

Inquiry-based project learning in early childhood: Time to develop localised understanding of this pedagogical approach

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Ko te tamaiti te pūtake o te ao
The child is the centre of the
universe

*'Children are our greatest legacy
Nature is our greatest teacher.'*
~ Dr Rangimarie Turuki Arikirangi
Rose Pere, C.B.E C.M, Maori Tohuna

Mā te ahurei o te tamaiti e ārahi i ā tātou mahi.
Let the uniqueness of the child guide our work
(Te Whāriki, 2017. p. 63)





Who is the child in the 21st century?

We are in the midst of Te Ao Hurihuri:

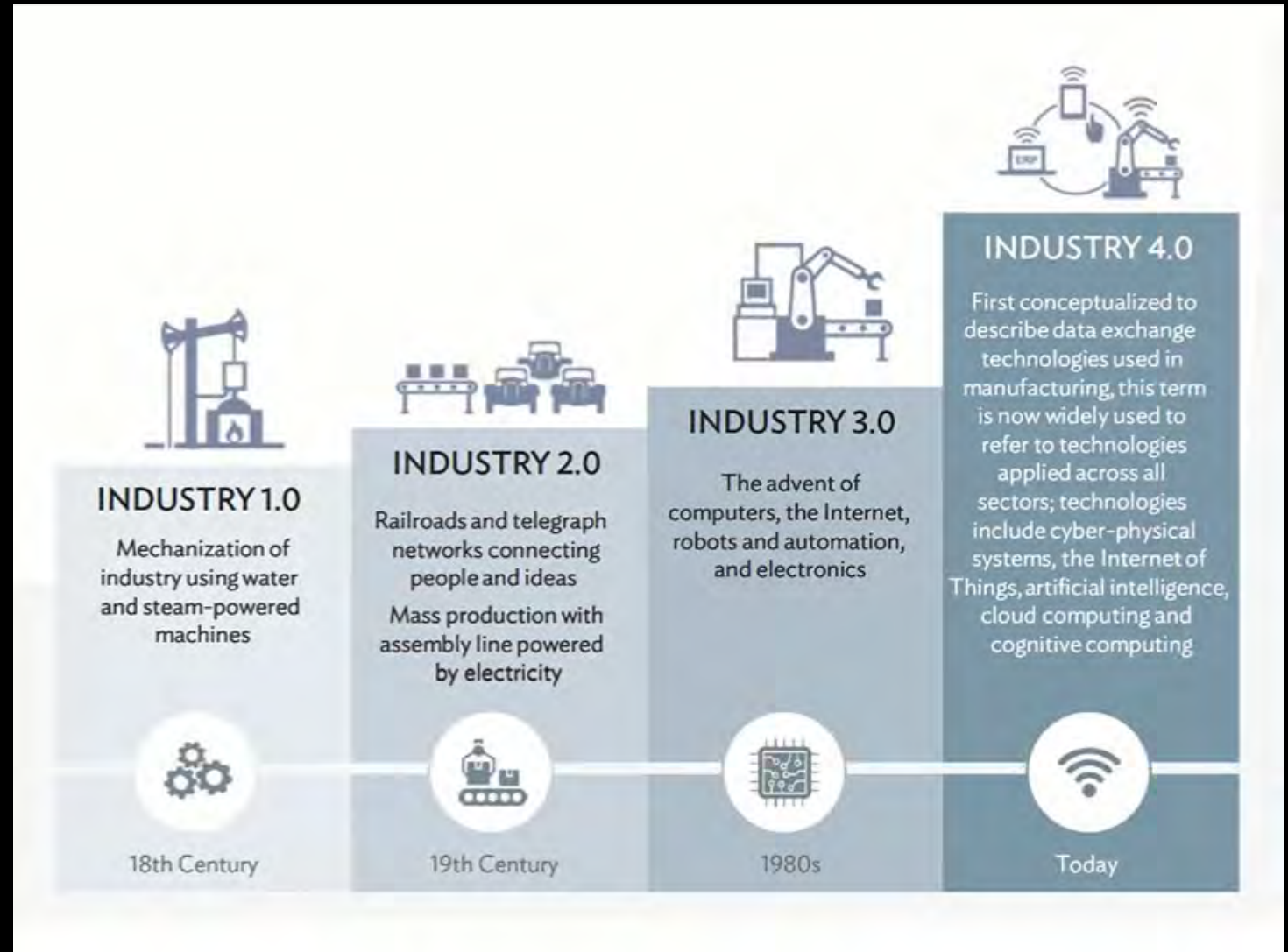
The only known is constant change

(Wixon, 2021)

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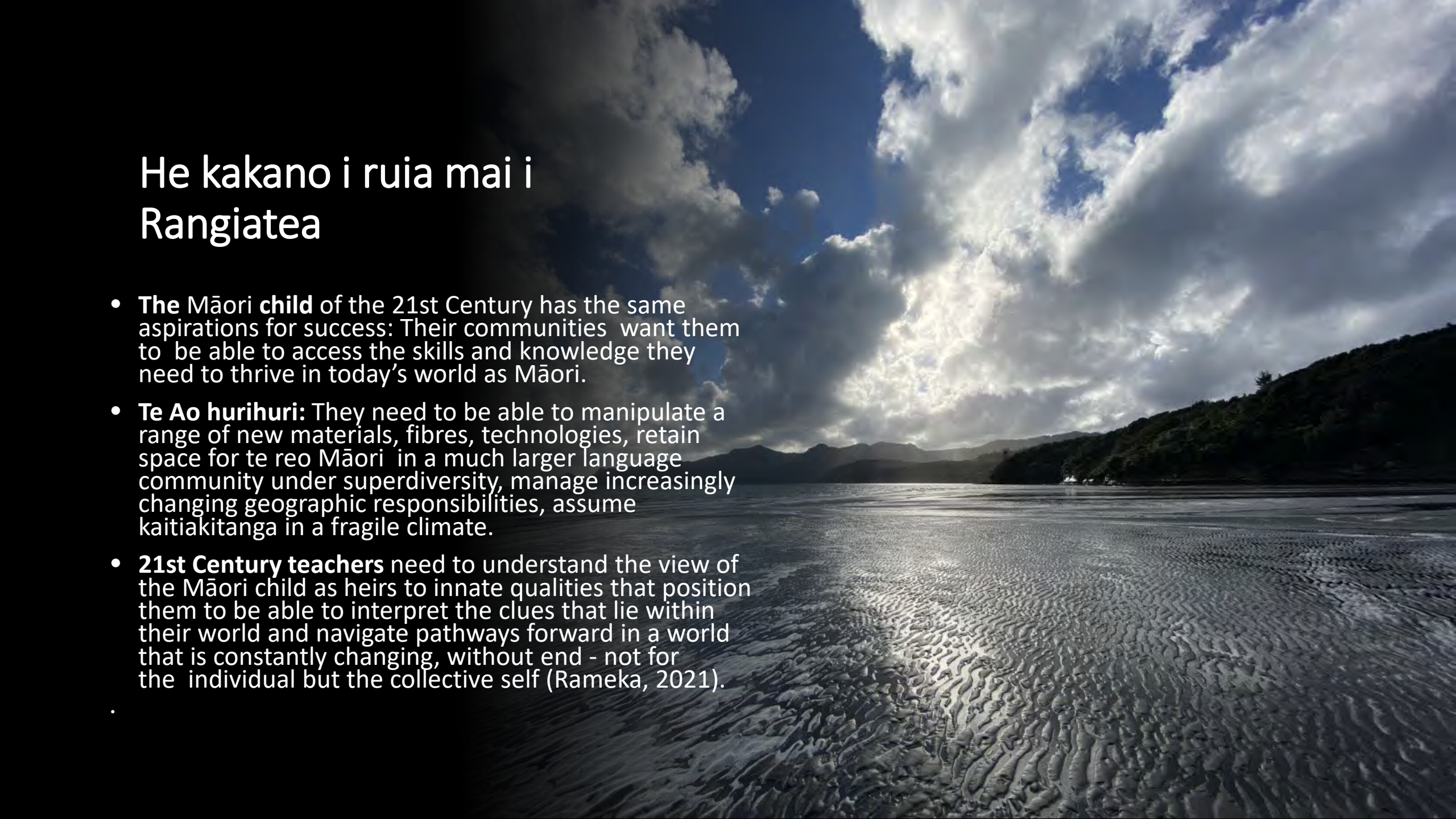
Industry 4.0

- Children are immersed in 4IR (4th Industrial Revolution) - Digitisation
- Global issues - worldwide pandemic, climate change, poverty, social justice, superdiversity
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He kakano i ruia mai i Rangiatea

- **The Māori child** of the 21st Century has the same aspirations for success: Their communities want them to be able to access the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in today's world as Māori.
- **Te Ao hurihuri:** They need to be able to manipulate a range of new materials, fibres, technologies, retain space for te reo Māori in a much larger language community under superdiversity, manage increasingly changing geographic responsibilities, assume kaitiakitanga in a fragile climate.
- **21st Century teachers** need to understand the view of the Māori child as heirs to innate qualities that position them to be able to interpret the clues that lie within their world and navigate pathways forward in a world that is constantly changing, without end - not for the individual but the collective self (Rameka, 2021).



What does the 21st Century child need to know?

Skills, dispositions, identity

OECD report suggests physical, emotional, family and digital skills

21st century recognised skills sets

Transferability to Early Childhood Education?

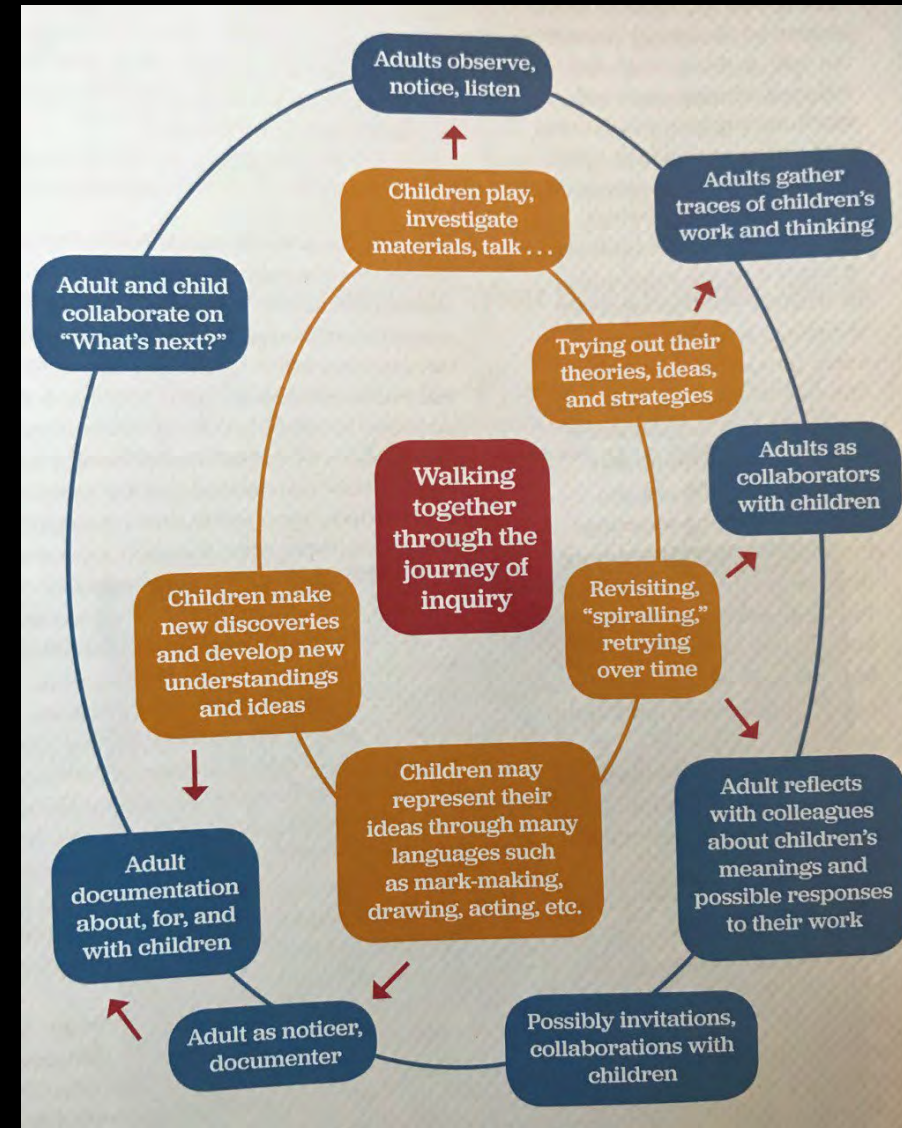
Current education systems are widely criticised due to their insufficiency to address and support the need of all learners (Bolstad et al, 2012).



Cycle of Inquiry for both children and adults

Inquiry based project work

- Children lead their own learning
- Discover the answers to their own questions
- Collaboratively explore and dialogue with peers and teachers
- Represent and reflect as they co-construct new understandings.



(Stacey, 2019, p. 4)



Inquiry based project work

- This approach aligns closely with the indicators for quality early childhood education outlined in Te Ara Poutama (Education Review Office, 2020, p. 12) which indicate children should become:
- Confident in their identity, language and culture as a citizen of Aotearoa New Zealand
- Physically, emotionally and spiritually safe and healthy
- A successful lifelong learner who has knowledge, skills and attitudes combined as dispositions and working theories that support lifelong learning
- A global citizen, adaptive, creative and resilient, confident to engage in new settings and contribute to society.

The issues and rationale for the research

- In recent years, interest in children's inquiry-based learning has gained traction
- International influences such as the pedagogical ideas of Reggio Emilia, and the Project Approach have had a significant influence on how inquiry-based project learning has been interpreted in Aotearoa
- Transplanting pedagogical ideas from one place to another, without critical examination of the values and priorities of the new context can, however, create cultural knots (Miller & Pound, 2010; Pohio, 2009)
- Little research in New Zealand has been conducted on how inquiry-based learning has been interpreted in this context
- Making connections with matauranga Māori principles of inquiry based learning require further examination



Aim of the study

- This project seeks to understand which pedagogical ideas have influenced teachers' thinking and what aspects of these influences have been most impactful.
- The project will also examine how differing interpretations of inquiry based learning play out in the classroom and what this means for children's learning

Theoretical framework

- Positioned within a qualitative interpretivist paradigm
- Underpinned by social-constructivist, bioecological theories
- Study design strongly informed by narrative inquiry
- Narrative inquiry supports the development of understanding how “the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individuals’ experiences were, and are, constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted” (Clandinin, 2014, p. 18).

Data collection

- **Phase one:**
- National questionnaire to early childhood centres who use inquiry based approaches

- **Phase two:**
- Small number (6-8) of centres will be purposively selected to participate
- Selection will ensure that a diverse range of cultural and pedagogical perspectives are represented across a range of geographic locations
- Data collection will include classroom observations, and a focus group interview



Findings: The dominance of the international discourse

“Respect, the importance of learning to work and live in a democracy, the premise that children have endless potential to guide their learning...The ideas that teachers are learning alongside children. The importance of the use of the hundred languages to inspire deeper thinking. The role of the teacher as facilitator or provoker”

Participant response

- The most influential pedagogical ideas were either the Reggio Emilia Approach or the Project Approach
- Teachers articulated conceptual knowledge – rather than pedagogical processes or practical application



Evidence of localised curriculum and the influence of National discourse

We have been working on a 'connection to local place' project for the past couple of years. The children have been exploring spaces around our local area - the Maunga, the awa and the ngahere near us, to understand its stories and histories

(participant response)

Across much of this year our older children have been investigating the world of bugs in our garden. This has branched in with some of our community mahi also with the establishments of a community garden with our young parents (we have an associated teen parent college), and with the enhancement of other streams of whanau wellbeing work. The project has created a hub for many spin off developments

(participant response)



A need for further guidance on processes

- Differences in teacher knowledge or value for IBL
- “Scaffolding teaching teams to get the same level of knowledge and understanding of how to implement this approach” (participant response)
- Understanding how to progress an inquiry and the teacher's role in this
- Avoiding a themed approach “To find ways to go beyond surface level exploration” (participant response)

Discussion

Cultural knots

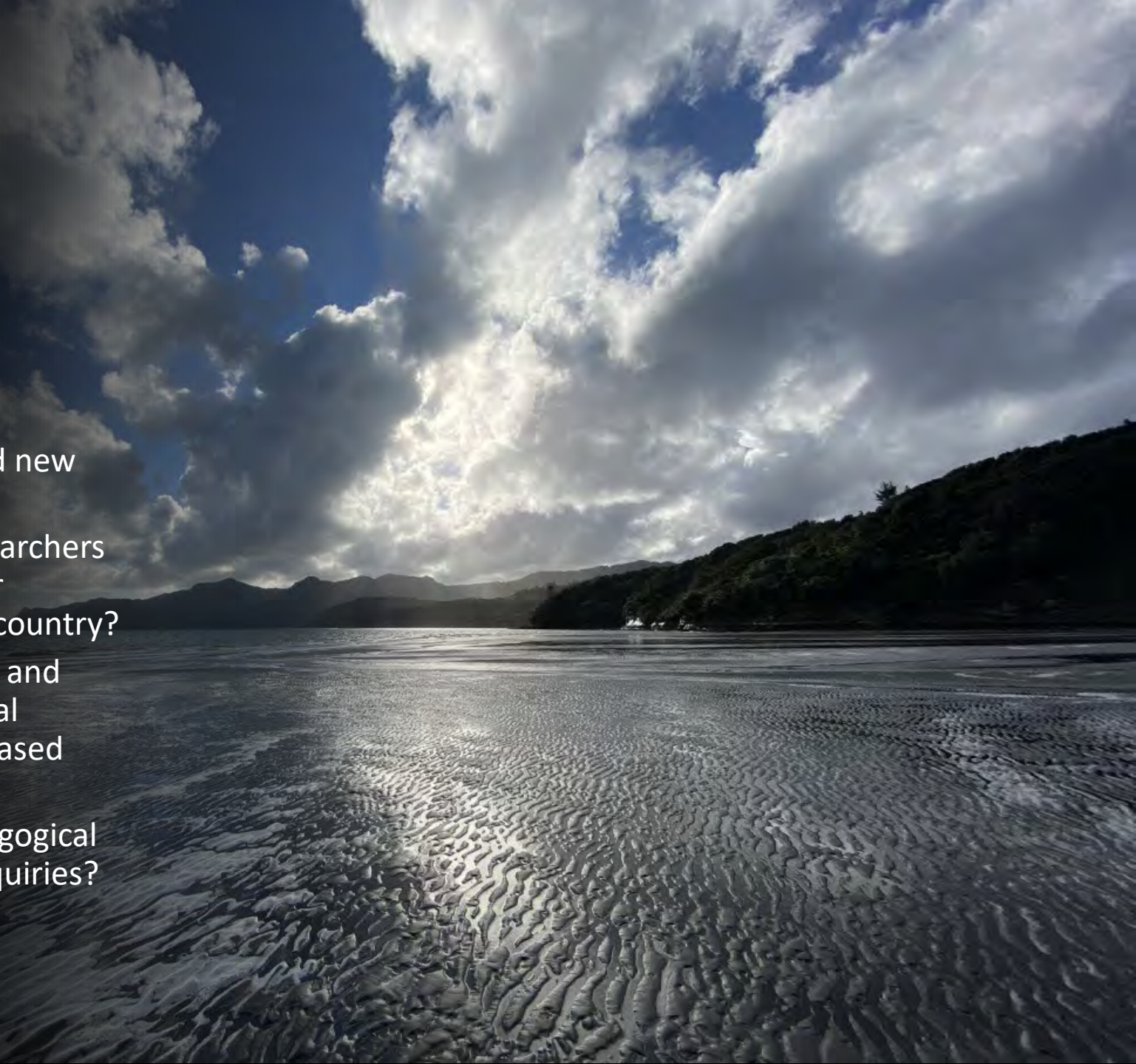
- The pedagogical language of Reggio Emilia has become a master narrative (Barone, 2009)
- The international literature is the predominant source for teachers to learn about this approach
- This has influenced how teachers articulate their understanding of inquiry based project work
- The examples of projects, however, demonstrated that teachers are developing rich localised curriculum through their inquiries with children
- Strengthening the connections between the national resources that guide teachers' work and the broader concepts discussed in the international literature has the potential to strengthen teachers' capacity to articulate and develop approaches to inquiry-based learning that meet the aspirations and needs of their specific contexts.

Discussion

- The findings from phase one reveal that there is a need for resources that offer guidance of the pedagogical processes of undertaking an inquiry could be of value
- Whilst many settings have developed rich practices, this knowledge, appears to be siloed within these particular contexts
- Experiences teachers are therefore responsible for continuously supporting new team members to develop this understanding

What next?

- Phase two will take place in 2022
- The findings from phase one have raised new questions
 - What does this mean for us as researchers who are also all teaching in teacher education programmes across the country?
 - What are early childhood teachers' and communities' understanding of local curriculum and how does inquiry based learning support this?
 - How do teachers develop the pedagogical knowledge to localise children's inquiries?



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