

Growing strong social competence inside a community of learners.

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Building a collaborative community within a socio-cultural framework is not a prescribed policy. It is a dynamic, interactive enterprise that relies on the interconnectivity of setting, relationships and context.

What is social competence and how do we grow this? What leads children to make wise decisions and to know what to do when they don't know what to do? What conditions for learning will be optimal conditions for growing social competence?

These are the questions and discussions that teachers are continually engaged in, as they unpack the terms and think deeply about what this looks like in their settings. Sometimes social competence is narrowly viewed as 'behaving'; however, we are broadening our understanding and widening our lens to encompass every aspect of our daily lives in centres. A collaborative community grows social competence on every level.

Tuning in and finding the language to describe what we mean is our first step. A range of language can describe the complexities of social competence. This language can be woven through our interactions with children and through our documentation, as we make visible what we are wanting to grow and celebrate in our children.

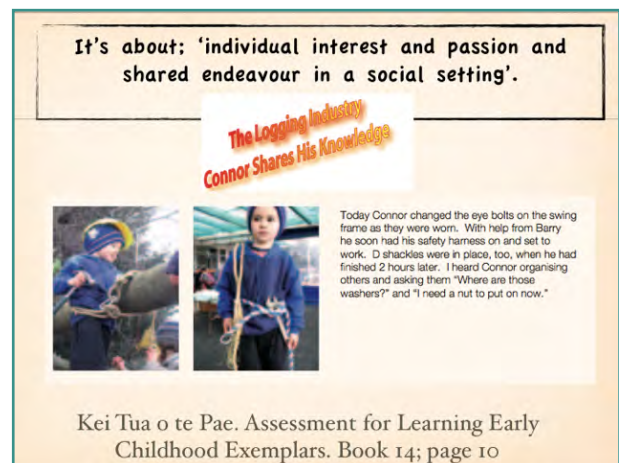


By reading through Kei Tua o te Pae we can find documentation showing deep and broad

examples of the many layers of social competence:

Conner who brings his funds of knowledge from home and organises to participate in the real work that needs doing. Harriet who involves friends in her plans to design a space for Mermaids. Sabine who works with a teacher through difficult problems to make a swing. Adam who knows the protocols around food and is allowed to organise his own routine.

We meet teachers who involve the children in deciding on new resources and children who learn the protocols they need to sensitively participate in a Marae visit. Louie who is making decisions about where to be and where to play and teachers who let him practice making those decisions.

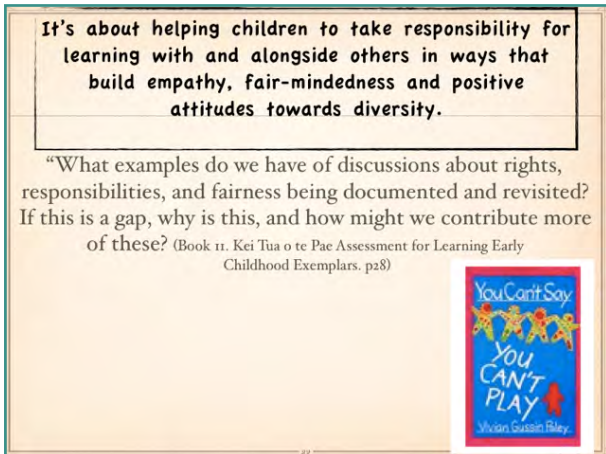


There are examples of Learning Stories that acknowledge children's ability to sort out their own conflict and find peaceful and successful pathways.

Documentation can be developed to strengthen the image of children as capable and confident who are learning alongside wise teachers.

In any collaborative community passions and interests are shared. There are spaces for children and teachers to enjoy what they love, to share their expertise and experiences and to be

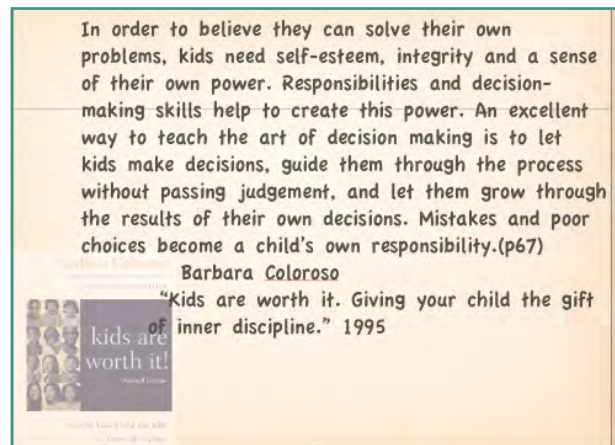
the learner as well as the knower. Practicing within real contexts will be the way children grow their abilities to work successfully with others. Think about where we can see meaningful shared endeavour, where children can practice and participate in real everyday activities which form the fabric of their learning community. As a teacher how do we help to create this kind of learning environment?



Vivian Gussin Paley in her book "You can't say you can't play" confronts the 'habit of rejection' in her classroom. Hearing children say 'you can't play' seems too harsh and the effect on children's sense of self too traumatic. A new 'social order' must be developed and Vivian's book tells the story of how this social order unfolds.

How often do we engage in discussion about social justice issues with our children? These issues are often close to children's hearts and children have real insights and theories to share. Taking children's points of view seriously and allowing time and space to explore ideas will build children's social competence. Making children share without having discussion and debate is about teachers having power over children and is not about social justice and fairness. Barbara Coloroso emphasises upholding children's and our own dignity. In 'Kids are worth it' Barbara suggests that the principle 'I will not treat a child in a way I myself would not want to be treated' (p.12) forms the foundation of our interactions and responses to those around us, including children.

As wise teachers we will take every opportunity as a learning opportunity. We will treat everyone in our learning community with dignity and respect and we will view social competence as a learning journey where mistakes can be made and learnt from.



References:

Coloroso, B. (1995). *Kids are worth it*. Toronto: Sommerville House

Carr, M., Lee, W., Jones, C. (2004, 2007 & 2009) [Kei Tua o te Pae. Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars. Books 1-20](#). A resource prepared for the Ministry of Education. Wellington: Learning Media

Learning Stories from KTotP:

- *Louie going out the door*. Bk. 4, p. 10
- *Greer's increasing confidence*. Bk. 7, p. 15
- *Adam determines the routine*. Bk. 8, p. 6
- *Ruby and the supermarket*. Bk. 8, p. 9
- *Making a card for great-grandad*. Bk. 12, p. 14
- *Caroline spreads her wings*. Bk. 12, p. 18
- *Alexander and the trees*. Bk. 12, p. 21
- *Negotiations during block work*. Bk. 13, p. 6
- *Sabine designs a swing*. Bk. 13, p. 20
- *The Logging Industry. Connor shares his knowledge*. Bk. 14, p. 10
- *Te Marae*. Bk. 14, p. 22
- *Harriet's mermaid*. Bk. 14, p. 28
- *Shai-Li makes a friend*. Bk. 17, p. 16
- *Preparing a budget and playing with numbers*. Bk. 18, p. 12
- *From costume designer to movie maker*. Bk. 19, p. 24

Gussin Paley, V. (1992). *You can't say you can't play*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

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