as gender queer have joined us and they have added new perspectives and also expertise. Exploring gender is not really a new thing for Collectively but it has become much more intentional.

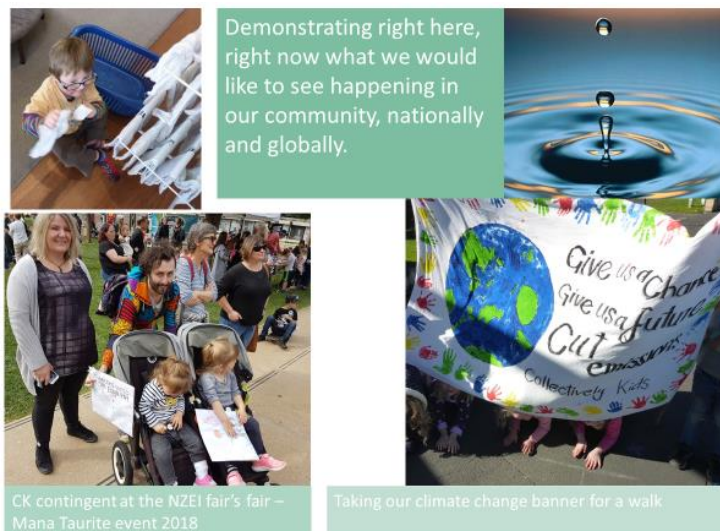


"We are now living in the Anthropocene period, where the state of the earth to a high degree is determined by us humans. And the diagnosis is not good. In many aspects the Earth is heading towards disaster. To reach sustainability, we all have to rethink what is important and reorient the ways in which we live our lives."  
Ingrid Engdahl



Gender neutral curriculum is a part of environmental education at the centre. Zane and I attended the OMEP conference in Prague earlier this year where Ingrid Engdahl gave a keynote presentation which was called – “It’s time to do the right things -The Role of early childhood education for a sustainable society.”

It is becoming very obvious that things are not going well for Papatūānuku and that is very sad news for our tamariki. Climate change and environmental degradation pose the biggest challenge for our children’s present and future and when we talk about children we mean children globally.




It is our responsibility as adults, as teachers, to act in the best interests of tamariki and to consider their rights. Now is the time to look at environmental education differently, not as a nice optional extra but as the foundation of everything we do. Nothing is more important to our wellbeing than the well-being of our planet.


At Collectively Kids we are trying to tackle this huge problem with small meaningful place-based actions that represent global issues. At the same time we are working on pushing out the boundaries and making more connections – giving and sharing presentations of our work is part of that. Collaboration on a local and global level is crucial to solving, or at least mitigating, the huge issues that face us. In small ways we (ECE communities) can become agents of change.




We have been refining our approach to environmental education for over a decade and over time it has become and our mission. It’s holistic and rewarding. There is potential to explore all curriculum areas, to be creative, to feel that we are doing something important. As you can see from the opening statements of our philosophy and the photos on the previous and this slide, our work has practical aspects (tree planting,

worm farms etc.) But it also involves children's rights, advocating for our environment and social justice and exploring ways to develop our engagement and citizenship - examples of that are going on marches, writing letters, seizing opportunities to have courageous and challenging conversations with each other and whānau.





FRI 6 JULY - WEDS 31  
OCT 2018  
FREE WITH MUSEUM ENTRY



**CK philosophy**

**Tamariki have the right to:**

**Tamariki and their whānau have the right to:**


- full participation and to achievement irrespective of ethnicity, gender, ability or background
- express who they are and be affirmed as an individual and as part of a community free from discrimination, assumptions or stereotypes.

So where does gender neutral education fit into an Environmental education? The first thing to be clear about is that it isn't going to save the world, only reducing emissions can (possibly) achieve that. BUT it is an important part of the big picture. It fits into social justice which is a key element of education for environmental sustainability. It is important that our solutions are equitable so that the more vulnerable people in our communities are supported at a time of crisis and that all people regardless of their sex are able to realise their potential. Realising that potential on a global scale could really change things and a lot of NGO's are working very effectively to empower women in the developing world including the Pacific Islands.

Gender neutral curriculum is also crucially important when it comes to exploring new and different ways thinking and being. More of the same isn't working for us now and is not option for the future. Developing a wider a range of ways of being (for instance valuing compassion, developing the courage to speak up, to be strong) will hopefully help us (kaiako, tamariki, whānau) to cope with complicated challenges. Our planet needs advocates and we need our planet.


Although sex is often considered a black and white state of affairs, there is, in fact, a significant amount of middle ground; some believe that sex should be considered a continuum as opposed to two mutually exclusive categories.

Sex and Gender: What Is The Difference?  
<https://www.SexAndGender:WhatIsTheDifference?>  
<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/232363.ph>.



"Gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men - such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed."

World Health Association



**Link to story of practice**

<https://tewhariki.tki.org.nz/en/professional-learning-and-development/els-centres-professional-learning-stories-of-practice/>



It is also important to understand that our ideas (and often stereotypes) of gender are socially constructed. They are not the result of the sex we were born with and even sex is now beginning to be described as a continuum rather than being binary.

From the moment we are born we are shaped by our experiences within our families, culture, societies and institutions. They define and shape expectations and how we see ourselves as girls and boys, men and women rather than just as people or humans. Often these stereotypes limit possibilities and potential, they are barriers that stop us from doing things.

While women and girls are arguably more affected, males are missing out too. Gender stereotypes are pervasive subtle and it can take a lot of effort to extricate ourselves from them. For example, gendered consumer choices are hard to resist and they are often geared at children. Industries, such as fashion, cosmetics children's clothing and toys, are built on Gender stereotypes - Stereotypes increase market possibilities, profit and ramp up consumerism (a key driver of climate change).

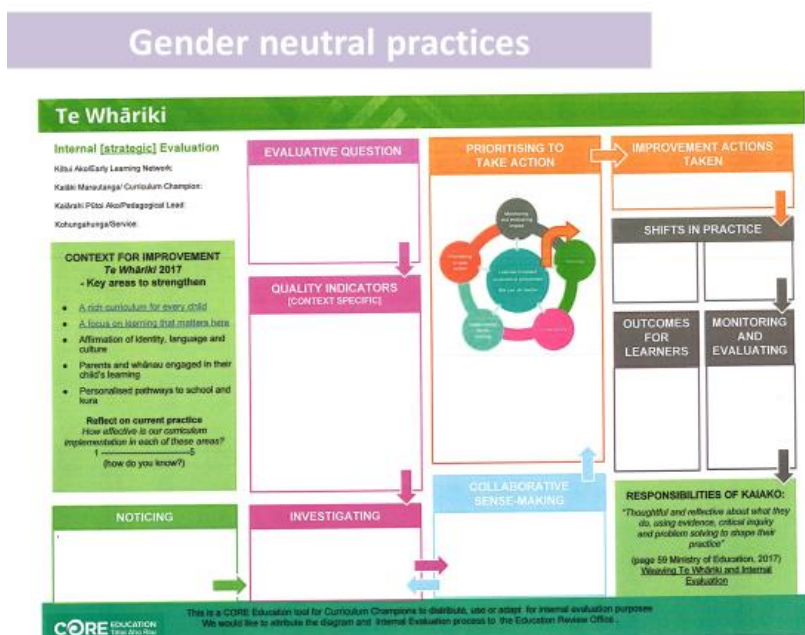
Once we understand that we are human and that regardless of our sex (or how define our gender) there are more similarities between us than there are differences then we are able to change things. It becomes possible to really explore, challenge and shift our working theories of gender. We are more able to develop strategies that will, and in our case, have already had a positive impact on the way tamariki, kaiako and whānau teachers think and interact. I should add that this project has been fun – I have had some excellent, moving and hilarious conversations with children, especially during book reading...

Over the last few years we have been contemplating writing a Gender Neutral policy but have never got that far. I think we will achieve that more easily now as all teachers and our community develop better understandings of this area. This means we will build the policy from clearly defined and agreed practices, rather than hoping practices will emerge as a result of the policy... It will be like the icing on the cake and more about ensuring that practices are embedded and truly a part of the CK environmental curriculum.

As well as receiving an OMEP ESD award the story of practice was selected by the Ministry of education for publication on TKI Website – I have put the link on the slide. If you do take a look please ignore the photo by our bit – it's not CK.

Zane

## Internal Evaluation process



Our internal evaluation on gender neutral education started with a series of workshops facilitated by CORE education that walked us through using Te Whāriki in the internal evaluation process. This consisted of mentoring and several face to face meetings with other participating centres.

We had been wanting to explore the implementation of gender neutral teaching practices for a long period of time. The CORE professional development allowed us to finally address this in a formal internal evaluation structure focused on engaging with Te Whāriki 2017.

Of the five areas to choose from we decided to focus on learning that matters here and affirmation of identity, language, and culture. The team discussed what would be the focus of the internal evaluation with it being determined that gender neutral teaching practices could be an interesting subject to explore further, as well as progressing our work on environmental education and citizenship through freeing our tamariki to explore a wider range of ways of being.

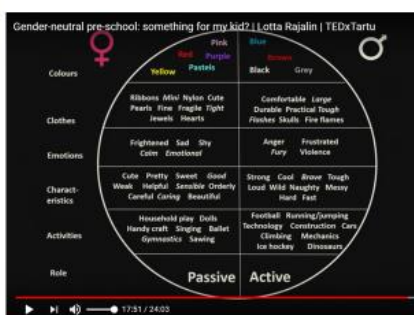
From experience, when the kaiako had discussed with whānau about providing their tamariki with opportunities to explore beyond gender stereotypes there was a positive reception towards their tamariki being offered these opportunities. Personally, this last point is why I have been interested in gender neutral teaching practices. I am aware of the limitations we can place on our tamariki through advertising, what experiences we expose them to, our use of language, and the assumptions we place on them.

#### The question

**How effectively do we, tamariki, kaiako, and whānau at Collectively Kids, explore, challenge, and deepen our working theories relating to gender to enable all of our tamariki to engage with a wider range of ways of being and living that go beyond gender stereotypes?**

Through the mentoring from the CORE process we were able to use Te Whāriki as a lens through which to determine and assess what we were doing throughout the internal evaluation process. It started with the question we asked ourselves. We used the strands of Te Whāriki to refine and focus our question on working theories, which is part of the exploration strand.

#### Data gathering



Sex And Gender: What Is The Difference?

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/232363.php>

Sweden's gender-neutral preschools produce kids who are more likely to succeed

<https://qz.com/1006928/swedens-gender-neutral-preschools-produce-kids-who-are-more-likely-to-succeed/>

Gender-neutral pre-school: something for my kid? | Lotta Rajalin | TEDxTartu

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1G1K7-kJxY>

Interview re gendered toys:

[http://www.radionz.co.nz/audio/player?audio\\_id=201847095](http://www.radionz.co.nz/audio/player?audio_id=201847095)

We then looked to gather data so we could determine where we were currently with regards to gender neutral practices.

Quantitative data analysis involved taking time samples of the centre environment to determine how it impacted on children's interactions and experiences. We analysed how tamariki were playing and who they were playing with based on the set ups and resources made available to them. To analyse the data we used a model from a TED talk presented by Lotta Rajalin that laid out the assumptions placed on boys and girls. The results indicated that there was a tendency for children to engage with experiences associated with their gender.

We also monitored who was visiting the under twos room as tuakana teina relationships are a very important practice for us. The numbers revealed that it was predominantly girls who visited, and more frequently, as well as that girls would help in the room with routines and care whereas the boys who visited would play.

We conducted qualitative data gathering through providing the kaiako with some references on gender neutral practices. These references included an article on the social construction of gender, a Radio New Zealand interview on gendered toys as well as the TED talk by Lotta that discussed the experiences, ways we talk to boys and girls, and assumptions we place on them based on their gender. The kaiako then reflected on these readings and their own understanding of what gender neutral practices might mean. The article on gender as a social construct helped to make it easier for people to understand that notions of femininity and masculinity are created within societies and therefore can be changed.

This helped us to understand where everyone in the teaching team was at with regards to this topic. We discovered there were differences in understanding, as well as discomfort, which was discussed further at a team meeting.

This meeting proved very beneficial for the project and the teaching team. Ideas were able to be discussed, concerns and understandings addressed in a safe space. We were able to unpack the idea of gender and clarify that the project was looking to create a place where tamariki were free to explore all different ways of being. We also discussed what teaching strategies would be useful and effective to shift practice for everyone moving forward.

## **Kate**

### **Teaching strategies**



I am going to discuss some of the strategies we try to use in our everyday practice to promote and support a gender neutral curriculum. First though, by way of introduction I'd like to share a little about myself.

I have always been interested in language – how we use it, and how it shapes our views of the world, others, and ourselves. I studied linguistics at university. I enjoy listening to tamariki explore and develop

language in their everyday lives, and I love joining them as they discover all the ways they can use and play with it.



I remember clearly when I was growing up people still talked about 'male nurses' and 'lady doctors'. And while I realise there was a time when 'lady' doctors or male nurses were the exception, I feel that describing them this way did nothing towards offering other possibilities for all people. I'm sure you will all have your own memories or examples of how language has reflected dominant attitudes, stereotypes, or indeed even limited how some people's lives are represented. It is heartening to see how times are changing in this regard, and how language is being invented, and reinvented, to more accurately represent individual's identities - including their gender identity.

This wee ramble is my way of saying that being proactive and consciously changing the language we use is something I feel is vital to enable people of all ages to see new possibilities and potential - for themselves and for others. Using gender neutral, inclusive terms is one way we can convey our similarities, rather than just highlight our differences.

Focusing on 'otherness' promotes discrimination and can have negative consequences and while I whole heartedly support celebrating diversity and uniqueness, I feel it's possible to both highlight the things that we have in common, and value our differences at the same time too.

Being aware of and challenging stereotypes has always been important to us at Collectively Kids.

With a more systematic approach and an internal evaluation focussed on a gender neutral curriculum, individual kaiako were able to reflect on and share strategies they had found useful in their everyday practice. This included during book reading, when singing and doing finger plays, how we set up the environment, and the language we used in our everyday interactions.



So, let's look at some examples:

Changing the words to well known songs, games and finger plays:

For example - What's the time hungry wolf?

'Miss Polly had a dolly' became: "\_\_\_\_\_ had a dolly" and the doctor came with "their hat and their bag" - even though doctors making house calls is a little outdated nowadays.

Old McDonald became "my friend \_\_\_\_\_ had a farm...and on that farm there were some\_\_\_\_\_"

And in '5 little monkeys jumping on the bed' – everyone in the whānau has a chance to call the doctor, not just the Mumma.

In 'the wheels on the bus...ngā wīra o te pahi' there are endless possibilities for what the passengers, young and old, are doing. And, we also insert the names of our own tamariki and their actions into the waiata.

### Our everyday language:

Using gender neutral terms for occupations is important: for example 'fire fighter, flight attendant, police officer, principal, postie...' - and if tamariki use gender specific terms for these jobs I think it is important to model the gender neutral term and gently remind them that everybody can do that job.

Using 'person' instead of 'woman, man, girl or boy' and 'parent' instead of 'mum/dad' (if we are not talking about a specific person).

Using 'they' for she or he and her or him and 'their' or 'theirs' instead of 'hers/his' (and I should add that this one was a particular challenge for me as I used to teach grammar in a previous life)

Animals and toys are often referred to as he, especially if their characteristics or physical appearance are seen as stereotypical of males so we try and use a fair amount of 'she' or 'it' as well.

### Book reading:

### Teaching strategies

*A lot of stories are very gendered in the way they describe boys and girls, men and women.*

To challenge children's thinking and complicate their experience of a story you can:

- Change the sex of characters (e.g. make the wolf female, Red Riding Hood male)
- Use children's names (changing the name for each page so every child listening to the story has a chance to be the protagonist (and the main character becomes gender fluid)
- Use non-gendered terms – they (instead of she or he), person, people, child, children, parents...
- Look at illustrations – reflect or 'notice out loud' when you see pictures that provide positive images or challenges to gender stereotypes
- Rephrase any sexist language in books
- Consider and/or ask who, what, why and how questions. Who is the protagonist/antagonist? Are they male or female? Why are they male or female? What is the impact of them being male or female? How could you change the story by changing the gender? What is the impact on the children if you do change the gender?

Changing the sex of characters in books. For example in 'where the wild things are' we often make Max a girl, or refer to Max as 'they' or 'them', rather than 'she' or 'he', and we change the mum to a dad (or another adult in a care giving role).

We also insert the names of our own tamariki into stories, changing the name on each page – which initially took some concerted effort for kaiako (and still does on some days) .....



In 'The three little pigs' – you can try making the pigs and the wolf female. There are lots of possibilities to change things round.

The three billy goats gruff is another favourite in our centre - but again all four main characters get changed - sometimes into objects the tamariki have constructed with duplo or lego, or our own props like people from the dolls' house, other animals, or figurines, or the children themselves.

In the much loved story about "the little mouse, the red ripe strawberry and the big, hungry bear"...I recently changed it to "the little bear and the big hungry mouse" instead.

Every community will have their own favourite stories, songs and traditions – play round and try different things with the stories and songs you and your tamariki enjoy.

Another thing we try and do is make sure we are using adjectives that aren't used so much for either sex in many people's everyday language use. For example noticing and describing when boys are being kind, gentle, nurturing, and using words like 'beautiful' and 'pretty' to describe them and their clothes or ways of doing things. And noticing and naming in our girls things like: their strength and courage, ferocity, and wildness for example.

Even little things like how some people often notice and comment when a girl's hair is getting long but not so much when it's a boy's...

When acting out stories encourage or suggest girls get to be male characters, dads or Maui for example, and boys get to be female – for example mums, Mahuika, or the bird woman. Recently one of our boys (who loves story-telling) became 'whero iti' who was going to visit his granny with a basket of food (and who rather conveniently happened to be wearing a red hoody at the time I was telling the story).

Sometimes I hear kids express surprise or doubt about themselves or someone else being able to be a character which they perceive is a different sex or gender. Isn't that one of the great things about using our imaginations I say – we can be anything we want!

Finally, being actively reflective and self-correcting is really important. It shows we are open to always learning more, and that it's ok to forget or make mistakes - which in itself is a good habit to get into and model. Lately, I've found myself saying : "oh boy" and "oh man" possibly from a recent interest of the children's in the song 'I jump out of bed in the morning' – which features the line "man I look so cool" – however this is easily changed to "wow I look so cool"...and the other week Margaret Mahy's "great white man-eating shark" became a "great white human-eating shark" and then a "human consuming shark" for a nice variation to the sounds.

Don't despair if older books and stories feature gendered language, or stereotyped occupations or behaviours. Our advice would be to make the most of the opportunity it presents: get creative and change it. Better still - discuss it with the kids. This happened recently when Zane was reading a book at mat time. The child who had brought the book in often does so and to our delight some of the books they bring belonged to their mother when she was little. One that was brought in recently featured a family of mice working on a building project together. I was interested to hear Zane change how the language was structured so that (for example):

"Mary fetched bricks for Grandpa" (who was doing the brick laying) became:

"Mary and Grandpa fetched bricks" and ...

Pip (who made the tea) became an unspecified gender, referred to in gender neutral language – opening up possibilities and opportunities for interpretation...

...and instead of "Ma held the shoe string for Mick to cut"

Ma and Mick just cut the string together!



On the subject of books we also researched and explored getting books from the library which challenged gender stereotypes or provided a wider range of experiences for tamariki to explore. You can search the library data base, there is also a good list of books on the website 'A Mighty Girl'

<https://www.iamightygirl.com/books> and of course OMEP has an extensive list of books under different topics too.

Setting up the environment:



Finally – we looked at ways we could provide more provocations for tamariki in the environment and how we set up areas, and how the resources were presented and (hopefully) used. Resources were organised and set up in ways to provoke different types of play and engage a wider range of tamariki, and we also looked at how we could encourage different groups of tamariki to play together (by mixing different combinations of resources up). Dolls were put to work in the sandpit on the diggers and forklifts, dinosaurs were adorned with necklaces, and blocks became part of the kitchen play props. Another day the dolls might be paired with the tools, enabling different tamariki to explore and use them in their play. Another aspect we intentionally manipulate is the size of our play spaces – for example making some small and intimate for closer proximity play. And also keeping things dynamic to maintain children's interest and curiosity.

### Tuakana teina relationships



Another thing we realised in the data gathering stage was that there tended to be a core group of older tamariki, mainly girls, who spent time in the infant toddler room. By organising a roster of tuakana where each day a different pair would spend time in the infant and toddler room, all tamariki had the opportunity to take on the role and grow their nurturing, caring skills as well as develop new ways of being. The effort and commitment by all kaiako to make this work has meant there is now more equitable access to this area.

So to conclude. I hope that by sharing some of the small ways we have intentionally tried to change our language, set ups and ways we do things, we have provided opportunity to reflect, debate and perhaps some inspiration to try different things.

### Teacher perspectives

#### Lisa



I am here to talk to you about my journey as a Kaiako learning and teaching within a gender-neutral curriculum. To give you a little context into my pathway, I will share with you some background about where I have come from to where I am now. My brother and I grew up under very strong family values that girls were to engage in quiet peaceful play and that it was acceptable for boys to be rough and wild. The expectation was that I was a quiet child, that I played with dolls, coloured in and painted by numbers, and that I wore dresses and looked like a doll myself. I don't have many memories of my childhood where I was fully allowed to explore being rough and wild, or being exposed to different ways of being. When I had my own children, I challenged the stereotypes that society and family had placed on us as children. I wanted my son to explore his gentle side as well as my daughter exploring being wild. I supported their play in a variety of ways and I like to think that I challenged them to be the strong adults they are both today. I have always supported inclusion and diversity.

When we began our more journey with a gender-neutral internal-evaluation at CK, I felt challenged. I realized I had some very ingrained thoughts and feelings into the way girls and boys should be. I fully supported the tamariki to explore different ways of being but really what did this look like for me? I identify as a woman and like to be feminine. I was challenged as I thought that I should feel differently. This was not the case. I began to reflect on my own childhood and how I would wish the children that I teach to fully explore how they see themselves and be open to possibilities. This is where I became fully engaged in the project.

The focus of my inquiry for teacher certification is extending experiences of tamariki with the visual arts. Some of the work I focused on predominantly with the older children was viewing how they looked at people. Earlier in the year some of our older children (mainly girls) preparing to transition to school were very interested in drawing. I offered them opportunities where they could explore working with different media around their areas of interest. Some of their work, from my own observations, was related to pictures of themselves, relationships with their peers, whānau, people in their world, and characters from stories or fairy tales. Marina and I discussed this with the tamariki and began to encourage the children to look closer at themselves and people they were drawing. At times I would use mirrors for inspiration. We noticed some of the older girls drawing triangles for body shape, clothing and hair that represented societies view of what a girl or boy may look like. Through this discussion and encouraging careful observation of themselves and others the tamariki began to draw differently. They observed that boys and girls could have long hair, just as both genders could have short hair. Bodies weren't in fact triangles, instead were shapely and people are of varying heights. We also looked closer at what their peers wore and adults in their lives, paying particular attention to detail in clothing. From this we began to establish that clothing was not limited to one gender. The photos of drawings pictured are of myself, Zane and Marina. The three tamariki who worked on these observed us all carefully and the clothing we were wearing on the day. These have become part of our teacher display board alongside other Kaiako of Collectively Kids.



Environments also played a huge part to my embracing this curriculum. I like to create aesthetically pleasing environments for children to work in and based around their interests so when Kaiako had conversations about changing resources around to support play in different ways I came on board with this. Like other teachers I began to set up dinosaurs to have tea parties, placed interesting jewellery with the toy animals, and involved dolls in construction in the sand pit. I became eager to see how children engaged in play differently, and with different play partners. I enjoyed intentionally supporting boys to be nurturers and girls to be wild, seeing the benefit of this.

I was particularly thrilled to document Eli's journey with this. He is a child on my portfolio list. I regularly monitor stories and goals for meeting his plan. When the dolls were introduced to the sandpit Eli took on the role of tuakana and caregiver, something I had not observed from him before. He incorporated his own



interests into this play. It became very powerful to document. Eli has continued to strengthen his role as tuakana over the past year and will make a wonderful big brother in a few months.

I have also been delighted to record other children playing in different ways. A gender- neutral curriculum opens a new way of looking at play and using resources. I am learning to adapt the language I use with children to limit societies stereotypical views and it has been rewarding and exciting to change characters around in stories. I now have the tamariki asking me to do this without challenging them. I realise that there is still a lot to learn and explore, however I intend to continue to challenge myself.

## Tessa



My first visit at Collectively Kids was as a student for my final practicum in my studies. I remember first meeting my AT Zane and highlighting the fact that having a male as an AT was something that I was excited about. As I drove home that day I felt a sense of discomfort with the comment I'd made. I was excited about my up and coming practicum journey at CK regardless of anybody's gender and reflecting on my statement I found it to be irrelevant.

Throughout my time on practicum I'd been exposed to so many new practices and deeper ways of thinking. I can't recall a moment where I heard the common "Good girl!" or "If you are a boy you may go and wash your hands". Children were addressed by their names, provocations challenged what society deemed as gender-appropriate and people were celebrated as people and not as beings who needed to be categorised. I could see how this impacted on the children in the sense that they all appeared to just feel as if they belonged, not as a boy and not as a girl but simply as a CK whānau member. I was able to reflect on how by limiting people to what society sees as appropriate, you are not only giving people ideas about their own capabilities but also you're telling them about who they are and that is no one's place to figure that out but their own.

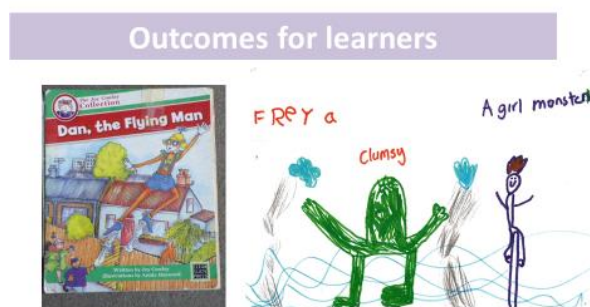


I have been at CK for eight months now and although I am still learning every day, what I have learnt so far has not only impacted my practice but also the way I see people and the choices I make. Simple decisions outside of CK like buying a gift for a child in my family, thinking to myself, am I buying this because it's what the child's genuine interest is or am I buying it because it seems gender appropriate. By simply being aware of these choices it allows me to think deeper about my contribution to the society 'norms'.

I have also learnt that it is not my right to assume based on what society has taught me and that the capabilities of others are not based on their gender. After working with Zane for eight months I look back on my first visit as a student and how I'd highlighted to Zane the fact that having a male AT was exciting. I could see how by doing this I was pointing out that this was out of the 'norms' and formed my opinion based on what society had taught me. Zane's capability as a Kaiako is amazing irrespective of gender and I feel that our children need to feel safe within their environment to make choices just like Zane did, based on their own passions and not what society limits their skills to be.

This is not the end of my learning journey, it will be ongoing but I am so grateful to be exposed to this so early on in my journey as a Kaiako. Because of these new skills I have learnt so far, I am able to contribute to an environment where people can explore their full potential and are free from stereotypes.

## Zane



## Outcomes for learners

We found some very positive outcomes for learners from our shifts in practices.

Tamariki are thinking more critically during storytelling. They are asking questions and thinking about why things are the way that they are.

Earlier in the year Oat the Goat, a story on bullying prevention, was published by the ministry of education. When reading this one of the tamariki asked why the monster was a boy. She then suggested and designed a monster named 'Clumsy', who was a girl monster.

Tamariki are seeing themselves reflected in the stories and there is more complex exploration of characters. They make suggestions about how we could change the story, such as changing Dan the Flying Man to Jan the Flying Woman.

The tamariki have a better understanding of diversity and are less likely to make assumptions, which has enriched play.

An example of this would be the exploration of wolf characters that we have engaged in recently. We have had some tamariki very interested in fairy tales. Wolves often appear as antagonists in these. Through providing stories where the wolf is portrayed in a more sympathetic light, addressing or questioning the wolf's motives in more traditional stories, and commenting on the behaviour of actual wolves tamariki have become less likely to assume that the wolf is the villain.

Tamariki are enjoying their ability to play with language and find different uses for it. They are using gender non specific terms, like person or people rather than boy or girl.

One whānau member commented that her child corrected her when they were out one day. She made an observation about there being a police man and her child said that she should say police officer. There has been exploration of terms such as girl and boy brains, which seeks to unpack the idea that gender is not dependant or defined by a person's sex.

I am Jazz was the book that really initiated this exploration. The tamariki found this book incredibly interesting. There was discussion about Jazz having a girl brain in a boy body. The tamariki explored an acceptance that gender doesn't have to be defined by ones body but how you view yourself. We also discussed further that liking more stereotypically feminine things doesn't mean that you are a girl, highlighting that Jazz still liked to play football, and likewise with more masculine interests not being indicative of being a boy.

Tamariki are seeing themselves in different ways due to their actions being perceived and affirmed differently.

Girls in particular now regularly comment on their strength and other abilities. These ways that they see themselves are affirmed by kaiako to ensure a stronger sense of self.

Tamariki have had opportunities for different ways to play. The environment is intentionally set up to encourage tamariki to explore different types of play and they have engaged with these different types of play, often discovering a new interest.

I noticed recently that one of the tamariki, who had found the dolls that had been placed outside on this day, taking the doll on a rollercoaster cart track. He placed the doll on the seat, pushed the cart, and then if the doll fell off would help the doll, make sure that it wasn't hurt, and repeated the sequence.

Tamariki see themselves as able to contribute to the wellbeing of others and the centre when they are given the opportunity to assist with care for others and taking part in routines. Tamariki are building positive relationships with others during these experiences.

There is one child who is very active and physical. We have noticed though that, through exposure to the role of acting as carer and supporting younger tamariki, that he is able to be mindful of who he is with and adapt his movements to ensure the safety of younger tamariki. He has a really close relationship with a child with special needs and loves to spend time with her. He will play rough and tumble with her, which

she absolutely adores, but at a level where she will be safe. He will be mindful his actions when she is nearby and talk to her about what she should do to keep safe.

### Where to next?



From here we are looking to monitor how our gender neutral teaching practices are still being implemented. This will likely involve time samples and observations of practice in order to determine what is working and what areas might need further support.

We are working on researching and acquiring books that challenge gender stereotypes for the centre and to share with whānau. We have been trialling these books through borrowing them from the library to determine whether they are useful. A list of books to use at home was also a request from some whānau who wanted to support our work at home and with their own communities.

We also intend to draft a policy on gender neutral practice. We would link our commitment to this practice to our centre philosophy, environment policy, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals.

A consideration to be made is how gender neutral teaching practices work within the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand. Do gender neutral teaching practices come into conflict with anything within te Ao Māori? How can we ensure a gender neutral teaching environment while also upholding our commitment to te tiriti and preserving the culture and identity of tangata whenua?

One of the challenges we continue to face is the assumptions that whānau bring to the centre. Kaiako and other whānau are addressing comments as they occur in a respectful way, which has been fantastic to see happen but these presumptive comments can have an impact on the tamariki, falling back into stereotypical ways of viewing the child. We are hoping that the policy will entrench our practices and provide clear reasoning and intent so that whānau have a better understanding for why we do what we do.



## Any questions?



Get in touch if you have comments, suggestions, questions, would like to visit...

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