A NEW DEBATE ABOUT CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD.
COULD IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO EARLY CHILDHOOD PEDAGOGY
AND POLICY?

By

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ABSTRACT

The study analyses constructions of childhood within early childhood education pedagogy and policy in New Zealand. Constructions are evaluated against criteria for an education based on a concept of the “child as citizen” and children’s rights. Qualitative research methods were used. Constructions of childhood in pedagogy were examined through analysis of pedagogical documentation and discussions of teachers who met together over a year within a teachers’ network. The teachers’ aims were to base their practice on notions of the “child as citizen” and extend their thinking and practice from this basis. Constructions of childhood in policy were studied within two arenas: focus groups of government officials and representatives of early childhood organisations who met to discuss key issues in early childhood education policy; and early childhood education policy documents and commentary produced during the period 2000–2007. The analytic approach enabled an evaluation to be made of how children were represented within policy and practice, and the implications of constructions of childhood which would lead to democratic citizenship.

Constructions of childhood were found to be dominant influences on thinking about early childhood pedagogy and policy, and were associated with views about the purposes and breadth of early childhood education; the roles of teachers, children, families, community and the government; and favoured pedagogical and policy approaches. I argued that organisational cultures exert a pervasive influence on participants’ assumptions and values.

Three main areas where policy could be developed to better support democratic citizenship were identified.

First, citizenry rights should be established as a predominant goal for policy as it is for pedagogy. Where policy and pedagogical goals are integrated, both can work together to reinforce each other. One contention is that the process of making meaning of beliefs and critiquing them within collective forums can enable participants to contemplate what the child as citizen means conceptually and in

practice and policy, and in this way incorporate the beliefs into the ways children are treated in these domains.

Secondly, I argued for inquiry into the nature of early childhood education provision that we want in New Zealand society and within communities. Institutional thinking can raise barriers to envisaging new forms of provision that cater well for all children, and contribute to a wide range of outcomes, including dispositions for participating in a democratic society, support for families, social cohesiveness and community building.

A third challenge is for policy frameworks to support teaching and learning. Action research approaches with support from a professional development adviser were shown to enable teachers to explore the value base of their pedagogy and experiment with change. Although such approaches are being supported by some Ministry of Education initiatives in New Zealand, working conditions are not conducive to these approaches in many early childhood settings.

I have argued that structures are needed to support debate in pedagogy and policy and enable all parties, including parents, to participate in it. A new debate could enable different voices to be heard and new possibilities constructed for early childhood services as sites for building a democratic society.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE

Introduction

This study analyses constructions of childhood within early childhood education policy and pedagogy in New Zealand, during 1999 to 2004, a period of change in government and policy approaches to early childhood education. It examines:

1. the pedagogical documentation and perspectives of kindergarten teachers who took part in a teachers' research network over the course of a year;
2. the perspectives of government officials and representatives from national early childhood education organisations who took part in three focus groups; and
3. early childhood education policy proposals, published policy and commentary.

Theoretical background

Recent writers involved in developments in the sociology of childhood and children's rights advanced views that early childhood education centres could be created that promote "children as learners, respect children's rights, and [promote] civil respectful relationships between children and those who help them learn" (Mayall, 2003, p. 29). I was introduced to research and theory on the concept of "the child as citizen" and the children's rights movement when I visited the UK, Denmark and Sweden in 1997. This viewpoint derives from an understanding of childhood as socially constructed and as an important life phase in its own right (Prout & James, 1997a). Children are seen as citizens who co-construct "knowledge, identity and culture" (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999, p. 48). Children's rights to participate, and the value of participation, are emphasised, as well as children's responsibilities to act as citizens. As Prout (2003a) argued:

The 'century of the child' paid far more attention to the contribution of society to children than the contribution of children to society. Nevertheless, we are now beginning to recognise children and adults as bound by mutual interdependence. We are starting to notice the contribution that children make. Although our gaze avoided this for a long time, it is clear that children are, for example, both social carers and economic producers.

They are also the active makers of the future. Whatever the level of investment society makes, without the active participation of children there will be no social future. It is, therefore, necessary to reconsider children's claim on citizenship (p. 18).

From this standpoint Moss and Petrie (1997) have argued that we need to raise new questions about children's services. They were critical of the "dominant discourse" about children, parents and society that had shaped public policy towards children and children's services in the UK. They noted, for example, that:

Three ideas lie at the heart of the dominant discourse about the relationship between children, parents and society:

- children are the *private* responsibility of parents;
- children are *passive* dependants of parents and recipients of services; and
- parents are *consumers* of marketized services for children, whether these services are mainly publicly funded (e.g. schools) or privately funded (e.g. 'child care' services) (Moss & Petrie, 1997, p. 4). [Original emphases].

Moss and Petrie (1997) argued that such a discourse places emphasis on the child and parents, and parents and the market. The role of the child in society, societal responsibility and the broader social context have little place in this discourse. Moss and Petrie (1997) advocate a different discourse on the relationships between children, parents and society, within an alternative intellectual and ideological frame, based on principles and values concerning children, childhood, parents, and civic society.

Prior to this thesis and in the context of my work, I had criticised New Zealand's early childhood education policy during the 1990s, on much the same grounds, arguing that:

. . . there has been a steady erosion of high-quality publicly-funded early childhood education and [that] the competitive free market model is inappropriate for the provision of education services (Mitchell, 1996, p. 75).

Moss and Petrie's (1997) ideas raise questions about what a different discourse might mean for early childhood education policy and practice in New Zealand. Early childhood education centres could be conceptualised as community institutions playing a role in fostering a democratic society. A new discourse could lead to a reconstruction of the role of the state and an integrated approach to early childhood education policy development in New Zealand. In contrast, the state at that time played a minimal role in early childhood education provision. There were

limited governmental goals for early childhood education, poor co-ordination and inconsistent information between government agencies, and poor statistics and research about early childhood education (Early Childhood Education Project, 1996).

There has been an emphasis internationally on the creation of forums for diverse participants involved in early childhood education to enable discussion about education, children and childhood. Moss and Petrie (1997) advocated public debate about fundamental questions and issues concerning: aspirations for children; values about childhood and the place of children and childhood in society; and relationships between children, parents and society. They argued that early childhood education institutions as community institutions can provide opportunity for a wide group of participants to be engaged in debating these issues. Barsotti, Dahlberg, Göthson, and Asen (1992) noted that one condition for the renewal of early childhood education is that “the discussion of society’s policies for children and youth takes a much more central position in public discussion and action” (p. 7). They suggested that one way for this to happen is through locally based forums with participation of local groups. Pence (Dahlberg et al., 1999) described the development of a partnership between First Nations Elders and the University of Victoria, Canada, where a “forum” for learning, involving Elders, students, instructors, community members and written texts, enabled diverse views and voices to be heard.

According to May (2005), the concept of “child as citizen” is embedded in the foundation principle concerning the “empowerment” of children in New Zealand’s early childhood education curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). “*Te Whāriki* positioned the consideration of rights, interests and culture as a crucial foundation for delivering ‘quality outcomes’” (May, 2005, p. 23). *Te Whāriki* portrays children as active participants in learning, contributing with others to the co-construction of knowledge, a view consistent also with sociocultural views of learning associated with Vygotsky’s developmental theory.

Although *Te Whāriki* has been the early childhood curriculum in New Zealand for over 15 years, Cullen (2003) claims that it is “a complex document, which has been difficult to interpret as a guide to practice” (p. 271). Despite having a curriculum that is based on sociocultural theory, developmental practices are still very much in evidence in early childhood education as other researchers (e.g., Nuttall, 2003b)

have shown. Carr, et al. (2000) have also highlighted the difficulties for untrained staff in working with *Te Whāriki*.

The network of discourse, policy and pedagogy

The literature on the sociology of childhood makes it clear that differing constructions or discourses of childhood are linked to favoured pedagogical approaches and policy frames. Bacchi (2000) has argued that representations (such as representations of children) influence policy solutions such as funding and the shape of service provision. If the constructions underpinning these frames are deconstructed, it is possible to understand how they shape early childhood provision at both practice and policy levels, what is problematic about them, and how they might be changed. This thesis explores the discourses about childhood, how they were being taken up by teachers and policy analysts, and what their effect was in pedagogical practice and policy. How do the discourses compare to a discourse of “child as citizen”?

Literature such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) is used to develop a framework based on a goal for policy and practice of the “child as citizen”. The process is described in Chapter 2. This framework then forms the basis for evaluating the discourses found in my analysis.

As an analytic tool in undertaking deconstruction, I used feminist discourse analysis advocated by Bacchi (1999, 2000) who suggests that problem representations are nested one within another, and that successive layers of analysis are needed.

Procedures

Constructions of childhood and their impact on pedagogy and policy were analysed through data gathered in two separate forums: a kindergarten teachers’ network; and through focus groups of government officials and early childhood organisation representatives and interviews with each participant. Focus groups were held with government officials from departments having an interest in early childhood education; representatives from three early childhood education organisations (the teachers’ union, a national childcare association and the kindergarten teachers’

employing organisation) and two teachers and the professional development adviser from the network.

While the main interest of the teacher network was pedagogy, and that of the focus group was policy, the discussion within each group was relevant to both pedagogy and policy. The groups met separately, but were “linked” through one of the three discussion papers I prepared for the first focus group meeting. This included an example of pedagogical documentation which was used as a catalyst for discussion about conceptions of children and childhood. As well, the groups were “linked” by the presence of four people in each context: two teachers, the professional development adviser and me. These participants were able to use network discussion material in the focus group.

The focus group meetings were structured around three discussion papers which I wrote on the following topics:

1. conceptions of childhood in relation to New Zealand’s early childhood policy framework and professional support for teachers. This paper included a vignette of a teaching and learning project from one of the kindergartens in the teachers’ network;
2. the contribution of early childhood centres to a democratic society, focusing on whether the government should fund and support for-profit provision; and
3. funding and regulatory mechanisms for early childhood education, especially whether the government should provide an entitlement to free early childhood education for every child.

The second and third discussion papers were about matters where new policy was being formulated at the time.

Contribution to theory

This study makes a contribution to theory by analysing relationships between differing constructions of childhood, institutional frameworks of participants and preferred policy mechanisms. It evaluates the implications of policy approaches for democratic citizenship. Such analyses have not been made before in a New Zealand setting. The study contributes to thinking critically about policy and practice, enabling assumptions and constructions to be questioned, thus creating the possibility for change in the manner described by Foucault “as soon as one can no

longer think things as one formerly thought them, transformation becomes both very urgent, very difficult and quite possible” (cited in Moss, 2000, p. 4).

The context

A Labour-led coalition government, elected in October 1999, shifted the balance from a minimal state approach in relation to early childhood education that was inherited from the previous government, to a more supportive approach and a new acceptance of greater state responsibility for early childhood education. The government undertook to mainstream human rights considerations into all policy and implementation (Wilson, 2001) and placed emphasis on collectivism in industrial bargaining and involvement of sector representatives in policy development. During this period, the 10-year strategic plan for early childhood education, *Pathways to the Future: Ngä Huarahi Arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002) was published, and new policy mechanisms, discussed by Dalli and Te One (2003), May (2004) and Mitchell (2005), were developed to support it. Aspects of the strategic plan, particularly early childhood education funding and staff qualification requirements, became subjects of debate. The central policy debates were about: funding of early childhood services as public services; whether to fund the user or fund the service; whether funding should be targeted to the “disadvantaged” or universal for all children; whether early childhood education should be free; and regulation of services (how prescriptively and to what standard staff qualifications, ratios and group sizes should be regulated). Some of these debates were also old and recurring. These debates remain current although new directions were set in the period 2001 to 2005.

Moss and Petrie (1997, 2002) have argued that making explicit the constructs of childhood that underpin policy and pedagogical approaches can open these up to scrutiny and change. The debate offered an opportunity to analyse policy-in-the-making through examining early childhood education policy proposals put forward and promoted by early childhood sector representatives and, on the other hand, by key government officials. These differences in perspectives on early childhood education policy indicated differing agendas for policy reform. They involved wider discourses about market, parental choice and the role of the state, which could all, in turn, be traced to dominant constructions of children and conditions of childhood.

The government officials and early childhood organisation representatives who participated in my study and supported different policy proposals, and representatives outside my study who made media commentary about early childhood policy gave reasons for their positions. These offered insight into the position they assigned to children. The statements took the form of a debate about childhood and policy for early childhood education.

My background

When I started my doctoral study in late 1999, I had worked in leadership positions as an official in unions covering early childhood teachers for 13 years. From 1986 to 1990 I was general secretary of the New Zealand Free Kindergarten Teachers' Association (NZFKTA), the union covering kindergarten teachers. In 1990, the NZFKTA and the Early Childhood Workers' Union amalgamated to become the Combined Early Childhood Union of Aotearoa (CECUA). This amalgamated union covered teachers in both kindergartens and childcare centres and I was one of two national secretaries of CECUA from 1990 to 1993. Another union amalgamation in 1994 with the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) brought early childhood teachers, school support staff and primary teachers into one larger union, NZEI Te Riu Roa. These amalgamations were driven by an analysis of the need to develop a powerful collective organisation to counteract the divisive individualistic policies of the time. I was senior research officer for NZEI Te Riu Roa from 1994 to 1997, and assistant national secretary of NZEI Te Riu Roa from 1997 to 2000. Throughout this time I had a lot of contact with the teachers who were union members, hearing from them about issues in their working lives, developing proposals and advocating for these.

A key issue during this period was the difference between kindergarten teachers and teachers in childcare centres with respect to pay and conditions. Kindergarten teachers were covered by collective employment contracts and were generally better paid. Many teachers in childcare centres were covered by individual employment contracts and there were variable pay rates and conditions. While kindergarten teachers had some noncontact time as part of their working week, many teachers in childcare centres had no noncontact time, and minimum paid time per term even for staff meetings. While 96 percent of kindergarten teachers were union members, only about 20 percent of teachers in childcare centres belonged to

the union. Low levels of unionisation made it impossible for these teachers to speak from a common understanding about their pay and working conditions, since there was no forum bringing them all together to discuss the issues.

In 2007, pay parity has been achieved for kindergarten teachers but has still not been fully realised for other teachers in the sector.

My experiences as an industrial advocate gave me an appreciation of, and interest in, the linkages between teachers' perspectives on their practice, their pay and working conditions on the one hand, and government responsibility and funding on the other. Secondly, they reinforced my belief in the value of people having opportunity to work together to discuss ideas about early childhood education provision and how things might be different if they acted together to achieve change. Thirdly, these experiences fostered my interest in the discourses that relate to teachers, and to policy analysts' ideas about teachers' work and educational provision.

Perhaps the most successful union initiative and campaign was the establishment of the Early Childhood Education Project, a working group of representatives from each of the major community-based early childhood education organisations in New Zealand that in 1995–1996 developed a blueprint for early childhood education policy (Early Childhood Education Project, 1996). I was a member of the working group with Clare Wells, and formed the secretariat. Geraldine McDonald was the Chair.

Changes resulting from these policy developments were likely to become embedded because they were based on a shift in values and underlying structures, rather than simply a supply of additional resources which could be easily withdrawn, as occurred in the 1991 budget cuts to early childhood education funding for under 2-year-olds (e.g., Dalli, 1994).

My union experience gave me opportunities to monitor and analyse policy. As a unionist, I developed an interest in policy issues and how policy linked to practice. Policy development influenced practice, but practice issues did not generally inform policy development.

In 1997 I was awarded a Winston Churchill Fellowship to study early childhood education policies and practices in Denmark, Sweden and England. I met with researchers, unionists, government officials and representatives of early childhood

education organisations. I visited early childhood centres and out-of-school care programmes. I attended two major early childhood research conferences: the European Early Childhood Educational Research Association Conference in Munich (3–6 September 1997) and the Thomas Coram Research Unit Conference “Childhood and Children’s Services: Time for a new approach” in London (7 October 1997).

In my three months of travel I talked about ideas that took me in new directions and led to an interest in analysis of policy from the perspective of “child as citizen”, and to thinking about the role early childhood education services can play as community organisations contributing to active citizenship and participatory democracy.

I was especially influenced by the work of Gunilla Dahlberg (Dahlberg et al., 1999), and the Thomas Coram Research Unit Conference and the discussion document prepared for this conference (Moss & Petrie, 1997).

Gunilla Dahlberg (personal communication, August 1997) advocated a new dialogue about children and childhood. She cited an Italian historian, Carlo Ginsburg, “Our world is full of solutions but not the critical questions”. She asked, “How can we construct emancipatory practice where the child is the subject?” which is central to the Reggio Emilia-inspired research project in Stockholm (Dahlberg, 2000). A discussion with Hans Dahlquist, a member of the Stockholm project network and pedagogue in Hojdens Daghem (a Reggio Emilia-inspired pre-school) in August, 1997 outlined the idea of creating firstly, a network as a space for teachers to critically reflect on their practice, and secondly, the use of pedagogical documentation as a tool to understand how the child is constructed in the early childhood education centre. These ideas fitted with my interest in the world of practice informing the world of policy. The Stockholm project (Dahlberg et al., 1999) established networking of early childhood pedagogues combined with pedagogical documentation as tools to create a “co-constructive learning culture” (p. 135).

Other writers have also promoted the value of wider discussion of educational policies. For example, Prout (2000) noted the value of bringing together fragmented organisations that are working on participation initiatives in the UK to debate ways of giving centrality to children’s participation in society. Similarly in Denmark, Brostrom (2003) argued that:

. . . society, parents and pedagogues/teachers need to engage in constant debate on societal and educational issues, and the outcomes need to be expressed, in their turn, in the curriculum in order that they may influence the thinking and actions of future educators (p. 237).

I brought to the design of my study a belief in collectivism and the power and wisdom of those involved at the grass roots, to identify issues and propose sound policy proposals. These require forums for their involvement.

At the beginning of 2001, I became a senior researcher at the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER), with specific responsibility for early childhood educational research. In mid-2000 I became a member of the working group of 31 sector representatives asked by the Minister of Education to draft the strategic plan for early childhood education in consultation with people involved in the field as teachers/educators, parents, employers, teacher educators, researchers and academics. Consultation and work occurred over a 12-month period.

A technical strategic plan working group, of which I was also a member, was then asked to prepare a report to the Minister of Education with more specific proposals derived from the draft strategic plan that would fall within a government budget allocation of \$100m over 10 years. This report was published in October 2001 (Early Childhood Education Long Term Strategic Plan Working Group, 2001). Subsequently, the government published its own 10-year strategic plan *Pathways to the Future: Ngä Huarahi Arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002).

New funding arrangements were announced in the budget on 29 May 2004 and are described in Chapter 4. A review of regulations is ongoing in relation to staffing and environmental standards.

The research questions

The research questions I addressed were:

1. What constructions of childhood are evident in early childhood education pedagogy, and what are their effects?
2. What constructions of childhood are evident in early childhood education policy approaches in New Zealand, and what are their effects?

3. What are the policy implications for the creation of early childhood education centres that would support democratic citizenship?

Significance of the study

There are three key reasons why this study is timely.

First, the thesis examines constructions of childhood that underpin thinking and discussion about early childhood education policy and pedagogy in contemporary New Zealand. It explores different views from a range of participants: teachers, government officials and early childhood education organisation representatives, and analyses policy, policy-in-the-making and public statements. The thesis brings together the worlds of teachers and policy makers within an overall analytic frame of “child as citizen”. Bringing consideration of pedagogy, and of the child, into policy debate provides new perspectives and prioritises issues for children. This has not been done before in New Zealand, and contributes to debate about the nature and role of early childhood education in New Zealand.

A number of writers (Dahlberg et al., 1999; Moss & Petrie, 1997; Prout, 2000) have suggested that societies need to discuss a new approach to children’s services that recognises the child as “citizen” who is not shaped by adult-controlled institutions, but who plays an active role in shaping them and in co-constructing knowledge and identity. Prout (2003c) argued that giving visibility to children as separate identities is increasingly necessary in societies where children are becoming a smaller proportion of the population in relation to older age groups, and where children’s lives are becoming increasingly complex and diverse. He suggested that societies need public institutions to represent children’s needs and interests so that just decisions about allocation of resources for children and distribution of resources among generations can be made. Hodgkin and Newell (1996) also called for a “visibility of children” through provision of information about children as a group and as individuals in their own right, statistical information, research and monitoring. Wintersberger (1995), in describing shortcomings of traditional policy approaches, noted that traditional childhood policies usually refer to children as individuals or subgroups of children, but rarely to children in a generational perspective.

Prout (2005) has argued that how children develop agency as participants is rarely studied:

The agency of children as actors is often glossed over, taken to be an essential, virtually unmediated characteristic of humans that does not require much explanation. The real novelty of the approach [studies of children as agents] is found in seeing that children may have agency at all and in the injunction of researchers to go out and find it. This they have most successfully done (pp. 64–65).

This thesis identifies relationships between constructions of childhood and early childhood practice, and what democratic citizenship may look like in an early childhood education setting.

Secondly, the thesis analyses the role of a teachers' network and policy discussion forums as means to create debate about early childhood education policies and pedagogy. The thesis research was committed to critiquing constructs of children, and exploring implications for creation of early childhood centres that support democratic citizenship. Cannella (1997) argued that social justice and equity are human rights, and that reconceptualising early childhood education involves pursuing social justice for young children, in ways that challenge traditional power hierarchies. The teachers' network and policy discussion forums were intended to provide opportunity for such investigation and critique.

Thirdly, the thesis is set within New Zealand's changing political context. The thesis contributes to understanding policy themes and issues being addressed in New Zealand, particularly in respect to topical issues of the role of the state, community and the private sector, and funding and regulating early childhood education which were discussed in the forums and were being addressed in policy reviews. It provides analysis of these issues from a human rights and "child as citizen" perspective. There have been recent international comparisons of aspects of policy frameworks (Moss, 2000; OECD, 2001), and some analyses of New Zealand's early childhood education policy framework since the publication of the government's early childhood education strategic plan (Dalli & Te One, 2003; May, 2004; May & Smith, 2006; Mitchell & Brooking, 2007). The strategic plan was awaiting important details about funding and regulation when these analyses were made. My thesis provides an analysis of New Zealand's policy framework for the early 2000s.

Analysis of the different understandings and perspectives that underpin thinking about policy may also make a contribution to cross-national understanding. While Moss (2000) warns against the idea that context can be treated as an independent variable or that policies or programmes in one country can be used as a model or exported to others, he noted that:

. . . country A may provide a prism or lens for looking at country B. Adopting a Foucauldian perspective, cross-national work can help us to ‘think differently’ and therefore critically: the lens of Country A may make it easier to see in Country B what is uncritically taken for granted and make the invisible visible and the familiar strange, so enabling dominant assumptions, discourses and constructions in Country B to be questioned (Moss, 2000, p. 4).

Outline

Chapter 2 reviews literature in relation to childhood as a social structure and social constructions of children. The theoretical frame is based on a concept of the “child as citizen” and draws from the sociology of childhood and international early childhood education policy research. In this chapter, I develop principles that I use in this study as criteria for evaluating early childhood pedagogy and policy based on a concept of the “child as citizen”.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the research design, methods of research and approach to analysis used in this study. Methodological issues include consideration of ethical issues, and reflection on my role as an “outsider” then an “insider” in early childhood education policy development during 1999–2003, while I was also investigating policy for this study.

Chapter 4 analyses New Zealand’s early childhood education policy as it was at the end of 2004 when I finished collecting data for this study. New Zealand’s shifting early childhood education policies, which became part of the thesis, and influenced the evolution of the thesis, form a context throughout subsequent chapters.

Chapter 5 examines three case studies to discuss dominant constructions of childhood that were evidenced in the teachers’ network, and their association with differing pedagogical practices.

In Chapter 6, main themes about childhood that posed challenges for teachers and the value of the network and pedagogical documentation in supporting pedagogical change are discussed.

Chapter 7 considers the views of government officials and early childhood organisation representatives participating in the focus groups, examining the range of perspectives about children and childhood that were evidenced in these forums, and their association with differing beliefs and approaches to early childhood education policy. Briefing papers to the government's review of funding made by some of the government departments in which these officials worked are also examined.

Chapter 8 brings together the worlds of teachers and government officials to examine ways in which policy and pedagogical frameworks interact to support or hinder the creation of early childhood centres that contribute to democracy and citizenship. Implications of the study are discussed.

CHAPTER 2: THE CHILD AS CITIZEN AND EARLY CHILDHOOD PEDAGOGY AND POLICY

This study is about constructions of childhood that shape possibilities for early childhood pedagogy and provision. My premise for the study is the need for a “new debate about childhood”, to enable early childhood pedagogy and policy to be framed around a concept of “child as citizen” and children’s rights. Such a framing could offer a foundation for early childhood services as sites for democracy, for creating “citizens of the world” and for responding to challenges of the “knowledge society”.

Two approaches from the sociology of childhood have informed the study. One emphasises childhood as a feature of social structure separate from other social structures such as the family, and examines the position of children as a group within a society (Qvortrup, 1997). The second approach is concerned with the idea that concepts of childhood are constructed in different times and contexts, highlights limitations of some dominant constructions to adequately represent children’s experiences, and emphasises the importance of children’s agency (e.g., James & Prout, 1997a). The meaning of the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC), particularly the participation articles which deal with children’s civil and political rights and the provision articles about right to education, is another useful tool for thinking about children’s rights and agency.

This chapter starts with a description of core themes within the sociology of childhood. The themes focus on reasons why explicit theories of childhood provide a useful basis for thinking critically about early childhood education, and the inadequacies of some commonly-held discourses of children and childhood to realise possibilities for children’s participation. These ideas from the sociology of childhood have highlighted new ways of representing and understanding children and childhood that foreground children’s experiences. Children are given visibility in their own right. In this chapter, I also discuss how views of children and childhood are productive of different approaches to early childhood pedagogy and

policy, highlight the effects of differing representations and why these may be problematic.

In the final section, I draw on insights from the sociology of childhood literature and early childhood policy research to develop a framework of principles that I use in this study as criteria for evaluating early childhood pedagogy and policy based on a concept of the “child as citizen”.

Childhood as a social structure

Childhood as a social structure is concerned with the characteristics that children who live within a defined locality have in common. Studies of childhood as a social structure aim to provide children and childhood with “conceptual autonomy” (Qvortrup, Bardy, Sgritta, & Wintersberger, 1994, p.xi) by making children the unit of observation rather than others on whom they are dependent. This approach to thinking about children’s experiences considers children outside the frame of the family and can be valuable in analysing early childhood education policy where children’s interests and parental and governmental interests are not always complementary and may even conflict. Qvortrup (1997) noted:

To liberate children conceptually, and thus give voice to their specific life conditions, may in the long run challenge current political thinking about children and in this way challenge our existing social order (Qvortrup, 1997, p. 87).

A large-scale project, “Children as a Social Phenomenon” (Jensen & Saporiti, 1992), carried out in 16 European countries from 1987 to 1992, found very little statistical data about children as separate units of observation. Except for details such as age and sex, or where children were seen as having “problems” such as ill health or deviance, children were often subsumed within statistics about “families”, “households”, “mothers” or “fathers”. As a result, children could not be accounted for in a statistical sense (Jensen & Saporiti, 1992; Qvortrup, 1997).

Likewise in New Zealand, the Early Childhood Education Project (1996) highlighted that information, statistics and research about children in early childhood services in the mid 1990s were very limited. There was, for example, no accurate information about how many children attended an early childhood service, since many children were attending more than one service and were double-counted in statistics. Further, there was no official analysis of whether provision was

available in all localities to enable all children to access early childhood services, or whether costs were barriers to children attending. New policy developments were not evaluated in terms of their impact on children and families.

Two years before I began this study, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (1997) report on New Zealand recommended the need to:

1. develop a comprehensive policy or plan of action for children and young people;
2. review all government policy, practice and legislation and bring these into line with the Convention;
3. give priority to children in budget allocation;
4. gather better disaggregated statistical data and information on the situation of children; and
5. study the impact of economic reforms on children; reduce inequalities between Māori and non-Māori (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 1997).

Jensen and Saporiti (1992) illustrated that different interpretations can be made when family statistics (children and siblings, children's living arrangements) and special statistics (such as migration, dwelling conditions, employment and income) are presented from a child's perspective rather than that of their family. For example, if "low-income families" is the unit for data collection, the number may be lower than if "children in low-income families" is the unit for data collection. A similar configuration has been shown to exist in New Zealand. Although no official statistics of children in poverty in New Zealand were being reported in the 1990s, the Child Poverty Action Group (2001) which undertook such an analysis, showed that while around a fifth of all New Zealanders lived in relative poverty, children were more likely to be in the lowest quintile. Jensen and Saporiti (1992) also showed that children make a work contribution through school work (including homework), paid work and housework. Across the countries in their project, the working week for a child aged 10 was about 40 hours, similar to a working week for adults in many industrialised countries. In these examples, presenting the position of children through the lens of families overestimated children's socioeconomic position, and failure to include unpaid work within a definition of work rendered children's work contribution largely invisible.

Jensen and Saporiti (1992, p. 66) suggested there are linkages between the relative number of children in societies and their economic position. Comparisons of data in the “Child as a Social Phenomenon” project showed that while children and the elderly are financially poorer than others who are “economically active”, children are poorer than the elderly. While Jensen and Saporiti attributed this to the larger number of elderly people compared with children, it could also be that the elderly may be better able to advocate for themselves.

Studies of childhood as a social structure have been valuable in highlighting children as a unit in statistical and social reporting (Qvortrup, 1997); the distribution of resources to children and children’s economic position compared with other groups in society (Hodgkin & Newell, 1996; Jensen & Saporiti, 1992); children’s contribution to society through school work, caring, household and paid work (Jensen & Saporiti, 1992; Mayall, 2002; Morrow, 1994); children’s contribution to society through building and maintaining family relationships and taking responsibility for self and others (Mayall, 2002); and the idea of generation and gender as a means of understanding childhood (Alanen, 2001; Mayall, 2002).

Why analyse structure?

Some scholars (noted by Qvortrup, 1994, p. 5) have argued that “childhoods” are context-bound, complex and diverse, and that usage of the singular term “childhood” suggests there is only one childhood. Prout (2005) regards as problematic the tendency of studies of childhood as a social structure to be concerned with the large-scale patterning of the childhoods of a given society and to pay insufficient attention to the “changing character of the boundaries between nationally defined societies and the flows across these boundaries. . . . it tends to homogenize the forms of childhood found within the boundaries” (p. 64). He also thought childhood as a social structure “was more focused on the pattern than how it is produced and constructed and it glosses over how stability and scale are achieved” (p. 64).

Qvortrup (1994, p. 5) defended such analysis on the grounds that it makes it possible to indicate common characteristics shared by children living in particular time, space, economic conditions or other criteria. He suggested that focusing solely on the unique prevents insight into what is common. Analysing “childhood” enables comparisons to be made across other age groups, within a given area, and across cultures and nations. In this way, “childhood” is a structural category which

can be used as a unit of analysis and compared with other structural categories. Likewise, Jensen and Saporiti (1992) argued that changing the unit of observation to children enables children's position to be illuminated, intergenerational comparisons to be made and children's contribution to society to become more visible.

Ideas from the literature on childhood as a social structure have informed my later analysis of early childhood education policy for this study. These include the value of:

1. examining the position of children separately from their families in respect to early childhood education access and participation; who provides early childhood education and why; government's rationale for supporting early childhood education; funding mechanisms (who are they intended to sustain?); and the nature of the environmental standards set by the government, e.g. curriculum, staffing, space;
2. making comparisons across age groups and countries by comparing resource allocations and infrastructure support to early childhood services in New Zealand with those to early childhood services in other countries; and
3. examining the kinds of data collection and research needed to make issues for children in early childhood education visible and consequently more open to discussion and change.

These ideas also draw from cross-national comparisons of early childhood education policy, especially the OECD's (2001) review of education and care policy in 12 OECD countries, and the more recent set of reviews in 20 OECD countries (OECD, 2006). The structural conditions provided through a policy framework do not, however, offer an absolute guarantee of what happens in an early childhood setting. This is because the setting is not static. It is influenced by the relationships and people, processes, resources and ideas that contribute to it. But the conditions do provide a basis for more or less favourable conditions that have been shown to link to outcomes for children and families in many research studies. Longitudinal research, for example, has shown that structural conditions of teacher qualifications, low child:staff ratios and small group size are associated with well-established measures of process quality (Smith et al., 2000).

In my study, as well as examining resources and conditions to support early childhood education provision, I draw on social constructionist theory to analyse

the discourses and relationships in early childhood pedagogy and policy within which childhood is produced.

Social constructionist theory

Social constructionist theory emphasises the diversity of childhoods that are locally constructed, and children's agency. James, Jenks, and Prout (1998) described this as a "new paradigm" of the sociology of childhood in which children are understood as "social actors shaping as well as shaped by their circumstances" (p. 6). Underlying the paradigm are two core ideas about childhood and children:

1. Childhood is socially constructed within relationships that are situated in time, place and culture. Childhood is part of society, not a precursor to it.
2. Children have rights and agency. Children are social actors, "beings not becomings".

Their pioneering work on constructing and reconstructing childhood, and that of others (e.g., Dahlberg et al., 1999; Jenks, 1982; Mayall, 1996; Qvortrup et al., 1994), during the 1980s and 1990s has drawn on a range of disciplines. These writers question much 20th century research that suggests that childhood is experienced in a similar way by all children. A particular criticism is of the idea that children progress through preordained universal stages of development to maturity, as is conveyed in normalised definitions of developmental psychology and socialisation theory. Underlying their ideas is their view that there are many diverse childhoods created through social relationships within different settings.

The diversity of ways in which childhood is defined is demonstrated in historical analyses of how children and childhood have been constructed according to values within social and cultural contexts. A first such analysis, Aries' (1962) *Centuries of Childhood*, showed the concept of childhood as separate from adulthood emerging during the 15th to 18th century in Europe. Before that time infants were portrayed as vulnerable but were not depicted as different from adults after about ages seven or eight. Hendrick's (1997) survey of British childhood in the 19th and 20th centuries also demonstrated constructions and reconstructions of childhood changing from ideas of childhoods distinguished by class, life experiences and geography (urban/rural), to ideas of a more uniform and universal childhood. These

and other analyses highlight that while children's biological immaturity is a fact, cultures decide how childhood is understood.

Social constructions of childhood differ not only within societies but also within particular "disciplines, professions, agencies, settings and policy areas" (Moss & Petrie, 1997, p. 20). Cannella (1997) has summarised how historical context, religion, the arts and science have contributed to constructions of the child. She argued that "philosophical perspectives would suggest that the concept of child does not represent a universal truth, but a category created through language that may actually limit and control the lives of those who are 'constructed' (and potentially those who are part of their lives)" (p. 27).

A key point that James and Prout (1997b) take from such analyses is that:

Concepts of childhood—and their attendant practices, beliefs and expectations about children—are shown to be neither timeless nor universal but, instead, rooted in the past and reshaped in the present (James & Prout, 1997b, p. 232).

Common discourses about children and childhood

James et al. (1998) suggest that it is helpful to understand pre-sociological discourses about childhood which have become "taken-for-granted 'truths'" (p. 9) because they continue to shape views and theories of childhood today.

Common discourses about childhood that have been influential in shaping policies for children have been described by several writers (e.g., Dahlberg et al., 1999; James et al., 1998; Moss & Petrie, 1997; Qvortrup, 1994). In this section, I outline these discourses, examine how writers have unpacked the assumptions underlying them, and discuss the usefulness of analysing what is problematic about them in order to evaluate their impact. Diagnosing what is problematic can also be a starting point for thinking about alternative discourses (Bacchi, 1999). These ideas about common discourses and feminist discourse theory were used as analytic tools for this study.

Four of the discourses—the "naturally developing child", the "immanent child", the "child as innocent" and the "redemptive child"—are considered by writers to be problematic in denying or minimising children's agency, and in portraying the child as largely "weak, poor and needy" (Moss & Petrie, 2002). These discourses minimise consideration of the interests of the child if they are the predominant concern. They are not mutually exclusive but may be dominant in different

contexts. The fifth discourse—the “child as dependant”—is characterised by absence of a view about the child as a person. Instead, the focus is on the child’s relationship with the adult who cares for the child.

The construction of the *naturally developing child* derives from an understanding that children follow an inevitable process of maturation or stages of development towards adult skills and competencies. Biological and psychological characteristics differentiate children from adults. The child development body of knowledge, especially during the latter part of the 20th century, is presented as scientific truth rather than value-based, and assumed to apply to all human beings regardless of context. Many writers (Boyden, 1997; Burman, 1994; Cannella, 1997; Dahlberg et al., 1999; James et al., 1998; Mayall, 1996; Morss, 1990; Moss & Petrie, 2002; Walkerdine, 1984; Woodhead, 1999) have been enormously influential in criticising and deconstructing this approach. Mayall (1996) described developmental psychology as “both individualist and universalist: individualist in its focus on the child set apart from social context; and universalist in aiming to uncover truths applying to all children” (p. 43). Universalism is related to biological assumptions, with social events occurring in a particular context being interpreted as natural and therefore universally applicable (Mayall, 1996, p. 44).

Numerous writers have identified as problematic the overemphasis on the natural development of the child on the grounds that children’s knowledge, and therefore their competencies and agency, are devalued since maturation through biologically determined stages rather than experience is emphasised (Archard, 1993; Burman, 1994; Cannella, 1997; James et al., 1998; Mayall, 1996; Morss, 1990). Writers have also argued that child development theories offer few opportunities to explore difference. The idea of a universal childhood ignores variations in cultural values and the position of children in cultures around the world (Boyden, 1997; Burman, 1994; Prout & James, 1997b; Walkerdine, 1984).

Cannella (1997) contends that child development has strengthened dominant ideologies and advantaged those already holding power. She claims that it has created hierarchies which privilege those at higher levels, and normalised standards, marginalising those who do not meet the standards and those characteristics that are not included in the standards. In the New Zealand context, MacArthur, Purdue and Ballard (2003) have contended that medical discourses of children with disabilities have dominated people’s understandings of disability and marginalised them:

Such a discourse sees disability as abnormal, as a problem within the individual child that requires professional and expert treatment, management, intervention and cure (Ballard, 1998) (p. 135).

According to Mayall (1996), individualising children's development enables policy makers to apportion blame for dysfunction onto the individual rather than onto social frameworks to support children. The examples of MacArthur et al. (2003) demonstrate how teachers who are influenced by medical or charity discourses of disability have regarded disability as deficit-bound and the responsibility of others. As a consequence, these teachers have denied access to early childhood education and upheld practices that are exclusionary. These authors have argued the discourses have been a key factor in influencing practice.

Child development was an element for early childhood teacher education and practice in New Zealand before publication of the draft early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, in 1993, and final publication in 1996. *Te Whāriki* is a bicultural curriculum from birth to school age “concerned with the whole child and a developmental framework (Piaget and Erikson), and with learning in a social and cultural context (Bruner and Vygotsky)” (Carr & May, 1990, p. 11). There are several teacher accounts about the shift in thinking and focus that a bicultural and sociocultural approach to curriculum entailed (e.g., Carr, Hatherly, Lee, & Ramey, 2003; Carr, May, & Podmore, 1998; Nuttall, 2003a; Te One, 2003). For example:

Many of us who were teachers at the time [that *Te Whāriki* was published] were using PIES (physical, intellectual, emotional, social) skills as the implicit or explicit framework for early childhood outcomes (Carr et al., 2003, p. 188).

The shift in emphasis of *Te Whāriki* was to “the view that learning was about participation and reciprocal relationships between people, places, and things, rather than about skills and knowledge that are ‘in the head of’ the learner” (Carr et al., 2003, p. 188). This shift necessitated further shifts in the role of the teacher from being the transmitter of knowledge and skills to a view that a community of learners co-constructs learning. Te One (2003) demonstrates the teacher shifts required through this account from Jean Simpson, then Head Teacher at Seatoun kindergarten:

If a child couldn't hop you taught it. Now with *Te Whāriki* we were focusing on what they could do—working from where children were at. *Te Whāriki* had a huge part in changing how we worked with children (Te One, 2003, p. 38).

Three related discourses have been described as influential in social and educational policy and practice (Dahlberg et al., 1999; James et al., 1998; Moss & Petrie, 2002). The *immanent child* is a child described by the 17th century philosopher, John Locke, as a “tabula rasa” starting life with a mind without ideas or characters who is being prepared for adulthood. The *child as innocent* first described in the work of Rousseau, is born with natural goodness (Dahlberg, 2000, p. 45) and their innocence needs to be protected so they are “unspoiled by the violence and ugliness that surrounds them” (James et al., 1998, p. 14). Moss and Petrie (2002) argued that understandings of the immanent child and the child as innocent merge in the idea of *the child as redemptive vehicle* who in the future “will save the world”. In common, writers have argued that these dominant constructions portray children as “human becomings” not “human beings” (Qvortrup, 1994). Children are dependent on adults and positioned where others always speak for them (Cannella, 1997, p. 42). Dahlberg et al. (1999, p. 48) argued that these constructions produce “a ‘poor’ child, weak and passive, incapable and under-developed, dependent and isolated”. Children are being prepared for adulthood and future productivity:

Each stage of childhood, therefore, is preparation and readying for the next, and more important, with early childhood the first rung of the ladder and a period of preparation for school and the learning that starts there (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 45).

A focus on innocence and protection from the dangers of childhood makes it legitimate for adults to over control and supervise children. “From this point of view the space of childhood becomes narrower, more specialised and under the adult gaze” (Prout, 2003b, p. 13). Children may be denied opportunities to explore and address the realities of their lives (Silin, 1995).

Public provision of education services is also developed to complement these constructions. In early childhood services where a predominant focus is on getting children “ready for school”, deficit approaches, where teachers assess children by a list of basic skills and teach skills that are poorly developed or lacking, overshadow much of the child’s experiences and capabilities. At school age, children may be retained in a school grade if they do not pass tests, as happens in many US classrooms. Traditional skills and knowledge are narrowly defined, overlooking learning dispositions—dispositions that are positive about learning, and able to support further learning. For example, Siraj-Blatchford (2004) concludes that in order to address orientations that can lead to lower outcomes for children, educators

are required to “take an active role in planning for, supporting and developing children’s identities as masterful learners of broad and balanced curriculum” (p. 11).

In a fifth approach to the development of public provision of children’s services, the child’s interests are not presented at all or are portrayed as secondary to those of adults. The underlying discourse is of the *child as dependant*. Children are largely absent in this discourse. A point is that unless the child’s interests are given primacy, and education goals are predominant in education service development, adults’ interests may override those of children. My later analysis of data on policy for this study will show the discourse of “child as dependant” is an enduring one, associated with institutional perspectives and favoured mechanisms for early childhood funding and regulatory policy in New Zealand.

Recently, Prout (2005) argued that the analytic approach taken in social constructionism, like developmental psychology and socialisation theory, has tended to be too categorical, setting up either/or dichotomies primarily between “culture” and “nature”, children as “being” and children as “becoming”, childhood as a feature of social structure and children as agents, and separation of the individual and society. He contended that these dichotomies have been useful initially in finding representations of children and childhood that offered new ways of understanding children and childhood. Nevertheless, the use of dichotomous categories as an analytic frame has created problems because it “directs attention away from the mediations and connections between the oppositions they erect” (Prout, 2005, p. 68). Prout has argued that it would be useful to use analytic language that finds the “middle” that has been excluded by the dichotomies and enables both ends and middle to be seen together. From Prout’s perspective the issue is not that these constructions should be rejected, but that they should be seen as one type of knowledge out of many. Bacchi (1999) argued that in unpacking problem representations in discourses, it is also crucial to analyse what is absent in representations or what issues are left untouched. In my study, I analysed discourses and their effects, asking what was left as unproblematic in different representations, and suggesting how they might be represented differently.

Writers have highlighted positive aspects of discourses that have been portrayed as inadequate when they have been presented as representing the only or main way to think about children. For example, children are biologically immature and less

experienced than adults and there are universal prerequisites for children's health, care and learning (Woodhead & Montgomery, 2003). There are positive aspects of emphasising the vulnerability of children to highlight social problems, reinforce the importance of publicly recognised standards for the treatment of children, and draw attention to ways in which children's protection rights can be upheld. Many current child-centred approaches in early childhood education emerged from the view of the child as innocent, including valuing the idea of free play (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 45). Nor is it reasonable to say that children are "beings", not "becomings", since all people are in some respects incomplete and dependent, as Lee (2001) argues.

A useful distinction is Mayall's (2003) differentiation between "biological vulnerability" arising from children's physical weakness, lack of experience and knowledge, and "socially constructed vulnerability". While biological vulnerability requires adult provision and protection, "socially constructed" vulnerability refers to "the ideas, policies and practices that adults put into place which confirm children in social inferiority and dependence. Children are vulnerable because adults do not respect their rights; they lack political, social and economic power" (Mayall, 2003, p. 9).

Policy and practice approaches that predominantly emphasise goals of early childhood education which support a process of inevitable development, or protect the vulnerable child, give insufficient weight to provision and possibilities for children's participation. In this view, the stages a child goes through are predetermined, and knowledge, skills and values for "transmission" are decided by adults. This would suggest that, as a consequence, prominence may be given to narrow goals that bypass the question of children's experiences and children's agency.

Why analyse constructs of childhood?

Several writers have demonstrated that constructs of childhood underpin distinctive approaches to policy and practice. Analysis of constructions of childhood can be a useful basis for identifying problem issues within these domains. Writers have also pointed to the inadequacy of some representations of children to cater for the challenges resulting from demographic and technological change in contemporary society.

Constructs underpin policy and practice

A prime reason for analysing constructions of childhood for this study is that these constructions are part of the discourses that structure policy and practice approaches in early childhood education. They can offer an explanation of how policy and practice have come to be the way they are. Moss and Petrie (1997; Moss & Petrie, 2002), for example, have analysed dominant ideas about children and childhood that have been associated with problems within UK children's services. Their critique of children's services in the UK highlighted that:

1. services were narrowly conceived as serving a single function such as education during school hours, and were fragmented and compartmentalised;
2. resources were often wasted because of the narrow function and fragmentation;
3. the pay and conditions of staff in children's services were often poor, training was limited and work undervalued;
4. different policy approaches were generated by different agencies producing piecemeal and unco-ordinated initiatives; and
5. children were often excluded from policy development.

Moss and Petrie (1997, 2002) argued that the ideas underpinning these problems were:

that children are the *private* responsibility of parents; that children are *passive* dependants; and that parents are *consumers* of marketised services for children. These ideas 'construct children as poor and weak' (2002, p. 5). [Original emphases].

Other writers too (e.g., Cannella, 1997; Dahlberg et al., 1999; James & Prout, 1997a; Mayall, 2003; Woodhead, 1999) have examined interrelationships between views about children and childhood and views of the roles and responsibilities of early childhood institutions, early childhood teachers, parents/caregivers and the state:

[Early childhood institutions] and pedagogical practices for children are constituted by dominant discourses in our society and embody thoughts, conceptions and ethics which prevail at a given moment in a given society (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 62).

Constructions of childhood within early childhood policy and practice in New Zealand have not been analysed. One of the aims of this study is to undertake such an analysis.

Critical analysis and change

According to Mayall (2003) “the social construction of childhood leads us adults to question our assumptions, by recognising that they are tied into our social and political systems and goals” (p. 21). Since educational goals are matters of value and reflect cultural perspectives, making understandings explicit enables perspectives to be recognised and to become open to debate.

Mayall (2003) has argued that the child is largely defined according to adult views of how society should operate. She described the growth of developmental psychology occurring in the UK in the 20th century after children were taken out of household and paid work and put into schools in the mid to late 19th century as:

. . . an example of the way concepts complement and underpin policy. People had to re-formulate concepts about children and childhood at a time when they had to think about a state education system (p. 12).

According to Mayall, developmental psychology reinforced ideas of the child as nonparticipant in society and childhood as preparation for adulthood. She contended that constructions of childhood as a single unitary construct are problematic. Applying these ideas to the context of international welfare agencies, Boyden (1997) showed that where those international welfare agencies have imported Western ideas about childhood to third world countries without taking account of the conditions of children’s lives as they are experienced there, the ideas may be inappropriate and increase rather than reduce children’s disadvantage. Western views of how society should operate become standards for judging others.

Understanding discourses about children and childhood contributes to an ability to deconstruct and explain them, and so become more critical about them. Drawing from Bacchi (1999), I have highlighted her view that unpacking problem representations in discourses also requires attention to be paid to what is not represented. I have used these ideas in my study to analyse discourses within New Zealand pedagogy and policy, and highlight representations that can forward an agenda for policy and pedagogy based around children’s rights and the child as citizen.

Inadequacy of current representations of childhood

Another reason for rethinking representations of childhood is the inadequacy of current representations to reflect the conditions of contemporary childhood. Prout

(2003a; Prout, 2005) has discussed “a growing disparity between conventional ways of representing children and the new realities of children’s lives” (Prout, 2003a, p. 14), arguing that this disparity has created a need for policy to reconstruct childhood in ways that focus on the possibilities of children’s citizenship. The following areas of childhood change, which Prout (2003a; Prout, 2005) described as occurring across Europe and North America, can also be identified in New Zealand:

1. Children are becoming a declining proportion of the population while life expectancy is increasing and the population is ageing. As noted above, social policy analysts (Jensen & Saporiti, 1992) consider that this situation has seen, and will see, the redistribution of social resources away from children towards the elderly. How to give visibility to children’s situation in relation to other groups in society, in a way that their interests are not subsumed by majority interest, has become a key policy question. Likewise in New Zealand, the dwindling proportion of New Zealand children relative to other age groups is a phenomenon that will continue in the next decades.

The number of children (0–14 years) is expected to gradually decline over the projection period from 890,000 in 2004 to 820,000 in 2021 and 790,000 in 2051. Their share of the New Zealand population will drop significantly, from 22 percent in 2004 to 16 percent in 2051 (Statistics New Zealand, 2005).

2. Children’s life circumstances are becoming more differentiated through family change and income inequality. Children are spending substantial time outside the family and relating to more than one social network, a process described as “dual socialisation” (Dencik, 1989; Prout, 2003a). Dencik (1989) demonstrated that dual socialisation requires children to make “flexible adjustments” between one environment and another and as environments shift in time. Children need to make sense of a world in which there are divergent values and perspectives. In New Zealand, several studies (Department of Labour and National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women, 1999; Mitchell & Brooking, 2007) have shown the percentage of children enrolled in more than one early childhood service at the same time is around 22 percent. This requires children to make “flexible adjustments” between home and two or more early childhood service environments.

3. There has been a transformation in the length of time children spend in early childhood institutions, for example in Scandinavia most children spend many hours per week in such institutions, where previously they did not (Mayall, 1996, p. 56). Mayall argued that this has led to rethinking the relationships between the state, parents and children in Scandinavian countries where children are now regarded as a shared responsibility of the state and parents, rather than the state being regarded as “backup” to parents. In New Zealand, a growing proportion of children are attending early childhood services for longer hours per week. Ministry of Education figures show that average weekly hours of attendance in all early childhood services except playcentre have increased between 1998 and 2004 and there is a consistent trend towards younger children (under two) attending early childhood services. A survey of early childhood services undertaken in 2003 found pressure for places for this age group (Mitchell & Brooking, 2007). These trends warrant close attention to provision for this age group and standards for quality.
4. Growing income inequality and child poverty is a feature of Western societies, including New Zealand (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2005). Low income may affect children’s development, health and survival, educational achievement, job prospects and life expectancies. Mayer (2002), who reviewed literature on the influence of parental income on child outcomes, wrote:

Parental income is positively correlated with virtually every dimension of child well-being that social scientists measure, and this is true in every country for which we have data. The children of rich parents are healthier, better behaved, happier and better educated during their childhood and wealthier when they have grown up than are children from poor families (p. 30).

Poverty limits opportunities for children to access education and health care and participate in family activities and their own culture.

5. Childhood is becoming more “transnational” through migration across national borders and through “flows of products, information, values and images that most children routinely engage with” (Prout, 2003a, p. 9). Migration is a source of ethnic and racial diversity among children and has direct implications for early childhood settings where culture-bound ideas about children’s experiences are inadequate to do justice to the diverse realities of children’s lives. New Zealand society will have greater ethnic diversity in the future. Durie (2001), speaking of a framework for Māori educational advancement, described one of

the goals of education in New Zealand to be about preparing people to actively participate as citizens of the world:

Quite apart from the increasing urbanisation of New Zealand, the shrinking globe will bring the cultures of other lands and communities to Turangi and Taupo, and in turn these towns will be only a stone's throw from London and New York (p. 4).

As well, the Māori, Asian and Pacific populations are all projected to increase their share of New Zealand's population, while the European share is expected to decrease (Statistics New Zealand, 2005).

Prout (2003a; Prout, 2005) argued that these trends as set out above call for new ways of representing children that are responsive to children's experiences; in my view the same argument can be made in the New Zealand context. In fact, McDonald (1978) was an early advocate for putting the child at the centre of research and policy analysis in New Zealand. He argued that from 1979 onwards, the rights and civil status of children were being opened up for debate, and that there was a move towards a social justice agenda in children's services.

Children as citizens with rights

The discourse of "needs" has been the norm in conceptualisations of children as vulnerable and requiring protection, or as being prepared for the future. This discourse positions children as dependent on the goodwill of adults (Moss & Petrie, 1997, 2002). What is left as unproblematic or silent in this discourse is the child as agent.

The concept of "child as citizen" picks up ideas from social constructionism about the value of appreciating and treating children as social actors. This concept also draws from the idea of considering childhood as a discrete group separate from other groups in society, positioned within childhood as a social structure. Dahlberg et al. (1999, p. 48) described the child produced under the "child as citizen" paradigm as a "co-constructor of knowledge, identity and culture". This view acknowledges that children have agency: they are shaped by society and they also shape it through their own experiences and interactions with others. This vision of children as competent and active contributors to society is a founding aspiration for children in *Te Whāriki*, New Zealand's national early childhood curriculum

(Ministry of Education, 1996). A discourse of children's rights was also used in the development of the Early Childhood Code of Ethics (Dalli & Mitchell, 1995).

There are two core ideas in the concept of "child as citizen":

1. The child is a citizen, with rights and responsibilities, a member of a social group, an agent and a voice to be listened to (Moss & Petrie, 2002, p. 101). Children are agents in their own learning and the learning of others.
2. Childhood is important in its own right, and not simply in relation to adulthood.

Te Whāriki positions children as bringing rich prior experiences to the early childhood setting, as participants in their own learning and the learning of others, and as capable of developing their own "working theories about themselves and about the people, places and things in their lives" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 44). *Te Whāriki's* aspirations for children are:

To grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society (p. 9).

My argument is that the construct of "child as citizen" is a new paradigm that places children's rights and agency to the forefront. As a basis for pedagogy and policy it could help to build a democratic society, cater better for societal change that is sweeping New Zealand and other Western societies, and help build a knowledge society where knowledge is co-constructed, not simply imparted.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC), which New Zealand ratified in 1993, is a useful framework against which to consider children's rights and agency. UNCROC has been ratified by all countries except Somalia and the United States and is legally binding on those countries that have ratified it.

Children's rights under UNCROC are commonly perceived as falling into three categories: provision rights; protection rights; and participation rights (Lansdown, 1994) and the particular efforts needed to ensure them. Rights apply in different settings in which the child engages, including the home and the early childhood setting.

Lansdown (1994) summarised the rights in the UNCROC as follows:

The provision Articles recognize the social rights of children to minimum standards of health, education, social security, physical care, family life, play, recreation, culture and leisure.

The protection Articles identify the rights of children to be safe from discrimination, physical and sexual abuse, exploitation, substance abuse, injustice and conflict.

The participation Articles are to do with civil and political rights. They acknowledge the rights of children to a name and identity, to be consulted and to be taken account of, to physical integrity, to access to information, to freedom of speech and opinion, and to challenge decisions made on their behalf (Lansdown, 1994, p. 36).

A major shift in thinking embedded in UNCROC is that children are not only to be protected, but also to be empowered to participate in society. The key article essential to children's participation rights is Article 12 that:

State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

All articles offer a basis against which to examine early childhood practice and policy, but the participation articles and Article 29 on provision of education are particularly relevant because they have been incompletely realised in New Zealand. In addition, as Noonan (2002) noted in the foreword for *Education is a Human Right 1998: Education International Barometer on Human Rights and Trade Union Rights in the Education Sector*:

Education and human rights are inextricably intertwined . . . Quality education underpins sustainable development, democracy and the exercise of fundamental human rights. Equally, quality education for all can only develop where there is an environment of respect for human and trade union rights (Education International, 1998, Foreword).

These wider political and civil, economic, social and cultural rights, as well as International Labour Organisation (ILO) standards¹ are relevant to consideration of early childhood policy and practice that can support a “child as citizen” world view. Their relevance to children may be indirect, such as through their influence on the working conditions and opportunities for democratic participation of staff and parents. These conditions may enable or hinder adults in early childhood settings to work in the interest of the “child as citizen”.

Participation rights

Participation rights have been incompletely realised in New Zealand (Action for Children and Youth Aotearoa, 2003; Le Lievre, 1999). Ten years after New

¹ Pertaining to Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining; The elimination of forced and compulsory labour; The abolition of child labour; and The elimination of discrimination in the workplace.

Zealand became a signatory to UNCROC, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2003) recommended that the New Zealand Government “undertake a review of legislation and regulations affecting children . . . to ensure that they appropriately integrate and apply the right of every child to be heard and have his or her views taken into account in accordance with article 12”. Biddulph’s (2004) stocktake of children’s rights in New Zealand concluded that “an active programme to promote children’s right to participation within the Government and non-government sectors is needed, along with the development and promotion of education resources, guidelines and other tools to assist organisations to involve children in decision-making and information giving processes”

Alderson, Hawthorne, and Killen (2005) reviewed the relevance of UNCROC, particularly participation rights, for the care of premature babies, who are highly likely to be excluded from these rights. They pointed out that, while it is easy to see premature babies benefiting from provision rights to health care, education, welfare and amenities, and rights to protection from abuse, neglect, violence and discrimination, participation rights are different. Many are linked to adult civil rights and autonomy. They illustrated through example that adults who know and care for premature babies and treat them as people who can express a view can respect their participation rights. A baby’s cry for example (expressing a view) may be responded to or ignored.

Cannella (1997) has argued that social justice is a human right, including for younger children, requiring those who work with children to acknowledge power relationships, build partnerships with children, families and their communities, and work towards social justice permeating decision-making and everyday practice. She argued that educators need to hear and respond to young children and to those who influence children in the worlds outside the early childhood setting, including parents;

The diverse everyday lives of young human beings, and the voices of their families and communities in those everyday lives, must be accepted as legitimate, multidimensional, and worthy of being heard (Cannella, 1997, p. 166).

While many writers have focused on participation rights for older children, there is now a body of research and exemplars on how very young children’s participation can be fostered in early childhood centres (e.g., Clark, 2005; Clark & Moss, 2001; Dockett & Perry, 2002; Lee, Hatherly, & Ramsey, 2002). They show a range of

participatory approaches that can be used to “listen” to young children’s views and experiences. These approaches include children making their own photographs and drawings, children leading guided tours of their early childhood setting which they document as maps to explain their perspective, informal interviewing and observation of children, and discussion and planning with children from their documentation. Carr (2001) demonstrated how assessments, using a learning stories approach,² can invite children, families and staff to participate in a social community of learners and teachers; provide spaces for everyone to contribute; and help participants to “develop trajectories of learning”—to story and re-story. The Reggio Emilia approach (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998) has demonstrated that children’s voice can be expressed in many ways, not just verbally.

Cannella (1997) argued that hearing the voices of children and their families and responding to these is likely to require educators to challenge their own conceptions of children. She contended that educators also need to be open to diverse viewpoints, since it is often only those views that are consistent with educators’ views that are really respected and heard. Beliefs may operate unconsciously and be based in past experiences. Woodrow (1999, p. 7) noted the calls recently:

. . . to hold our understandings about children and childhood up for re-examination, to reconsider them from multiple perspectives, and to consider how dominant understandings of children and childhood take account of difference, promote or constrain equity and equality, and position the child (Cannella, 1997; James & Prout, 1990; Silin, 1995; Woodrow, 1996; Woodrow & Brennan, forthcoming).

The participation of children will also require pedagogical approaches and tools, and policy frameworks that support children as active agents in their own learning.

More adequate representations of children in sociocultural approaches are making it possible to highlight supports for learning that foster children’s participation. Claxton and Carr (2004, pp. 91–92) have described potentiating (powerful) learning environments as:

. . . those that not only invite the expression of certain dispositions, but actively stretch them, and thus develop them. It is our view that potentiating environments involve frequent participation in shared activity (Rogoff, Chavajay, & Matusov, 1993, p. 533) in

² A learning stories approach is described by Carr (2001, p. 29), as “a particular form of documented and structured observations that take a storied and non-deficit (credit) approach, and an underlying agenda of protecting and developing children’s identities as learners in accordance with the national early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki.”

which children or students take responsibility for directing those activities as well as adults (Brown et al., 1993).

The concepts of scaffolding (Wood, Bruner & Moss, 1976), of co-construction of learning and communities of learners (Rogoff, 1994; Rogoff, Turkkanis, & Barlett, 2001), and enactivist learning theory (Sumara & Davis, 1997) offer relevant concepts and tools for promoting children's participation. There are challenges to practitioners to be aware of and understand such theoretical approaches, to critically analyse their beliefs about learning and pedagogy in their own setting, and to take approaches that support participation of children and families. Practitioners may need external help to do this since what is assumed is not seen as problematic and unpacked.

From a policy perspective, these concepts raise question such as:

1. How consistent is the curriculum and supporting material with the concept of child as participant?
2. What enabling conditions (e.g., teacher education and professional development, working conditions, tools) are offered to underpin teachers' work?

These policy issues that connect with practice, are analysed in my study.

Provision rights

While there is no specific mention of access to free early childhood education within UNCROC and other rights conventions, UNCROC Article 28 does recognise the right to education and that primary education should be compulsory and available free to all. The right to primary education is portrayed as a move to achieving the right to education progressively. UNCROC also states that the:

. . . education of the child shall be directed to

The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;

The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. . . ;

The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilisations different from his or her own;

The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society. . . ;

A rights-based approach to education can use evidence about disparities in access and quality of early childhood education, and about benefits of quality early childhood education, to argue that quality early childhood education should be universally available, as New Zealand's Chief Human Rights Commissioner, Rosslyn Noonan, has done.

Noonan (2001) has said that New Zealand's failure to ensure all children have access to quality early childhood education could amount to a form of discrimination, because many children are missing out on the opportunity to attend a good early childhood centre. She referred to Article 29a arguing that:

In the New Zealand context the results of the Competent Children longitudinal study and other research confirm the very significant impact of quality early childhood education on a child's achievement at primary school. On that basis early childhood education can be viewed as an implicit element of the right to free primary education provided for in the international Conventions that New Zealand has ratified (Noonan, 2001, p. 65).

Where children cannot participate in early childhood education because the service is not available in their locality, or they cannot access a service because of cost or waiting lists, or where the service is not appropriate to their special needs or language and cultural aspirations, they are discriminated against.

New Zealand has never had a universal entitlement to free early childhood education.

Unlike the school-aged child, who had long had a right as a citizen to a free education, of the kind for which he is best fitted and to the fullest extent of his powers (Fraser, 1939, p. 2), children under the age of five years had no universal entitlement (May, 2004, p. 140).

A universal entitlement to free early childhood education came closer to realisation after the strategic plan working group in 2001, comprising members from private and community-based community groups, made a recommendation for "whānau and families to have a universal entitlement to a reasonable amount of free, high quality, ECE" (Ministry of Education, 2001a, p. 5), although the then Minister of Education, Trevor Mallard, termed this "blue skies thinking" and charged a technical working group to produce a more fiscally responsible document. The recommendation appeared again, this time outside the terms of reference (Early Childhood Education Long Term Strategic Plan Working Group, 2001). The

strategic plan *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki* did not mention free early childhood education, or a universal entitlement. However, the government's 2004 budget announced free early childhood education for three- and four-year-olds in teacher-led community-based services for up to 20 hours per week from July 2007. This was not expressed as an entitlement, and excluded the private sector. A year later, following outcry from private, for-profit providers who saw their commercial interests under threat, the free early childhood policy was extended to private centres. A story of the policy shifts, an analysis of the discourses about children and their rights that emerged from the government announcements and the effects of these discourses, are discussed in Chapter 7.

Goals and principles for evaluating early childhood education policy and pedagogy

Drawing on insights from social constructionist theory, literature on children's rights and international evidence (Cohen, Moss, Petrie, & Wallace, 2004; European Commission network on childcare and other measures to reconcile employment and family responsibilities, 1996; Hodgkin & Newell, 1996; OECD, 2001) of successful early childhood education and care policy, I have highlighted three principles for evaluating constructions of childhood within early childhood pedagogy and policy. The principles support a construction of the child as a citizen, and aspirations for children in New Zealand: *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood education curriculum, and Durie's (2001; Durie, 2003) framework for considering Māori educational advancement.

The purpose of the principles is to offer criteria for this study against which to examine discourses of children and childhood in policy and pedagogy, unpack problem representations and evaluate discourses and their impact. The principles will be revisited at the end of the thesis.

Consensus on goals for government action to give priority to children's rights have emerged internationally and in New Zealand (Durie, 2001, 2003; Hodgkin & Newell, 1996; OECD, 2001; Parliamentary Assembly for the Council of Europe, 1996).

Broad goals based on a vision for children as citizens

According to the OECD (2001), those countries that have developed strong early childhood education and care systems have developed policy centring predominantly on children as a social group with rights. I have argued that the concept of “child as citizen” is a new paradigm in early childhood education that could offer a base for pedagogy and policy that contributes to building a democratic society. If there is agreement about children’s participation rights as outlined in UNCROC, early childhood education provision will enable children to participate in society, including in education, health services, the economy, culture, technologies, sport and recreation. This goal is consistent with aspirations for children in *Te Whāriki* and with the New Zealand Government’s commitment to mainstreaming human rights into all policy development and implementation (Wilson, 2001, p. 2).

The concept of “child as citizen” is open to interpretation. Brostrom (2003) highlighted possible differences in interpretation of *Te Whāriki* when he questioned the meaning of the aspirations, principles and strands. He contended discussion of meaning and values needs to occur at a societal level:

What do we mean by phrases such as competent and confident learners and communicators? And what does it mean to ‘make a valued contribution to society’? If we have not discussed at a societal level how we understand and define ‘the future citizen in the future society’, then we have no chance of incorporating such a vision in the activities we create with children (Brostrom, 2003, p. 235).

In their description of the Stockholm project, Barsotti et al., (1992) also argued that one condition for the renewal of early childhood education is that “the discussion of society’s policies for children and youth takes a more central position in public discussion and action” (p. 7).

Later, in my examination of discourses underpinning pedagogy in Chapter 5, I shall show how some teachers debated their vision for children in relation to the practices within their kindergarten, and in so doing clarified and refined the vision, making it meaningful for their community, and for goals of biculturalism in New Zealand society. A central argument of this thesis is that such discussion helps generate a collective vision, which is sufficiently defined to be meaningful, and which is not static.

Principles

What principles are able to guide the advancement of a goal of “children as citizens” as a basis for pedagogy and policy? Analysis of UNCROC, and international and New Zealand research evidence suggests that at least three principles have been found to be useful conceptual tools for thinking about provision for children on this basis. These are the principle of:

1. integrated action;
2. that all children will have opportunity to participate without discrimination of any kind; and
3. best outcomes.

The main reason for making these principles explicit is that they make visible the values that guide my analysis and are used in my evaluation of the effects of constructions of childhood. Each of these principles is elaborated in the following three parts.

Principle 1: Integrated action

The principle of integrated action refers to both structural integration of policy and conceptual integration within policy and pedagogy. Cohen et al. (2004) noted that:

Structural dimensions include departmental responsibility, staffing, funding and regulation. Conceptual dimensions include principles, values, identity, approaches to practice, understandings of children and of learning, care and other purposes (p. 9).

Durie (2001), speaking about Māori educational advancement in New Zealand, explained why integrated action across the “multiple players in education” needs to be a guiding principle. He stated:

The principle of integrated action recognises the multiple players in education. Success or failure is the result of many forces acting together—school and community; teachers and parents; students and their peers; Māori and the State. Lives in New Zealand are too closely intertwined to pretend that action in one sphere does not have repercussions in another. Unless there is some platform for integrated action, then development will be piecemeal and progress will be uneven (p. 7).

The OECD (2001) report of early childhood education provision in 12 OECD countries also provided a rationale for integrated action, noting that:

OECD countries are recognising that coherent early childhood experiences are more likely to facilitate children's transitions from one sphere of life to another, and provide more continuity in their early learning and development (OECD, 2001, p. 76).

In addition, the report noted that “a more holistic approach” makes the most efficient use of resources.

As well as administrative unification of the early childhood sector within a single government department, the OECD report described other mechanisms for creating coherence for children that had been used by countries in the review: including co-ordination across departments and sectors by appointment of a political leader with policy responsibility for children under 12 years in France, and an Inter-Ministerial Committee on Children in Denmark, and Ombudsmans or Councils for Children in several countries. It cautioned that a co-ordinated system needs more than structure and organisation to provide coherence for children: policy makers, staff and parents also need to share an integrated view. For example, “pedagogical integration” with the schools sector can support children's transition to school, although such integration could also undermine the pedagogical approaches of early childhood education if a school culture dominates. Collaboration rather than integration, could also occur through services in a locality, whether school-based or early childhood education-based, forming networks to work closely together, and through teachers in both sectors planning and organising activities together. Many examples from the OECD countries showed ways in which early childhood services worked together, or integrated, with services for families, especially health and social services.

There is evidence that not taking a co-ordinated approach within government agencies can be problematic in policy development and for those who are affected by the policies. Hodgkin and Newell's (1996) inquiry into effective government structures for children singled out many serious problems relating to poor interdepartmental co-ordination, including complex issues where the nature of the problem is not fully understood, issues which involve more than one government department and are not dealt with satisfactorily by any, complications from lack of co-ordination (such as one department having “financial” responsibility and another “provision” responsibility for a service), contradictory policies between departments dealing with the same issue from different perspectives, and narrow rather than multidisciplinary approaches being taken to training and research because a department saw these only from its own perspective and discipline. In

New Zealand, *Future Directions*³ (Early Childhood Education Project, 1996) revealed similar issues: inadequate communication between and within government departments, and inaccurate and inconsistent information provided by government departments to early childhood services. It also highlighted inequitable treatment between the early childhood sector and the schools sector in respect to governmental financial and infrastructural support, with early childhood education less well supported. Within New Zealand's early childhood policies during the 1990s, several writers (e.g., Dalli, 1992; Dalli, 1994; May, 1992; Mitchell, 1996) have documented the impact of these and other problems.

Principle 2: All children without discrimination

The second principle draws on four different articles of UNCROC:

Article 2 of UNCROC set out that the rights should apply to all children without discrimination of any kind, and that appropriate measures should be taken to ensure that the child is protected against any discrimination. The Committee on the Rights of the Child identified Article 2 as one of four principles that must inform the analysis and implementation of all other rights (UNICEF, 2001). This human rights perspective on discrimination is consistent with *Te Whāriki*'s emphasis on every child's right to belong:

Te Whāriki is designed to be inclusive and appropriate for all children and anticipates that special needs will be met as children learn together in all kinds of early childhood education settings (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 11).

Three other Convention articles are of particular priority in respect to addressing discrimination in the content and provision of New Zealand's current early childhood services.

The first of these is Article 23, which highlights the right of children with disabilities to have access to special assistance and education and training in order to support the fullest possible social integration and individual development. This requires early childhood services to be "inclusive", and is supported in New Zealand's mandatory requirements, the "Desirable Objectives and Practices" (DOPs), for early childhood services "to plan, implement, and evaluate curriculum in which there are equitable opportunities for learning for each child irrespective of

³ The report of a team of representatives from the major community-based early childhood organisations in New Zealand who consulted widely with their constituents, called for and received many submissions and questioned government departments about early childhood education policy in New Zealand in 1995/96.

gender, ability, age, ethnicity, or background . . .” (Ministry of Education, 1998, p. 1). Cullen (2002), drawing from interview and survey data from two Ministry of Education research contracts (Bourke et al., 2002; Cullen & Bevan-Brown, 1999), highlighted tensions between a philosophy of inclusion and practice:

Limited communication between professionals, parents and educators does not support an ecological approach; diversity is acknowledged but can also be undervalued when the nature of a sociocultural curriculum is misunderstood; and, the rights of the child to be included may be undermined when resourcing is insufficient to support inclusive practices (Cullen, 2002, p. 142).

The second relevant article is Article 29c. This article states that the purpose or content of education be directed to the development of the child’s cultural identity, while the third relevant article states that the child has a right “in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, and to enjoy and use his or her own language” (Article 30). These two articles are crucial in respect to indigenous Māori and to the many cultures represented in New Zealand society.

Durie (2001; 2003) argued that cultural identity is a critical prerequisite to wellbeing, and that an educational goal must be to promote security of identity. He argued that Māori, as tangata whenua (people of the land) and indigenous people of New Zealand, have a set of rights that “indigenous people might reasonably expect to exercise in modern times” (Durie, 2001, p. 8). Since in New Zealand, many Māori have inadequate access to te ao Māori (the Māori world), facilitating such access needs to be a key educational role. This includes “access to language and knowledge, access to culture and cultural institutions such as marae,⁴ access to Māori economic resources such as land, forests, fisheries, access to customary foods, access to Māori networks especially whānau,⁵ and access to customary ways of exploring the world through time and space” (Durie, 2001, p. 4). Early childhood services in New Zealand can make a contribution to at least some of these domains.

Durie (2003) also argued that the rapid change in New Zealand’s overall ethnic diversity requires teachers in early childhood centres to interact positively with children from different cultural backgrounds. “. . . unless interaction with children recognises and builds on their cultural realities, opportunities for educational gains

⁴ Open space or plaza in front of meeting house.

⁵ Extended family.

may be lost” (p. 3). And as Noonan stated, “The early childhood sector in New Zealand has a crucial role to play in ensuring that our children grow up celebrating diversity, respecting difference, and with the confidence to feel at ease with ‘others’ rather than to fear them” (Noonan, 2001, p. 67).

Principle 3: Best outcomes

The third principle in the framework I am proposing, the principle of best outcomes, draws on two UNCROC articles. Article 3 confirms that in all actions concerning children the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. This includes children’s health and safety, as well as standards “established by competent authorities”. This is another Convention principle that the Committee on the Rights of the Child have agreed must inform the analysis and implementation of all other rights (UNICEF, 2001). In respect to the content and purpose of education, Article 29a states that the education of the child shall be directed to “The development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential”.

The meaning of “best outcomes” is contested. Interpretations of outcomes of education are analysed in this study. What is problematic about these interpretations if childhood services are to be sites for creating citizens and participatory democracy? What are alternative discourses, and what follows from these?

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have introduced key themes from the sociology of childhood that are useful for this study. These themes emphasise children as having identities in their own right, and recognise the agency of children as citizens. Drawing on literature about childhood as a social structure (Jensen & Saporiti, 1992; Qvortrup, 1997; Qvortrup et al., 1994), I have highlighted the value of examining resource allocations and infrastructure to support and sustain early childhood education provision, and of comparing resource allocations across generations. From social constructionist theory, I have outlined common discourses of children and childhood found in early childhood education.

My main argument has been that understanding discourses about children and childhood contributes to an ability to deconstruct and explain them, and so become more critical about them. An exploration of what is problematic in common

discourses offers insights that challenge views about the role of education as transmission of knowledge and skills and that highlight power hierarchies that are limiting of children as citizens.

Human rights conventions also provide a challenging lens through which to analyse early childhood education policy and practice from the perspective of children.

Drawing from these ideas and international evidence I have developed a framework of goals and principles to offer criteria for evaluating discourses and their impact. I have highlighted Bacchi's (1999) view that unpacking problem representations in discourses also requires attention to be paid to what is not represented. In my study, I analyse how policy and pedagogical discourses left different problems unrepresented. I shall propose a discourse and associated approaches to early childhood policy and pedagogy in New Zealand that represents problems differently, and can forward an agenda for early childhood education based around children's rights.

The next chapter discusses the research design and methods.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

The research design and methods are explained and justified in this chapter, and methodological issues are discussed. The focus of the thesis is an analysis of constructions of childhood within early childhood education pedagogy and policy. The study used qualitative research methods. Constructions of childhood in pedagogy were studied through analysis of pedagogical documentation and discussion by teachers who met together over a year within a research network. The teachers' aims were to explore what the notion of "child as citizen" might mean for their practice. Constructions of childhood in policy were studied within two arenas: focus groups of government officials and representatives of early childhood organisations who discussed key issues in early childhood education policy; and early childhood education policy documents and commentary produced during the period 2000–2007. The analytic approach used enabled comparisons to be made between differing constructions of childhood, and associated approaches to pedagogy and policy. Constructions were evaluated against criteria for an education based on a concept of the "child as citizen" and children's rights. This evaluation enabled an examination of the implications for pedagogy and policy of constructions of children and childhood which would lead to democratic citizenship.

Diagram 1 **Research design**

The chapter begins by discussing the methods of research and approach to analysis used in this study. In the first part, methods for analysing constructions of childhood within pedagogy are discussed. In the second part, methods within policy are discussed. Methodological issues are then considered. These include consideration of ethical issues, and reflection on my role as an “outsider” then an “insider” in early childhood education policy development during 1999–2003, while I was also investigating policy issues for this study. It is important to note that the research design included an action research component which had its own goals as well as providing data for the study.

The research questions

The unit of analysis is the construction of childhood within early childhood pedagogy and policy. Such constructions imply views of children and how they are treated. The research focus is on the potential of early childhood services to be sites for citizenship and participatory democracy, and the problems of constructing policy frameworks to support this goal. The three research questions are:

1. What constructions of childhood are evident in early childhood education pedagogy, and what are their effects?
2. What constructions of childhood are evident in early childhood education policy approaches in New Zealand, and what are their effects?
3. What are the policy implications for the creation of early childhood education centres that would support democratic citizenship?

Method

Investigating early childhood pedagogy

Constructions of childhood and views of children within pedagogy were investigated through action research undertaken by 15 kindergarten teachers who participated in a year-long research network (Dahlberg et al., 1999) with a professional development adviser, and myself. These teachers aimed to base their practice on notions of the “child as citizen” and to extend their thinking and practice from this basis. The network teachers collected documentation of practice and generated their own plans for pedagogical change from the network discussions. Teachers were interviewed by me at the start and finish of the network about their beliefs, their views on pedagogy, their thinking about early childhood education policy issues, and their experiences of working in the network. The interview schedules are set out in Appendices D and E. Three teachers wrote journals that became part of the analysis.

The action research generated documentation of pedagogical practices, transcripts of network discussions, interview responses and teacher journals. This data enabled an examination of how different constructions limited or enabled early childhood services to operate as sites for democratic participation, and how teachers interpreted national early childhood policies locally.

This section begins by examining the rationale for using action research and pedagogical documentation as methods to investigate practice and as a means to generate data for this study.

Rationale for using action research and pedagogical documentation

Action research

Action research is defined broadly as ‘the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it’ (Elliott, 1991, p. 69).

Action research is a form of applied qualitative research that enables data in specific early childhood settings to be gathered for the purposes of teacher self-improvement and as research evidence. One of its values was its focus on investigation of actual practices within kindergartens, rather than practices in the abstract.

The two core goals of action research are improvement and participation (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Action research is usually depicted as involving spirals of self-reflection, including: planning a change; acting and observing the consequences and processes of change; reflecting; and replanning, etc.

In reality, these stages are not neat and separate, but may overlap as participants respond to their experiences:

The criterion of success is not whether participants have followed the steps faithfully but rather whether they have a strong and authentic sense of development and evolution in their *practices*, their *understandings* of their practices, and the *situations* in which they practice (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 563). [Original emphases].

Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) discuss the progression from action research of a practical nature during the 1970s, to more explicitly “critical” and “emancipatory” action research, to critical participatory action research that is oriented to community action, and undertaken in participation with others. The main method of inquiry for investigating pedagogy in this study had features in common with critical participatory action research, where critical reflection occurred within the teachers’ network, and actions and data collection were undertaken by teachers in their own kindergartens. The orientation to “community action” in this study was an orientation to democratic citizenship and improving practice from this perspective.

The rationale for using critical participatory action research was based on evidence that action research can enhance professional learning and generate reflective discussion, and had been used for these purposes in New Zealand early childhood services (e.g., Carr et al., 2000; Jordan, 1999). Ministry of Education resources produced in New Zealand during the 1990s (Ministry of Education, 1998, 1999) encouraged teachers to adopt action research and critically reflective approaches to enhancing pedagogy within their early childhood settings. Teachers in my study were familiar with action research. They were willing to collect data about practice from their own kindergartens, and discuss the data with others in the network.⁶ For my study, analysis of reflective discussion was used to understand connections between constructs and action.

Pedagogical documentation

Documenting pedagogy is commonly used by early childhood education practitioners in New Zealand as a process in assessment, planning and evaluation. It has been made visible through the work of Margaret Carr and others (Carr et al., 1998; Carr et al., 2000; Carr et al., 2001) through the use of a “learning and teaching story”⁷ framework, and in 2005 through a resource kit of exemplars of assessment, “Kei Tua o Te Pae. Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars” (Ministry of Education, 2005b) and accompanying professional development.

Carr et al. (2001) has argued that assessments “can be formative of democratic communities of teaching and learning” (p. 29). She sees this happening in three ways:

Assessments can act as a ‘conscription’ or recruitment device for children, families, and the staff team, to participate in a social community of learners and teachers;

Assessments can provide social spaces for everyone to contribute to the curriculum;

Assessments can assist participants in the community to develop trajectories of learning—to story and re-story (Carr et al., 2001, p. 29).

⁶ Further discussion of the social aspect of critical reflection is included in a subsequent section discussing the use of focus group methodology to investigate constructions of childhood within policy.

⁷ A Learning Story is “a documented account of a child’s learning event, structured around five key behaviours: taking an interest, being involved, persisting with difficulty, expressing a point of view or feeling, and taking responsibility (or taking another point of view). . . . A Teaching Story, on the other hand, is about evaluating practice” (Carr et al., 2000, pp. 7–8).

Similar purposes and processes were described by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999), who argued for the use of pedagogical documentation as a tool for reflecting on pedagogical practice and for creating democratic pedagogical practice. According to them, pedagogical documentation also enables those involved in the early childhood education setting to take responsibility for making meanings and decisions about what is going on there.

Dahlberg et al. (1999) differentiated between pedagogical documentation as a process and as content in that process:

‘Pedagogical documentation’ as *content* is material which records what the children are saying and doing, the work of the children, and how the pedagogue relates to the children and their work. This material can be produced in many ways and take many forms—for example, hand-written notes of what is said and done, audio recordings and video camera recordings, still photographs, computer graphics, children’s work itself. ... This material makes the pedagogical work concrete and visible (or audible), and as such is an essential ingredient for the process of pedagogical documentation.

The process of pedagogical documentation involves the use of that material as means to reflect upon the pedagogical work and to do so in a very rigorous, methodical and democratic way. That reflection will be done both by the pedagogue alone and the pedagogue in relation to others—other pedagogues, pedagogistas, the children themselves, their parents, politicians (p. 148).

Documentation and dialogue enable processes of learning and teaching to be made visible so that they can be deconstructed:

Through documentation we can more easily see, and ask questions about which image of the child and which discourses we have embodied and produced, and what voice, rights and position the child has got in our early childhood institutions (Dahlberg et al., p. 153).

The role and operation of the early childhood education centre can be made visible through documentation and afford a focus for debate (Dahlberg et al., 1999; Moss, 1997, 1999).

The teacher-produced pedagogical documentation was used to understand children, to analyse constructions of children, to examine early childhood education services as sites for citizenship, as a catalyst for discussion with others, for network participants to reflect on practice and as evidence for this study. This ability to use documentation both to analyse constructions of children within practice and to analyse early childhood education services as sites for citizenship, suited the aims

of my study, and was a reason for the choice of pedagogical documentation as a method.

In this section, I have discussed documentation of a teachers' research network and pedagogical documentation as two approaches to data collection for this study. The next section turns to the practical organisation of the teachers' research network and the actual data collected within it.

Teachers' research network

For the teachers, the overall goal of the research network was to assist them to strengthen children's citizenship within their practice through discussion of relevant literature and of pedagogical work. In particular, network members were to work from the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki's*, aspiration for children "to grow up as confident and competent learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9) and from a perspective of the child as "rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and most of all connected to adults" (Malaguzzi, 1993). In common, these principles emphasise the agency of children and participation rights which, I have argued in Chapter 2, are some of the hallmarks of children's citizenship.

The network teachers' documentation, interviews and discussions provided data that I used to describe vignettes of what democratic practice might look like in an early childhood setting, to analyse what constructions of children were being taken up within practice and to examine their effects. This analysis enabled me to examine relationships between constructions of childhood and democratic practice, and to consider what policy frames could support early childhood services as sites for citizenship. Teachers' perceptions of the childhoods of kindergarten children revealed some of the issues that teachers wanted assistance to address.

Sample

A pragmatic decision was made to work with Wellington kindergarten teachers rather than teachers in other early childhood education centres. The participants were therefore a purposive sample of kindergarten teachers. Although it cannot be claimed that they were representative of all kindergarten teachers, they shared with other kindergarten teachers working conditions which allowed them to take part in the network. The choice of the Wellington region was a matter of convenience

although there is no reason to believe that kindergartens in this area differed from kindergartens in other areas. The Wellington Region Free Kindergarten Association (WRFKA) is an incorporated society with an elected body of parents/community members who form its council. The association employs teachers and administers the kindergartens within Wellington city, and parts of the greater Wellington region, i.e. Porirua, Petone, Days Bay and the Kapiti Coast. The kindergarten model places emphasis on parent and community involvement in governance of kindergartens. Another reason for this choice was that there was a single employer from whom I could ask for support. I could more easily work with the employer and the elected council of parents and community members than with a number of individual employer and parent groups. Moreover, unlike in many other early childhood education services, teachers in kindergartens had nonteaching time as a normal part of each working day. This provided a time for the network meetings to be held. All teachers were required by the association to be qualified and registered teachers, a condition that ensured they held some core teaching competencies and theoretical knowledge, and that these had currency, as required by the New Zealand Teacher Registration Board (as it was at the time).

Gaining access

In 1999, I began discussions with the WRFKA in order to obtain approval from it as the employer for me to work with a network of their kindergarten teachers. The WRFKA executive officer was sympathetic to the proposed aims of the network, gained approval of the WRFKA council and gave approval in January 2000. This support meant that the network meetings could be held in teachers' paid work time.

At the same time I attended a meeting of the WRFKA senior teachers to discuss the idea of establishing the network with them. The core responsibility of WRFKA senior teachers is to offer professional advice and guidance for the teachers within their association. They are experienced teachers and work in a variety of ways: for example, visiting individual kindergartens to observe, provide feedback, model teaching practices and offer ideas and resources; undertaking teacher appraisals; organising and facilitating professional development; and holding regular staff meetings with all the teachers from geographically related areas to discuss issues, requirements and ideas. The senior teacher team supported the notion of a network and offered their assistance in establishing it. The professional development adviser to the network was a senior teacher from this team. I had asked the team for

volunteers, and this senior teacher, with support from the team, offered to undertake this role. She was an ex kindergarten teacher, with 16 years' teaching experience, and 3½ years as a senior teacher. As well as holding an early childhood teaching qualification she had completed her Master of Education. She subsequently went on to work as a teacher educator at a college of education.

The professional development adviser's commitment to the network was involvement in planning, preparation and facilitation of network meetings, participation in two interviews at the beginning and end of the network, review of written papers and reports, and participation in focus group meetings. In addition, as part of her usual work, she visited two of the kindergartens between the network meetings to offer professional advice and support. This provided her with opportunity to offer input related to issues raised during network meetings and teachers' pedagogical practice.

The professional development adviser's own interest in the project arose from her recently completed university thesis in which she explored formats for professional development, and her interest in my research project which she thought was at a "higher level" than hers. The opportunity to work with teachers over a full year or longer interested her because of her belief, supported by her own study (Hampton, 1999), that the ability for teachers to be engaged over a long period of time in a professional development network does tend to change practice. Secondly, she thought that the network experience could lead to senior teachers within her association re-looking at the way they offer professional development. In this respect, she felt that the network could be regarded as a "trial" of a new method of working. Thirdly, she was interested in pedagogical documentation and putting ideas on documentation into practice. In addition, I offered to support the professional development adviser if there was an aspect of the work that she wished to research or write about.

The commitment of the professional development adviser and other network teachers to critique and to change practice was to provide a solid foundation for the network and this is explored in Chapter 5.

Teacher participants

Selection of participating teachers was based on the following criteria: all the teachers in the kindergarten were enthusiastic and wanted to be involved; the

teachers were fully registered, rather than just provisionally registered; and there was unlikely to be a change of staff during the year 2000.

On the one hand, the network experience was likely to provoke the selected participants in my study to enhance democratic practice within their kindergartens. I hoped that this would enable a range of vignettes of democratic practice to be examined. On the other hand, this selection bias is a limitation of the study, discussed in the later section “Limitations”.

In order to recruit participants who fitted this description, I attended the 10 WRFKA area kindergarten staff meetings from 25 February to 22 April 2000. At each meeting I discussed my thesis, the proposed network, expectations of participants and selection criteria, and invited discussion. I left a letter inviting expressions of interest (Appendix A), and asked teachers to discuss the project with their own kindergarten teacher team and to register interest in participating by filling in and sending me the registration of interest form attached to the letter.

Twenty-four teachers from a total of 10 kindergartens expressed interest in participating. I could not offer a place to everyone. One teacher who was not selected because not all the teachers in his kindergarten wanted to be involved expressed disappointment about this. I discussed selection with the senior teacher team according to my criteria and invited teachers from six kindergartens to attend.

The 15 teachers (joined in September by a sixteenth teacher) all had an early childhood teaching qualification, and three had more advanced qualifications. Teachers were asked to complete background information about their kindergarten and their ethnicity, qualifications, years of experience and gender, as well as information about their kindergarten. They described their ethnicities as European, New Zealander/NZ European, Pākehā or Indian. All but one had five or more years of experience, with seven having more than 10 years’ experience. All were women.

All but two of the kindergartens (located in a rural and seaside urban community respectively) were located in city suburbs. At the time the project started, most kindergartens were organised so that two or three teachers worked with groups of 30 to 45 children for five sessions of three hours, and with another group of 30 to 45 children for three sessions of 2½ hours per week. Teachers had two afternoons of nonteaching time per week. During the course of the network, morning sessions

were extended to four hours on two days of the week. Income levels of the kindergarten communities varied.

Table 1 shows the characteristics of children and the number of participating teachers.

Table 1 **Characteristics of kindergartens and number of participating teachers**

Name* of kindergarten	Number of teachers and participating teachers	Roll numbers and groupings	Income levels of community (gauged by teachers)	Locality
Totara	3 (2 teachers participated in network)	44 children in am group, 5 days per week 44 children in pm group, 3 days per week	Mixed income	Rural urban
Kowhai	3 (all participated in network)	42 children in am group, 5 days per week 42 children in pm group, 3 days per week	Middle income	City suburban
Karaka	3 (all participated in network)**	40 children in am group, 5 days per week 40 children in pm group, 3 days per week	Middle income	City suburban
Punga	3 (all participated in network. One teacher was employed in a 0.6 position)	40 children in am group, 5 days per week 30 children in pm group, 3 days per week	Middle/high income	City suburban, harbourside community
Pohutukawa	3 (all participated in network. One teacher was employed in a 0.6 position)	40 children for 4 hours per day, 5 days a week	Low income	City suburban
Rimu	3 (1 teacher attended. This teacher had shifted from one kindergarten to another during the early part of the network. She was joined by a second teacher towards the end of the network)	40 children in am group, 5 days per week 43 children in pm group, 3 days per week	Mainly middle income	Seaside urban community

* I have given the kindergartens names of New Zealand native trees.

** Teachers from this kindergarten replaced teachers from a central city kindergarten who attended the first network meeting and subsequently withdrew on the basis that one member of staff was on extended leave, and there was varying interest amongst staff and concerns about workload.

Eleven network meetings were held on the following dates in 2000: 13 April, 10 May, 7 June, 23 July, 23 August, 13 September, 22 November, 12 December; and in 2001 on 14 February, 4 March and 4 April 2002. In addition, many network teachers attended the NZEI Te Riu Roa conference *Policy, practice and politics*, 9–12 July 2000, where Gunilla Dahlberg was a keynote speaker and workshop presenter. She has written and presented extensively about pedagogical documentation, networking and the purposes of early childhood education

(Dahlberg, 2000; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg et al., 1999). Gunilla Dahlberg participated in and contributed to a special network meeting on 12 July 2000 to discuss her experiences and views about networking and pedagogical documentation, and respond to teachers. Eleven teachers attended.

The first two network meetings were four hours in length. Between our second and third meetings, the WRFKA brought in a requirement that kindergartens would extend their morning sessions by one hour. This followed the WRFKA's analysis that the most acceptable way to avert a funding shortfall was to generate more government funding through increased hours of child attendance. (Government funding is based on an hourly rate for children's attendance.) In respect to the network, this meant that our four hour meeting time was from then shortened to three hours occurring after a hard morning's work and snatched lunch.

Teachers attended all meetings, along with the professional adviser and myself, with the following exceptions. Three teachers from Karaka kindergarten missed the first meeting. These teachers were invited after this meeting was held. One teacher from Pohutukawa kindergarten missed the last two meetings because she went on maternity leave. One teacher from Punga kindergarten was away for family reasons for three meetings. One teacher from Rimu kindergarten joined the network at the ninth meeting. There was always at least one teacher from each kindergarten present, except for the first meeting. The aim to have kindergartens with staff stability was not met in all cases.

Professional development within the research network

The background information supplied to the network stated that teachers would discuss their own pedagogical documentation and research-based readings and, drawing from any insights that were generated, plan and carry out action research to strengthen democratic teaching and learning within their kindergartens. The focus of the network was consistently related to these aims. The documentation was discussed from this point of view. All the network teachers, the professional development adviser and I together discussed pedagogical documentation from each of the kindergartens in a systematic way. We tried to understand what is meant by the "child as citizen" (a concept I have discussed in Chapter 2), to challenge views and practices that were limiting of this construct and to create practices that were based on it. The approach to organisation of network meetings changed as we

learnt from our experiences, and specific topics that emerged from network discussions were followed up in subsequent meetings.

First network meeting

We began the network with a one-day meeting in which our aims were to:

1. get to know and start to feel comfortable with each other;
2. understand my study, and discuss issues and questions about it;
3. obtain consent;
4. start to explore pedagogical documentation (as content and process);
5. think about the perspective of the child and what questions could help tell us we are taking the child's perspective into account;
6. start to plan action research within each kindergarten, including ways to gather pedagogical documentation; and
7. discuss a group contract on how we would operate as a network.

Our first meeting included an introductory exercise where people talked about their backgrounds in pairs and then with the whole group. I talked about the aims of the network and what specific commitments were involved, and invited questions and discussions of issues. I also gave out a letter to each teacher explaining the project (Appendix B), and asked teachers to fill in a form of consent to participate (Appendix C).

The professional development adviser and I then discussed what was meant by “critical reflection” and made a comparison with “action research”. We gave a presentation of pedagogical documentation as “process” and “content”, and then explored, in small groups, examples of documentation from Pen Green's integrated early childhood centre in Corby, England. Pen Green is a UK Centre of Excellence (now termed “Children's Centres”). It is internationally respected for its work on involving parents in early childhood education, and has used documentation to assess and explain children's schema interests and learning with parents (Whalley, 1997; Whalley & the Pen Green Centre Team, 2001). Teachers then talked within the small groups about their own experiences and challenges with documentation. I presented a session “Focus on the child”, drawing on international conventions on the rights of the child and challenges for those working in education to encourage democratic participatory education practices involving children and adults.

Teaching teams then discussed what methods and situations they would like to explore to encourage a stronger focus on the child as citizen.

Second network meeting

Before our second meeting, one kindergarten withdrew. I invited a kindergarten that had not initially been chosen but had expressed interest in attending.

In the second meeting, we needed to spend time in introductory work again. We agreed on the group contract, drafted in the first meeting and setting out how we would work together. It focused on how we would communicate with each other (respect for each other, ability to ask questions without ridicule, openness, listen and be heard) and some organisational matters (start and finish on time, ring in if not able to attend). Three teams brought documentation of their work to share and others reported on what they were thinking about.

Third and subsequent network meetings

Meetings subsequently followed a format that included presentation by teams of documentation and discussion with the network. We had started by giving each team an opportunity at each meeting to discuss their work, but learnt during the operation of the network that we were able to have more in-depth discussions if only two teams presented material at any one meeting. From the fifth network meeting, this was our practice.

At most meetings, new material was presented and discussed either in the form of articles, or a session on a topic of interest, or the involvement of outside people. Suggestions for these came from any member of the network. At the 6 September 2000 meeting, an Early Childhood Development professional development co-ordinator with teachers from a childcare centre met with us and discussed some pedagogical documentation that they had been developing to help better communicate ideas about teaching and learning with parents. By March 2001, teachers as a network group had become particularly interested in exploring more about parents' perspectives and parent involvement in children's learning. Parent involvement was a focus at the eleventh meeting. We saw and discussed the video "Involving parents in their children's learning at the Pen Green Centre" (Pen Green Research Base, 2000). At this meeting I introduced the notion of journal writing and three teachers subsequently kept journals.

Teachers filled in an individual written evaluation of the network at the twelfth (December 2000) meeting, to inform the final three meetings and for use as data. There was a verbal evaluation at the final (April 2001) meeting and discussion of future plans. All teachers were presented with a certificate at the end of the network.

Methods of network data collection

Data from network teachers were collected through:

1. an audio-taped initial interview with network teachers in May to July 2000 (Appendix D);
2. an audio-taped final interview with network teachers after the last network meeting in August to November 2001 (Appendix E);
3. audio-taped initial and final interviews with the professional development adviser on 7 June 2000 and 17 November 2001 respectively (Appendices F and G);
4. audio-taped recordings of network meetings;
5. an audio-taped recording of the special network session with Gunilla Dahlberg on 12 July 2000;
6. written evaluations of network meetings done by teachers in December 2000 (Appendix H);
7. analysis of a sample of documentation that teachers presented at the network meetings; and
8. analysis of teachers' journals where these had been kept.

One teacher who joined the network after the fifth meeting had a final interview only. Altogether, 31 teacher interviews and two professional development adviser interviews were held. All interviews were individual except that a joint initial interview was held with two teachers from one kindergarten (who chose to be interviewed together) and a joint final interview with two teachers from a different kindergarten (they believed their collaboration within the network was an appropriate model for their final interview).

Analysis of constructs of childhood within pedagogy

Analysing patterns and themes

At a practical level, analysing patterns and themes within the teachers' data was the first step in data analysis. I began by reading and re-reading the data, and became very familiar with it. The research questions about pedagogy were kept in mind, while an "open mind" about the data was maintained, so that I did not close off noticing themes that were not expected. Miles and Huberman (1994) noted that:

The challenge is to be explicitly mindful of the purposes of your study and of the conceptual lenses you are training on it—while allowing yourself to be open about and reeducated by things you didn't know about or expect to find (p. 56).

The following "tactics" were followed: noting patterns and themes (Huberman & Miles, 1994) or "perceiving" (Le Compte & Preissle, 1993); writing down first impressions in the margin of a copy of transcripts of network discussions; focus group discussions and interviews; and referring to documentation.

I then drew on the steps in analysis suggested by Huberman and Miles (1994) and Le Compte and Preissle (1993), particularly the latter. This was to compare, contrast, cluster and label groups that went together, and order them. I colour coded sections of the transcripts that went together, and considered these.

In undertaking this initial analysis of teachers' network discussions, I found useful Giroux's (1992) discussion of a distinction made by John Dewey between "education as a function of society" and "society as a function of education". Giroux (p. 18) argued that schools are the major institutions for educating students for public life. A question that arises from these arguments, therefore, is the extent to which educational institutions reproduce society and the extent to which they build society. If one role of education is to build society, teachers need to pay careful and critical attention to underlying assumptions about how they teach and why, to questions of value and to perspectives of others, especially those of the child, but also those of other significant adults. I was interested in the role early childhood education can play in building society. In respect to this, I noted interview statements, network discussion and documentation about the following themes: linkages with parents, whānau, family services and community; participatory processes; pedagogical roles of teachers, children and whānau; children's engagement in meaningful and "real" work; and teachers' views of children.

Patton (2002) has noted that “One way of testing analyst-constructed typologies is to present them to people whose world is being analyzed to find out if the constructions make sense to them” (p. 460). I talked about the themes from the initial analysis to the network teachers at the ninth network meeting (December 2000) to get their permission to use examples and find out what they thought of the themes.

I intended to pick themes to provoke discussion within the focus groups. In the end, I made limited use of the themes in the focus groups because change in the political climate and early childhood education policy context, discussed in Chapter 4, necessitated a shift in research focus. The themes that the government officials were interested in discussing were the policy areas that were being developed at the time.

Vignettes are used in this thesis to exemplify themes from documentation and accounts of life in individual kindergartens that were discussed in the network. The vignettes are intended to be illustrative. Erickson (1986) described a vignette as a “vivid portrayal of the conduct of an event of everyday life, in which the sights and sounds of what was being said and done are described in the natural sequence of their occurrence in real time” (pp. 149–150).

Summary

In summary, the teachers’ research network provided an avenue to analyse constructs of children within teachers’ thinking and pedagogical documentation, and relationships with practice. The use of pedagogical documentation from within kindergarten settings ensured the focus was on actual rather than imagined practice. The focus of the network and the study was on children as citizens, as agents in their own lives and the lives of others.

Investigating early childhood education policy

Constructions of childhood in early childhood policy was investigated through analysis of the discussions of government officials and representatives of early childhood organisations who participated in focus groups to talk about conceptions of childhood and key early childhood education policy issues of funding and regulation that were being reviewed at the time. Secondly, constructions of childhood within briefings to the government, published policy, government legislation and media commentary were analysed.

Focus groups

Focus groups have been described by Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) as “collective conversations or group interviews” (p. 887). The focus groups of government officials and representatives of early childhood organisations met three times to discuss issues of early childhood education policy. The aim of the focus groups was to stimulate thinking and discussion about children and childhood and the development of early childhood policy. I told participants about this aim in my letter of invitation.

This choice of methodology allows conceptualisations of children associated with democratic citizenship to be analysed and evaluated. Lather (1986) defined “praxis” as research that is “explicitly committed to critiquing the status quo and building a more just society” (p. 258). Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) defined it as “critical reflection related to political action in the real world” (p. 890). In addition, focus groups can contribute to analysing dynamics and issues within participants’ professional sphere of influence, and research for “praxis”. My intention was to discover ways to influence policy development.

Paulo Freire (1970/1996) was an early advocate of study groups or focus groups to enable people to come together in a space for dialogue, critical thinking and action. Both Freire and later Kozol (Kozol, 1985, 1991) used study groups to engage in local politics. Both held emancipatory aims of raising consciousness and transforming reality, working with people and encouraging collective responsibility for political aims. In my study, I used focus groups to collect data about constructs of childhood in relation to policy aims and mechanisms, and as a forum for participants to discuss policy issues being debated within the early childhood sector at the time. Within the focus groups, I hoped to raise consciousness of these issues from a child-focused perspective.

As a research tool, focus group research “is a key site or activity where pedagogy, politics, and interpretive enquiry intersect and interanimate each other” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 903). The kinds of data that are produced through focus group research are different from that produced through individual interviewing because ideas and thoughts go beyond what a single individual alone can produce. According to Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, focus groups are also suited to “real-world” problem solving:

‘Real-world’ problems cannot be solved by individuals alone: instead, they require rich and complex funds of communal knowledge and practice (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 903).

The “real world” problems in my study were the problems of constructing policy and practice in early childhood education. Many researchers have made use of networks or focus groups to construct emancipatory early childhood education practice where the child is the subject (Barsotti et al., 1992; Dahlberg et al., 1999; Edwards et al., 1998). Participatory processes for developing policy are less common. In New Zealand, working groups of early childhood sector representatives have sometimes been invited to contribute to policy development, within defined parameters.

The focus group was a means to generate debate about early childhood education policy in my study. The changes to early childhood education policy that occurred from 2000 to 2002 when I held the focus groups led me to target the second and third focus group discussions at policy issues that were being debated concurrently within the government’s reviews of funding and regulation. These were:

1. the issue of who should provide early childhood education (the place of commercial, for-profit owners); and
2. early childhood education funding and staffing.

Bacchi (1999) has argued that in order to reveal and problematise dominant representations, it is useful to investigate how problems are framed, as well as policy solutions to “problems”. My focus of investigation was on constructions of childhood within the policy areas of provision, funding and staffing, and the debates around them. The value of this focus was that it provided opportunity to examine the rationale being advanced for important policy approaches as policy was being developed. The rationale could be analysed to reveal whether children featured at all, and if so, which children were represented and how. The ways in which children were constructed could be evaluated against the three principles I had developed of integrated action, best outcomes and all children without discrimination could I could

Choosing the focus group members and gaining access

Texts providing guidance on practical aspects of planning focus groups (e.g., Krueger & Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1998; Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996) emphasise the importance of having the right group composition that will generate useful discussion applicable to the research questions. I had initially proposed a small group of government officials from three government agencies (the Ministry of Education, Education Review Office⁸ and Ministry of Women's Affairs⁹), education organisation representatives and two teachers to participate in the focus group since these people were directly involved in early childhood education or in matters related to early childhood education. I thought the Ministry of Women's Affairs would have an interest in childcare as an employment issue for women and women as workers in early childhood education settings (98 percent of staff in early childhood education in New Zealand are women).

Later, when I came to establish the focus groups, I thought again about the composition, deciding to widen the group of officials to include all those government departments that had a central interest in the funding and regulatory reviews of early childhood education that were occurring at that time or were interested in human rights, including children's rights. As well as those listed above, I invited other representatives of government departments that were involved in early childhood education operational matters (Early Childhood Development¹⁰), had a central interest in children's rights (Office of the Commissioner for Children, and Human Rights Commission), indigeneity and rights of Māori children (Te Puni Kōkiri¹¹), children's wellbeing and early childhood education funding (Ministry of Social Development¹²) and government financing (New Zealand Treasury). I chose this wider group purposely because I was interested in understanding differences in perspectives of those officials who

⁸ The Education Review Office is the government department that reviews and reports publicly on the quality of education in all New Zealand schools and early childhood education services.

⁹ The Ministry of Women's Affairs provides advice on policy solutions to improve the status of women; recommends suitable women nominees for state sector boards; and manages New Zealand's international obligations in relation to the status of women, in particular under the United Nations Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women until 2004.

¹⁰ Early Childhood Development was a crown-owned entity responsible for providing advice and support to groups wishing to establish early childhood education services, professional development, and funding and support for licence-exempt playgroups. Subsequent to the focus group meetings, it was amalgamated into the Ministry of Education in 2001.

¹¹ Te Puni Kōkiri is the Ministry of Māori Development in New Zealand.

¹² The Ministry of Social Development provides strategic social policy advice to the New Zealand Government and provides social services to New Zealanders. It administers the Childcare Subsidy for low-income families using early childhood education services who meet criteria related to income and employment/training status.

were providing advice about early childhood education policy or had a contribution to make from a rights-based perspective. I wanted to generate discussion and offer opportunity for diverse views to be brought out. The invitations went to the Chief Executive Officer of the agency or a named senior policy analyst working in early childhood education.

I invited Chief Executive Officers from early childhood education organisations that represented employer and teacher interests, namely:

1. New Zealand Childcare Association Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa (a national early childhood organisation with a range of functions, providing advocacy, early childhood training, and representing teachers and employers in education and care centres);
2. Wellington Region Free Kindergarten Association (employing body for kindergarten teachers in Wellington and the network teachers); and
3. New Zealand Educational Institute Te Riu Roa (the national union representing teachers in early childhood education centres).

These organisations have an elected governance structure, including an elected national executive or parent council, annual meetings or conferences for policy decision making and local structures that enable membership viewpoints to be ascertained. The people attending the network had overall responsibility for the management of their organisation, or in the case of NZEI Te Riu Roa, responsibility for servicing the early childhood membership nationally.

Teachers from the network kindergartens and the professional development adviser to the network were invited. The letter of invitation is contained in Appendix I.

Only one government department, the Education Review Office, declined to attend. The reason given was that Education Review Office officials thought there might be a conflict of interest since this government department is responsible for reviewing early childhood education centres, including the network kindergartens.

Some participants did not attend all three meetings. The reasons why a meeting was missed were ill health or unexpected urgent meetings, except for Treasury officials (two officials came) who were interested in attending only the meeting about early childhood education funding.

Two teachers and the professional development adviser attended all three meetings.

Table 2 **Attendance of government officials and representatives of early childhood organisations in focus groups**

Representative	First meeting <i>Conceptions of children and childhood</i>	Second meeting Place of commercial for-profit provision, staffing regulations	Third meeting Early childhood funding
Ministry of Education	Attended		Attended
New Zealand Treasury			Attended
Ministry of Social Development	Attended	Attended	Attended
Early Childhood Development	Attended	Attended	Attended
Ministry of Women's Affairs	Attended	Attended	Attended
Te Puni Kōkiri		Attended	Attended
Office of the Commissioner for Children	Attended		Attended
Human Rights Commission		Attended	Attended
New Zealand Childcare Association Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa	Attended	Attended	Attended
Wellington Region Free Kindergarten Association	Attended	Attended	Attended
New Zealand Educational Institute Te Riu Roa	Attended	Attended	Attended
Professional development adviser	Attended	Attended	Attended
Two teachers	Attended	Attended	Attended

Note: No shading denotes government officials.

Discussion papers as catalysts for critical discussion

To stimulate discussion about constructions of childhood and early childhood policy, I wrote three discussion papers on topical early childhood policy issues. These papers, *Conceptions of Children and Childhood*, *Early Childhood Education for a Democratic Society* (focusing on who should provide early childhood education) and *Funding, regulations and systemic support for early childhood education*, were sent to focus group members before the meetings. Each had a set of questions for discussion.

Discussion paper 1: *Conceptions of Children and Childhood*

Conceptions of Children and Childhood drew on research evidence, literature and made explicit links to the network teachers' discussions and documentation. I described some dominant ways in which children have been conceptualised, and drew attention to how these conceptualisations have cloaked policy and pedagogy.

These conceptualisations were contrasted with a view of the “child as citizen” and some core aspects of this paradigm. Two questions were posed:

What view of the child is apparent in New Zealand’s early childhood education policy?

What should be the balance of emphasis in early childhood education policy objectives?

The second section to the paper referred to research evidence about effective teaching and learning, and conditions to support it. It drew on network teachers’ experiences to indicate that making change to teaching practice is challenging in that it is helped by critical reflection and time. The following question was posed:

What early childhood education policy frameworks are needed to support up-to-date pedagogical practice and knowledge?

In the third section, I highlighted children’s rights and evidence about principles for early childhood education policy development. An explicit link was made between the discussions of the network teachers about their practice and this first paper on “Conceptions of children and childhood”. An example was given of a kindergarten operating on democratic principles, creating their own local culture and building traditions that were to continue. I posed the question:

What early childhood education policy frameworks do we need to ensure opportunity for every child to participate in high-quality early childhood education?

Discussion paper 2: Early Childhood Education for a Democratic Society

Early Childhood Education for a Democratic Society specifically focusing on who provides early childhood education and implications of government’s role. I summarised evidence and questions about for-profit early childhood education provision. The issue of for-profit provision is relevant to policy development because of the expansion of this provision in the childcare sector in New Zealand, and some evidence of poorer standards and employment practices within the private sector compared with the community-based sector. The question posed was:

To what extent if any should the government fund, regulate, and support for-profit early childhood education services?

Discussion paper 3: Funding, regulations and systemic support for early childhood education

Funding, regulations and systemic support for early childhood education was in two parts. The first part provided a brief background and contrasted different approaches taken to the application of regulatory standards to structural features of quality. Approaches taken in Denmark, and in the United States and Canada were discussed as a background for New Zealand policy. The second part described a funding option for free early childhood education services that I had prepared with a co-ordinator from Early Childhood Development¹³ for consideration in the review of early childhood education funding.

Bacchi (2000) has argued that representations (in my study, representations of children) influence policy solutions such as funding and the shape of service provision. My questions aimed to investigate constructions of children within the responses given by participants, and preferred policy solutions. The questions posed were:

To what extent should New Zealand regulate for (or establish) staff:child ratios, group size, teacher qualifications and teacher pay and conditions in early childhood services?

What funding arrangements and accountability mechanisms would ensure that government funding is spent on aspects that contribute to good-quality provision?

What are the pros, cons and considerations of the government providing an allocation of free early childhood education for every child?

The full discussion papers are provided in Appendix J.

Organisation of focus groups

Size matters in focus group research. For example, Morgon (1998) suggested that six to 10 participants “provides enough different opinions to stimulate a discussion without making each participant compete for time to talk” (p. 71). Two focus group meetings were held to discuss each topic, with a choice of time of attendance. This

¹³ The Early Childhood Development co-ordinator had developed a Web page for early childhood education centres on how to prepare budgets for their centres. I had asked her to work with me in costing a funding proposal for free early childhood education for up to 30 hours per week. I needed the co-ordinator's help to do this with me as I did not have in-depth understanding of early childhood education service budgets. She attended the focus group meetings when this was discussed.

was to ensure each group was a manageable size (six to eight people) and to give people a chance to attend before their working day or at the end of it. The meetings and papers discussed were:

- First meeting** Tuesday 27 August, 8.30 a.m. to 10.00 a.m., or
 Wednesday 28 August, 4.30 p.m. to 6.00 p.m.
 Topic: Conceptions of children and childhood
- Second meeting** Tuesday 1 October, 8.30 a.m. to 10.00 a.m., or
 Wednesday 2 October, 4.30 p.m. to 6.00 p.m.
 Topic: Contribution of early childhood centres to a
 democratic society, especially the place of private for-profit
 provision
- Third meeting** Tuesday 26 November, 8.30 a.m. to 10.00 a.m., or
 Wednesday 27 November, 4.30 p.m. to 6.00 p.m.
 Topic: Funding, regulations and systemic support for early
 childhood education

I asked focus group members to read and think about the discussion papers before the focus group meeting, with the intention of going straight to the starter questions for discussion after a short time spent in reacting to the papers. However, not all people did read the papers beforehand and I needed to summarise the information within them for those people.

An experienced early childhood education field researcher (whom I had worked with on several research projects) and professional development adviser took notes. I acted as facilitator. Krueger (1998) and Vaughn et al., (1996) emphasise that the role of the facilitator is to guide the discussion and listen, but not to participate. This role proved difficult for me: during the debate on funding I did enter into some discussion, giving my views rather than guiding others to give their views. I come back to this situation when discussing limitations (p.80).

Individual interviews with focus group participants

Each participant was invited to take part in an interview after the focus group meetings. All took part except the Treasury officials who said they were too busy at the time. Later, the Treasury official who had done the speaking in the focus group

meeting he attended moved to another division of Treasury. However, the Treasury officials gave me a draft overview of their thinking about the early childhood education funding review. The ideas expressed in the draft paper were reflected in Treasury briefing papers discussed below.

The focus group interview schedule is in Appendix K.

Summary

In summary, focus groups provided opportunity for participants to talk about views of children and their perspectives and their rationale for preferred early childhood education policy solutions and mechanisms. The diverse makeup of the focus group membership led to a divergence of viewpoints and enabled opportunity for participants to debate alternative views of contested early childhood policy issues.

Document analysis

Documents analysed for this study were from four sources: representatives of various early childhood sector organisations; government officials; politicians; and government. They included early childhood sector reports on policy proposals, government officials' briefings on policy proposals (Ministry of Education, 18 March, 2003; Ministry of Social Development, 2003; Te Puni Kōkiri, 2003; Treasury, 7 November, 2003, 12 September, 2003), published policy, budget announcements, government legislation and media commentary.

Table 3 **Policy documents used in analysis of constructions of childhood in policy**

Author and date	Document	Commentary
Strategic plan working group (Ministry of Education, 2001a)	Consultation document for the development of the strategic plan for early childhood education	Policy proposals developed by representatives of the early childhood sector for consultation with the sector
Technical Working Group for the development of the strategic plan (Ministry of Education, 2001c)	Final report of the Working Group	Policy proposals written by selected sector representatives and Ministry of Education officials. Charged with developing a “fiscally responsible” proposal
Ministry of Education (2002)	Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki	10-year strategic plan on early childhood education—published early childhood education policy
2003	Briefings from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Development, Department of Labour, Te Puni Kōkiri, Treasury and Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet ¹⁴ on the early childhood funding review obtained under the Official Information Act	Commentary on funding proposals from government officials
May 2004	Government budget and funding review decisions	Funding review decisions implemented in April 2005. Government budget announced free early childhood education for 3- and 4-year-olds in teacher-led community-based early childhood services from July 2007. (Policy extended to private for-profit teacher-led services in 2006)

Reaction to report “Differences Between Community Owned and Privately Owned Early Childhood Education and Care Centres: A Review of Evidence”

One of the papers prepared for discussion in the focus group was later refined and published on the NZCER website (Mitchell, 2002a). It reviewed research evidence about differences between community owned and privately owned early childhood education services in aspects related to quality for children. It included a report of an analysis on whether there were statistically significant differences between privately-owned and community-based providers in their employment of qualified teachers in childcare services in New Zealand. The analysis was done on services’

¹⁴ The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) is one of the three central agencies responsible for co-ordinating and managing public sector performance. The role of the DPMC is to serve the Executive (the Governor-General, the Prime Minister and the Cabinet) through the provision of high-quality impartial advice and support services which facilitate government decision making at both strategic and operational levels. A further role is to help co-ordinate the work of the core public service departments and ministries with the aim of ensuring decision making takes account of all relevant viewpoints and is as coherent and complete as possible.

data supplied to the Ministry of Education annually, in which the qualifications of staff are listed.

Publication of the report was controversial. Private early childhood education centre representatives, Business New Zealand and some politicians were highly critical of the report, while some community-based early childhood education representatives welcomed the findings. Ways in which children are portrayed within the media statements and reports about this analysis are analysed for this study.

Analysis of patterns within policy focus groups and documents

I used Carol Bacchi's (1999; 2000) "What's the problem?" approach to analyse and deconstruct problem representations of children in policy participants' viewpoints and in policy-related documentation.

Analytic steps

Bacchi (1999) offers a set of questions that could be used to initiate a "What's the problem?" approach to analysis of policy proposals and those who deny an issue problem status:

1. What is the problem represented to be either in a specific policy debate or a specific policy proposal?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation?
3. What effects are produced by this representation? How are subjects constituted within it? What is likely to change? What is likely to stay the same? Who is likely to benefit from this representation?
4. What is left unproblematic in this representation?
5. How would 'responses' differ if the 'problem' were thought about or represented differently? (Bacchi, 1999, pp. 12–13).

I used Bacchi's questions as tools to help me probe how children were represented in policy submissions and published policy, and for evaluating these against principles based on a construction of child as citizen and children's rights. These principles, discussed in Chapter 2, are integrated action, all children without discrimination, and best outcomes.

Identifying linkages and relationships in data analysis

The themes identified in the initial analysis of data from the network and focus groups formed categories that were the basis for further data analysis.

My research questions went beyond description about how childhood is constructed in early childhood education pedagogy and policy. I established linkages and relationships, especially examining how the categories that had been identified related to each other; and speculating about theory, through making tentative explanations and comparing these with the literature (Le Compte and Preissle's (1993):

Theories are statements about how things are connected. Their purpose is to explain why things happen as they do (Le Compte & Preissle, 1993, p. 118).

Speculating about theory was necessary to provide explanation of how constructions of childhood may link to pedagogical approaches and support for participatory democratic practice. In turn, the policy implications were investigated.

Summary

In summary, action research within the teachers' network, and policy focus groups, were a means to provide space for critical conversations about children and childhood to occur, a method for collecting data about different perspectives within these critical conversations, and a subject of inquiry to examine potential roles of networks and focus groups in creating space for debate. Discussion of pedagogical documentation and research evidence on current policy issues were key methods used to provoke critical thinking within the pedagogical network and policy focus groups.

Analysis of differing constructions of childhood evident in the thinking and actions of the teacher participants and policy focus group participants enabled comparisons to be made between discourses in practice and policy, their differences and synergies and their effects.

Methodological issues

Myself as researcher and my relationship with participants in the study

According to Davies (1999), considerations of reflexivity are important to all forms of research since all researchers are to some extent connected to their research. In social research, influences of the researcher on the research process outcomes and interpretation, are very likely. “Critical researchers often regard their work as a first step toward forms of political action that can redress the injustices found in the field site . . . “ (Kincheloe & McLaren, (2005), p. 305). This appears to apply to my study. In critical research, hidden ideological views may inform the research process. I had a close involvement through my paid employment with most of the teachers, representatives of early childhood education organisations and government officials participating in this study.

It was therefore necessary for me to think about my own perspectives and how these changed over time, and of power relationships between participants and myself.

Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) argued that qualitative researchers need to enter an investigation “with their assumptions on the table, so no-one is confused concerning the epistemological and personal baggage they bring with them to the research site” (p. 305). Patton (2002) suggested that researchers can help to make their own self visible in qualitative research through writing in the first person, active voice. Researchers can communicate perspective and voice, and so foreground these. Feminist researchers emphasise positioning the self within research projects, having awareness of contributions from the researcher’s own background (Olesen, 2005), and portraying findings and standpoints as a partial form of knowledge, and therefore open to contestation (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005; Marcus, 1998).

The influence of my role as union advocate and early childhood education activist on my choice of topic and action research methodology was described in Chapter 1. I showed how during the course of this study I became more self-conscious about the assumptions and ideological frame of the thesis. In analysing the data and writing the thesis, it has been useful for me to further consider issues of reflexivity and examine how other researchers writing about education policy have approached

such issues. Reflection was an evident element in three different research projects (described below), in which researchers were researching education policy while being involved in education policy development. All three researchers made clear their positions as insiders in the communities and policy processes they were studying, but took different approaches to addressing their own position within their research projects and addressing issues of bias.

Ben Levin (2005), writing about education policy in Canada, described issues that were prominent when he was the deputy minister of education, and his views on what might be needed to transcend them. A main concern for him was to address issues of bias through depersonalising data and using evidence that was publicly available. He argued that while being an insider in the governing process as a politician he was able to tell stories that were complete and informative through drawing descriptions from events that were in the public domain, examining systems and events rather than people and not using names:

I see politics not so much as a matter of heroes and villains, but of systems. A book that focuses on flaws and mistakes may have the perverse effect of increasing levels of cynicism rather than promoting sustainable change (Levin, 2005, p. xi).

He was a member of a political party for many years before taking up the position of deputy minister of education. Nevertheless, he regarded civil servants as having a duty to be nonpartisan and severed his political connections each time he became a civil servant.

Foley and Valenzuela (2005) both undertook activist research and aimed to shape public policy. They emphasised the importance of collaboration with the community each was studying. Foley described writing a cultural critique of colonialism and racism in South Texas and finding ways that he, as a “gringo” social scientist, could be directly involved in the Chicano movement his research team was studying. One way in which Foley’s cultural critique was collaborative was through development of a set of trusted relationships with knowledgeable key community residents who helped with interpretation and understanding. This also involved sharing of mutual biographies. Another was to interview in a conversational, informal way, often sharing the interview with respondents, who were able to edit what they said. Community members were also asked to review the manuscript before publication. The style of writing was purposely accessible and engaging so that participants could read and understand what was written.

Valenzuela, on the other hand, as a third generation Mexican American, was a member of the community she was studying—a community that lacked voice, status and representation. Her desire was “to use research to address the inequities of political and policymaking processes” (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005, p. 225). She claimed her insider status was a factor enabling her to do this. Valenzuela also developed collaborative relationships with the community but did not find it possible to share work with the community for review except in a limited way. Like Foley, she tried to write in ordinary language. She not only studied education policy but became pivotal in achieving legislative reform and argued that her direct involvement led her to have greater understanding. She was able to use her understanding of discourse and rhetorical analysis to understand legislators’ rhetoric and logic, and craft arguments in ways that would be accepted by these legislators.

These three examples illustrate different forms of collaboration, and that “insider ethnographers may have to march to the beat of a different drum” (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005, p. 231). A further implication drawn by the authors is that “Researchers who are directly involved in the political process are in a better position to understand and theorize about social change” (p. 231). Likewise, my roles within the early childhood education sector have helped me to start this study with insights about policy and its impacts, and strong relationships with sector representatives and government officials.

My position as an advocate and early childhood education activist has been laid open from the beginning, both with the participants and throughout this thesis. Ethical issues are examined in a later section about the selection of participants and organisation of the network and focus groups. Like Ben Levin, my analysis of policy and participant views of policy, steers clear of the personal, and of dichotomising views into “good” and “bad”. Rather, the issue is examining discourses of children and childhood in participants’ views and policy developments, and evaluating them from a framework based on a construct of “child as citizen” and children’s rights. This vision has been made clear as one I support. The government briefing papers that were obtained under the Official Information Act are publicly available. I have used the method of “bringing the results back to the community” to a limited extent only. All participants received transcripts of network and focus group discussions and of their own interview/s,

and were invited to modify them if they wished. Three chose to do this. As well, I discussed with network teachers the main themes that I identified in the initial data analysis. The teachers said these themes made sense to them.

It is not possible to create an “objective” analysis of early childhood education policy and pedagogy since differing goals and beliefs lie behind the issues that are seen as problematic and solutions that are proposed. Bacchi (1999) has argued that it is important to make competing visions transparent, and to analyse and discuss their impact.

My involvement as a union advocate and early childhood education activist, and my role as researcher and “insider” in policy development influenced my choice of topic and methodology, and enabled me to start the study with an understanding of policy processes and where to access data.

Limitations

Participants in the teachers’ network were kindergarten teachers because they were able to attend during the working day. This predominance of data from kindergarten teachers is a limitation. The New Zealand early childhood sector is very diverse and kindergarten teachers are no longer the majority. No data was gathered from playcentre, kōhanga reo or home-based service representatives, and only one participant represented childcare.

There were three main limitations related to the organisation and participation of focus group members:

The size of the focus groups was limited to six to eight people, and participants were given a choice of times for attendance. As a result there was no interaction between those people who attended at different times. There were only two participants at one meeting (2 October 2001) although there was an in-depth discussion between these two, whose views were not in conflict.

Participants from the Ministry of Education, Human Rights Commission and Office of the Commissioner for Children each missed one focus group meeting and the Treasury participants missed two meetings. The Treasury participants were not able to be interviewed. This limited the data that were collected about their perspectives.

A third limitation was that the papers I wrote as catalysts for focus group discussion could have influenced participants' views. The paper on differences between community owned and privately owned early childhood services had an emphasis on evidence against for-profit provision. I also entered into some of the focus group discussions, especially related to free early childhood education. This was done because the focus group participants wanted me to clarify the funding formula that was proposed in that paper and to understand the basis for the approach. However, my support for free early childhood education was clear and my interests and concerns could have dominated and influenced how participants responded. As well, some focus group participants were particularly articulate and could have exerted power over others.

On the other hand, the focus group participants all held positions of seniority within their organisations. The government officials were very used to entering into policy discussions and analysing arguments for and against policy approaches. They did not reach consensus positions and were willing to argue for views that differed in fundamental ways.

Ethical considerations

Informed consent

Participation in this study was voluntary. Teachers had opportunity to hear about the study, receive written information and discuss it amongst themselves before deciding whether they wanted to volunteer to participate in the teachers' network. Officials and early childhood education organisation representatives were individually invited to attend focus groups, had opportunity to accept or decline and to choose which meetings they came to. Nevertheless there would have been an obligation for officials to attend if their department had required this. This was the case for the Ministry of Women's Affairs representative who was asked by her Chief Executive Officer to attend.

I obtained informed consent (Appendix L) from participants in the focus groups and an interview, and for transcripts to be collected for the study. The person typing the transcripts signed a confidentiality agreement. I sent the transcripts of network discussions to the focus group members who had participated in those discussions for them to add further comments if they wished. Three did provide further

comments. I sent the interview transcripts to each person interviewed and provided opportunity for the person to amend or add to the transcribed interview.

Where children's work, photographs or actions are used in a vignette, a parent's permission was obtained for this use (Appendix M).

Originally I had intended to write papers deriving from the teachers' network discussion for consideration within the policy focus groups. Instead I focused on issues that were being discussed in the government's reviews of funding and regulations at the time of the focus groups. I explained the changed context to teachers, and the reasons for pinpointing some current issues for discussion with those involved in policy development. Teachers were supportive of this approach.

Teachers and officials were asked in writing whether they wanted their own names or fictitious names used. All the network teachers were willing to have their own names used; some of the government officials were willing to have their own names used. However, I decided to use fictitious names to enable consistency throughout.

I kept the Wellington Region Free Kindergarten Association informed of the work and ideas emerging from the network through presentations at council meetings on 22 August 2000 and 14 July 2001, and through a letter outlining the work at the end of the network meetings.

Roles and power relationships

The professional development adviser and I agreed the role of facilitator was to include the function of:

1. positively supporting teachers;
2. helping teachers to articulate, reflect on and plan their work;
3. asking critical questions;
4. suggesting ideas, tools and resources; and
5. participating in network sessions.

Both of us were aware of our position of power in relation to teachers. The professional development adviser had responsibility within the WRFKA for some teachers' performance appraisals and could be called on to investigate issues of concern about teacher competency, and to offer follow-up support if concerns were upheld. I was well known to many teachers in my past role as a union advocate and

later held power as an “expert researcher” through my changed employment to senior researcher at NZCER. There was a possibility that our perspectives would dominate the group discussions and overly influence the discussion. We tried to safeguard against this by leading participants to actively contribute to discussions rather than by us dominating discussions.

The teachers’ network provided opportunities for generating understanding through collaborative conversations with colleagues stimulated by and focused on pedagogical documentation.

There was also a power differential within the focus groups. As researcher, I had power to publish, which was exercised. In addition, the three discussion papers that I prepared could have influenced viewpoints.

Equity between costs and benefits

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that there should be some equity between costs (investment in time, energy and money) and benefits to participants from taking part in research. Participants invested their own time and thinking into the study. Their salaries were paid by their employers so costs were not financial. In a final evaluation of the study, teachers talked about the benefits of the reflective discussion in the network for their own practice and some went on to establish ongoing networks when this network finished. Officials and representatives of early childhood education organisations talked about the value of the focus group discussions at a time when the issues being discussed had currency. When asked, all those who were interviewed said they would like to continue to meet within a focus group if this was to be organised.

Worthiness of the project and competence boundaries

Miles and Huberman (1994) described “worthiness of the project” and “competence boundaries” as two specific ethical issues that need attention before, during and after qualitative studies. “Competence boundaries” also refers to expertise to carry out the study, and willingness to explore things and seek help for things the researcher is not quite able to do. A consideration in deciding on the research questions and focus was that the study would contribute to new ways of thinking about policy and practice and could potentially help transform New Zealand early childhood education policy.

Conclusion

The research design and processes of undertaking the research for this study have been described in this chapter. The qualitative approach used in this study—action research within a teachers’ network to investigate pedagogy, and focus groups to investigate policy—enabled important conversations about children to occur, and data about constructions of childhood to be collected for this study. Policy-related documents were a source of data for investigating policy-in-the-making and policy change from 2000 to 2007.

The analytic approach is to compare, contrast and probe constructions of childhood, examine their effects within pedagogy and policy and evaluate them against a frame of principles based on a concept of “child as citizen”. The final steps in analysis, to examine linkages and relationships between constructions of childhood in policy and pedagogy, are crucial in exploring the middle ground between pedagogy and policy. The analysis in this study offers theoretical insights into what pedagogical practices and policy approaches that are linked with democratic citizenship may look like. The new policies that were being developed at the time were not the contexts in which teachers taught. However, ways in which policy and pedagogical frameworks may interact to support or hinder the creation of early childhood centres that contribute to democracy and citizenship are suggested. This analysis lays the ground for speculation about future directions in early childhood education to enhance participation of children as citizens and their families.

In order to set the context for the study, the next chapter provides an analysis of New Zealand’s early childhood education policy as it was during the 1990s before the study started. It foreshadows policy development occurring during subsequent years.

CHAPTER 4: POLITICAL FRAME AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION POLICY CONTEXT

Introduction

The mid 1980s and 1990s have become known as times of sweeping change in social, economic and educational reform in New Zealand. These wide-ranging neo-liberal reforms, of which early childhood education was a part, emphasised self-sufficiency and market provision. They positioned children as dependent on their families, and impacted disproportionately on children's economic position, health and educational opportunities. A change to a Labour-led Government in 1999 heralded a shift to a more supportive state, and further reforms in relation to welfare benefits, education, health, housing and employment relations.

This chapter provides an overview of these reforms, particularly those in early childhood education, from the mid-1980s to 2002, the date at which I finished collecting data for the study. The overview sets the context for my study, by discussing the main discourses that were behind the reforms, how children were positioned in relation to them and the effects of reform policies on children. Within early childhood education policy, the debates that government officials and politicians used to justify the reforms, and differing debates used by unionists, researchers, academics, and representatives of early childhood organisations arguing for alternative policy proposals are discussed. This sets the scene for ideas about a new debate about childhood, and how it might change the position of children and policy frames.

Social and economic reforms

Children do not live their lives in isolation; they are part of a community which in turn is part of a socioeconomic system, that may, and often does, affect them badly (Penn, 2005, p. 13).

The social and economic reforms in New Zealand that began in 1984 and continued through the 1990s worsened the economic position of children (Davey, 1998; United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 1997). The reforms involved a widespread programme of privatisation, reducing the role of the welfare state, and emphasising market provision. The reforms have been termed “liberal welfare” and are comparable in their underlying basis to those produced in England and Scotland (Moss & Petrie, 2002) during the 1980s and 1990s.

The government’s 19 December 1990 Economic and Social Initiative Statement and July 1991 budget introduced harsh measures to cut government spending. The social policy changes included cuts in benefit levels, new tests of welfare provision involving a move from universalism to targeted benefits, the movement of state house rentals to market levels, and user charges in tertiary education, health and Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) provisions. In May 1991, the Employment Contracts Act became law and removed a statutory requirement for recognition of unions and arrangements for fair collective bargaining.

The National Government acknowledged that the changes in the December 1990 Economic Statement would impact very severely on beneficiaries and low-income earners, and said that others would have to contribute to belt-tightening through measures in the 1991 budget. Waldegrave (1995) analysed the income or expenditure impact of the various 1990 and 1991 measures on different families, and calculated the total impact as a percentage of family disposable income prior to the changes. This analysis showed that, in fact, it was families on the lowest incomes that made the largest dollar contributions to fiscal savings:

Raising the greatest contributions for government cost-saving from the poorest families is a strategy we associate with King John and the Sheriff of Nottingham. Such inequity should not be a feature of government today (Waldegrave, 1995, p. 87).

Further inequities followed. Taxes were cut significantly in the 1996 government budget and family assistance was increased, but only by a small amount in comparison with tax cuts for high-income earners.

Children were disproportionately affected by these reforms. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in its first report in 1997 on New Zealand expressed concern:

... that the extensive economic reform process undertaken in New Zealand since the mid-1980s has affected the budgetary resources available for support services for children and their families and that all necessary measures to ensure the enjoyment by children of their economic, social and cultural rights to the maximum extent of the State's resources have not been undertaken (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 1997, para 14).

The committee recommended a study of the impact on children, young people and their families but this was not undertaken. However, individuals and groups documenting the impact have shown that family income inequality grew substantially relative to other countries (O'Dea, 2000), child poverty more than doubled from 1987/1988 to 1992/1993 (Ministry of Social Development, 2001) and there was a higher incidence of poverty in younger children under the age of five years (Davey, 1998). Waldegrave's (1995) study showed that families with children were the worst off of all, especially single parent families.

Low income affects children's development, health and survival, educational achievement, job prospects, and life expectancies (UNICEF, 2000). Mayer (2002), in her review of literature on the influence of parental income on child outcomes noted:

Parental income is positively correlated with virtually every dimension of child well-being that social scientists measure, and this is true for every country for which we have data. The children of rich parents are healthier, better behaved, happier and better educated during their childhood and wealthier when they have grown up than are children from poor families (p. 30).

A New Zealand study (Waldegrave, King, & Stuart, 1999) of 401 low-income families (95 percent had children) found many were paying high levels of their income on housing, over half were unable to access medical and dental help because of cost, and two-thirds were in debt. Over 60 percent of the families had been unable to provide a proper meal at least once in the last three months because they could not afford it. A quarter of families used food banks.

Poverty can affect children's ability to participate in community activities. Durie (1996) showed how poverty can alienate Māori from language and culture by limiting opportunity to participate in whānau, hapū and iwi. Hill et al. (2004),

writing about the UK, also noted that “inadequate material resources, especially low income, make it very difficult for children and families to share in the social activities generally expected in the societies in which they live” (p. 79).

Underpinning the reforms was a belief that individuals themselves were responsible for their poor economic circumstances. The cause of poverty was personalised, rather than attributed to socioeconomic conditions. In the late 1990s, the government was intruding even more into the lives of beneficiaries with children while devolving its own critical responsibilities. The public discussion document *Towards a Code of Social and Family Responsibility* (New Zealand Government, 1998) that was sent to all households failed to ask critical questions about the role of the state, while placing demands on those parents who themselves were exposed to greatest hardship. Within this discourse, the role of the state is to support parents to take responsibility and to “pick up the pieces” only where parents cannot provide.

However, change started to occur after the election of the 1999 Labour-led Government. By early 2000, New Zealand’s Child Poverty Action Group (2003) noted that:

Recent government reports (Ministry of Social Development, 2001; Mowbray, 2001; Treasury, 2001) show a new willingness to recognise the profound changes that have taken place in income distribution and the rise of social exclusion in New Zealand (p. 10).

In New Zealand, socioeconomic structures to do with unequal distribution of resources and opportunities (UNICEF, 2000) led to a rise in poverty. These systemic issues need to be tackled if child poverty is to be eradicated. Early childhood education cannot be expected to offer solutions to the cause of poverty, but services can be valuable institutions in offering opportunities for children’s learning and wellbeing and support for families.

Early childhood education provision

Within this broad context, early childhood education and care in New Zealand is provided by a diverse range of services. The earliest services, kindergartens and childcare centres, developed in the late 19th century. Other types of service “emerged to meet a new need, usually through ‘do-it-yourself’ activism” (Smith & May, 2006, p. 96). Currently, early childhood services are characterised by their

diversity on a range of dimensions: service type;¹⁵ hours of operation; whether the service is teacher-led or parent/whānau-led,¹⁶ whether paid staff are employed or staffing is provided by volunteers; philosophy; and whether the service is community-managed or privately owned. Privately owned services are found only in the childcare sector. In 2007, 57 percent of childcare services (including centre-based and home-based) were privately owned. Ownership and distribution of assets and financial gains distinguish between these service types. The Ministry of Education defined community-based services as follows:

Community-based services are those established as Incorporated Societies, Charitable, Statutory or Community trusts, or those owned by a community organisation (e.g. City Council). Community-based services are prohibited from making financial gains that are distributed to their members (Ministry of Education, 2001b, p. 3).

Smith and May (2006) have linked the “paradigm of diversity” to New Zealand’s historical context, particularly the Polynesian migration approximately 800 years ago, European colonisation in the 19th century and immigration during post war years, especially from Pacific Islands nations, but more recently from other countries. Diversity can offer opportunity for children to attend services that meet families’ cultural and other aspirations, but only if diverse provision is available in all localities.

In 1986, all early childhood services except *kōhanga reo*,¹⁷ were brought under the administration of the Department of Education, making New Zealand the second country in the world after Iceland to have integrated its education and care services within an educational administration. Prior to this, childcare services were administered by the Department of Social Welfare, and kindergartens and playcentres were administered by the Department of Education. In 1988, three-year integrated training in colleges of education for teachers in childcare centres and kindergartens was introduced, replacing two-year training for kindergarten teachers and one-year training for childcare teachers. In the previous divided approach there was an implicit view that childcare was a welfare service offering “care for the

¹⁵ The main service types are kindergartens, childcare centres, home-based services, *kōhanga reo* (providing total immersion in Māori language and in *tikanga Māori*—Māori culture, and requiring whānau management), Pasifika bicultural and immersion services, playcentres (parent-run co-operatives where parents are trained to work with the children), home-based services, The Correspondence School (distance services) and playgroups. Playgroups include Māori immersion, and community language playgroups for different ethnic communities, as well as general playgroups.

¹⁶ Whānau means extended family. Parent/whānau-led services are playgroups, playcentres and *kōhanga reo*, which are run by parents or managed by the whole parent/whānau body.

¹⁷ *Kōhanga reo* came under the administration of the Department of Education in 1989.

needy”, while kindergartens and playcentres were “education” services (Dalli, 1992; May Cook, 1985; May, 1992).

The integration into the Department of Education was over 10 years in the making. It was a tortuous process. Geraldine McDonald (1981) tells the story of the passage of the recommendation for integration passed by the Child Care Syndicate of the Conference on Women and Social and Economic Development held in March 1976 to mark the end of International Women’s Year. This followed a less concrete recommendation for integration passed at the Seminar on Equality and the Education of the Sexes in 1975. These first proposals for integration did not come from other services in the early childhood sector (kindergarten and playcentre), but from the women’s movement. Women were not organised as a group to see the recommendations through, and McDonald (1981) argued that “the original intention of those who passed the recommendation became pressed out of shape by ‘the system’” (p. 169).

Integration is now recognised as one of the core elements of a successful early childhood policy (OECD, 2001). For this study, I proposed it as a key principle for an education based on the concept of the child as citizen. Integration was significant in New Zealand in acknowledging the inseparability of care and education, and promising an educational focus in all early childhood services. In terms of children’s rights, integration offers a basis for a good quality education for all children in whatever service they attend, but needs other policy (e.g., curriculum, staffing, advisory support, and funding) to support this goal.

It was not until the *Education to be More* report (Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group, 1988) and the subsequent government response in the *Before Five* policy (Lange, 1988) that common funding, regulatory and administrative requirements for all early childhood services were proposed. *Before Five* also promised that “At all levels of education, the early childhood sector will have equal status with the other education sectors” (Lange, 1988, p. 2). Status implies equitable treatment, including in funding, teacher pay and government resources and support. At the end of 1999, there were large inequities between early childhood services and the schools sector in all these aspects.

The years 1989–1999

The story of early childhood education in New Zealand under a centre-right National Government from 1990 to 1996, and a National Coalition Government from 1996 to 1999 is of cost-cutting and restraint, down-sizing the role of the state and backtracking on policy plans to improve teacher qualifications. These policy developments have been analysed and monitored by many commentators (e.g., Dalli, 1992; Dalli, 1994; Dalli & Te One, 2003; May, 1992; Meade, 1990; Mitchell, 1996, 2002a; Smith & May, 2006). On the positive side, in this same period, the government funded the development and publication of the early childhood education curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, and associated assessment and evaluation resources.

The 1990s in New Zealand education has been called “the decade of marketisation” (Nash & Harker, 2005, p. 201). Within education, early childhood education was the most extreme, operating within the community and business sphere, with the state playing a minimal role.

A market approach to education is based on assumptions that parents and children are consumers of education, and markets encourage consumer needs to be met. Under this paradigm, it is assumed that parents will not use a service that is not meeting their needs, is too costly or is of low quality. This assumption that markets will encourage improved quality, and that parents will “vote with their feet” is not sustained by research evidence. Barraclough and Smith’s (1996) study of whether parents choose and value quality in childcare found that parents were more positive and uncritical than researchers about poor-quality childcare programmes. There was no correlation between research-based measures of quality and parent satisfaction:

Parents appear to make passive choices about the care they use for their children, and therefore parental choice about a childcare centre is not a viable means of controlling quality (Smith & May, 2006, p. 108).

Likewise, Wylie, Thompson, and Kerslake Hendricks (1996) found location was the dominant reason for parents’ choice of early childhood service. In a 2003/2004 national survey, Mitchell and Brooking (2007) found that most parents relied on word-of-mouth to make decisions about how good their chosen early childhood service was before making a choice. Parents may leave a service they perceive to be of poor quality. However, Noonan (1992, p. 5) has pointed out that unless such

parents have a role in changing what they do not like, they are likely to leave other disadvantaged parents behind.

Competition between providers is supposed to contribute to efficiency, cost effectiveness and higher quality. This argument is flawed, since quality is affected by the interactions and education programme that children experience, the nature of the curriculum and aspects of structural quality, e.g. teacher qualifications, adult:child ratios, group size and teacher salaries (Smith et al., 2000).

The market model and noninterventionist stance was largely applied to early childhood education policies in major policy areas of provision of services, funding mechanisms and government regulations, with the exception of the development of the early childhood curriculum, and associated approaches to assessment and evaluation. There was minimal government intervention in the early childhood sector. The government was portrayed as a purchaser of education provided by the market.

Key features of early childhood education policy were as follows:

1. Provision and planning for services. The government held a very limited role in respect to planning and provision, simply offering some advice and support through a government agency, Early Childhood Development, to any organisation (private or community-based) wanting to establish early childhood services. Discretionary grants were available for community-based services wanting to become established that met criteria set on an annual basis, but there was insufficient funding to grant all applications for discretionary grants.
2. Funding mechanisms. There was a competitive bulk funding mechanism, paid as a grant-in-aid to early childhood services, with amounts largely the same for all services regardless of differences in the characteristics of the intake (children) or cost drivers associated with staffing, advisory support, parent education and operations. An individually targeted childcare subsidy was provided through Work and Income New Zealand for families meeting low-income criteria. It provided for nine hours per week to all low-income families and additional hours up to a maximum of 50 hours per week for children from low-income families where the parent/s were in employment or training or the family was affected by sickness or disability issues. It was paid direct to services charging fees. Services were responsible for managing and spending

funding and managers had discretion in deciding spending priorities. There was no monitoring of how funding was spent and services had to comply only with minimal standards set in regulation.

3. Regulatory framework (staffing). Minimal standards for staffing were set in regulation. These did not provide structural underpinning of low child:staff ratios, small group size and qualified staff that are associated in the research literature¹⁸ with good quality for children. There were particularly poor adult:child ratios for over two-year-olds in sessional centres (1:15) and for under two-year-olds in all day settings (1:5). Centre size could be as large as 50 over twos or 25 under twos, with all children being educated in the same group. Kindergarten teachers were required to be registered teachers, similar to primary and secondary teachers, but staff in education and care centres had lower qualification requirements. Pay varied throughout the sector. There were further large pay discrepancies between teachers in the early childhood sector and primary and secondary teachers. Professional development was contestable, with professional development advisers competing for limited funds. Access to professional development varied. Management had discretion about staff participation in professional development unless provisions had been negotiated into employment contracts.
4. Accountability. The Education Review Office (ERO) carried out assurance audits, assessing activities against rather limited legislative and regulated requirements. ERO's 1995 education evaluation report questioned whether those arrangements were sufficient to ensure that each child was well cared for and actively educated on a professional basis. It suggested the need for regulations to allow more active monitoring of structural and process quality (Hurst, 1995).

There was evidence in the mid-1990s that the Ministry of Education took little effective action on noncomplying services and played no role in ensuring services had access to support for changing. The Ministry of Education seemed to be unwilling to suspend or cancel licences—actions which would have removed government funding and prevented their operation as licensed

¹⁸ (Goelman, Doherty, Lero, LaGrange, & Tougas, 2000; NICHD Early Child Care Network, 2002; Phillips, Mekos, Scarr, McCartney, & Abbott-Shim, 2000; Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes, & Cryer, 1997; Smith, 1996; Smith et al., 2000).

centres—even when a centre was in breach of serious health, safety, welfare and educational requirements (Mitchell, 1996). Consistent with a market model, it was up to services to find any support to change that they needed.

5. Curriculum. *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum, was published in 1996. The emphasis is on children’s competencies, dispositions and theory building, and the child as a participant within a social world. *Te Whāriki* is a framework, rather than a prescriptive curriculum, and defines curriculum broadly as “the sum total of the experiences, activities and events, whether direct or indirect, which occur within an environment designed to foster children’s learning and development” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 10). It “requires attention to every aspect of every child’s experience within the early childhood setting” (Nuttall, 2003a, p. 162), and may therefore be difficult to operationalise. It rejects more traditional notions of curriculum that prescribe aims and content, and expects services to create their curriculum in a culturally situated way. The word whāriki in the name is a “woven mat” reflecting the view of curriculum as “distinctive patterns” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 11). Margaret Carr has argued that its aspirations set out a view of social justice, and that the four principles of *Te Whāriki* set out a pathway for reducing barriers to this aspiration for all children and families:

Whakamana—Providing opportunities for children (and their families) to have some control over their lives;

Ngā hononga—Developing reciprocal and responsive relationships in a community where everyone is a learner and everyone benefits;

Whānau tangata—Engaging families and community;

Kotahitanga—Developing strengths and competence in contexts that are meaningful to learners and that provide a platform for life-long learning (Carr, 2006, p. 1).

Alongside *Te Whāriki*, an approach to assessment and evaluation using learning and teaching stories (Carr et al., 1998; Carr et al., 2000) was developed. Dalli and Te One (2003) have argued that, throughout the 1990s, the community-based early childhood education sector remained active, articulate and united about pedagogic principles, influencing the development of *Te Whāriki* and the teaching and learning story assessment approach, as well as initiating sector projects. These factors have helped to create and maintain a pedagogic focus in New Zealand’s

early childhood sector that has enabled children's rights to emerge as the basis of policy development in the years 2000–2004.

In summary, at the end of the 1990s, market mechanisms and a private sector framework had been applied to all early childhood education services. In a system where all services were treated much the same, a low level of regulated standards was required, and insufficient government funding and support were offered for meeting the costs of staffing and operating early childhood services to a high standard. On the other hand the integration of childcare into the Department of Education promoted coherence for early childhood services and therefore for children. The aspirations for children within *Te Whāriki* held up a vision of children as active contributors and citizens.

Discourses of quality, equity and market

Two debates were evident within the policy-related statements and campaigns during these years:

A left-wing debate came largely from unionists, academics, researchers, representatives of community-based early childhood organisations, women's organisations and teachers, who combined within advocacy groups and participated in campaigns. These debates were primarily concerned with raising the levels of quality of early childhood provision, addressing inequities for children in terms of access to early childhood education, and addressing pay inequities for early childhood teachers through pay parity with primary and secondary school teachers, and between teachers in kindergartens and childcare centres. The framing was in terms of rights, especially children's rights to access good-quality early childhood education, and equity. The quality arguments drew on a research basis.

The aims of each of the campaigns described below were to raise awareness with politicians and the public and make explicit recommendations for actions. These campaigns were a response to a view that the policies of the 1990s were failing and marginalising children and the women who participated and worked in early childhood services. Collective action was seen as a way of uniting and mobilising a common voice. The Early Childhood Group (1994) and the Early Childhood Education Project (1996) analysed current situations and made detailed recommendations to move the sector forward. The Early Childhood Group made recommendations about teacher qualification requirements. *Future Directions*

(Early Childhood Education Project, 1996) highlighted aspects of policy in 1995/1996 that were problematic and made 27 recommendations to develop proposals on governmental structures and funding to support good-quality education for all children. The recommendations were about specific measures, and had a focus on funding rather than on pedagogical processes. Funding was identified in the report as a pressing issue, and *Te Whāriki* had just been published and welcomed by the sector. The Code of Ethics working group consulted widely to develop values and processes for resolving ethical dilemmas. Other campaigns were more traditional, making specific recommendations for funding increases in particular.

Table 4 **Left-wing sector campaigns and coalitions 1989 to 1999**

Initiative	Who involved	Actions	Main recommendations and framing
Campaign for Quality Early Childhood Education (1989)	Unions, women's groups, early childhood organisations	Petitions to increase funding, press conference, rally at parliament	Increase early childhood funding Framed in terms of rights to quality provision
Code of Ethics working group (1996)	Academics, unionists, early childhood sector representatives, teacher educators	Developed Early Childhood Code of Ethics, accompanying video and education kits	Shared values and processes for resolving ethical dilemmas Framed in terms of rights of children, parents, teachers and employers (Dalli & Mitchell, 1995; Dalli & Te One, 2003)
Early Childhood Group (1994)	Unionists, teacher educators, academics and researchers	Analysed key reports and reviews of early childhood qualifications and training in the previous 15 years	Integrated training, 3-year teaching diploma as minimum benchmark, availability of institution-based and field-based training Framed in terms of quality
Campaign for Quality Education in the Early Years (1993)	Unions, teacher educators, academics, researchers, early childhood organisations	Launched Anne Smith's video "Early childhood educate: The search for quality" (discusses 10 major indicators of what to look for in quality educate)	Framed in terms of quality provision.
Campaign for pay parity for early childhood teachers (1990s)	Unions	Petitions calling for increased funding, days of action, a teacher strike	Increased funding to enable pay increases Framed in terms of valuing the size of the teaching task and equity
Early Childhood Education Project (1996); Wells (1999)	Coalition of representatives from the largest national early childhood organisation for each service type. All community-based	Researched and developed proposals on structures and funding for high-quality early childhood education services	Universal funding for all children, pay parity for teachers and a strategic plan for the sector Framed in terms of aspirations for children and family

Keeping the debates about funding, teacher pay, qualifications and government structures alive within the public arena through articulating arguments framed within a rights and quality discourse, and campaigning collectively, has been a key to achieving some policy change to benefit the early childhood sector. For example, Anne Meade (1990), commenting on the 1989 Campaign for Quality Education, from her vantage as an adviser to the Prime Minister on early childhood education policy and the chair of the Education to be More Working Group, said:

Obtaining a government policy on funding early childhood services was hard. Economic considerations had entered the decisions. The interests of capital and male power-holders joined together and came to the fore. The Business Roundtable and others in the new right economic discourse were spelling out the political advantages of the government decreasing its expenditure. The intervention of some new participants in the form of the Campaign for Quality Early Childhood Education was a key to cabinet ministers being willing to consider the political advantages of increased funding. I believe that the players inside parliament buildings would not have achieved worthwhile funding against the power of those supported by ‘captains of industry’ without the political activity of the campaign (p. 106).

Wells (1999) analysed the policy recommendations of *Future Directions* in comparison with policy developments undertaken by the Ministry of Education, to show that in 1998 there was a close parallel between them in relation to a range of initiatives in funding, teacher qualifications and relationships with government agencies and early childhood services. She also demonstrated the widespread engagement of politicians with the report recommendations, including select committee hearings about the recommendations, carried out in 1997 in Auckland, Hamilton, Palmerston North, Christchurch, Dunedin and Wellington (where three hearings were held). The implementation of Equity Funding in 2002 and the decision to develop a strategic plan for early childhood education were both *Future Directions* recommendations.

Participants involved in organised collective action made use of research to marshal arguments for policy proposals. New Zealand research on its own also made a strong contribution to policy development, as Smith and May (2006) noted:

A cumulative body of systematic research has directly influenced government policies towards increasing the status, recognition and funding for early childhood education services (p. 110).

In contrast, a right-wing debate came from central government agencies, especially the Treasury and State Services Commission, government politicians and the

national organisation representing the private childcare sector, the Early Childhood Council, during the 1990s. Like the left-wing advocates, this debate was also framed around arguments of “improving quality” and “equity”, but quality and equity discourses were subverted to fit with the protagonists’ proposed policy mechanisms of competition, choice and marketisation.

Justification for a limited role for government and contestability of early childhood education service provision was found in Treasury’s 1987 briefing to the incoming government (Treasury, 1987). Contestability was promoted as giving consumers a choice of service provision and promoting efficiency (Meade, 1993). In 1992, two services providing advisory support to early childhood education, the Special Education Service and Early Childhood Development Unit, were made contestable.

“Equity” arguments were used in relation to kindergarten provision, as a reason for making kindergarten “the same” as other services. So, for example, in 1995, John Luxton, the Associate Minister of Education responsible for early childhood education from 1993 to 1995, told a select committee hearing on kindergarten funding that kindergartens were privileged, and there were advantages in kindergartens having lesser government funding, charging fees and so attracting a Social Welfare subsidy. At this same hearing, the Ministry of Education argued for equal treatment:

Under current policies, the government buys educational hours of a particular quality from early childhood services and overall is neutral in terms of service type (Ministry of Education, 1995, p. 1).

Equity arguments were used for removing kindergartens from the state sector. The Minister of State Services, Jenny Shipley, told parliament that the State Services Commission involvement in collective employment contract negotiations had enabled the teachers’ union to secure extra funding for wage increases that was not available to other providers:

The government is not prepared for this inequity to continue in the forthcoming contract negotiation (Shipley, 1997).

In the next section I examine the main effects of market approaches for early childhood services, focusing on effects on children. This sets the scene for ideas about a new discourse, and how it might change the position of children.

Effects of the market approach

At the end of the 1990s, more children were participating in early childhood education, an increase in overall participation from 42 percent in 1989 to 59 percent in 1999. The highest increases were for three- and four-year-olds. There was also an increase in early childhood services from 2,572 in 1989 to 3,340 in 1999.

The free market approach assumes that the community or business sector will respond to community needs and the operation of the market will ensure appropriate provision. This did not occur and community needs were not being met. By the mid-1990s, there were gaps and duplications in service provision, and access by different groups in the community was variable. Low-income families, and Māori and Pasifika families had lower levels of participation than high-income families and Pākehā New Zealanders (Department of Labour and National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women, 1999; Early Childhood Education Project, 1996; Hanna, 1994; Mitchell, 1996). The principle that every child should be able to participate without discrimination was not being met: Children were discriminated against in terms of access to early childhood education by means of family income, ethnicity and where they lived.

There was a greater expansion under the market approach in private, profit-making childcare centres, from 407 in 1992 (47 percent), to 800 in 2001 (51 percent), to 1,082 (58 percent) in 2007. Private centres are primarily accountable to their owners and investors, raising questions about their accountability to children and families if interests conflict. In New Zealand there is some evidence that private provision is of poorer quality than community-based provision. Smith (1996) found that there were differences in quality depending on the ownership of childcare centres. Employment-based centres were of highest quality, followed by community-based centres and private centres. My New Zealand research has found that in 2001, private centres employed less well-qualified staff than community-based centres (Mitchell, 2002b), and in 2003 they had poorer employment conditions (Mitchell & Brooking, 2007). These findings are consistent with international evidence. If the government remains reliant on private childcare provision, and these differences remain, children in private centres could be vulnerable to low-quality standards.

Although the integration of care and education services had occurred at an administrative level, fragmentation was evident. Services which were not part of a

larger umbrella organisation operated as isolated stand-alone units. The early childhood workforce was fragmented by the bargaining arrangements that favoured individual bargaining (Mitchell & Wells, 1997), by differences in rates of pay and working conditions and by differences in training requirements. There was no coherent policy framework, and sector representatives had little involvement in policy making.

The curriculum and learning and teaching stories assessment approach offered a unifying pedagogy, but training and professional support was not of uniformly good quality or available to all early childhood practitioners (Mitchell, 2005). Quality was trimmed following the 1991 budget cuts, and in 1999 services were still of variable quality, and the early childhood workforce continued to be underpaid and undervalued (Early Childhood Education Project, 1996; Mitchell, 1996). Reliance on the market for early childhood provision exposed children to inconsistencies and inequalities.

The years 1999–2007

Since the election of a Labour-led Government in 1999, the story is of shifting balances from a minimal state to a supportive state, as the government started to take greater responsibility for provision and standards of quality. The Royal Commission on Social Policy (1988) defined “minimal state” as follows:

In a situation of ‘minimal state involvement’, the family is regarded as largely responsible for the care of dependants. In practice this means the responsibility rests largely with women working without a wage within the household. Those women with access to sufficient income can buy assistance of various kinds on the market. . . . The role of the state is restricted to ‘picking up the pieces’ only where family care has broken down, or when the care provided is beyond the family’s means. In other words, the state’s role is to substitute when the family does not perform its function.

The ‘supportive state’ assumes that providing care is a co-operative effort between families and the state, given the importance of care for the continuing functioning of society. In this view, waged and unwaged work are seen as interdependent and as often undertaken by the same person. Policies to support families will necessarily include labour market policies (p. 128).

The most significant shift in relation to policy for the early childhood sector as a comprehensive whole was the development of a 10-year strategic plan for early childhood education (*Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki*). This was

done through consultation with the sector—a working group of 31 people chaired by Anne Meade developed early plans.

The plan covers three inter-related goals: to improve the quality of services; to increase participation in quality early childhood education services; and to promote collaborative relationships. Four “supporting strategies” underpin the three goals: to review regulations; review the funding system; undertake ongoing research; and involve the sector in ongoing policy development and implementation.

The strategic plan and policy implemented to date signal a transformed role of the state away from minimal state involvement and support, with individual services alone responsible for their own performance, to a system of mutual responsibility between government and services. There are distinctly new roles for the government in planning and provision, in supporting teaching and learning and in creating co-ordination and coherence between systems, as well as an emphasis on goals for education and actions to support teaching and learning. Evident in the proposals is a new valuing of the role of early childhood teachers, recognition of the importance of their qualifications and some adoption of governmental responsibility for ensuring teachers’ remuneration is equitable and adequate.

Comparison of policy elements

The OECD (2001) report, *Starting Strong*, and the follow-up report, *Starting Strong II* (OECD, 2006), identified eight key elements of successful early childhood education policy that are likely to promote equitable access to quality early childhood education. These offer benchmarks against which to evaluate elements of New Zealand’s early childhood education policy.

Table 5 summarises common elements from the OECD (2001) *Starting Strong* report, the early childhood sector’s *Future Directions* report (Early Childhood Education Project, 1996), and the government’s strategic plan, *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002). The comparison shows that New Zealand’s strategic plan and the policies that were advocated by the early childhood sector in the *Future Directions* and *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki* reports are aligned in key ways with the elements identified by the OECD. The focus on achieving greater integration within policies affecting children in early childhood education and amongst services, professionals and parents extends the concept of integration for New Zealand’s early childhood

services. Both the *Future Directions* and *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki* reports highlight ways in which to improve access for all children. However, they focus on issues of physical access and planned provision, rather than barriers related to the ways in which services cater for diversity. Major improvements have been proposed in the remaining five aspects: funding and infrastructure support, quality improvement and assurance processes, staffing, data collection and monitoring, and research and evaluation.

The strategic plan actions have taken New Zealand in some new directions and consolidated other directions. Nevertheless some notable gaps remain. The vision for children within the strategic plan is not well specified and is open to interpretation. Early childhood education is portrayed as the foundation for ongoing learning and enriching children's "growth and development". The idea of children as citizens does not feature here, except through the plan's support for *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum. Working conditions vary throughout the sector, and many teachers have insufficient noncontact or meeting time for "participatory approaches to quality improvement and assurance" that the OECD report advocates. There are still issues of uneven access to services because a market approach largely applies to provision of services.

The Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education is much more comprehensive than the *Future Directions* report. However, one conclusion is that *Future Directions*, through articulating values about children ("a new debate about children") alongside specific recommendations for early childhood policy helped keep these debates alive in the public arena and contributed to policy change.

Table 5 Elements of successful early childhood education policy

Policy element	Starting strong (OECD, 2001)	Future directions (Early Childhood Education Project, 1996) recommendations	Strategic plan for early childhood education (Ministry of Education, 2002)
Integrated action	A systematic and integrated approach to policy development, underpinned by a clear vision for children underlying policy	A long-term strategic plan for early childhood education, including how society can offer holistic support for families Improved co-ordination between government agencies and within the Ministry of Education	Plan based on aspirations for children to participate in quality early childhood education, no matter their circumstances More integrated services to children, parents, families
Relationships within the education sector	A strong and equal partnership with the education system		Coherence of education birth to eight promoted
Access	A universal approach to access, with particular attention to children in need of special support	A funding system and service planning aimed at enabling access for all families. Funding and co-ordination of specialist services to support children with disabilities	Network planning in some localities, and some support for provision, but not everywhere
Funding and infrastructure	Substantial public investment in services and the infrastructure	Universal funding Funding to compensate for costs; equity funding to meet additional costs for immersion programmes, for services in low-income and isolated communities, and with special needs Equitable funding on the same basis as the schools sector	Free early childhood education for 3- and 4-year olds in teacher-led services New funding system based on cost drivers Equity Funding Substantial increase in funding for early childhood education
Quality improvement and assurance	A participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance Regulatory standards and co-ordinated investment Pedagogical frameworks	Parent involvement in decision making as democratically elected representatives on management Partnership with government over policy development Improve regulated staff:child ratios, support for Māori immersion and Pasifika bilingual and immersion centres	Partnership with government over strategic plan development Publication of assessment, evaluation and self-review resources that support participatory approaches to quality improvement Legislation of <i>Te Whāriki</i> , the early childhood curriculum, proposed
Staffing	Appropriate training and working conditions for staff in all forms of provision	Financial and professional support for staff to gain qualifications to address problems of unsatisfactory training and insufficiently qualified workforce Address issues of low pay	Regulated qualification, staff:child ratio and group sizes are being improved Pay parity with school teachers (kindergarten teachers only)
Data collection and monitoring	Systematic attention to monitoring and data collection on the status of children, early childhood education provision and the early childhood workforce	New policies based on sound consultation, information and research	New policies based on sound consultation Improved data collection, e.g., on children's participation, teaching workforce, costs of ECE
Research and evaluation	A stable framework and long-term agenda for research and evaluation	New policies based on sound consultation, information and research	Long-term agenda for research and evaluation

The participatory processes followed in the development of the *Future Directions* report, and of the government's strategic plan are consistent with the idea that the education and upbringing of young children is a co-operative effort between families and the state (a supportive state) rather than a largely family and private responsibility (minimal state).

Conclusion

The New Zealand and early childhood context have been discussed in this chapter. A marked shift has been away from a market approach with minimal state involvement, to a more supportive state with the government offering enhanced systemic support and willingness to engage with sector representatives to look for solutions to problems. The market approach of the 1990s fostered inequalities for children and was not responsive to community needs. In contrast, the strategic plan policies, while not eliminating the market approach, is better able to respond to differential needs and costs and to support teaching and learning for all children.

CHAPTER 5: CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHILDHOOD IN PEDAGOGY, AND THEIR EFFECTS

A premise of the thesis is that teachers' constructions of children and early childhood education practice are connected. In this chapter, the teachers' pedagogical documentation, the network discussions and the interview data are examined to address the research question: "What constructions of children are evident in early childhood education pedagogy, and what are their effects?" The teachers who participated in the teachers' network had taken on the challenge of undertaking and exploring their work based on a dominant image of the "child as citizen". I examine to what extent and how these teachers were able to incorporate a culture of citizenry participation within their thinking and practice.

Teachers were categorised according to their dominant views about children as I understood these. I discuss three case studies, chosen because they offer examples of the two main constructions found within the teachers' viewpoints: constructions of the developing child (developmental appropriateness); and constructions of the child as participant and competent learner. These constructions were not held consistently or revealed in discussion and practice in all situations. However, a thread of my argument will be that teachers draw on these constructions, that they do affect practice and that they have implications for how children are positioned in relation to my three principles for an education to embrace the child as citizen. The three principles are: integrated action; best outcomes; and that all children will have opportunity to participate without discrimination of any kind.

One of the values of using case studies is that they illustrate what constructions of the "child as citizen" and early childhood education centres as "sites for democracy and citizenship" may look like. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss approaches to forming democratic communities of teaching and learning, compare the findings with other research evidence and examine the implications for pedagogy and policy.

Constructions of the child as citizen

This section discusses two case studies where teachers' dominant views of children were closest to the idea of the child as citizen. In common, these teachers placed value and emphasis in their discussions and pedagogical documentation on creating a socially just world, with active contribution and participation of children, parents, whānau and community. Data are analysed to illustrate that these teachers constructed democratic values suitable to their contexts through thinking about and discussing new theories and ideas about childhood, and critically examining them in relation to pedagogy and their own setting. The thinking and discussion itself was a form of democratic practice. There were consistencies between teachers' construction of statements of their values, their construction of their own roles and their documented examples of practice.

Case study one: Nurturing the mana of the child

Totara kindergarten is a three teacher kindergarten in a predominantly farming community. Forty-four children attend morning sessions (three hours on four days a week, and four hours on two days), and a different 44 children attend afternoon sessions (2½ hours on three days a week). Younger children, mainly three-year-olds, attend in the afternoon, and then move on to the morning sessions when they are four years old. Sixty-five percent of the children are Pākehā¹⁹ New Zealanders, and 24 percent are Māori. The families have a range of income levels. The kindergarten teachers have formed working relationships with a wānanga²⁰ and local marae,²¹ as part of their interest in developing their kindergarten as a bicultural community. They are also trying to develop close relationships with the local school which adjoins the kindergarten, and place store on building relationships with people, community groups and businesses in the community. Two of the teachers participated in the network.

Creating a democratic community of teaching and learning

Below is a description of a pedagogical project from Totara kindergarten that was discussed in the network. As the project was carried out, teachers photographed what was happening and put the photographs in the kindergarten "term book". The

¹⁹ Pākehā is defined by Māori as meaning "extraordinary" or "white".

²⁰ Māori university.

²¹ Open space or plaza in front of meeting house.

term book is of happenings in the kindergarten, always of group projects, and often involving children, parents, teachers and people from the Totara community. These term books were a source of reflection for teachers and children, a means for capturing parents' involvement and a celebration of the work of the kindergarten.

The teachers in this example found out what the children were thinking about when they were working in the sandpit, so that they could help the children undertake work that would motivate and engage them. The project described took place over a long time—months rather than days or hours, and the ideas and learning that occurred were built on subsequently.

As a context for this project, there is a concrete works in the locality where some parents are employed, and a few children have experienced concrete-making at home.

The story began in 1998 when three boys were in the sandpit were mixing water with sand and carting it in their trucks to dump it in another part of the sandpit and pat it down. The teachers asked and found out they were making concrete.

Teachers used this evident interest to talk with children about concrete—a dad making a concrete path, a nanny making concrete blocks for the barbeque. How did it hold together? Teachers and children discussed this idea. They decided to make real concrete. There was lots of talk about what they could make, and children contributed their ideas and came to decisions themselves.

It was a project that reached out into the community. Teachers and children went out looking at walls, photographing walls, drawing walls and asking their families about walls. Children discussed their ideas about the kind of wall they would like. They decided to make a low wall with a wooden top they could sit on at morning tea time. Children wrote lists of resources they needed for their project. They posted these on the noticeboard for parents and visitors to see.

A teacher offered a wheelbarrow for mixing concrete. A local garden centre donated tomato boxes as moulds for making concrete bricks. Children measured in buckets the water, sand and mortar after finding out the right quantities. Parents helped the children take the blocks out of the moulds and cement them in place. The local reporter visited and wrote a story. Her story headlines: “The great kiwi²² tradition of ‘do-it-yourself’ is alive and well at Totara kindergarten.”

Since then, making concrete has become a tradition. A concrete path being built by council workers outside the kindergarten offered opportunity for children to go out with their sketch books and pens, observe and draw what they were seeing and ask the workers questions. Children have since made concrete to repair the edging of the sandpit, to make a concrete path (decorated with shells) and to repair the potholes in the drive. This last project was instigated by the teachers:

“The children hadn’t talked about potholes or anything, but we made them aware because it’s part of the environment. Their cars pull up there every day. It’s making the children responsible for the environment as well.” (Mary, second interview)

In each project, children solved problems themselves, and taught each other. For example, the problem of making the boxing so that the sandpit edging would stand up was resolved by a four-year-old who had seen concrete being made at home. He showed how to nail wooden struts at intervals between the two boxing edges to hold them apart and keep them rigid. Children were recollecting and going back over previous learning as they made plans and found ways to do things. The photographic documentation of previous projects helped them do this because they could return to look at it. There was interdependence as children and adults listened and negotiated, coming to agreements, sharing and learning skills. Children’s theories were respected. Roles were shared. Some children gave ideas about how to do things, others were doers—getting into the thick of concreting.

²² New Zealanders are sometimes referred to as ‘kiwis’. A kiwi is a native bird of New Zealand.

It would have been easy for these teachers to organise a working bee of adults to make the wall, repair the sandpit and make the concrete path. The teachers enabled children to do this themselves, with adults as helpers. In working in this way, they were showing respect for the children as competent to undertake work that is traditionally regarded as adult work. Teachers worked from a social constructionist perspective, enabling children to have real influence over how the projects were conceived and progressed, and to create their own solutions when faced with difficulties, rather than teachers telling children what to do, providing “correct” answers or doing things for them.

There were opportunities for children to develop leadership roles. Children were encouraged to draw on their own “funds of knowledge” (Moll, 2000) from their homes and communities, and were responsible for their own and others’ learning processes. Children were valued for their contribution. In this way children had opportunities to experience democracy within the kindergarten.

Much of the content of the collective projects that were developed at Totara kindergarten were environmental projects about caring for animals, making concrete, composting, collecting shellfish, growing vegetables and preparing and cooking food. In this respect, children were encouraged to understand environmental issues and solve environmental problems, such as the pot holes in the driveway.

Langsted has said:

The game itself and the social relationships are the most important things. Skills and competence are by-products (Langsted, 1994, p. 33).

Within the concrete project, learning of mathematical concepts was happening without being consciously taught, for example, mathematical problem solving, dividing, measuring and estimating quantities. Writing tasks were undertaken for a purpose. The focus was the game and social relationships, which the Totara kindergarten teachers said were of primary importance to them.

The kindergarten as a social community

The teachers at Totara kindergarten placed emphasis on kindergartens as social communities.

Teachers described the role of kindergartens as including the creation of environments that brought together children of different backgrounds, and a world that teachers also liked:

I think it's a great learning establishment. . . . It's a melting pot, and some of those who haven't had social experiences, it's a really good way to learn. And it's a neat place for us to work in. (Sally, first interview, June 2000)

Although most of the statements of these teachers about children's capacities and experiences were positive, some elements of deficit thinking were also evident, in this example in the assumption that some children "haven't had social experiences". A deficit approach holds to a "notion of the developing child as incomplete, a jigsaw with parts missing". The educational focus is on what children cannot do. In contrast, the educational interest in a credit model is on learning dispositions and encouraging a view of the self as a learner. This approach to learning encourages skills and funds of knowledge that the child will need to be able to participate in a domain of learning disposition. A deficit model takes a narrower view of learning (Carr, 2001, pp. 11–12).

These teachers brought a display they had set up at the kindergarten for discussion at the tenth network meeting. Mary described the display as concerning both "families in our community, or the community in our kindergarten":

We have many important people in Totara. Our neighbours—the school and our two families on either side, and an adult language group. We've been involved with them. And we've got a body building gym down the road.

And one of the kids invited Janice, the instructor, to come down. Unbeknown to us. We had a session with Janice. It was off [child A's] bat. Kids enjoyed it.

Then we've got people working locally. Which is our council workers who came and laid the footpath. We had to take the opportunity to go to help them. They were not impressed. But our kids are sensible. They know about concrete. They're not going to run up and down on it. They were involved in the laying of the footpath. Seeing how the concrete was done.

This is a whole group of kids. The school had a wet day, a splash day. And the kids said 'I wish we could have some of those.' We said, 'We can. Set up the mat and I'll turn the hose on.' So we had a splash day. And because the school was having a slip and slide they got together and created a slip and slide. They had a wonderful time. This was through the school.

Parents bringing materials for building houses. [Children] wanted to build a hammering house. So parents sent along lengths of wood. And bricks as I recall. Came from home—different lengths. Involvement of parents was really good in supplying materials and planning it.

And whenever parents at home have produce, there's a lot of farming and vege gardens, if parents have left-overs, we're quite keen to make our own tomato sauce. Just bring in the goods. We've had tomato sauce and apples and lemons. And we make lemonade.

This is [the man] who runs the language school next door. He stored our carpets because we had floods and over the holidays he stored them all. [The children] made a kono²³ of food and took it across to the language nest. The kids were very excited, 'We're going to give a basket of food!' The whole area is a marae, total immersion. So we stood there. We were sung to, we had a waiata²⁴ and singing. And we came back really enthusiastic about the singing. (Mary, tenth network meeting, March 2001).

Sally pointed out that these events were “just normal term happenings”.

In these examples, adults are responding to children's invitations and requests, and children are confident in initiating their own ideas. This suggests that the kindergarten is the “children's place” and children are active in creating the kindergarten world. A culture of reciprocity is exemplified—the kono (basket) of food taken to the language nest, and adherence to tikanga Māori.²⁵ In tikanga Māori, reciprocity is related to the concept of “whanaungatanga” or interrelationships. Royal Tangaere wrote that “Whanaungatanga draws on the importance of whakapapa or genealogical ties and the collective responsibility that this cultural pedagogy expects” (Mitchell, Royal Tangaere, Mara, & Wylie, 2006b, p. 30). In their discussion and documentation of the project, the teachers drew on these Māori concepts and Māori language.

These examples show the learning environment to be a “potentiating” (powerful) environment, described by Claxton and Carr (2004) as:

. . . [an environment] that not only invite[s] the expression of certain dispositions, but actively stretch[es] them, and thus develop[s] them. It is our view that potentiating environments involve frequent participation in shared activity (Rogoff et al., 1993, p. 533) in which children or students take responsibility for directing those activities as well as adults (Brown et al., 1993).

²³ Kono is a basket made from harakeke (a New Zealand flax).

²⁴ Waiata means song.

²⁵ Tikanga means “culture”.

Totara kindergarten teachers' emphasis on co-operative processes could also be seen in their approach to activities that are often undertaken by children individually. In one example, Sally described how the teachers tried to encourage cooperative learning and peer learning through group puzzle work. The teachers' interest and focus was on getting children to co-operate and talk and solve problems together, and the puzzle was a vehicle for that to happen.

In another example, Mary talked about how co-operation extended to children comforting other children if they hurt themselves, and attending to children's needs.

You know, 'Are you all right? Do you need a tissue? Where does it hurt?' Picks them up, brings them in. 'Oh, so and so needs a band aid.' They report—we know exactly what's happening, because we have our reporters—the natural reporters in life! (second interview, September 2001)

The importance of collaborative processes is also emphasised in *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum:

Children learn through collaboration with adults and peers, through guided participation and observation of others, as well as through individual exploration and learning (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9).

In these examples, collaboration with adults and peers was a primary focus.

Building a co-constructed learning community

The Totara kindergarten teachers had clear ideas about outcomes that they valued, such as working collaboratively, participating and contributing. They consciously set about constructing ways of working to encourage what they were aiming to achieve.

Teachers held back from doing things for children. I asked Mary to explain how teachers strengthened children learning together in a community:

Linda: One of the things that was said . . . at one of the network meetings, was that you had strengthened the importance of the social group, and the way kids work together. . . . Have you got any examples you can tell me about, of how you strengthened the children working together as a social group?

Mary: The children—we don't actually rush into situations with children . . . or we don't assist until absolutely necessary. And even then, arriving on the situation, if there's children there, they will be asked to do it. (Second interview, September 2001)

This way of working had helped children to rely more on each other instead of the teacher, and also freed the teachers to spend sustained and concentrated time with children:

I found one of those network meetings, a lot of the teachers said, 'We can't do that, we haven't got the time, because of all the interruptions.' Now we've got all the time in the world because the kids don't actually come to us to do things. They'll have to find someone else who can do it for them. And that's encouraged. . . . It's like doing the puzzles.—'So and so's good at puzzles. Go and ask him to help.' (Mary, second interview, September 2001)

The teachers observed that some activities afforded greater opportunities for co-operative learning than others. Mary thought cooking contributed to social strengthening, and that problem solving together encouraged children to work things out for themselves. This requires the teacher to take a role of holding back from offering solutions, encouraging children to try things out for themselves, and asking questions. Mary described talking with a boy who wanted her to join together a truck and trailer:

He said I was the teacher and I knew how to put the truck and trailer together. And I explained to him I was a learner, just like he was. And he said, 'But you're big, you can't learn.' And I said, 'But I still don't know how you want me to put the truck and trailer together.' He said, 'Well I'll show you.' And he did! I said 'Oh you don't need me! You did it yourself!'

. . . And adults just have to stand back a bit. And not be too presumptuous with their knowledge. (Mary, second interview, September 2001)

Totara kindergarten teachers' documentation and assessment were consistent with valuing the group. The term book was not put together explicitly to show community, "but it was just full of it". Sally made the point that documentation shows what is valued:

Perhaps there are things others might see as more important. . . . The reality is that we see what we choose to document. And if someone was keen on maths [that's what they would document]. (Sally, tenth network meeting, March 2001).

The "Kindy books" that documented and celebrated group "term happenings" were portrayed as providing a window onto the kindergarten:

The material we choose tells us a story about ourselves and can help us see our own bias and thus help us broaden what we do (Sally, journal excerpt)

An external evaluation of the education and care provided for children in all early childhood education services is provided by a government department, the Education Review Office (ERO). The review focus is on educational improvement and compliance with statutory obligations. ERO's reviews are published on their website at www.ero.govt.nz. One issue that emerged from this case study is the incompatibility between the ERO's review focus on assessment and planning for individual children's learning, and assessment and planning for group learning that these teachers routinely undertook. A 2005 review (with the same teachers) acknowledged that "children are able to observe, participate and develop process and problem solving skills, and see that they can make enduring, useful contributions to their kindergarten", but expressed concern there was insufficient documented assessment and planning for all individual children. A challenge for teachers may be how to document how projects foster individual as well as group learning pathways, and for ERO to recognise outcomes for individual children from group projects.

Margaret Carr has defined "intentional teaching" as "Settings that provide opportunities for 'sustained shared thinking', rich teacher-child interactions, engaging programmes, peers learning together, and assessments with valued outcomes in mind" (Mitchell, Wylie, & Carr, Forthcoming, p. xiv). "Intentional teaching" with valued outcomes in mind was a feature of the pedagogical practice of these teachers. In the next section, I discuss how the values and beliefs about community held by these teachers were linked to their approaches to teaching and learning. The ideas that the Totara kindergarten teachers held about education flowed into their practice.

Educational beliefs and values

The Totara kindergarten teachers described their central focus as the mana (defined in the next paragraph below) of the child, and emphasised the value of social relationships and belonging to a co-operative group where contributions of all players are welcomed. They described their main beliefs ("philosophy") about kindergartens as:

Whānau, tamariki, kaiako.²⁶ Working together to create an environment for learning, where the mana of each child is nurtured. (Sally and Mary, first interview, 1 June 2000)

Their beliefs were not static. Sally described teachers puzzling about the meaning of their original “philosophy” (held at the start of the network) of “empowerment” and why they wanted “to empower” children. The teachers decided that an empowered person can stand strong as a lone individual, and thought this was inconsistent with their commitment to community building and biculturalism. Consequently they changed their stated “philosophy” to emphasising the “mana of the child”, which they understood to be wider than empowerment, inclusive of biculturalism and of nurturing, never “trampling on” others. Their definition of mana came from an article by Soutar (2000) which Sally described as “a light” for them. The definition was typed out and put in the term book that documented ideas, children’s projects, commentary and questions:

Mana has several meanings in different contexts. Its definitions include power, status, prestige, authority, integrity and control. It is a key component of being Māori. In a Māori context when one’s mana is acknowledged so too is one’s potential. Because such an acknowledgement implies respect and trust and consequently freedom to develop further. When applied to young children, the nurturing of mana is vital to their wellbeing.

. . . Making space for learning, for listening with eyes and ears and valuing children’s knowledge and authority protects their personal tapu.²⁷ It conveys to children that their mana is heard, seen and felt by adults and peers. It also means that adults are able to guide meaningful learning situations for children (Soutar, 2000, p. 8).

It was evident in questions and commentary raised by Sally and Mary in network meetings, and ideas Sally expressed in her journal, that teachers tried hard to put their beliefs into practice.

These teachers noticed examples of practice that were inconsistent with their own ideals. At the eleventh network meeting (March 2001) we discussed a video from the UK of Pen Green staff working with families. Pen Green is an integrated early childhood centre and UK Centre of Excellence in Corby, Northamptonshire, that is internationally renowned for its work in involving parents. Margy Whalley, the director of research at Pen Green, has spoken at conferences in New Zealand about

²⁶ Whānau means extended family, tamariki means children, kaiako means teacher/learner (akin to concept of pedagogue).

²⁷ “Tapu, like mana, is an essential element of being Māori. It demands respect and requires careful interactions. There is a notion of restriction, sometimes inaccessibility and caution surrounding tapu. Acknowledgement of tapu in relation to people is about respect of personal space and belongings, intellectual, physical or otherwise” (Soutar, 2000, p. 8).

the Pen Green work with parents (Whalley, 1997; Whalley & the Pen Green Centre Team, 2001). Consistent with the value placed on relationships, community and children as active participants within the community, Sally noticed that the video portrayed “an individual child-centred life-style. There was no social comment at all.” And Mary focused on the need to find out what the children were thinking, noticing that the Pen Green teachers:

. . . never actually asked the children what they were doing. They said about the—filling up the sand—‘He really enjoyed it.’ He might have been filling up the sand. He might have been doing something else. (Mary, eleventh network meeting, March 2001)

This contrasted with their concrete project which was a group project, starting from teachers finding out what children were doing.

Much of the documentation Sally and Mary brought to the network, and the entries in Sally’s journal, showed that both teachers were interested in finding out about new educational ideas and tried to “make sense” of them by asking questions about them.

These teachers routinely spent time thinking and talking about educational ideas and values and questioning their meaning and consequences for pedagogical practice. Both teachers had thought about deficit approaches to learning and consciously rejected these. Mary was influenced by her experiences as a primary school teacher in the 1970s and rejected a heavy emphasis on teacher-directed activities, such as “art” based on outlines drawn by teachers. She had lately read Freire’s (1970/1996) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and was struck by his opposition to the “banking method” of teaching, of the teacher “depositing information” which the child absorbs. Sally described the key influences on her as a teacher as being *Te Whāriki*, and reading about the early childhood programmes of Reggio Emilia (Edwards et al., 1998). These texts position teaching and learning as active co-constructions between parties.

After the second network meeting, where we discussed aspirations for children and the roles of kindergarten, Sally wrote in her journal:

Totara Kindy is a (forum) for engagement and dialogue enabling children to have the courage to think and act for themselves.

She then asked the question, “What the heck is happening” to enable this aspiration to be realised? Asking what is happening raised questions for her about

documentation, assessment and evaluation. She made linkages between these processes and “ensuring the programme/curriculum is relevant to children” and “informing whānau”.

I interpret this to indicate that the act of puzzling over theories and ideas and interpreting them within their kindergarten context helped these teachers to become better able to base their practice on them. It was an ongoing process, that seemed to enable these teachers to incorporate their beliefs into the ways they worked with children, parents and families, and community.

Constructions of the role of teacher

There were connections between how teachers constructed themselves as teachers and their constructions of children as capable and active contributors to learning. Sally was averse to the word “teacher” describing her role “More as a facilitator. As an encourager. The provider of a rich environment.” She explained that teachers are also learners:

We’ve always had a problem with the words ‘staff’ or ‘workers’ and it never gelled. But it’s under our noses, the Māori word for teacher and learner is the same word. ‘Kaiako’. And it’s also like [the Swedish] word ‘pedagogy’ (Sally, Gunilla Dahlberg workshop, 12 July 2000)

Alongside an aversion to role descriptions that implied teachers were “providers of knowledge”, Sally also had an aversion to teachers creating distinctive and rigid roles for themselves within the kindergarten. She had seen this operate when she came to work in a very established kindergarten:

Job descriptions that go with teachers, e.g. you’re the resource person so if you’re the resource person you are the only one who’s allowed to answer the phone for example. There are kindergartens that operate like that. . . . We have a bit of trouble with that. . . . So the resource person was the only person allowed to greet people when they walked through the door, to talk to someone if they said ‘Hello’. You weren’t actually allowed to say ‘Hello’. You had to be working with the children. It doesn’t do much for community. (Sally, first interview, June 2000)

Paradoxically, the teachers’ thinking and practice with the four-year-olds whose documentation was discussed in the network, was very different from their thinking and practice with three-year-olds who attended separate afternoon sessions:

Mary: I still have problems feeling ‘Is there any relevance for three-year-olds in here?’ There’s not really, I can’t see any value in their learning.

Sally: It's a bit like sending Standard 3s into a Form 3 class and saying "This is good for you. You're going to have to come here one day to a college environment, so this is a good way for you to do it." No, it's almost unethical. I would go that far. It's almost like inappropriate. (Sally and Mary, first interview, June 2000)

Here teachers were implicitly reverting to theories of developmental appropriateness, and limiting what they regarded as appropriate or not appropriate because of the children's chronological age. Their statements also suggest that the afternoon sessions were conceived as "preparation" for the morning sessions, rather than being valuable in their own right. Yet, Sally and Mary were highly critical of primary school teachers seeing early childhood education as preparation for school.

Interestingly, by December 2000, these teachers said they were challenged to reconsider their views of the competencies of the afternoon children. They conveyed some shift in thinking:

We value them now [laugh] or we start to value them as investors. . . into the programme.
(Mary, eighth network meeting, December 2000)

This differential understanding of four-year-olds' compared with three-year-olds' competencies illustrates how teachers' beliefs about children influence teachers' expectations of them. According to Timperley and Robinson (2001), a valuable process in thinking critically is to be confronted with data that are discrepant with beliefs of a person or a group. They used schema theory to explain the durability of beliefs and the social processes needed to change them:

According to schema theory, schema are organised knowledge structures representing concepts such as situations, objects, events and actions and the relationships between them. ... The central functions of schema are to assist with the comprehension of new data and to predict future events. They serve as recognition devices that allow new data to be processed according to the goodness of fit with current schema. Existing schema strongly influence how the new data might be perceived, so that to a great extent, we perceive what we expect to perceive (Timperley & Robinson, 2001, p. 282).

While the processing of information may be made faster through application of existing schemas, this may also lead to inaccurate interpretation of new data, as occurs for example, when evidence on low achievement in students from low income families is explained by teachers saying the children have no skills. According to schema theory, a key process for schema revision is "creating surprises through exposure to discrepant data" (Timperley & Robinson, 2001, p. 283).

Data gathered from the setting, in my study pedagogical documentation, is very important in assisting with interpretation. Investigating and challenging teachers' expectations and assumptions may help teachers to shift their thinking. In my study, challenging deficit views associated with children's age derived from the Totara kindergarten teachers using theoretical understanding about the child as citizen, and being exposed to views of the network teachers.

Conclusion

In summary, Totara kindergarten teachers' aims to build community through a co-constructive teaching and learning process was evident within their actual practice, including how they carried out their roles, and their expectations of children. There were also inconsistencies with aims. In practice, Totara kindergarten teachers asserted the competencies and encouraged the capabilities of the older children to think and act for themselves, while holding a view of the younger children as weak and incompetent, "in waiting" for development that would occur naturally through simply growing older. As a consequence, their views limited the way teachers interacted with these younger children.

Discussion of beliefs and practices that gave emphasis to their commitment to biculturalism, community, human potential and worth was central to the Totara kindergarten teachers' pedagogical practice. I interpreted this discussion as a way for teachers to deepen their understanding of the values they held for children and their community, to critique the meaning of values for practice and to offer a foundation for exploring how children and community can contribute to creating a democratic environment for learning and participation.

The teachers' approach to forming values was consistent with their culture of asking questions of themselves and each other, of discussing children and their practice, reading from education texts and literature, and writing about ideas in journals and kindergarten documentation. This reflection seemed to help these teachers to integrate values with practice and to challenge their practice.

Teachers found a range of ways to incorporate their beliefs into practice. At a practical level, teachers prioritised their work to fit with the work that they valued the most, and they built their documentation practices to reflect their values. These focused on group projects, and were incompatible with the ERO emphasis on individual children.

Finding out what children were thinking and responding to that thinking was centrally important. Lawrence (2004) has argued that teachers must know what a child is thinking about an interest (not simply that teachers think they have identified a child's interests) for planning to be child-initiated and that planning is "reflectively responding to children's thinking" (p. 16). These teachers were able to encourage children to pursue their own ideas and theories through finding out their thinking.

Brostrom (2003) has argued that:

The child should engage with content that points ahead and helps to make the world transparent. When children grow up they will live in a future world, so they should be able to solve the problems of that world. With this in mind, children should be challenged with some fundamental problems of their time (Brostrom, 2003, p. 228).

There were some examples of how teachers encouraged this kind of engagement in the environmental projects that they initiated, and their emphasis on co-operative endeavours.

The case study raises policy questions about the kinds of training and professional development that can help teachers move from stereotyped views, for example views related to gender, ethnicity, child age, family socioeconomic status and parent knowledge or ethnicity, that serve to limit teachers' interactions.

Case study two: Building a "can do" culture

Pohutukawa kindergarten is a three teacher kindergarten in a predominantly low-income city suburb. Two of the teachers are full-time, and one is 0.6 time. Almost all of the children are of Pacific nations ethnicity, especially Samoan and Tokelauan. Forty children attend for four hours per day, five days a week.

Like the Totara kindergarten teachers, teachers at Pohutukawa kindergarten became engaged in thinking about and developing their value base in relation to pedagogical practice through their participation in the network. This was particularly evident in the interview responses and views expressed in network meetings by teacher, Josie. Josie was consistent in attending network meetings, and the only member of the team who came to the first meeting.

Josie described the culture as being "reconstructed" by the Pohutukawa teaching team. She said the discussions at the first and second network meetings had prompted this reconstruction:

We're actually revisiting [our beliefs], because . . . we're becoming aware here that we're trying to create this culture of children. I guess it's empowerment, but it's more than that—it's really that 'I can do it'. We're aware that children are coming from backgrounds where the expectation of what learning is, is different. And we're trying to say, 'You can make the choices'. It's allowing the child to become a confident learner. That's coming through very strongly as an ethical base.

Linda: So how do you allow the child to become a confident learner?

Josie: Through the relationships, with us, with the environment, with each other, that that is very much part of them. (Josie, first interview, May 2000)

Josie regarded the idea of the child being part of a democratic society and able to contribute to community as a powerful idea that linked thinking about young children to a “world view of education”:

It was quite a new idea to actually look at your practice from this base. I don't think it was a new concept, but I thought, yes, there is validity there. There is a reason that we do say to children, 'Go with it, follow your interests, get engaged, stay with it'. Even if to the outside world it looks sort of mucky. (Josie, second interview, 2001)

She said the teachers were trying to build a “can do” culture. The two other teachers at this kindergarten also said they believed in enabling children to do things themselves and recognising children as capable. They also placed a high regard on respectful relationships. The second teacher in the kindergarten, Luisa, emphasised affording opportunities for children to “be themselves” and the “utmost respect” in which children are treated “as human beings”. As an example of respect, Luisa contrasted two forms of setting limits for inappropriate behaviour. In one kindergarten she had worked in, children were made to sit in a corner until the teacher was satisfied. This compared with the Pohutukawa approach where “the child is approached at a level that is not intimidating, is not scary and [teachers] talk at a dignified level”. Karen spoke of “honest communication, treating children like adults and not talking down to them”. There was an expectation that children would respect themselves, as evidenced in the following statement and example.

We believe that children have to be enjoying what they do to learn. They've got to believe in themselves to learn. And wellbeing and belonging are underlying. . . . So it's constantly making the child feel that they are special, that they have a place, that they can do it, that they can achieve, that they are empowered, that they can talk freely, that they are safe. . . (Karen, first interview, May 2000)

Karen said that teachers also expected children to have respectful relationships with each other. She described a child who would “start trouble everywhere” if he was

allowed to begin the morning by not responding to greetings from other children and teachers:

And we'd say, 'No, J, it's important that you say 'hello' to us. We know that you think you're in control when you don't. You're not powerful when you don't. You're making us feel sad and it's not safe for everyone else. (Karen, first interview, May 2000).

Teachers' ideas about education and pedagogy were consistent with their "can do" philosophy. Ideals about creating a socially just society were evident in Luisa and Josie's views, and were linked to ideals about New Zealand developing as a bicultural and multicultural society.

Josie was particularly influenced by sociocultural theories, and Gardner's "multiple intelligences stuff" (Gardner, 1999). Gardner is best known in educational circles for his theory of multiple intelligences, a critique of the notion that there exists only a single human intelligence that can be assessed by standard psychometric instruments.

Josie had thought about her knowledge of her culture in relation to Reggio Emilia which she said has "thousands of years of culture in a very small area", compared with New Zealand where she regarded biculturalism as important. Her South Taranaki childhood helped her develop awareness about biculturalism and land confiscation issues. The New Zealand wars between European settlers and Māori of the 1840s and 1860s were primarily over sovereignty and land. For example, in Waitara, Taranaki, in 1860 a war between European settlers and Māori was sparked over the refusal of the principal Māori chief of the area to sell a block of land to the government. The governor of the time insisted a transaction proceed, and the land in question was then peacefully occupied by Māori. A war ensued, initiated by the governor, and the government gradually instigated a series of land confiscations, taking Māori land for European settlements (King, 2003).

Josie thought that although the Pohutukawa kindergarten community "is very much Pacific Island", biculturalism is an important concept to aim to incorporate within a New Zealand early childhood education setting.

Luisa, a teacher from the Pacific nation of Tokelau, was inspired by two Pacific teacher educators whom she met during her teacher education study. One of her reasons for being an early childhood teacher was because she thought Pacific

families were just starting to “wake up to” the values of early childhood education. She wanted to “be one of those people that wake people up”. Her aims were to:

Create better children for the future. Help create a better world. . . . Break down barriers, gender barriers. Help break down racial barriers. I’m dreaming here, but the ideal world.
(Luisa, first interview, May 2000)

Karen was predominantly influenced by a previous head teacher who “never talked down to children”, and used complex ideas and language. Her view was of children as capable of complex thinking and understanding.

Linking beliefs and pedagogy

The Pohutukawa kindergarten teachers said that when they started thinking in network meetings about ideas about constructions of children, they began questioning the extent to which their practice was based on their image of the child as a confident learner. They also reported being influenced by seeing Totara kindergarten’s term books:

Josie: We’ve done lots of talking. It gets back to ‘What are we trying to do?’

Karen: [The network] gave us permission to try something new. That’s what we’ve discovered. We’ve taken a step back and we’re not afraid to dump everything that we’ve been doing. And go back to the very beginnings of what the children are doing. That’s our judgement of what they’re doing, not their representation of their learning. It’s our perception of what they’re learning. (Josie and Karen, third network meeting, June 2000)

The teachers established a connection between their articulated philosophy and pedagogical practices, particularly their processes for assessing, planning and evaluating for children’s learning. They came to realise that these practices were not well integrated.

One thing the teachers did “dump” was the term plan, setting out activities for the term. In its place, they started documenting and planning “for more of the culture of what we want to create here”. This demonstrated these teachers were moving from a universal planning approach regarded as suitable for any kindergarten, to an approach that encapsulated the values of their kindergarten in their community.

For example, an aspect of the environment teachers wanted to create was an interest in the books that they started making about the children at work:

Karen: We’ve created a book nook. We had to create a book nook because our book area was so bad. We knocked out a wall and we knocked out a cupboard and Luisa made a

seat. Got out the power tools. We made cushions and [the children] go in there and they just sit and they just look at their books [with lots of photographic documentation about the child] and they just talk about it. . . . And some of it is in their own language which is even more special.

Catherine (network member from Kowhai kindergarten): As you say, often the photos tell the story.

Josie: But you need the input as well (Third network meeting, June 2000)

These teachers changed their views about what could be included in documentation after questions were raised by Josie in her first interview and later discussed with the team:

What it raised for me was [that] it's okay to use the photos, but where are the links? Because it's a bit like having someone's holiday snaps, it's all very interesting but if you don't know the context of what's happening, what is it that the person who is looking is getting? (Josie, first interview, June 2000)

Josie thought that knowing about the teachers' input was important:

And my input might be 'Shall we put these things on the wall?' It might be the language we're using, but we need the context. (Josie, First interview, June 2000)

By the fifth network meeting (August 2000), teachers said their practice had changed, from taking photos to also articulating the context, professional insights and children's comments. By network seven (November 2000), they had started to also include teaching stories.²⁸ Josie also raised the idea that taping evaluative conversations and critically reflecting on them might also help generate insights:

It might be interesting in evaluating later if we did the right thing, to go back and listen to those conversations and say, 'Well, did we really use that informal knowledge we were sharing? Or what didn't we listen to?' (Josie, seventh network meeting, November 2000)

The teachers described exploring the question "What's the purpose?" in relation to pedagogical documentation, finding different purposes for different contexts. In a team presentation at the fifth network meeting (August 2000), they described the purpose as "to express our practice to our community culture", to recognise and catch moments of learning, to follow learning over time and celebrate, and for teachers to extend learning through planning from the documentation. These purposes would seem to be in Carr's (2001) words "formative of democratic

²⁸ "A Teaching Story refers to the systems, structures, and processes put in place by teachers/practitioners as part of on-going evaluation and accountability procedures" (Carr et al., 2000, p. 7).

communities of teaching and learning” (p. 29). They provided access for children, parents and whānau to the values and practices of the kindergarten and to teachers’ understanding of pedagogy:

Luisa: As a result of photos, parents take a whole heap of interest and stand back and [say] ‘Oh my gosh! Is that what my child does?’ We’ve decided as a result of this we’re going to run a workshop on screen printing.

Josie: The screen printing that we think is just amazing. And paper making. Because to this community a lot of what kids do is foreign, frankly, unknown.

Luisa: If they’re not writing their name or reading a book, they’re not actually learning. Or not sitting at the table. (Fifth network meeting, August 2000)

The Pohutukawa kindergarten teachers experimented with documentation. They described tape recording children’s conversations and realising on analysis that many of the ways in which children expressed themselves were nonverbal: tape recordings did not pick up these nonverbal communications. Photographs and commentary were able to show learning processes. The practices teachers developed also helped them to recognise and respond to learning.

These teachers were trying to develop meaningful documentation that represented the Pohutukawa kindergarten children’s modes of expression. They represented their work as a continuing “journey” or “maze”. They thought that there was no correct way of documenting learning episodes. Therefore, it was necessary to continue to inquire and find approaches that suit individuals and groups of children, in the setting at the time:

I think it’s meant that things like the profiles are much more of an evolving process. There’s never going to be one right or wrong way of documenting children’s learning. Because there are so many ways that children are expressing it themselves. ... They are working documents. ... So much easier if someone comes along and says, ‘This is the way! Fit them in the boxes! Tick off whatever!’ But actually that means nothing. (Josie, final interview, October 2001)

Karen also expressed the importance of making meaningful documentation that is relevant to the setting:

You can write waffle, jargon, words but in our community lots of images were really good. And being succinct. (Karen, second interview, November 2001)

These teachers found methods and processes for themselves that suited their situation at the time. They were willing to experiment and this appeared to have

been beneficial in helping them understand the value of documenting over time, the importance of putting documentation into context, the value of different methods of documentation for their kindergarten community, and how to use documentation to probe deeper into children's learning and their own teaching:

It has made the team and me reassess systems that were in place, simplifying them to best record/document and evaluate what has worked, what will make it better and what shows the most of children's learning. (Karen, second interview, November 2001)

Summary

This case study exemplifies teachers becoming more focused on a construction of the child as a capable and confident learner, a member of a local community and a member of a world community. Community building through respectful relationships with others and the environment was encouraged.

I interpret the development of depth and permeability in the teachers' pedagogical documentation, particularly as seen through Josie's views, as being assisted by a number of practices. For example, teachers foregrounded their "can do" beliefs as a "philosophy" they wanted to realise within their kindergarten community. Additionally, the focused thinking and discussion about "What is the purpose?" enabled these teachers to go beyond superficial adoption of methods of documentation to a genuine understanding of what they were documenting, and why. They also were willing to experiment with types of documentation and critically analyse these in relation to their children and community. Furthermore, the methods of documentation that teachers developed enabled them to pick up on some of the multiple ways in which the kindergarten children communicated and expressed themselves, and make these meaningful to parents and whānau as examples of valuable learning.

Constructions of developmental appropriateness

Teachers from a third kindergarten struggled to shift their thinking away from an understanding of childhood that was largely based on concepts of developmental appropriateness. Nevertheless, these teachers did change some practices during the course of the network. Notably they included more narratives of children's exploration and conversations into assessment, and had more emphasis on showing processes of learning rather than simply making judgements about children's skills

and levels of development. Nevertheless, their underlying beliefs remained a dominant force.

Case study three: Providing an environment for children “to grow and develop”

Karaka kindergarten is a three teacher kindergarten in an outer city suburb. Forty children attend morning sessions (three hours on four days a week, and four hours on one day). A different 40 children attend afternoon sessions (2½ hours on three days a week). Younger children, mainly three-year-olds attend afternoon sessions, and then move on to morning sessions. Eighty percent of children are New Zealand European/ Pākehā. The other main ethnic backgrounds are Māori, Asian, and Pacific. All three teachers attended the network, but missed the first meeting.

There were strong developmental messages in the descriptions of values and pedagogy of teachers from Karaka kindergarten. In the following description of values, the role of the child is portrayed as essentially passive (“growing” and “developing”), and the role of the teacher is portrayed as a source of information and guidance within an adult-planned environment:

We provide a safe, secure environment that’s challenging, stimulating, where children can grow and develop; where teachers will work with children or alongside children. That teachers will be challenged, and will have to find out a lot about things they don’t know, to help children find out what they want to know. Especially in science and technology areas. (Kate, first interview, June 2000)

Assessments were done after six weeks at the kindergarten and six weeks before the child went to school. These were partly carried out in a “test” situation rather than the everyday life of the kindergarten:

And [they were] quite skills-based but it did have a part at the bottom for inquisitiveness and those sorts of things. A big part of it was social skills, not just manipulative and literacy and numeracy skills. And I actually thought that gave you quite a good picture, and it gave you the opportunity to sit with the child and play a few games and things, and actually see if they were there or they were not really moving on. (Juliet, first interview, May 2000)

When playing a matching game [child] was able to name “blue” and “yellow”. He recognised no. 1 and also named a triangle. Communication, goal 3 [of *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum]. (Example of assessment, June 2000)

Assessments also recorded the areas of play (blocks, puzzles, sandpit etc) in which the child participated, but the purpose of recording that the child played in these areas was not made clear.

Moving from stereotypic perspectives

Kate thought a lack of grounding in theoretical understanding of the social constructionist base of *Te Whāriki* was making it difficult for her to move from her training as a teacher in 1969 and 1970 where:

Piaget . . . was the man . . . [and] even Erikson was sort of just beginning. But it was very much the case of, once you've trained, well that was it. And I came back to teaching in 1987 and everything's gone beserk in early childhood education. (Kate, first interview, June 2000)

She explained that priorities with family and cost made it hard for her to do long courses, and described herself as “very keen on picking up the day courses”. She did courses on schema (which she noted is Piagetian-based), and Vygotsky and Bruner. Athey (1990) defined schemas as “patterns of repeatable behaviours into which experiences are assimilated and that are gradually co-ordinated. Co-ordinations lead to a higher level and more powerful schemas” (p. 37). Nutbrown (1994, p. 35) calls schemas “the core of young children’s developing minds”. When children are working on understanding a particular schema there are visible patterns in the children’s behaviour which have “threads of thinking” running through them.

Kate commented on the piecemeal approach to learning about theory:

We had smatterings of all sorts. I guess it really hit home to me that I didn’t know very much at all about anything.

. . . I’ve picked up a bit but not enough to understand them enough to actually look at *Te Whāriki*. I mean Bronfenbrenner. There was a page on Bronfenbrenner, that I’ve actually skimmed over. . . . I’m still at a point where I have to look at it a lot deeper than I have. (Kate, first interview, June 2000)

During the year of the network, these teachers developed their assessment practices to include photographs and records of processes of learning. They also started to focus more on learning dispositions, but had reservations. At the second interview, Grace’s reservations were that “We weren’t particularly good at [learning dispositions]” and that learning dispositions did not tell teachers much about the child being assessed. Juliet’s reservations were that she was worried “about whether we are going to miss out on children’s lack of skills maybe, particularly in maths”.

These statements give an impression that the concept of learning dispositions as important for lifelong learning is not appreciated, and that Juliet was mainly concerned with children acquiring skills, with teachers seeing gaps in skills that needed to be addressed.

Learning dispositions offer a basis for promoting citizenry participation. Carr describes learning disposition as “a combination of knowledge, skill and inclination that sets up expectations and motivations about being a learner that will influence learning in later life” (Carr, 1998, p. i). Learning dispositions and key competencies are seen as combinations of ability, inclination and sensitivity to occasion, and refer to the competencies and skills that enable children to keep learning. Learning outcomes in *Te Whāriki* are summarised as learning dispositions and working theories. Learning dispositions include attitudes of perseverance, curiosity and confidence, and social competence such as the ability to work with others. Learning dispositions are important for the development of children’s learning identities (Carr, 2001) that are positive about learning, and able to support further learning, e.g. Dweck and Leggett’s (1988) work on “mastery orientation”. Siraj Blatchford (2004) described mastery orientation as children tending, after a setback, to “focus on effort and strategies instead of worrying that they are incompetent” (p. 11), and problem solving. Siraj-Blatchford concluded that in order to address orientations that can lead to lower outcomes, educators are required to “take an active role in planning for, supporting and developing individual children’s identities as masterful learners of a broad and balanced curriculum” (p. 11). In terms of the principle of “best outcomes for all children” in my framework, a pedagogical focus on learning dispositions would contribute to these outcomes.

Kate spoke about her ongoing struggle in shifting to a pedagogical approach that respected children’s agency. She found it hard to:

. . . stay back and not offer information, but to give [children] the opportunities to discover the information. . . .

We’re all trying very hard not to—to show a child how to do something, but say to them, ‘Well you’re going to need’, or ‘What are you going to need?’ if they can’t even scaffold what they’re going to need. And then letting them experiment with what it is. (Kate, second interview, October 2001)

Within these statements is an indication that Kate is very doubtful that children can problem solve themselves (e.g. “they can’t even scaffold what they are going to

need”), as well as uncertainty about the role of the teacher in supporting experimentation. Teachers in this kindergarten said they wanted “more challenge” from others in the network, perhaps indicating that they were looking for answers or finding it hard to be part of the critiquing process themselves. They would have liked the network to continue.

Summary

The dominant constructions of children held by the Karaka kindergarten teachers in this case study were of children as recipients of skills and knowledge which were taught or passed on by teachers. These dominant constructions began to change over the year of the network. Pedagogical practice based on beliefs in the child’s mind as an empty container to be filled with knowledge are problematic because children are not encouraged to develop learning abilities and dispositions that equip them to be lifelong learners. Another problem in emphasising skills and knowledge predetermined by the teacher is that some children will be privileged if their existing abilities, knowledge and skills are similar to those valued by the teacher, and others will be marginalised. One of the key issues of our time is catering for difference and diversity.

For teachers accustomed to basing their practice largely on concepts of developmental appropriateness, a framework that sees children as active agents in their own and others’ learning represents a different way of thinking, which perhaps required greater attention to professional development on learning theories than was offered in the network, and starting from teachers’ current thinking about theory.

Conclusion

In these three case studies, teachers’ views of children were powerful factors in influencing the kinds of early childhood environment teachers aimed to create, and how teachers saw their role. Introducing “a new debate” about the child as citizen through the network was not sufficient on its own to make a difference. Teachers needed to believe in the ideas of the “new debate”, and interpret and make sense of ideas in pedagogical practice within their own early childhood setting. The case studies highlighted four main ways in which this happened: through constructing consistent values suitable for their local and national context; through changing the power relationships so that children and adults took responsibility for each other

and for learning; through opening up the early childhood service to community contribution and participation; and through consistency between values in terms of outcomes for children, and documentation of learning.

Those teachers whose practice upheld children's agency and encouraged participation from all-comers, constructed and articulated beliefs consistent with democratic principles. These beliefs made sense to them. They were examined and interpreted in an ongoing way, and they underpinned kindergarten pedagogical practices and teachers' interpretation of their own role. These teachers had opportunities for reading and discussion that stretched their thinking. Constructing beliefs through discussion was also a form of democratic practice. Teachers discussed their beliefs in relation to their local and national context: some teachers were trying to embrace values such as biculturalism, environmental responsibility and multiculturalism. Likewise, Eisner (1985) has argued for "a deeper conversation" about education and for teachers to have "the educational imagination to invent practices that are appropriate for not only the individual child, but also suitable for the particular time and situation in which something is to occur" (p. 7).

Some teachers found it difficult to move beyond the influence of theories of developmental appropriateness within their teacher education background, or to know whether developmental appropriateness had a place in sociocultural approaches, and what this place might be. Teachers who extended their practice during the course of the network already seemed to hold ideas that were consistent with the theoretical ideas that were being discussed. Perhaps these teachers who were less "in tune" felt they had to discard theories of developmental psychology they had learnt in their teacher training and replace these with new theories. As Prout (2005) has argued, it is not that these constructions should be rejected, but that they should be seen as one type of knowledge out of many. This lends weight to the argument that teachers' perspectives on pedagogy are grounded in the beliefs that they held, whether or not these are articulated beliefs.

Teachers purposely offered opportunities for children to take responsibility, problem solve and contribute to the learning of others. This was an intentional focus: these dispositions were regarded as valued outcomes of early childhood education. In terms of "best outcomes" for all children, learning dispositions are important to help children develop an identity as a learner. However, teachers

varied in their relationships and the roles they played with different children within the same setting, by virtue of the child's age, and potentially other characteristics, such as gender, family socioeconomic status, ethnicity and parent education. This finding highlights the importance of challenging teachers' assumptions and expectations for every child, not just beliefs in general. It is especially important as New Zealand's child population has become more ethnically and economically diverse.

The early childhood service was regarded as a community facility, open to parents, families and community organisations. Reciprocal relationships were emphasised. In this way, the early childhood community, including children, were involved in "creating a world", a terminology used by Bruner:

One of the people whom I have admired all of my adult life is Gian Battista Vico. It was Vico who recognized that there was some important way in which human beings not only *lived* in reality, but *created* the reality in which they lived.

Now a new chapter in this revolution has begun. We begin to realize that the revolution begins in childhood, in the way in which we make it possible for our children to create a world (Bruner, 1998, p. 6).

Documentation approaches supported the outcomes valued by these teachers and the changes they made to the distribution of power. Hence, a focus on documentation of group projects was evident in Totara kindergarten where community building was a core value.

In examining these three case studies, I have focused on childhood as a "local and negotiated order" (Prout, 2005, p. 69) without considering the societal systems and policy frameworks that interact with pedagogical work. In Chapter 6, I examine the context of childhood, and what engagement in the "new debate" about children as citizens may mean for systems and frameworks to help early childhood education services develop as sites for democracy and citizenship.

CHAPTER 6: CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHILDHOOD, AND THEIR LINK TO PEDAGOGY

Constructions of childhood provide a context for pedagogical practice in early childhood services. The analysis in this chapter moves from constructs of children in pedagogical practice to themes about childhood, and how these were being addressed by the teachers in this study. The teachers' network in this study was based on assumptions that teachers would develop their thinking and ideas of children as citizens and about the childhoods experienced in New Zealand. It was proposed that pedagogical documentation would help teachers focus on actual examples of practice rather than talking about practice in the abstract. Such a focus could help teachers confront the realities of their work, trial theoretical ideas in practice and extend their thinking about children and childhood. The network provided evidence of how concepts of childhood are embodied in pedagogy, and that changing the concepts, results in changes in pedagogy.

Three main themes about childhood presented challenges to the teachers in this study. Each of these themes is systematically examined:

1. The theme is introduced.
2. Constructions of childhood underpinning teachers' responses to the theme are examined.
3. The source of the construction, for example whether it is an external source such as the employment of mothers, network discussions, readings, theoretical ideas introduced to the network, or experimentation within the teachers' kindergartens, is discussed.
4. Practices illustrating particular beliefs or ideas are analysed.
5. Whether the practice was pre-existing or changed through the network is discussed.
6. Implications are considered.

One of the issues with the design of this study is that there was no prior measure of practices and beliefs, so there is some difficulty in sorting out pre-existing beliefs and practices from those that changed during the network. However, the data includes teachers' evaluation of the network experience, views of the development that occurred in practice and documentation showing shifts in practice. These sources are drawn on to suggest whether the practice was already in existence or whether it recorded change.

Themes about children and childhood

Three themes about childhood in New Zealand raised challenges about the responsiveness of services and teachers to diverse families: changing family employment patterns and needs of families for longer hours of early childhood education; the complexity and diversity of childhoods; and child poverty and access to early childhood education. These themes link to the effects of the social and economic policy changes that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s (reviewed in Chapter 4). They also reflect demographic change in New Zealand that has occurred in the last three decades, and globalisation. New Zealand is growing in ethnic diversity, family structures have become more diverse, more mothers with young children are now in paid employment and children are disproportionately represented in poverty figures.

Family employment patterns and needs

In 1991, 37 percent of mothers with children aged one to four years were in paid employment compared with 49 percent in 1996. The 2004 Living Standards Survey showed that 22 percent of families with a child under four reported that a lack of access to early childhood education affected adults' ability to work (Ministry of Social Development, 2004). Eighty-one percent of parents in the Work, Family and Parenting study relied on some type of childcare arrangement to participate in the workforce (Ministry of Social Development, 2006).

Teachers who had been teaching for a long time said that they could perceive a shift towards more parents (mainly mothers) who would previously have been at home caring for their child taking up paid employment. Teachers thought that the increasing take-up of paid work by parents of kindergarten children created challenges with respect to the operation and focus of kindergartens. Teachers talked

about these issues in their final interview: they were not a specific focus of the network discussions.

All the kindergartens were providing sessions that were limited in duration to 2½ hours to four hours. Some families in paid employment wanted their child to attend for longer hours because the sessional hours did not fit with their work arrangements. One kindergarten, Rimu, had difficulty in attracting parents largely because the hours did not suit parents, according to the teachers. Traditionally, kindergartens use voluntary help during sessions (parents are rostered to help in the kindergarten), and engage in a range of other voluntary activities, including serving on the committee. The teacher from Rimu kindergarten also said she had noticed a reduction in the number of families who were willing to volunteer to help during the session time, or serve on the committee, both at Rimu kindergarten and in her previous kindergarten.

One of the debates within kindergartens during the 1990s, at the time of data collection and subsequently, is whether kindergartens should change the way they operate to accommodate the times and hours that families want. Such a change could mean kindergartens extending their hours, for example by providing school day provision, all-day provision, flexible hours to suit families or longer sessions.

Another issue for kindergartens is that the population of children under five years is declining in some localities and in New Zealand overall, and the pool of children who might attend kindergarten is decreasing. Marked population decline was a feature of the localities of two kindergartens in this study: Totara and Rimu. Three kindergartens were experiencing children starting kindergarten at younger ages, and one did not have full rolls.

Nevertheless, in the timeframe of this study, most teachers were resistant to changing the nature of their operation. The discourses underpinning this resistance resurrected the care and education divide that the 1986 integration of childcare within the Department of Education was intended to dispel.

Children in childcare services were constructed as dependants, in need of care while their parents work. In Chapter 7, I have termed this construction the “Child as dependant” and shown it to be a dominant construction in some government officials’ thinking that was also associated with their preferred policy mechanisms for funding and provision.

One viewpoint, expressed by three teachers, Mary, Juliet and Luisa, depicted the main role of childcare services as “babysitting services” that are unable to be educational. In this viewpoint, the child attending a childcare centre was portrayed as a deprived child because she or he did not have access to the richness of home activities or the educational experiences of a kindergarten. The sources of these constructions were external to the network. The following interview transcripts exemplify the constructions and suggest they came from beliefs that are not founded on experience (Mary and Juliet), or on limited teaching experience within childcare settings (Luisa):

Mary: I am concerned about poor kids that sit in centres from half past seven in the morning till half past five, six o'clock at night.

Linda: You think that's too long do you? For children?

Mary: Yes, unless it's a particularly small centre and there's a good quality programme run. . . . If you're in care for that long, you really need the experiences of shopping and cooking at home. The homely stuff.

Linda: So a good centre would do those things presumably?

Mary: Hopefully. I haven't got a wide experience at early childhood. (Mary, second interview, July 2001)

Another participant had undertaken her teaching experience in both childcare centres and kindergartens:

Having done teaching experience in childcare centres, you really can't compare the two. There's no comparison. We're not a nappy-changing service. We are an education place. (Luisa, first interview, 10 June 2000).

In an initial interview, Juliet had said she had experience as a primary teacher, new entrant teacher and nursery school teacher in England, and of a sessional community crèche in New Zealand, but had not experienced all-day childcare. Within a construction of children as dependants and childcare as a baby sitting service, she portrayed a view of parents using all-day childcare as negligent and selfish:

And why are they having those children? When do they see them? Everybody's grumpy and tired at night and you've got to get tea done and kids to bed, and you know, there's no time together is there? (Juliet, second interview, October 2001)

In this view, the home is idealised as a place of caring and security. There is little conception that parents might have their own needs for wanting to work other than

making money. The proviso to “having a break” is that the break is part-time only, for older children only, and the child is placed in a kindergarten-type environment:

Juliet: You do wonder, don’t you, how much they must be earning to make it viable to go back to work and pay out that money in childcare, because it isn’t cheap.

Linda: Some people don’t like to be at home with their children. That’s a factor isn’t it?

Juliet: Well I don’t know. I would have thought something like a kindergarten which was part-time, so you can actually get that break from the child, and . . . you both get a break from each other. Because it does happen. I had a friend who went back to work part-time because she and her daughter just didn’t get on. And they were much better with those two or three mornings, or days a week, apart from each other. And I think that’s a good thing too. I think people mustn’t feel ashamed to say why they’re doing it. (Juliet, second interview, October 2001).

There were gender biases to Juliet’s views about who should care for the child at home. Her expectation was for one parent, implicitly the mother, to do this. When a father decided to undertake a stay-at-home role, Juliet was full of praise:

We’ve got a dad who’s just given up work for a year. He’s going to stay at home. They’re divorced. And he’s going to look after the son until he goes to school. I admire that. Well done! (Juliet, second interview, October 2001)

A justification for kindergartens retaining their traditional sessional nature of their operation was a claim that a few hours per day in an education service is best for children:

They’re only little and one of my hot points is that people often forget that children are only 3 and 4 years old at kindergarten. And I suppose I get infuriated that a lot of pressure is put on these young children. Yes I think the hours for those littlies is long enough. (Kate, second interview, October 2001)

I think [two hours or three hours is] a good amount of time for children to be spending outside the home. I think the sessional works really well for children because they do have that stint of two hours or three hours and then they have some down time, hopefully at home. (Jane, second interview, August 2001)

I’m not sure that being in an institution [for a school day] for that age group is ideal. (Sally, second interview, July 2001)

The professional development adviser for the network encapsulated this thinking about kindergartens as a premise that “kindergarten is a place where you come for a quick injection of early childhood education and care and then you go home again” (November 2001). In her view, this thinking limits the potential for kindergartens to

be a broad service that could support families to undertake other activities, including employment, and to include families as integral participants.

Research evidence about whether full-time or part-time attendance benefits children most is mixed. For example, in relation to cognitive outcomes, a US study, Robin, Frede and Barnett. (2006) found children from low-income families in good quality extended duration programmes (8 hours for 45 weeks per year) improved more on measures of vocabulary and math skills than children in half-day programmes. The English *Effective Provision of Preschool Education* study (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004) of everyday early childhood education serving children from a range of family backgrounds found no evidence that full-time provision resulted in better cognitive outcomes than part-time. The main issue of importance for children's wellbeing and learning is the quality of the service, rather than the number of hours attended. For example the *US Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes* study (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 1999), the *Effective Provision of Preschool Education* study (Sylva et al., 2004), and New Zealand's *Competent Children, Competent Learners* study (Wylie, Hodgen, Ferral, & Thompson, 2006) found aspects of adult-child interaction and opportunities afforded by the environment were associated with greater gains for cognitive outcomes and learning dispositions.

Even some teachers who thought that kindergartens need to adapt their operation, were frequently thinking of adaptations to suit their views of the ideal, rather than families' views. Sally, for example, would like the kindergarten to operate longer sessions similar to a school day, but with only older children attending for the whole period of time:

I'm not sure about this, but maybe the younger children just for two hours in the morning, when at least they're fresh and don't need a sleep. (Sally, second interview, July 2001)

This thinking limited how teachers conceptualised changes that could be made to kindergarten operation. One of the obstacles to thinking about change was teachers retaining an idea that if a kindergarten was to extend its hours, it would continue to operate with a big group of children (around 40), and that the education programme, which teachers regarded as intensive, would not change. Another obstacle was teachers' preference for working in a sessional service with three- and four- year-olds. In Chapter 5, some stereotyped age-based assumptions were discussed. Some teachers liked age groups to be segregated, and liked the way their

kindergarten had younger children in one group and older children in another. Segregation enables children to learn alongside same-aged peers. On the other hand, children in segregated age groups do not have opportunity to develop relationships with older and younger children. Within tikanga Māori, the concept of tuakana—teina relationships where older or more experienced people (children and adults) take responsibility for support, caring and teaching each other is valued.

The review of early childhood policy in New Zealand in Chapter 4 referred to a construction of childcare services as services for the needy and disadvantaged child, and indicated that this thinking was a dominant feature of the thinking of representatives of kindergarten, playcentre and childcare services in the late 1970s and prior to the 1986 integration of childcare into the Department of Education. It was only when a recommendation came from the 1976 Conference on Women and Social and Economic Development that moves towards integration were made. At least initially, integration was not supported by kindergarten, playcentre or childcare services (McDonald, 1981).

Other literature has also described how an image of the poor, needy child is associated with a view of childcare as a welfare service. Moss and Petrie (2002) noted that the family is still viewed as a place of safety, warmth and caring, in contrast to an uncaring and often dangerous outside world, despite the evidence that child abuse is more likely to happen in the family than outside. They argued that “it is almost as if in Britain at least, there are no ways of talking about children being located in a network of relationships, stretching both within and without the home, a discourse which emphasises connectedness rather than exclusivity of the parent/mother-child relationship” (p. 59).

References to the value of family life were mainly made by teachers who were opposed to childcare. A different frame of thinking was encapsulated in the views of Josie. Here, the home is not portrayed as an idealised place for children’s early care; “well qualified professionals do a magnificent job”:

I’m a great believer in choices really. I don’t think any man or woman should have to stay home because they made a decision to have a baby, and think it’s going to be the most wonderful thing on the face of the earth. But actually it’s damned hard work and perhaps it’s not actually them. But there are actually very well qualified professionals who do a magnificent job. And those children are not going to suffer. . . . It’s those choices that make us a humane society, quite frankly. (Josie, second interview, August 2001)

Josie also constructed childhood as a time of value in its own right, not preparation for adulthood:

Children have a right to childhood. Childhood is not just becoming an adult. Childhood is a really special time. (Josie, second interview, October 2001)

She thought a high expectation of achievement prevented children from having a good childhood:

Everybody wants their children to get on in life and do well. But the flip side of that is perhaps pushing them a little too hard, too soon. (Josie, second interview, October 2001)

Her expectations of children were about “Their health and safety, and also in challenging themselves and doing their own thinking. The sky and the stars are the limit basically.” Both Josie and Luisa, another teacher at Pohutukawa kindergarten, saw one of their challenges as communicating with parents about their expectations for children and how these are being achieved in kindergarten. They did not overstate their sphere of influence: “We can only control what happens within these gates” (Luisa, second interview, October 2001).

Views of childcare as a babysitting service and of children attending childcare centres as disadvantaged do not hold up against the principles of integrated action and best outcomes for all children. These views denigrate the status of childcare services and the nature of care, and in so doing, reinforce stereotypes. Conversely, a construction of kindergartens as purely education does not recognise the interweaving of education and care within kindergartens. As well, the choices emerging from these views do not cater for the reality of families’ lives in New Zealand. The privileging of kindergarten children as having the best of both worlds, education in the kindergarten and nurturing and care in the home environment, is not in accord with evidence about the reality of these worlds or the contexts within childcare services. There is no account of what is best for all children: those three- and four-year-olds attending kindergarten are the predominant concern. Finally, the negative viewpoints about childcare that are evident here can serve to exacerbate competition and divisions between teachers working in different early childhood service types. A key reason for the amalgamation of the Early Childhood Workers Union and the Kindergarten Teachers Association in New Zealand in 1990 was a belief that a united early childhood workforce, acting collectively, had a stronger position from which they could advocate for the inequities in pay and working conditions within early childhood services and between early childhood services

and schools to be addressed. A hope was that it could also support professional collaboration between these services (New Zealand Free Kindergarten Association, 1989, p. 11). Divisions between these groups that existed at the time of the amalgamation were still evident in my study in 2001.

The network experience was not a catalyst for change in this thinking about the “Child as dependant” and “childcare as babysitting” since it was not discussed in the network. However, the thinking revealed here by some network teachers does create care versus education boundaries between service types and within practice. Teachers might ask themselves what is their understanding of care and education, and whether their identity as a teacher holds up against this understanding and the realities of childhood.

Complexity and diversity of childhoods

Many teachers made reference to the diversity of children’s family backgrounds and home experiences. Teachers also commented on the complexity of childhoods, in particular the influence of television in children’s lives, and the pressures of commercialisation on children.

My argument in this section will be that the network experience contributed to changes in how teachers understood children, and that these changes enabled teachers to be more responsive to the diversity and uniqueness of the children in their kindergartens, and more willing to encourage children’s participation. As part of new ways of working, the relationships between teachers and children, and teachers and parents, were transformed, and the associated constructions of children and parents, and of teacher and learner, were also transformed.

Changes to practice: Finding out about children’s perspectives

Teachers gained greater understanding of children’s interests, experiences and thinking through analysis and discussion of pedagogical documentation. Four vignettes discussed below suggest that this understanding in turn enabled teachers to become more understanding of what children were thinking and more responsive to children’s interests and ideas. The vignettes also demonstrate some issues that were evoked by focusing on children’s perspectives.

Vignette 1: Finding out about the child's television interests

The dominant construction of children revealed in this vignette is of children as participants in a technological world.

The sources of this construction were a reading discussed within the network, and ideas about basing pedagogical practice on the child's perspective. At the second network meeting, I had read out an excerpt from Dahlberg, et al. (1999, p. 51) and the network teachers had discussed how to find out about children's perspectives. The excerpt involved a Swedish pedagogue (teacher) visiting an early childhood education centre in Reggio Emilia where a project was being undertaken on modern fairy tale figures. Children were playing with plastic characters from television programmes:

[The pedagogues told me] how often they observed children talking about figures and stories they saw on TV and how little they as pedagogues knew about these figures and stories. They also found out how little they listened to the children when they talked about such figures. Often they said to the children 'we don't talk about that here', or 'we'll talk about that another time' (Dahlberg, et al., 1999, p. 51).

The excerpt discussed how the pedagogues began the project by getting more knowledge themselves through watching the programme and interviewing children about their knowledge and ideas. Children then brought modern fairy tale figures to the centre and "the project moved out from the children's experiences, stories and ideas" (p. 51).

The reading and theoretical ideas prompted teachers in two kindergartens to find out more about children's television interests. In both cases, the teachers had had limited knowledge of the television programmes that children watched, and the characters in the programmes.

Irene thought changes in ways she responded to children were derived from thinking about this excerpt and a network discussion that was held about listening to children. One change Irene thought she had made was to listen more closely to what children were saying, and take this into account in responding to children:

And hearing it as well. It's all very well listening, and then carrying on your own stream. . . . There was one comment about how we hear things like children's TV programmes and turn off and don't really hear what they are saying. Even though it's absolutely huge for them. I think that was a big change for me. (Irene, second interview, August 2001)

Irene went on to explain how she was working with a child who was deaf who had an interest in Batman and Batman's ability to fly. She talked about "using [this interest] instead of brushing it past and then looking for something to work with, when he's already presenting something". Irene then described how she asked the teacher aide working with the child to encourage him to do his own drawing and collage about Batman rather than doing it for him. She also picked up on his interest in flying, and other children's interest in space, to provide reference material for the children.

Teachers from Karaka kindergarten were also interested in this particular reading. They said they discussed the idea of using children's interest in television characters, in this case Pokemon, within the kindergarten programme. In the event they decided not to follow this up since they found out that the characters were violent and did not approve of them. Nevertheless, these teachers thought that holding the discussion rather than discounting the use of Pokemon without careful thought made a contribution to teachers' discussing what principles were important to them. The experience encouraged teachers to find out more about the Pokemon characters in children's worlds, and the nature of this television programme. They thought they were better equipped for understanding influences on these children.

In this account of teachers from Karaka kindergarten, the teachers did not go beyond finding out about the characters, which they identified as of interest to the children. They did not find out what the children thought about the characters. There was no analysis of whether ignoring and forbidding play or discussion of the violent stereotypes to which children were exposed could help these children to understand and deal with violence in everyday life. In their account can be seen parallels to the notion that children are innocent, to be protected from ugly aspects of life, their play topics controlled. Dahlberg, et al. (1999, p. 45) argued that "if we hide children away from the world of which they are already a part, we not only deceive ourselves, we do not take children seriously and respect them". It is questionable whether preventing play at kindergarten with Pokemon characters which these children already played with outside kindergarten, would contribute to generating children's understanding and resistance to the violence that teachers were worried about.

In both these examples, a network reading and discussion encouraged teachers to find out more about a child's television world, and in one case to use the child's

interest in the programme. A next step could be to find out what the child is thinking about the programmes, rather than interpreting it from an adult perspective.

Vignette 2: Recognising schema interests in play

A shift from viewing a child as aimless in his interests and actions to viewing the child as competent and purposeful in his interests and actions lay behind the following interpretation of teachers at Punga kindergarten.

The source of the shift was pedagogical documentation, based on observation of a child's play, and discussion with the child's father. Knowledge of schema theory, which one teacher had gained from playcentre training, formed a basis for the teachers' analysis. Schema theory was also discussed briefly in the first network meeting in conjunction with looking at pedagogical documentation from Pen Green.

Interpretation and recognition of a pattern in the child's schema interests enabled teachers from Punga kindergarten to accept play that would otherwise have irritated them, and to discuss ways to understand and extend it:

Rebecca: The other one we've started working on is a kid who comes to afternoon kindergarten. And he has an absolute passion for mixing stuff up. And he's going to the art area and mixing all the water and paint and glue—putting it all over the table. He actually fits into the schema pattern where he transfers it all around the kindergarten. So if he does dramatic play outside, he's stirring up stew or rabbit bait. . . .

Rebecca went on to explain that the child also enjoyed mixing at home, baking with his father and helping his father make concrete dye:

Rebecca: In the kindergarten it's a bit of a problem because it's such a wide mess. And he especially uses mixing things that he's not supposed to mix.

Jane: The main thing is for us to be positive about him because he does make a heck of a mess. We need to challenge ourselves to protect it and work with it. (Jane and Rebecca, third network meeting, June 2000)

In this kindergarten, teachers said they valued the idea of every child developing a sense of their own worth or identity:

It's that recognition of the special uniqueness of that child, and how important that is. . . . And that your experiences with that child are at this time and place. . . . And seeing them as an individual rather than a number, or one of many. And that's really in essence what the network did for me, it forced me and helped me to really look at each child as an

individual; rather than these glib, fobbing off comments that you'd say to every child. It made me selective about the way I use the language, and made sure it was appropriate to that child. (Wendy, second interview, 2001)

She reiterated these points in the written evaluation:

It has reinforced my respect for the children I work with, how uniquely individual they are, and the importance of recognising and extending each child's personal path while at kindergarten. (December 2000)

As if to emphasise every child, Wendy had crossed out "children" to write "each child". Likewise, other New Zealand research (Meade, 1995; Meade, with Cubey, 1995; van Wijk et al., 2006) investigating schema learning theory has found that careful observation of children's schema interests can assist adults to understand children better, and to think about how adults might support and enrich these interests.

In this example, the shift in perceptions was supported by the network focus on pedagogical documentation and finding out the child's views, as well as teachers' existing theoretical understanding.

Vignette 3: Responding to cultural diversity

Teachers thought their work as teachers was becoming more complex as kindergartens become more culturally diverse. This awareness and experience of cultural diversity raised issues for teachers about their limited understanding of the language and culture of some children, and their ability to really know children and respond to them.

The construction of children in these episodes is of children who bring social and cultural funds of knowledge (Moll, 2000) from home. Teachers talked about exploring ways in which to tap into these funds of knowledge.

Sources of this construction of children were teachers' own understanding of the cultural meanings and languages of children in their kindergartens. For example, communication with families was made easier when teachers could speak the home language of the families. An example of this was provided by Reshina, who described herself as Indian, and spoke Gujarati. She was attracted to the position at Kowhai kindergarten because the job description asked for someone able to understand the "cultural aspect of the kindergarten". The kindergarten families are mainly New Zealand European/Pākehā, with a small number of Indian, Chinese,

Māori and Samoan families. Reshina described working with a young Indian boy and his mother with whom she was able to communicate in Gujarati. She thought this experience aided understanding between the parties.

Reshina thought the experimentation she had done with documentation over the course of the network had opened her eyes to documenting a wide range of areas, including things derived from children's interests and experiences to things that were happening in the community. She described how she made cultural connections with a Fijian Indian child through sharing photographs of her hennaed hands at her cousin's wedding with children at the kindergarten:

I had my hands painted for my cousin's wedding, and did a little documentation on that and showed the children. And asked them about what can you see, what about the patterns. We talked about the patterns and the lines and I recorded each thing they said and then they started drawing their own hands and decorating them. And about a month later . . . an Indian child who had been to Fiji to see his aunt get married came, and this child had minimal English, and all of a sudden he turned up one day back from Fiji with these photos of his aunty's hands, and he had remembered it. And I thought "What a lovely connection". (Reshina, second interview, September 2001)

This connection was made through documenting and talking about a cultural practice.

Pedagogical documentation and experimentation helped three other teachers to work more closely with children and families whose English was not their first language. They described making cultural connections by communicating through modes other than traditional verbal and print-based literacies. Luisa spoke Tokelauan to the Tokelauan children and families in her kindergarten. She also thought her understanding of other Pacific languages enabled her to communicate better and understand the cultures of the Samoan and Rarotongan children in her kindergarten. She made tape recordings of conversations. But Luisa and teachers in her team found that:

With our Pacific children, it didn't do them enough justice because a lot of their language is body language. That's when we decided to go for the photographs instead. (Luisa, first interview, June 2000)

This experience helped Luisa realise that multiple ways of documenting could help tap into the different modalities in which children communicate. These teachers also started to build some bridges to communication by inviting Pacific artists and musicians into the kindergarten to work alongside children, bringing their own self

and culturally valued art forms and images. The practice of experimenting with documentation developed because of the network experience.

Wendy, who was passionate about music, also talked about how working with young children through music could build areas of connection and competence. She saw this as useful in a multicultural kindergarten. As well, she referred to challenges of “knowing” from a cultural perspective:

I see that documentation would be a real challenge for kindergartens [with children with English as a second language]. Because what you're really focusing on there is establishing a relationship with the children, the communication, making sure you knew those children and were aware of their needs. . . . You get right down to basics really. Is the child psychologically okay? In the sense of do they feel safe? (Wendy, first interview, May 2000)

In summary, a recognition of children as bringing funds of knowledge from home was associated with teachers' interest in finding out about and supporting those funds of knowledge in the programme. Experimentation with pedagogical documentation, encouraged within the network, enabled teachers to make some cultural connections and find out more. Employment of staff from the cultural community of families participating in the kindergarten, and inviting participation of knowledgeable people from the community helped teachers to communicate better with families and understand cultural practices.

Teachers said they would like to have further resources and professional resources and access to staffing. Since this study was undertaken, some government financial support has been provided for working with children from non-English speaking homes through the low-income component of Equity Funding. My evaluation with other researchers of the initial uses and impact of Equity Funding (Mitchell, Royal Tangaere, Mara, & Wylie, 2006a) also found teachers in centres receiving equity funding for children from non-English speaking backgrounds wanted permanent staff members who were multi-lingual, access to interpreters and translators, and professional advice and support to enable them to better understand and work with these children and families. As well, the Equity Index used to capture services with higher numbers of children from non-English speaking homes does miss some services with a large number of such children, as was demonstrated in NZCER's 2002/2003 national survey of early childhood services (Mitchell & Brooking, 2007).

Vignette 4: Examining adult:child interactions

Awareness of the teachers' role in reinforcing the child as a passive recipient of knowledge was triggered by network discussions. The vignette exemplifies how teachers engaged in network discussion, the learning teachers identified and teachers' reflections on the insights that filtered through into their practice. In this example, there was a greater awareness of the extent to which the questions that teachers use and the experiments they set up shape children's response.

Teachers at Kowhai kindergarten had set up an experiment on mould after a banana had been left on a windowsill over the weekend and had started to go mouldy. The teachers placed the banana, a peanut butter sandwich and a carrot on a tray. Children in three groups, working with different teachers, were asked to speculate on what would happen to these food items and then to observe changes over time.

Most children in the first group discussed shapes. ("It will turn into a heart." "It might turn into an oval or square shape.") The teacher, Jane, thought that her preceding discussion of shapes might have influenced the children's responses in this new situation. A similar effect happened with the second group, with children suggesting the food would change into another type of food (e.g. "carrot's going to turn into the banana", "sandwich will turn into a sausage"), or would change colour.

This presentation led into network discussions about questioning children:

Reshina: Children thought it was a trick question.

Catherine: Questions are really important. You have to really think about them.

Jane speculated that discussion in her group about shapes had arisen because she had asked how the children wanted the food arranged on the tray. The professional development adviser, Viv, reminded Jane that Reshina's group gave the same kind of response but had not been asked how they wanted the items arranged. Was it the questions that influenced answers?

Jane commented on her tendency to ask questions to which she knew the answers. She seemed to be demonstrating her need to keep control over the direction of children's thinking:

Jane: I think it's very hard to ask questions if you've got no indication of where you want the answer to go.

Viv: What if you didn't ask questions?

Catherine: Yes. I think I'll be sneaky. I'll stand around and I'll write down what they're actually saying.

Viv: We often don't actually ask questions if we really don't know the answer. (Network meeting 3, June 2000)

In exchanges where adults know the answers, children are not encouraged to form their own theories and ideas.

The teachers continued to discuss the "mould experiment" with children, and presented this further work to the next network meeting in July 2000. They had changed their approach to one that started by seeking and listening to children's ideas and questions rather than asking questions themselves. This approach seemed to encourage children to observe the mouldy food more closely, rather than trying to predict what answers teachers were seeking, and to think about why food became mouldy:

Catherine: I began by asking 'What would you like to tell me about [the mould]?' I gave each child a turn at talking and gave plenty of time for each child to observe.

Child 1: It's gone blue. The sandwiches have gone blue.

Child 2: The sandwiches have gone blue and the carrot is going black.

Child 3: The carrot is small and the sandwiches are getting small.

Child 4: The carrot is going bad. The banana is getting very black.

Child 5: It's got old. If you leave it, it goes old. You wouldn't want to eat it.

These children then went on to talk about the food being "rotten". One child suggested this happened because "There was no fresh air. Fresh air makes everything clean." Another suggested "magic" turned the food rotten. Teachers did not extend these ideas at the time.

At this network meeting there was discussion about the extent to which these teachers had engaged in testing children's prior knowledge rather than talking to children about their theories. It was noticed that there was a lot of questioning and answering by children, and teachers recognised that children had knowledge. It was suggested that talking more about and experimenting with the fresh air theory and the magic theory could have been fruitful avenues to finding out more about children's thinking. One teacher, Mary, for example, suggested testing the fresh air theory by leaving the banana out without its cover.

This led into discussion about the kinds of circumstances that encourage children to think and problem solve. Some of this discussion was about organisational features of kindergarten. Some teachers thought it was hard to “extend theories” at “mat time”²⁹ with a large group of children. This raised questions about whether it is appropriate to hold mat times if children are not encouraged to “think” in this context.

In their July presentation to the network, teachers from this kindergarten described some of their learning and conclusions:

We all felt that unprompted comments, observations and questions from the children were a very valuable, perhaps the most valuable start to conversations and discussions.
(Presentation by Kowhai kindergarten teachers to network meeting 4, July 2000)

In their second interviews at the end of the network these teachers said that they had talked together, and with parents, quite a lot about children’s working theories and how to “tap into” these. In one of these discussions they analysed their tendency to pre-empt children giving their own views by suggesting what the teacher thought the child was thinking. For example, a teacher might say “I can see you’ve been thinking about [whatever you’ve been doing] because . . .” Now the teachers said they are more likely to ask, “What were you thinking about when you were doing so-and-so?” (Catherine, second interview, 9 July 2001). The shifts in questioning were also evident in later pedagogical documentation where the teachers tended to ask open-ended questions rather than questions to which there was a right or wrong answer.

One unexpected outcome for these teachers was their observation that children are “actually more conscious that they are having thoughts”.

Some other network teachers also said they learnt from the mould experiment:

When Kowhai teachers talked of the mouldy sandwich, we went and evaluated and looked at how we were questioning children. It made us aware. (Karen, second interview, November 2001).

In this vignette, the network discussion of pedagogical documentation helped teachers think about whether and how the interactions they have with children and the activities they set up contributed to children’s thinking and problem solving.

²⁹ “Mat times” are often held in kindergartens for the whole group of children (usually 30 to 45 children) to sit together with teachers and other adults on the mat to undertake structured activities, such as children telling news, introducing new families, making music, playing a game, reading stories.

Teachers generalised their learning to other situations where they wanted to find out children's views. These teachers were encouraged to examine their interactions with children and experiment with different approaches by the observations that their questioning may have led children to respond in certain ways, and their willingness to trial and document other approaches. The main value was for children to be encouraged to formulate and express their own thinking. This vignette reinforces the benefit of having "critical outsiders", including teachers and researchers, working with teachers to discuss pedagogical documentation, and of a theoretical position that they were interested in encompassing.

However, the experiment had not been child initiated. It was a small context that may not have been chosen had teachers wanted to examine community learning and collaboration. The episode never went beyond analysing questioning to teachers working with children to experiment with children's theories.

The *Effective Provision of Preschool Education* project in the UK (Sylva et al., 2004) found that interactions that encouraged "sustained shared thinking" and where adults used open-ended questioning extended children's thinking and problem solving and were associated with excellent early years practice. "Sustained shared thinking" is:

An episode in which two or more individuals 'work together' in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative etc. Both parties must contribute to the thinking and it must develop and extend (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2003, p. 153).

These teachers did not take up suggestions of how they might work with children's theories, and said they had gone as far as they wanted.

Questioning power dynamics within the ECE setting

In each of the changes in power relationships in the vignettes discussed below, there are shifts from constructions of "the developing child" to a "child as citizen".

As teachers found out more about children's perspectives, they questioned the power dynamics in the kindergartens and more strongly identified children as active participants in learning. Transformations also occurred in relationships with parents, as teachers sought parents' views about their own children. Instead of informing parents about teachers' views and providing parents with information, teachers held discussions with parents about children in which both parties

contributed from their own knowledge base. The three vignettes provide examples of these changing relationships.

Vignette 1: Challenging norms of developmental appropriateness

A shift in power from adults holding the expertise to children holding the expertise is illustrated in the following account of a project undertaken at Punga kindergarten. This shift was initiated by talk about the work of other network teachers, where children took on a range of responsibilities traditionally regarded as belonging in the adult domain.

Jane regarded documentation as a tool to focus her attention on children within the environment, rather than classifying them against developmental norms:

So documentation for me, it really forces me to do the thinking and documenting about who [the children] are with, what they are doing, what they are interested in. (Jane, third network meeting, June 2000)

Jane said that in the past she had never really questioned how she wrote observations and how she analysed them. Categories from child development had been learnt in her teacher training to analyse child observations. To some extent Jane thought this had hindered her from making new understandings and masked some ways in which less powerful perspectives were represented. Jane and the other teachers at her kindergarten felt that they had tended to see things from an adult perspective even though they thought they were being “child centred”.

These insights led this teacher team to work with children in “empowering” ways. Jane described this changed approach when a new fence needed to be built at her kindergarten. Jane learnt from other teachers’ examples. The new approach had also been stimulated by Jane and Sally’s work on the concreting project, described in Chapter 5:

We’re starting to get into more group projects. And I’m changing my thinking so much in that we are getting a fence built and before I’d have been ringing up a builder to get a fence built. I’ve shifted my thinking. Well actually, we shouldn’t be asking a builder. We should be asking the children to build the fence. (Jane, third network meeting, June 2000)

Jane’s thinking here about the influence of child development theories reflected postmodern ideas derived from the network discussions and readings that these theories can play such a dominant role they can detract from consideration of sociocultural effects. Dahlberg, et al. (1999) for example, wrote:

Theories used to describe children's development have a tendency to start functioning as if they were 'true' models of reality, becoming a kind of abstract map spread over the actual territory of children's development and upbringing. Instead of being seen as socially constructed representations of a complex reality, one selected way of how to describe the world, these theories seem to become the territory itself. By drawing and relying on these abstract maps of children's lives, and thus decontextualising the child, we lose [sic] sight of children and their lives: their concrete experiences, their actual capabilities, their theories, feelings and hopes (p. 36).

The fence building project took place over several months and involved children looking at and photographing fences in their community, visiting a child's home where a fence was being built (here the children preferred to "play in the bedroom" rather than look at the fence being built), drawing pictures of fences children would like. The Association builder came to the kindergarten, and was introduced to a planning group of children to hear and discuss how he could work with them and incorporate their ideas. However, the design that was adopted was not one of the children's design and, unlike Totara kindergarten, the children were very much "helpers" in the building process, because "building a fence was too hard for them".

Two of these teachers said they learnt from this project.

Jane's views:

Linda: The fence project was interesting, because it seemed to start off with wonderful creativity and enthusiasm and then—the last time you presented it to the network, there was a slight tinge of disappointment, or disillusionment? What was going on there, do you think?

Jane: I think,—I suppose it didn't turn out or wasn't as stimulating as we were hoping. Probably because it was actually our ideas, it wasn't actually children's ideas totally.

Linda: So would you do that differently now?

Jane: Yes, I think so. Yes, I think we probably wouldn't even do it. And we'd just start with things like the children's cricket interest, and just the real things that happen. Which we do. (Jane, second interview, August 2001)

Rebecca's views:

Well the thing was it took so long. That the children who finished it weren't the children who started it. We had our documentation about how we introduced it and they were all enthusiastic, and the children suggested this and that. Well, . . . the children who are the bubbliest with the ideas are the ones who are ready to leave! And they all left. . . . So your timeframe is really important. I guess that's learning. (Rebecca, second interview, 2001)

Smith (2002) argued that:

An alternative to child development theory, a more appropriate framework for child advocacy work, and a new theoretical dimension to be added to children's rights discourse is offered by sociocultural theories of development (p. 74).

It can be seen in this episode that moving away from child development theories that have shaped teachers' practice is hard. The ideas for the project were copied and transported to another setting, rather than emerging from exploration of the kindergarten's own context and values. The Punga kindergarten teachers supported children to express their views and find out about fences themselves, but the project was chosen by adults, who did not share power over the decisions about the kind of fence to be built or responsibility for building it. Smith (2002) has compared Hart's (1992) and Shier's (2001) models of participation to show that in the upper levels of meaningful participation, children increasingly initiate and control their participation. The teachers at Punga kindergarten did not believe children were competent to take such initiation and control within this project.

Nevertheless, the episode provoked valuable thinking and learning that assisted these teachers to question the dominant developmental theories that guided their work, think about children's capabilities and start to make a deeper analysis of children's actual experiences and interactions with adults and children. This encouraged these teachers to think more about the role of adults in relation to children's learning, and when, and whether, adults should take responsibility or children should actively share power.

Vignette 2: Integrating assessment and planning

Planning and assessment were other sites where power dynamics changed because of network experiences. Children and parents started to become involved as participants in these processes rather than as recipients of outcomes from these processes or of information.

Progression was evident at Karaka kindergarten from planning activities that teachers thought would lead to outcomes, to planning for learning from identifying children's interests. Another change was to incorporate parents' and children's views in planning and assessment.

Juliet, one of the teachers at this kindergarten, said that the experience of being part of the network had not radically altered her views of teaching, but had given her encouragement and affirmation:

[It had] speeded up the way I was thinking anyway. It was going more—not child centred, I think that’s the wrong phrase, but this listening to the child and trying to go from what they were wanting. Because obviously they are always going to take in more if they’re interested in something. And I think I was fairly that way inclined, but I think it’s made me better about doing it. (Juliet, second interview, October 2001)

Juliet said that this way of working was harder than in the past when “you had your plan and sat them down. You said ‘We’re all going to do this.’ And that was very easy. You knew where you were going.” Another teacher from this kindergarten, Grace, also commented on changes with planning. Teachers in this kindergarten were finding planning “a struggle”, in particular, planning for every child in a setting that has a large number of children (two groups of 40 children), while recognising that in planning for one child’s interests there are other children who will benefit. Kate noticed how much easier it had been to pick an outcome and work through that, than work through children and see the outcomes.

Juliet’s journal showed the changes made in planning from October 1999 to the early months of the network. Planning at first comprised “individual learning assessments” that “seemed to produce accurate pictures of individual children and that particular stage of development. . . . they seemed to cover all areas and were manageable” . Evident in these statements is a concern with predetermined outcomes against which the child is assessed.

This moved to a realisation that “the written word is insufficient to do justice to the intricate play in which children are involved”. At the end of the network, these teachers were trialling different approaches, using photographs more, asking parents to comment on their own child, including children’s views, and documenting projects that involved groups of children and ran over several weeks or months. These approaches enabled learning to be set within context, and provided a richer range of data for interpretation than planning by teachers, working through outcomes. It offered children and parents a role within assessment and planning that they had not previously held.

Lawrence (2004) has described general shifts in planning by early childhood teachers in New Zealand over the last two decades from “ keeping children busy”

with activities in the 1980s, planning activities and events from children's interests in the 1990s, to planning that nurtures the dispositional learning that is situated within *Te Whāriki*. The planning at Karaka kindergarten demonstrated some progressions to the second level.

Vignette 3: Building a co-constructed learning community

The network focus on gathering data about children's interests encouraged teachers to find out more about children's interests from parents.

Teachers at Kowhai kindergarten illustrated how actively seeking the perspectives of parents and analysing what is happening at kindergarten brought new insights about children's experiences. These teachers undertook a project on mobilo (a piece of play equipment). The teachers wanted to understand why it was so popular and also how children were using it. They made a video, took photographs, surveyed parents and asked parents to interview their children. Teachers said that they and some parents learnt unexpected things in the child interviews. One mother had asked her daughter, "Do you like playing with mobilo?" and the girl replied, "Yes but the boys won't let me." Catherine (head teacher) said:

That was really good because we didn't realise, hadn't seen it or heard it. And...it hadn't come up at home until the parent asked the question. (Catherine, second interview, 2001)

These teachers then worked with the girl to help her become more assertive, in the first instance by teaching her to answer back in a strong voice, "I can play with the mobilo."

At Pohutukawa kindergarten, photographing children at work and at the same time recording the context of that work, helped to draw in parents, who then became more involved in the child's learning. As Josie said:

We're trying to take photos of processes rather than products. Because, the classic I always think is the painting that you've seen in ten stages that have happened over an hour, and what the parent actually sees is the grey sheet of totally covered paper because all of the colours have mixed and it's dripping wet. You think, 'Well, we've had the privilege of actually seeing the thinking and planning and processing that's gone into this.' Trying to capture that. (Third network meeting, June 2000)

The photographs of process enabled families to have access to the practices happening within the kindergarten and were a means for teachers to communicate with families about children's learning.

Carr (2001) has said that:

A democratic community might be seen as a characteristic of a place where people are able to (and recognise that they are able to): belong, make an authentic and valued contribution, and collectively make a difference for children (p. 35).

The key changes in these vignettes have been towards enabling people—children and families—to participate in the kindergarten community and for teachers to value their contribution.

Transforming constructions: Child and parent, teacher and learner

The vignettes discussed above and in Chapter 5 suggest that focusing on the child's perspectives also led teachers to develop different constructions of children and parents, and of teachers and learners. The transformation was from seeing teachers as the educators, children as the learners and parents as the caregivers, towards viewing all these participants as having an active role in building community, teaching and learning. Stereotyped views of the roles of teacher and learner were challenged. Views of knowledge became broader and were more akin to Gilbert's (2005) description of "applied knowledge", which she regards as necessary to prepare people to participate in the knowledge based societies of the 21st century:

In contrast [to academic knowledge] applied knowledge is practical knowledge that is produced by putting academic knowledge into practice. It is gained through experience, by trying things out until they work in real-world situations.... It embodies people's desires, concerns and feelings (p. 160).

Constructing the people involved in an early childhood community as participants is a hallmark of a democratic community.

Child poverty and income inequalities

Teachers regarded child poverty as a serious social problem in New Zealand society. They were very concerned about poverty and financial hardship being experienced by some kindergarten families. The main concern was the impact on children whose health, housing and nutrition needs were not being met:

Rebecca: The thing is that it's hugely tangled up with social welfare isn't it. Hugely. And the huge amount of people in poverty.

Linda: So that's a big issue?

Rebecca: Oh it is. Yes. You know back to wellbeing and belonging. [These are two strands of New Zealand's early childhood education curriculum].

Linda: And do you think early childhood education can make a difference to people's lives?

Rebecca: Yes it does, but it's still only exponential to where they're at. You know, like Petone kindergarten [a low-income kindergarten where Rebecca had worked], they cook every day. They frequently have toast. We cook every now and then and it's a bit of a luxury, and they've got every hearty kind of food in their lunch boxes. It's quite a different feeling. We wouldn't dream of serving up toast here. That basic needs hierarchy thing. (Rebecca, second interview, August 2001)

There were limitations to what participants thought early childhood services could do to alleviate the effects of poverty: poverty was construed as a societal problem. Likewise, the Child Poverty Action Group (2003) has pointed out that families who rely on benefits are amongst the poorest in New Zealand. To alleviate poverty for children requires government to institute reforms to the benefit system.

Family income levels also affected the material resources that could be provided in kindergartens, and the ability of parents to pay donations and participate in activities. Only one of the network kindergartens, Pohutukawa kindergarten, was in a low-income community, but most teachers had experienced teaching in such communities.

The material resources of Pohutukawa kindergarten were poorer than those of other kindergartens. This was evidenced in teachers' descriptions and photographs of their physical environments. Pohutukawa kindergarten teachers had to prioritise spending to be able to afford paper and photograph reproduction (before they had less costly digital cameras), and they lacked resources that others took for granted. Their kindergarten community had limited resources to fundraise or donate goods.

Teachers commonly thought that a uniform funding system, based on per capita amounts that are largely the same for every child, regardless of socioeconomic background, is inequitable:

And I feel that there does have to be some way of redressing the balance for kindergartens in lower socioeconomic areas as compared to places where I work. Because it was a real eye-opener listening to the people from Pohutukawa (Wendy, first interview, May 2000)

Teachers had strong views that resourcing should be equitable so that discrepancies in material resources were removed.

All teachers also thought that early childhood education services should be conceptualised as a public good, accessible to all children (at least those aged three

and four), and free. When asked, they reacted strongly to comments made by the Associate Minister of Education, John Luxton,³⁰ to an Education and Science select committee hearing on the funding of kindergartens in November 1995 that kindergartens, because they had higher funding rates than other early childhood centres, should have their funding levels reduced. They argued that participating in early childhood education from an early age offers children “a good start” and that children have an entitlement to education in their own right that is not dependent on parents’ ability or willingness to pay:

I think every child has a right to some quality early childhood education and the cost of it shouldn’t be an issue. . . . a service like that which any parent with a child of three or four can think ‘Yes, my child can go to this place and if I’m financially strapped, I don’t have to pay if I don’t need to.’ (Catherine, second interview, August, 2001)

But I think there needs to be something that is freely available, that regardless of whatever your circumstances, that you’re entitled to attend. And that money isn’t an option. And that you can guarantee that there’ll be quality experiences for them, and that there’ll be opportunities to socialise and to learn a lot of skills that will stand that child in good stead when they are five. . .

And if you can build up a child’s strong sense of themselves at an early age, before they go through any further in the system, then hopefully that child will have faith in themselves. They will never lose hope, and they will always feel that their life is of value and that they are important. So no matter what else might happen, they have that strong sense of who they are. A quality education, where the teachers are trained and they really are looking out for that child, then hopefully that can make a difference. (Wendy, second interview, August, 2001)

Teachers commented also that articulating the value of early childhood education is difficult, because the learning that happens is not self-evident:

I think there’s a lot of children under five who aren’t getting access to early childhood education for a range of reasons. . . . There seems to be a perception still, I think, in the wider community, that early childhood education is just play in the sandpit and that’s all that happens. But I think there needs to be a lot more awareness of what children are learning before they’re five. (Jane, second interview, August 2001)

At the same time, teachers did see themselves as responsible for grasping the challenge of making learning visible:

³⁰ John Luxton was associate minister of Education responsible for early childhood education from 1993 to 1995.

I think . . . globally there needs to be recognition of the importance of those early years. But I think sometimes it's hard to do that because there's so many different factions of early childhood. But I think, what has helped here is parents who have been interested and who have wanted to know more, and it forces you to be really au fait with articulating those things. (Wendy, Second interview August, 2001)

Summary

The nature of discussion generated within the network revealed three main themes about childhoods that challenged teachers to think about the operation of their service and their responsiveness to diverse children and families. These were: children's experiences of changing family employment patterns and needs; complexity and diversity of childhoods; and child poverty and income inequalities.

These themes about childhoods in New Zealand make demands on early childhood services and teachers, and the nature and operation of early childhood education provision. Data gathered from the teachers' network indicated some problematic responses to these demands as well as ways that teachers started to address them. The demands, related to changing childhoods, need to be addressed in early childhood policy and practice: implications are discussed in a final section to this chapter.

First, I have argued that children's experiences of changing family employment patterns are making new demands on kindergartens to adapt their hours of operation to meet family needs. Adaptation could mean a shift from sessional provision to longer hours. Resistance to change from many of the kindergarten teachers in this study was evident. Problem constructions of children as dependants, childcare as a "babysitting service for deprived children" and "kindergarten as an education service" underpinned their resistance. These constructions devalue the concept of care, and the understanding that care and education are integrated. They make assumptions that children are better off in a combination of home care and kindergarten "education", without due analysis of the nature of these worlds, or of alternative worlds. The constructions serve to heighten division between teachers in kindergartens and childcare services, and run counter to aims for an integrated, professionally supported, well-qualified early childhood teaching workforce.

These teachers did not hold an integrated view of early childhood education, a finding that raises questions about how to advance conceptual understanding of

care and education. I have argued that integrated action is a principle for an education for a child as citizen. Teachers' resistance to changing the operation of kindergartens could inhibit positive changes that are in the interests of children and families. This raises questions about the place of families, community and the government in determining forms of early childhood provision to meet local and national needs and aspirations. New Zealand's mainly market approach to provision, described in Chapter 4, relies on local responses to establish the form and location of services. As Moss and Petrie (2002) have argued "There are . . . risks attached to reliance on the local, not least diversity slipping into inequality" (p. 170). Another risk is that early childhood services will become set in ways of operating that do not adapt to children's life circumstances, and miss the potential to play a wide role in relation to children's care and education, family support and community engagement and cohesion.

Childhoods in New Zealand are becoming more diverse and complex. Teachers in this study became more responsive to the diversity of childhoods through practices of examining and discussing pedagogical documentation. This assisted teachers in developing "critical thinking" defined by Nikolas Rose as:

. . . partly a matter of introducing a critical attitude towards those things that are given to our present experience as if they were timeless, natural, unquestionable: to stand against the maxims of one's time, against the spirit of one's age, against the current of received wisdom. It is a matter of introducing a kind of awkwardness into the fabric of one's own experience, of interrupting the fluency of the narratives that encode that experience and making them stutter (1999, p. 20).

Pedagogical documentation provided data for exploration of teaching and learning. It was meaningful and of interest to teachers because it was chosen from their own settings. Pedagogical documentation offered concrete evidence of interactions and work within the setting: it went beyond teachers talking about what they thought they did. Exploring data from different perspectives sometimes affirmed teachers, and on occasions "created surprise" when teachers' perceptions were different from those of others and from the data presented in the documentation. Other New Zealand researchers (Carr et al., 2000; Timperley & Robinson, 2001) investigating how teachers challenge assumptions and revise their understandings suggest that "creating surprise through exposure to discrepant data" (Timperley & Robinson, 2001, p. 283) is a key process. Learning from data that was dissonant with perceptions, was not confined to the teachers who had brought the documentation

to the network. Teachers gained insights from discussing pedagogical documentation from other kindergartens that they applied in examining their own practice. It was also helpful to have the whole teaching team working together within the network. These teachers were all involved in a common experience, and were able to develop shared goals and work on them together.

The vignettes discussed in this chapter illustrated transformations in the power relationships between teachers and children, and teachers and parents, and differing constructions of the roles of teacher and learner, child and parent. The shifts were towards seeing childhood, not as “an essentialised category”, but as being produced within a set of relationships (Prout, 2005, p. 76), and towards greater participation of all parties in the teaching and learning community. I would argue that this shift supports democratic citizenry. Gilbert (2005), writing about the schools sector, has argued that knowledge is now a verb, not a noun. Rather than seeing the main focus of schools as consumption of academic knowledge and learning how to learn, we need also to “teach people how to do things with knowledge, and how to work with others to produce new knowledge” (p. 77). This ability to influence daily life and take transformative action is a key competency for creating a democratic society (cf Giroux, 1988, cited in Brostrom, 2003, p. 224).

In practice, the experiences of the teachers in this study suggest it is difficult to generate a critical attitude and bring to the surface stereotyped assumptions that limit children’s participation. One policy challenge is how to offer all teachers opportunities for critical reflective discussion and access to resources and support that can help them develop professionally. Support for working with families from culturally diverse backgrounds was a particularly strong need that is likely to be augmented as New Zealand society becomes even more culturally diverse.

The third theme about childhood that affected kindergarten teachers in this study was child poverty and income inequalities. This theme was less developed than the other two themes in my study. Early childhood education cannot be expected to compensate for the effects of child poverty: poverty is a societal problem that affects the ways in which families participate in communities and live their lives. Government failure to act against poverty constructs poverty as an individual’s fault which the individual alone can overcome. It positions children as dependants on their families, living in conditions that children cannot address. The theme

indicates that early childhood education cannot be expected to do everything alone: it is embedded in wider government policies that also affect children.

Low income was also found to affect the material resources available in kindergartens. When the network was held, the funding formula for early childhood services was fairly uniform, with no distinctions in levels of funding according to the socioeconomic makeup of the community or special features of the education programme that were costly. However, since then, the need perceived by network participants and others in the sector for additional resourcing for ECE services serving low-income communities has started to be addressed within ECE policy. Equity Funding, introduced in March 2002, has provided additional funding for these ECE services. The network was also held before policy decisions, made in May 2004, that government would fund up to 20 hours free ECE per week for three- and four-year-old children attending teacher-led community-owned ECE services. This was extended to all teacher-led services (private and community-owned) in the May 2005 Budget.

In examining the network teachers' experiences, I have focused on themes that emerged about childhood that affected pedagogical practice and referred to societal systems and policy frameworks that interact with practice. In Chapter 7, I examine what engagement in the "new debate" about children as citizens may mean for government officials and representatives of national early childhood organisations.

CHAPTER 7: CONSTRUCTIONS OF CHILDHOOD IN POLICY, AND THEIR EFFECTS

Constructs of childhood in early childhood education policy provide a second representation of the problem of constructing early childhood services as sites for democratic citizenship. The analysis moves from constructs of childhood in pedagogy, to the national policy perspectives of government officials and representatives of early childhood organisations who participated in focus groups and interviews. Discussions in the focus groups related to views of children, the roles and purposes of early childhood education provision, valued outcomes of early childhood education and policy mechanisms favoured to achieve outcomes. The research question addressed in this chapter was “What constructions of childhood are evident in early childhood education policy, and what are their effects?”

Early childhood funding and the place in New Zealand of private for-profit provision of early childhood services, were key contested policy issues that were discussed within the focus groups and on which new policy decisions were being made during the time of data collection, 2001 to 2004. Briefing papers to the government from the Ministry of Education, New Zealand Treasury and Ministry of Social Development on the review of early childhood education funding occurring in New Zealand over 2003/2004, statements from the Minister of Education, Trevor Mallard, and media commentary about these issues are also used as data in this chapter. These policy proposals and commentary convey competing constructions of issues in relation to young children, and the rationale for views.

The main constructions of childhood that emerged from the data and the discourses underlying these, and relationships between dominant constructs, views of the purposes of early childhood education, institutional frameworks of participants and favoured policy approaches are examined.

In addition, I hypothesised for this study that the focus groups would provide a useful forum for discussion that would enable participants to gain insights from considering perspectives, information and research evidence that were different

from their own or were new to them. Whether and how the focus groups created debate about early childhood education policies and pedagogy, and participants' views of the potential role of such forums, is also analysed.

Constructions of childhood and views of early childhood education outcomes

Three main constructs of children were revealed in the viewpoints of participants. The study participants did not adhere to a single or narrow viewpoint, but favoured arguments that positioned children as dependants within their family, as learners within a community of learners and as participants within a social community, including their family, the early childhood service community and the wider community. There was consistency between constructs of children, and views of the purposes of early childhood education, as follows:

1. The Child as dependant within the family; purposes of early childhood education learning and educational achievement especially for disadvantaged children, support for parents to enter paid employment and training (Treasury, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Development—briefing);
2. The Child as learner within a community of learners; purposes of early childhood education children's learning and wellbeing (NZEI Te Riu Roa participant, Ministry of Social Development participant, Early Childhood Development participant, professional development adviser, teachers);
3. The Child as participant within a social community; purposes of early childhood education; children's learning and wellbeing, parent employment, parent education, social and personal support, connectedness with others (Human Rights Commission, Ministry of Women's Affairs, Commissioner for Children, New Zealand Childcare Association Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa).

The participants held a particular view to the forefront, but it did not exclude other views.

The next three subsections discuss these dominant constructions of childhood. Each section follows the same order. The role and affiliation of participants who were positioned together within a conceptual cluster is discussed. Data illustrating the dominant construction of childhood, views of the main purposes of early childhood

education and discourses underpinning these constructs and views are then examined. The effects of different constructs and discourses for children are considered with reference to my principles for the participating citizen child. Finally, key policy issues that were emphasised by each group of participants are discussed. All the participants commented on funding and staffing issues, but these other key policy issues above were troubling to them.

Construct 1: The “Child as dependant”

Participants and “official” briefing papers

Participants from the Treasury and the Ministry of Education, and briefing papers from these government agencies and the Ministry of Social Development³¹ expressed views that positioned children as dependants within the family. These government agencies have key input into early childhood education policy development. The Treasury’s role is to advise the government on economic and financial policy, including fiscal policy. It is also one of three central agencies responsible for providing leadership, co-ordination and monitoring across the entire public sector. The Ministry of Education is not a direct provider of education but is responsible for education policy and operation. One of the functions of the Ministry of Social Development is to administer the Child Care Subsidy for low-income families, mainly those who are in paid employment or training. This is the only government funding stream to early childhood education that comes from outside the Ministry of Education. A government review of early childhood education funding was carried out from 2001 to 2004. The review aimed to “facilitate the achievement of the Government’s strategic plan and other Government objectives”, and “to be more responsive to the cost drivers faced by ECE services” (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 18). It examined the funding formula, how funding was delivered, and funding levels. These participants were all involved in this funding review. The Ministry of Education organised consultation and wrote policy proposals for the funding review. The Treasury and Ministry of Social Development analysed proposals and gave advice to Ministers on them. The briefing papers analysed in this chapter are related to this funding review.

³¹ The Ministry of Social Development participant expressed views that were different from the “official” briefing views.

Dominant constructs and purposes of early childhood education

A construct of children as dependants and as private responsibilities of parents (except where parents cannot provide), and an emphasis on learning and educational achievement during schooling (especially for disadvantaged children) as outcomes of early childhood education were evident in viewpoints expressed by participants from the Ministry of Education and within government briefing papers. In addition, early childhood education was portrayed as having a labour market role in allowing parents to participate in the paid work force and training. Within the construction of the child as dependant, three main discourses were evident: an economic discourse; a labour market discourse; and a welfare “child in need” discourse.

An economic and child in need discourse was conveyed in the Treasury participant’s statements and Treasury briefing papers (Treasury, 7 November 2003, 12 September 2003). The papers highlighted long-term “educational outcomes” as the key goal for children from participation in early childhood education, and suggested these accrue largely to children from low-income and otherwise disadvantaged families. Following logically from this view, the role of government is seen as picking up and supporting where parents cannot provide adequately.

From the Treasury participant’s review of some US literature about the impact of intervention programmes, taken from Karoly et al.’s (1998) review, and of general ECE programmes (mainly targeted to low-income families) on children’s achievement test scores and social development outcomes, a Treasury document stated:

From a public policy perspective, the evidence suggests that it may be more appropriate to regard formal ECE provision as a key mechanism for addressing educational and social disadvantage, rather than as a means of addressing educational outcomes of children in general. (Literature review on early childhood education prepared by the Treasury participant, January 2003)

The primary goal for early childhood education in this view is future academic achievement. The policy focus is on groups who may be most “at risk” of poor educational achievement. The review is silent about child and family wellbeing at the time of attendance and the role of early childhood education in supporting families and community development. The outcomes of early childhood education can thus be seen to be narrowly conceived, incorporating only measurable achievement and social outcomes. They do not address learning dispositions and

key competencies identified as important for learning in the 21st century, and included as goals within *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) and the new key competencies in the draft New Zealand school curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2006b). Learning dispositions refer to the competencies and skills that enable children to keep learning. Learning dispositions include attitudes of perseverance, curiosity, confidence and social competence such as the ability to work with others.

The selection of studies of programmes for review by the Treasury were mainly targeted at children from low-income families and from US settings and are not necessarily directly comparable to programmes and settings in New Zealand. Recent relevant studies of impacts of early childhood education carried out in European countries, for example the longitudinal *Effective Provision of Preschool Education* studies in England (Sylva et al., 2004) and Northern Ireland (Melhuish, Sylva, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Quinn, 2006), and studies in Sweden (Andersson, 1992; Broberg, Wessels, Lamb, & Hwang, 1997) where country settings are more comparable to New Zealand, and New Zealand's own longitudinal *Competent children, Competent Learners* study (Wylie et al., 2006; Wylie et al., 1996) show there are benefits for all children (not just those who are “disadvantaged”) from participating in “good-quality” early childhood education. Key factors in “good-quality” are aspects of adult–child interaction and opportunities afforded by the environment.

More broadly, the Treasury briefing paper also noted the potential of early childhood education to affect children's health outcomes, and parent education and employment. It highlighted the importance of “locking in” early gains by ensuring “the quality of primary schooling is up to standard”. This latter point is important. Life span modelling (Cunha, Heckman, Lochner, & Masterov, 2005), for example, emphasises that later, successive, educational contexts are significant influences on the enduring effects of learning orientations and dispositions established in the early years.

An economic discourse is evident in the emphasis on output and performance measures, a concern for rate-of-return on investment, and policies of user pays, except for the disadvantaged. A commitment to minimising spending lies within this framing. An economic discourse has been a strong discourse within the Treasury briefings on education since 1984 when, according to Codd (2005), the Treasury became “the most powerful bureaucratic influence in state policy making,

pursuing an agenda based upon human capital theory, public choice theory, and transaction cost economics” (p. 5).

Nevertheless, the Treasury participant in the focus group discussion held an open and exploratory attitude to policy issues, including funding. He conveyed a sense of trying to understand the diversity of operation and meaning of “quality” for different early childhood services, and therefore what benchmarks could be set in policy terms:

I wonder if we could separate out the question of funding by saying, just assume, that all early childhood centres received multiple times the amount of funding that they currently get. That is, the funding is no longer an issue. And the question is just can we have different ways of recognising quality, qualifications may be there, or there may be a scheme of some Māori body attests to the fact that there is good quality interaction that is going on at kōhanga. (Third focus group meeting, 27 November 2002)

A construct of the child as a dependant and a private responsibility was also conveyed in the viewpoints of the Ministry of Education participant. In his view, the balance of private and public responsibility is associated with the level to which it is appropriate for the government to fund early childhood services. Conceptually, location within the private domain is conveyed as necessarily limiting the role of the state. Responding to what issues of importance he took from the focus group discussions, the Ministry of Education participant described the “rights paradigm” as interesting to think about, alongside paradigms of public good, private good and national good. Rights could be universal or limited:

I’m not sure I would change my views in terms of rights. We in early childhood education from a rights perspective are getting into the intersection between parental rights and government responsibilities. And how far government is willing to curtail parental rights appears to depend to some extent on the age of the child. When the child is very young the state tends to think that the responsibility is with the parent, they will support the parent in that responsibility but they won’t take over. (Ministry of Education participant, interview, 20 May 2003)

The Ministry of Education participant likened the issue of children having a right to early childhood education with the debate at the time about parental rights to smack

children,³² arguing that the government is reluctant to set rules about what parents can and cannot do:

Participant: The smacking issue is quite an interesting issue actually. That is very much about whether the parent has the right to do that or does not. Every parent does have the right.

Linda: That does not mean it is [ethically] right this smacking issue, just because we are allowed to do it.

Participant: It is an issue of where the government is imposing its views on parents in terms of what they are allowed to do and what they are not allowed to do. (Ministry of Education participant, interview, 20 May 2003)

He regarded a “good education component to counter the effects of poverty” as a key purpose, along with multiple objectives of early childhood education: education and care; cultural objectives; some provision for language acquisition; childcare for working families; and parent support and development. In his view, early childhood education may constitute a greater public good for children from poor families.

A construct of the dependent child in need of care while parents are in employment was evident in the Ministry of Social Development’s briefing paper (Ministry of Social Development, 12 September 2003a). The briefing reasserted the care and education divide that the 1986 integration of childcare into the Department of Education was intended to dispel. It advocated for childcare services that are not education-based as complementary to education services. The briefing emphasised the physical care of the child in relation to childcare, and learning in relation to education:

Early childhood education is limited in the way it can meet families’ labour market needs, and has other features that are not always necessary for childcare. Early childhood education is traditionally provided during standard business hours, obviously caters only for preschoolers and has a focus on high quality educational components (i.e. a curriculum and professional teachers) (Ministry of Social Development, 12 September 2003a, p. 7).

³² Under section 59 of the Crimes Act, parents were allowed to use “reasonable force” to discipline their children. The New Zealand Parliament was debating a repeal or modification of this section at the time of the focus group meetings and interviews. The Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act was passed on 16 May 2007. The Act removed from the Crimes Act the statutory defence of “reasonable force” to correct a child, meaning there will be no justification for the use of force for that purpose. In addition, the police have the discretion not to prosecute complaints against a parent where the offence is considered to be inconsequential.

In elaboration of this attitude, the briefing then described the need for childcare for children up to age 14, and the need for childcare (including for preschoolers) during nonstandard hours:

Not all care arrangements have an educational component, and often all that is needed is safe childcare to meet families' labour market needs alongside children's education (Ministry of Social Development, 12 September 2003a, p. 7).

Key policy issues

One of the key policy issues for these participants was what policy mechanisms were appropriate to achieve a desired goal, as the Ministry of Education participant explained:

Government basically can intervene through regulations, through funding, or through information and support. . . . often in public policy development it's determining which way to regulate or what mix of those to use to get the desired outcomes. If you go down the regulatory route, what you gain is more certainty but less flexibility. . . . That can lead in some cases to an inability to cater for diversity. . . . What we'd need to do is find out what they're trying to achieve, and then work out whether that is the best way to achieve this outcome, or are there other ways. . . . The previous administration took much more of a funding approach, a more flexible approach to provide the funding and let that drive for example, teacher qualifications through Rate 2 [a higher level of funding for centres employing more qualified staff]. (Ministry of Education participant, third focus group meeting, 26 November 2002)

Setting an aim or benchmark is part of this exercise of determining the appropriate policy mechanisms to use. This was evident in the Treasury participant's interest in whether there could be differential "standards of quality" for children:

Treasury participant: You can compare tertiary and early childhood education to some extent, there are some similarities there. And the degree to which you would have to be prescriptive about exactly what funding levels would apply for different ranges of quality. . . . If you have a view that there should be one standard of quality throughout the country, then you probably wouldn't go down the direction so much of having a range of say funding rates, or different quality levels. But, alternatively, if you had a view that you could have different ranges of quality, then you might link up with funding. . . . So I guess for us there is a question of 'What would drive you to think that, say, in early childhood education, there was one standard of quality only that was important?'

Chief Human Rights Commissioner: I think probably an answer to that would be the vulnerability of the small human beings that you're dealing with which is what differentiates early childhood education from tertiary education, because the potential for lasting harm, setting aside potential for positive achievement, is so great. Listening to

you, I wonder are you really talking about quality, because clearly in terms of quality there should be a standard . . . which would deliver benefit as opposed to harm. . . . There are different services being delivered, whose costs are different, even where the appropriate level of quality should be the same. So that suggests you can have single quality provision, while having I think quite different costings attached, depending on the nature of the service. . . . But I think whatever the provision, whatever the service the young children are involved in, the outcomes need to be essentially within the same parameters. (Third focus group meeting, 27 November 2002)

If an overall aim of early childhood education is to support democracy and citizenship, then this aim needs to underpin policy as well as practice. These central government agency and Ministry participants in my study did not convey this as an aim for policy (even though this is a curriculum aim), perhaps in part because they were deterred by economic constraints.

Summary

In summary, a dominant construction of the “Child as dependant” is associated in this study with an economic discourse, labour market discourse and discourse of “the child in need”. Within this representation is an unanalysed assumption that middle-class families will have the means and desire to pay for early childhood education, and that the criteria for determining “need” will be fair. The possibility that families who are classified as disadvantaged may also feel stigmatised and isolated as a needy underclass is not analysed.

The economic discourse has a clear purpose of reducing costs of early childhood education to government. The labour market discourse is mainly concerned with parental employment. As Bacchi (2000, p. 144) points out, the child in need discourse represents the problem as resting with the families who are unable to cater for themselves, rather than the conditions that produced the “need”. All three discourses are premised on parents’ rights to choose for their child, but are silent about conditions, such as access to appropriate services and disposable family income, that would make choice possible. The central focus in these discourses is not on a vision of citizenship, but on a vision of providing where families cannot cater for themselves, or of meeting goals for adults. At its extreme, the purpose of early childhood education is future focused, aimed at school achievement. Moss and Petrie (2002) described such viewpoints as problematic in that they “can only recognise and value children in relation to the adults they will become and childhood as an opportunity for shaping a desired adulthood” (p. 80).

Later, the analysis of responses to the proposal for free early childhood education will demonstrate how this analysis is associated with advocacy for funding targeted to low-income families and potentially others who are “disadvantaged”.

The participants portraying these constructs were from central government agencies and Ministries that hold key roles in policy development. Unlike other participants, they were also required to be concerned about costs to government.

Construct 2: The “Child as learner within a community of learners”

Participants

Participants from the teachers’ union, the government agency Early Childhood Development³³, Ministry of Social Development, kindergarten association, and the professional development adviser, along with two teachers from the network, portrayed dominant views about the child as a learner. All these participants had originally taught or were currently teaching in kindergartens or primary schools. All except the Ministry of Social Development participant had roles within the early childhood education sector that involved them in working directly with early childhood centres. The Ministry of Social Development participant had held a range of positions within the early childhood education sector as a teacher educator, teacher and researcher, as well as within government agencies. Her views were different from the official Ministry of Social Development views expressed in the briefing papers. A predominant emphasis for these participants, like the network teachers, in their views about children and the purposes of early childhood education was teaching and learning, and pedagogical frameworks to support this.

Dominant constructs and purposes of early childhood education

The dominant construct of the child was the “Child as learner within a community of learners”. The primary purpose of early childhood education was portrayed as teaching and learning. These participants emphasised early childhood education provision offering learning environments that are responsive to children’s family backgrounds and cultural heritages. These participants did not essentialise “the child” but drew attention to differences among children. In this way, their views resembled those of the network teachers in their efforts to cater for family and

³³ As noted in Footnote 11, Early Childhood Development in 2001 was a crown-owned entity responsible for providing advice and support to groups wishing to establish early childhood education services, professional development, and funding and support for licence-exempt playgroups.

cultural diversity of children attending their kindergartens. It was thought to be necessary in pedagogy and policy to view each child as unique, and cater for every child:

There is still a view of the child as a ‘universal child’, but not an appreciation of the child as a child, not an appreciation of the diversity of children (e.g. special needs, other cultures). Policies in place now have the potential to make good provision in these areas. (Ministry of Social Development participant, first focus group, 27 August, 2002)

Fairness and equity are important, balanced alongside diversity. (NZEI Te Riu Roa participant B, interview, 11 May 2003)

These participants said the focus group discussions were a catalyst for them to think more about the meaning of the concept of “quality”, and cultural relativity within the concept of “quality”. Cultural relativity was not regarded as a reason not to insist on “standards”: rather it was to acknowledge the value of pedagogies that draw on the cultural capital of children and their families, and of regulations that enable culture to be expressed and supported:

One of the big things that came out of the focus group for me was the whole thing about ‘What is quality?’ I think quality is quality. And it is maybe the way you get to it. And I think that different people should be able to define what they mean by quality, but it isn’t less than other people would define quality. [How would you define quality?] It is to do with meeting the needs of children, families. Providing responsiveness, relationships, that they know the children are safe, that their learning is being developed. The learning will develop in terms of the pedagogy that is articulated. All of these things are being monitored, evaluated and assessed, so you give feedback to both parents and children. (Ministry of Social Development participant, interview, 3 June 2003)

[I have thought more about] the insensitivity of some current ways of thinking—the cultural bias of a dominant white regime that sets funding and regulation rules and the subsequent disadvantage to Māori and Pasifika people. The fact that some such groups may find themselves marginalised because they have a different cultural capital and different ways of viewing things is something that I continue to reflect on. (Professional development adviser, interview notes, July 2003)

There is a whole pile of government officials trying to make things right for the Pacific services, but I think it is a Pākehā [white European New Zealander] model. The notion of child-initiated play, the whole curriculum issue will be different in a Pacific centre. I think we have to re-look at what a curriculum in a Pacific centre entails, not an individual child with individual goals. (Early Childhood Development participant, interview, 30 May 2003)

A key theme within this construction was about how to strengthen early childhood centres as communities of learners, focused especially on the child, and on family contribution:

Back to that real partnership, where people feel free to come and spend time at the centre and their input is valued, rather than just allowing them to be there and say their bit. To seek them out and ask their opinions and involve them in decisions. (Kindergarten association participant, interview, 3 June 2003)

All people around the child have a valid contribution to make to early childhood education. (NZEI Te Riu Roa participant B, interview, 11 May 2003)

We have to get away from . . . parents' key role in most early childhood centres is to fundraise and do working bees and do the garden. That suits us, 'they' don't understand. We have never really given over an understanding to parents of what they truly could do. We've got a 'teacher knows best' attitude to learning. That is why that post-modern structuralism is quite interesting. It challenges the educator or teacher to not think in a 'one model fits all' approach. Most of my generation come from that type of thinking. We need to change that thinking. If parents had that power, that influence, then we would be seeing some centres of innovation. . . .

I have been thinking a lot about . . . relationships with parents. We talked for a number of years about partnerships, almost as rhetoric. I am really interested in what Alan Pence³⁴ did with the First Nations group. Them working from a post-modern perspective and trying to find solutions to those groups. That is really regional, and that is probably the only way you are going to get true influence from parents. (Early Childhood Development participant, interview, 30 May 2003)

Statements from these participants reflect similar ideas to those behind some ways of working with parents being trialled by network teachers and discussed in Chapter 6. As the Early Childhood Development participant noted, rejecting established ways of working with parents involves a relinquishing of teacher power and willingness to share power with others—community members, parents [and children]. This is difficult pedagogical work as the experience of network teachers, and Australian writers Hughes and MacNaughton (1999; 2000) have shown.

³⁴ Alan Pence is Professor of Child Care at the School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria, British Columbia. His projects have included development of a Generative Curriculum approach in partnership between the university and regional First Nations people. The curriculum approach involves a co-construction of ideas and possibilities rather than a curriculum based on predetermined outcomes and content (Ball & Pence, 1999; Dahlberg et al., 1999). Alan Pence was a speaker at a New Zealand Childcare Association Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa conference soon after my data were gathered.

Key policy issues

A key policy issue for these participants who emphasised children as learners was to support a pedagogic focus. The balance of emphasis in early childhood policy objectives needs to be on children's learning and wellbeing, and building a community of learners. Other policy needs to be developed to support broader goals:

Early Childhood Development participant: Have we got it wrong—Early childhood education as supporting a workforce rather than supporting learning? The emphasis should be on the latter. We need to be really careful about meeting community need and meeting workforce need, and work at looking at what we provide is a good learning opportunity for children. Other policies have an impact, and early childhood education should not be expected to carry all the responsibility. Paid parental leave makes it possible for parents to choose what is best for the child rather than what is best for the parental situation. (first focus group meeting, 27 August 2002)

Professional development adviser: We have a wider picture now of what is of value to the child. How much value is placed on the education of the child? (First focus group meeting, 27 August 2002)

One implication for policy is the importance of moving away from a culture that is most concerned with what is reported as measurable outcomes of education, to the educative process itself:

Government's attempts to measure quality through outcomes, places stress on the early childhood community as it tries to find pedagogically appropriate ways to measure outcomes. The structural aspects which are far easier to determine and measure can in fact mask the process aspects of quality which are less apparent to viewers. For example, compare a parent who checks out a centre and goes on visual first impressions, hours, access, availability and so on, to a more scrutinising approach to measuring process quality, e.g. level of teacher:child interaction, cognitively challenging environments. (Professional development adviser, interview notes, July 2003)

Within this statement can be seen a rejection of an economic discourse, which is only concerned with products of early childhood education. The participant favours a discourse that values processes and is open to incorporating diverse educational values.

These participants had the most clearly articulated views of the focus group participants about policy frameworks needed to support up-to-date pedagogical practice and knowledge, and enabling investigation of teaching and learning:

The teachers are probably the most critical factor and need to be highly qualified critical thinkers and have ongoing group advice and support. Not advice and support that tells them what they are doing. More the critical reflection that challenges things and keeps taking people forward, because I think that is where teachers get their energy from, that debate, thinking, reading, trying things out. (NZEI Te Riu Roa participant A, interview, 11 May 2003)

The professional development adviser had a clear description of the conditions she thought were needed to help support critically reflective practice. She also spoke about the experience of working with the teachers' network. These conditions included ongoing professional development and time to critically reflect on practice:

The three-year teaching qualification does not allow for learning and consolidation of many of the things I see as important for teachers to learn. Ongoing professional development provides avenues to support pedagogical practice and knowledge. Networks were found to be a useful forum for this professional development. The kindergarten teachers' network provided a planned opportunity for reflective practice.

Teachers in the network had a structured opportunity to reflect on practice. Kindergartens are lucky to have the opportunity for reflection in comparison to staff working in childcare who have a long day and are tired and hungry. The opportunity for this section of early childhood educators is often non-existent. There is never quite enough time. Because of limited structures for PD [professional development], teachers are not encouraged to ask questions or to challenge.

Reflection can make a difference to children—being critical about practice, having dialogue with colleagues. Reflective practice, critical discussion, encourages teachers to see other ways to view the child. For example, teachers may use a Learning Stories approach, and view children's learning through a dispositional lens. Discussion and reflection support the process of assessment. (Professional development adviser, first focus group meeting, 27 August 2002)

No contrasting views were offered, but the Ministry of Education participant thought the early childhood curriculum was conceptually challenging because it was not a curriculum that is “taught”, and presupposes a level of understanding and ability to think critically that is not always present. This participant said that some teachers “need more scaffolding” and the Ministry of Education was being increasingly asked for support materials. A current challenge was to “layer out” support.

Two participants also raised issues about the currency of knowledge gained from teacher education undertaken in previous years, whether and how beginning teacher

education could adequately help teachers to become critically reflective practitioners, and difficulties in supporting conceptual understanding of *Te Whāriki* when working with untrained staff:

The decisions about what to include or what to omit in teacher education programmes are difficult to make. There are teacher education opportunities in training establishments but teachers need time to develop notions and ideas. Some teachers trained 20 years ago and have minimal contact with current teacher education institutions. (Professional development adviser, first focus group meeting, 27 August 2002, p. 6).

We are supposed to look after professional development of all sorts of groups, with a huge range of qualifications. We have to live with what *Te Whāriki* is, and it is hard to monitor growth and development. Untrained staff make up a huge group especially in Auckland. (Early Childhood Development participant, first focus group meeting, 27 August 2002)

The Early Childhood Development participant thought contestability of professional development³⁵ contracting was inefficient, since staff spent many hours putting proposals for professional development together and working to retain staff who were employed contract by contract. She thought this time and effort could be better placed in delivering professional development. Contestability is part of a market approach that has permeated early childhood education since the 1990s (Meade, 1993).

The professional development adviser raised questions rather than offering answers to issues about professional development:

Professional development as an indicator of quality, and how this can be regulated for—how can it continue to be resourced and should it also be part of the wider funding issue? How do we define it and how does it differ from academic study? (Professional development adviser, interview notes, 2003)

These participants explicitly rejected the market model of provision and user pays that dominated early childhood education policy in the 1990s. In place of markets and choice, the Early Childhood Development participant argued there needs to be a structure for parents to have a real say in early childhood education provision:

³⁵ The Ministry of Education offers contestable contracts for delivery of professional development linked to the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*. Professional development providers include universities/colleges of education, some early childhood education organisations, and some private providers. The contracts are held for two years, so there is a need for providers to make new applications when existing contracts expire and new contracts are advertised.

It would be really good to look at a parent advocacy voice. The organisations that once had parental voices like Plunket are groups that represent one view really. It is quite a middle New Zealand view really. It is from another era. It [is based on] an old-fashioned committee volunteer structure. One of the things I struggle with in the early childhood sector now is we are not a group of volunteers of community people any more. Not today's parents. They don't fit a committee model, they don't have a consensus, and they don't understand it. They understand paying for something, getting service back. Finding a way for those people to have a buy in is not about money or being a consumer. That is one of our challenges. (Early Childhood Development participant, interview, 30 May 2003).

Rejection of market approaches and user pays was also evident in the views of these participants about funding and private provision, as discussed in the next sections.

Summary

In summary, the dominant construct of the “Child as learner within a community of learners” was linked to views of children and families as social participants within the early childhood setting. These participants had a pedagogical focus, framing their thinking about policy from this focused viewpoint. They acknowledged difficulties for teachers in working in empowering ways with families, and challenges in catering for culturally diverse children and families. These same challenges were experienced by network teachers. Discourses of the market and user pays were explicitly rejected, in favour of a discourse of collective responsibility. The following principles for an early childhood education based on a view of the child as citizen are upheld in these views: the principle of integrated action between home and early childhood service, and as some of the “best outcomes” for children, outcomes that are not all predetermined, but are negotiated within context. Policy challenges arising from these views are about parent voice, and pedagogical frameworks to support teaching and learning within a community of learners.

Construct 3: The “Child as citizen within a network of relationships”

Participants

The third grouping was of participants from rights-based government agencies, and the New Zealand Childcare Association Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa. The agencies were the Human Rights Commission, Office of the Commissioner for Children and

Ministry of Women's Affairs. The Human Rights Commission is an independent national human rights institution that "champions fundamental human rights for a fair and just society". The Office of the Commissioner for Children is an independent government agency promoting children's and young people's rights. The Ministry of Women's Affairs is a small government agency that provides advice to help improve women's lives. The New Zealand Childcare Association Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa represents education and care centre teachers and management, and provides teacher education. The participant from the New Zealand Childcare Association Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa expressed a wider view of the purpose of early childhood education than did other early childhood organisation participants.

Dominant constructs and purposes of early childhood education

These participants positioned the child as a member of a social group and wider community, with wide-ranging purposes of early childhood education to support the child and the family to flourish. Broad views about how early childhood education could contribute to community development as well as the wellbeing of children were expressed. These participants asserted the importance of care, and caring relationships. They paid attention to the experience of childhood and to what early childhood education could be for children, parents, whānau and community.

The New Zealand Childcare Association Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa participant thought "education should be broad in its conception". She was concerned that "care, nurturance and love" are often not seen as education and yet "these have such importance to education". Her concept of care was akin to the Nordic concept of caregiving which "of course includes physical caretaking, but it also requires mutual regard, warmth, and a genuine sense of shared personal and emotional involvement between the child and the adult" (Einarsdottir, 2006, p. 173).

This participant thought it is important to consider the life circumstances of families participating in early childhood education, and how early childhood education services can contribute to supporting families through, for example, health care, parental education and childcare for parents in paid employment.

Rejection of the role of early childhood education as preparation for school, and acknowledgement of the actual experiences of the child were evident issues for the Ministry of Women's Affairs participant. This participant thought the view of early

childhood education as preparation for school is still held by some parents and some people working in early childhood education:

Participant: I think there is still too much of a view that is around ‘You children are going to hit the system soon, and you had better be up to it’ view.

Linda: The system being what, the school system?

Participant: The school system and expectations of the ongoing standards.

Linda: So by standards do you mean learning or achievement or what?

Participant: Yes, learning. I think there is also a view of the child that says that children can be bad and be disciplined, that they can go and do these activities, and have all these demands made on them to do a lot of interacting, to go to a lot of activities, to behave at the table, to sleep when everyone else is sleeping. I think it gives a view of the child that the child is able to cope with these demands.

Linda: When they are not necessarily able to?

Participant: Yes, I prefer more security for the child. (Ministry of Women’s Affairs participant, interview, 19 May 2003)

An emphasis on care and education as a holistic concept was associated with an understanding of the reality of childhood within New Zealand society, the shift towards more women with preschool children being employed in the labour force and the absence of traditional extended family support:

I think there’s lots of really positive stuff going on in terms of what you were looking at as we discussed in the first focus group. A big emphasis, and the extended research on the development of young children. I wonder if while all that’s been going on we have lost sight of the whole issue which was the need, given changing labour market/family structures, to provide quality services that did provide care—not separate from education. I was interested in the papers and all the references to early childhood education, which I’m not opposed to, but I think it partly feeds into the view that therefore what this is about is making children ready for school as opposed to creating an environment for our young children to be safe and flourish which includes providing all day care, because there aren’t extended families or women at home full-time. (Chief Human Rights Commissioner, interview, 28 May 2003)

In the third focus group meeting the same participant criticised the idea that the “care” component is almost being regarded as irrelevant—“It’s suddenly all about what do we need to do to ensure competencies.”

These participants valued goals for parent participation, support and learning, as well as the government goals of early childhood education supporting workforce participation and training:

One of the things I have been saying in the policy debate is that the emphasis on parents' activities [is] too narrow. Paid work and education should be broadened right out to respite, rehabilitation, having a break, voluntary work, community work, participating on the marae, whatever. A whole range of things. . . . All have value. (Ministry of Women's Affairs participant, interview, 19 May 2003)

I think it is really important not to miss the issue of the reality of actually providing a service that does actually meet children's and families' needs, which is why I always talk about children's and families' needs, which might not necessarily coincide either. (Chief Human Rights Commissioner, third focus group meeting, 27 November 2002)

Ideally I would like to see a well-funded early childhood sector that allowed for a wide range of services to meet the needs of the parent and child communities in New Zealand. (Office of the Commissioner for Children, email after first focus group meeting, September 2002)

The Office of the Commissioner for Children participant also raised issues about early childhood education being able to contribute to strengthening the role of fathers in parenting.

Key policy issues

Consistent with their view of the purposes of early childhood education, these participants regarded the shape of early childhood provision as a critical policy issue. One interest was in integrated early childhood education provision, and services having flexibility to meet a range of aspirations and needs:

The other thing I did reflect on that is a concern, is the importance of actually having time in an organised way, not just an informal way for parents or other family members, and not just involving them in fundraising activities, but actually having the sense of becoming sources of support, information, access to other services. That actually is a role that early childhood services played to an extent in the past. I'm not saying to a sufficient extent in the past, but I am saying to an extent. Partly we have had significant societal changes which have made it harder for parents who had time to participate in all sorts of ways, but at the same time there hasn't been the resourcing and it hasn't been such a critical element to develop their resourcing and support services, to enable the support services to do that. That is a real gap. (Chief Human Rights Commissioner, interview, 28 May 2003)

This participant went on to talk about options for early childhood services to cater for needs of young mothers who themselves might be relatively disadvantaged, through opportunities such as early literacy classes, or learning to read, or “other things that young mothers want to do”.

People’s perceptions were portrayed as one of the barriers to changing the way services operate.

The Chief Human Rights Commissioner thought the reason why more flexible provision and greater connectedness did not happen is partly a resourcing issue, and partly a vision issue, “what/how services see themselves”.

In terms of the two discussions I participated in, and subsequently listening to other things that are happening, was a way in which particular physical regulations have been used to constrain the provision of flexible services. Silo, that’s the impact. The extent to which the regulations are the way they are applied really reinforces silos in terms of service provision as opposed to encouraging the development of flexible, responsive services. And obviously I’m thinking of kindergartens getting out of sessional (there’s nothing wrong with sessional) and the ability of providing a mix of sessional and [longer hours]. It’s shocking to think this is something we thought should have happened in 1975, ‘76, ‘77, ‘78 and it’s still not [happened], and when we as a people attempt it because there is a need, the rules make it virtually impossible even where there’s goodwill. (Chief Human Rights Commissioner, interview, 28 May 2003)

The kindergarten association participant also thought kindergartens had “clung to a philosophical stance” which had “actually stopped us going into day care and longer hours”:

Diversity is really important. But within that, kindergarten teachers are trained to be kindergarten teachers. They like what they do, they like sessional care, they like the 3–5-year-olds, they like all that sort of stuff. (Kindergarten association participant, second focus group meeting, 2 October 2002)

Barriers to change, predominantly originating from kindergarten teachers’ perceptions, were also discussed in Chapter 6. Some teachers in the teachers’ network were adamant about the need to retain kindergartens as sessional education services, and resistant to changing the kindergarten way of operating.

Structural arrangements within the funding system were portrayed as an impediment to integrating education and care. The New Zealand Childcare Association Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa participant thought that the funding arrangements—the bulk funding formula, which funds “education” for up to six

hours per day, and the Child Care Subsidy, which subsidises childcare for up to 50 hours per week—were partly responsible for emphasising a division between care and education, when she thought these should be regarded as interdependent.

Structural features were also thought to contribute to divisions between early childhood services of different types, along the lines of “care” services and “education” services.

The basic structure of services is divisive. Kindergartens are like schools and centres for under-twos are like care. Are we saying that the reasons that infants and toddlers are away from homes are different? There is an overlay in having the same curriculum but it's done in different ways. There's an issue of accessibility and affordability, moving from childcare to kindergarten and later to school. Parents pay for childcare but kindergarten is free. (New Zealand Childcare Association Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa participant, first focus group meeting)

Perceptions of quality differences between services were portrayed as creating divisions:

There tends to be this thing of teacher-led are better and kōhanga are somehow second class. (Te Puni Kōkiri participant, third focus group meeting, 27 November 2002)

These views were re-asserted in the Te Puni Kōkiri briefing on the regulatory changes:

There is a belief that teacher led services deliver quality ECE whereas parent led services deliver a lesser form of quality. There is no research that substantiates that viewpoint (Te Puni Kōkiri, 18 May 2004, Para. 19).

The Chief Human Rights Commissioner regarded this as an adversarial position and not a good basis for looking at how to move for moving forward. For her, provision of early childhood services is a key unresolved issue:

Linda: What issues of importance did you take from the focus group meetings?

Participant: The fact that really the provision of early childhood education is only still contentious and unresolved. That's the main thing. Although there was some consensus . . . I thought possibly even amongst the practitioners across the different services, not much kind of shared understanding of each other. (Chief Human Rights Commissioner, interview, 28 May 2003)

The diversity of provision in New Zealand's early childhood education sector has often been acclaimed. The government's strategic plan for early childhood education states:

The choice of ECE services is broad; this country has a strong ECE sector offering a diverse range of services to meet the education and care needs of most children, parents, families and whānau. In some ECE settings parents and whānau are directly responsible for the education and care of the children. In other settings, paid staff are responsible. There are also home-based settings where paid staff are responsible for the education and care of the children within their own (or the children's) home (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 5).

It is largely assumed in this statement that the diversity of service types that exists in New Zealand will offer responsiveness to needs. The framing accepts as uncontested that meeting a wide range of needs will occur though the sector providing a range of services from which parents can choose. The views expressed by participants in the focus groups suggest that such a representation is problematic because it does not address impediments to diversification.

A point raised by these considerations is whether by uncritically acclaiming the current diverse early childhood education service options that were developed through grass roots community initiatives often many years ago, opportunities are being missed for services to learn from and collaborate with each other, and for new types of early childhood service that are relevant in contemporary New Zealand society to be developed.

Summary

In summary, the dominant construct of the “Child as citizen within a network of relationships” linked to views that early childhood education can play a wide role in strengthening children, families and community development. The participants holding these views had an appreciation of social change and the realities of lives of families. Inability of services to adapt to these realities was a barrier to fulfilling the wide role that could be played. Impediments to change arose from service participants’ vision of what the service could be, and structural arrangements, for example, funding streams that were not integrated, traditional service operation and uneven costs to parents. Key policy challenges from these viewpoints are about generating a collective vision about what early childhood can be in a broad sense, and developing structures to enable responsiveness of early childhood services to childhood in contemporary New Zealand society.

Conclusion

A key theoretical point is that participants who shared particular constructs of the child also shared views about the main purposes of early childhood education, and the roles and responsibilities of families in relation to young children's early education. The "Child as learner" and the "Child as citizen" constructs related most closely to the idea of education institutions as a "social environment of collective responsibility and national identity" (Codd, 2005, p. 5) within which citizenry rights are nested. The three conceptual clusters made sense in accordance with the roles played by the participants' organisations within the early childhood sector. Each of the three social constructions of the child has implications for the role of the state in the provision of early childhood education.

These differences between groups were further reflected in participants' views of free early childhood education, and the place of private for-profit provision of childcare services. The main differences reflect views about whether early childhood education is primarily a public or private responsibility, the value of a market approach and the role of community and government in provision of services. These issues are examined in the next two sections.

Universal access to free early childhood education

Universal access to free early childhood education was a recommendation of the early childhood sector's Strategic Plan Working Group. May (2004) has noted that this was a new demand on the political agenda, in keeping with the emphasis given by the working group on the Articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Treaty of Waitangi and the Principles of *Te Whāriki*. The then Minister of Education, Trevor Mallard, claimed this proposal to be "blue skies thinking". He asked a Strategic Plan Technical Working Group to trim its proposals and prepare a "fiscally responsible" plan. Nevertheless, the Strategic Plan Technical Working Group's final document still stated, this time outside the terms of reference, a recommendation for "An entitlement to a reasonable amount of free early childhood education for all children before they start school, implemented in stages" (Working Group for the Development of the Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education, 2001, Appendix A).

A review of early childhood funding was carried out from 2001 to 2004.

My discussion paper for the third focus group meeting described a funding option that I had prepared with an Early Childhood Development co-ordinator for consideration by the Strategic Plan Technical Working Group and for this review of funding. Both the funding review and the focus group meetings were occurring at the same time. The funding option costed a 20-hour free entitlement for early childhood education for three- and four-year-olds. One of the reasons for doing the costing was to suggest that the fiscal impact of free early childhood education was not great if the Childcare Subsidy funding was moved from Vote Social Development into Vote Education funding.

Discussion in the focus group was about the concept of free early childhood education.

Targeting the disadvantaged child

An exact match was found between a dominant construct of the child as dependant, opposition to free early childhood education for all children and options favouring funding targeted to disadvantaged children. The opponents of free early childhood education constructed young children as dependants within their families, and early childhood education in part as a private responsibility. Hence, within this thinking, free early childhood education for all children is an inappropriate intervention for government to make, except for children categorised as disadvantaged, whose families cannot provide.

The “unofficial” Ministry of Education participant’s views that private benefits need to be weighed up against public benefits are explicit:

Entitlement to free [early childhood education] is more about rights and public good arguments. My thinking about that is probably still around ‘Who is getting the benefit here?’, and there are also issues in terms of public policy about how should government be using this money. Where you argue for ‘free’ is where the government would say ‘This is so important for children to get an early childhood education that we are going to pay for it all.’ Even though there is a significant benefit to parents from this, particularly those who are using it to go to work. . . . Part of the benefits the state is interested in, are those where parents are in a disadvantaged situation. Or when most parents can’t afford to use this service, then maybe that is when the state should step in. (Ministry of Education participant, interview, 20 May 2003)

An economic discourse was a clear line of argument in his views of funding:

If you have got plenty of money [free early childhood education] it is not an issue. But where you have got a limited resource, if you don't start taking those who can't afford to pay it and you even it out, which is to some extent what is happening at the moment, those who can afford to pay it can purchase quality, those who can't get the second best. (Ministry of Education participant, interview, 20 May 2003)

There is an assumption that the market provides variable levels of “quality” early childhood education, that the purchaser (the parent) has information to help distinguish between good quality and not so good quality and can make choices accordingly. It is further assumed that “good-quality” provision will be more expensive than poorer quality. In practice, parents choose early childhood education services mainly for affective reasons (Barracough & Smith, 1996). Few make use of information from ERO reviews or consider staffing features described in the literature as structural quality (Mitchell & Brooking, 2007). Nor is there evidence that services that cost more to the parent will be better “quality”.

The “official” Ministry of Education initial proposal on the funding review (Ministry of Education, 18 March 2003) to Trevor Mallard, the Minister of Education, proposed a strongly targeted component calculated according to “affordability for parents”, in addition to a base funding rate linked to early childhood service cost drivers:

The funding received by a centre would be adjusted to reflect the ability of the parents using a particular service to pay fees. . . .

With a limited amount of government funding, putting the bulk of this funding through as a flat increase . . . is likely to disadvantage centres in low socioeconomic communities and provide a windfall gain to centres (parents) in higher socioeconomic communities proposal (pp. 1–2).

Both economic and needs discourses were evident in a further briefing paper to the Minister of Education on this proposal (Ministry of Education, 1 April 2003):

This [affordability] step would give Government the ability to target resources to those areas where participation is lowest (typically low income and Māori and Pasifika families). It would . . . [ensure] that most funding goes to the sections of the population assessed as being in greatest need. This would allow the fiscal impact upon the government to be controlled (p. 4).

In a courageous political decision, Trevor Mallard, the Minister of Education, rejected this proposal. He asked officials to go back to develop and cost alternative options for providing totally free early childhood education by the year 2012, and a

range of scenarios varying the proportion of government funding and the amount of free entitlement that may be provided (Ministry of Education, 12 May 2003, p. 1). Proposals for free early childhood education were duly developed, and comment sought from the central government agencies and other government departments.

A Ministry of Social Development briefing was critical of the proposal for free early childhood education for all children on the grounds that a large proportion of “families who could otherwise afford to contribute to the cost of their ECE services” would be “winners” (Ministry of Social Development, 12 September 2003, p. 8). Implicit in this statement is a notion that education for young children is a private benefit (families are “winners”); by implication the government’s role is to provide only in situations where parents cannot afford to pay (early childhood education is a private responsibility). This casts children’s access to early childhood education as dependent on parental decisions about whether to spend on early childhood education, and frames the child who is from a low-income family as being “in need”, with others being self-sufficient. In this construction, the role of government is as a “minimal state”.

In addition, the briefing indicated a view that labour market and educational goals are in competition for funding, and the current separate streams of funding, one through Vote Education and one through Vote Social Development, would continue:

MSD’s [the Ministry of Social Development’s] view is that the ECE funding proposal [for free early childhood education] does not take sufficient account of Government’s labour market participation goals. The proposal may cut across the direction of Future Directions and the planned Family Income Assistance/Childcare package by encouraging families to cluster their labour market participation around the 20 hour mark. Some form of flexible and responsive socioeconomic targeting of assistance to families will still be required through Vote:Social Development in addition to the bulk funding of early childhood education services through Vote:Education, if the Government’s ECE and labour market participation goals are to be met (Ministry of Social Development, 12 September 2003a, p. 3).

The strongest advocacy for individually targeted funding for low-income and “disadvantaged” children was made by the Treasury participant and in Treasury briefing papers on the options for free early childhood education. This was a logical extension of the analysis that “disadvantaged” children are likely to gain most (in terms of long-term educational achievement outcomes) than other groups.

Therefore more resources should go to these children who would benefit most. Responding to proposals for free early childhood education, the Treasury stated:

Evidence suggests that general programmes appear to offer limited measurable long term gains to children from middle-upper income families with supportive home environments (compared to gains they would have made under informal care arrangements). This would suggest that an option of targeting ECE to those who would gain the most benefit (children from low income or otherwise disadvantaged families) would be more effective in raising educational outcomes than the proposed approach (Treasury, 12 September 2003, p. 3).

The unambiguous economic rationale and the assumption that there is and always will be a limited financial resource for early childhood education is one way of silencing discussion of universal free provision.

Universality and children's rights

A universal approach offering some free early childhood education for all children, provided education was of “good quality”, was the position favoured by all other participants in the focus groups. The main argument was for funding to enable every child to access good-quality early childhood education, no matter the home circumstances, or parents’ willingness or capacity to pay. Targeted funding is unable to deliver this for all children. Provision of appropriate services where they are needed is also a factor:

I think the reality is that if you view early childhood education and care as a really important service to the children and the family, which actually has lasting impact . . . then how does society ensure that every child gets a fair opportunity to have access to an appropriate service? It seems to me that the places that do it best fund services. They don’t fund individual children and they don’t fund tax breaks. (Chief Human Rights Commissioner, third focus group, 27 November 2002)

Free quality childcare for the under-fives is what we would advocate here because it gives all that free choice. That would have to be matched with provision for those who do not want to take that up, so those people aren’t living impoverished lives, because they haven’t taken it up. (Ministry of Women’s Affairs participant, interview, 19 May 2003)

It seems to me that if you come from a basic principle that an early childhood experience is important for children, your next question is ‘How can we ensure that all children get it?’ . . . And the Office [of the Commissioner for Children] has a position that universal provision is the answer. [Can you say why that is?] Well it’s the only way we can see that everybody gets a fair share, so that even if you’re a child who is in transition, your parents are on the run from the bailiffs, in any town or place where you arrive you can go to the

nearest early childhood centre and have a session. . . . So that means regardless of circumstances. Availability is the main factor. (Office of the Commissioner for Children participant, interview, 28 May 2003)

This Office of the Commissioner for Children participant described problems with the targeted Child Care Subsidy, including the need for people to be “bureaucratically literate” and able to apply for the subsidy, the stigma of a targeted subsidy “in people’s own minds if nowhere else”, and costly administration that detracts from funding the service itself. These problems were also reported by the Early Childhood Education Project (1996), and discussed in the Strategic Plan Working Group.

One issue was what a “reasonable amount” of free early childhood education might be and how it might be implemented:

I personally have quite a pragmatic view, which is obviously we don’t currently fund access for all children, so we’re not going to fund open-ended access to all children at present. It seemed to me that there was a kind of reasonable community expectation that you would get access to a kindergarten and I think most parents like the idea you would have at least half a day every day of the week, so I would start at that free access for all children for a week’s sessional at kindergarten, te kōhanga reo, playcentre and community-based childcare centres. (Chief Human Rights Commissioner, second focus group meeting, 2 October 2002)

Postscript

After the focus group meetings and the funding review, a “landmark” political decision was announced in the May 2004 budget: up to 20 hours per week free early childhood education for children in teacher-led community-based services. In a media statement about the policy, Education Minister Trevor Mallard referred to the value of “quality” education and emphasised his vision of early childhood education outcomes to include “love for learning”. He called the early childhood package:

. . . a landmark package for New Zealand’s youngest children and their families through the provision of free early childhood education and significant new funding to ensure early childhood education of the best possible quality.

The package will implement a comprehensive plan for early childhood education that will be completed by 2012.

Our government is firmly committed to giving all young New Zealanders the opportunity to have the best possible start in education and to develop a lifetime love for learning (Mallard, 2004).

A sign perhaps of citizenry rights in political thinking?

A further important sign of citizenship is in the goal in the strategic plan of “promoting collaborative relationships” which “recognised the role of early childhood education (beyond the benefits for individual children) in community development” (May, 2004, p. 86).

The 20 hours free early childhood education was extended to all teacher-led services, including private for-profit services in the 18 May 2005 budget. New funding rates for free early childhood education were released on 21 December 2006, and increased in the government’s May 2007 Budget. It is up to individual services to decide whether they will offer free early childhood education. At 7 July 2007, a week after the date of implementation, 70 percent of eligible children were enrolled for free early childhood education. One major shortcoming in the coverage of the policy for children is that it does not extend to children in parent/whānau-led services (playcentres and some kōhanga reo). Children’s access to free early childhood education is therefore not a right since it is dependent on whether the family’s chosen service has “opted in” to free early childhood education, the type of service attended (teacher-led or parent/whānau-led), and the age of the child.

For-profit early childhood education service provision

The idea of early childhood centres as part of civil society links with the idea that early childhood services can operate as forums for participation and engagement of children, parents and community. One of my premises was that if early childhood services are to be sites for democratic participation, they need to operate as a community facility and to be open to engagement of participants in contributing to their direction. Can private for-profit childcare services play this role?

Traditionally in New Zealand, most private services had owner operators, with some seeking just a living for themselves. However, at least one private chain has operated since 1972 (Kindercare). During 2002, after I had collected data for the study, two companies that had bought early childhood centres in New Zealand, Kidicorp and ABC, were listed on the sharemarket. These corporate childcare

chains have expanded rapidly. In 2006, Kidicorp, which was taken over by “Feverpitch International”, a gambling software venture that did not survive, owned 68 centres. ABC owned 77 centres in New Zealand, 1,158 centres in Australia, 1,100 centres in the US and 47 centres in the UK (Campbell, 2006). Forward Steps, owned by Macquarie Bank, bought 20 New Zealand centres in 2005 (Education Forum, 2005).

Newspaper reports indicate that these developments have been associated with strong promotion of business opportunities for childcare provision:

Caring for kids is not just child’s play. It’s big business with massive revenue and growth opportunities available for private child care agencies. . . . Big players in this game are experiencing high industry growth combined with high market share—a recipe for solid revenue and profits. . . . The dollars going around in this ballooning industry—which is only just emerging from its infancy—make it tempting for the entrepreneurial-type looking for a capital opportunity (O’Rourke, 2002).

Under the heading: “New baby boom for KidiCorp”:

Kids are the market’s little darlings as Feverpitch gives up on gambling.

Like a child discovering the latest hot toy—this year’s Bleyblade or Pokemon—the Stock Exchange is finally catching up with the big kid across the Tasman [Australia] and getting into the craze for listing childcare companies. . . . A statement from Feverpitch says that the ‘highly fragmented’ childcare market is worth more than \$500m a year (Panckhurst, 15 January 2003).

The government funds for-profit and community-based services on the same basis, with two exceptions. Community-based early childhood services only are eligible for capital grants and advice and support to become established. The government also provides additional Equity Funding for community-based services (not for profit services) serving low-income and isolated communities and offering programmes in languages other than English. Both policies existed at the time of the focus group meetings.

The question that I asked participants was: “To what extent, if any, should the government fund, regulate and support for-profit early childhood education services?” In addition, in 2003, the government asked officials to comment on a proposal that an entitlement for free early childhood education should be available in community-based services only, with government funding increased to these centres but not to private for-profit services. The Ministry of Social Development and Treasury government briefing papers commented on this proposal.

Participants' constructs of children, views about free early childhood education provision and views about government funding of for-profit early childhood education were consistent, except two participants (New Zealand Childcare Association Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa and Ministry of Women's Affairs) were undecided.

An economic and market discourse in support of for-profit provision

One view, held by participants from the central government agencies and ministries, was that the government should not make any further distinctions in the treatment of for-profit and community-based services.

The main reasons were pragmatic and economic. A key issue concerned the capacity of community-based services to cater for needs for provision in all localities, and costs to government if the government had to provide early childhood services directly:

In terms of funding, we have a situation in New Zealand that if the government were to remove funding from for-profit education and care services, we would have service gaps, which the government couldn't actually afford to have. The government could fill those gaps itself, but it would be at a very high cost to government or a high cost to parents. Then there are some places where the local capability to provide such a service may well be limited, in which case the private provider can step into that slot. So I think if government is going to achieve its policy goals, which are very ambitious, for early childhood education, it actually needs the for-profit sector. (Ministry of Education participant, interview, 20 May 2003)

The Ministry of Education participant was noncommittal, when asked about whether a market approach to establishing provision should be replaced by an approach where evidence of planning to meet community need had to be provided. He thought a planned approach would require additional staff and more information:

You could do it, but you would have to do a cost benefit analysis to work out whether it is worth doing that and what is the problem you are trying to solve by committing a considerable amount of government expense to centralised planning and regulation of provision. (Ministry of Education participant, interview, 20 May 2003)

Another argument, a personal view of the Te Puni Kōkiri participant, was that choice and markets are an effective way of encouraging provision of good-quality early childhood services that are available where they are needed:

I guess that if you are providing a service for profit . . . you are trying to meet market needs. If you are not meeting parents' expectations or needs they will just go out of business. So one would expect that you would have to, like any good firm, while you have got to pay dividends and profits and stuff to shareholders, you will reinvest in the company. This will be no different for early childhood. (Te Puni Kōkiri participant, interview, 19 June 2003)

Discourses of the child in need (and child rights), labour market and economic impacts were again evident in the Treasury and Ministry of Social Development briefings. The idea that free early childhood education should be offered to community-based services only was not supported by the Treasury or the Ministry of Social Development. The reasons given were:

1. Child impacts. Target groups, e.g., children from low-income and solo-parent families who attend private services would not benefit from the free entitlement (Treasury, 7 November 2003, p. 10). This represents a child rights discourse, but not for all children. The Treasury analysis is silent about another possibility: that the government intervenes to plan and support community-based services where they are needed, or provide services itself.
2. Labour market impacts. Many parents wanting to enter or stay in the workforce need to be able to access childcare "that they are comfortable with". If parents are not comfortable with community-based childcare, they might revisit their choice to work, or the hours they work (Treasury, 7 November 2003, p. 10). Labour market patterns would be distorted by encouraging families to "cluster their labour market participation around the 20 hour mark" (Ministry of Social Development, 12 September 2003a, p. 3).
3. Provision impacts. Pressure on supply of community-based centres would be created. Such a policy would provide an incentive for parents to attend community centres for the free entitlement and shift to private centres for remaining hours (Treasury, 7 November 2003, p. 10). The viability of some private centres could be jeopardised (Ministry of Social Development, October 2003, p. 2)

In particular, these considerations raise issues about provision of early childhood education. The government has never had a direct ownership role in early childhood provision, and has relied on the community and private sector to respond to "need". The account of problems with early childhood education provision in the

1990s, discussed in Chapter 4, has shown reliance on the market has produced unevenness in supply and has not ensured services are responsive to what families want. Under the Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education, the Ministry of Education is undertaking network analyses of provision, identifying need for provision where participation is low and making it a priority to support new provision there. It is also offering advice and support for services to adapt their operation. These were new policy initiatives at the time the focus groups were held. However, these measures are unlikely to cater for provision needs in all localities, because the provision initiatives are limited. As well, the “market” approach still operates and any provider can establish an early childhood service in competition with other services, and receive government funding, provided they meet regulatory requirements.

Planned community-based provision

Most early childhood sector participants and those from the rights-based government agencies thought that the competitive model did not ensure services are available where they are needed. They thought that planned expansion of community-based services should be encouraged, and that ways needed to be found to curb profit making from tax-payer-funded services which they thought detracted from spending on the service itself. Moving from a position where over 50 percent of childcare centres were for-profit to one where community-based centres were the majority was problematic, but could be resolved.

Those favouring expansion and greater resourcing and support for community-based centres were predominantly concerned that profits for the owner or shareholder in for-profit services may be made at the expense of adequately funding features associated in research evidence with good-quality provision. This view was backed by the participants’ own experiences:

We know that services sell for \$300,000 to \$1.5 million. We know there are Wellington chain owners who have now got shares in 60–80 centres up and down the country. And we also know from a recent survey that staff who work in community-based not-for-profit centres are probably earning between \$1 and \$2 an hour more than people who work in private centres, that in terms of our membership they’re more likely to be qualified, they’re more likely to be older, they’re more likely to be stable in the job and they’re more likely to stay. Private centres are skimping. (NZEI Te Riu Roa participant, second focus group meeting, 1 October 2002, p. 7)

Some of these participants regarded the Early Childhood Council, a national organisation representing many for-profit providers, as a powerful advocate for lower standards. Their view is backed by criticism the Early Childhood Council has made of the Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education. The plan to require levels of qualifications of staff to be incrementally raised over the next 10 years came under particular criticism. The Early Childhood Council president, Ross Penman, argued the strategy would force fees up and that “a lot of our staff are really valuable as support staff—cooking, cleaning and changing nappies, supervision and activity set-up, for example—but under the strategy they will be required to have the same diploma and ‘fit-for-purpose’ qualifications to suit multi-level teams” (Penman, 2002).

These participants thought high standards in regulation are needed to help ensure all early childhood education services offer optimal staffing and environmental quality:

It’s absolutely vital that government legislates/regulates the for-profit sector. I think the review of regulations is really important because there’s a whole lot of regulations that don’t support quality early childhood in terms of space or group size or ratios or whatever. (NZEI Te Riu Roa participant, interview, 11 May 2003)

Government should regulate early childhood provisions very strictly because children are vulnerable. There is always going to be some private provision and it needs to be very highly regulated to ensure it is a quality service because the evidence is too strong of the detrimental effects at that age. (Chief Human Rights Commissioner, Second focus group meeting, 2 October 2002, p. 2).

These participants were opposed to a market model of provision, where private owners can establish an early childhood education service without first going through a process of determining community aspirations and need, and considering impacts on other services in the locality. They saw this as contributing to inequities in access (e.g., “There is no guaranteed place for every child”), and placing existing services in jeopardy where new provision caused an oversupply.

Nevertheless, three participants thought that some “owner operator” centres were different from the owners of commercial chains of centres. They did not make profits for themselves and had a greater commitment to parents and children:

Lots of people, certainly lots of kindergarten teachers, lots of primary teachers who have worked in poor-quality centres want to open their own centres as a way of having some control over decision making. Many would be very happy to include parents in the

decisions of the centre. The owner operator that's run by a qualified teacher is probably different in lots of respects and it may well be run on a not-for-profit basis. (NZEI Te Riu Roa participant, second focus group meeting, 2 October 2002, p. 10)

Issues of accountability were raised. Some participants saw a conflict between for-profit owners' accountability to shareholders in those services that were listed companies, and accountability to parents and the government:

[Talking about a 'massive Australian private childcare company which is promising huge returns']: I think it's become hugely problematic because of the power of people who have invested in something like that to prevent standards getting to a level that might impede their return on their money. (Chief Human Rights Commissioner, second focus group meeting, 2 October 2002)

At the heart of their views was an argument that children are constructed as "commodities" within a market model, and it is not appropriate for taxpayer funding to support private business:

Just as you buy a fridge, it comes back to seeing early childhood education as a commodity. (NZEI Te Riu Roa participant, second focus group meeting, 1 October 2002)

There is an issue about whether children are a commodity—how you feel about using children as a commodity. . . . The fact is people have got childcare centres running and they are making huge profits and I don't think the government should be funding them. (Kindergarten Association participant, second focus group meeting, 2 October 2002)

Nevertheless, most of these participants were pragmatic about the difficulties of moving from a situation where over half of education and care centres at the time were privately owned, to largely community-based provision. If all children are to access free early childhood education and only have this access in community-based services, such a shift would be necessary. They offered ideas on how the problems they saw could be overcome.

One idea mooted at the time was an opportunity for for-profit centres to retain some of their special character and integrate into the state system in return for strict conditions and receiving government funding. Private owners who want to remain politically independent can make that choice, but would not receive government funding. This model parallels the integration of most faith-based private schools into the state system that occurred in the 1970s:

I think in terms of what we are up to right now, the issue is how do we move from where we are now to a position that is politically sustainable? My personal view is it's the same situation as private schools which should not be publicly funded. Similarly, families who

choose to use them, fund it on that basis. It's a perfectly legitimate choice but given that there are very limited resources then public funding should go into public or community-based services which are accountable to the public and where the prime objective is the quality of the service for the child as opposed to a return to the shareholder or return on capital. . . . I think interestingly enough the integration of private and religious schools in the state system offers quite an interesting model. (Chief Human Rights Commissioner, second focus group meeting, 2 October 2002)

Another idea was to strengthen the community-based sector through much greater governmental support for financial management and leadership, promote the systematic extension of the community sector including help to set up in areas where there are not services currently, and gradually erode private provision.

The two participants (New Zealand Childcare Association Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa and Ministry of Women's affairs) who were unsure about their views would like more information. The New Zealand Childcare Association Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa participant said that her organisation was less concerned with ownership than with what is happening to children and whether teachers are qualified. She shared a view that owner operators are in a different position from those operating childcare chains that are listed on the sharemarket.

Postscript

The subsequent publication of my research paper (Mitchell, 2002b) that I had presented to the focus group highlighting that private for-profit centres employed fewer qualified teachers than community-based centres was controversial. Private centre owners, through their organisation the Early Childhood Council, described the report as "an unwarranted attack on centre managers and staff" and "a hatchet job on our sector" (Early Childhood Council, 6 November 2002). Business New Zealand (New Zealand's national employers' organisation) also claimed that privately run centres had been "unfairly treated" (Business New Zealand, 6 November 2002). The research added to a consistent pattern of findings from New Zealand, Australian, Canadian and United States research which share a market framework, that for-profit centres are more likely to employ less-qualified staff, offer poorer pay and working conditions and have poorer ratings on well-established measures of process quality, than community-based centres.

The Early Childhood Council, representing mainly private childcare centre owners lobbied strongly against government decisions to restrict free early childhood

education to community-owned services. In May 2005, the policy was extended to the private sector. Since then, these owners have been entrenched critics that the rate of funding provided under free early childhood education is insufficient to meet costs.

In 2007, the Kidicorp director announced he is considering taking Kidicorp's listing from the sharemarket. The reasons:

What I've found since being in the public arena [is] that it's been impossible to satisfy the three major stakeholders—the teachers, the parents and the shareholders.

The teachers are always wanting higher wages, the parents are always wanting lower fees and we're starting to get pressure now from the shareholders wanting dividends (Hembry, quoting Wayne Wright, Kidicorp director, 2007, C1).

Promoting early childhood education services mainly for the purpose of making financial return for absent shareholders puts the interests of children and families second. Interests of shareholders in making profit from their investment are clearly in conflict with investing fully in the service itself, and the investors represent a powerful group in lobbying for lower regulated staffing standards. The New Zealand debate raises questions about the role of private provision in early childhood education. It is unlikely that "best outcomes" for children can be realised if the interests of children and families are regarded as secondary, and if funding intended for the educational service is used for private purposes.

Summary

Two main discourses underpinned the rationale for government supporting private for-profit provision of early childhood services: an economic discourse and a market discourse. The rationale for upholding the need for for-profit provision was mainly derived from analysis of the cost to government or community of replacing for-profit provision, and the gaps that loss of for-profit provision would leave. There was also a view that the market produces efficiencies and effectiveness.

Accountability to parents and benefits for children were the main reasons for opposing for-profit provision and supporting community-based provision.

The focus group discussions suggest that at the heart of responses within this debate lie different views about relationships between children, parents and the state, and different views of children. A key difference is in whether children are regarded as a public or private responsibility.

The focus group as a forum for debate

Did the opportunity to participate in “a new debate” about children and childhood make a difference for focus group participants? The only data in respect to this question is what participants reported about the focus group experience.

When asked in interview about the pros and cons of the focus group for them, all participants said they found it valuable. All the participants were interested in participating in a continued forum, with presentation of research evidence, on topics chosen by the group.

Two main reasons why the focus group was regarded as valuable were:

1. The focus group offered opportunity to be involved in discussion about ideas. Some participants thought it was useful to think about a new emphasis, in particular making the child the focus, the rights paradigm and issues about provision:

One thing I found useful was coming in from a rights paradigm. (Ministry of Education participant, interview, 20 May 2003)

I really liked the discussion we had about universal provision and I have thought about that subsequently. It seems to me that if you come from a basic principle that an early childhood experience is important for children, then the next question is ‘How can we ensure that all children get it?’ (Office of the Commissioner for Children participant, interview, 28 May 2003)

I would personally like to see a sort of strong united view of at least a universal minimum provision for all children. (Chief Human Rights Commissioner, interview, 28 May 2003)

I had never thought about government’s choice to subsidise for-profit services or whether that was a good idea or not. And now I have to start thinking about that. I was grateful for that. (Ministry of Women’s Affairs participant, interview, 19 May 2003)

It just gave me time out to think about those things. All my time is spent on managing and organising and meeting with people and briefing them and checking out things and reading what other people are doing. So the focus group gave me time to be engaged in some of those debates, it lit me up, it energised me again, it made me think again. (NZEI Te Riu Roa participant A, interview, 11 May 2003)

I thought the questions were very good. It was good to talk. (New Zealand Childcare Association Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa participant, interview, 16 May 2003)

2. Participants were well informed and held a diversity of viewpoints:

You need people who had those sorts of discussions who are well informed, and that was the key to the groups you put together. You had people that know about things, they had perspectives, obviously not the same perspectives as I had, but they knew about the topic and could discuss it in a more analytic way. (Ministry of Education participant, interview, 20 May 2003).

Really I came away impressed with the calibre of the people and their knowledge and understanding, and the only internal frustration [I had] was that those people are not being involved in the policy process in really meaningful ways. (Office of the Commissioner for Children participant, interview, 28 May 2003)

Definitely the discussion from different perspectives. That is always interesting. Also being able to be in a discussion like that without having to say this is a government position. (Ministry of Education participant, interview, 20 May 2003)

It was a diverse range of views expressed. It was really informative for me to hear what other people say works. I felt the people there very freely expressed their views. (Ministry of Women's Affairs participant, interview, 19 May 2003)

I was both impressed by the diversity of the opinions expressed around the table and from the members of the different services, but I was also alarmed by that at the same time in that the sector needs to be pulling together a bit more within their philosophical differences. (Office of the Commissioner for Children participant, interview, 28 May 2003)

Ideas about structures, conditions and processes that could support teachers and policy analysts in broader debate about children and childhood were expressed. These ideas included an advocacy group for parents, formed from parents in playgroups; regular consultation with the sector, such as was occurring through the strategic plan consultations; citizens' referenda on major issues; and greater collaboration between government agencies at a local level.

Conclusion

The focus groups reminded me of how strongly we align sectors, service and ideology through the language we use to describe and explain early education today! (Professional development adviser, interview notes, June, 2003)

The main constructions of children found in this study were associated with participants' affiliations—government officials from the central government agencies and Ministries constructing the Child as Dependant, a private responsibility; participants involved in teaching practice constructing the Child as

learner within a community of learners; and participants from rights-based organisations constructing the Child as citizen within a social world.

A key finding is that the three constructs were associated with differing views of the benefits of early childhood education, the role of the state, whether participants favoured a targeted or universal approach to funding, and a market or planned approach to provision. Other authors (Dahlberg et al., 1999; Moss & Petrie, 2002) have also made connections between how we construct the child, our images of early childhood institutions and policy and practice:

How we think about children and childhood, the value we place on them, finds its way into how we act towards them (Moss & Petrie, 2002, p. 99).

One conclusion is that our constructs of children and our vision about what early childhood education can be are key elements in policy, just as this study has found them to be key elements in pedagogy.

Table 6 **Constructs of child, roles of early childhood education, and favoured policy mechanisms**

Constructs	Roles of ECE	Who benefits from ECE	Policy mechanisms
Child as dependant, private responsibility.	Children's learning, long-term educational achievement; support for parents in paid employment and training	Especially disadvantaged children	<p>Funding: Base funding plus large targeted component, others pay Not supportive of universal free entitlement</p> <p>Provision: Market approach. Community owned and for-profit funded equally</p> <p>Policy issues: Desired goals, and appropriate policy mechanisms to achieve these goals</p>
Child as learner within a community of learners	Children's learning and wellbeing—learning dispositions and processes of learning emphasised	All children. Parents may benefit, but children primary goal	<p>Funding: Universal free entitlement to good-quality ECE</p> <p>Provision: Planned provision. Community-owned provision encouraged</p> <p>Policy issues: Supportive conditions for teacher professional development and investigation of pedagogy</p>
Child as citizen within a social network	Children's learning and wellbeing; parent employment, parent	All children, parents and community	<p>Funding: Universal free entitlement to good-quality ECE</p>

education, social and personal support, connectedness with others	Provision: Planned provision. Community-owned and state owned provision encouraged. ECE centres fulfilling a range of purposes, offering services to meet aspirations for children, families and community Policy issues: Encouragement of integrated forms of service provision to meet a range of needs
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The three principles of integrated action, best outcomes, all children without discrimination, are used next to evaluate the implications of different constructions.

Integrated action

Integrated action refers to structural and conceptual integration. Like Bradley (1982, cited in Cohen et al., 2004, p. 9), I would agree that structural integration is not by itself enough to make services integrated.

My study suggests that the “conceptual integration” of understandings of learning, care and other purposes of early childhood education (Cohen et al., 2004, p. 9) was not a dominant element of the thinking of the officials from the central government agencies and Ministries. There was also a view expressed by the Chief Human Rights Commissioner that some teachers struggle with the idea of integrated care and education within pedagogy, a finding that is consistent with the findings from the teachers’ network. The models of teaching and of early childhood service provision that arise out of this more confined understanding of “learning” separate from care are likely to be different from those where these concepts are integrated. Moss and Petrie (2002) have suggested the usefulness of the concept of pedagogy in referring to “the whole domain of social responsibility for children, for their wellbeing, learning and competence” (p. 138). If one of the principles for early childhood services is integration of care and education, as we have proclaimed in New Zealand, a fruitful question is what this may mean conceptually and in policy and practice. What are the implications for teacher education and professional development?

Structural barriers to integration were identified: the organisation of childcare centres as all day in comparison with sessional services; the dual funding streams

from the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Education; the cost basis of fee charging or free; and the division of types of service included in free early childhood education. Perceptions of people within the sector also play a role in creating divisions between services.

Best outcomes

All participants viewed a dominant purpose of early childhood education as children's learning, but portrayed different views about what it means to learn. These ranged from long-term educational achievement to dispositional learning and outcomes that are not all predetermined, but are negotiated within context. Social constructionist views of knowledge and learning suggest that the latter view of learning is better able to support children to participate in society as co-constructors of knowledge. A narrow future-focused perception of benefits and insufficient attention to the agency of participants in early childhood education constrains opportunity to develop a vision of what early childhood education for democratic citizenship might be for children, families and community.

Participants from rights-based organisations suggested that services can usefully meet wide aspirations for families as well as children, and this will also be positive for children. The model of early childhood provision is likely to be different where addressing family aspirations as well as aspirations for children are regarded as legitimate and important roles. This raises questions about planning with local communities and the role of parents in determining directions of provision.

All children without discrimination

The market model, associated in this study with a construct of the "Child as dependant", makes children's access to early childhood education dependent on parents' ability to make the right choices from early childhood services that may vary in quality, location and affordability. Inevitably, some children will miss out either in terms of access, or having a "good" early childhood education.

The pedagogy that is appropriate for all children looks at children from all social and cultural groups. Discussion by focus group participants and the findings from the network teachers indicate that this is difficult pedagogical work requiring reflection.

In my next final chapter to this thesis, I shall bring together the worlds of teachers and policy analysts to analyse challenges for pedagogy and policy and future directions for creating early childhood services and policy frameworks that would support democratic citizenship.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION: THE CHILD AS CITIZEN AND ECE POLICY AND PEDAGOGY

The study aimed to generate “a new debate” with teachers, government officials and early childhood organisation representatives, about early childhood pedagogy and policy that foregrounded a construct of the “child as citizen”. The purpose was to identify and evaluate the effects of different constructs of the child, and what a construct of the “child as citizen” implies for developing early childhood policy frameworks and practices to support democracy and citizenship. In this final chapter, I bring together findings, and discuss key challenges for early childhood education in New Zealand.

Summary of the thesis arguments

What’s the problem?

The problem with the policy framed around some common constructions of children, is that the constructions are no longer responsive to children’s experiences since the context of childhood is changing. Changes to the context of childhood occurring in New Zealand created challenges for teachers within this study in relation to pedagogy, and for government officials and representatives of early childhood organisations in relation to policy. Both groups identified the following changes: income disparities and children living in poverty; family and cultural diversity; parental employment and needs for children to spend longer hours in early childhood education; and family isolation from extended family support networks. These are consistent with changes experienced in other OECD countries (Prout, 2005). In my study, the challenges produced by these changing conditions were different in relation to pedagogy and policy, but arguably need to be addressed at both levels so that pedagogy can be supported by policy frameworks and can contribute to policy goals. Several writers (e.g., Moss & Petrie, 1997; Prout, 2005) have argued that new ways of constructing children that emphasise children’s citizenry rights are needed to enable responsiveness to these and other changing conditions of childhoods, and to living in a democracy.

In late 1999 when I began the study, I contended that reliance on the market for early childhood education provision was problematic in exposing children to the inconsistencies and inequalities that are inherent in a market approach. A new policy approach was needed. Since then, under a Labour-led government, the market policies have been diminished and the government is providing a more supportive role. However, this study has shown that some challenges for pedagogy and policy remain, if early childhood education is to emphasise citizenry rights.

The “child as citizen”

The “child as citizen” is portrayed as a child who participates actively in her or his social worlds, who is shaped by society and contributes to society, a child with agency, rights and responsibilities. The concept emphasises the child as a co-creator of learning, rather than a recipient of traditional knowledge and skills whose shape and content are predetermined and transmitted by adults. This broader view of children as participants, and knowledge as created through interactions among people, enables development of children’s “capacity for knowing” (Gilbert, 2005) that is relevant in many different situations, present and future. It is especially relevant in New Zealand society today, in enabling education to be responsive to ethnic, cultural, family and economic diversity that is a feature of the changing conditions of childhood. It moves away from a limiting idea that education is about imparting “knowledge” which advantages children from certain socioeconomic and ethnic groups, as Gilbert (2005) pointed out. A new representation of children as citizens can offer a foundation for a democratic society where all people are able to participate without discrimination and to have equitable opportunities to succeed.

The effects of constructs of children in this study were evaluated in relation to three principles for an education for democratic citizenship. These were developed from international rights conventions and research about children’s rights:

1. integrated action, referring to both structural and conceptual integration within pedagogy and policy;
2. all children without discrimination, an UNCROC article that is consistent with the emphasis on inclusion within *Te Whāriki* and addressing the concept of diversity; and

3. best outcomes, another UNCROC article, that is interpreted in this study to include children's learning dispositions as well as knowledge and skills, and strengthening families and community.

Constructions of childhood, and their effects

One key finding from this study is that constructions of childhood are dominant influences on thinking about early childhood education pedagogy and policy, and are associated with actions in these domains. Constructions of childhood are associated with views about the purposes and breadth of outcomes of early childhood education; the roles of teachers, children, families, community and the government; and favoured policy mechanisms and focus. What does the thesis tell us about the challenge of constructing an early childhood education for democratic citizenship? In the next two sections, key findings about constructions of childhood in pedagogy and policy are discussed, and main policy and pedagogy challenges are identified.

Constructions of childhood in pedagogy

Primarily two dominant constructions were revealed in pedagogy: a construction of the developing child, and a construction of the child as citizen. These constructions were derived from teachers' experiences, beliefs, teacher education and professional development backgrounds.

I have argued that a dominant construction of the developing child is inadequate to cater for the socioeconomic and cultural diversity of children in New Zealand society, and to cater for the need for children to develop as ongoing learners. This construction is associated with an ethnocentric view of what knowledge and skills are valuable. It privileges children from families holding similar experiences to those of the teacher. Teachers whose dominant construction of the child was "the developing child" also regarded the role of the teacher predominantly as to teach knowledge and skills, and the role of the child as to learn. Such restricted views of roles minimise opportunities for children to initiate activities, contribute to teaching and learning and to develop participatory competencies—key competencies for living in a democratic society.

Developmental traditions were evident in my study, manifested to different degrees and in different circumstances. Teachers who scrutinised their own developmental views and associated practice, reflected on how hard they were to change.

Likewise, Cullen (2003) and Meade (2000) have argued that developmental traditions still strongly influence practice in New Zealand, despite an early childhood curriculum based on sociocultural theory.

Teachers who conveyed a dominant view of children as citizens found out about children's perspectives and interests. They shared power for decision making about the curriculum with children, and supported children to be active in initiating activities, problem solving and taking responsibility for each other and the environment. Teachers encouraged learning dispositions and contributed to strengthening children's cultural identity through finding ways to bring family and community values and practices into the kindergarten. Approaches to supporting these outcomes of early childhood education were unique and developed within the context of the early childhood setting. I have argued that these are practices that help children to become competent as citizens.

Teachers' pedagogical documentation and accounts of practice showed that their dominant constructions of children varied in relation to different groups of children and different teaching and learning situations. Several examples were reported of stereotyped assumptions that limited children's participation and were hard to shift. In this study, these assumptions were particularly related to age. They could also be related to ethnicity and culture, class, gender and views of parents. The teachers' age-based assumptions were about the limited capacities of younger children for learning in a kindergarten setting. The teachers holding stereotyped assumptions regarded the kindergarten environment and certain activities as educational opportunities that they considered were not able to be utilised by younger children. Smith (2002) has argued that it is not uncommon for adults to have low views of children's capabilities that are age-based. In respect to children's participation rights, she argued that children of any age should receive appropriate support to express a view.

The processes of pedagogical documentation and the network experience contributed to some shifts in teacher thinking and practice.

Within the study, teachers consciously set out to find out more about children's interests and experiences, and to follow these through in projects in their kindergartens. One shift was in teachers' views of the value of input from parents into teaching and learning processes. Teachers became more willing to elicit parents' views in order to draw on the "funds of knowledge" (Moll, 2000) that

children bring from home, and then acknowledge and support this knowledge within the kindergarten. “Funds of knowledge” are one way in which children’s diversity is manifested.

Pedagogical documentation provided tangible data from the teachers’ own setting, which was examined in discussion with other network teachers. The practice of collecting and analysing data is a key element in action research approaches. In my study, one of the outcomes of the focus on data collection was a better integration of assessment, planning and evaluation approaches. Teachers developed approaches to documentation that were able to be “read” and interpreted by parents and children. In this way parents and children were able to make a contribution to the curriculum. Carr et al. (2001) have argued that assessments can invite children, families and the staff team to participate in a social community of learners and teachers. They can also signal to families that the curriculum is “permeable” (Carr et al., 2001, p. 31), open to contribution. Documentation of the “concrete project” discussed in Chapter 5 showed children, teachers, whānau and community working together to make a concrete wall. The documentation signalled that co-operative work and community contribution is valued in this kindergarten.

Teachers seemed to have to make sense of readings and theory about the “new debate” about children as citizens and interpret ideas for their own settings. This was most evident in the account of teachers from Totara kindergarten where teachers discussed the meaning of the word “empowerment”, revised their aspirations for children to “nurturing the mana of the child”, and then examined ways in which they as teachers supported this aspiration. Nuttall (2003b) has argued that issues of identification and negotiability, processes described by Wenger (1998) as central to identity formation, were critical factors in her account of the childcare teachers in her study co-constructing curricula practices. In my study, Totara kindergarten teachers identified with each other as part of a community, and negotiated the meanings of their aspirations for that community. Making sense of ideas was demonstrated by the Totara kindergarten teachers in their discussion of what they meant when they said they believed in “empowering the child”, and what values were important to them.

Another factor in contributing to change was bringing to consciousness embedded assumptions and images of the child, and critiquing these. Some teachers became aware of their own thinking and roles, after close observation and analysis of their

practice. Likewise, other researchers (Blenkin & Kelly, 1997) have found teachers became conscious of advances in their thinking after observation and analysis. Pramling and Palmerus (1991) found greater teacher awareness of the need for education of toddlers, as opposed to care, following participation in an intensive professional development programme involving theory, data collection and group analysis of interactions within their early childhood setting.

In practice, the experiences of the teachers in this study suggest that it is difficult to generate a critical attitude and bring to the surface stereotyped assumptions that limit children's participation and family and community contribution. One policy challenge is how to offer all teachers opportunities for critical reflective discussion and access to resources and support that can help them develop professionally. Support for working with families from culturally diverse backgrounds was identified as a particularly strong need that is likely to become intensified as New Zealand society becomes even more culturally diverse. This policy challenge was also identified by participants from teacher institution backgrounds who took part in the focus group.

A second critical policy and pedagogical challenge emerging from the network related to conceptualisations of the roles an early childhood centre might play for families and children. How can early childhood centres respond to the realities of family lives in contemporary New Zealand society? Teachers primarily regarded kindergartens as places for children's learning within a community of learners. Several teachers conveyed a view that sessional education services are preferable to "childcare" services for "educational" purposes. There was some resistance to any adaptations of the kindergarten's sessional operation to address family needs for longer hours. A predominant barrier was in the thinking of teachers who resurrected a conceptual divide between "education" and "care". This conceptual divide was also evident in the preferences of some teachers for working with older-aged children. It highlights a strong culture of thinking that was associated with the kindergarten service in the 1970s and 1980s, and was discussed in Chapter 4. This finding raises further questions. For example, how can concepts of care and education become integrated in teachers' thinking and practice? A fruitful line of investigation could be to widen the debate and critique that was a feature of the network to a wider range of issues. Issues could include understandings of the concept of care and education, views about the roles and purposes of early

childhood services, and organisation of early childhood services. As we shall see in the next section, focus group participants also highlighted conceptual divides that served to limit a vision of what early childhood services might be.

A third key policy issue emerging from the teachers' network data was to address child poverty. Child poverty affected children's health and wellbeing, and could not be addressed by the kindergartens. Income inequalities also affected the material resources available in kindergartens.

In Figure 1 below, I have brought together the main elements of pedagogical thinking and practice demonstrated in this study that supported early childhood centres as sites for creating citizens. The arrow in the diagram³⁶ goes two ways. The intention is to illustrate that teacher beliefs, pedagogical practices, assessment, planning and evaluation, the engagement of participants and outcomes for children and families combine to influence the extent to which early childhood centres are democratic teaching and learning communities. Conversely, operating as democratic communities strengthens each of these elements.

³⁶ The idea of the two-way arrow came from a figure developed by Margaret Carr (with different content) for a recent review of literature on outcomes of early childhood education (Mitchell, Wylie, & Carr, in press). In the event, the figure was not used in the final literature review report, but I thought the idea of elements reinforcing each other fitted my thesis argument, and I adapted her figure to my content.

Figure 1 Early childhood education centres as sites for creating citizens

Constructions of childhood in policy

Primarily, three dominant constructions of childhood were revealed in the policy focus groups: a construction of the “Child as dependant within the family”; the “Child as learner within a community of learners”; and the “Child as participant within a social community”. These constructions were linked to the institutional affiliation of participants: a Ministry and central government agency frame (Child as dependant); a teacher institutional frame (Child as learner); and a rights-based government agency frame (Child as participant). One conclusion is that organisational cultures exert a pervasive influence on the assumptions and values of participants. Old discourses that were prevalent in the 1990s and before I started the study, and were associated with particular institutional views, reappeared as dominant discourses underpinning constructions of the Child as dependant. Market and economic discourses were largely evident in the central government agency frame; rights discourses in the rights-based organisation frame; and pedagogical discourses in the teacher institutional frame. These positions are not exclusionary. The economic framing, pedagogical framing and rights framing highlight different

policy issues, and together point to forward thinking about broad policy development.

A construction of the “Child as dependant” was associated with policy approaches that target disadvantaged children, and views of a primary role of early childhood education as compensatory for disadvantaged children. I have argued that such a frame of thinking and policy approach is problematic for supporting democratic citizenship because it excludes children who do not fit the criteria of disadvantage while potentially marginalising and stigmatising those who do. On the other hand, through the concern for disadvantaged children, a case is made that equitable outcomes are a key policy issue. The frame of thinking behind the “Child as dependant” construct does not foreground the potential for early childhood services to be community organisations contributing to a wide range of outcomes for children and families. Codd (2005) has discussed the main differences between the concept of human capital, which is vested in individuals, and the concept of social capital, which resides in communities. He argued that, in terms of human capital, education is positioned as a private good, composed of credentials, earnings and productivity. It is manifested in skills and performance and fosters competition. In terms of social capital, education is positioned as a social good, composed of norms, networks and trust. It is manifested in social relations, and fosters co-operation. The economic analyses of the central government agencies and Ministries in my study focused on the effects of “human capital” improvements, but not on the effects of social capital. A wider-based economic analysis is possible. Cleveland and Krashinsky (1998), for example, used a wide range of measures in their economic analysis of projected benefits of early childhood education, including “improved citizenship”.

A predominant policy issue for the central government agency participants who held this view was deciding what policy mechanisms (regulation, information or funding) are appropriate for achieving a desired goal. Setting an aim or benchmark is part of this process. A key point that can be argued from these findings is the value of having explicit societal goals as a basis for policy. Another key point is that the outcomes measured and assigned value in economic analysis are contested. Therefore, outcomes that are costed in any economic analysis need to relate to the societal goals for early childhood education.

A construction of the “Child as learner within a learning community” portrayed children, families and people from the community as participants contributing together to a teaching and learning environment. The focus within this construction is on pedagogy, and pedagogical challenges such as addressing the concept of inclusion, developing broad understandings of “outcomes” for children and working in genuine partnership with parents and community. These were also challenges for teachers in the network. Policy issues emerging from this framing were comparable to those emerging from the network teachers, i.e., pedagogical frameworks to support teaching and learning. In addition, the development of structures and consideration of possibilities for parents to have a say in early childhood provision, on a wider basis than their own child’s learning, was considered to be a further key policy issue.

A construction of the “Child as participant within a social network” was associated with emphasis on the rights of all children to participate and benefit from early childhood education, and wide roles of early childhood education in relation to children’s learning and wellbeing at the time of attendance, support for parents and strengthening community connectedness. Such an approach requires universal policies so that no family is excluded and an assurance of high standards so all children can benefit from early childhood education. These participants emphasised that government requirements and mechanisms should not put barriers in the way of early childhood services providing integrated services that meet family needs, e.g., for flexible times and parent education.

These findings form a background to another main aim of this thesis: an attempt to understand pedagogical practice and policy implications for the creation of early childhood centres that support democratic citizenship. These implications are discussed next, with particular reference to early childhood education provision in New Zealand.

Creation of early childhood services to support democratic citizenship

Major and consistent themes have come through the teachers’ network and focus group discussions, indicating ways in which early childhood services could develop to cater for challenges of childhood in New Zealand, and an early childhood

education for democratic citizenship. The findings of this study suggest three main areas where there are contradictions and tensions in policy development.

Aspirations for children as goals for policy and pedagogy

One conclusion from this study is that beliefs about children do influence how people act towards children in policy and pedagogy. Beliefs are ingrained in institutional cultures and are hard to recognise and change. The importance of having goals for children as a basis for pedagogy and policy was a theme in both the teachers' network and the national focus groups. It was evidenced in teachers striving to make meaning of their beliefs for practice, in government officials' quest to find the best policy mechanism to achieve "desired goals", and in the wide variation in emphasis on goals of early childhood education, from compensatory outcomes, pedagogical outcomes, to family and community outcomes.

One of my contentions is that if we are to build New Zealand's early childhood services as sites for democratic citizenship, we need to establish citizenry rights as a predominant goal for policy, as it is for pedagogy. Where policy and pedagogical goals are integrated, both can work together to reinforce each other and a wider goal is kept in sight as the main basis for action. There is room for locally negotiated goals to meet community aspirations, but unless these are set within a nationally agreed vision, they may be defined narrowly and without the benefit of thinking from a society-wide perspective.

A citizenry rights framework for pedagogy exists in the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, where aspirations for children are "to grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging, and that they make a valued contribution to society" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9). *Te Whāriki* positions "children as active participants in their own learning" (Nuttall, 2003a, p. 163).

The strategic plan goals for early childhood education are framed in terms of participation, quality and collaborative relationships. A universal approach is implied, with some focus on children from low socioeconomic backgrounds, Māori children and Pasifika children:

The Government's vision is for all New Zealand children to have the opportunity to participate in quality early childhood education, no matter their circumstances. Research shows that having access to quality education in early childhood offers the greatest

benefits for the very children who are least likely to be attending (children from low socioeconomic backgrounds) (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 1).

Quality is defined in terms of structural quality (teacher qualification levels, low teacher:child ratios and small group size) which support “quality interactions” and enable *Te Whāriki* to be effectively implemented. The literature on the relationships between structural and process quality largely confirms this association (see New Zealand reviews by Smith et al., 2000; Mitchell, et al., in press). The strategic plan implicitly supports a goal of democratic citizenship, through supporting *Te Whāriki*, but it is not to the forefront as an overarching goal to drive policy development and implementation. *Te Whāriki* is portrayed as an “intermediate outcome” to children developing “strong learning foundations” (Rodgers, 2003).

Goals for children as participants and citizens were present in the consultation document for the strategic plan that was developed by the sector (Strategic Plan Working Group, 2001). May (2004) has pointed out, a new emphasis was given to “the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Treaty of Waitangi, and the Principles of Te Whāriki” (p. 87). These were not included in the final government plan, where a focus on “quality” and “educational achievement” is able to be interpreted very widely. For example, educational achievement may be measured in relation to academic test results, assessments of social adjustment or more widely in relation to learning dispositions, knowledge and skills.

In order to advance citizenry rights, national goals for children that state these rights and aspirations and guide early childhood education policy development and implementation would be helpful—otherwise aspirations for children can easily be subverted. This idea is consistent with one of the eight elements of successful ECEC policy identified by the OECD review of early childhood provision that “a systematic and integrated approach to policy development calls for *a clear vision for children from birth to 8*, underlying ECEC policy, and co-ordinated policy frameworks at centralised and decentralised levels” (OECD, 2001, p. 126). [My emphasis.]

My account of the teachers discussing pedagogical documentation in the network and the discussion of policy in the focus groups suggests that goals to support democratic citizenship can offer a child rights basis for policy and practice, but having goals is not in itself sufficient. I have argued that a factor for teachers in

developing practice to meet aspirations for children was a process of consciously bringing to the surface the nature of their beliefs about children and education, interpreting the meaning of these aspirations and discussing how they were reflected in practice. In this way they were not only articulating and clarifying what they believed, but were also creating new ideas that connected with practice and that were suitable to their time and context.

Participants in the focus groups said they were exposed to some different views and ideas. According to some officials, these ideas were new: the concept of the child as citizen has not been a frame for early childhood policy development in New Zealand. They said the debate within the forum about topical policy issues with participants who were well informed and came from different perspectives helped them think more about a rights paradigm in relation to policy.

One way to frame these findings is to suggest that the process of making meaning of beliefs and practice and critiquing them within a collective forum enables participants to contemplate new understandings of what the participating child as citizen may mean conceptually, and in practice and policy. This argument is consistent with Brostrom's (2003) view that:

. . . society, parents, and pedagogues/teachers need to engage in constant debate on societal and educational issues, and the outcomes need to be expressed, in their turn, in the curriculum in order that they may influence the thinking and actions of future educators (p. 237).

The difficulties for teachers in shifting from stereotyped assumptions, and the institutional "frames of thinking" of focus group participants, suggests that a debate needs to challenge the barriers that participants create in their own thinking. Articulation of debates that were framed within a rights and quality discourse has played a role in the development in the 1990s of New Zealand's early childhood services, as was discussed in Chapter 4. Then, some policy developments were made through sector campaigns and coalitions around a collectively defined vision.

As we reach the mid point in implementation of the strategic plan, it could be timely to refine the aspirations for children underpinning the plan to support citizenry rights and re-examine how such a conceptual basis aligns with policy measures. New Zealand has already agreed with such a basis through the legislation to mainstream human rights considerations into policy development and implementation (Wilson, 2001).

Nevertheless, revisiting the strategic plan would be a dangerous undertaking if it was not undertaken in good faith and instead used as an opportunity to revisit aspects of the plan and dilute actions that are consistent with a rights approach. The history of early childhood education in New Zealand has shown that blueprints are easily eroded, as happened with the 1990 qualification blueprint (Ministry of Education, 1990). The staged plan, contained in the blueprint, to introduce an improved qualification structure for early childhood education was discarded after the election of a National government at the end of 1990.

Provision of early childhood services

The market approach to early childhood education prevalent in the 1990s largely assumed that communities or private businesses would provide early childhood education services where they are needed and that the market would ensure services are responsive to family needs. In Chapter 4, the inequalities in access to early childhood services, and the boom in growth of for-profit childcare services, that the market approach has generated in New Zealand was discussed. Since then, under the strategic plan for early childhood education, the government has developed a range of initiatives aimed at “improving participation” in early childhood education. These initiatives include:

1. Network analysis and development. Across New Zealand, the Ministry of Education is undertaking analysis of the current state of the network of provision. This analysis is to assist in identifying where investment may be needed in new services and where the existing network is sufficient to meet community need. A discretionary grants scheme for building new services has been expanded in areas of low participation and high population growth.
2. A Promoting Participation project is working through contracted organisations in areas of low participation identifying families who do not participate in early childhood education and providing options for them to participate.
3. Land is being set aside for an early childhood service to be established on new school sites.
4. Advice and support are offered for new services to become established.
5. Advice and support are available for services to meet community need—mainly advice and support for governance, management and administrative processes.

6. Through the Ministry of Social Development, 10 pilot projects have been established for early childhood education centres to become integrated services of parent support and development.

Most of these initiatives are about encouraging families to access early childhood services. The findings of my study suggest that government support for provision needs to go beyond issues of physical access if early childhood services are to develop their capacity to play roles, not only in the care and education of children, but also in building support for families, and strengthening social capital. All these roles contribute to societal wellbeing. Except for some limited advice and support, and the 10 pilot projects outlined above, these issues are not at the forefront of New Zealand's policy development around provision.

In my study, the widest views of the potential roles of early childhood education were portrayed by participants from the rights-based agencies. A telling statement from the Chief Commissioner for Human Rights that early childhood services still work in “silos” that constrain the development of responsive, flexible early childhood services was reported in Chapter 7. “Thought barriers” to changing the sessional nature of kindergarten operation were evidenced in some kindergarten teachers' views, despite families wanting to use longer or more flexible hours. These teachers did not fully countenance the idea that “education” could be offered within an all-day childcare provision, nor did they place store on early childhood provision having a wide range of purposes. Participants in the focus groups also noted barriers to change that originated from perceptions of different groups within the early childhood sector. Other New Zealand survey evidence (Department of Labour and National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women, 1999; Mitchell & Brooking, 2007) indicates some parents would like more hours of early childhood education than they are able to access, or to use a different type of provision.

In my study, a number of tensions within policy systems were also seen as contributing to the “silo” effect, and intensifying a care and education divide. These tensions were partly attributed to policies that were not integrated for all services—a divided funding system delivered through the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Social Development, organisational arrangements that limit the shape of provision (school-like and home-like) and free services and fee-paying services.

A fruitful source of inquiry, then, is about the nature of early childhood education provision that we want in New Zealand society and within communities. To date, planning to become established or to change operation has been undertaken on a service-type basis, as for example by playcentre and kindergarten associations within their service types, or by individual early childhood education centre communities or by the Ministry of Education in “low participation” areas. A problem with working with existing provision is that “institutional thinking” may result in the status quo service type being seen as the “best” form of provision. Institutional thinking can create a barrier to dreaming about what might be possible as new forms of provision. For example, ideas about developing multipurpose integrated early childhood services have been discussed since the 1970s in New Zealand as the Chief Human Rights Commissioner stated (Chapter 7) and in Britain (Tizard, Moss, & Perry, 1976). New integrated forms of provision such as centres of excellence in the UK, and integrated centres in Toronto can offer early childhood services consolidated with family support, health and advocacy services, alongside good early childhood provision for children. Toroyan et al. (2004) have described a Centre of Excellence in Hackney that offered flexibility for families. It was better able to cater for a larger number of children (through rostering teachers) and offer hours to suit parental employment than solely sessional ECE services.

This raises questions about whether local communities could be involved in planning early childhood education service provision in their localities within a national framework. Such a process could include discussion of community values for early childhood education as well as the jigsaw of local provision, with participants from interested organisations contributing ideas on how they might connect with early childhood services so that services become a hub for community development. It seems possible that local planning could be a better way to attract families to participate in early childhood education, since services planned within a community could be more responsive to aspirations and diversity of families.

Local planning is unlikely to occur naturally in the absence of structures to encourage local community participation, and monitoring and oversight on a locality basis. In addition, as the Early Childhood Development participant said, a gap in structures is for parents to have a say in decision making about provision.

Similar ideas are reflected in the following statement from Charles Leadbeater of DEMOS about “users as citizens and co-designers of services”:

Professionals are still providing the solutions for dependent users, albeit in a more personalised fashion. What would happen if we started to imagine personalisation at a 'deeper' level, whereby users began to take on some of the role of the producers in the actual design and shaping of the education system?

Here, we can imagine users not only having a choice between predefined services or packages of services, but also having a voice in what those services looked like in the first place (Leadbeater, 2004, p. 12).

A collaborative planning approach could invoke a genuine sense of local commitment to the quality of early childhood education services in a community, as well as to establishing provision that meets family circumstances. There is a real possibility for collaborating on a local basis rather than just competing. Planning provision, rather than funding any service that meets regulatory requirements as is currently the norm, offers opportunity to develop new and responsive forms of provision. A planned approach is also a more effective use of government funding since planning should avoid oversupply and duplication, and consequent wastage. In many countries, a co-ordinating and planning role is played by local authorities working closely with community groups.

A second key provision issue is the prevalence of for-profit childcare centres, and the burgeoning growth in numbers of those that are part of a chain and listed on the share market. By their nature, for-profit centres have as one of their reasons for being, making a profit for their owners or shareholders. They are not able to operate as a community facility, there is not opportunity for participants to take responsibility in deciding their shape and direction and they "are situated in the economic sphere; they cannot also be forums within civil society" (Dahlberg et al., 1999, pp. 74–75). As a site for community participation and development, private services are necessarily limited. Parents and teachers are not equal members. They cannot have a stake in the service because it is owned by a private individual. For-profit services cannot be sites for civic responsibility and engagement: What the service is and can be is determined by the owner, even if this role is decided in consultation with a parent body. In New Zealand, for-profit providers have been strong advocates against high standards for staffing and against free early childhood education, both elements of which are crucial for policy based on ideals of the child as citizen. In Australia, private for-profit providers have lobbied against paid parental leave, since such leave may reduce the need for their services (Brennan, 2007, unpublished manuscript). My paper to the focus group provides evidence

that, internationally and in New Zealand, for-profit provision has been found to be of poorer quality. Profits for owners and shareholders compete with spending fully on the service.

Finding ways to halt expansion of the for-profit sector, and address existing for-profit provision is a policy challenge. One suggestion, raised within a focus group, is for opportunities for private centres to integrate into the state sector, subject to strict conditions. Those operating outside this framework would have minimal state support, as happens in the schools sector. At the same time, the government would need to expand community-based provision so that community-based and private integrated early childhood education services are accessible for all children.

Policy frameworks to support teaching and learning

A third policy challenge emerging from the experiences of teachers participating in the network and the views of participants from teacher institution backgrounds is for policy frameworks to support teaching and learning. Since publication of *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum (1996), Ministry of Education policy initiatives and contracted research projects, publications and professional development have put emphasis on curriculum enactment, especially planning, assessment, evaluation and self-review (Carr et al., 2000). Recent strategic plan initiatives have been the publication of professional resources: an ICT strategy (Ministry of Education, 2005a), *Kei Tua o te Pae*, Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars (Ministry of Education, 2005b) and self-review guidelines (Ministry of Education, 2006a). The strategic plan for early childhood education also provides for leadership development programmes, a course that Cullen (2003) argues “should support the exploration of new curriculum trends” (p. 286). Centres of Innovation are being funded to build the use of innovative approaches to improve teaching and learning based on *Te Whāriki*, and share the models of practice with others in the sector. Professional development to support curriculum enactment is also funded by the Ministry of Education.

Action research approaches with support from a professional development adviser or researcher, such as those offered in the network, are promising approaches to enabling participants to explore the value base of their pedagogy and experiment with change. Nevertheless, such opportunities for professional advice, examination of theories, collection and discussion of pedagogical documentation, and leeway to experiment are not present in many early childhood settings. In an NZCER national

survey (Mitchell & Brooking, 2007), of 191 early childhood teachers, 25 percent of teachers in childcare centres had no noncontact time. In 45 percent of centres there was less than three hours per week. Thirty-six percent of childcare centres held staff meetings only every three weeks or even less often. There were also high levels of teacher turnover, with half of all early childhood services having one or more teacher leave in the last 12 months. Amongst other problems, teacher turnover makes it hard for services to build on professional development that is not shared by all teachers. Under poor working conditions, it is unlikely that teachers on their own will be able to generate a culture of systematic data collection, analysis and critique that my study, and other studies, have shown to be associated with shifts in thinking and practice. Many had had limited professional development over the last 12 months. One issue is to enable all teachers to have opportunities to participate in professional development.

Principles for evaluating practice and policy

In this section, I return to the principles that I argued need to underpin a goal for early childhood education as a site for creating citizens: a principle of integrated action; a principle of all children without discrimination; and a principle of best outcomes. These are demonstrated below as the far points in a continuum.

Table 7 **Principles for policy and pedagogy based on a concept of the preschool child as citizen**

<p><i>Integrated action:</i> Conceptual integration of education, care and caring; integration between rights-based beliefs, policy and pedagogy; integration between curriculum aspirations for child as citizen and pedagogy; integrated action between children, teachers, families and community.</p> <p><i>All children without discrimination:</i> strengthening identity; effective access to early childhood education for all children regardless of family circumstances, universal approaches.</p> <p><i>Best outcomes:</i> Dispositions, knowledge and skills for participating in a democratic society; support for families; social cohesiveness and community building.</p>
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A key conclusion is that beliefs about children and childhood do influence how people act towards children in pedagogy and policy. The finding of an association between constructions of childhood and views of children and of the roles of early childhood education and institutional frames offers an insight into one of the challenges in addressing the government's aim to mainstream human rights considerations into all policy developments and implementation (Wilson, 2001). In my study, participants from the rights-based agencies expressed viewpoints that were closest to the three principles for policy and pedagogy for the preschool child as citizen. How does this rights-based thinking filter through into the thinking of participants from other organisations?

Conclusion

Childhood is “produced within a set of relationships”, as Prout (2005, p. 76) has argued, and the reality of children's lives within their family and within society is diverse and changing. These relationships and life realities need also to be conceptual frames in policy development and provision. Such conceptual frames can offer insight into how early childhood services can be enhanced as democratic communities of learning and teaching. Analysis of the data from this study highlighted some challenges for early childhood education in New Zealand in respect to these concepts.

In this thesis I have raised questions about the value of a wider debate:

1. in relation to aspirations for citizenry rights of children as goals for education policy;
2. in relation to provision of services that can address broad outcomes that empower children, families and communities; and
3. in relation to pedagogical practice to challenge stereotyped assumptions and beliefs that limit learning and participation.

I have argued that structures are needed to support such debate and enable all parties, including parents, to participate in it. A new debate could enable different voices to be heard and new possibilities constructed for early childhood services—as sites for building a democratic society.

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Appendix A: Letter inviting expressions of interest for the teachers' network

23 March 2000

Kia ora

Dear Wellington Kindergarten teachers

You are invited to register interest in participating in a network of Wellington kindergarten teachers to undertake on-going professional development with other teachers.

Network members will meet over a period of one year to explore methods of documentation, document their practice and discuss their documentation with each other. They will also be asked to consider the roles of kindergartens in a democratic society and contribute to thinking about public policy on children.

The network will be supported by: Linda Mitchell, PhD student; Viv Hampton, senior teacher, who will both be active participants.

Network meetings will be held on:

13 April 9.00am to 4.30pm
10 May)
7 June)
26 July) 1.00pm to 5.00pm
30 August)
18 October)
15 November)
and in February, March and April 2001
Venue: to be determined

The network is part of a PhD research project being carried out by me under the supervision of Professor Helen May and Dr Carmen Dalli. It has the support of the Wellington Region Free Kindergarten Association and NZEI Te Riu Roa. The project aims not only to offer professional development to network members but also to deepen understanding of teaching and learning in kindergartens.

Sustained, professional development grounded in the use of documentation is likely to have benefits in encouraging teachers to focus on the child and become reflective and analytic about their teaching practice.

As part of the research project, I shall ask participants to provide background information and to allow me to interview them at milestones. I shall ask permission to tape record network meetings for use as data in my study. I shall also ask them to keep a journal during some of the time. I am currently seeking ethics approval

Appendix B: Letter to teachers explaining the study

Date

[Address]

Dear [Name]

I am enrolled as a PhD student in education at Victoria University of Wellington. My supervisors are Professor Helen May and Dr Carmen Dalli.

I am planning to begin my research project in April 2000 and I'm exploring three major areas.

The first area involves 10–15 kindergarten teachers meeting in a network, initially for one day on 13 April, then twice a term until April 2001. The teachers will be invited to explore methods of pedagogical documentation and to document the teaching and learning processes occurring within the kindergarten. They will be asked to bring examples of their documented practice to network meetings to discuss with the wider group of colleagues.

I want to interview teachers to explore the ways in which pedagogical documentation about the processes of teaching and learning is used in their teaching. I also want to examine teachers' thinking about pedagogical documentation in early childhood and their own teaching practices.

The second area is my aim to generate a wider public discussion about the role of community based early childhood centres in a democratic society. I intend to write a series of discussion papers, illustrated by the work of the kindergarten teachers' network. I shall invite representatives of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Women's Affairs Te Puni Kōkiri, Early Childhood Development. NZEI Te Riu Roa, Wellington Region Free Kindergarten Association and Wellington College of Education to form a focus group to discuss the papers. Members of the kindergarten teachers' network will be asked to participate.

I want to interview participants of the focus group and teachers' network about their views on the role and work of early childhood centres and on public policy for children.

Finally I shall take up opportunities to promote public forums for discussion of early childhood education, using the work of the kindergarten teachers' network

and any discussion papers as catalyst. The first opportunity for a public forum discussion may be the NZEI Te Riu Roa conference "Practice, Policy and Politics" to be held in July 2000. I shall record and analyse any discussion.

I believe that this research project will make a contribution to policy and practice in early childhood education.

Kindergarten teachers' network

Participation in the kindergarten teachers' network is voluntary. I shall select from interested teachers on the basis that they are trained and registered teachers, work in a stable team (i.e. there is unlikely to be turnover of staff) and that all teachers in the kindergarten want to be involved in the project. Senior teachers will be asked to help in the final selection.

The kindergarten teachers' network will have an initial one-day meeting and then meet for half a day twice a term from May 2000 to April 2001.

If you agree as a kindergarten teacher to take part in this project, it will involve you in:

- attendance at an all-day meeting on 13 April 2000

- attendance at network meetings on 10 May, 7 June, 26 July, 30 August, 18 October, 15 November 2000 and in February, March and April 2001 from 1.00pm to 5.00pm and willingness to gather pedagogical documentation from your kindergarten to discuss with other teachers;

- completion of a background questionnaire;

- participation in interviews in April/May 2000, November 2000, April 2001 (for approximately 4 hours);

- willingness to keep a journal.

I am inviting you to participate and to fill in the attached consent form.

Yours sincerely

Linda Mitchell
PhD Student

Appendix C: Consent to participate

Victoria University of Wellington Consent to Participation in Research
(Kindergarten participants)

Title of project: A new debate about children and childhood. Can it make a difference?

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I may withdraw myself (or any information I have provided) from this project (before data collection and analysis is complete, i.e. May 2001) without having to give reasons.

I would like to participate in the kindergarten teachers' network over the period April 2000 to April 2001. I am willing to discuss documentation and practice with colleagues in the network, and have examples of my work illustrated in discussion papers about early childhood education. I am willing to fill in a questionnaire and to be interviewed about my thinking about policies needed to support teaching and learning. I understand there will be three interviews of about 1½ hours during the course of the project. I am willing to keep a journal during part of the project and allow it to be analysed.

I understand that the questionnaire, interview and journal information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher, Linda Mitchell and her supervisors Professor Helen May and Dr Carmen Dalli. Should a transcriber be employed it will be a condition that confidentiality is given. I understand that the published results will use my name only if I agree and no opinions will be attributed to me in any way that will identify me, unless I agree in writing to such publicity. I understand the tape recording of interviews will be electronically wiped and the transcripts destroyed at the end of the project unless I indicate that I would like them returned to me.

- ☐ I would like the tape recordings and transcripts of my interview returned to me at the conclusion of the project
- ☐ I understand that I will have an opportunity to check the transcripts of the interview before publication.
- ☐ I understand that the data I provide will not be used for any other purpose or released to others without my written consent.
- ☐ I would like to receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed.

I agree to take part in this research

Name: (Please print clearly)

Signed: Date:

Note: Two copies of this form will be held—one for the researcher and one for the participant.

Appendix D: First interview with network teachers

1. Why did you want to be involved in the network?
2. What do you hope to get out of it?
3. Thinking of the first network session, did that trigger any ideas for you?
4. How do you go about working with children? [Probe: documentation, planning] assessment.
5. How would you describe the “philosophy” of the kindergarten, what you believe in?
6. How do you think the “philosophy” is shown in the kindergarten programme and teaching?
7. Thinking about yourself as a teacher where do you think your strengths are as a teacher?
8. Are there any people who have particularly influenced you as a teacher? In what ways?
9. Are there any ideas of theories that have been influential to you, that you feel that you use in your teaching? [What? How are they used?]
10. I’m going to ask you about policy now. Politicians have been critical of kindergartens in the last decade for “expecting preferential treatment”. John Luxton (Associate Minister of Education) said kindergartens should be treated the same as every other early childhood centre, have the same funding base and charge parents fees. [Kindergartens had a slightly higher funding rate, and were free].
How do you respond to that?
11. What government policies would you like to change if you had a magic wand?
12. What do you see as the role of kindergarten in New Zealand society? What is that kindergarten doing?
13. Is there anything else you’d like to say?

Appendix E: Final interview with network teachers

The questions below are simply ‘starter’ questions to get you thinking. The interview will be informal and I’ll follow up ideas with you. I shall also work out some specific questions for each person based on issues that you or your kindergarten team raised during the network meetings.

Interview Questions

1. Thinking back over the last year, what was the value of the network experience for you?
2. What if any changes did you make in your way of working as a result of the network experiences and use of documentation. In considering this question think about:
 - how you work with children;
 - how you work with parents, family and community;
 - how you work with others in your kindergarten team;
 - your thinking about the nature of teaching;
 - your ideas about education.
3. Have you had unexpected things emerged for you from the network experience?
4. Have you continued to use documentation or journal writing or networking since our network finished? If yes, describe how you have used these.
5. What conditions are most important to support you and your development as a teacher?
6. One of my research questions is about developing a new climate for children. Can you see any themes or debates from your perspective as an early childhood teacher that need to be raised or addressed?
7. What do you think are key roles for kindergartens? How do kindergartens contribute to building a society in which all people are able to participate?
8. Is there anything else you would like to say?

Appendix F: First interview with professional development adviser

The first interview of network teachers was used. An additional question was asked:

How do you perceive your role within the network?

Appendix G: Second interview with professional development adviser

My research questions at the start of my study were:

In what ways can the establishment of a professional network of kindergarten teachers and teachers' on going reflection about documentation result in change to practice/influence teaching and learning?

In what ways can the process of documentation and the creation of forums for public dialogue:

- Generate a debate about children and childhood?
- Encourage an understanding of early childhood centres as community organisations that contribute to citizenship and democracy?
- Provide a basis for development of public policy towards children?

In these interviews I want to 1) evaluate the network and documentation work and 2) develop from teachers' perspective a contribution to thinking about children, childhood, the role of kindergartens and policy.

The questions below are starter questions to get you thinking.

1. Thinking back over the last year, what was the value of the network experience for you?
2. What insights were reinforced and/or gained for you as a result of the network experiences in respect to:
 - The nature and purpose of documentation?
 - Working with children?
 - Working with parents, family and community?
 - Teaching and learning in kindergartens?
 - Your thinking about the nature of teaching?
 - Your ideas about education?
3. Did any unexpected things emerge for you from the network experience?

4. In your first interview you said that documentation from a European perspective is more social and communal than the kinds of documentation being used in New Zealand. Can you elaborate on what you mean by this? What do you see as the advantages of “communal” types of documentation? Did you see any evidence in any of our network teachers that they were moving to this more communal type of documentation? (Describe). What sort of training or support, if any, do teachers need to document in this way?
5. How is the work of teachers constrained and assisted by structural features of the environment in which they operate?
6. What do you think is the value of having a senior teacher or professional adviser as part of the network?
7. Have you continued to use documentation or journal writing or networking since our network finished? If yes, describe how have you used these?
8. One of my research questions is about developing a new climate for children. Can you see any themes or debates from your perspective as an early childhood teacher that need to be raised or addressed?
9. What do you think are key roles of early childhood centres in New Zealand society? How do early childhood centres contribute to building a society in which all people are able to participate?
10. Anything else you would like to say?

Appendix H: Network evaluation questions

1. Thinking back over the last year, what were the positive aspects, if any, for you?
2. What were the weaknesses, if any, of the network meetings?
3. How could the value of the network meetings be enhanced?
4. Write down examples, if any, of how you have used documentation to:
 - Understand and extend children's learning?
 - Involve parents and represent their perspectives?
 - Challenge your own thinking about children in your kindergarten?
 - Plan your kindergarten programme?
5. In what ways, if any, has the network discussion helped you to make changes to your practice and/or thinking?
6. What are three things you have learnt from other participants in the network?
7. What do you think of networks as a forum for professional development for you and your team?
8. What would you like to personally achieve in the last three network meetings?
9. Any other comments

Name_____

NB: Comments will be treated in confidence and your name will not be used.

Appendix I: Letter inviting participation in the focus group

20 March 2002

[Name]

Chief Executive Officer

[Organisation]

[Address]

Dear [Name]

A new debate about children and childhood. Can it make a difference?

I am writing to invite you or a representative of [name organisation] to participate in a set of three focus group meetings to critically analyse and discuss issues about the work of early childhood education. The focus groups are part of my PhD study at Victoria University of Wellington. The study aims to examine how the creation of forums for public dialogue can contribute to thinking and discussion about the nature of early childhood education and to the development of public policy for children. The value of early childhood education is usually portrayed in relation to children's learning, development and wellbeing, as well as in relation to support for families and labour market goals. We seldom take the time to examine broader questions concerning the nature and purpose of early childhood education and its role in laying a basis for the kind of society we want. These are crucial questions and how we understand them raises varying implications for policy and practice.

I started a process of systematic discussion about the work of early childhood education during 2000 and 2001 when I worked with a network of 16 kindergarten teachers and one senior teacher. We met 12 times over a period of a year to analyse and discuss the teachers' documented examples of teaching and learning and ideas from research and theory. Although our discussions were usually about teachers' everyday practice and their interactions with parents and the community, some of the core underlying themes related to beliefs about education and the teachers' own work environment as it influences their ability to educate. I am now developing a series of discussion papers arising from the network discussions and some of my wider reading. I would like these to form the basis for work in the focus group. These discussion papers are on:

- conceptions of children and childhood;
- the contribution of early childhood centres to a democratic society;
- management, policy, funding and systemic support for early childhood education services.

I would ask focus group members to read and think about the discussion papers before the focus group meetings.

I intend to analyse themes and issues arising from the focus group meetings, and need to gain your consent or the consent of your representative to take notes, audio-tape meetings and, if you agree, to use your name in publications. I've enclosed a consent form setting out the basis for participation in this research, which I shall discuss with participants in the first focus group meeting.

The focus groups will meet at Education House, 178–182 Willis St. I'm suggesting a choice of dates and times so that the meetings can be held at times that are most convenient for everyone. Dates for meetings are:

<i>First meeting</i>	<i>Tuesday 27 August, 8.30 a.m. to 10.00 a.m., or Wednesday 28 August, 4.30 p.m. to 6.00 p.m. Topic: Conceptions of children and childhood</i>
<i>Second meeting</i>	<i>Tuesday 1 October, 8.30 a.m. to 10.00 a.m., or Wednesday 2 October, 4.30 p.m. to 6.00 p.m. Topic: Contribution of early childhood centres to a democratic society</i>
<i>Third meeting</i>	<i>Tuesday 26 November, 8.30 a.m. to 10.00 a.m., or Wednesday 27 November, 4.30 p.m. to 6.00 p.m. Topic: Management, policy, funding and systemic support for early childhood education</i>

Times are 8.30 a.m. to 10.00 a.m. on the Tuesdays or 4.30 p.m. to 6.00 p.m. on the Wednesdays. You would be able to choose which (if any) of the alternative dates and times suits you best, as there will be two groups for each set of discussions. If both of those times suit you for each date, please note this on the attached form so that if necessary I can balance out numbers for each group.

I have invited representatives from the Ministry of Education, Early Childhood Development, Ministry of Women's Affairs, Te Puni Kōkiri, Education Review Office, The Treasury, Ministry of Social Development, Human Rights Commission, Office of the Commissioner for Children, Wellington Region Free Kindergarten Association, NZ Childcare Association, NZEI Te Riu Roa and network teachers.

I would also like to carry out a one-hour individual interview with each participant after the focus group meetings at the end of 2002. The aim of the interview is to

explore your views of the roles of early childhood education, early childhood education policy, how government agencies can work from a basis of children's rights and the value of forums for participation in policy discussion. You would have an opportunity to read and modify your interview transcript.

I believe that in combination, the teachers' discussions and those of the focus group members will make a strong contribution to policy debate about early childhood education in New Zealand, and to similar types of debate occurring internationally. The New Zealand Council for Educational Research is keen to support this work by helping with publication. I know you would make a very valuable contribution and do hope that you are able to participate.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss the work with me. My direct phone number is (04) 802 1443 and my email address is linda.mitchell@nzcer.org.nz.

Would you please fill in the attached form to let me know whether you are able to accept my invitation to participate and, if so, which of the focus group meetings you are able to attend. I look forward to hearing from you.

With kind regards

Linda Mitchell

PhD student

Appendix J: Focus group discussion papers

Conceptions of children and childhood

Linda Mitchell, PhD student, Victoria University of Wellington

This paper is the first of a series of three discussion papers highlighting themes and questions about the role and work of early childhood education in New Zealand. It draws on research evidence, theoretical ideas and kindergarten teachers' analysis and discussion of their documented examples of teaching and learning during eleven meetings of a teachers' network held over a 12 month period.

The questions are starters for discussion for a focus group of government officials, employer, union and teacher representatives. The focus group discussions are part of my PhD study at Victoria University of Wellington aimed at examining how the creation of forums for public debate can contribute to thinking and informal discussion about the nature and purpose of early childhood education, its role in contributing to the kind of society we would like, and the development of public policy for children.

This first paper outlines themes and questions about our conceptions of children and childhood in relation to early childhood education. The other two papers will be about the contribution of early childhood centres to a democratic society, and policy, funding and systemic support for early childhood education services.

What is our construction of the child and childhood?

The way in which children are conceptualised is influenced by social and cultural beliefs and varies according to societies, communities and individuals. How we understand “what children are and what they should be” determines the kind of institutions we create for children and the teaching and learning that is undertaken within them” (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999, p.43). The choices we make about our constructions of the child influence the policies, systems and practices of the early childhood education system.

Some dominant ways in which we view the child have cloaked our policies and practices with respect to children. These have been identified in many writings on childhood (e.g. by Cannella, 1997; Dahlberg et al., 1999; James & Prout, 1997):

- The child as “knowledge, identity and culture reproducer”, an “empty vessel” (Dahlberg et al., 1999) who needs to be filled and made ready to learn or prepared for school
- The child as innocent, requiring protection;
- The child as nature, following predetermined stages of development;
- The wild child needing to be taught acceptable behaviour and regulated.

The child is sometimes portrayed as secondary to adults, as a factor in labour market supply, requiring childcare so that parents can enter paid employment. These views are not discrete but may merge and overlap.

They are all restrictive constructions, producing “a ‘poor child’, weak and passive, incapable and underdeveloped, dependent and isolated” (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p.48). The teaching practices that flow from them disempower and limit children by denying their contributions, the influence of relationships and interactions (adult:child, adult:adult and child:child), and the social and cultural contexts within which learning and development occurs.

An alternative construction of the child is evident in the aspirations for children of Te Whāriki, the early childhood curriculum:

To grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valuable contribution to society (Ministry of Education, 1996, p.9).

This view of the child as part of society and culture, a social actor, with rights and agency is a developing theme in recent theoretical and policy debate (e.g. Cannella, 1997; Dahlberg et al., 1999; Greishaber & Cannella, 2001; James & Prout, 1997). The need to draw on family, whanau and cultural perspectives is identified as important in Maori and Pasifika education. For example Durie (2001) speaking at Hui Taumata, outlined three goals for education as:

- To live as Maori;
- To actively participate as citizens of the world;
- To enjoy good health and a high standard of living.

He stated that

Education should enable Maori to live as Maori, by having access to te ao Maori, the Maori world. Access to language, culture, marae, resources such as land, tikanga, whanau, kaimoana. To the extent that the purpose of education is to prepare people for participation in society, it needs to be remembered that participation in Maori society is also required. If after twelve or so years of formal education a Maori youth was totally unprepared to interact within te ao Maori, then no matter what else had been learned education would be incomplete (Durie, 2001).

These views require an understanding of difference, of multiple perspectives and, for teachers, of one's own educational practice in relation to these.

This view of the child is part of what Prout & James (1997, p.49) describe as an “emergent paradigm”, not yet completed, which attempts to give a voice to children through considering them in their own right and not simply as the recipients of others' actions. Some key elements are recognition that childhood (as opposed to biological maturity) is understood as socially constructed and occurring in context. Childhood varies according to class, gender and ethnicity – there is no universal childhood. Children's relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right. Children are active in constructing and determining their own lives, the lives of those around them and the societies in which they live (Prout & James, 1997).

What view of the child is apparent in New Zealand's early childhood education policy?

What should be the balance of emphasis in early childhood education policy objectives?

What kind of early childhood teachers do we want?

Our knowledge of teaching and learning in early childhood settings shows that adult:child interactions, children's learning experiences with other children, and a rich range of age appropriate activities are important components of quality early childhood education. Adults who engage with children's interests, are involved, responsive and cognitively demanding are able to stretch the child's skills and understanding. For example, an adult may extend the child through offering suggestions to allow the child to see other possibilities, or question and comment to take the child to a higher level of knowledge (e.g.

Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden, & Bell, 2002; Wylie, Thompson, & Lythe, 2001).

The Competent Children study (Wylie et al., 2001) showed that aspects of early childhood education quality that accounted for differences in children's performance at age 10 were:

- early childhood education staff ask children open ended questions;
- the early childhood education centre is print saturated;
- children can select their own activities from a variety of learning centres;
- early childhood education staff guide children through activities;
- early childhood education staff join children in their play;
- children are allowed to complete their work;
- children co-operate and support one another.

The long lasting aspects of early childhood education quality are related to how teachers interact with children, and whether they interlace warmth with cognitive content, building on children's interests (Wylie et al., 2001, p.254).

Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002) in a UK study of effective pedagogy found that where adults and children co-construct an idea or skill, by both being involved in an educational activity they encourage "sustained shared thinking" which they defined as

- a) the teacher having an awareness of, and responding to the child's understanding or capability vis-à-vis the particular subject/activity in question;*
- b) the child's awareness of what is to be learnt (i.e. what is in the teacher's mind);*
- c) the active co-construction of an idea or skill (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002, p.49).*

Adults' understanding of theoretical and curriculum concepts is also linked to effective practice. Teachers' practice, beliefs, conceptual understanding, and attitudes are interrelated (see review of evidence, Mitchell & Cubey, in publication).

In an action research trial of Learning Stories³⁷, Carr et al. (2000) show how early childhood teachers can shift their focus from children's activities to children's questions and from a concern for external accountability to a greater willingness to analyse their own interactions. They argue that this requires professional development to help them change.

³⁷ A Learning Story is a documented account of a child's learning event, structured around five key behaviours: taking an interest, being involved, persisting with difficulty, expressing a point of view or feeling, and taking responsibility (or taking another point of view) (Carr et al., 2000, p.7).

Changing thinking and practice is hard, as the network of kindergarten teachers experienced. The teachers started the network with a commitment to base their educational practice on a view of the child as competent, connected to others and active in constructing knowledge. They aimed to welcome and respond to diversity and the contribution of families, children and others to the curriculum. It was challenging for them to critically examine their own assumptions and become open to the perspectives of others.

All the teachers described difficulties in realising possibilities. Some teachers struggled with bringing their practice into line with a conceptual framework that was different from the frame under which they had trained. The change process took months, not weeks. But the experience of critically examining their own work and discussing new ideas and theories seemed to assist them to step out of their shoes and see with other eyes. Teachers identified a range of key purposes that were developed through the network and documentation processes:

- to question assumptions, values and beliefs about broader goals of education;
- to open up the process of teaching and learning for critical analysis. Teachers regarded pedagogical documentation as valuable for getting to know children because it encouraged them to focus on individuals, use understanding of children in planning, examine inequities and ensure that all children were given attention;
- to share with others and so create opportunities for others to contribute to the curriculum;
- to celebrate the kindergarten by offering a “window” for the community to see what happens in the kindergarten, programme or curriculum;
- to provide opportunities for children to reflect on their own activities.

At the heart of this way of working is an understanding of education as a generative activity that is constructed and reconstructed in different times and places by different participants. Appendix 1 provides an example of how one team of kindergarten teachers are building a democratic learning community, in which the contributions and perspectives of others are incorporated into the programme.

What early childhood education policy frameworks are needed to support up-to-date pedagogical practice and knowledge?

A new direction

... ensuring the rights of children must begin at the start of life. ... The time of early childhood should merit the highest priority attention when responsible governments are making decisions about laws, policies, programmes and money. Yet tragically, both for children and for nations, these are the years that receive the least (UNICEF, 2001, p.9).

New Zealand and many other countries have made a formal commitment to the rights of the child by ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. How to enact that commitment generally and in the early childhood sector specifically has been analysed and discussed internationally. While different countries will develop different specific practices and strategies for enactment depending on their contexts, consensus on a number of principles for policy seems to be emerging.

These principles are:

- a clear policy framework based on goals for children, which is coherent, consistent and integrated across policy areas;
- comprehensive data collection, monitoring and analysis;
- investing in children and giving them budgetary priority, through financing services and infrastructure (Hodgkin & Newell, 1996; OECD, 2002; Parliamentary Assembly for the Council of Europe, 1996).

Signs of the government rethinking policy in relation to the rights of the child in early childhood education is evident in initiatives taken during the course of the last two decades, including:

- The integration of care and education and co-ordination of all early childhood education services under the Department of Education in 1986. This acknowledged that children's "care" and "education" needs are not separable and promoted some coherence for early childhood education services and therefore for children, by bringing education services under a unified administrative framework.
- The publication of Te Whāriki in 1996 and its promotion of children as active learners and citizens.
- The commitment of government to mainstreaming rights considerations into all policy development and implementation (Wilson, 2001).

- Proposals to develop greater coherence and communication between government agencies and government agencies and services (Advisory Group on the Review of the Centre, 2001).
- The Agenda for Children's aims to recognise children's rights and interests.

What are the rights of the child to participate in high quality early childhood education? Chief Human Rights Commissioner Rosslyn Noonan has said that New Zealand's failure to ensure all children have access to quality early childhood education could amount to a form of discrimination because many children are missing out on the opportunity to attend a good early childhood education service.

Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that the education of the child shall be directed to, amongst other things, "the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential".

In the New Zealand context the results of the Competent Children longitudinal study and other research confirms the very significant impact of quality early childhood education on a child's achievement at primary school. On that basis early childhood education can be viewed as an implicit element of the right to free primary education provided for in the international Conventions that New Zealand has ratified. (Noonan, 2001, p.65).

The long term strategic plan proposed an entitlement to a "reasonable amount" of free early childhood education for all children implemented in stages. The first stage would be an entitlement for free early childhood education for children aged 3 and 4 years of age up to 15 hours per week, but the plan stated that this was "beyond the financial constraints of the government" (Early Childhood Education Long Term Strategic Plan Working Group, 2001, p.44).

What early childhood education policy frameworks do we need to ensure opportunity for every child to participate in high quality early childhood education?

Creating a democratic learning community at Otaki Kindergarten

Taking into account multiple perspectives and negotiation are ways in which kindergartens incorporate democratic ideals and operate as learning communities. Sue and Anne (teachers) gave an example of how this can happen. They described their kindergarten

philosophy as “Whanau, tamariki, kaiako. Working together to create an environment for learning, where the mana of each child is nurtured.” The teachers value children’s opinions. They regard all children as competent and believe it important that the children see themselves as competent. They try to make the kindergarten open to the community and they believe children should be responsible for the environment. Their beliefs flow into their practice.

Within the local community are a host of people and ‘identities’, all of whom had been involved in the kindergarten and held significance: children, teachers/kaiako, a “carpentry tutor/builder/ interior designer,” whanau, the local garden centre staff, cleaners, council workers, the local journalist, the teachers’ families, neighbours and kindergarten “identities”, Mrs Heihei (the hen) and the guinea pigs.

One of their projects has spanned several years and become a tradition – making concrete. Concrete is a part of this kindergarten community. There is a concrete works where some of the parents are employed and quite a few kindergarten children have experienced concrete making at home. The story began in 1998 when three boys became deeply interested in making concrete in the sandpit-mixing water with sand and carting it in their trucks to pat into place.

Teachers used this evident interest to talk with children about concrete-a dad making a concrete path, a nan making concrete blocks for the barbeque. How did it hold together? Teachers and children discussed. They decided to make real concrete. There was lots of talk about what they could make. It was a project that reached out into the community. Teachers and children went out looking at walls.

Children and teachers out looking at walls, photographing walls, drawing walls, asking their families about walls.

They decided to make a low wall with a wooden top they could sit on at morning tea time. A teacher had a wheelbarrow for mixing. A local garden donated tomato boxes for boxing.

They needed to measure out quantities. One part concrete, 3 parts sand and water.

Building the wall.

Parents helped unmould the blocks and others helped cement them in place.

The local reporter visited and wrote a story. Her story headlines: ‘The great kiwi tradition of “do it yourself” is alive and well at [our local] kindergarten’!

The same kindergarten in 1999. Children were working to resolve a problem in the sand pit. There were gaps in the edging and the sand kept falling out. They had a meeting and remembered the concrete. They took two days to dig a trench.

Digging the trench.

The boxing. One boy (centre) contributed a plan on how to make the boxing for concrete stand up: he had seen this done at home.

In the year 2000, a new concrete path was being built outside the kindergarten. A new concrete project developed:

A new concrete path right outside the kindergarten.

Children watching the council workers concreting the footpath, observing and drawing what the workers did.

Drawing the boxing as they had seen.

Otaki kindy fashion.

Pipi shells contributed by Koro Moffatt for decoration.

In the year 2001, I felt another concrete project coming on. There's a whole lot of potholes in the roadway leading up to the kindergarten. As Anne said, 'The children haven't talked about potholes or anything but we'll make them aware because it's part of the environment. Their cars pull up there every day. It's making the children responsible for their environment as well'.

There was lots of learning happening here. The events or projects involved mathematical problem solving, sharing, dividing, measuring and estimating quantities.

Children were teaching each other and the adults too. Remember the boy who showed how to keep the boxing upright?

Children were recollecting and going back over previous learning. We call this 'metacognition' because children are thinking about their own thinking and using their thinking in a new situation. This is often non-tangible, because unless you know the past context you may not be aware it is happening. It's another reason why documentation is helpful – as something to return to – and why links between children's lives are so important.

In doing this and other projects, there's a lovely sense of interdependence as children and adults work together, collaborate and rely on each other. Children and adults listened and negotiated, coming to agreements, sharing and learning skills. Roles were shared. Some children gave ideas on how to do things, others were doers – getting into the thick of concreting. Children's theories were respected. The kindergarten itself was a community operating on democratic principles. As well, it involved collaboration with the wider community- the council workers making the concrete path, the reporter who took the photo and wrote the story, the garden shop that donated the tomato boxes, the teacher who brought her wheelbarrow from home, the parents who came and helped.

At the 1998 international conference, "The city of the possible", held in Naples, Bruner (1998) spoke about the admiration in which he held Gian Battista Vico and Vico's recognition of ways in which human beings both live in reality and create the reality in which they live. Childhood is one arena, he argued, in which we can make it possible to create a world. He reflected on views coming through the conference that "having a sense of place, knowing where you are, somehow helps you develop a sense of your own personal identity, your uniqueness, as well as your place in the world".

The children at this kindergarten were creating their own local culture and building traditions that were to continue. Children were developing a “sense of agency” (Bruner, 1998, p.6), as they worked on meaningful projects that they had planned, developed themselves and succeeded in doing well.

If we return to the first photograph, we no longer see three boys mucking around with sand and water. It’s the beginning of a fantastic journey and we have the privilege of knowing about it because it’s been documented.

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Early childhood education for a democratic society

Linda Mitchell

This paper is the second of a series of three discussion papers highlighting themes and questions about the role and work of early childhood education in New Zealand. It draws on research evidence, theoretical ideas and kindergarten teachers' analysis and discussion of their documented examples of teaching and learning during eleven meetings of a teachers' network held over a 12 month period.

The questions are starters for discussion for a focus group of government officials, employer, union and teacher representatives. The focus group discussions are part of my PhD study at Victoria University of Wellington aimed at examining how the creation of forums for public debate can contribute to thinking and informal discussion about the nature and purpose of early childhood education, its role in contributing to the kind of society we would like, and the development of public policy for children.

The first paper was about conceptions of children and childhood in relation to early childhood education. This second paper outlines themes and questions about the contribution of early childhood centres to a democratic society, specifically focusing on who provides early childhood education and implications of government's role. I have summarised evidence and questions about for-profit early childhood education provision. The final paper will be about government funding, regulation and support for early childhood education services.

Non profit and for-profit early childhood services

At 1 July 2001, there was a total of 3450 licensed early childhood education services. 800 of these (23%) are privately-owned childcare centres, with others being community-based childcare centres, kohanga reo, kindergartens, home-based networks, and playcentres. There has been strong growth in the number of childcare centres from 300 in 1988 to 1558 in 2001.

Growth in private centres was probably encouraged by the market approach to funding and provision during the 1990s, which meant that any service that met licensing and chartering requirements, including privately-owned centres, would be eligible for bulk funding.

The rationale for government funding of private or for-profit centres is largely based on a view that markets are a good way to encourage quality education and offer parents choice.

Arguments in favour of private provision include:

- the profit motive encourages services to be responsive to community needs, because those that do not meet needs are not sustainable;
- private centres provide an alternative option for parents as part of the diversity of early childhood education;
- parents choose for-profit centres because they do not have the time or do not want to be involved in governance (e.g. Elliott, cited in Carnachan, 2002, p. 55);
- if the for-profit sector provides good quality early childhood education, it should be funded on the same basis as other services;
- if for-profit services went out of business, children would miss out on early childhood education.

Arguments against government funding of for-profit centres include:

- profit margins detract from spending on factors (e.g. staffing, wages) that are linked in research evidence with good quality education;
- parent involvement in governance provides a mechanism for accountability to parents and offers opportunity for democratic parental participation in civil society;
- early childhood education is a public good, that needs to be provided and supported within the public domain.

Evidence about quality of education and differences between community and non-profit centres

There is a body of research evidence demonstrating that early childhood education services must be of good quality if they are to make a difference to children's learning. Quality is defined in the research literature in relation to structures and processes. The two are linked.

Structural quality refers to those conditions or frameworks that assist staff/adults to engage in processes that foster children's learning. Wylie Thompson and Kerslake Hendricks (1996) showed that structural variables (small group size, high staff: child ratios, training, qualifications of staff and highest staff salary paid) were related to the quality of children's experiences in New Zealand early childhood settings. Another New Zealand study, (Smith,

1996), showed relationships between staff training, group size, staff wages and conditions, and measures of process quality.

These findings are consistent with many findings in international research. Smith, Grima, Gaffney and Powell (2000, p. 49) gave the following examples of established measures of structural quality:

- adult: child ratios
- group size
- staff training, education and experience
- staff wages and working conditions
- staff stability.

Process quality refers to the environment and the interactions and relationships that occur in an early childhood setting and shape children's experiences. There is now substantial evidence on aspects of children's experiences that contribute to their social and cognitive development. These have been highlighted in the first paper to the focus group (Conceptions of children and childhood). Adult:child interactions, children's learning experiences with other children, and a rich range of age appropriate activities are important components of quality early childhood education. Adults who engage with children's interests, are involved, responsive and cognitively demanding, are able to stretch the child's skills and understanding. For example, an adult may extend the child through offering suggestions to allow the child to see other possibilities, or question and comment to take the child to a higher level of knowledge (e.g. Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden, & Bell, 2002; Wylie, Thompson, & Lythe, 2001).

New Zealand, Canadian, and US studies have examined links between structural and/or process quality and centre auspice, defined as nonprofit or community-based centres versus for-profit or private centres. There are consistent patterns of findings from these studies, despite the different early childhood education policy frameworks in the three countries. The only feature that seems to temper the linkages is a stringent regulatory framework. Findings that show consistency across the three countries can be summarised as follows:

- For-profit centres tend to pay their staff less and offer poorer working conditions. Wages are a strong predictor of quality in early childhood education.

- For-profit centres tend to employ fewer staff holding an appropriate early childhood education qualification. Training and qualifications are strong predictors of quality in early childhood education.
- Community-based centres tend to have different spending priorities than for-profit centres, being more likely to place priority on staff wages and conditions. For-profit centres place a higher priority on buildings and/or equipment.
- Parents tend to be less involved in for-profit centres.
- Ratings of process quality tend to be higher in community-based centres than in for-profit centres.

There is some evidence from a US study (Gelles, 2002a) that for-profit centre owners are more likely to incorporate cost-benefit factors into their decision making practices. Other US studies (Helburn, 1995; Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes, & Cryer, 1997) found that for-profit centres are likely to provide much lower quality than non-profit centres where there are weak licensing requirements.

New Zealand evidence

The Ministry of Education defines community-based services as:

Community-based services are those established as Incorporated Societies, Charitable, Statutory, or Community trusts, or those owned by a community organisation (eg City Council). Community-based services are prohibited from making financial gains that are distributed to their members (Ministry of Education, 2001, p.3)

Between 1989 and March 2002, there was no difference in the funding rates of for-profit and non-profit centres. From March 2002, some community-based centres became eligible for Equity Funding. This funding does not apply to for-profit centres. The evidence below of differences between community-based and for-profit centres in employment of qualified staff, quality ratings, and spending priorities is not a result of different funding levels, since services have been funded on the same basis for 12 years.

There is striking current evidence that community-based centres in comparison with for-profit centres employ a significantly higher percentage of staff holding an early childhood qualification, and of staff holding a teaching diploma. This differential pattern was also present in the mid 1990s. Trained and qualified staff are one of the key structural aspects of quality, and the absence or paucity of trained staff in for-profit centres would probably

link to lower quality education and poorer outcomes for children. There is evidence of differences in quality ratings, with for-profit centres having lower quality ratings than community-based services. There is evidence that for-profit managers may have different spending priorities from community-based management, and of concerns during the 1990s about accountability for spending government funding in the for-profit childcare sector.

Figures provided by the Ministry of Education under the Official Information Act on 20 May 2002 of the number and qualifications of teachers and staff in early childhood education centres show that community-based centres employ a significantly higher percentage of staff holding an early childhood qualification, and of staff holding a diploma qualification³⁸ than for-profit centres.

At May 2002, community-based services with 5 or more staff employed a total of 2622 staff. 66% (1741) have an early childhood qualification, with 40% (1053) of these holding a Diploma qualification. Private /Trust services employed 4517 staff. 62% (2948) had an early childhood qualification, with 35% holding a Diploma. There were 698 staff in corporate institutions, with 74% (515) holding an early childhood qualification and 53% holding a Diploma. Differences between community-based and private/Trust services are statistically significant ($p < .000001$). Corporate/institutions services include public service, hospital, tertiary institution, and school early childhood services and would generally be non-profit making.

There were 474 education and care centres with fewer than 5 staff. A total of 785 staff were employed in private centres, 630 in community-based centres, and 91 in corporate or institution centres. 56% of staff (51) in corporate/institution centres and 52% of staff (326) in community-based centres held a teaching qualification, compared with 41% of staff (423) in for-profit centres. Differences between community-based centres and for-profit centres are statistically significant ($p < .001$), but not between community-based and corporate/institution centres. 27% (209) of staff in for-profit centres had no early childhood qualification, compared with 24% in corporate/institution centres and 21% (133) in community-based centres.

³⁸ Diploma of Teaching (ECE), or NZQA equivalence, or NZFKU Diploma, or Higher or Advanced Diploma of Teaching, or Bachelor of Education (Teaching)

The Combined Early Childhood Union of Aotearoa (1993) surveyed 292 staff members employed in childcare centres in November 1992 about changes that had been made to centre operation following the February 1992 cuts in under-two funding rates from \$7.25 per hour to \$4.50 per hour. Results were analysed by centre auspice. A higher percentage of private centres reported making negative changes to staffing (poorer ratio, bigger groups, 1 redundancy, less inservice) and working conditions (cutbacks to leave, hours cut, employment contract not able to be negotiated satisfactorily), and losing children. A higher proportion of community-based centres reported making negative changes to fee levels (fee increase), not replacing equipment or maintaining buildings, being faced with possible closure, and making redundancies.

These results suggest that when faced with reduced government funding, private centres may determine different priorities from community-based centres for making savings in their operational expenditure. Community-based centres are more likely to look for savings in areas that keep staffing and conditions intact. These are aspects linked with quality for children.

Anne Smith (1996) examined the relationship between centre auspice and ratings of quality in her study of 100 childcare centres in Hamilton, Palmerston North, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, Invercargill and smaller provincial towns. The study was carried out in 1993/94. This showed a relationship between the Abbott Shim Assessment Profile³⁹ and auspices, with institution/employment-based centres generally doing better than community centres, followed by private centres. Smith pointed out that private centres differ from community and employment-based centres because most private centres try to make a profit. "Profit margins may lead centres into paying staff lower wages, and providing them with poorer conditions of work in comparison to community centres" (p.43).

In 1993/4 there was no distinction in funding rates for community and for-profit centres in New Zealand, so the results cannot be attributed to differences in levels of government funding. The Smith (1996) study gave no evidence about costs of buildings or utilities for the sample centres, but it seems that both community-based and for-profit childcare

³⁹ **An observation checklist for evaluating early childhood centres in terms of whether they facilitate children's learning and development.**

centres have variable costs, e.g. some centres have a mortgage or pay rent, while others own the building outright.

Soon after bulk funding of early childhood services was introduced in 1990, concerns were expressed by the Audit Office that there was insufficient accountability for government funding of early childhood education. In September 1990, the Education Review Office carried out a special review of the use of funding by early childhood centres. It expressed concerns about the use of funds: “There was evidence that in some centres bulk funding was being directed to aspects of administration and the upgrading of existing assets to the prime benefits of the proprietors now and in the future” (Education Review Office, 1990, p.7). A national special review in January 1991 confirmed the findings of the first review:

There continues to be concern, as expressed in the pilot review, of the use of increased income to purchase additional property or to make substantial improvements to existing property, which creates the clear potential for capital gain if the business is sold. (Education Review Office, 1991, p.3)

The first formal hearing of the Parent Advocacy Council on 4 October 1990 considered accountability of private childcare centres for government funding. This followed a complaint by parents at a privately-owned centre that increased government funding intended for education was not being spent on reducing fees or enhancing staffing or resources.

The committee reached the view that privately-owned early childhood institutions should be fully accountable to their parent communities and to the government for the way they spend the bulk grant and that the current system for that accountability was inadequate (Parent Advocacy Council, 1991, p. 28).

It recommended that bulk funding should be tagged for

- Reducing fees; and/or
- Improving staff conditions; and/or
- Improving centre facilities; and/or
- That reporting procedures should be set in place on how funds are spent.

The profit-making opportunities offered by childcare provision are illustrated in an advertisement in the “Business Opportunities” column of an Auckland newspaper in

December 1998 (NZEI Te Riu Roa, 1998). It read, “Childcare. An industry which will return you 20% plus on your investment. From \$300,000 to \$1.4 million”.

Canadian evidence

Goelman, Doherty, Lero, La Grange & Tougas (2000) carried out a large research study across 7 states in Canada (Alberta, British Columbia, New Brunswick, Ontario, Quebec, Saskatchewan and the Yukon) aimed at identifying factors that are most important for predicting and maintaining high quality teacher–child interactions and optimising the quality of learning experiences in childcare centres. The study involved 234 centres and a survey of 1352 teaching staff. Observations were done in the classrooms of 312 of the teaching staff, who also took part in follow–up interviews.

Quality ratings were gathered using the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale, the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale –Revised, and scores of teachers on the Caregiver Interaction Scale. The study examined centre quality in relation to centre characteristics, teaching staff wages and working conditions, and teaching staff characteristics and attitudes.

Centres under two types of auspice were studied:

- Non–profit centres operated by parents, a voluntary board of directors, or a a non–profit organisation, such as the YM/YWCA, a college, university or school board;
- For–profit centres that are private businesses operated by an individual, a partnership or a corporation.

There were no for–profit centres in Saskatchewan, and data for the whole sample across states was analysed in relation to centre auspice.

The analysis considered both direct predictors of quality, and indirect predictors of quality (variables that impact on intermediate variables that in turn serve as direct predictors of quality), and the relative weight of each.

Higher levels of staff sensitivity were associated with:

- Higher staff wages;

- Teaching staff with higher levels of early childhood care and education (ECCE) specific education;
- Better benefits;
- Higher staff levels of satisfaction with their relationships with colleagues and the centre as a work environment;
- The centre being used as a student–teacher practicum site;
- The centre receiving subsidised rent and/or utilities (a factor that allows it to pay higher wages);
- The centre having favourable staff:child ratios;
- The centre being non–profit (p.x).

The most significant predictor of quality in both infant/toddler settings and preschool settings was the observed staff member’s wages. Four variables in turn were significant predictors of wages. These were

- The auspice of the centre;
- The level of full–time fees;
- The individual’s level of ECCE specific education;
- The number of staff in the observed room.

Auspice was the **strongest** predictor of wage level, with non–profit centres paying higher staff wages. Non–profit centres also had higher levels of parent fees and subsidised rent or utilities than for–profit centres. The strongest variable that was both a direct and indirect predictor of quality was the level of the observed staff member’s ECCE specific education.

Doherty, Lero, Goelman, LaGrange, & Tougas (2000) in their Canada wide survey of 848 childcare centres, 848 childcare directors and 4,154 childcare staff found differences between for–profit and non–profit centres in staff training and qualifications, wage rates, expenditure patterns, and centre resources.

In non–profit centres, 10% of teaching staff had no ECCE education, 14.5% had an ECCE course lasting one year or less, and 59% had a two or three year ECCE credential. In for–profit centres, 16% of staff had no ECCE education, 27% had an ECCE course lasting one year or less, and 43% had a two or three year ECCE credential. 17% of directors in non–profit centres and 20% of directors in for–profit centres lacked any ECCE education. In

other words, more staff in non-profit centres had indepth training and qualifications for work in early childhood education than staff in for-profit centres.

Staff were paid more in non-profit centres. The mean average hourly rate for full-time teaching staff was \$12.21 an hour in non-profit centres and \$8.64 an hour in for-profit centres.

Non-profit and for-profit centres allocated different proportions of their budget to different expenditures – wages (80% and 66% respectively), benefits (10% and 6% respectively), rent/mortgage (6% and 18% respectively), and utilities (3% and 10% respectively). For-profit centres were less likely to receive in-kind donations. Non-profit centres therefore spent a higher proportion of their budget on staff than for-profit centres, and a lower proportion on plant.

Nationally, 38% of revenue in for-profit centres came from government sources, and 51% in the non-profit sector. More non-profit centres received in-kind donations and subsidised or free rent.

US evidence

A major US study (Helburn, 1995) carried out in 1993/1994 examined the cost and quality of childcare in 401 childcare centres, and the effect of centre quality on developmental outcomes for 826 children. It compared characteristics of centres by auspice within the non-profit and for-profit sectors. Characteristics were:

- structure;
- wages, personnel policy;
- structural quality, process quality, and staff characteristics;
- cost, revenue, subsidies, and fees.

Non-profit centres were separated into three auspices, church-affiliated centres, publicly operated centres, or independent non-profit centres. For-profit centres were also separated into three auspices, independently owned, belonging to local systems of two or more centres, or part of national systems of centres. The extent of government funding was considered, and worksite centres were compared with all other centres. These were on or adjacent to facilities of an employer, were intended for the employees of that employer, and received significant assistance from the employer.

An overall conclusion was that

The following types of centre seem to provide better quality: public auspices, independent non-profits, private centers receiving funds tied to higher standards, and worksite centers. Generally, these types of centers also have higher expended costs and full costs per child hour (Helburn, p.232).

Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes, & Cryer (1997) used interviews, questionnaires and observations to assess structural and process quality in 228 infant/toddler and 521 preschool classrooms. Higher quality was found in both settings in states that had the most stringent regulations, and in non-profit centres.

A recent US study (Gelles, 2002a, 2002b) found differences in administrative attitudes and practices among for-profit and nonprofit childcare providers. She surveyed 120 directors of randomly selected centres in Atlanta. She evaluated attitudes to the following aspects of childcare: ratios, staff education, parental involvement, and group stability. She gathered information on the following practices: current ratio in one year old room, current hourly wage for highest paid toddler/caregiver, reported parent volunteering, self-reporting of groups of children being shifted. She reported findings as including:

- Directors of nonprofit centers tend to have higher levels of education, and are more likely to have training in child development than in management.
- Directors of nonprofit centers value quality of service above all other factors and make decisions accordingly. For-profit centres are more likely to incorporate cost/benefit factors into their decision making processes.
- For-profit centers tend to pay their employees less, have a higher staff to child ratio, and lower group stability. Parents of children in for-profit centers tend to be less involved in the operations of the center than parents in non-profit centers.
- The analysis suggests that communications problems between parents and providers are more likely in the for-profit enterprise, because it is in these facilities that the reported quality of care is lowest (Gelles, 2002a).

Questions

The Childcare Resource and Research Unit, University of Toronto, proposed that as a long term goal, Canadian childcare should be delivered through non-profit services, and suggested ways in which this could be done. These were to:

- Revoke funding for currently funded programmes;
- Direct new funding only to non-profit childcare services;
- Establish funding and assistance to “convert” to non-profit services;
- Grandparent existing services which are for-profit, permitting new funds to flow only to grandparented services, not new ones;
- Restrict new licences to non-profit services;
- Terminate licence to for-profit services;
- Shift responsibility for childcare to a public service, like education.

To what extent, if any, should the government fund, regulate, and support for-profit early childhood education services?

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Funding, regulations and systemic support for early childhood education

Linda Mitchell

This paper is the third of a series of three discussion papers highlighting themes and questions about the role and work of early childhood education in New Zealand. The papers draw on research evidence, theoretical ideas and kindergarten teachers' analysis and discussion of their documented examples of teaching and learning during eleven meetings of a teachers' network held over a 12 month period.

The questions are starters for discussion for a focus group of government officials, employer, union and teacher representatives. The focus group discussions are part of my PhD study at Victoria University of Wellington aimed at examining how the creation of forums for public debate can contribute to thinking and informal discussion about the nature and purpose of early childhood education, its role in contributing to the kind of society we would like, and the development of public policy for children.

The first paper was about conceptions of children and childhood in relation to early childhood education. The second paper focused on who provides early childhood education and implications of government's role. Evidence and questions about for-profit early childhood education provision were summarised.

This third paper is in two parts. Both relate to the theme of government funding, regulation and systemic support for early childhood education services. The first paper provides a brief background and contrasts different approaches taken to the application of regulatory standards to structural features of quality. Approaches taken in Denmark, and in the United States and Canada are discussed as a background for New Zealand policy. The second part describes a funding option for early childhood services in New Zealand that was prepared by Linda Mitchell and Ann Pairman (ECD) for consideration in the current review of early childhood education funding and regulations. It draws on work of the long term strategic plan working group.

Questions for discussion

To what extent should New Zealand regulate for (or establish) staff:child ratios, group size, teacher qualifications and teacher pay and conditions in early childhood services?

What funding arrangements and accountability mechanisms would ensure that government funding is spent on aspects that contribute to good quality provision?

What are the pros, cons and considerations of the government providing an allocation of free early childhood education for every child?

The application of regulatory standards to structural features of quality

Background

There is international evidence and consensus about key structural features which are linked to high quality early childhood education. Most of these features are able to be regulated. In order to influence the quality of education and care, many countries have focused on similar structural features in their regulations.

In relation to staffing, structural features of quality are:

- qualifications of staff
- staff pay and conditions
- staff: child ratios
- group size.

In relation to environments, high standards of health and safety, and design of buildings contribute to pedagogical goals and most countries regulate for these aspects.

Another feature that is emphasised in some countries is parent engagement in the management and/or governance of services.

There is a degree of consensus about conditions needed to enable children to access good quality education services. For example, the European Commission Network on Childcare (1996), involving national experts from 12 European countries proposed a number of common targets to enable the achievement of objectives for the development of services for young children. These conditions included:

- A policy framework for service provision
- Co-ordination of responsibility for services
- A curricular framework
- Appropriate staffing and staff conditions (including training and pay)
- Appropriate physical environments
- Infrastructure for planning monitoring and support
- Training research and development
- Adequate financing of services and infrastructure.

The Network established precise targets in relation to each of these conditions. However, the Network did not prescribe how these targets could be met and countries take different approaches, for example encouraging voluntary adoption of codes of practice, regulation and/or legislation. An issue for New Zealand's review of funding and regulation is what targets should be set and how these will be achieved.

Denmark

Denmark has a system of publicly funded early childhood services and aims for access for every child whose parent/caregivers are in paid employment. In 1993, the government made a commitment to provide a place in a publicly funded service for all children from 12 months to 6 years by the end of 1995 (European Commission network on childcare and other measures to reconcile employment and family responsibilities, 1996).

Local authorities are responsible for funding and supervision, and for determining the objectives and framework for work in their services. Some general principles have been laid down by the Ministry of Social Affairs:

1. Children's development, well-being and independence must be encouraged
2. Children must be listened to
3. Parents must have influence
4. Centres must be regarded as a resource in connection with preventive work, i.e. the staff must in co-operation with other professionals, ensure the special support that is needed for some families with children
5. Centres must be regarded as one of each neighbourhood's facilities for children, i.e. the staff must co-operate with other facilities in the neighbourhood, both public and private. (Langsted, 1994, p.30)

Although there are no prescribed national regulations for staffing, staff:child ratios are reportedly high. In 1999, ratios were: creche (0-3 years) 1:3; kindergarten (3-7) 1 trained adult to 6 or 7 children; age integrated facility (0-7) 1:6; special day care 2 trained adults to 3 children; out of school care 1 trained adult to 9 or 10 children. Lead staff in all services are trained as pedagogues for 3.5 years in Centres of Further Education. In 1995, about 60% of staff in Danish centres had completed this training. There is much in-service training, and working conditions and salaries of educators are considered satisfactory (European Commission network on childcare and other measures to reconcile employment and family responsibilities, 1996; OECD, 2002, p. 161).

The OECD report (OECD, 2002) noted however that the interpretation of guidelines by the 275 different municipalities has led at times to some diversity in approach, provision and quality. It suggested that there may need to be guidance from the ministries about the national objectives and how these might be monitored.

A feature of Danish culture is commitment to the rights of children and young persons. For example, an Inter-Ministerial Committee on Children, established in 1987 involving 15 ministries, aims to create coherence in areas relating to children and families and to improve living conditions for children and young persons. Early childhood services in Denmark have their basis in a well developed infrastructure, and targets for access. Parents have a role in planning and running services, and making financial and staffing decisions. From 1993, all services run by local authorities must have a committee with parents making up the majority of members.

United States

A number of studies in the United States have examined structural and process measures of quality in relation to the stringency of state childcare regulations and centre compliance with childcare regulations. These indicated that state regulations do make a difference to quality, with associations between uniform and higher standards of quality in states that have more stringent regulations for ratios, teacher training and (in some studies) group size.

Phillips, Howes and Whitebrook (1992) reported findings on the relationship between state childcare regulations and centres' legal auspices, and the quality of the child's classroom. The study was part of the National Childcare Staffing study (Whitebrook, Howes, & Phillips, 1990) where childcare centres were studied in 5 areas in states (Arizona, Georgia, Massachusetts, Michigan, and Washington) that included the most stringent regulations (Massachusetts) and states that included the most lax childcare regulations (Georgia). Each state set its own regulations but all included provisions for staff: child ratios, staff training and group size. Measures of ratio, group size and quality ratings were taken at classroom level, staff turnover was measured at centre level, and measures of staff education and Sensitivity, Harshness and Detachment were taken at staff levels.

As well, the researchers examined whether voluntary compliance with a set of Federal standards (Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements) for ratios, group size and child-

related training offered higher quality care. These standards met with professional consensus and had been adopted in 1980 and then rescinded.

Centres in the areas where there were more stringent regulations for staff: child ratios in Boston (Massachusetts), Detroit (Michigan), and Seattle (Washington) which required staff: infant ratios of 1: 4 or 2: 7, had significantly better ratios than in Atlanta (Georgia) which required only a 1: 7 ratio for infants. Similar associations with regulations were found for toddler and preschool classes. For example, centres in Boston and Detroit which required staff: toddler ratios of 1:4, had significantly better staff: toddler ratios than in Atlanta which required 1:10 ratios. Centres in states with more stringent regulations tended to have staff with more child related training. Differences in staff turnover paralleled differences in regulation, with centres in states with poorer regulations having higher staff turnover.

Centres that voluntarily complied with the set of proposed Federal childcare standards had significantly lower staff turnover rates, more age appropriate activities, less harsh and more sensitive teachers, and more teachers with specialised training.

The authors argued that efforts to improve regulations would be likely to improve the quality of childcare settings. They also suggested that the Federal government could take an expanded role in regulating the childcare sector and so creating more even standards throughout the United States.

Another United States study, (Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes, & Cryer, 1997) examined data from 100 centres in each of four other states (California, Colorado, Connecticut, and North Carolina) which also represented the range of childcare regulations. Data was analysed from the Cost, Quality, and Outcomes study (Helburn, 1995) and included information on structural characteristics relating to caregivers, classrooms, wages, centres, administrators, and economics and ratings of process quality.

Higher quality was found in states with the most stringent regulations and in non-profit centres. In general, differences between for-profit and non-profit were strongest in the least regulated state. However, in the state with the most stringent regulation the score on one of the rating scales of process quality was highest in for-profit centres after adjusting for structural characteristics. Adult: child ratio and staff wages were the strongest predictors of

process quality. This finding suggests that stringent childcare regulation may be able to dispel differences between sectors, creating a uniformly higher standard of education.

These findings suggest that childcare regulation does have an impact on the quality of care that children experience. More stringent regulations do effect process quality, regardless of the sector in which centres operate. These results indicate that more stringent regulations for teacher education and experience and adult: child ratios have a substantial impact on childcare process quality (Phillipsen et al., 1997, p. 301).

A study by Phillips, Mekos, Scarr, McCartney, and Abbott-Shim (2000) examined relationships among state regulations, compliance, and quality of care in three states that varied in the stringency of their regulations – Boston, Massachusetts (most stringent), Virginia (middle stringency), and Atlanta, Georgia (least stringent). Regulations differed in teacher: child ratios, group size (only regulated in Massachusetts) and teacher training. The teacher training regulation concerned number of hours training per year rather than teacher qualification. Data was collected in 1988 and 1989 in a project on the relations between childcare environments, family environments and child adjustment.

Findings replicated those of the prior studies outlined above of a positive association between observed care and the stringency of state regulations. The study also showed that the greatest contribution to high quality classroom processes was teacher wages and parent fees.

The NICHD Early Child Care Network (2002) analysed whether there is a mediated path from structural features of childcare quality (caregivers' training and child-staff ratio) through process features (qualitative ratings) to child outcomes (measures of cognitive competence and ratings of social competence). It used data on family environment (mothers' education in years and an income-to-needs ratio, measures of maternal caregiving), measures of childcare settings and child outcome at age 54 months from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care in which children were followed from birth to 54 months.

The main findings were:

- maternal caregiving was the strongest predictor of cognitive competence and a moderate predictor of ratings of social competence

- quality of nonmaternal caregivers was associated with cognitive competence and caregivers' ratings of social competence
- there was a mediated path from childcare structures to process quality to child outcomes that did not appear to be due to family selection of childcare quality, i.e. structural features of childcare were directly linked to process childcare quality which in turn was directly linked to child outcomes.

The authors stated that these findings provided empirical support for improving state regulations for caregiver training and child-staff ratios.

Canada

Goelman, Doherty, Lero, La Grange & Tougas' (2000) large research study across 7 states in Canada (Alberta, British Columbia, New Brunswick, Ontario, Quebec, Saskatchewan and the Yukon) aimed at identifying factors that are most important for predicting and maintaining high quality teacher–child interactions and optimising the quality of learning experiences in childcare centres. The study involved 234 centres and a survey of 1352 teaching staff. Observations were done in the classrooms of 312 of the teaching staff, who also took part in follow–up interviews.

Quality ratings were gathered using the Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale, the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale–Revised, and the scores of teachers on the Caregiver Interaction Scale. The study examined centre quality in relation to centre characteristics, teaching staff wages and working conditions, and teaching staff characteristics and attitudes.

Centres under two types of auspice were studied:

- Non–profit centres operated by parents, a voluntary board of directors, or a a non–profit organisation, such as the YM/YWCA, a college, university or school board;
- For–profit centres that are private businesses operated by an individual, a partnership or a corporation.

There were no for–profit centres in Saskatchewan, and data for the whole sample across states was analysed in relation to centre auspice.

The analysis considered both direct predictors of quality, and indirect predictors of quality (variables that impact on intermediate variables that in turn serve as direct predictors of quality), and the relative weight of each.

Higher levels of staff sensitivity were associated with:

- Higher staff wages;
- Teaching staff with higher levels of early childhood care and education (ECCE) specific education;
- Better staff benefits;
- Higher staff levels of satisfaction with their relationships with colleagues and the centre as a work environment;
- The centre being used as a student–teacher practicum site;
- The centre receiving subsidised rent and/or utilities (a factor that allows it to pay higher wages);
- The centre having favourable staff:child ratios;
- The centre being non–profit (p.x).

The most significant predictor of quality in both infant/toddler settings and preschool settings was the observed staff member’s wages. Four variables in turn were significant predictors of wages. These were

- The auspice of the centre;
- The level of full–time fees;
- The individual’s level of ECCE specific education;
- The number of staff in the observed room.

Centres in British Columbia which had amongst the strongest regulations on ratio, group size and staff early childhood care and education levels, had higher scores on ratings of quality than centres in provinces with weaker regulations. The authors pointed out (Goelman et al., 2000, p.xi) that quality is “a dynamic interaction among different kinds of variables”. They highlighted the need to address the extreme variation in areas such as adult:child ratio, group size and required level of ecce specific education for staff. They recommended that governments should continue to regulate and enforce acceptable group sizes and ratios at levels consistent with those demonstrated by research to be associated with the provision of quality childcare.

New Zealand

The government’s ten year strategic plan for early childhood education sets out actions to improve the quality of early childhood education through improving staff qualifications,

ratios, group size and pay and conditions. It states that it can take a range of approaches to bring about changes in direction and actions: namely fund, regulate, inform, and support.

It sets out a staged plan to increase the number of qualified teachers and states that this will be regulated:

- By 2005 all persons responsible are required to hold a Diploma of Teaching (ECE)
- 2007 50 percent of regulated staff in every teacher-led service are required to be registered teachers
- 2010 80 percent of regulated staff in teacher-led services are required to be registered teachers
- 2012 all regulated staff in teacher-led services are required to be registered teachers.

The government has announced a review of regulations and states that it will “reduce progressively under-two ratios and group size and over-two sessional ratios and group size”.

It has negotiated pay parity for kindergarten teachers with school teachers and has stated that there will be “flow on effects of this to the rest of the early childhood sector”.

Questions for discussion

To what extent should New Zealand regulate for (or establish) staff:child ratios, group size, teacher qualifications and teacher pay and conditions in early childhood services?

The next two questions are to be considered in relation to the paper “Funding Option for Early Childhood Education”

What funding arrangements and accountability mechanisms would ensure that government funding is spent on aspects that contribute to good quality provision?

What are the pros, cons and considerations of the government providing an allocation of free early childhood education for every child?

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Funding option: Free Early Childhood Education

Prepared by Linda Mitchell and Ann Pairman

Introduction

The ECE strategic plan (2002) expresses the following broad aims for ECE.

To:

- Increase participation⁴⁰ in quality ECE services
- Improve quality of ECE services
- Promote collaborative relationships

Implementation of the plan is being supported by a review of the regulations and funding system.

The following seven principles guide this review.

- Reflects the diversity of ECE services in New Zealand;
- Continues support for improvement in the quality of ECE service delivery that reflects the educational and developmental needs of children and the needs of the community;
- Recognises the value of ECE services that involve parents and whanau and reflect the culture, language and aspirations of communities;
- Is more responsive to the cost drivers faced by ECE services;
- Is capable of delivering funding differentially to address potential impacts of increased costs on disadvantaged groups;
- Facilitates the achievement of the Government's strategic plan and other Government objectives⁴¹; and
- Reflects best administrative practice by ensuring clear accountability in the use of public funds and minimising administrative and compliance costs.

⁴⁰ Services must be affordable to low income families and available within local communities.

⁴¹ E.g.: parental involvement in the labour market.

Option

This option draws on work of the original long term strategic plan working group. The final report to the Minister of Education established a long term vision for all children to have entitlement to a reasonable amount of free early childhood education. It was argued that free early childhood education (alongside planned provision of early childhood services so that they are available where they are needed) would enable access to those children whose parents wish them to attend. Cost of services is a barrier for some children. Such an entitlement would put children's interests first, signal that early childhood education has political priority and be consistent with international trends in OECD countries towards universal free access for three and four year olds, with some countries providing for even younger children. Provision of free early childhood education would be consistent with the government's commitment to mainstreaming human rights into all policy development and implementation, highlighting the child's right to a good early childhood education.

The option aims to support structural conditions that are linked in research to good quality early childhood education. Specifically, these are qualified teachers, having good pay and conditions, working with high staff:child ratios and small groups of children. The option aims to support parent involvement in all services, and enable parent and whanau led services to further develop in quality. The option provides a first attempt at a formula for all services, and provides some broad models for different types of education and care services. The aim is that all services with children attending for up to 30 hours per week would be fully funded for actual staffing (including professional development and support, pay, conditions), operational costs and advisory support. Services with children attending for longer hours would receive a proportion of their full costs to safeguard the entitlement to 30 hours per week free early childhood education. The option indicates what costs need to be covered, and models how this may be achieved in education and care services. Modelling would need to be done for kindergartens, playcentre, te kohanga reo, licensed exempt playgroups, home-based networks, and hospital services to show costs for different service types.

Thirty hours per week was chosen for the following reasons:

- This time period fulfils the dual role of enabling children to participate in a reasonable period of early childhood education and parents/caregivers to take part in paid employment and/or training. The cost to parents/caregivers calculated under a 20 hour per week model was still high, meaning that cost factors would constitute barriers for some families to seeking training or employment options.

- This time period would not place artificial barriers on services, such as kindergartens, wanting to diversify to meet community needs. We could find some interesting new arrangements occurring, such as services covering a school day.
- 30 hours is the time period for which children attend school. It is an historical accident that schooling begins at age 5 years when limited government funding and support is replaced by free state provision.
- It is likely that the WINZ subsidy would not be necessary under a 30 hour per week model, with savings being released for funding the free option. There would be considerable savings in time spent by WINZ and early childhood staff in administering the subsidy.

The option considers funding directed to early childhood services, and to organisations supporting these services. The government's strategic plan aims to ensure that advice and support for governance, management and professional leadership are available to all early childhood services. Financial and governmental support for management, governance, and professional leadership will be new elements needing to be costed and developed.

To better meet these principles and considerations, early childhood centres and home-based schemes could be funded through a combination of advisory/support grant, a staffing grant and an operations grant.

A tagged system of funding is proposed so that funding is spent on elements that are known (through research evidence) to be linked to quality, participation and sustainability. A base level of operational funding is also proposed, to cater for all centre sizes. The enrolment based funding formula currently in existence does not cater for the more uniform costs of running a centre. Centres that are small in size find it particularly difficult to operate because their bulk funding does not sufficiently cater for operating costs.

The model would sit alongside stringent regulations for staffing in teacher led services. Studies in the United States have shown that state regulations do make a difference to quality, with associations between more uniform and higher standards of quality in states that have more stringent regulations for ratios, group size, and teacher qualifications.

Table 8 **Funding Formula for Early Childhood Centres, Home-based Schemes & licensed exempt playgroups**

The Funding	Costs the funding is expected to cover	Who receives funding
Advisory/Support Grant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Parent training and support; ii. Home-based caregiver training and support; iii. Play group support; iv. Intensive management support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Playcentre, kohanga reo and centres offering parent training and support, and/or umbrella organisations; ii. Home-based care schemes; iii. Licence-exempt groups, and/or support organisations; iv. Accredited management support services¹ available for licensed and chartered early childhood services
Staffing Grant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The human resource costs² of the paid staff needed for provision of up to 30 hours per week free early childhood education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Any centre/scheme employing paid staff.
Operations Grant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Base funding for costs of curriculum resourcing, maintenance, administration, utilities, consumables and cleaning; ii. Equity funding for extra costs in low income and isolated communities, for immersion programmes and ESOL students; iii. Plant / rental funding for mortgage / rental costs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. All centres, home-based care schemes & licensed exempt receive relevant components; ii. Community-based centres meeting criteria; iii. Centres meeting criteria³.

- 1. An approach to identification and accreditation of management support services would need to be developed.**
- 2. The staff entitlement would be directly linked to the pay and conditions of an agreed collective agreement.**
- 3. Criteria need to specify ownership of capital assets.**

Advisory / support grant /to management providers / networks

The advisory/support grant would be expected to cover the costs of parent training, home-based caregiver payments, training and support, playgroup support and intensive management/governance support for licensed and chartered services.

In licensed and chartered services, community representatives would have a governance role and develop long term goals for the centre. Management support services would be established and be capable of developing and implementing management plans, policy reviews, overseeing employment processes and carrying out administration tasks such as monthly accounts, payment of wages, bills and fee collection. The method of funding management support services would need to be decided, but as an interim measure, until they are established, all services would be funded for management support.

How might staff and parents have a role in governance in all services? This question was raised in the long term strategic plan working group report to the Minister of Education and is embedded in one of the principles guiding this review, i.e. “recognises the value of ECE services that involve parents and whanau and reflect the culture, language and aspirations of communities”. Parental involvement in governance also provides some checks and balances in decision making.

Staffing grant

The staffing grant would be expected to cover the full cost of a “staffing entitlement” for those licensed and chartered services that employ paid staff and cater for children for up to 30 hours per week, 48 weeks of the year. For centres offering more than 30 hours per week of education and care for individual children, the staffing entitlement would be a percentage of the full staffing cost. The staffing grant would be tagged for spending on staffing.

In teacher-led services the staffing entitlement would cover for example:

- Supervisor/head teacher/kaiako – an entitlement per centre.
- Teacher/educator/kaiako staffing - determined by roll size, age levels, hours of operation, qualifications and experience of actual staff employed.
- Provisionally registered teacher allowance – .1 release time.

The staffing entitlement would be directly linked to the pay and conditions of an agreed collective agreement. The negotiation of pay parity for all teachers is a key issue. A single collective agreement negotiated by the government, is one option for achieving a unified pay system and parity with school teachers. Such an agreement would need to address conditions to enable all teachers to be supported in their professional role, e.g. through adequate planning time, staff meeting time, professional development, leave. All teaching staff employed by the centre should be covered by the collective agreement irrespective of funding.

Operations grant

The operations grant would fully fund the three components:

- base funding
- equity funding
- plant/rental funding for services meeting criteria.

Base funding would be calculated on the basis of service type, roll numbers and age levels. It would be expected to cover the costs of curriculum resourcing, maintenance, administration, utilities, consumables and cleaning. Research will need to clearly identify these costs for different service types, and make regular reviews of these costs.

Equity funding is for community-based licensed and chartered centres only. It would be expected to compensate for extra costs of programmes and resources for children in low-income communities and rural/isolated communities, and for staffing and resourcing for children in immersion programmes and with English as a second language.

Plant/rental funding is for services meeting criteria. It would be expected to compensate for the costs of mortgages and rentals of eligible services where applicable.

Funding levels

The advisory support grant and operations grant formula would be tagged to cost drivers, identified through research on costs. It would be adjusted annually in relation to those cost drivers, and after reviews of cost drivers.

The staffing formula would be tagged to the cost of negotiated employment agreements and to regulated staffing requirements. The government would want to be party to employment agreement negotiations, if it is to meet the cost of agreements for entitlement staffing. This occurs currently for kindergartens but not for other early childhood services.

WINZ subsidy

The WINZ subsidy would not be necessary under the option of 30 hours per week free early childhood education. Savings on costs and administration could offset the cost of this free option.

Accountability

The option proposes tagging funding for particular spending purposes. This in itself would help ensure that funding is spent on elements that support quality and participation, and would provide mechanisms for greater accountability than currently exists.

Accountability would be strengthened by requiring all centres to furnish a full set of audited accounts to the Ministry of Education, which would need to monitor these to examine whether funding is spent on tagged purposes. Monitoring might reveal any issues related to different components.

The Minister of Education would provide an annual consolidated report to parliament on the performance of early childhood services.

In conclusion, this is a rough model, which does not take account of all costs and would require further work to see what effect it might have.

Attachments

Costings for different types of centre were attached to the proposal, with the basis for costings itemised. One example is attached.

Example annual budget

centre type: over two yr olds only / two sessions per day

licensed number of children: 30 (60 over 2 sessions)

operating: 6hrs per day (2x3hr sess) / 5 days per week / 48 weeks per year

Current funding model:

Income

Fees	51,840
Bulk funding	115,840
Fundraising	2,000
Total income (ex GST)	168,924

Total expenditure (ex GST)	<u>168,459</u>
	465cr

Per child cost to families (PA) \$960 (for 5 sessions per week)
(60 children per week)

Cost to the government (PA) \$115,840

Proposed funding model:

Income

Staffing grant	106,085
Advisory / support grant	20,000
Operational grant	42,374
Total income	168,459

Total expenditure	168,459
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Per child cost to families (PA) 0

Cost to the government 168,459

Extra cost to the government, compared to current model \$52,619

Income

	Income Based on 100% occupancy rate	Income Based on 90% occupancy rate⁴²	Budget
Fees ⁴³	57,600	51,840	51,840
Bulk funding ⁴⁴	127,872	115,084	115,084
Fundraising ⁴⁵	2,000	2,000	2,000
Other ⁴⁶			
Total Income	216,272	168,924	168,924

⁴² **Occupancy rate** describes the extent to which the centre is able to attract funding, including fees, for the maximum licensed numbers at all times. Centres are unable to maximise funding when:

- (i) children leave and new children must be settled in prior to becoming fully enrolled,
- (ii) children under two years old turn two, and attract less bulk funding and fees. This place cannot be filled because the total number of children remains the same.

For this reason, mixed age centres that are licensed for 8 children under the age of two, will generally only have 4 – 6 children of this age at any one time.

Therefore these budgets estimates occupancy rates for mixed age centres at 80% and non mixed age centres at 90%.

⁴³ **Fees** calculated at \$20 per week per child / per session.

⁴⁴ **Funding rate.** Funding calculated at rate 2, excluding GST

⁴⁵ **Fundraising.** \$2000 included in all budgets.

⁴⁶ **Other.** Some centres are eligible for equity funding. This is not included in these comparative budgets.

Expenditure

Staffing	Costs specific to this budget	Budget
Basic staffing ⁴⁷	Basic staff hrs ⁴⁸ : 2 staff / 77.5hrs p. week. See ref 7 for calculations	73,145
Non teaching time ⁴⁹	30% added to staff hours for non teaching time. See ref 8 for rationale	21,943
Meetings ⁵⁰	See ref 9 for rationale	0
Leave entitlement ⁵¹	See ref 10 for calculations	8,095
Prof. Dev. ⁵²	See ref 11 for calculation	1000
Allowances ⁵³	See ref 12 for calculation	728
Management support ⁵⁴	See ref 13 for full explanation	20,000

⁴⁷ **Basic staffing** refers to the staff hrs required by this centre to;

(i) meet the regulations,

(ii) allow 0.5 hrs set up and 0.5 hrs tidy up time & ½ hr tidy between sessions, for two staff, and

(iii) allow 2 hr per day non teaching time for the supervisor.

⁴⁸ **Basic staff hours.** To meet these criteria 2 staff must be employed for a total of 80 hrs (refer to attached staff roster)

In this example the 2 staff are paid for 52 weeks of the year according to the consenting parties collective agreement rates as follows: (i) supervisor at T4 / 7t yr, (ii) assistant supervisor at T3 / 5th yr, (

⁴⁹ **Non teaching time.** A loading of 10% non-teaching time has been added for education and care centres, many of which offer staff only limited time for assessment, planning, resource preparation, and liaison with external services. 10 hours per week is considered a minimum. It accords with targets proposed by the European Commission Network on Childcare that at least one tenth of the working week should be non-contact time. Further modelling, taking into account issues such as number of children per staff member, needs to be done on extending non-teaching time to 20 or 30% of the working week.

⁵⁰ **Meetings.** Staff meetings are carried out within the 30% non teaching time described above.

⁵¹ **Leave entitlements** based on consenting parties collective agreement as follows: Annual leave total 20 days but 10 days estimated for reliever cover (for leave taken outside the christmas break), sick leave 13 days (7 estimated for budget), 7 days study, 12 days study days for staff in training, 5 days for other leave (eg; bereavement, infectious).

Leave calculated as follows: staff member's daily hours * av wage staff wage (reliever rate) * individual leave entitlement.

⁵² **Professional development.** \$500 per teacher is based average figures from 12 Wellington education and care centres (ECD internet)

⁵³ **Allowances.** Clothing allowance of \$7 per week per person is based on the consenting parties collective agreement.

⁵⁴ **Management and administration.** Proposal aims to ensure licensed and chartered centres can access intensive management support at no cost to the centre. All centres would get money for management support. As a matter of priority management support services would be set up. Once these are established this component of funding would be reviewed.

Estimates are \$7,000 for part day and /or sessional centres with fewer than 4 staff. \$20,000 for full day centres.

Training ⁵⁵	See ref 14 for rationale & calculation	0
	<u>Sub total</u>	<u>124,911</u>
ACC levy		1,174
	Total staffing	126,085
Equipment	Costs specific to this budget	Budget
Consumables ⁵⁶	See ref 15 for calculation	3000
New & replacement resources ⁵⁷	See ref 16 for calculation	3000
Outings & trips	Estimate only. Reduced for part day centre.	500
	Total equipment	6,500
Environment	Costs specific to this budget	Budget
Ground maintenance ⁵⁸	See ref 17 for calculation	1,560
Building maintenance	Estimate only.	2,000
Cleaning ⁵⁹	See ref 18 for calculation	6,384
Energy ⁶⁰	See ref 19 for calculation	2,440
Waste disposal ⁶¹	Reduced for part day centre. See ref 20 for calculation	720

⁵⁵ **Training.** 0.2 release time for staff in training for Dip Ed. This calculation * 0.2 of the basic staff cost of any staff in training by centre's reliever rate.

⁵⁶ **Consumables.** \$100 per child, excluding GST, is based average figures from 12 Wellington education and care centres (ECD internet)

⁵⁷ **New and replacement resources.** Ibid

⁵⁸ **Ground maintenance.** Calculation based on minimal cost of \$30 per week.

⁵⁹ **Cleaning.** Cleaner or contractor for 5 days at 1.5hrs per day, and 1 day at 2 hours. Estimate \$14 per hour * 48 weeks.

⁶⁰ **Energy.** Calculated at \$50 per week * 48 weeks.

⁶¹ **Waste disposal.** Calculated at \$15 per week * 48 weeks.

Water rates		
	Total environment	13,104
Property	Costs specific to this budget	Budget
Rent or mortgage and rates ⁶² .		13,000
	Total Property	13,000
Administration	Costs specific to this budget	Budget
Advertising ⁶³	Estimate	500
Audit fees		500
Bank Charges		100
Insurance ⁶⁴	See ref 23 for rationale	1,500
Contingency ⁶⁵	See ref 24 for rationale	1,000
Postage etc		100
Printing & stationary		150
Repairs to office equipment		200
Telephone & tolls		300
Computers (email, print, internet)	Estimate only.	1,000

⁶² **Property cost.** Estimated at an average cost of \$250 per week for 52 weeks PA. There will obviously be huge variation between centres and geographical areas. Centres may need to apply for this component, which may need limits and / or guidelines. Ownership needs to be addressed so that private gain is not government funded.

⁶³ **Advertising** the centre. Estimate only.

⁶⁴ **Insurance** to cover building and contents and public liability (staff wages). Reduced for part day because wages are reduced.

⁶⁵ **Contingency** for bad debts etc.

Recruitment – advertising ⁶⁶	See ref 25 for calculation	400
Misc.		500
	Total administration	6,250
Miscellaneous	Costs specific to this budget.	Budget
Replace / repair whiteware		1,000
Professional fees		500
Savings for large projects		1000
Health and safety equipment & replacement		500
General groceries ⁶⁷		520
Meals and snacks for children ⁶⁸		0
	Total miscellaneous	3,520
Total expenditure		168,459

⁶⁶ **Recruitment costs.** Estimate based on \$200 PA, per staff member.

⁶⁷ **General groceries.** For adult's tea, coffee, milk etc only. Reduced for part day centre. Calculated at \$5 per week per staff member.

⁶⁸ **Meals and snacks.** This would amount to several thousand dollars in centres providing lunches and snacks. This is not included in the current budget.

		Supervisor T4 7 yrs	Assist T3 5 yrs	# of children		# of adults needed <i>note 1</i>	# of adults actual	# of PR needed <i>note 2</i>	# of PR actual
				0	30				
7.30									
7.45									
8.00									
8.15									
8.30									
8.45									
9.00					30	2	2	1	1
9.15					30	2	2	1	1
9.30					30	2	2	1	1
9.45					30	2	2	1	1
10.00					30	2	2	1	1
10.15					30	2	2	1	1
10.30					30	2	2	1	1
10.45					30	2	2	1	1
11.00					30	2	2	1	1
11.15					30	2	2	1	1
11.30					30	2	2	1	1
11.45					30	2	2	1	1
12.00									
12.15									
12.30									
12.45									
1.00					30	2	2	1	1
1.15					30	2	2	1	1
1.30					30	2	2	1	1
1.45					30	2	2	1	1
2.00					30	2	2	1	1
2.15					30	2	2	1	1
2.30					30	2	2	1	1
2.45					30	2	2	1	1
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3.15					30	2	2	1	1
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5.30									
5.45									
6.00									

Appendix K: Focus group participants' consent to participate

Title of project: A new debate about children and childhood. Can it make a difference?

Focus group interviews

Please read the following information and if you agree to participate in this research, please sign this consent form and return it to me.

I have been given and understand an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information I have provided from this project before data collection and analysis is completed without giving reasons.

I agree to participate in four focus group meetings during 2002, and in one interview. I understand that the discussions will be audio-taped and that tapes and manuscripts will be held in a secure place by the researcher. I understand that these will be wiped or destroyed when the report is written and that the published results will use my name only if I agree. I understand I will be able to read and approve the transcript of my interview.

Name: (please print clearly)

☐

I agree that my name be used in this report.

☐

I do not agree that my name be used in this report.

Signed:

Date:

RETURN TO LINDA MITCHELL, NZCER, P O BOX 3237, WELLINGTON

Appendix L: Letter to parents seeking consent to use examples of child's work

21 March 2002

Dear

A new debate about children and childhood study

When your child was at [NAME] kindergarten, the teachers took photographs of their work with children, collected examples of work, made written observations and sometimes transcribed what children said. The photographs and some comments and transcripts of children's words were put in children's portfolios and also used as a basis for discussion to plan work.

In 2000 and 2001, I have been working with the [NAME] kindergarten teachers and other teachers to discuss and analyse teaching and learning in their kindergartens. This is part of my PhD study where I am exploring how discussion of teaching and learning can help teachers to gain insights into their teaching practices. These discussions have revealed the complex nature of teaching and learning. I would now like to explore with government officials and representatives of early childhood organisations how documented examples of teaching and learning can be used as a base for policy development.

I feel our discussions would be much enriched with some examples of work done by the teachers with your child. I would also like to show these examples at presentations about my research in conferences and seminars, in articles and in my PhD publication.

I am asking for your permission to show examples of your child's work, observations of your child and photos of your child from [NAME] kindergarten. If you agree, would you please fill in the enclosed form and return it to me in the postage paid envelope. I would appreciate if you could do this as soon as possible.

Please contact me if you would like to discuss this. My direct dial is (04) 802 1443.

Kind regards

Linda Mitchell

PhD student

Consent from parents to use examples of child's work

A new debate about children and childhood study

Researcher: Linda Mitchell, PhD student, Institute for Early Childhood Studies,
Victoria University of Wellington

PERMISSION FROM FAMILIES/WHĀNAU TO USE OBSERVATIONS, PHOTOGRAPHS AND CHILDREN'S WORK

I am carrying out research for my PhD to examine how examples of teaching and learning in kindergartens can be used as a basis for teachers to analyse their own teaching practice and for others involved in early childhood education to consider for the development of policy in early childhood education. As you know, teachers in your kindergarten have collected photographs, observations, transcripts, documentation (which may include the child's own words) and examples of your child's work in order to show the learning that has occurred and to discuss it with others so they can plan for further learning. Some of the collection has formed part of the kindergarten's or your child's portfolio.

The items collected may be used in one or more of the following ways:

- as an example of learning in my PhD publication;
- in presentations and papers about the research project; and
- in discussions with teachers, government officials and others involved in early childhood education.

Your permission is required before any examples of your child's learning are used in this project.

CHILD'S FULL NAME:

(First name)

(Last name)

I give permission:

(Please circle that
which applies)

for observations of my child to be included in this project	YES	NO
for examples of my child's work to be included in this project	YES	NO
for photos of my child to be included in this project	YES	NO

I UNDERSTAND THAT AT ANY TIME I CAN SAY NO TO THE
FURTHER USE OF OBSERVATIONS OR WORK FOR THIS PROJECT

PARENT/CAREGIVER'S FULL NAME:

(Please print)

(First name)

(Last name)

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

NAME OF KINDERGARTEN:

Tick this box if you would prefer to give permission for each and every individual
item chosen.

☐

Tick this box if you DON'T want your child's first name to be used*.

☐

*If you don't want your child's first name used please suggest another name.

**Note: Two copies of this form will be sent (one to return to the researcher and one for
the participant to keep).**