



## Book review

### **The thinking child: Laying the foundations of understanding and competence by Pamela May**

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Pamela May, an early years consultant and former Senior Lecturer in Childhood Studies at Canterbury Christ Church University in the United Kingdom, has written a publication that is practical and accessible for early childhood teaching practitioners and students focusing on children's cognitive and intellectual development. This concise book is part of a child development series specifically emphasising the necessity for understanding cognitive strategies and characteristics that children use as part of their daily learning experiences. The central focus being on children's understandings and the processes involved in children's learning. In addition to the thinking child, the series includes the feeling, growing and social child, written by three other authors, all in a well formatted, user friendly size.

*The Thinking Child* initially starts with a *setting the scene* chapter that provides the reader with a clear and succinct account of historical and theoretical perspectives around cognitive processes. This follows key aspects of effective learning, namely play and exploration, creating and thinking critically, and active learning. May selects, arranges and describes these wide ranging concepts with clarity by incorporating brief examples in a manner that supports a practical understanding and application. Further, principles of children's cognitive development and how teachers recognise these are outlined and continued alongside more descriptions of children's daily learning experiences.

Some of the main concepts emphasised for teachers throughout the text include sustained shared thinking, strong teams that support children's deep level thinking, thoughtfully planned and nurturing environmental contexts and teachers' commitment to children's active learning. Repeatedly, the author stresses the need to intentionally foster new learning opportunities and, from these opportunities, to further develop children's thinking and ideas in creative and innovative ways. The importance and challenge of working effectively with parents and fostering inclusive practice are given full chapters in the publication, supporting practitioners to be collaborative, inclusive and responsive to the communities in which they work. The final chapter is interestingly entitled, *Equipped for life, ready for school?* This chapter starts with acknowledging the political and sector challenges and concludes with a practical focus based on caring, responsive and holistic early childhood pedagogies.

This publication is intended to guide teaching practice, and I feel that May has achieved this. Each chapter finishes with *challenges and dilemmas*, in order to provoke professional debate and question current thinking, actions and decisions of leaders and teaching teams. Multiple pedagogies and perspectives have been represented throughout, including *Te Whāriki*, which provides an international perspective. The ideologies of learning most effectively through



play and fostering the views of competent, motivated children in safe loving, thoughtfully planned environments translates well to the Aotearoa/New Zealand context of early childhood education.

### **References**

May, P. (2013). *The thinking child: Laying the foundations of understanding and competence*. Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge.