‘IT’S ALL THE THINGS’?
EXPLORING TEACHERS’ VIEWS ON THE NOTION OF
‘COMMUNITY’ IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

BY

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Abstract

This thesis explores the meaning of ‘community’ in early childhood education (ECE). Utilising a qualitative, interpretive approach, this exploratory case study has sought to gain an in-depth understanding of how teachers view the meaning of ‘community’ within a typical, non-community-owned ECE centre. Rogoff’s (1984, 1995) three planes of sociocultural activity (personal, interpersonal and institutional) have been utilised as a theoretical framework to more fully understand the rich context of this case study centre. Findings from this study highlight that practices of this centre primarily focus *inwards* on the education and care of the enrolled children and the support of their families within the ECE ‘centre community’. However, despite this, the teachers both collectively and individually also reflect a diverse range of views on the notion of ‘community’ in terms of people, place and connections, including views that look *outwards* to consider the child within the context of their wider social and physical world. This study concludes that there needs to be a much larger social and political discussion about the notion of ‘community’ within the wider ECE sector, including the role and provision of ECE, not only in terms of the care and education of children but within society as a whole.

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Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

'Community': the term 'community' has been placed within single quote marks throughout this report to signal that it is a contested term. Similarly, related terms such as 'centre community', 'local community', 'wider community' and 'sense of community' have been placed in single quote marks to signal that they reflect particular meanings of 'community'.

Childcare: Full or part day teacher-led education and care centres catering for children between 0-5 years of age and licensed by the Ministry of Education. These services may be community-based or privately owned (<http://www.minedu.govt.nz/Parents/EarlyYears/OtherInformationAndResources/Choices/WhatAreMyChoices.aspx>).

Community-based ECE service: Refers to ECE services that are community owned and governed and which do not operate for profit. They may include services owned by incorporated societies, charitable or community trusts, or public bodies such as government departments. (<http://www.lead.ece.govt.nz/ManagementInformation/EstablishingAnECEService/DecideWhatTypeOfService/CommunityBasedECEServices.aspx>).

ECE: Early childhood education – sometimes also referred to as 'early childhood education and care' (ECEC) to highlight that care and education are inseparable in the early years.

Group Special Education: Department of the Ministry of Education focussed on supporting children with special educational needs.

Hapū: Māori sub-tribe or clan, comprised of a number of whānau, generally related to a common ancestor (Reilly, 2004).

Iwi: Māori tribe, comprised of groups of hapū (Reilly, 2004).

Kaha: Strong (<http://www.maoridictionary.co.nz/>).

Karakia: A prayer (<http://www.maoridictionary.co.nz/>).

Kindergarten: Community owned, teacher-led education and care centres operating under the New Zealand Kindergarten Association (<http://www.nzkindergarten.org.nz/>).

Kōhanga Reo: Māori immersion ECE services focussed on building te reo Māori (language) and tikanga (culture) for children and families, and that are operate under the umbrella of Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust (<http://www.minedu.govt.nz/Parents/EarlyYears/OtherInformationAndResources/Choices/WhatAreMyChoices.aspx>).

Matariki: The traditional Maori New Year (<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/matariki-maori-new-year>).

Mihi: The formal speaking structure used during a welcome ceremony (pohiri) (<http://www.maori.org.nz/tikanga/>).

Non-community-based ECE service: Refers to ECE services that are privately owned. Such services may operate for profit. They may include services owned by individuals, private trusts and companies (<http://www.lead.ece.govt.nz/ManagementInformation/EstablishingAnECEService/DecideWhatTypeOfService/CommunityBasedECEServices.aspx>).

Pepeha: A formal Māori introduction identifying an individual's ancestral heritage, including connections to people (iwi and hapu) and the land (such as ancestral mountain (maunga) and river (awa)) (<http://www.maori.org.nz/tikanga/>).

Playcentre: Parent-led early childhood services that include a programme of parent education and belong to the national New Zealand Playcentre Federation (<http://www.minedu.govt.nz/Parents/EarlyYears/OtherInformationAndResources/Choices/WhatAreMyChoices.aspx>).

Plunket: This organisation provides services to support the development, health and wellbeing of children under 5 (<https://www.plunket.org.nz/>).

UNCRC: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1998).

Whānau: Extended family unit, kin group (Reilly, 2004).

Note: Formatting for this report is broadly based on the sixth edition of the American Psychological Association (APA) Publication Manual.

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Chapter One: Introduction

This study explores the notion of ‘community’ in early childhood education (hereafter referred to as ECE) and focuses specifically on how teachers within a typical ECE centre view the notion of ‘community’.

1.1. Background to this Study

My own experiences of the ECE sector spans over 20 years and over this time I have watched with interest as the landscape of ECE in New Zealand has changed and evolved. In particular, I have observed the political changes of the ‘Before Five’ era (mid-1980s to mid-1990s) that saw significant changes in the funding and regulation of early childhood services (Dalli, 1994; May, 2009) and the development of New Zealand’s first early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996a). Since then, there have been numerous Government strategies focussed on increasing quality and participation in ECE (including Ministry of Education, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2011).

One relatively recent change sparked my interest in the importance and meaning of ‘community’ in ECE. Since 1996, the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices (DOPs) for Chartered Early Childhood Services in New Zealand* (Ministry of Education, 1996b) has required ECE services to communicate and consult with ‘local communities’ (including hapū and iwi) to “acknowledge and respect all parties’ values, needs and aspirations” (DOP 6). However, in 2008 there was a major review of the ECE regulatory framework. One of the changes that has resulted from this review is that ECE services no longer need to consult with ‘local communities’ but instead need only to collaborate with “parents and family or whānau of children enrolled in the service” (*Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008*, Clause 47, 1b). This change seems to have been introduced with little comment from the ECE sector even though the implications of this change are significant. ECE services now only need to concern themselves with the families of enrolled children and are no longer required to also consider the aspirations and needs of the local or wider communities in which they are situated.

This change in regulations led me to explore how the term ‘community’ has been used in key documents that shape and guide ECE services and teachers’ practice over the last 20 years. In the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, the use of the term ‘community’ largely relates to the world beyond the ECE setting, with the phrases ‘family and community’, ‘local community’ and ‘wider community’ used throughout the document. For example, the curriculum principle of ‘Family and Community’ states, “The wider world of family and community is an integral part of the early childhood curriculum” including “local communities and neighbourhoods” (Ministry of Education, 1996a, p. 42). This use of the term ‘community’ is also echoed in *Pathways to the Future*, the 10-year strategic plan for early childhood education (Ministry of Education, 2002). However, this document refers more specifically to groups within the local and wider community. For example, the strategic plan outlines strategies to increase participation in ECE that “focus on communities where participation is low, particularly Māori, Pasifika, low socio-economic and rural communities”, and are “driven by the needs of those individual communities” (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 10).

In the early childhood assessment exemplars, *Kei Tua o te Pae* (Ministry of Education, 2004) the term ‘learning community’ is used. For example, the introduction to Book 5, *Assessment and Learning: Community. Te Aromatawai me te ako: Hapori*, refers to “the learning community (children, families, whānau, teachers, and beyond)” (Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 2). Here, the term ‘community’ focuses primarily on the members of the ECE setting. While the term ‘beyond’ is added, it is unclear what or who it refers to, particularly when a few paragraphs later it states, “learning communities can be connected to the world in meaningful ways” (p. 2).

The term ‘learning community’ also appears in *Ngā Arohaehae whai hua. Self-Review Guidelines for Early Childhood Education* (Ministry of Education, 2006). Here the ‘learning community’ refers more specifically to “members of that same service” (p. 7). This document defines ‘learning community’ as “a community made up of children, families, whānau, teachers, and others who have common learning goals” (p. 71). However, the term ‘local community’ also appears in relation to wider consultation where the document poses the question: “What are our unique relationship obligations within our local community and the various groups that we belong to?” (p. 45).

The *Licensing Criteria for Early Childhood Education and Care Centres 2008* (Ministry of Education, 2011) mentions the term ‘wider community’ once in relation to the term ‘philosophy’, which it explains as “a statement that – i) outlines the fundamental beliefs, values, and ideals that are important to the people involved in the service – management, adults providing education and care, parents, families/whānau, and perhaps the wider community” (p. 6). In the additional guidance provided on the Ministry of Education’s ‘www.lead.ece’ website, the term ‘community’ is used several times, generally within the phrase “children, their families, staff, and community” (<http://www.lead.ece.govt.nz/ServiceTypes/CentreBasedECEServices/Curriculum/ProfessionalPractice/C1CurriculumConsistent/Guidance.aspx?p=2>).

However, there appears to be little indication of what is actually meant by the term ‘community’ within this guidance (the ‘community’ within the ECE service or the local/wider community in which the centre operates), particularly given the expectation set out in Governance, Management and Administration criterion 4 which only requires that services collaborate with families of enrolled children (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 25).

Exploring how the term ‘community’ has been used in these key guiding documents highlights an increasing trend to refer to the early childhood setting itself as a ‘community’, or more specifically, a ‘learning community’. While the ‘local and wider communities’ in which ECE services operate are still acknowledged, the emphasis seems to have shifted away from an expectation that ECE services look *outwards* to consider the communities they serve, to looking *inwards* to those already using the service. This has left me wondering how this shift has impacted on the ways in which ECE teachers understand the term ‘community’.

1.2. Introducing the Researcher

As Braun and Clarke (2006) point out, “researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments” (p. 84). Philosophical beliefs shape the way researchers view and approach all aspects of their research. This includes beliefs about the nature of being, what is real and what is truth (ontological beliefs) and the nature of knowledge and knowing (epistemological beliefs) (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). My own philosophical beliefs reflect an interpretive worldview, which holds that knowledge is created and re-created by people within the

contexts of social interactions in time and place. As a result, there are multiple truths and realities, and knowledge is not static; it changes over time and in different contexts. The focus of learning then shifts to understanding (as opposed to knowing) and knowledge cannot be fully understood outside of the context in which it is created. This approach acknowledges the subjective researcher. As Cohen et al. (2007) explain:

We must use ourselves as a key to our understanding of others and conversely, our understanding of others as a way of finding out about ourselves, an anthropomorphic model of people. (p. 19)

From this perspective, the researcher's own understandings and meanings will inevitably shape all aspects of the research itself. Hertz (1997, cited in Mutch, 2005, p. 63) highlights, the importance of acknowledging the researcher's 'location of self' (such as age, gender, social class, ethnicity, life experiences, current status) as these factors have an influence on all research decisions. Therefore, it is important to introduce myself. I am a middle-aged Pākehā/ European woman from a middle class background, born and raised in Aotearoa New Zealand. I am the mother of two children (now adults), and a committed partner of Paul. I was a 'Playcentre' child and my mother's involvement in ECE in the 1980s and 1990s sparked my own interest in this field. I have been involved in the ECE sector for over 20 years, as a student, ECE teacher and supervisor, and for the last 15 years as a lecturer in early childhood teacher education. I have a particular interest in the wider contextual influences on early childhood education provision, including historic and political influences.

1.3. Introducing this Study: Understanding Teachers' Views of 'Community'

This study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of how teachers view the meaning of 'community' within a typical non-community-based ECE centre and is informed by sociocultural theory and the work of Barbara Rogoff (1984, 1995) in particular. Rogoff's three planes of sociocultural activity (personal, interpersonal and institutional) have been used to inform the gathering and analysis of data in order to capture not only teachers' perspectives on 'community' but also the social and contextual influences on those perspectives. As Rogoff (1984) explains, "One must attend to the content and the context of the intellectual activity in order to understand thought processes" (p. 3). Three broad 'orientations' to 'community' highlighted in

my review of the literature [see Chapter 2, Section 2.2] have also shaped the research questions and topics discussed with research participants.

1.4. Research Questions

a) The research problem. The problem this research investigates is:

How teachers in a typical non-community-based ECE centre view the notion of ‘community’.

b) Specific research questions. The following specific questions emerge from this research problem:

- i) How do teachers in this ECE centre view the notion of ‘community’?
- ii) To what extent are the three orientations to ‘community’ – ‘Developing ‘community’ within the ECE centre’; ‘Children’s engagement with the ‘wider community’; and, ‘Centres promoting ‘wider community’ well-being’ – reflected within teachers’ views of ‘community’?
- iii) How are teachers’ views of ‘community’ reflected within centre practices?
- iv) To what extent do teachers’ views of ‘community’ align with the views of parents and of management?
- v) To what extent are teachers’ views of ‘community’ aligned with the philosophy, policy and planning documents of the ECE centre?

1.5. Structure of this Thesis Report

This report consists of 6 chapters, including this introduction. Chapter 2 provides a review of literature that has informed and shaped this study. The literature review includes an examination of the social and policy contexts of the notion of ‘community’ in New Zealand and a broad consideration of the diverse range of meanings of ‘community’ within the social sciences and ECE. Lastly, Chapter 2 outlines how the literature review has shaped this study including the problem it explores, the specific questions it poses and the methodology it employs to examine these questions.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used in this study. This chapter includes an outline of the theories that underpin this qualitative research and explains the case study methodology utilised, including selection of the research site and participants. This is followed by a discussion of the methods of data collection and data analysis.

Finally, ethical considerations and research reliability and validity are discussed.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed account of the research findings. This chapter draws on Rogoff's (1984, 1995) 'three planes of activity' to present findings on the personal plane (focussing on teachers' views), the interpersonal plane (focussing on teacher practices and the views of the centre manager and parents), and the institutional plane (focussing on the centre's guiding documents, vision, location, design and routines).

Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings. This chapter utilises the three broad orientations to 'community' derived from my review of the literature – 1) developing 'community' within the ECE centre; 2) children's engagement with the 'wider community'; and, 3) the role of ECE centres in promoting 'wider community' well-being – as a structure to consider the diverse meanings of 'community' identified in the findings.

Finally, Chapter 6 provides a review of the study including the key findings and implications for teachers and policy. It also discusses broader considerations from the research followed by an examination of the strengths and limitations of the study and its implications for further research.

To conclude, this study seeks to make a contribution to the small but growing literature on the notion of 'community' within the social sciences and specifically early childhood education.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The focus of this study is on the notion of ‘community’ within early childhood education (ECE). The following review of literature on this topic begins with a background examination of the social and policy contexts of the notion of ‘community’ in New Zealand, including why ‘community’ is seen to be important within ECE as well as the role ECE services currently play within ‘local and wider communities’. This is followed by a broad consideration of the diverse range of meanings of ‘community’ within the social sciences and ECE. This highlights that the term ‘community’ is not easily defined and is the focus of considerable on-going debate within the social sciences. In addition, a wider search into the ways in which ‘community’ has been articulated within the ECE field as a whole highlights three broad orientations to ‘community’: developing ‘community within the ECE centre’, children’s engagement with the ‘wider community’, and centres promoting ‘wider community’ well-being. Finally, I outline how this literature review has shaped this study including the problem it explores, the specific questions it poses and the methodology it employs to examine these questions.

2.1. Background to the Social and Policy Context of ‘Community’ in New Zealand

‘Community’ has always been an important aspect of ECE in New Zealand. The importance of connections between the ECE setting, home and ‘community’ is reflected within the sociocultural and bioecological theories that increasingly underpin ECE practice in New Zealand (McLachlan, Flear & Edwards, 2010). These theories argue that children’s learning is promoted when there are strong connecting links between all the microsystems that children participate in, including the home, ECE setting and ‘community’. The importance of these ‘community connections’ is clearly highlighted within the ECE curriculum *Te Whāriki* and its principle of ‘Family and Community’ in particular, which states: “The wider world of family and community is an integral part of early childhood curriculum” (Ministry of Education, 1996a, p. 42). Similarly the ‘Belonging’ strand of the curriculum emphasises, “connecting links with the family and the wider world [should be] affirmed and

extended” (p. 56).

Historically, a range of early childhood services have developed in New Zealand, not only to provide education and care for young children but also to cater for the diverse aspirations and needs of families and community groups. For example, the Playcentre movement emerged to offer education and social support for mothers as well as for their young children. Full-day childcare services developed in response to the needs of working parents and played a significant role in the liberation of women, and the participation of mothers in wider society (May, 2009). Ngā Kōhanga Reo (Māori immersion early childhood centres) is another example of an early childhood service that was developed primarily to meet the needs of the Māori community. Te Kōhanga Reo was developed by Māori, for Māori, with the aim of reigniting the Māori language and culture (May, 2009).

Today, ECE services offer vital support for families with young children who are increasingly isolated as urbanisation increases and traditional close neighbourhood communities disappear. ECE services provide a place for families to meet other families, to develop friendships and networks within the ‘local community’, and to connect with wider social services and support (Duncan & Te One, 2012). In particular, quality ECE services have been found to provide valuable support for vulnerable families and contribute to “breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty” (Fletcher & Dwyer, 2008, p. 67).

Of particular relevance to this study, over the past decade there has been increasing debate about the role ECE services play in the ‘local communities’ in which they operate. This debate responds to the shift towards neoliberal economic policies and a market model of early childhood provision that, it is argued, has resulted in ECE centres focussing more on the supply of a service (care and education of children) to meet the needs of consumers (parents), with little space for the needs of the ‘local communities’ in which the ECE services are bedded (Duncan, 2012; May, 1999; May & Mitchell, 2009; Moss, 2009). As May and Mitchell (2009) note, “Community well-being is outside the mandate of commercial operations, which cannot afford to invest in non-core activities with no financial return” (p. 11).

As an alternative to the prevailing neo-liberal market models of early childhood provision, Moss (2009) argues for a ‘democratic and experimental practice’ model. He suggests that ECE services should operate from a basis of democratic and experimental practice and need to be “treated as places of encounter and collaborative

workshops, public spaces that are the expression of a responsibility for children that the public shares with parents” (Moss, 2009, p. 62). This echoes Mitchell (2007, 2010) who proposes that constructing a view of the ‘child as citizen within a social community’ would provide a basis for policy that “could cater better for societal change and enhance ECE services as participatory forums building social networks, support, and cohesion” (Mitchell, 2010, p. 339). Similarly, Duncan (2012) argues that ECE services can “position themselves as the *heart of each community* and build their practices around discourses that support social capital, family reliance, community cohesion, and society wellness” (Duncan, 2012, p. 84, original emphasis). However, Duncan (2012) notes that in order to achieve this shift, the “traditional discourse of ECEC [early childhood education and care] as a place only for children” (p. 84) needs to be challenged, and ECE services “will need to reconceptualise both their role in the community and their relationships with families” (Duncan & Te One, 2012, p. 3).

From this examination, it is clear that ‘community’ plays an important role within ECE. However, there has been an increasing debate about the role ECE plays within the ‘local and wider communities’ they serve. There is a clear tension between the potential value that ECE services can provide in fostering the well-being of families and the ‘local community’ in which the ECE service is based, and the increasing trend for ECE services to focus primarily on enrolled children and families. The following section examines how ‘community’ is defined within the social sciences and highlights that ‘community’ is a term that has, and continues to be, the focus of much debate.

2.2. Debating Diverse Meanings of ‘Community’ in the Social Sciences and ECE

The meaning of ‘community’ has been increasingly studied and debated within the social sciences over the last four decades. Kelly (2007) highlights that finding a clear definition for the term ‘community’ is a difficult task as the term is so widely used, that “its meaning has become elusive and vague” (p. 63). Broadly, ‘community’ can be described as a social group, however, exactly how any one social group “is constituted is highly complex and belies easy definition” (Bryan, 2006, p. 605). ‘Community’ is commonly defined in terms of place (e.g., your neighbourhood community) along with the sense of connection that is associated with belonging to the group. For example, Clark (2010) describes ‘community’, “first as a physical

neighbourhood or local environment but also carrying a more tangible meaning relating to social networks and a sense of belonging” (p. 57). However, other academics highlight the nature of people’s connection with others, rather than location, as central to the meaning of ‘community’. This is illustrated by Nisbet (1967) who explains ‘community’ as a concept which “includes, but goes far beyond local community to encompass religion, work, family, and culture; it refers to social bonds characterised by emotional cohesion, depth, continuity and fullness” (p. 6; quoted in Clay, 2007, pp. 12-13).

According to D’Aloisio (2007) and Madden (2007), the term ‘community’ generally evokes a sense of something good, associated with a high quality of life, a sense of belonging, connection, unity, warmth and sharing. This is reflected in the term ‘sense of community’ which McMillan and Chavis (1986, cited in Mannarini & Fedi, 2009) define as consisting of four dimensions: “membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection” (p. 212). This ‘sense of community’ can be particularly evident in times of tragedy “when people imagine themselves bound together by a common grief or joined through some extraordinary effort” (D’Aloisio, 2007, p. 47). Central here is “the notion of community as a form of collective” (Kelly, 2007, p. 64) – through a sense of unity and common purpose, a ‘community’ can act together. However, Madden (2007) also highlights that enmity can also be a powerful unifying force, and states, “to put it crudely, ‘the community’ can also be the lynch mob” (p. 75). So the concept of ‘community’ can be as much about exclusion as it is about inclusion (Madden, 2007). It is clear then, that the concept of ‘community’ is not easily defined, and as Bryan (2006) highlights, whether the relationships that underpin ideas of ‘community’ are real or imagined, ideal or practical, a means of control or of radical opposition, they remain vexed questions that continue to be argued and debated.

More specifically, with regard to debating diverse meanings of ‘community’ within ECE, according to Sumsion, Press and Wong (2012), the concept of ‘community’ in ECE is one that tends to be taken for granted and which is often used uncritically:

Assertions that commitment to and connectedness with community is a distinguishing feature of the ECEC sector seems commonplace. Yet what is meant by community and implications of the emphasis on community rarely seem to be questioned despite *reconceptualist* challenges to many traditional views and assumptions about ECEC. (pp. 41-42, original emphasis)

An exploration of research relating to the notion of ‘community’ has highlighted *multiple* ways in which the concept of ‘community’ has been conceptualised and also reflected in mainstream practice within ECE services. Therefore, it is important to canvass the literature regarding these varying conceptions in some depth, as this will form an important conceptual foundation for the research in this study. In particular, it is clear that there are three main sets of meanings of ‘community’ that have been used in the academic literature pertinent to ECE: developing ‘community’ within the ECE centre; children’s engagement with the ‘wider community’; and, the ECE centre’s role in promoting ‘wider community’ well-being.

a) Developing ‘community’ within the ECE centre. The research examined in this section focuses on ways in which ‘community’ can be developed *within* an ECE centre. Literature and research in this area fall into three groups: the concepts of ‘communities of practice’ and ‘communities of learners’; developing partnerships with parents within ECE ‘communities’; and, children’s active participation in the early childhood ‘centre community’.

Communities of practice and learners. The terms ‘community of practice’ and ‘community of learners’ are founded within sociocultural theory, and the work of Rogoff (e.g., 1984) in particular, and view cognitive activity and learning as situated within the social context. As Rogoff (1984) explains, “Cognitive activity is socially defined, interpreted, and supported” (p. 4). Building on the idea of learning as a social practice, Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that “learning, thinking, and knowing are relations among people in activity in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world” (p. 51). So from this perspective, a ‘community of practice’ or ‘of learning’ is essentially a group of people with a shared concern or interest “who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p. 4).

‘Communities of practice’ can come in all shapes and sizes, and members may participate in differing ways and levels, but all share three elements: “a *domain* of

knowledge, which defines a set of issues; a *community* of people who care about this domain; and the shared *practice* that they are developing to be effective in their domain” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 27; original emphasis). Wenger (1998) points out that an institution (such as an ECE setting) does not necessarily mean a ‘community of practice’ exists, and there may be one, none, or a number of communities of practice within an institution. In other words, it is the *practice* that forms the ‘communities of practice’, not the institutional boundary.

Research drawing on theories relating to ‘communities of practice’ or ‘communities of learning’ has focused on four on differing groups within educational settings: teachers and other professionals; teachers and parents; teachers and children; and, teachers, parents and children. First, there is a body of research in which teachers, along with other professionals involved in an ECE setting, are considered to be a ‘community’ either ‘of practice’ or ‘of learners’. Such ‘teacher communities’ can be developed within professional development, where teachers and professionals come together for a specific purpose. For example, Warren (2008/2009) and Cotton (2013) both explored ways in which a ‘community of practice’ approach can underpin effective models for teacher professional development. Both of these studies found that a ‘community of practice’ approach emphasising co-construction of knowledge and understanding is more effective in transforming teacher understanding and practice than one that focuses primarily on the transmission of knowledge. Cotton’s (2013) London-based qualitative case study explored professional development with early years practitioners from a range of settings. While small-scale, this study did provide a valuable insight into the ways in which, despite several barriers, a co-constructed approach to professional development can be both empowering for participants and develop connections as a foundation for on-going collaboration.

The impact of educational leadership within a teaching team’s ‘community of practice’ on infants’ and toddlers’ disposition to enquire was the focus of a three-year New Zealand Centre of Innovation study in a community-based ECE centre (Bary et al., 2008). This qualitative action research study utilised Rogoff’s three planes of activity to help understand the impact of the centre’s organisational culture, the way teachers worked together, as well as each teacher’s own understandings and practices. This study found that the model of distributed leadership used in this setting supported the development of a ‘community of practice’ within the teaching team through; mutual engagement that involves communication and negotiation, joint

enterprise which involves working together and being mutually accountable, and developing a shared repertoire of systems and processes through which negotiation can occur. They also found that the distributed leadership approach utilised in this centre promoted both empowerment and security for children, parents and teachers (Bary et al., 2008).

Second, is research that focuses on parents and teachers together as a ‘community of practice’. For example, Laluvein (2010) draws on Wenger’s theory of ‘community of practice’ to examine parent-teacher relationships. Laluvein (2010) conducted a small-scale interpretive, qualitative study utilising semi-structured interviews of 10 pairs of parents and mainstream primary school teachers in England. He argues that Wenger’s theory of ‘community of practice’ can provide a framework for teachers to work in partnership with parents in ways that can “overcome the problematics of status and power which undermine so many professional-lay relationships” (Laluvein, 2010, p. 186). According to Laluvein (2010) a ‘community of practice’ offers a “social rather than didactic approach to problem-solving can contribute to the improvement of school and teacher-parent focused educational decision-making situations which affect children’s life chances” (p. 176). While focussed on primary school, the findings of this study are applicable to the ECE context, particularly given the close relationships ECE teachers have with parents within the ‘centre community’.

Third, is research that focuses on teachers and children working together as a ‘community of learning’. Jordan’s (2003) doctoral thesis focussed on the ways that ECE teachers “value children’s voices as the basis for developing authentic learning experiences with them” (p. i). This New Zealand-based qualitative action research study involved teachers in four case study centres critically reflecting on their practices, utilising Rogoff’s three planes of activity to better understand the complexities of each learning context. Jordan (2003) found that teachers and children become a ‘community of learners’ when teachers promoted a culture of inquiry that supported the sharing of power between teachers and children.

In a more recent study, Folque and Siraj-Blatchford (2011) examined ways in which a ‘community of learning’ can be developed in an ECE classroom. Their qualitative year-long case study of two Portuguese early childhood classrooms (3-6 years), explored how the Portuguese pedagogical model, *The Movimento da Escola Moderna* (MEM), could help generate a ‘community of learning’ with teachers and children, and promote children’s “learning to learn” (Folque & Siraj-Blatchford,

2011, p. 229). This model included actively involving children with the teacher, in planning and evaluation as regular part of the daily routine. The study found that the MEM model supported the development of ‘communities of learning’ within both classrooms, “where children were encouraged to self-regulate their learning and engage in collaborative activities, transforming their leading activity from playing with others to learning with others” (Folque & Siraj-Blatchford, 2011, p. 242).

Finally, we examine research in which the ‘community of learners’ within the ECE setting includes all members of the centre, including teachers, children and parents. For example, a three-year qualitative participatory action research study within a Māori immersion ECE centre (again, community-based) drew on a kaupapa Māori (Māori philosophy) paradigm to examine strategies that would support the development of all members of their ‘centre community’. The term ‘whānau’ was used to describe this ‘community’, which included the centre management, teachers, parents and children; “Hence, whānau development involves the learning and development of every member of our community of learners” (Tamati, Hond-Flavell, Korewha & the whānau of Te Kōpae Piripono, 2008, p. 8). This New Zealand-based study found strengthening partnerships between kaiako (teachers) and families (including fathers) supported children’s learning. Open and honest communication, effective induction processes, and acknowledging and responding to fears held by whānau members were also found to be important in strengthening whānau participation (Tamati et al., 2008).

In another three-year research project undertaken within a community-based preschool in New Zealand (Wright, Ryder, & Mayo, 2006), a qualitative, participatory action research project explored ways in which a ‘community of learners’ that included teachers, children and parents, could be developed within the context of visual arts and project work in the curriculum. Rogoff’s three planes of activity was also utilised in this study to better understand the interplay between individuals, their relationships within the centre and the centre context itself. This study highlighted four elements essential to building a ‘community of learners’: “individual identity that nourishes co-learning, transforming relationships through dialogue, nurturing a community of practice identity, and empowering the community” (Wright et al., 2006, p. 14). Teachers involved in this study shifted their view of parents, children and teachers as separate groups within their ‘centre community’ to viewing all participants as co-learners. And through this, found that

“individual identity came to mean acceptance of self and others as both a learner and teacher regardless of the role one has in the community” (Wright et al., 2006, p. 90). In sum, the term ‘community’ in ‘communities of practice’ and ‘of learners’ has proved a useful vehicle for supporting the learning of children and others *within* ECE ‘communities’.

Developing partnerships with parents. In addition to studies that view teachers, parents and children variously as members of a ‘community of practice’ or ‘community of learners’, there is a body of research that focuses on *partnerships* between teachers and parents within ECE ‘centre communities’. This body of research emphasise the place of parents within ‘centre communities’ and highlights that parent-teacher partnerships, underpinned by effective communication, are beneficial for children’s learning. Such partnerships can also enhance family well-being.

A strong theme that emerges from the research in this area is that strengthening partnerships with parents within the ‘centre community’ enhances children’s learning. Van Wijk, Simmonds, Cubey and Mitchell (2006) undertook a 3-year participatory action research project within a Playcentre (a community-based, parent-led, sessional ECE service). This New Zealand-based qualitative study found that parent engagement in the ‘centre community’ was strengthened by the common purpose of providing and participating in children’s education. However, it was noted that the additional workload and time involved in this study was a challenge for centre parents. This study also highlighted that knowledge of children’s learning, such as a child’s schema, enabled parents to recognise and support children’s learning in both the early childhood and home settings.

A year-long New Zealand-based research and professional development project by Mitchell, Haggerty, Hampton and Pairman (2006) also highlighted that effective partnerships with parents within ‘centre communities’ enhanced children’s learning and well-being. This study involved 6 case study centres – 3 kindergartens and 3 educations and care centres – collecting data in two phases which included interviews with teachers, parents, and in some centres, children (although no useful data was gained from these child interviews). This study identified three key elements of good parent partnerships:

- 1) Parent contribution to children's learning via assessment planning and evaluation;
- 2) Effective communication about the ECE curriculum in ways parents can understand (e.g., cutting out the jargon), and that that engaged parents; and,
- 3) Involving parents in the life of the 'centre community'.

They noted, however, that some "hard issues continued to be challenging, in particular, responding to parents' desire for formal "literacy" teaching, and working with parents from multicultural backgrounds" (Mitchell et al., 2006, p. ix).

Communication within an ECE 'centre community' is highlighted as key to strengthening parent-teacher partnerships. Van Wijk et al. (2006) identified informal conversations between adults as one of the factors supporting the engagement of parents within the Playcentre 'community'. Tamati et al. (2008) also identified open and honest communication as key in supporting whānau involvement, and in supporting the involvement of fathers in their children's learning in particular. In addition, Mitchell et al. (2006) found that communication between parents and teachers is key to ensuring there is a 'meeting of minds' when identifying shared goals and aspirations for children. They found that effective communication with parents was enhanced when teachers saw parents from a credit, rather than deficit basis, acknowledging that both teachers and parents have valued strengths and knowledge. This then lead to a greater balance of power between parents and teachers. This finding is echoed in a similar study by Duncan et al. (2013) who highlighted that key to developing parent participation was relationships that were authentic (genuine and respectful), sustained over time, and intentionally developed by teachers (deliberate, thoughtful, purposeful). In sum, this conception of 'community' revolved around the place of parents within the ECE 'centre community' emphasising the benefits of developing effective parent-teacher partnerships for parent participation and children's learning.

Children as active participants in ECE. The third group of studies that sits within the area of 'community within the early childhood setting' focuses on children as central and active members of the 'centre community', with a particular emphasis on children's rights. There is significant overlap with research considered above that focuses on teachers and children as a 'community of learners'; however, literature and research in this particular area draws on the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) and positions children as active citizens with rights including

the right to participate in decisions affecting them (United Nations, 1989, article 12). Of particular relevance here, is research that examines ways in which children can be supported to express their opinions and achieve agency within the ECE 'centre community'.

Smith, Bjerke and Taylor (2009) highlight that a key component of citizenship includes, amongst other things, "opportunities for belonging and meaningful participation within groups and communities" (p. 43), and emphasise the importance of children's active participation in 'communities of practice' within ECE. A key component of meaningful participation in a 'community' is for children not only to have a voice but for their voices to be heard. As Te One (2011) explains, "listening to the child's voice includes the child being heard, and being listened to, the right to express an opinion, and the right to contest, challenge, debate, and question. This translates as agency" (p. 43).

Nutbrown and Clough (2009) also argue that children's voices should not only be heard but teachers also need to find ways in which to actively 'listen' to their voices within their 'centre communities'. Nutbrown and Clough (2009) undertook a qualitative project in England that involved 16 small participant action research projects in a range of ECE settings. While each project was unique in itself, "what united them all was the common concern of all the practitioners to develop their understanding of children's views of their environments and what it was to feel a sense of 'belonging'" (Nutbrown & Clough, 2009, p. 196). This constellation of small action research projects highlighted ways in which children were able to "express their opinions about various issues which mattered to them in their settings" (pp. 199-200) that resulted in actions being taken in response. For example, in one setting children expressed their dislike and fears about the centre toilets, resulting in changes to make them more inviting and pleasant. One of the key findings from that project was that actively listening to young children impacted on children's identity and self-esteem. Nutbrown and Clough (2009) argue that:

If children are successfully to experience a sense of inclusivity and belonging in their early years curriculum and pedagogy [teachers] must attend to aspects of practice that make all children feel valued by enabling them to contribute their ideas and know that their contributions matter. (p. 203)

Research by Te One (2008) found that the extent to which children in ECE

‘centre communities’ have a voice and are heard is influenced by a range of factors, and argues that “more in-depth awareness of children’s rights in early childhood settings would support the development of a children’s rights-based pedagogy” (p. i). Te One’s (2008) doctoral research utilised a qualitative, interpretive approach involving three case study ECE centres in New Zealand – a full-day service for under 2-year-olds, a sessional kindergarten for 3- and 4-year-olds, and a parent-led Playcentre for birth to 6-year-olds. Data was gathered through individual interviews with children and teachers, focus groups with adults, and observations of centre life. Drawing on sociocultural and ecological theories as well as childhood sociology and childhood studies, this study explored how children, teachers and adults in these three ECE settings perceived children’s rights. Her research highlighted that adult perceptions of children’s rights were “directly influenced by the organisational philosophy or auspice of the particular service” which then influenced “how children’s rights were implemented and enacted” (Te One, 2008, p. 239). In addition, Te One (2008) found that children’s participation rights were “interwoven, interrelated, and interdependent” (p. 241) with their protection and provision rights. In a later article on children’s rights in ECE, Te One (2011) poses questions for further research in this area including:

On whose terms do children participate? Whose choices are they selecting from?
How can children influence these choices? To what extent are children involved
in setting the structure of the day? Ultimately these questions are about power and
how it is shared, and these are questions for future research. (p. 257)

In sum, the focus here is on the place of children within the ‘centre community’ and emphasises that viewing children as citizens with agency can support their ability to actively participate and have a voice within the ‘centre community’.

b) Children’s engagement with the ‘wider community’. The second broad area of research that uses and frames the term ‘community’ focuses on engaging children who attend ECE settings with the ‘wider community’ – beyond the centre gates. A range of studies explore children’s engagement with the ‘wider community’ and society, and emphasise the value such engagement has in developing children’s sense of belonging, participation in, and social responsibility towards, their ‘local and wider community’ and environment. Research in this area draws on ideas of ‘ethic of care’ (Winwood, 2011) and ‘place-based education’ (Gruenewald, 2003; McInerney, Smyth

& Down, 2011), while others emphasise citizenship education (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr & Losito, 2009) and the right of children, as citizens, to participate in wider society and develop a sense of social responsibility through ‘service learning’ (Freeman & King, 2001). The focus of ‘community’ here, then, is on ‘community as place’ including children’s engagement with and participation in their ‘local and wider community’.

Ethic of care and place-based education. Engaging with ‘local communities’ supports children to develop a sense of ‘community’ empathy and concern (Freeman & King, 2001; Ritchie, Duhn, Rau & Craw, 2010). Ritchie et al. (2010) report on a study involving participant action-research projects within ten ECE centres throughout New Zealand. This qualitative study drew on both kaupapa Māori and Western perspectives including critical and postmodern perspectives, and challenged the ECE centres involved to explore issues of ecological sustainability on a local, national and global level. The result was “widespread participation in collective endeavours” (p. 120) that involved children, parents and teachers in both within centre and local ‘communities’. They highlight that involving children in ‘wider community’ projects such as fundraising, tree planting at the local Marae and visits to local elders, supported children to develop an ‘ethic of care’ for themselves as well as for others (Ritchie et al., 2010).

The benefits of engaging with the local physical environment are another aspect that is evident in this category of research (Kernan, 2010; Ritchie et al., 2010). A key focus for Ritchie et al. (2010) was developing respect for Papatūānuku (the earth) along with a concern for global issues of ecological sustainability. Ecological sustainability is primarily focused on the interconnection between individuals and the physical environment, and as Ritchie et al. (2010) puts it, seeks to shift “our attitudes and ways of being in the world, towards much more ecologically sustainable ways of life” (p. 10). This study also drew on theories of ‘place-based education’, which advocates “for a pedagogy that relates directly to student experience of the world, and that improves the quality of life for people and communities” (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 7). Experiences in these projects involved children in working with the ‘local community’ to develop sustainable practices, such as adopting a local park and beach clean-ups (Ritchie et al., 2010). In sum, the term ‘community’ here is located primarily in ‘place’ and emphasises the benefits of children’s engagement in the wider social and physical ‘community’.

Citizenship education. There is relatively little research that focuses on citizenship education in ECE. However, there is increasing recognition of young children's rights and of UNCRC that position young children as active citizens (Smith et al., 2009; Te One & Dalli, 2009; Te One, 2011). According to Schulz et al. (2009):

Citizenship education focuses on knowledge and understanding and on opportunities for participation and engagement in both civic and civil society. It is concerned with the wider range of ways that citizens use to interact with and shape their communities (including schools) and societies. (p. 22)

In the previous section, I have considered research that explores how such rights are supported and exercised within the ECE 'centre community'. Here, the focus shifts to how young children attending ECE engage with the 'wider community', beyond the early childhood centre gates, and how this supports their developing understanding of what it is to be a citizen (including their rights and responsibilities as citizens) and an active member of the 'wider community'. For example, Kernan (2010) highlights the increasing marginalisation of young children in urban environments, and the concern that attending ECE settings can result in children's increasing separation from 'real life' and the social capital of 'local and wider communities'. Kernan (2010) argues that such separation can impact on "children's sense of belonging and opportunities to participate and be active citizens" (p. 201).

According to Freeman and King (2001), involving children in the 'wider community' through 'service learning' promotes young children's prosocial attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. Their small qualitative project identifies three types of 'community service' children can engage in: direct service – involving face-to-face hands on interactions; indirect service – activities that indirectly involve others (such as collecting donations for a community group); and civic action or advocacy, which involves informing policy makers (such as letters campaigns to the local council) (Freeman & King, 2001). While there is relatively little research on citizenship education in ECE, it is an important part of a more diverse conceptualisation of the role children play in the 'local and wider community', and in society as a whole.

c) Centres promoting 'wider community' well-being. The positioning of ECE services (as a whole) as sites that promote 'wider community' well-being and social change is a theme that is evident in another pool of research (e.g., Bellett, Sankar & Teague, 2010; Duncan, 2012; Vasconcelos, 2006) that again reflect the notion of

‘community’ primarily in terms of ‘place’, focusing on the ‘local and wider community’ in which ECE centres are embedded. These studies focus on ways in which ECE services can reach out to and support the well-being of their ‘wider community’, promoting ‘community’ development and capacity building. The focus here is on ECE centres ‘looking outwards’, and positioning their role as serving the ‘wider community’, rather than only ‘looking inwards’ and focussing on the ‘centre community’ and the provision of early childhood care and education services for enrolled children and their families. Two broad categories emerge here: ECE settings actively serving the ‘local and wider community’, and ECE settings supporting families and, in doing so, strengthening ‘local and wider community’ well-being.

Serving the community. The ability for ECE settings to become sites of ethical practice through actively and deliberately supporting the ‘local community’ in which they are based is highlighted in a case study by Vasconcelos (2006). This case study drew on “ideas on ethics, an ethics of care, and ethical pedagogical practices” (p. 170) to explore an exemplary ECE centre within an economically impoverished neighbourhood in Lisbon, Portugal. The ECE centre examined in Vasconcelos’ (2006) study actively engaged and supported vulnerable families within the ‘local community’. By deliberately choosing the ‘local community’ it served, networking with that ‘community’ and focusing their curriculum on social concerns, this ECE setting clearly positioned itself as ‘looking outwards’ and serving vulnerable members of its ‘local community’.

ECE services can also be part of ‘community hubs’, with a particular focus on improving outcomes for children by reaching out to and supporting vulnerable families within the ‘local community’. ECE services attached to ‘community hubs’ then become a focal point in the ‘local community’, working in partnership with other social support services to provide wrap-around support services for families in the ‘local community’. These services combine ECE, parent support, wider family support services, community education, and empower families to be involved. Pen Green in the United Kingdom (Whalley, 2007) and Te Aroha Noa in New Zealand (Munford, Sanders, Maden, & Maden, 2007) are examples of this approach. For example, Te Aroha Noa operates in a low socioeconomic area of a small New Zealand city and “represents a seamless blending of early learning, parent support and development, whānau/family support, and adult education and community development programmes” (Munford et al., 2007, p. 6).

The potential for ECE centres to provide targeted parental and family support for vulnerable families within their ‘local community’ as well as education and care for young children was investigated in a significant project initiated by New Zealand Ministry of Education in 2006 called the *Early Childhood Education Centre-based Parent Support and Development (PSD)* programme (Bellett et al., 2010). As part of this programme, 18 pilot ECE services were funded to provide additional support and development services for parents within their centre and local ‘communities’ over a three-year period, involving 2,246 parents. While the Ministry of Education took a flexible approach to this programme, allowing the ECE centres involved to respond to the differing needs in both their ‘centre’ and ‘local communities’, Bellett et al. (2010) note that some ECE centres required significant support in doing this. One issue here was the lack of time and resources that centres had to undertake needs analysis and consultation with their ‘local communities’. There were also significant variations in the way programmes were implemented across the 18 ECE centres (Bellett et al., 2010).

Despite the limitations and challenges involved with this study, the ECE settings involved “reported that the programme had encouraged them to develop new networks, furthered their reach into the community and expanded their focus beyond children” (Bellett et al., 2010, p. 4). This study highlights what is possible within a funded and supported project. It is interesting to note that many centres in this project were initially focussed primarily on the education of children already attending their centre rather than considering how they might cater for the needs of all families within their ‘local community’. Bellett et al. (2010) notes that “marketing themselves and networking within the community was quite challenging for some of the centres, as it was not something they saw as their core business, and had previously needed to do” (p. 57). In these cases, ‘community’ was viewed as ‘outside’ the ECE centre and focused on ways in which ECE centres can reach out and support families in their ‘local community’, with a particular emphasis on reaching out to vulnerable families.

Supporting families, strengthening community. A further theme that emerges from this category of research is that engaging in an ECE setting has a range of wider benefits for families and the ‘local and wider community’ in which the ECE setting is embedded (Duncan, 2012; Duncan et al., 2013; Powell, Cullen, Adams, Duncan & Marshall, 2005; Tamati et al., 2008; Van Wijk et al, 2006). In these contexts ‘community’ is again viewed as outside the ECE centre but rather than primarily

targeting vulnerable families in the ‘local community’, emphasise the direct and indirect contribution that ECE centres make to the well-being of both families of enrolled children and the ‘local communities’ in which ECE centres are based.

Based on an analysis of data from interviews with parents and teachers from four New Zealand-based studies, Duncan (2012) highlights three discourses regarding the benefits for families of engaging with an ECE centre: ‘belonging and bonding’; ‘networks and linking with others’; and, ‘ECE as the builder of community’. The first discourse, ‘belonging and bonding’, emphasises the benefits of the ECE environment providing opportunities for strong trusting and supportive relationships to develop with others also involved in the service (including teachers and other families) (Duncan, 2012).

This ‘belonging and bonding’ discourse is also reflected in a more in-depth qualitative action research project that explored the question, “How does active adult participation in early childhood education enhance positive outcomes for children and their whānau?” (Duncan et al., 2013, p. 2). This New Zealand study found that the depth and quality of parents and family participation increased when teachers actively and intentionally focussed on strengthening their interactions with families as part of their every day activity. This resulted not only in increased parental engagement in their children’s learning, but increased parent confidence and “enhanced adults’ participation in centre activities” (Duncan et al., 2013, p. 2).

An investigation into the effect of adult engagement in Playcentres (a parent-led early childhood service that includes a programme of parent education) also found that involvement in Playcentre increases parents’ confidence both in terms of supporting their children’s learning and development as well as personally (e.g., taking on different roles in Playcentre) (Powell et al., 2005). This mixed mode research involved a national survey of Playcentres, as well as four in-depth case studies of rural and urban Playcentres in New Zealand. Powell et al. (2005) highlights that for many parents in the study (both rural and urban), involvement in Playcentre was “a primary source of adult social support and friendship for parent members” (p. 106).

The second discourse identified by Duncan (2012) was ‘networks and linking with others’. This discourse highlights that participation in ECE supports parents to develop connections with ‘community’ beyond the ECE setting, such as play dates with children, connecting to other young families, and links to other groups (e.g., play

groups or church). Duncan et al. (2013) found that intentional practices by teachers to increase parent participation also increased the level of connection between families, promoting friendships between both parents and children. Both Van Wijk et al. (2006) and Powell et al. (2005) echo this finding, highlighting that the friendships parents developed within the Playcentre also extended beyond the centre.

An examination of survey and in-depth interview data from a large 'The Place of Caregiving' study funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand (Witten, McCreanor & Kearns, 2007) found that "schools and preschools impact on the way neighbourhood is experienced by parents" (pp. 146-7) and play a significant role in developing their sense of 'community belonging'. This mixed mode study drew on a phone survey of 877 parents and 128 in-depth interviews. It highlighted that the networks parents developed through their connection with ECE centres and schools were often enduring and "a source of friendship, local information, reciprocity in childcare arrangements, and other forms of parenting support" (Witten et al., 2007, p. 144).

The third discourse Duncan (2012) identified is 'ECE as the builder of community'. This discourse highlights the significant support that ECE services provide for families' wider lives (beyond the ECE setting), such as providing time out for parents to meet their own and others' needs (Duncan, 2012). Wiseman's (2009) small qualitative study, based in a predominantly African-American community in America, provides further insight into this discourse, exploring "how mothers of kindergartners navigate their families' experiences within a community and how their children's kindergarten experiences affect their interactions and investment in a place" (p. 333). Wiseman (2009) conducted interviews with kindergarten parents during walks in the local neighbourhood. While small-scale, findings from this study highlight that while each mother had "unique ways of navigating through the community based on their personal experiences and goals for their children" (Wiseman, 2009, p. 337), the kindergarten played a significant role in shaping the values and life decisions of these families.

This study echoes that of Witten et al. (2007) who found that ECE settings and schools "act as portals into neighbourhood communities and as such they are ideal sites for the regular, mundane encounters that can build social capital and neighbourhood cohesiveness" (p. 147). Similarly, Powell et al. (2005) found that involvement in Playcentre provided parents with "a valuable community link and a

sense of being part of the wider community” (Powell et al., 2005, p. 3). Powell et al. (2005) also highlights that; “for many participants, Playcentre contributes to a sense of participation and citizenship by providing the opportunity for adults to interact socially with other adults and parents who come from a variety of backgrounds” (p. 3).

Duncan et al. (2013) concludes that ECE services can do more to develop ‘local and wider community’ well-being by reframing their ECE services from “child-centred places to community-supported teaching and learning settings” (p. 2). They argue that this shift in orientation would encourage ECE services to actively embed themselves within the ‘local and wider community’, facilitating all involved in the centres to build and strengthen links, networks and connections, and ultimately supporting “community development and community wellness, and strengthened parenting” (Duncan et al., 2013, p. 2). In sum, the notion of ‘community’ in this section focuses on the ‘local and wider community’ in which ECE centres are embedded, and argues that ECE centres can have a positive impact on ‘wider community’ well-being by actively supporting the families they work with.

2.3. Rationale for this Study

a) The focus of this study: What does ‘community’ mean? This broad literature review highlights that the notion of ‘community’ within ECE is not straightforward. It is clear that connectedness with, and responsiveness to ‘community’ is seen to be important within the ECE sector within New Zealand with ‘community connections’ an integral part of early childhood curriculum. However, current debates within the ECE sector raise concern about the impact of neoliberal economic policies on the ability for ECE centres to be responsive the ‘communities’ they serve. In addition, the diverse ways that the notion of ‘community’ is articulated within the ECE sector as well as on-going debates within the social sciences about the complexities of ‘community’ (e.g., Bryan, 2006; Kelly, 2007; Madden, 2007), highlight that there are *multiple* meaning of the notion of ‘community’. This research aims to draw attention to the complexity of the notion of ‘community’ and begin exploring the question, ‘What does ‘community’ in ECE mean?’.

b) Researching ECE teachers' views of 'community'. Despite the extensive academic debate surrounding the meaning of 'community', it is interesting to find that there has been very little research examining people's views of the meaning of 'community'. Thorough searches within the field of ECE and education in general, have found no research that explores how teachers view the notion of 'community'. Expanding this search to include research in the social sciences has identified just two studies that explored participants' views on the meaning of 'community'.

As part of a study on health issues in the community (Phillips, 2007), participants were asked what they understood 'community' to mean. This qualitative case study involved 35 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, tutors and students involved in a *Health Issues in the Community* (HIIC) course in Scotland. Responses fell into two broad groups: place-based (viewing 'community' in terms of place, or geographical location) and non-place-based. Non-place-based definitions saw 'community' as relational (people who share common beliefs or activities, and were bound by shared values, loyalties, or concerns), with some associating 'community' with feelings of attachment and belonging (Phillips, 2007). According to Phillips (2007), the data suggests, "ideas of community are negotiated and considered with reference to different features of daily life and social relationships, physical location and emotional attachment" (p. 182).

Similar findings were highlighted in a study by Mannarini and Fedi (2009). This qualitative study explored participants' understanding and experiences of 'community' and 'sense of community'. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 76 participants who were involved in various groups (political parties, volunteers, cultural groups, and neighbourhood associations), as well as some who had never been involved in a social or political group. Findings highlighted that people's experiences of 'community' shaped their views, and participants described 'community' in terms of place, and in terms of their sense of belonging and connection to the group. As Mannarini and Fedi (2009) explain, "the 'community' individuals live in is conceptualised as a tangible, physical entity, but also, and above all, as a relational and affective universe" (p. 223). In addition, this study found that involvement with 'community groups' did not always coincide with participants experiencing a 'sense of community'. These authors also note the value of conducting qualitative studies in this area and "approaching these constructs as 'culturally situated' narratives" (p. 225).

In sum, these two studies highlight that people hold diverse views of the meaning of ‘community’. It would therefore be valuable for this study to explore the views held by *ECE teachers* on the meaning of ‘community’.

c) Exploring three orientations to ‘community’. An examination of ways in which the notion of ‘community’ is articulated and practiced within the ECE sector reveals a diverse range of approaches or orientations to the notion of ‘community’. I have categorised these orientations into three broad areas:

- i) *Developing ‘community’ within the ECE centre.* Research here focused on ways in which a ‘sense of community’ can be developed *within* the ECE centre. This included research exploring: the development of ‘communities of practice’ and ‘communities of learners’ (Bary et al., 2008; Cotton, 2013; Folque & Siraj-Blatchford, 2011; Jordan, 2003; Laluvein, 2010; Tamati et al., 2008; Warren, 2008/2009; Wright et al., 2006); developing partnerships with parents (Mitchell et al., 2006; Van Wijk et al., 2006); and, children as central and active members of the ‘centre community’ (Nutbrown & Clough, 2009; Te One, 2008).
- ii) *Children’s engagement with the ‘wider community’.* This body of research explored the benefits for children attending ECE engaging with the wider social and physical environments outside the ECE centre. This includes research that draws on concepts of ‘ethic of care’ and ‘place-based education’ (Freeman & King, 2001; Kernan, 2010; Ritchie et al., 2010).
- iii) *Centres promoting ‘wider community’ well-being.* This group of studies focused on ways that ECE centres actively promote ‘wider community’ well-being and social change. Research here focused on the ECE service serving the ‘local and wider community’ (Bellett et al., 2010; Munford et al., 2007; Vasconcelos, 2006; Whalley, 2007), and supporting families and strengthening ‘local and wider communities’ in which centres are based (Duncan, 2012; Duncan et al., 2013; Powell et al., 2005; Wiseman, 2009; Witten et al., 2007).

Given the varied ways in which the notion of ‘community’ is articulated and reflected in practice within ECE, this research also seeks to offer some insight into the extent to which the three orientations to ‘community’ (that are articulated within the ECE sector literature considered in this chapter) are reflected within teachers’

views of ‘community’.

d) Researching a non-community-based ECE centre. This review of the literature has highlighted the concern that neo-liberal market models of ECE provision have resulted in many ECE services, and privately owned for-profit ECE centres in particular, have shifted their focus away from considering ‘local and wider community’ well-being, to concentrate solely on the business of providing care and education services to families (Duncan, 2012; May, 1999; May & Mitchell, 2009; Moss, 2009). This concern is echoed by Bellett et al. (2010) who found that ECE services that were not set up with a clear mandate to serve the ‘local community’ did not view engaging and networking within their ‘local community’ as part of their core business. However, it is evident from the literature reviewed here that the majority of research has been undertaken in centres that are ‘community-based’ (centres that are owned and governed by their communities and do not operate for financial gain), with little research undertaken in ECE services in New Zealand that are privately owned (and which can operate for financial gain). With this in mind, this study focuses on a privately owned non-community-based ECE service to better understand the views of ‘community’ by teachers within this context.

e) Methodological approaches. When considering methodological approaches to this study, it is evident from two social science studies that explored participants’ views on the meaning of ‘community’ (Mannarini & Fedi, 2009; Phillips, 2007), that a qualitative, inductive approach, using semi-structured interviews would be appropriate for this study. In addition, because, as Mannarini and Fedi (2009) highlight, narratives about the meaning of ‘community’ are “culturally situated” (p. 225), it is also important to consider the context in which ECE teachers’ hold their views. Following the approach utilised by several New Zealand studies examined in this literature review (Bary et al., 2008; Jordan, 2003; Wright et al., 2006), Rogoff’s three planes of activity has been utilised in this study to provide a theoretical framework that enables the teachers’ views to be situated within the wider context of the ECE centre in which they work.

2.4. Concluding Comments

This literature review has focussed on the importance of unpacking the diverse meanings of ‘community’ in the social sciences and ECE. It is clear from these debates that the notion of ‘community’ is complex and not easily defined. It is also evident that the term ‘community’ is used with varying meanings within the ECE sector. As a consequence of reviewing this literature, this study focuses primarily on exploring the question ‘What does ‘community’ mean?’ and in particular, how teachers in a typical non-community-based ECE centre view the notion of ‘community’. It is evident from this review that a case study methodology that utilises Rogoff’s three planes of activity will allow for a sound examination of the context of a non-community owned ECE centre, including the extent to which teachers’ views are reflected within centre practices and align with the views of centre parents and the manager. In addition, this review has suggested a methodology that also explores the extent to which the three orientations to ‘community’ identified in this literature review are reflected within teachers’ views of ‘community’.

The following chapter outlines the methodology used within this study, including its theoretical underpinnings, the case study methodology, methods of data analysis, ethical considerations and validity of this research.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology used in this study. This includes an outline of the theoretical basis to this qualitative research, the case study methodology, and the approach taken to analyse the research data. In addition, ethical considerations and the validity of this research are discussed.

The research problem and questions for this study have been derived from an examination of the literature in the area [see Chapter 2]. Consequently, the problem that this research intends to investigate is, ‘How teachers in a typical non-community-based ECE centre view the notion of ‘community’’. The following specific questions emerged from this research problem:

- 1) How do teachers in this ECE centre view the notion of ‘community’?
- 2) To what extent are the three orientations to ‘community’ – ‘Developing ‘community’ within the ECE centre’; ‘Children’s engagement with the ‘wider community’; and, ‘Centres promoting ‘wider community’ well-being’ – reflected within teachers’ views of ‘community’?
- 3) How are teachers’ views of ‘community’ reflected within centre practices?
- 4) To what extent do teachers’ views of ‘community’ align with the views of parents and of management?
- 5) To what extent are teachers’ views of ‘community’ aligned with the philosophy, policy and planning documents of the ECE centre?

3.1. Qualitative Research

This research draws on sociocultural theory and the work of Rogoff (1984, 1995) in particular. From a sociocultural perspective, individuals actively seek to construct understandings of the world and “develop subjective meanings of their experiences” (Cresswell, 2003, p. 8) within their own historic, cultural and social contexts. These understandings of the world cannot be understood by looking at individuals in isolation but must also consider the wider sociocultural/historical contexts in which those meanings are negotiated (Rogoff, 1995). As Rogoff (1984, p. 4) highlights:

Central to the everyday contexts in which cognitive activity occurs is interaction with other people and use of socially provided tools and schemas for solving problems. Cognitive activity is socially defined, interpreted, and supported.

Drawing on this theoretical base, this exploratory study utilises a qualitative, interpretive approach in order to “uncover the lived reality or constructed meanings of the research participants” (Mutch, 2005, p. 43). A case study methodology has been employed to allow for in-depth, rich, descriptive, contextually-based data gathering to capture the complex and multi-layered elements (Merriam, 2009) involved in shaping the way teachers in an ECE centre view the notion of ‘community’.

Rogoff’s (1984, 1995) ‘planes of activity’ provides a framework for informing data gathering and analysis to ensure that these institutional and interpersonal aspects of the sociocultural context are considered alongside those of the individual. In order to understand the complexities inherent in any sociocultural activity, Rogoff (1984, 1995) proposes the use of three planes as the basis for analysis; the personal/intrapersonal, interpersonal and institutional/community plane. The personal plane of activity focuses on the individual alone, while the interpersonal plane shifts the focus to consider interrelationships and interactions between individuals, including social practices. The institutional plane provides a wider lens, focusing on the cultural, physical and historical context in which the sociocultural activity occurs. These three planes, then, provide a framework for examining different aspects of a given context so that each plane can be foregrounded without losing sight of the other two planes and “their inherent interdependence in the whole” (Rogoff, 1995, p. 2).

3.2. Case Study

a) Case study methodology. The methodology used for this research is a single case study of a ‘typical’ non-community-based teacher-led ECE centre. A case study approach allows the researcher to gain a rich descriptive insight into the particular case being studied (Cresswell, 2003; Lichtman, 2010). This case study could best be described as ‘heuristic’ – Merriam (2009) describes heuristic research as an illumination of our understanding of the phenomenon under study. As Stake (1981, as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 44) explains:

Previously unknown relationships and variables can be expected to emerge from case studies leading to a rethinking of the phenomenon being studied. Insights into how things get to be the way they are can be expected to result from case studies.

The focus of a case study is on gaining an in-depth understanding of the case itself, and acknowledges the uniqueness of that particular case. Lichtman (2010) notes that for case studies “as with other approaches to qualitative research, generalisation is not expected or viable” (p. 84). However, as ECE services in New Zealand operate within similar historical, social and political contexts, an in-depth examination of one ‘typical’ ECE centre is likely to generate valuable insights for other early childhood settings.

b) Case study selection. As this study has sought to understand the views of teachers in a ‘typical’ non-community-based ECE setting, rather than study an example of extemporary practice, it was appropriate to use a ‘purposive’ (i.e., fits the purpose), ‘typical’ sample (Mutch, 2005). With typical sampling, “the site is specifically selected because it is not in any major way atypical, extreme, deviant, or intensely unusual” (Patton, 2002, as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 87). Due to the constraints of this study (in terms of academic scope, time and funding), ‘convenience sampling’ (Mutch, 2005) has also been used. For the sake of expediency, only ECE services within the lower North Island region were considered. As Mutch (2005) notes, while convenience sampling might compromise the search for the perfect example in favour of one that is easier to access, it will still provide useful data to illuminate the phenomenon of interest.

The criteria for the selection of this ‘typical’ case study centre were: location; ownership; type (teacher-led, centre-based, full-day, sessional); and number of licenced child spaces. Using the latest *Directory of Early Childhood Services* from the *Education Counts* website (<http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/directories/early-childhood-services>), ECE centres were filtered based on:

- *City* – limiting this to one particular lower North Island town only;
- *Authority* – limiting this to ‘privately owned’ services only; and,
- *Institution type* – limiting to ‘Education and Care’ services only.

Of the centres remaining, the majority catered for children from birth to five years of age, so centres with no under two-year-olds enrolled were excluded. For those centres remaining, the average ‘maximum licensed places’ was 51.8. Based on this, the final pool of potential services was limited to those with maximum licensed places of between 40 and 60 children. From here, I excluded centres where I had close connections with teachers or managers (such as those I have current students working in). This left three ECE centres. I then rang the managers of two of these centres in turn inviting them to express an interest in being involved in this research.

The manager of the second centre expressed an interest in being involved and agreed to participate in this study after a meeting to discuss my research and what it would involve. This meeting included a discussion of the Manager Information Sheet and Manager Consent Form [see Appendices A & B]. Once the centre manager had agreed for her centre to partake in this study, all teachers working directly with children (both qualified and unqualified) employed in the centre for more than 30 hours per week were invited to participate in this study and were provided with a Teacher Information Sheet and Teacher Consent Form [see Appendices C & D]. Limiting teacher interviews to those working over 30 hours per week helped to ensure that the teachers I interviewed were fully involved within the centre. Six teachers agreed to take part. In addition, eight centre parents were invited to take part, selected in consultation with the centre manager, and they were provided with Parent Information Sheets and Parent Consent Forms [see Appendices E & F]. Six parents agreed to participate.

c) Research site and participants. The research site of this case study is one ECE centre in the lower North Island, and the participants of the study include six teachers, the centre manager and a focus group of six parents. Details of this research setting and participants are provided below.

The ECE centre. The ECE centre used in this case study has been given the pseudonym ‘Kaha Kids’ and key features of the centre are detailed in the table below:

Ownership	Privately owned, education and care centre
Location	Located in a commercial area of the town centre
Opening hours	7.30am to 6.00pm
Maximum licenced places	50 children, with up to 25 under two-year-olds
Number of enrolled children	43
Ethnic composition of enrolled children	NZ European/Pākehā – 24, Māori – 11, Cook Island Māori – 3, Other ethnic groups – 5
Classrooms	3 main rooms divided into the following age ranges: 0 to 18 months, 18 months to 3 years, 3 to 5 years
Reported ratios of staff to children	Under 2s – 1:4, Over 2s – 1:5
Staffing	1 manager, 7 full-time teachers, 4 part-time support teachers, 1 cook.
Percentage of qualified teachers	Over 80%
Age of the centre	2 years

Table 1: Research site details

Teachers. Six teachers participated in this study, all female. These teachers each selected their own pseudonym from a list of popular children's names. The following table provides details of each participant; however, details that may reveal the identity of these teachers have been excluded:

Teacher Pseudonym	Age Range	ECE Teaching Qualification	ECE Teaching Experience	Hours Worked
<i>Lily</i>	20 – 29 years	Yes	2 – 5 years	Full time
<i>Sophie</i>	20 – 29 years	No	2 – 5 years	Full time
<i>Olivia</i>	30 – 39 years	Yes	1 – 2 years	Full time
<i>Emily</i>	40 – 49 years	Yes	2 – 5 years	Full time
<i>Sharon</i>	40 – 49 years	Yes	5 – 10 years	Full time
<i>Georgia</i>	40 – 49 years	Yes	10 – 20 years	Full time

Table 2: Teacher participant details

Centre manager. The centre manager selected the pseudonym, Louise. Louise is in her forties and has an ECE teaching qualification. She has over twenty years experience in ECE, including teaching, management and professional development roles. Within her role as centre manager of Kaha Kids, Louise has overall

responsibility for day-to-day operations within the centre, while the centre owners provide governance and management support.

Manager Pseudonym	Age Range	ECE Teaching Qualification	ECE Teaching Experience	Hours Worked
<i>Louise</i>	40 – 49 years	Yes	20+ years	Full time

Table 3: Centre manager details

Centre parents. The six parents who agreed to take part in a focus group interview comprised three mothers and three fathers of children enrolled in Kaha Kids ECE centre. Rather than pseudonyms, these parents are referred to as Parent 1 through to Parent 6. Five parents have one child attending Kaha Kids centre full-time, and one parent has two children attending full-time. All had been involved with Kaha Kids ECE centre for at least one year.

3.3. Methods of Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured individual interviews with six teachers and the centre manager, a focus group interview with a group of centre parents, and an analysis of centre documents. Brief observations were also carried out over an afternoon to gain a better understanding of the centre routines.

a) Semi-structured interviews. Individual semi-structured interviews were used to develop an understanding of the teachers' and the centre manager's views of 'community'. The benefits of using interviews is that it allows the researcher to gather data that can not be observed, including feelings, thoughts, intentions and understandings (Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured interviews allowed for specific questions to be asked while also providing space for a broader exploration of thoughts and ideas.

A set of five questions provided a basis for the semi-structured interviews with teachers and centre manager. These questions were piloted before being used. Feedback from this pilot resulted in some minor changes to these questions. In particular, question 2 was altered to broaden the focus from parent participation only to 'community within the centre'. The following key questions provided the basis for the semi-structured interviews with both teachers and centre manager [also see Appendix G – Individual Interview Schedule]:

- i) People talk about ‘community’ in early childhood education. What does ‘community’ mean to you?
- ii) What are your views on developing ‘community’ within your centre? (e.g. with teachers, children, families ...). How might you see this happen in practice?
- iii) What are your views on promoting children’s engagement with the ‘wider community’? How might you see this happen in practice?
- iv) What are your views on the centres’ role in promoting ‘wider community’ well-being? How might you see this happen in practice?
- v) Revisiting the first question ‘What does ‘community’ mean to you?’, is there anything you would like to add? Are there any other ways that you can see your views of ‘community’ might be reflected in practice?

Each interview was digitally recorded and then transcribed [see Appendix H – Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement]. ‘Member checking’ (Mutch, 2005) was used, whereby individual interview participants were then provided with a transcript of their interview to check it accurately reflected their views, and given the opportunity to revise any of their comments. One teacher responded to clarify a statement made in her interview.

b) Focus group interview. A one-hour focus group interview was undertaken with a group of six centre parents in order to gain an insight into their perspectives on ‘community’ in ECE. Parent views provide a valuable window into the institutional and interpersonal planes of activity [see Section 3.4, b)] in this ECE centre, as the views of parents’ shapes the broader context as well as the relationships within the centre in which teachers’ views are held. An advantage of a focus group is that it allows for the views of a number of individual to be captured in one interview (Lichtman, 2010). Interaction within the group can “also trigger thoughts and ideas amongst participants that do not emerge during an individual interview” (Lichtman, 2010, p. 154).

A semi-structured interview approach was used for this focus group interview using key questions based on those used for the teacher and management interviews [see Appendix I – Focus Group Interview Schedule]. The researcher conducted the focus group interview and a research assistant was also present to make notes of key aspects of the discussion [see Appendix J – Assistant Confidentiality Agreement]. A

digital recording of this focus group interview was also made. Members of the parent focus group were provided with a summary of the main points discussed to check that these provided an agreed reflection of the group discussion.

c) Documents. As Merriam (2009) notes, “documents are, in fact, a ready-made source of data easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator” (p. 139). For the purposes of this study, documents such as the centre philosophy, policies, and pedagogical documents present a public face of the centre and provide a valuable window into the institutional plane of the setting. An examination of these documents provides insights into the extent to which teachers’ views of ‘community’ are aligned with the centre’s philosophy, policies and pedagogical documentation.

d) Observations. Merriam (2009) points out that “observational data represent a first-hand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a second-hand account of the world obtained in an interview” (p. 117). Because the focus of this research is on teachers’ views, rather than teachers’ practice, observations of teachers’ practice were planned only if anything emerged from the individual and focus group interviews or centre documents that would be useful to observe in practice. As a result, it was decided to undertake brief observations only, focussing on gaining a better understanding of daily centre routines.

e) Data management and storage. The interviews were electronically recorded and then transcribed. I then checked each transcription against the recording to ensure each transcription provided an accurate record of what was said. The focus group discussion was also electronically recorded and an assistant took notes of key themes that emerged from the focus group discussion. The electronic recording was then transcribed and edited alongside the recorded notes to gain an accurate (or as accurate as possible) record of the discussion that took place. All documentation has been stored in password protected electronic files and in a locked filing cabinet and will be held for five years before being permanently deleted or destroyed.

3.4. Data Analysis

a) Thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is commonly used as a method for identifying and analysing qualitative data and, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), “provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data” (p. 78). Broadly, thematic analysis involves examining research data to identify “repeated patterns of meaning” (p. 86).

Drawing on the work of Bazeley (2013) and Braun and Clarke (2006), the following process was utilised to analyse data generated from the teacher interviews:

Phase	Description of the Process
1. Familiarisation with the data	Checking the transcribed teacher interviews, reading and re-reading, recording my initial thoughts and impressions.
2. Generating, labelling, defining initial codes	Coding interesting features in a systematic way across all teacher interviews, collating extracts relevant to each code, labelling and providing a brief definition for each code. Codes were then reviewed and refined.
3. Focused coding. Searching for themes	Collating codes into clusters and potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis. Reviewing and refining themes.
5. Defining and naming themes	On-going analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.

Table 4: Phases of thematic analysis (adapted from Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87).

After completing this thematic analysis of the teacher interviews, the entire data set (including the centre manager interview, the parent focus group interview, and the documentation and observations) was analysed in light of the themes identified from the teacher interviews. Rogoff’s (1984, 1995) three planes of activity was utilised as a framework and focus for this analysis. This is explained further below.

b) Planes of activity. Rogoff’s (1984, 1995) three planes of activity have been used as a framework for analysing the various layers and dimensions of the case study setting, focussing on the personal, interpersonal and institutional planes of activity. The use of this framework allows for each layer or plane of the ECE centre to be foregrounded and back-grounded without losing sight of the dynamic relationships between them. According to Rogoff (1995):

Research resulting from this approach emphasizes observing both similarities and differences across varying sociocultural activities, as well as tracking the relations among aspects of events viewed in different planes of analysis. (p. 154)

The following table highlights, for each plane of activity, which data sets have been examined and the specific research question/s that analysis addresses on each plane:

Plane of Activity	Focus of Analysis	Related Research Questions
<i>Personal Plane</i>	Individual teacher interviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do teachers in this ECE centre view the notion of ‘community’?
<i>Interpersonal Plane</i>	Individual teacher interviews, centre manager interview, parent focus group interview, planning documents, observations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent do teachers’ views of ‘community’ align with the views of parents and of management? • How are teachers’ views of ‘community’ reflected within centre practices?
<i>Institutional Plane</i>	Individual teacher interviews, centre manager interview, parent focus group interview, centre philosophy and policy documents, planning documents, observations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent are teachers’ views of ‘community’ aligned with the philosophy, policy and planning documents of the ECE centre?

Table 5: Data analysis using Rogoff’s three planes of activity

3.5. Ethical Considerations

As this research involves human participants, including data gathered from interviews, ethical approval was gained from the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee (HEC), and complies with the university’s Human Ethics Policy and HEC Guidelines [see Appendix K – Ethical Approval]. Although, as Cullen, Hedges and Bone (2011) note, “participation in formal ethics review procedures does not negate the researcher’s responsibility to engage in on-going ethical decision making” (p. 123). The ethical framework for planning, undertaking and disseminating research in early childhood settings, developed by Cullen et al. (2011), was also used to support ethical decision-making throughout this research. This ethical framework draws on universal ethical principles (such as informed,

voluntary consent and participation, respect for persons, privacy and confidentiality, minimising harm and maximising benefits, and social and cultural sensitivity), and also emphasises the important role of relationships that are central to any early childhood setting, and therefore to any early childhood research setting. As Cullen et al. (2011) conclude, “a relationships perspective is particularly important for small scale qualitative studies in a single setting” (p. 124).

a) Researcher’s approach and behaviour. Lichtman (2010) highlights the importance of researchers developing a trusting environment, while at the same time being “sensitive to the power that they hold over participants” (p. 56). This is particularly important in a case study, as participants need to trust that what they share will not harm or disadvantage them in any way. Being open and honest with participants helps to build trust and balance power within this research relationship (Cullen et al., 2011), and as an outsider to the ECE centre used in this study, I was conscious of the need to be open and honest with all participants. I ensured there was time for participants to ask questions at any stage during data gathering, and in particular, before each interview.

It is important to respect information shared by participants. As Mutch (2005) explains, researchers need to be clear about the focus of their research and to consider what to do with the information they gain that exceeds the boundaries of this focus. Key questions were used to keep the semi-structured teacher and parent group interviews focussed. Information shared beyond the scope of these questions has not been referred to in these research findings. ‘Member checking’ (Mutch, 2005) was also used, where transcriptions of individual interviews and the main themes arising from the focus group interview were shared with participants to ensure they accurately reflect participants’ views.

b) Impact of this research for this centre. According to Cullen et al. (2011), “all research activity must be good use of teachers’ time and have benefits for the centre” (p. 126). Research can be intrusive, not only in terms of time and space but on the personal lives of participants (Lichtman, 2010). For the purposes of this study, I needed to be conscious of my impact on the case study centre as a whole as well as on individuals within it, and sought to minimise this where possible. As an exploratory case study, this research has focused on gaining a fuller understanding of teachers’ views of ‘community’ rather than exploring the impact of any change to the centre

environment or practices. As such, the impact of this research is intentionally minimal. The centre manager was able to roster her staff to allow me to interview teachers with the least disruption to centre routines. I also ensured interviews were kept focussed and did not extend beyond the agreed times.

During my discussion with the centre manager during the selection of this centre, the manager highlighted that this centre was currently in the process of reviewing its philosophy and the focus of my research would be valuable in promoting further discussion and reflection amongst the teaching team on the concept of 'community'. During individual interviews, several teachers noted that the questions asked had made them think and consider perspectives that they had not thought about previously. In addition, a summary of these research findings will be provided for the centre manager and made available for both teachers and parents. In this way, it is hoped that this research will contribute to the on-going professional reflection and discussion within this centre and as such have a positive impact.

c) Participation and voluntary informed consent. Voluntary informed consent is an essential part of ethical practice in any educational research. When gaining consent, participants must be provided with, and fully understand, all the information needed to make an informed decision, and must be able to make a free choice without pressure or coercion (Cohen et al., 2007; Springer, 2010).

Gaining informed consent involved first meeting with the centre manager to discuss the research. Information Sheets [see Appendices A, C & E] and Consent Forms [see Appendices B, D & F] were then provided for the manager, teachers and a group of parents selected by the manager, along with an invitation to take part in this study.

While anonymity of individuals cannot be assured, I have endeavoured to protect the identity of both the centre and the individuals involved by removing all identifying information from my records and using pseudonyms for the ECE centre and individual participants. This has been negotiated with the centre manager and with participants as part of the informed consent process.

With a case study, completely protecting the identity of participants is difficult if not impossible. Within close teams, individuals can work out who said what, or perhaps more potentially harmful, guess who said what. This issue was managed by discussing this with each participant and explaining the steps I would take to protect

their and the centre's identity. Moreover, I pointed out that they also needed to be aware of the implications of discussing their own interview responses with others. Finally, participants were able to retract any comments in their interview transcripts that they did not wish to be used in this research.

3.6. Reliability and Validity

Research validity asks the question, 'How trustworthy is this research?' For the results of this research to genuinely be trustworthy, the reader needs to have confidence that it has been undertaken in a rigorous way. As Kvale (1989) points out, "to validate is to investigate, to check, to question, and to theorize. All of these activities are integral components of qualitative inquiry that insure rigor" (as cited in Morse, 2002, p. 19). Validity is therefore reflected not only in the design of the research (as outlined in this chapter) but also relies on the researcher to carry out the research in an open, honest and reflective way. As Merriam (1998) highlights, a qualitative researcher's personal qualities should include the ability to tolerate ambiguity, be a sensitive observer and analyst, and be a good communicator.

Several processes support the validity of this research. As this study has been undertaken as part of a Masters programme, there has been on-going supervision and feedback through the Victoria University of Wellington research processes, including peer reviewing of the research proposal, ethics approval processes, and on-going supervisor feedback and advice. However, as Morse (2002) highlights, "it is the researcher's creativity, sensitivity, flexibility and skill in using the verification strategies that determines the reliability and validity of the evolving study" (p. 17). This kind of 'investigator responsiveness' (Morse, 2002) has been supported by on-going communication with others, and particularly my supervisor. In addition, during the analysis stage, reading and re-reading data, reviewing and revisiting coding and themes, as well as utilising sound theoretical frameworks (such as Rogoff's (1984, 1995) three planes of activity [see Section 3.4]), have assisted my reflective and critical engagement with the data.

Further processes utilised to ensure the reliability of the research data, include close checking of transcribed interviews to ensure accuracy and 'member checking' (Mutch, 2005) to ensure that the transcribed interviews accurately reflected the participants' views. Triangulation (Cohen et al., 2007) was also utilised to increase

the internal validity of data, allowing for a degree of ‘cross checking’ between data sets. In this case, in addition to teacher interviews, data has been gathered through interviews with the centre manager and parents, as well as an examination of centre documents and observations.

3.7. Summary

This chapter has outlined the qualitative, exploratory and socioculturally-based case-study methodology that has been used to guide this research, with the intention of making explicit the theoretical, procedural and analytical approaches undertaken while carrying out of this research. Ethical considerations and the reliability and validity of this research have also been discussed. The following chapter outlines the main finding of this study.

Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter presents the key findings of this case study and utilises Rogoff's (1984, 1995) 'three planes of activity' as an analytical framework [see Section 3.4, b)]. This approach allows the personal plane (focussing on teacher's views), the interpersonal plane (focussing on teacher practices and the views of the centre manager and parents), and the institutional plane (focussing on the centre's guiding documents, vision, location, design and routines) to each be foregrounded in turn, while keeping the other planes "in the background but taken into account" (Rogoff, 1995, p. 154). In this way the views of individuals, the relationship between individuals and their practices, and wider institutional influences on teachers' views have been illuminated, providing a holistic understanding of teachers' views on the notion of 'community' within the context of this case study centre.

4.1. Personal Plane of Activity

In the personal plane of activity attention is focused on the views expressed by teachers in this ECE centre (given the pseudonym Kaha Kids). In particular, analysis on this personal plane addresses the first specific research question: "How do teachers in this ECE centre view the notion of 'community'?" The views of the six teachers interviewed (Georgia, Sophie, Lily, Emily, Olivia, and Sharon – not their real names) fall broadly into three areas; 'community is place', 'community is people', and 'community is connections'.

a) Community is place. The idea of 'community' as something that is grounded in 'place' is reflected in a range of views expressed by teachers in this ECE centre. Underlying this view is the idea that 'community' is something that can be identified in terms of location. Two broad themes emerge within this view of 'community is place'; first, that 'community' is defined in relation to location; and secondly, that 'community' is a source of resources that we can utilise.

Community is location-based. Georgia, Sophie, Lily, and Olivia described 'community' in relation to location, including describing 'community' as: something that is external to the ECE centre (Georgia); where we live including the towns, and regions we live in (Sophie); through to, the whole of our society including the

physical, social and organisational environment and resources (Lily and Olivia). For example:

I think the community is obviously the wider community outside of the centre.
(Georgia 2.1.1)

For me the community is like [the] whole [of] society, like hospital, like government, like, I mean, the city council and even playground, dining places.
It's all the things. (Olivia 2.1)

All four teachers described 'community' on a local and national level rather than seeing 'community' from an international or global perspective. Sophie also felt that people could belong to several places, and so several 'communities' at the same time:

Yeah, definitely they're part of our centre's community really and they're also part of like [the lower North Island region] community. So I guess there's lots of different communities. (Sophie 3.8.2)

Lily's view of 'community' also includes a strong focus on the physical as well as the social environment, describing 'community' as including people, places and things:

It's a society of where one's living so like it could be, it's not just the people in it, it's the places, the things, it's everything that makes up that environment of where we are living. (Lily 2.1)

Here, Lily's view echoes the *Te Whāriki: New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum* principle of Relationships – Ngā Hononga, which emphasises children learning through "responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places, and things" (Ministry of Education, 1996a, p. 43).

Community is a resource. The idea that the 'community' beyond the ECE centre is the source of resources that can be utilised is reflected in all teachers' responses to varying degrees. Teachers felt the local environment offered a wide range of facilities, resources and services that they utilised to expand the range of experiences they could provide for children, and to support their own teaching.

All six teachers felt that excursions into the 'local community' add variety to children's experiences, providing opportunities that children may not otherwise have. Teachers discussed a range of places that they take children, including parks,

playground, supermarket, shopping mall, Mitre 10, a church, library, school, police station, dentist, a children's gym and a local post box.

Most children attend this ECE centre full-time, and Sophie, Georgia and Emily all felt that children attending full-time were less likely to spend time in the 'local community' with their families and therefore trips into the local environment provide these children experiences they may otherwise miss out on. As Sophie explains, "So I guess if their parents don't really take them out often they get those opportunities here at the centre" (Sophie 4.2.3). Sophie, Georgia and Emily also highlighted that the ECE centre itself can only provide a finite range of resources and places for children to experience. Therefore, excursions into the local environment, beyond the centre, broaden children's experiences. Again, this was seen to be particularly important for children attending full-time. As Emily explains, "Because it's, because it's showing them what else is out there. 'Cause I think a lot of the time they're in the car from home to here, from the car in the car park into the room" (Emily 4.6.1).

Simply getting out of the centre and going for a walk around the block was something that four teachers (Lily, Emily, Sophie, Sharon) clearly valued. They described these walks as having no specific purpose or goal, but were more about 'just getting out' and taking their time to explore the local environment. For example:

But also yeah just getting the children out into the community, even the local community, just walk around the block seeing the buildings, the things that are available for them to have a look at. (Lily 3.1.2)

For most teachers (Georgia, Lily, Sophie, Sharon and Olivia), the local environment, outside the early childhood centre, provides valuable resources that teachers draw on to enhance children's learning and development. This includes trips into the 'local community' as well as organising visitors to come into the centre. Georgia and Lily, for example, valued excursions from the centre as a way of extending children's interests. They felt the local environment offered additional resources that can be used to extend children's interests including the ability to experience things in real-life:

... and it also helps develop their interests at the time. A lot of our excursions when we go in the Kaha Kids¹ van are based around the children's interests at the time so it's extending that and letting them have those connections. (Georgia 4.1.4)

Sophie and Olivia also felt that experiencing the world outside the centre is important for building children's social skills and confidence along with belief in their ability to cope and be safe in the wider world. As Sophie explains:

Yeah. I do think it's important definitely because when they get older they're gonna need those skills I think, especially social skills and not being afraid of going out into public spaces; I think that's really important um, for them. (Sophie 4.3.1)

Georgia, Lily, Sharon and Olivia also described bringing 'community' resources and services into the centre to provide specific learning resources, health services and professional development for teachers as well as children. For example, they talked about visits from the library, community support services such as Plunket, Group Special Education, and professional development providers. Georgia in particular emphasised that drawing on services from outside the centre was vital to the effective functioning and success of the centre.

... You know we need those strengths and the knowledge base and everything of all those other people out there to make our job and to make the children happy and the families happy and to give them meaningful learning, you know. Yeah definitely I think yeah, I think it's vital to be honest. (Georgia 6.2.1)

Finally, having a presence within the 'local community' helped to build the profile of Kaha Kids ECE centre. Lily, Emily, Sophie and Georgia all expressed the view that it was important to develop a positive public profile for Kaha Kids in the local area in order to promote the centre's good reputation and to attract new families to the centre. For example:

And we want to portray a positive view of our centre because it is important for the community to know who we are. Well not for them to know who we are, but for them to see us as a really cool place and maybe want to bring their children along too. For the sort of expanding. (Lily 5.7)

¹ Kaha Kids is a pseudonym for the case study ECE centre

Sophie also noted that consulting with families outside the centre (in the ‘wider community’) as well as families already enrolled in the centre was important for developing a successful centre. This view reflects the importance of considering the needs of potential families in the ‘local community’ as well as those already attending the centre:

‘Cause I guess when we try and get those new families in we do have to think about them and we do have to, well, cater for them as, yeah. We have to think about them as well. We have to include them, not just the families that we have here. ... (Sophie 5.1)

From this perspective, the ‘local community’ was also seen not only as influencing the centre’s good reputation, but also as a source of new families to support the centre’s on-going growth.

In sum, teachers expressed the view that ‘community is place’, and that people, resources, organisational structures and the physical environment belong to a ‘community’ if they are located within the physical bounds of that ‘community’. It is the location or place, they propose, that determines membership to that ‘community’.

b) Community is people. The second view of ‘community’ reflected in the views of teachers in this ECE centre is the idea that it is people (as opposed to place) who make ‘community’. From this perspective, teachers’ felt a ‘community’ exists where there is a group of people who share a common focus or purpose, and as such the families, children and teachers who belong to the ECE centre are members of the Kaha Kids ‘centre community’. In addition, teachers’ felt that the relationships that people form with each other within the ECE ‘centre community’ are central to developing a ‘sense of community’.

Community is people with a shared focus. Emily and Sophie described ‘community’ in terms of people. For Emily, a ‘community’ is a group of people who come together with a common focus, concern or interest. As Emily explained:

Okay, so community to me would be, sort of, a group of people probably with something in common, or with a common interest. Or who may end up being together through a situation. (Emily 2.1)

Sophie also echoed this view, expanding on her view about ‘community as place’ to add: “So I guess um, oh what’s the word, like, a group of people who work or work together, I guess, is a community. I would think that” (Sophie 6.1.2). From this

perspective, living in a particular place is not what defines a ‘community’; rather, it is people who are connected to each other through a shared focus that create a ‘community’.

The ECE centre is a community. All six teachers referred to the Kaha Kids centre as a ‘community’ in itself, comprising of the enrolled children, their parents and extended family (whānau), and the centre staff, particularly the teachers. As Sharon explains, “Even your extended whānau. Even people in here. Like the three rooms that we have here, we are all community and you know, when we come together and that” (Sharon 2.2.1). For Georgia and Emily, the Kaha Kids ‘community’ also extends to include other early childhood centres in the region that were under the same ownership and with whom they shared professional development. As Georgia notes, “And our sort of other centres as well, like our other [Kaha Kids] centres, yeah” (Georgia 2.1.3).

Several teachers positioned enrolled children and their families as central to the ECE ‘centre community’. For Emily and Sophie, enrolled children are the shared focus that brings the ‘centre community’ of families and teachers together and are therefore the reason the ECE ‘centre community’ exists. For example, Emily notes, “Yeah. So of course the children here would be, yeah, they’re at that core of the community” (Emily 3.6). In a similar vein, Georgia and Lily explained that their ECE centre exists because of the families that use it. As Georgina put it, “Okay. I think it’s really important. I think the whānau and families are vital to our, our jobs. Without their children we wouldn’t have a job” (Georgia 3.1.1).

Relationships build a ‘sense of community’. All of the teachers in this study spoke extensively about relationships, highlighting the central role that relationships play in developing a ‘sense of community’ within the early childhood centre. When considering how they developed ‘community’ within their centre, all teachers focussed primarily on the importance of relationships with parents and whānau, but some also referred to relationships with children and with other teachers.

Emily expressed very clear views about the central role of relationships in building a ‘sense of community’ within the ECE centre. For her, simply belonging to a group is not enough; meaningful relationships are central to creating an effective ‘community’:

But if you don't have those relationships with the parents initially you've got a community but it might just be a community in name rather than actually functioning as a community because you don't have that feel and the, the relationships and that between each other. (Emily 3.2.2)

This central importance of relationships with families is echoed by all six teachers, with most teachers describing the importance of developing 'genuine', 'closer' and 'very strong' relationships with parents and whānau. Teachers' discussed the importance of continually working on developing these relationships, and on building trust and respect. For example:

Well it's the, develop relationships obviously, and that. And having closer relationships and probably about trust and all that, that all comes in with it. (Sharon 3.3)

... And it is genuine and you're not just sort of doing the community thing by, by being polite and saying hi and, and that; that you actually want them to be a part and feel at home. (Emily 3.8)

Georgia, Sharon, Sophie and Olivia all emphasised supporting families to feel included and comfortable within the centre and with teachers. In addition, Olivia discussed the inclusion of children's wider family members, particularly grandparents within the centre. For example: "Also yeah, not just the parents we involve all the whānau, like nana, the grandparents to the centre because they have much [more] time for the children" (Olivia 6.18). Teachers also clearly value and enjoy the relationships they develop with families, as Sophie's comment highlights:

And we also do, well I believe do very, we build very strong relationships with the parents and whānau here, which is really cool as well. They do, like we're, if we open up to them they open up to us and then we just, like it's really cool how we do build those relationships. So we're always working on it I guess. (Sophie 6.7.2)

Four of the six teachers (Georgia, Sharon, Sophie and Olivia) talked about working in partnership with parents and families and explained the central role they play in supporting families to raise their children. Developing open and trusting relationships with families is therefore very important, and these teachers' value the involvement of families and their input into their children's learning. As Georgina explains, "You know that we value their input and their attendance and things. That

we want them to be part of their children's learning journey" (Georgia 3.6.2). Sophie and Olivia also emphasised the importance of respecting parents' views in relation to their children's education and care, as well as understanding their expectations and cultural perspectives. For example:

... 'cause we do value what the families do say to us and what advice they do give or what their expectations are. That does have quite a huge impact on what we do ... (Sophie 6.15.1)

For Sharon and Olivia, building relationships with families is also important in helping them to develop more holistic understandings of each child. Understanding the whole child, including their family and cultural backgrounds and experiences beyond the centre, then helps teachers to better support assessment and planning for children. As Sharon explains:

And then it gives us an understanding of, you know, what, where our children come from and all that and so we just want to know that. It is really important too. You know, like planning and, you know, learning about each other and their cultures and all that kind of stuff. Really important actually. (Sharon 3.2)

Emily provided another perspective, explaining the importance of providing wider support for families. Emily felt the relationships that teachers have with parents goes beyond focussing on the provision of care and education for children to also providing wider emotional support. As she explains:

Like for us, our community here we can support the parents in what they're doing. So from a parents' perspective they may see us as providing a service but also as supporting them if they're going through a difficult time or something like that. So it's that side of things. (Emily 6.2)

In addition, Emily highlighted that the early childhood centre provided a base from which parents can meet and develop relationships with other parents. Emily felt teachers play an important role in this as they support new parents to enter the 'centre community'; and parents who feel comfortable in the centre then begin to develop relationships with each other. In this way, the 'centre community' provides wider social support for families. As Emily describes:

Yeah, with the individuals and then, and as you get to know those individuals a bit more and the other parents see each other, you're introducing the parents to each other, they can make those connections or something so that's just, so that it's building up. (Emily 3.2.1)

For Emily, this wider social connection between families also extends to children as parents go on to organise play dates for their children outside of the centre.

As well as developing relationships with parents, teachers also discussed developing relationships with children as well as within the teaching team itself. Sophie, Emily and Olivia considered the importance of developing trusting relationships with children in the centre. Sophie also felt that developing relationships with children helped her to develop relationships with their parents:

... We work very closely with the children and then they get to trust us and know us and then that makes the parents more comfortable in talking to us as well. So it's a work in progress all the time. (Sophie 6.7.3)

Emily also explained, children need to be introduced to visitors and new members of the centre and to develop relationships with others in the centre (children and adults):

And with the children too. I like to make a point of that. If somebody new is coming into the room, saying to the children, "This is so and so, they're going to spend a bit of time in our room," and then letting that person know who the children are just around in that little small group so that they feel that this person's come in here and is okay and a part of, of now entering the groups. (Emily 3.7.2)

Emily, Olivia, Sophie and Georgia also talked about relationships amongst the teaching team. They felt that building relationships; both professional and social, sharing ideas and supporting each other, facilitated a strong team and helped to ensure they were all on the same page. As Olivia explains:

Because for me it's like, when we [are] working we need to know what your colleagues' philosophy or strategy [is] for the children. You need to understand each other, and [this] will be beneficial when you are working together. (Olivia 3.6.1)

Both Emily and Georgia described the teaching team as a 'community' in itself, brought together by their shared focus of working with children and their families, and supported by the way they engage with each other. As Georgia explains, "We are

also a ‘community’ because we bounce ideas off each other, we work together. You know we are always doing professional development together” (Georgia 3.2.2).

In sum, teacher’s reflected a view of ‘community as people’ emphasising the idea that a ‘community’ is defined and shaped by people. Here, teachers’ felt that it is the shared focus of the group, rather than location, that identifies membership of the ‘community’. As such, teachers saw the early childhood centre itself as providing a focus that unites parents, teachers and children as a ‘community’. In addition, all teachers positioned relationships as a central element of a ‘community’ of people. These relationships are vital to developing a ‘sense of community’, or as Emily put it, “... actually functioning as a community” (Emily 3.2.2). While teachers considered relationships with each other and with children, their primary focus was in the relationships they developed with parents and whānau of the children enrolled in tier centre.

c) Community is connections. This third broad view of ‘community’ expressed by teachers in this study emphasises connections, both between individuals and between people and the environment. In many ways this view of ‘community’ echoes aspects of the views of ‘community’ discussed already – ‘community is place’ and ‘community is people’. However, from this perspective the teachers’ position individuals as inseparable from their social and physical contexts. It is the connection we have with others and to places that is central to this idea of ‘community’. This view of ‘community’ encompasses connections with people as well as connections with place.

Connections with people. For Emily, Sharon and Olivia, ‘community’ is primarily about connecting with people, both within and outside of the ECE centre, emphasising that what we gain from connecting with others is the most important element of ‘community’. As Emily explains, “But what you get from the community I think is quite important. So it’s the support, it’s that networking” (Emily 6.1). Sharon used the term ‘whānau’ to describe her view of ‘community’, emphasising the connections, relationships and support attained through engaging with others:

No I just think it’s one big old whānau, connecting and building relationships and all that kind of thing, and just supporting each other, and yeah, whether you’re at work or whether you’re at home or in your whānau, yeah. (Sharon 6.1)

Sharon and Olivia also expressed the view that it is our connections with others that shape our identity and make us ‘who we are’. As Sharon explains:

It’s like community around is just like who we are. Yeah. You know, it makes, it makes us who we are. You know like your neighbours and all that. Hooking up with just your neighbour and all that kind of thing that’s like, that’s who we are and we want to know them and all that kind of thing. You know, get to know your neighbours. And probably just the same as whānau here and all that, and the children and that, it’s just getting to know them aye and that kind of stuff. But yeah community is about who we are. I think that actually moulds us to who we are kind of thing, where we all live. (Sharon 2.4)

For Olivia, the child, family, centre, and ‘wider community’ are all parts of a whole, “Because we don’t live individually” (Olivia 4.4). While these elements can be considered individually, each is connected to the other and cannot be separated. As Olivia explained, “We don’t think like the group *is* the community, [it] is a *part of* the community” (Olivia 3.3).

Lily, Emily, Olivia and Sharon reflected the idea that we are all connected and the well-being of children and families enrolled in their centre cannot be separated from the well-being of the ‘wider community’. As Lily puts it, “Because we all live, learn and feed off each other” (Lily 5.4). Emily explained why it is important to consider the well-being of the ‘wider community’ as well as those who belong to the ECE centre:

I think it does because I think that’s a part of the well-being of the child and the family, individually... if things aren’t going well in the wider community, that’s affecting the child, and that affects us. So I think we do have that responsibility to a degree because we’re looking out for those children. (Emily 5.2)

For Sharon, this sense of interconnectedness with the ‘wider community’ is reflected in the idea of mutual support. Sharon explained this in terms of give and take, and described how the Kaha Kids teachers not only utilised resources from the ‘local community’ (beyond the centre) but also gave back to the ‘local community’ in a range of ways. For example:

Just at the back, the fella had some ducklings and all that kind of thing, and you know if we promoted his business, you know like cards say and all that kind of thing, he'll bring over the ducklings and things like that. So yeah it's just that kind of sharing around the community kind of thing, yeah. (Sharon 5.3.2)

Olivia and Emily's views extended on this idea highlighting that caring for others (beyond the centre) is part of our social responsibility as members of society. As Olivia explains, "... because we are, I mean we're ... part of the society" (Olivia 5.4). Emily felt that it was important to instil a sense of caring for others in children, helping children to understand that there are others who are less fortunate, and developing a sense of satisfaction and pride in giving to others in need. As she explains:

But I think most people would like to instil that in children, that caring for others. And for the children to see that yes, they are important to, to ... But there is so much else, so many other people out there, and yeah... (Emily 5.5)

Both Olivia and Emily provided examples of ways the centre had engaged in caring for people in need in the 'wider community', including engaging with Red Nose day fundraising, and a parent who had organised a collection of second-hand toys to donate to a Christmas appeal. Both felt that developing this sense of social responsibility was an area in which their centre could do more.

Connections with place. Five of the six teachers (Sophie, Lily, Emily, Olivia and Sharon) talked about supporting children to develop a sense of connection and belonging within their local environment, particularly through excursions into the local environment (beyond the centre). They felt such trips help children to make sense of their world and shapes their sense of self. Olivia and Lily both felt that experiences in the local environment help children to strengthen their sense of belonging and connection to place. As Lily explains, this supports children to feel "I belong here, this is my community" (Lily 3.11). Both also felt that developing this sense of belonging helps children to understand who they are. For example, Olivia notes:

... I think that's important for children to understand the community. They are finding a sense of belongings and they find their identity, and they feel ... confident around [the] area they live in. (Olivia 4.5)

Lily's views also emphasised the connection we all have with the wider physical environment. Her views reflect ideas of ecological sustainability and developing respect for the environment. Lily emphasised the importance of children developing a sense of belonging and pride in the local environment to which they identify, such as the local river or mountain. From this perspective, the holistic well-being of the individual and the well-being of the natural environment are inseparable. For example:

And then also if you think of ecological niches like they all work within an environment, within a setting, but they feed off each other, they live off each other. So if we look after the tree obviously they're going to give us fruit yeah. So that's the importance of the community and what's in our community. (Lily 4.9)

Lily also related the importance of connections to place to children's pepeha. A pepeha is part of a formal Māori introduction that identifies an individual's ancestral heritage, including people (iwi, hapū, whānau) and significant landmarks, such as their mountain (maunga) and river (awa) (<http://www.maori.org.nz/tikanga/>). Reciting their pepeha is part of the daily routine at Kaha Kids. As Lily explains:

They know that this is their place, this is where they belong, yeah. It is very much a belonging thing and even for their well-being because they are learning about the river, they are learning about their environment. (Lily 4.6)

Lily felt that connections to places in children's pepeha, such as the river and mountain could be strengthen by actually visiting these places with children.

Olivia, Sharon, Lily and Emily felt that excursions into the local area helped children to make sense of their world, including developing an understanding of how they are connected to their wider environment. For example:

And yeah, it's just making sense of their own world, aye. And then, then you give them a little bit more, you know, extension of what's community about and then, you know, you go for those trips and all that kind of stuff. But really it's about what they are connected to and it's making links from that place to this place (Sharon 4.2.3)

Sharon, Emily and Lily expand on this idea to explain that excursions outside the centre help children to connect elements of their home-life experiences with experiences they have while attending the centre. For example, because the centre is

located near the town centre and close to many parents' places of work, excursions often involved visiting parents' workplaces as well as places children had been to with their families (when not attending the centre). As Sharon explains:

Kids see connections within the community. You know 'that's where my mum goes' and all that kind of thing, or 'my mum works there'. We have a lot of that actually because a lot of parents work around here. 'My mum works there' and all that kind of thing. (Sharon 4.1.1)

These teachers highlighted that making these connections, particularly visiting parents at work, was a source of excitement for children as well as being greatly enjoyed by parents. For example:

So yeah community walks and we went to a walk I think to Mitre 10 one day and we walked past another child's father's work so we said hello to him and then all the work people and staff came out to see the children, yeah. They just loved it. (Lily 3.6.2)

Emily, Lily and Sophie also highlighted that excursions into the local area helped to develop new centre-based connections for children. That is, children become familiar with and develop a sense of connection to places that they visit only while attending the early childhood centre (not with their families). As Emily explains:

And they may know that that connection is because they come here. It may not be that they're connected to that, because of their family or where they live, but that's something that's a part of this Kaha Kids Centre – if that makes sense. (Emily 4.8)

Walks around the block help children to become familiar with the local area around the centre. For example, Emily and Lily both noted a local church that has become a favourite place for children to visit on walks. Teachers also talked about ways in which they support children to develop connections into their 'community', including regular walks around the block, visiting parents' workplaces, and asking children questions. As Sophie explains:

Yeah, and especially asking them questions too... We like to ask them questions and see what they think. Like 'Oh, where are we going?' or 'What place, what can you see?' like, things like that just to get them thinking about it as well. (Sophie 4.7)

To summarise, in this view of ‘community’ the teachers’ shifted their focus from what *defines* ‘community’ – such as place or people – to *why we engage* with ‘community’. From this perspective, these teachers’ emphasised that we are all connected to both the wider social (connection to people) and physical world (connections to place) and it is this connection that not only provides us with our sense of belonging but also shapes our identity.

d) Diverse views of ‘community’. From the examination above, it is evident that these teachers as a group held a number of views on the meaning of ‘community’. However, each teacher also reflected their own unique combination of views, emphasising certain orientations to ‘community’ over others. The three tables below highlight the views expressed by each individual teacher within each of the three orientations to ‘community’ identified in these findings – ‘community is place’, ‘community is people’ and ‘community is connections’.

Community is place	Georgia	Sophie	Lily	Emily	Olivia	Sharon
<i>Community is location-based</i>						
• community is external to the ECE centre						
• community is where we live						
• community is the whole of our society						
• we can belong to several places/communities						
• community includes people, places and things						
<i>Community is a resource</i>						
• trips provide variety						
• trips provide experiences for full-time children						
• trips broaden children's experiences						
• getting out and going for a walk						
• offers resources to enhance children's learning						
• builds children's social skills and confidence						
• bringing community services into the centre						
• builds the profile of Kaha Kids ECE centre						
• consulting with families outside the centre						

Table 6: Individual teacher's views on ‘community is place’

Community is people	Georgia	Sophie	Lily	Emily	Olivia	Sharon
<i>Community is people with a shared focus</i>						
• community is a group with a common focus						
<i>The ECE centre is a community</i>						
• the ECE centre is a community						
• children are the focus of the centre community						
• the centre exists because of families						
<i>Relationships build a 'sense of community'</i>						
• meaningful relationships are central to community						
• importance of relationships with families						
• supporting families to feel included in the centre						
• working in partnership with parents and families						
• develop holistic understandings of each child						
• providing wider emotional support for parents						
• provides wider social support for families						
• developing trusting relationships with children						
• relationships facilitate a strong teaching team						
• the teaching team is a community in itself						

Table 7: Individual teacher's views on 'community is people'

Community is connections	Georgia	Sophie	Lily	Emily	Olivia	Sharon
<i>Connections with people</i>						
• community is about connecting with people						
• our connections with others shapes our identity						
• child, family, centre, community are parts of a whole						
• we are all connected						
• mutual support, give and take						
• caring for others is our social responsibility						
<i>Connections with place</i>						
• children's belonging and connection to place						
• connections with the wider physical world						
• children make sense of their world						
• connecting home and centre life						
• developing centre-based connections						

Table 8: Individual teacher's views on 'community is connections'

Considering each teacher's views on 'community' outlined in the three tables above, some clear differences can be seen. For example, Georgia and Sophie both described 'community' in terms of location and had a lot to say about the 'local community' as a resource. Both also discussed the importance of developing relationships with parents, as well as teachers within the centre. However, the view that 'community is connection' was not one that was prominent for either of these teachers.

In contrast, while Lily expressed views that reflected all three orientations to 'community', she was particularly strong in her views about 'community' as 'connection with place'. When considering Emily's views, there is a clear emphasis on 'community is people' and the importance of relationships in building a 'sense of community'. Emily was also the only teacher to discuss the wider social and emotional support of parents in the centre. Olivia and Sharon also emphasised relationships with parents as well as reflecting the importance of connecting with people. And it was Olivia and Sharon who spoke of the way in which connecting with others shapes our identity.

e) Personal plane summary. Findings in this section, focussing on the personal plane of activity, have identified a range of ways in which teachers in this ECE centre view the notion of 'community'. Thematic analysis of the six teacher interviews has highlighted three broad orientations to 'community': 'community is place', 'community is people', and 'community is connections'. Each of these orientations highlight differing ways in which these teachers perceived the notion of 'community', both broadly and in relation to their work as educators within an ECE centre. Within the first orientation – 'community is place' – teachers defined or described 'community' in terms of location, and they included as part of the 'community' the people, resources and physical environment connected to a particular location. The 'local community' in which the ECE centre is based was seen as a source of a range of resources that teachers could utilise to support both teaching and learning. The second orientation that these teachers reflected is the idea that 'community is people'. Here, the teachers defined 'community' in terms of people who were united by a shared focus. From this view, the ECE centre itself provided a shared focus that united these teachers, enrolled children and their families together as a 'community'. Teachers emphasised that relationships, particularly those with parents, played a

central role in developing a ‘sense of community’ within their ECE centre. Finally, in the third orientation to ‘community’ – ‘community is connections’ – these teachers’ views shifted from defining what makes a ‘community’ to focussing on why engaging with ‘community’ is important. In this orientation, the teachers emphasised the connections between individuals, as well as the connections individuals have with the physical world.

While all six teachers reflected more than one of these three orientations to ‘community’ in their responses, each teacher also portrayed their own unique perspective on what ‘community’ meant to them. Notably, there were marked differences between the teachers in relation to their views of ‘community’.

4.2. Interpersonal Plane of Activity

The interpersonal plane of activity shifts focus to the inter-relationships between various individuals within the ECE setting. This analysis examines the views expressed by the six teachers in light of practices within the ECE centre as well as the views held by the centre manager and centre parents. As such, this section particularly focuses on research questions three: ‘How are teachers’ views of ‘community’ reflected within centre practices?’ and four: ‘To what extent do teachers’ views of ‘community’ align with the views of parents and of management?’. Three key areas emerged from this analysis on the inter-personal plane. Firstly, that the ECE centre is a ‘community’ in itself; secondly, the value placed on close, genuine relationship within the ‘centre community’, and particularly between parents and teachers; and thirdly, the reasons why excursions with children, beyond the centre boundaries are valued by teachers, manager and parents.

a) The ECE centre is a community. While individual teacher’s expressed a range of views about the notion of ‘community’ [see Section 4.1], all six teachers talked about the ECE centre as a ‘community’ in itself [see Section 4.1, b)]. This view is consistent with that of the centre manager, Louise [not her real name] who also felt that the ECE centre is the focus that unites everyone together as a ‘community’. She explains:

So what community looks like here is what we create together, like what the parents bring and what we bring and this building kind of houses us. Does that make sense? (Manager Louise 2.2)

Similarly, the parents interviewed for this study all reflected the orientation of ‘community is people’, and described ‘community’ in terms of people who are connected together in some way. For example:

I think that’s probably the key with community it sort of like what an individual sort of sees it and makes it really isn’t it. (Parent 6 – 7.14) ...

And then all those individuals create a community. (Parent 4 – 7.15)

These parents emphasised that the ECE centre provided the common focus that connected them with other centre parents in particular: “Yeah just the parents, just the parents that I meet” (Parent 1 – 1.2). So in many ways, these parents viewed *themselves* as the ‘centre community’. The idea that the ‘centre community’ is primarily the *parents* of enrolled children was echoed by three teachers (Georgia, Sharon and Sophie) who, when asked about their views on developing ‘community’ within the ECE centre, initially talked only about engaging with families.

Parents also clearly valued the connections and friendships they were able to make with other parents through their involvement with the ECE centre:

Yeah and you talk about the community for me, you know I can see this lady in here and wave to her ‘Giddy, giddy’ and it still might be just a passing smile, ‘Hi, how are you going?’ But if I didn’t know her from here we might just pass each other on the street and say nothing. But now, you know if we saw each other in the [mall] we would probably think, [finger snap] from the day-care. And you know, so for me that, that creates that better environment I think, for, for me personally. (Parent 1 – 1.50) ...

And so you commented about, that’s how you get your friends and your personal friend base its from that. (Parent 4 – 1.51)

When relating this to the teachers’ views, Emily in particular highlighted the friendships that parents within Kaha Kids were able to develop with one another [see Section 4.1, b)].

In addition, the parents also valued the connections their children were able to make with other children and adults associated with the ECE centre:

Noticed a sense of belonging, like the relationships that they [children] build within this centre too. Like they have got their, you know, their group of people that they know, they see every day ... (Parent 5 – 1.25)

Again, it was Emily who also noted the connections children, as well as parents, make with each other and with adults in the centre:

That's brought them together because otherwise they, their paths might not have crossed, yeah. And we do have, you know, some of our children have play dates with the other children and things like that so, which is really nice. (Emily 6.10)

Interestingly, the parents, and two in particular, also highlighted that one reason they had chosen this particular centre was that they felt that the other parents who belonged to it reflected their own values as working families:

See if I was to take that word and say what does community mean to me, to me community means quality people and the reason why I say that is because I don't want anyone in my community that's not quality, being dodgy. You know, the druggies, the scumbags, the real bad people because I don't want my son exposed to it. (Parent 1 – 7.3)

Neither the teachers nor the centre manager commented specifically on parent values, other than teachers commenting on the importance of understanding the values and culture of families they work with, and the manager reflecting on the needs of working parents [see Section 4.1, b)].

b) Relationships within the centre community. A second area in which all teachers expressed similar views was the role that relationships played in developing the 'sense of community' within their centre. Of particular importance for all teachers, was building meaningful relationships with parents and whānau [see Section 4.1, b)]. This is an aspect that was strongly reflected by the centre manager, Louise, who emphasised the importance of developing very close relationships with families. Louise preferred the term 'whānau' rather than 'community' to describe her centre as it better reflected the deeper and more familial relationships with centre parents and wider families that she clearly valued. As Louise explained:

So I, you know I 'get', you know, I 'get' mum when she comes in and she's had a rough morning because I know her, not because she's in my community but because I've got that sort of whānau feel for her. And she always asks how my kids are, this mum ... and she asks me about them not because we are part of the same community but because we are sort of that whānau feel. (Manager Louise 2.9)

I think I still have to say that I would remove the idea of community and put the idea of whānau. That's what it means to me. ... I've never felt like this is the community I work with, but I always feel like this is the whānau I am part of. (Manager Louise 6.1)

Interestingly, despite Louise expressing quite strong views about using the term 'whānau' rather than 'community', Sharon was the only teacher to describe the 'centre community' as 'whānau' [see Section 4.1, c)], although Sophie and Georgia did talk about Kaha Kids as being 'whānau focussed'.

Underpinning Louise's views about developing more familial relationships with centre parents was her view that ECE was not only about providing education and care for children, but was about sharing the role of raising children with families. This included developing an understanding and supportive climate within the centre where parents felt relaxed and accepted, confident that their children were well cared for. As Louise explained:

100% of the parents here are working. So, how we could contribute to the community, our families, is by being the best that we can for them so that when they rock off to work they just know they can do their job and totally feel confident about where their babies are. And that they don't go with guilt or anything like that, you know. That's how we would contribute to this, the community of parents that we have here. Yeah, that's our role, that they go off happy and can do their jobs really well. (Manager Louise 5.3.1)

For the parents, this sense of confidence and trust in the centre to care for their children allowed them to be productive at work, without guilt or worry:

With knowing that your child is in a great place, they are safe, they are learning, it helps you to have a productive day too. You know, I can [be] going to drop my child off in the morning, go to work, I don't need to worry if she's going to be alright or you know, getting these phone calls or have to deal with her behavioural issues. I can go to work for a good day and not be side-tracked. (Parent 5 – 6.17)

The manager, Louise's emphasis on developing closer, more familial relationships with parents is clearly echoed by all of the teachers interviewed in this study, particularly in relation to building a 'sense of community' [see Section 4.1, b)]. When discussing their practice, Sharon, Sophie and Emily explained how they

established and built meaningful relationships with parents and whānau, promoting open, reciprocal communication. This included being open, relaxed, welcoming and approachable, as well as introducing parents to others in the ‘centre community’. They also noted that developing trusting relationships was a gradual process that takes time and was on-going. As Sharon and Sophie explained:

Well I would probably hopefully have a welcoming approachable manner [laughs], nice smile, feel relaxed and all that, so that they’re relaxed and all that, and just talk about the day or how they are and all that. That’s how I do it, and that. And you know, it just eventuates from there and if they, if they feel the sense that they could talk and all that they will give you a little bit more. If they don’t, well you’d have to wait for the next visit, something like that. So it’s just little steps at the moment aye. (Sharon 3.6.1)

Yeah, as long as we tell them [parents] everything that’s going on and open up to them, then they will do the same to us. Yeah. I think that’s important too. (Sophie 6.8)

This emphasis placed on developing close relationships with parents was something that the parents themselves also recognised and valued. The parents felt that they and their children were more than simply clients of the centre; as one parent put it: “You are just not another number” (Parent 3 – 1.37). In particular, they highlighted the close, caring relationships teachers had developed with them and their children, and talked about the centre as an extension of their own family:

And they do one thing that’s really important me, is [that] they treat my son like he is theirs and they’re not afraid to pick him up and give him a hug and stuff like that. You know. (Parent 1 – 1.30)

... It was like you’ve got your little family at home, you’ve got your extended cousins, aunties all of that and then you’ve got the family that’s day-care, and how that falls into your family, and it’s yeah, just part of it. It’s not um, it all crosses over. (Parent 4 – 1.61)

The parents also talked about the emotional support and parenting advice they received from teachers in this centre and felt that the teachers cared about them as individuals. As one parent explained:

For me the thing is, because of being a, yeah a first time parent, is just like, realising that, you know, the mistakes that I was making are normal. Well, and also just getting advice ... (Parent 2 – 2.1)

Interestingly, however, only Emily highlighted her role in providing broader social and emotional support for parents in her responses [see Section 4.1, b)].

Parents strongly valued the way that teachers consulted with them and shared information on their child. Their responses reflected a real sense of partnership with the teachers in the raising of their children:

They are consistent. I find that it's quite consistent as well. Informative as well, so we both yeah understand what's going on at home and at day-care and keeping it the same. ... (Parent 3 – 1.36)

Yeah, and just the fact that they asked us what we wanted about that too and then that they are actually, they are willing to, you know ... (Parent 2 – 4.17)

This echoes comments made by Georgia, Sharon, Sophie and Olivia about working in partnership with parents [see Section 4.1, b)]. This partnership approach was also evident in a centre newsletter that emphasised that conversations with whānau at drop-off and pick-up times were welcomed, and encouraged families to complete 'parents voice forms' and 'special dad forms' in their child's learning portfolio. In addition, children's learning portfolios included a range of items reflecting parent input, including learning stories written by parents about children's home interests, language and family trips.

Teachers also discussed a range of centre practices that helped to develop relationships between parents and teachers, and built a 'sense of community' within the centre. For example, Georgia and Olivia discussed the centre's open door policy where family members were welcome to come into the centre at any time. Both felt this supported parents and wider whānau to feel that they could come into the centre and stay whenever they wanted to. For example, Georgia noted, "We have an open door policy and parents, we want parents to contribute and just pop in whenever they like and stuff like that" (Georgia 6.3.5). This was echoed by the centre parents, with two also noting that the open door policy extended to wider family members:

It made them more inviting that my sister can, you know, come to day-care to visit him. Or his aunty that comes down from Auckland if she's on holiday and she can come in and she doesn't have to tell me. She can just come in for lunch

and that's cool and that's how we operate. And day-care is aware of that and they're accommodating so, yeah, that's special for us. (Parent 3 – 1.80)

Inviting parents and whānau to participate in centre celebrations and special events was another way in which teachers (Georgia, Sophie and Lily) felt a 'sense of community' was developed within the centre. As Georgia explained:

We have a lot of, within the centre, we have lots of celebrations throughout the year that we invite families to, you know things like Matariki, Christmas and New Year and mufti days throughout the year that parents and that are involved in and just other little centre functions, their children's birthdays. (Georgia 3.4.1)

Such events were clearly valued by the parents, who also appreciated the extra time and effort of the teachers to get involved:

You know, you know we come to events and evenings and this, this particular childhood centre has a lot, lot on. You get invited to lots of things. (Parent 1 – 1.2)

Sophie also noted that the centre occasionally ran open days on a weekend so that not only could families not enrolled spend time in the centre, whānau of enrolled children who are not normally able to spend time in the centre during the week could also come along:

Well, open days; having open days for the centre maybe on weekends so that people can, like who aren't working in the weekends can come in and have a look around. (Sophie 3.4)

These practices are also echoed within centre documents. For example, a centre newsletter celebrates an open day focussed on male family members, including fathers, grandfathers and uncles. In addition, the children's learning portfolios include stories written by teachers about centre events involving families (e.g., Matariki celebration, open days, children's celebrations and birthdays).

c) The value of excursions with children. A third aspect that stood out from an analysis of the interpersonal plane was in relation to excursions that teachers went on with children. Excursions with children into the 'local community' were a regular event in this centre, with teachers taking children on trips in the centre van at least once per month, and with walks around the block and to closer destinations occurring

more frequently, when weather and numbers of children allowed. These excursions also featured prominently in children's portfolios, with learning stories written about trips to the library, shopping mall, playground, museum, various stores, as well as walks around the block visiting a local church and post-box.

When considering children's engagement with the 'local community' beyond the centre, the centre manager, Louise, reflected on her past experience working in a centre catering for lower socioeconomic status families. In that setting, centre excursions allowed children to visit places that they were unlikely to visit otherwise:

Parents didn't have, a lot of our parents have never been to [the nature reserve]. A lot of our parents when we were at [the community centre] had never been to [the city], so we took them to [the city], you know. Those sorts of things. So here I know that they do all of those things. (Manager Louise 4.1.3)

In contrast, Kaha Kids caters for working families who, the centre manager felt, had the means to provide a wide range of experiences for their children, and so these kinds of excursions were not such a priority to her. Instead, she felt excursions offered experiences that extended on children's interests or that working parents would not easily be able to access themselves:

Here, I know these families have quite a lot of involvement with their children outside of the centre so it's not so much of a priority to make sure we get our children involved in these things. Other than when it's directly related to an interest that the child is involved in. That's where I would go. The emphasis would be that way rather than we need to help our children to participate in this community because they don't do it, you know, have an opportunity otherwise, so. (Manager Louise 4.1.2)

This emphasis reflected the views echoed by all the teachers to some extent, that the 'local community' was a source of resources that could enhance children's learning [see Section 4.1, a)]. However, the teachers and parents also highlighted a wider range of reasons why such walks and excursions with the children were valued.

For the centre parents, one of the reasons excursions were valued was that they provided a broader range of experiences for their children:

Just broadens horizons doesn't it. Like you say it lets them understand that, home at the weekend it's mum and dad at home and off to the park and that sort of thing but when mum and dad aren't there it's not just the four walls, or four walls and a play area type thing. (Parent 6 – 5.5)

In addition, the parents also noted that, with their children attending Kaha Kids full-time, they only have a limited time on weekends to provide a variety of experiences themselves. As one parent explained, “Because there is only so much that we can do in the two days in a weekend sort of thing as well” (Parent 2 – 5.7). Several teachers (Sophie, Georgia and Emily) also highlighted the value of trips for providing variety, particularly for children attending full-time [see Section 4.1, a)].

The parents also felt that walks and excursions helped their children gain a sense of their wider world. For example:

It's good for them to know that there's like they leave home, they learn that there is life and there's a world outside these four walls. There are you know, there are trees, there are, there's, there's roads, there's hazards, there's shops, they can go to Mitre 10, they can go to the library, they can go wherever. It just broadens their experiences. Yeah. Builds on their knowledge or it builds on everything. (Parent 4 – 5.2)

This reflected the views of several teachers (Olivia, Sharon, Lily, and Emily) in relation to helping children to make sense of their wider world [see Section 4.1, c)]. Lily, Emily, Sophie and Sharon also talked about the value of simply getting out and going for a walk [see Section 4.1, a)] to become familiar with their local environment. In addition, the parents felt excursions helped to develop their children's confidence that they were okay in the wider world and could trust the teachers to keep them safe, echoing the views of Sophie and Olivia [see Section 4.1, a)].

Parents also valued the connections their children were able to make, particularly when visiting their parents' places of work:

I used to get that when the girls at reception would say, ‘Oh your son's out front’. And I'm like, ‘What?’ and I'll walk out there and they'll have stopped at the front of my work or, yeah someone would come and get me and all these kids sitting around, and ‘This is where A...’s mum works’. (Parent 4 – 2.21)

Sharon, Emily and Lily also highlighted the value of excursions for supporting children to make connections between their home and centre lives [see Section 4.1, c)].

d) Interpersonal plane summary. An examination of teachers' views on the notion of 'community' from an interpersonal lens, highlights a number of areas of consistency between the views of teachers and those of the centre manager and parents, and can also be seen reflected in centre practices. However, there are also some notable points of difference. These differences tend to reflect the differing perspectives of each group.

While the teachers interviewed in this study highlighted varying views about what 'community' meant, all felt the Kaha Kids centre itself connected the teachers, manager, parents and children together as a 'community', with a particular emphasis on the place of parents within this 'community'. The centre manager and parents also echoed this view. However, the parents also viewed *themselves* as the centre 'community', emphasising the connections and friendships they were able to make with other parents, and in particular, parents who they identified as similar to them.

Another area of strong agreement between all the teachers, centre manager and parents was that meaningful relationships within the 'centre community' were important, and it was evident when considering teachers practices that teachers did a great deal to build close, supportive relationships with the families they worked with. However, while teachers emphasised close *professional* relationships with parents, the parents and centre manager also discussed relationships that were more emotionally supportive and familial, an aspect that was discussed by just one teacher.

Finally, excursions with children into the 'local community' were a regular occurrence in the Kaha Kids centre and featured prominently within children's learning portfolios; however, there were differing views expressed by teachers, parents and centre manager on the value of these excursions. The teachers and parents highlighted a wide range of reasons why such excursions were valued, including: providing greater variety of experiences, particularly for children attending full-time; helping children gain a sense of their wider world; and, to support children in making connections with the 'wider social and physical community'. In contrast, the centre manager only highlighted additional resources that the 'local community' offered as support for children's learning.

4.3. Institutional Plane of Activity

In the institutional plane of activity, my lens shifts to the broader contextual factors that may have influenced or shaped the views of teachers in this research setting. This section focuses on research question five: ‘To what extent are teachers’ views of ‘community’ aligned with the philosophy, policy and planning documents of the ECE centre?’ It includes a consideration of the centre philosophy, purpose, vision and regulations, as well the physical location and design of the centre and centre routines.

a) Philosophy and vision. The Kaha Kids principle philosophy statement applied to all centres under the same ownership. This philosophy drew heavily on the four principles of the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996a). It emphasised the inclusion of centre families and the ‘wider community’ (echoing the *Te Whāriki* principle; Family and Community), encouraging excursions into the community, community visits to the centre, and utilising community resources to support children and families. Knowledge of the whole child was also emphasised, along with positive, reciprocal relationships and effective communication between teachers, parents and children. The regular review of the centre philosophy, including consultation with parents, was included within the centre’s communication policy.

During the data gathering stage of this study, the Kaha Kids manager and teaching team, in consultation with centre families, were also in the process of developing their own centre philosophy. The development of a new philosophy, specific to this particular centre, indicates that while several elements of the generic centre philosophy were echoed to varying degrees in the teachers’ views on ‘community’, it was difficult to ascertain how much the generic philosophy had influenced teachers views.

In her role as centre manager, Louise has had considerable input into the development of Kaha Kids, including the recruitment of teachers and implementation of policies within this setting. As the manager of this centre, Louise had been able to reflect her own values and vision into her leadership of this centre:

I’m pretty, pretty upfront about ‘that’s what I want’, yeah. But I employ people who I knew that that’s what they wanted too. Does that make sense? So I was able to select a team that had the same vision as me. Had I walked in on another

team I don't know where that would go. But that's my heart and that's who I am. (Manager Louise 6.6.1)

As noted in Section 4.1, b) and in Section 4.2, b), the centre manager's emphasis on developing closer relationships with parents is clearly echoed by all of teachers interviewed in this study, particularly in relation to building a 'sense of community'. It could be argued, then, that the vision of the centre manager, as the professional leader of Kaha Kids, had a much stronger influence on the views of teachers than the generic centre philosophy.

b) Purpose. As a privately owned ECE centre catering for working families, the centre manager, Louise, felt the purpose of Kaha Kids was primarily to make money (for the owners), and was therefore only focussed on the families of enrolled children, rather than promoting the 'wider community' well-being:

... I, this place wasn't founded on vision either. It was you know, again, it was let's build a centre and see if we can make some money – in a really respectful way. (Manager Louise 6.7.1)

But I think when you open up a centre that's based on the financial thing not based on what the needs of the community is, you kind of, are chasing your tail to create that community, because it's backwards. (Manager Louise 6.5.2)

Two teachers (Emily and Georgia) also echoed this perspective. For example, Georgia highlighted that the extent to which a centre promotes 'wider community' well-being was dependant on the centre's values, philosophy and aims, as well as the needs of children and families that the centre caters for. As she explains:

Yeah I do. I think that you know, that obviously it boils down to your management structure and the philosophy of your centre and what, how they value the importance of that community I guess. But I suppose it also depends on the diversity of the children that you've got in the centre as well. Whether you are going to, how much you will involve the outside community within the centre. (Georgia 5.2.1)

Emily felt that focussing on the children already attending the centre was the main priority and that there was little time to consider the well-being of families beyond the centre. She felt factors such as time and resources mean that this was not a key focus for teachers at Kaha Kids:

... So you can talk about things and that, but I think we're quite limited because our focus really here is with the children at that time during the day so it is quite hard to um, to include a lot of that. (Emily 5.2.2)

Kaha Kids ECE centre also happened to be relatively new; having opened just under 2 years prior to data gathering for this study. This meant that Kaha Kids had been, and was still in the process of building its enrolments. This focus on building enrolments was reflected in several teachers' comments. In particular, some teachers interpreted the question: 'What are your views on the centre's role in promoting 'wider community' well-being?' as relating to the promotion of the early childhood centre as a business within the 'local community':

I think it definitely benefits the centre because it does get those numbers up.
(Sophie 6.5)

It was a hard road to start with because we had to set up that reputation I guess and get it out there that we are, really value community and families in our centre. (Georgia 6.3.4)

The purpose of this centre, as a business catering for working families, is also reflected within the enrolments policy. Kaha Kids enrolments policy requires children to be enrolled for a minimum of 8 hours per day. Children can be enrolled for a minimum of 2 to a maximum of 5 days per week. This policy, along with the location of this centre within the commercial area of town [see Section 4.3, c)], means that primarily working families use it, with the majority of children being enrolled full-time. Three teachers (Sophie, Georgia and Emily) noted this as a reason why it was important for children to experience the environments outside the early childhood centre [see Section 4.1, a)]. The lack of part-time and part-day enrolments also means that teachers, parents and children have regular on-going contact with each other, which may also influence the relationships that developed within the centre, supporting the 'sense of community' that had developed there.

c) Location. Kaha Kids centre is located in a commercial area of a large town. The parents noted that they selected this centre not because it was located near their homes but because it was convenient for their work and/or they felt it provided the kind of service they were looking for, catering for working families who were similar to themselves [see Section 4.2, a)]. Several parents noted that they passed a number of

other ECE centres on their way to Kaha Kids each day. Kaha Kids, therefore, does not draw on a readily identifiable place-based ‘community’ of parents.

The location of this centre is significant in shaping the centre manager, Louise’s views about ‘community’ in ECE and has influenced her vision for this centre [see Section 4.3, a)]. Louise’s previous experiences in ECE have all been in centres based in small towns or suburbs where the families who used the centre lived, and so catered for families within a definable location. In contrast, because Kaha Kids draws on working families from all areas of the town, Louise was very conscious that the only point of connection for herself, the teachers and enrolled families in Kaha Kids was the centre itself. As Louise explained:

No, because yeah, we don’t have, we’re disjointed from many of the communities that these people, you know, are connected to. (Manager Louise 3.3)

Because it is very disjointed, ‘cause people don’t, everywhere else people know each other outside of the, or outside of the centre and here they don’t. (Manager Louise 2.4)

The location of this centre also has an influence on the teachers’ views about children’s engagement in the ‘wider community’ beyond the ECE setting. Being centrally located, there are a wide range of resources that are within walking distance or a short drive from the centre, including parents’ places of work, places children have visited with their families, as well as parks, shops, library and a range of other facilities. Emily’s comment illustrates this well:

Yeah, so. And we can talk about work people who work, “Oh, my mum works there”, so then it starts that whole conversation about, “Oh, what does your mum do at work?” and “Oh, she’s on the computer.” And then we’ll go a bit further and it’s, um, the doctors and they’re like, “Oh, that’s my doctor.” So quite a few of the children will identify that they, they go to the doctor just down the road and things. So they can make those links and see that other places that they know of or have that sense of belong, you know belonging or knowledge of, so they can talk about that. (Emily 4.6.2)

In addition, because the centre is not based near most children’s homes, teachers saw the value in children becoming familiar with the environment in which the centre is located. As Sophie explains:

Yeah, especially ‘cause they’re probably not familiar with our area, just, yeah, ‘cause they probably come from all over [this town], so. Yeah, and especially asking them questions too... We like to ask them questions and see what they think. Like ‘Oh, where are we going?’ or, ‘What place, what can you see?’ like, things like that just to get them thinking about it as well. (Sophie 4.7)

d) Physical design. The physical design of Kaha Kids centre was noted by some of the teachers as a reason why taking children on excursions beyond into the ‘local community’ was particularly important to them. The centre complex consists of the centre building itself with a fenced outdoor play area at the back and one side of the building. There is also a paved parking area at the front facing the road (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: General layout of Kaha Kids centre.

The building is designed so that the adult spaces (offices, kitchen, staff and utility rooms) are on the street side at the front, with the three main rooms where children spend the majority of their time at the rear. These three main rooms have large doors that open to the outside play area. This outside area is surrounded by a high solid wooden fence, meaning that children can only see the fenced play area and

the top of nearby trees and buildings when outside. Both Georgina and Emily reflected on the enclosed nature of this centre in their comments:

Yeah, yeah that's right and they sort of, you know in a fenced area where they can't see out you know. So I think the community is huge for those children.
(Georgia 4.4)

Because it's, because it's showing them what else is out there. 'Cause I think a lot of the time they're in the car from home to here, from the car in the car park into the room. (Emily 4.6.1)

The three main children's rooms are used to separate children according to age; birth to 18-months-old, 18 months to 3 years, and 3 years to 5 years, catering for a maximum of 50 children with a maximum of 25 under 2s. This was commented on by parents in particular who felt that their children could connect across rooms more readily than if they were in separate buildings, supporting transitions between rooms, as children got older. As one parent explained, "... they go to the next room but they consistently keep seeing those other kids. They're not going to a whole another building" (Parent 4 – 2.46). Parents also noted that their children were easily able to visit siblings:

I like the closeness. I've just had my 5-month-old start this week and 3-year-old is here and it's nice that she can just pop up the hall and visit her sister, both for her and for baby, because you know there's a familiar face that can just pop in.
(Parent 5 - 4.21)

Parents also commented that teachers from all three rooms made an effort to know them and their children, and not just the teachers working with their child:

Every single parent, oh sorry teacher here though, will, will always walk past you and they will always know what child you've got and they'll always, they'll generally know your name. (Parent 1 – 1.71)

That special effort you know, in making it a personable experience as well.
(Parent 3 – 1.72)

e) Routines. In this ECE centre, one daily routine is for all the children from the three rooms and their teachers to come together as a group in the morning and afternoon. During this gathering, two children are invited to recite their pepeha and mihi (traditional form of Māori greeting identifying an individual's connection to

ancestors, ancestral land, and whānau). Two teachers, Sharon and Lily noted this coming together of children and teachers from all three rooms when discussing their views on ‘community’ within the ECE centre. For example, Sharon commented, “Like the three rooms that we [have] here we are all community and you know when we come together, and that” (Sharon 2.2.1). Parents also noted that they felt this coming together each day enhanced the sense of the whole centre being a ‘community’:

It’s, I suppose it’s a bit fluid, they all go to karakia in the morning in one room and then the afternoons. It’s still all there, they’ve got their room but it’s still all one centre and it’s not big, big, it’s, everyone knows ... (Parent 4 – 4.10)

f) Institutional plane summary. An analysis of the institutional plane of activity highlights several factors that appear to have had an influence on the views of teachers in this setting. In particular, the vision of the centre manager appears to have a much greater influence on the views of teachers in this setting than that of the generic centre philosophy, particularly in relation to the kind of relationships developed with centre families. In addition, the purpose and location of this centre, as a business based in a commercial area of town providing primarily full-time education and care for children of working families, appears to have a significant influence on how teachers view ‘community’. In particular, this appears to have shaped these teachers’ views about the ECE centre as a ‘community’ in itself, as well as their views on children’s engagement in the ‘local community’. Finally, the physical design and routines of this centre has shaped the way teachers, children and families interact within this centre and may influence teachers views, particularly in relation to the role relationships play in developing a ‘sense of community’ within the centre.

4.4. Concluding Comments

Using Rogoff’s planes of activity offers a valuable tool for ‘unpacking’ the complexities of teachers’ views on the notion of ‘community’ within the context of this case study centre. Each plane has afforded a different focus on this case study centre, “not as separate or as hierarchical, but as simply involving different grains of focus [within] the whole sociocultural activity. To understand each requires the involvement of the others” (Rogoff, 1995, p. 141). On the personal plane, it is evident that teachers hold a range of views on the meaning of ‘community’ both collectively

and individually. And while there were many areas of similarity between these teacher's views, there were also some quite notable differences in relation to their views of 'community'. An analysis of the interpersonal plane demonstrates that there are some strong areas of consistency between teachers' views, their practices and the views of the centre manager and parents, and also reveals that not all teachers' views are clearly echoed by the centre manager and parents. Finally, a consideration of the institutional plane of activity highlights that teachers' views on the meaning of 'community' are also shaped by wider factors including the centre's vision, purpose, location and building design. The next chapter discusses these findings in light of key literature in this area.

Chapter Five: Discussion

What does ‘community’ mean to you? This may appear a simple question, however, despite its frequent use particularly within the field of ECE, defining the concept of ‘community’ is not an easy task (Bryan, 2006; Kelly, 2007; Madden, 2007). As one teacher interviewed in this research noted, “It’s a hard question!” (Sophie 2.1). In this study, teachers’ initial responses to this question ranged from quite specific definitions for ‘community’, such as “a group of people probably with something in common” (Emily 2.1), to very broad definitions, such as our “whole society ... it’s all the things” (Olivia 2.1).

Echoing research by Mannarini and Fedi (2009) and Phillips (2007), the teachers in this study reflected a range of meanings of ‘community’. This included place-based views, which describe ‘community’ as “a tangible, physical entity” (Mannarini & Fedi, 2009, p. 223) (e.g., “It’s a society of where one’s living” (Lily 2.1)), and non-place-based views, describing ‘community’ as a concept centred on people and relationships (e.g., “People coming together” (Sharon 2.1)).

Irrespective of the viewpoint, the concept of ‘community’ also includes elements that are less tangible which contribute to members experiencing a ‘sense of community’ (D’Aloisio, 2007; Madden, 2007; Mannarini & Fedi, 2009; Phillips, 2007). Several teachers in this study highlighted that there was more to ‘community’ than simply living in a place or being a member of a group and emphasised the importance of *connections* with people and places, including having a sense of belonging, as central to the notion of ‘community’. As Sharon described, “I just think it’s one big old whānau, connecting and building relationships and all that kind of thing, and just supporting each other ...” (Sharon 6.1).

This diversity of views about the meaning of ‘community’ held by the teachers in this study, both collectively and individually, highlight two critical aspects: 1) the importance of *defining* exactly what we mean when we use the term ‘community’, and 2) the opening up of many possibilities for *developing* elements of ‘community’ within ECE in a range of ways. This was particularly evident in the findings of this study, which variously reflected, not only in scope but practice, the three broad fundamental ‘orientations’ to ‘community’, derived from my review of the literature.

Consequently, these three broad orientations – 1) developing ‘community’ within the ECE centre; 2) children’s engagement with the ‘wider community’; and, 3) the role of ECE centres in promoting ‘wider community’ well-being – form the main structure of this discussion chapter.

5.1. Developing ‘Community’ Within the ECE Centre

A major focus of this study was to consider teachers’ views on developing ‘community’ within their ECE centre, and perhaps unsurprisingly, their responses reflected Kelly’s (2007) description of ‘community’ “as a form of collective” (p. 64). In many ways, the concept of the ECE centre as ‘community of practice’ comprised of a group of people with a shared concern or interest who learn through their engagement with each other (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger et al., 2002) was also evident in the views of teachers in this study. While each teacher discussed various members of their ‘centre community’, all placed a particularly strong emphasis on children’s *parents* when discussing the development of ‘community’ within their centre. In contrast, teachers had notably less to say about children as members of the ‘centre community’, and while some teachers discussed developing relationships with the children enrolled in their centre, there was a tendency to refer to children as the *focus* of this ECE centre rather than as *members* of the ‘centre community’.

a) The place of parents in the ECE ‘centre community’. All of the teachers in this study viewed parents as central members of their ‘centre community’ and emphasised the importance of developing meaningful relationships with parents. It was clear that relationships with parents and families were a foundation for the education and care they provided for children, echoing research on the value of partnerships with parents in supporting children’s learning (Duncan et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 2006; Van Wijk et al., 2006). For example, the teachers in this study talked of wanting parents to be “part of their children’s learning journey” (Georgia 3.6.2), and felt that relationships with parents supported them to gain a more holistic understanding of each child and better understand the views, beliefs and aspirations parents have for their children.

According to Mitchell et al. (2006), effective partnerships with parents enhances children’s learning and well-being and such partnerships can be supported through effective communication with parents about the ECE curriculum, parents contributing

to their children's learning, and involving parents in the life of the centre. These elements of effective parent-teacher partnerships were also evident in this case study centre, particularly in relation to parent contributions to their children's learning stories and assessments and family involvement in the centre, supported by their open-door policy and regular centre events involving parents and wider family members.

The importance of open and honest communication (Tamati et al., 2008) as well as authentic, genuine and respectful relationships with parents (Duncan et al., 2013), was also clear, with teachers in this study commenting on: developing 'genuine', 'closer' and 'very strong' relationships; building the trust and respect of parents; and, their desire for parents to feel included and comfortable within their ECE centre – for example, “you actually want them to be a part and feel at home” (Emily 3.8). Most teachers also spoke of relationships with parents as something that they needed to actively persevere with and continue to build over time, reflecting the findings of Duncan et al. (2013) that emphasised the need for relationships to be sustained over time, and intentionally developed by teachers.

The *central* place of parents in the 'centre community' was also strongly echoed in this study by the centre parents themselves. However, the focus for these parents differed to that of the teachers. The parents in this case study felt that they *were* the 'centre community' (rather than a *part of* the 'centre community') and emphasised the connections and friendships with others that they gained from their involvement in this ECE centre. Duncan (2012) and Duncan et al. (2013) highlight that one of the benefits for families of engagement within an ECE centre is the ability of parents to develop strong trusting and supportive relationships with other parents and with teachers. This benefit is evident in this study where parents spoke about the trust they had in the teachers to care for, educate and love their children; as one parent put it, “And they do one thing that's really important to me, is they treat my son like he is theirs” (Parent 1 – 1.30). Parents also valued the advice and support they gained from teachers and other parents; as one first time parent noted, “realising that, you know, the mistakes that I was making are normal” (Parent 2 – 2.1). Interestingly, just one of the six teachers interviewed in this study (Emily) and the centre manager talked about providing emotional and social support as part of their role in working with parents.

Several studies highlight that parental involvement in ECE centres also supports parents to develop networks and link with others, including connecting with other

young families, building friendships (including children's friendships), and increasing connections beyond the ECE centre (Duncan, 2012; Powell et al., 2005; Van Wijk et al., 2006; Witten et al., 2007). For the parents in this study, connecting with other parents was central to their view of 'community' in this centre; as one parent explained, "that's how you get your friends and your personal friend base its from that" (Parent 4 – 1.51). Again, only one teacher (Emily) discussed parents developing connections with each other within the centre.

In many ways, what the teachers, parents and centre manager in this case study centre highlighted was the importance of developing a 'sense of community' within the ECE centre. Mannarini and Fedi (2009) explain that, in addition to membership and influence, "integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection" (p. 212) are essential elements in developing a 'sense of community'. For the centre manager, this 'sense of community' was captured in the term 'whānau' (literally meaning 'family grouping') emphasising the importance of creating a 'whānau feeling', particularly in relation to working with families. As she explained, "I've never felt like this is the community I work with, but I always feel like this is the whānau I am part of" (Manager Louise 6.1). Several parents also noted that they saw the ECE centre as an extension of their family; for example, "... you've got your little family at home, you've got your extended cousins, aunties ... and then you've got the family that's day-care" (Parent 4 – 1.61).

While the teachers, parents and centre manager all talked about relationships within the ECE centre in ways that reflect the importance of developing a 'sense of community' within the centre, their views also reflect their different perspectives about the focus or purpose of the ECE 'centre community' as a whole. It appears that for most teachers, the development of 'community' within the ECE centre was primarily focussed on the care and education of young children, with relationships with the parents and families of these children an essential part of this aim. However, for the parents, 'community' within the ECE centre was also about the social and emotional support that they gained from their involvement in the ECE centre, a view echoed by one teacher. Similarly, the centre manager emphasised the role of the ECE centre as sharing the raising of children with families, rather than focussing on the provision of education and care for children alone.

The differing perspectives of 'community' *within* the ECE centre raise questions about what the focus of ECE should be. Reframing ECE centres as sharing the role of

raising children with families, rather than as services only focussed on the care and education of young children, could legitimise teachers placing greater emphasis and value on practices that promote the broader emotional and social benefits for parents of belonging to an ECE ‘centre community’. This debate is not new, with Duncan et al. (2013), Mitchell (2007, 2010), Moss (2009) and Sumsion et al. (2012) amongst others, calling for a change in the way ECE ‘centre communities’ are conceptualised. They argue that there is a need to move away from viewing ECE centres as places that are solely concerned with the provision of education and care for young children to, as Duncan (2012) put it, services that “position themselves as the *heart of each community* and build their practices around discourses that support social capital, family reliance, community cohesion, and society wellness” (p. 84, original emphasis).

b) The place of children in the ECE ‘centre community’. When responding to the question, ‘What are your views on developing ‘community’ within their ECE centre?’, the teachers in this study spoke a great deal *more* about parents than they did about children. For example, when asked about developing ‘community’ within their ECE centre, three of the six teachers only referred to centre parents and families. When prompted for their views on the place of children within their ‘centre community’, teachers tended to position children as the *focus*, rather than as *members* of their ‘community’. For example:

Um, well the kids are at the core of the community because that’s, that’s that interest or that situation that’s brought all these people together who probably wouldn’t, might not meet each other. (Emily 3.4)

I guess that’s just neutral really, working with the children. That, obviously, yeah, it’s why we enjoy doing our job because of the children, most of the time. (Sophie 6.12.1)

Without their children we wouldn’t have a job. (Georgia 3.1.1)

In addition, all teachers talked extensively about engaging with parents while just three discussed developing relationships with children. This is not to say these teachers did not value the development of relationships with the children they worked with, or acknowledged children as part of their ‘centre community’. On the contrary, it was clear from wider discussions with these teachers about engaging children within the ‘wider community’ (as well as from the assessment documentation and

practices in this centre) that close, meaningful and caring relationships with children were very central to their teaching practices, and children were a central focus within their centre. However, these teachers did not appear to conceptualise children as *members* of their ‘centre community’ in the same way as they viewed children’s parents.

The last decade or so has seen an increasing focus on the interdisciplinary study of ‘childhood’ as a complex social phenomenon (James & James, 2008). Childhood studies position children as active social agents, with children viewed as “social subjects, rather than just objects of social practices” (James & James, 2008, p. 27). Childhood studies is strongly influenced by the rights of children outlined in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC), including their rights as active citizens. James and James (2008), here, define citizenship as:

A status that is given to members of a community who share those rights, responsibilities, duties and adopt those social practices that are intrinsic to belonging to and being a responsive member of that community and who, in return, share in the resources that are distributed within that community. (p. 31)

This definition echoes that of Smith et al. (2009) who emphasise that central to citizenship is a sense of belonging and the ability to participate within social groups in meaningful ways. James and James (2008) also highlight that in order to participate within society, children must have a voice. However, as Te One (2008) found in her doctoral research, the extent to which children have a voice and are heard within the context of ECE centres is influenced by a range of factors, and that adult perceptions of children’s rights were shaped by the ECE setting’s organisational philosophy. Te One (2008) concluded that the participation rights of children were inseparable from their protection and provision rights. James and James (2008) also note that the intentions of adults to protect and promote the best interests of children can mean “children are simply further disempowered and their voices rendered silent once more by adult determination of what their needs are, what is in their best interests, and what constitutes their welfare” (James & James, 2008, p. 30). Moreover, according to Nutbrown and Clough (2009), teachers in ECE need to look for ways, not only to ‘hear’, but also to actively ‘listen’ to children’s voices.

In sum, when considering the concept of ‘community within the ECE centre’, two key questions are crucial: ‘Who are the members of our ‘community’?’ and ‘What

is the focus of our ‘community’?”. If children are viewed more as the focus of the ‘community’, rather than as members of that ‘community’, there is a risk of children’s learning and development being positioned as the product of adult activity in the centre. As the study by Wright et al. (2006) highlighted, conceptualising the ECE centre as a ‘community of learners’ resulted in teachers shifting their view of children, parents and teachers as separate groups within their ‘centre community’ to viewing all participants as co-learners. In this way, positioning children as equally important members of a ‘centre community’ affords a greater likelihood that the views of children and their participation within that ‘community’ will be both acknowledged and promoted.

5.2. Children’s Engagement with the ‘Wider Community’

The second major focus of this study was to consider teachers’ views on children’s engagement with the ‘wider community’ – outside the ECE centre. It was clear in this case study that excursions with children into their local neighbourhood and wider town were regular and valued events. When discussing reasons why getting out into the ‘wider community’ was important for children, several teachers pointed out that most children in this case study centre attended full-time (8 hours per day, 5 days a week). They also commented on the enclosed nature of the centre premises and the finite range of resources within it as reasons why they valued excursions with children. As one teacher commented, “So we, we do have children here who, who do a full day which is quite long and if they were only to be in here, with a, yeah, in the same environment with the same people ...” (Emily 4.2.1).

Brennan (2008) and Kernan (2010) highlight concerns at the significant amount of time young children spend within ECE centres. As Brennan (2008) points out, “today even very young children are spending greater proportions of their lives in public, group care settings” (p. 13). Brennan (2008) questions the impact this has on children’s learning, particularly in light of sociocultural theories that explain learning, broadly, as occurring through social participation within a social, cultural and historical context. This is echoed within the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, which emphasises that children learn through “responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places, and things” (Ministry of Education, 1996a, p. 43). Teachers in this study felt that excursions allowed children to engage with a wider range of ‘real

life' people, places and things within the 'local community' – discussed as both the local neighbourhood and the town.

According to McInerney et al. (2011), “how we see the world is profoundly influenced by the geographical, social and cultural attributes of the place(s) we inhabit” (p. 5). This sense of ‘connection to place’ was clearly evident in the views of four of the six teachers in this study. For these teachers, excursions supported children to make connections between their home, centre and the wider environment, or ‘community’ that they lived in and helped them to make sense of their wider world. As one teacher explained, “And yeah, it’s just making sense of their own world, aye ... But really it’s about what they are connected to and it’s making links from that place to this place” (Sharon 4.2.3).

Gruenewald (2003) and McInerney et al. (2011) argue that engaging children in ‘place’ helps them to view themselves as a part of their wider society, fostering “values that are largely absent from individualistic and utilitarian approaches to schooling” (McInerney et al., 2011, p. 13). As noted above, a sense of belonging and the ability to participate are central elements of citizenship (James & James, 2008; Smith et al., 2009) while Hart (1992) adds, that citizenship is actually something that develops with experience:

A nation is democratic to the extent that its citizens are involved, particularly at the community level. The confidence and competence to be involved must be *gradually* acquired through practice. (p. 4; italics added)

Ritchie et al. (2010), also highlight that actively engaging with local and wider ‘community’ concerns, involving both people and places, supports young children to develop an ‘ethic of care’, including a sense of social and ecological empathy and concern.

This discussion highlights a wider view of ‘community’ that extends beyond the ECE centre and focuses on the notion of ‘community’ in terms of location and emphasises the importance of ‘connection’ to both ‘people and place’. This view of ‘community’ raises the question, ‘Why is connection to people and place important?’. All teachers in this study expressed views that highlight the value of the local environment as a resource that can enhance children’s learning, with several also highlighting the importance of children developing connections to people and places beyond their ECE centre or home because, as one teacher explained, “... we don’t

live individually. We need to every day, whether it's children and adults, we need to communicate with the outside world" (Olivia 4.4).

5.3. The Role of ECE Centres in Promoting 'Wider Community' Well-being

The final major focus examined in this study was to consider teachers' views on the role of ECE centres in promoting 'wider community' well-being. It was evident in this case study that, in *practice*, the primary focus of the teachers, manager and parents was 'inwards' on the education and care of enrolled children and the support of their families within the ECE 'centre community'. However, the *views* of teachers on this topic were mixed. Several teachers had clearly not thought of their ECE centre as having a role beyond providing a supportive care and education service for children and their families. Yet others felt that while their main focus was on enrolled children and their families, it was also important to consider the relationships between centre children and families and the 'wider community'. The views of these teachers suggest that, given the opportunity, a great deal more could be done within ECE to promote 'wider community' well-being.

The ownership model and purpose of this ECE centre appears to have had a significant impact on the way the notion of 'community' was viewed within it. A number of authors (including Duncan, 2012; May, 1999; May & Mitchell, 2009; Moss, 2009) have critiqued the influence of neoliberal economic policies that have shaped ECE provision within New Zealand and internationally over the last three decades. This debate continues, in both academia and the media, about the impact of private, for-profit ECE provision both within New Zealand and internationally (e.g., Duhn, 2010; Early Childhood Council, 2015, April 22; Johnston, 2015, April 21 & 22; Lloyd & Penn, 2012; May & Mitchell, 2009; White & Friendly, 2012). In particular, this debate has raised concerns about the impact of a profit motive in privately owned ECE services on both quality and accessibility.

In terms of quality, a key concern raised in this debate is that the drive for profit means "less money for quality teaching and provision" (Johnston, 2015, April 22). However, the Early Childhood Council (2015, April 22) points out that Education Review Office (ERO) reports reviewing the quality of ECE services in New Zealand show little difference between the quality ratings of privately owned and community owned ECE services. Certainly, the centre that this study focused on was rated as

‘well placed’ to promote positive learning outcomes for children (based on a four-point scale ranging from: ‘Not well placed’; ‘Requires further development’; ‘Well placed’; ‘Very well placed’) in an ERO review completed just after data gathering was completed.

In terms of accessibility, Mitchel and May (2009) assert that:

The private sector tends to provide full-day services suited to the needs of middle and higher income families where the parents are in full-time work. There is no mechanism to ensure that community services are established in areas of need which may not be attractive to private operators. (p. 11)

The privately owned centre in which this study is based was established as a business and its enrolment policies, fee structure and location means that it specifically targets working families. As a result, this centre would not be easily accessible for families who could not afford the fees or who needed more flexible hours, even if they lived near-by. As the centre manager explained, “The centre was formed on no basis of community. It was formed on a financial, you know, financial premises that it would generate a bit of money for the business” (Manager Louise 2.2). It is evident in this study that the business model of this centre has influenced teachers’ views about ‘community’ within this centre. In particular, it appears to have resulted in a focus that looks *inward* at the ‘community’ of people who are directly associated with the ECE centre (enrolled children, their parents and teachers). This *inwards* focus echoes concerns raised by several academics (including Duncan, 2012; May, 1999; May & Mitchell, 2009; Moss, 2009) who argue that the market-model of ECE provision has resulted in a shift away from ECE centres that are responsive to their ‘local community’ needs, towards centres that focus solely on providing a care and education ‘service’ for young children and their families.

However, despite this, this centre manager’s preference for the term ‘whānau’ to describe this centre, and her emphasis on sharing the raising of children with families, clearly signalled that she saw the role of ECE as wider than just the care and education of children. One teacher in this study, Emily, also echoed this view, as she explained:

Like for us, our community here we can support the parents in what they're doing. So from a parents' perspective they may see us as providing a service but also [it's] supporting them if they're going through a difficult time or something like that. So it's that side of things. (Emily 6.2)

This wider view of ECE supporting families (in addition to the care and education of children) echoes a growing body of research (e.g., Duncan, 2012; Powell et al., 2005; Witten et al., 2007) that emphasises the dual benefits of engaging in ECE – not only for families but also for society at large. This includes increasing parent confidence, social support, friendships, and increasing family networks and connections within the 'wider community'. Parents in this case study centre clearly valued the support they gained from their involvement in the ECE centre. They also felt that the centre contributed to the 'wider community' by providing excellent care and education for their children, helping to raise the next generation of citizens and allowing them to engage fully in their work as productive citizens. As one parent put it, "I think it's a by-product of them doing a really good job in what they do" (Parent 6 – 6.2).

Several teachers in this study highlighted other perspectives on the role of ECE in supporting 'wider community' well-being, emphasising that the well-being of the individual is interconnected with the well-being of society as a whole. For example, Sharon's view of 'community' emphasised that our connections with people within families and neighbourhoods shapes our identity – she explained, "Community is about who we are. I think that actually moulds us to who we are" (Sharon 2.4). Sharon also discussed the concept of mutual support and reciprocity when considering the role of ECE in promoting 'wider community' well-being: "So yeah it's just that kind of sharing around the community kind of thing, yeah" (Sharon 5.3.2).

Similarly, Olivia stressed that we are all part of society, and along with Emily, identified ways that they could engage children and their families in local, national, and global charity events, such as fundraising for families in need. Additionally, Lily reflected an ecological view of 'community' emphasising that each individual is part of the wider ecosystem, including people, places and things. For Lily, the well-being of the individual is inseparable from the well-being of the whole environment; as she put it, "Because we all live, learn and feed off each other" (Lily 5.4).

These wider perspectives open up possibilities for engaging children *and* their families in the local and wider 'community' by responding to social and environmental concerns, strengthening their connections to place and developing an

‘ethic of care’. Such approaches benefit not only children and their families, but also society on a local, national and global level (Davis, 2009; Freeman & King, 2001; Gruenewald, 2003; Prambling Samuelsson & Kaga, 2008; Ritchie et al., 2010).

5.4. Summary

This chapter has examined the diverse range of meanings of ‘community’ expressed by teachers in this study, both collectively and individually. Exploring these teachers’ views of ‘community’ in light of the three broad ‘community’ orientations identified from the literature has raised a number of important questions and possibilities both in terms of the importance of *defining* the term ‘community’ and *developing* valuable aspects of ‘community’ in ECE.

This discussion of teachers’ views has raised two fundamental questions: ‘Who are the members of our ‘community’?’ and ‘What is the focus of our ‘community’?’. The teachers in this study asserted the importance of the parents as the *central members* of their ‘centre community’ which opens up possibilities for acknowledging the emotional and social benefits that parents gain from their involvement in ECE, that then flow on to benefit wider society. Conversely, teachers tended to view children as the *focus* rather than members of their ‘centre community’. Reframing this focus of ECE from providing a care and education service for children to developing ‘democratic learning communities’ may help support teachers to view children as active members of their ‘centre community’.

When considering children’s involvement within the ‘wider community’ as well as the role of the ECE centre in promoting ‘wider community’ well-being, several teachers highlighted the importance of children developing connections with people and places. This perspective sits well with the idea of the child as a citizen, along with practices that engage children within the ‘wider community’ and promote children’s sense of belonging and participation within their local, national and global society.

The following concluding chapter provides a review along with a discussion of broader considerations and implications of this research.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This report has provided a detailed account of this study, including the background, research problem and questions, literature review, methodology, findings and discussion. This final chapter provides an overview of the study, the key findings and its implications for teachers and policy. Broader considerations are then discussed, followed by an examination of the study's strengths and limitations. Finally, implications of this study for further research are considered followed by a concluding statement.

6.1. Overview of the Research

Sumsion et al. (2012) argue that the concept of 'community' within early childhood education (ECE) is one that tends to be taken for granted and "yet what is meant by community and implications of the emphasis on community rarely seem to be questioned" (pp. 41-42). This research has sought to contribute to the debate on the meaning of 'community'. With this in mind, this exploratory case study has utilised a qualitative, interpretive approach to gain an in-depth understanding of how teachers view the meaning of 'community' within a typical, non-community-owned ECE centre. Rogoff's (1984, 1995) three planes of sociocultural activity (personal, interpersonal and institutional) have been utilised as a framework to enable teachers' views of 'community' to be explored within the rich context of the ECE centre in which they are based.

6.2. Review of the Key Research Findings

A review of the key findings of this research is presented here, and considered in relation to the five specific research questions that this study set out to address.

a) Research question one. The first question this study sought to examine was: 'How do teachers in this ECE centre view the notion of 'community'?' Findings in relation to this question highlight that teachers reflected three broad views of the notion of 'community'; 'community is place', 'community is people', and 'community is connections', and there was a diverse range of views both across and

between teachers.

‘Community is place’: Teachers in this study reflected the notion that ‘community’ was something that was grounded in ‘place’. Two broad themes emerged within this view of ‘community’; first, that a ‘community’ was something that can be identified and defined in terms of location; and secondly, that the ‘local community’ (neighbourhood and town) was a source of resources that could be utilised, particularly in support of children’s learning and development.

‘Community is people’: Teachers in this study also reflected an alternate view that it is people, rather than place, that define a ‘community’. Within this view, teachers defined a ‘community’ as a group of people who share a common focus or purpose, and described the enrolled children, their families and teachers associated with their ECE centre as members of their ‘centre community’. In addition, teachers emphasised that relationships were central to developing a ‘sense of community’ within their ECE centre.

‘Community is connections’: The third view of ‘community’ expressed by the teachers emphasised *connections* both between individuals and between people and the environment. Within this view of ‘community’, the teachers emphasised *why we engage* with ‘community’ rather than what *defines* ‘community’. From this perspective, teachers stressed the importance of being connected to both the wider social world (‘connections to people’) and the physical world (‘connections to place’) and felt that these connections supported a sense of belonging and shaped identity.

Teachers reflected a range of views, both collectively and individually: In addition to collectively reflecting these three orientations to ‘community’ each teacher also reflected their own unique combination of views, emphasising certain orientations to ‘community’ over others.

b) Research question two. The second research question examined in this study was: ‘To what extent are the three orientations to ‘community’ – a) ‘Developing ‘community’ within the ECE centre’; b) ‘Children’s engagement with the ‘wider community’; and c) ‘Centres promoting ‘wider community’ well-being’ – reflected within teachers’ views of ‘community’?’ When considering teachers’ views about developing ‘community’ *within* their ECE centre, all teachers placed a particularly strong emphasis on children’s *parents* as central members of their ‘centre community’. In contrast, teachers had notably less to say about children and

demonstrated a tendency to refer to children as the *focus* rather than as *members* of the ‘centre community’. When considering children’s engagement with the ‘wider community’, all teachers emphasised the value of the local environment as a resource to enhance children’s learning, with some also highlighting the importance of children developing connections to people and places beyond their ECE centre or home.

Finally, when considering the role of ECE centres in promoting ‘wider community’ well-being, it was evident that, in *practice*, the primary focus of the teachers, manager and parents was ‘inwards’ on the education and care of the enrolled children and the support of their families within the ECE ‘centre community’. However, the *views* of teachers on this topic were mixed. Several teachers had clearly not thought of their ECE centre as having a role beyond providing a supportive care and education service for children and their families. Conversely, others felt that while their main focus was on enrolled children and their families, it was also important to consider the relationships between centre children and families and the ‘wider community’.

c) Research questions three and four. Research questions 3 and 4 are considered here together as both reflect elements of the interpersonal plane of activity examined in this case study. These questions were: ‘How are teachers’ views of ‘community’ reflected within centre practices?’; and, ‘To what extent do teachers’ views of ‘community’ align with the views of parents and of management?’. This study found three areas of note in relation to both of these questions. First, there was a clear alignment between teachers’, manager’s and parents’ views that the ECE centre is a ‘community’ in itself. Second, close, genuine relationships within the ‘centre community’ were clearly evident within centre practices and valued by teachers, manager and parents. Thirdly, excursions with children into the ‘local community’ beyond the centre boundaries were valued by both teachers and parents and reflected within centre practices but were not acknowledged to the same extent by the centre manager.

d) Research question five. The final research question in this study was: ‘To what extent are teachers’ views of ‘community’ aligned with the philosophy, policy and planning documents of the ECE centre?’. Findings here highlight that teachers’ views and practices are influenced by the centre manager’s vision for the centre, but

were also significantly shaped by the purpose of this centre, and most notably its business model, including enrolment policies, fee structure and location.

6.3. Implications of this Study for Teachers and Policy

a) Implications for teachers. This study raises several implications for the case study ECE centre and its teachers, as well as for teachers working in similar centres, to consider. First, the study highlights that it is important for teachers to be aware that there are multiple meanings of the notion of ‘community’ and that their own view of ‘community’ may not be the same as the views of others in their teaching team, or indeed the views of the centre manager and parents. It would, therefore, be valuable for teachers to engage in discussions with each other and with other members of their centre, about what ‘community’ means. In addition, the unique views about ‘community’ held by each individual teacher in this study offer numerous possibilities for this teaching team and ECE centre as a whole to develop broader understandings of the notion of ‘community’, particularly in relation to how the notion of ‘community’ might be *defined*, *described* and *developed* within their practices.

In particular, it would be valuable for teachers to consider the following questions:

- i) How do we *define* ‘community’ within ECE? – Does ‘community’ exist only within our ECE centre or does it also extend beyond it? Are there multiple ‘communities’ and if so, how do we define each one, and how do we develop a ‘sense of community’ in each?
- ii) ‘Who are the *members* of our ‘community’?’ – What are the differing aspirations of each group in belonging to this ‘community’ and how are these aspirations acknowledged, including children, parents and teachers?
- iii) ‘What is the *focus* of our ‘community’?’ – and is this focus the same for all its members?
- iv) ‘What does this mean in terms of *practices* within our ‘community’, both within the ECE centre and within the local and wider social and physical environment in which it is based?

b) Implications for policy. This study has clearly highlighted that the term ‘community’ can be viewed in a range of ways within an ECE setting. In addition, the imprecise use of the term ‘community’ within and across the ECE sector’s guiding policy documents (and each with their *own* specific definitions), only adds to the lack of clarity about how the sector should be perceiving and responding to ‘community’. As such, the meaning of ‘community’ “has become elusive and vague” (Kelly, 2007, p. 63). It is of great importance, then, for any policy documents to be very explicit about what the term ‘community’ actually means, and for them to be more effective, this should be reflected in a *consistent* way throughout all the sector’s policy and regulatory documents.

6.4. Broader Considerations from this Study

This study highlights a need to problematise the notion of ‘community’ within ECE, because the way we conceptualise ‘community’ shapes our ideas about the role and purpose of ECE, and the place of children and families within both ECE and wider society. Therefore, it is important to ask questions such as, ‘What do we mean by ‘community’?’, ‘Who are the members of our ‘community’?’, and ‘What is the focus of our ‘community’?’.

An examination of key guiding documents within ECE in New Zealand considered at the beginning of this report [see Chapter 1, Section 1.1] highlighted an increasing trend to refer to the early childhood setting itself as a ‘community’. In addition, there is an array of differing meanings of ‘community’ both within and between these documents, including the terms ‘learning community’, ‘family and community’, ‘local communities and neighbourhoods’, ‘community groups’ and ‘wider community’. The diverse, and at times contradictory, ways in which the term ‘community’ is used makes it challenging for teachers and ECE centres to clearly understand what these documents are actually asking of them. It also provides space for ECE centres to choose only to focus *inwards* on those already using their service, and as a result, largely ignore the wider social and physical context in which they are based. Further, this choice to only focus *inwards* is legitimised by the current *Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008* that only require services to collaborate with “parents and family or whānau of children enrolled in the service” (Clause 47, 1b).

The business model of ECE provision is also a factor to consider because, as highlighted in this case study, there is a potential for ECE services to focus solely on the families of the enrolled children as their ‘community’, and in doing so, become dislocated from their wider social and physical environments. This highlights that viewing ‘community’ in terms of people and place alone can be limiting. If ‘community’ is only seen in terms of ‘people’ then we risk ignoring the fact that ‘people’ do not exist in isolation. The notion that ‘community’ within ECE might consist *only* of enrolled children, their families and teachers, does not recognise the wider context in which the centre operates.

In contrast, the notion of ‘community as connection’ has potential here, as it offers a definition that is not limited by people or place, but which can encompass both. This notion of ‘community is connection’ with ‘people’ and with ‘place’, offers possibilities for considering the importance of such connections for all members of a centre – including for children, parents and teachers. This view of ‘community’ is not limited to the physical bounds of the ECE centre, but enables the ECE centre to be situated within the context of society as a whole, and sits well with Moss’s (2009) call for ECE centres to be viewed as “public spaces that are the expression of a responsibility for children that the public shares with parents” (p. 62).

The view of ‘community is connection’ provides space to acknowledge the importance of the wider social and emotional benefits that parents can gain from participation within ECE, including the flow-on benefits this may have for their participation within wider society (Duncan et al., 2013). It also provides space to view children as citizens of a wider society, opening up possibilities to actively support their increasing sense of belonging and participation within their wider social and physical world (Gruenewald, 2003; McInerney et al., 2011). And finally, for teachers themselves, viewing ‘community as connections’ may provide a framework to support their engagement with children, parents and other teachers, as well as with their wider profession.

6.5. Strengths and Limitations of this Study

The methodology used for this study has both strengths and limitations. As a qualitative, interpretive case study, its strengths lie in the richly contextualised nature of the data (Merriam, 2009). As such, the findings of this study have accentuated the

individual ‘voices’ of the research participants (Mutch, 2005). Using pseudonyms for the teachers and the centre manager also assists in reminding the reader that these participants are ‘real people’. Utilising Rogoff’s (1984, 1995) three planes of sociocultural activity (personal, interpersonal and institutional) as a conceptual and theoretical framework within this case study allowed each plane to be examined in turn, without losing sight of the whole. This approach has therefore afforded a deeper understanding of the complex and multi-layered elements that have influenced the way teachers in this setting view the notion of ‘community’.

Alongside these strengths, there are also limitations to this methodology. In particular, this case study has focussed on just one early childhood centre, and as a small-scale qualitative study such as this one, “generalization is not expected or viable” (Lichtman, 2010, p. 84). However, as this study has focussed on a ‘typical’ ECE centre in New Zealand, the findings may offer insights for other early childhood settings that operate within similar historical, social and political contexts, particularly within New Zealand.

In addition, as a qualitative study, it is important to acknowledge the significant impact of the subjective researcher whose philosophical beliefs will inevitably have influenced all aspects of their research, including its focus, design, analysis and discussion of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Cohen et al., 2007). This ‘subjectivity’ has been mitigated to some extent by utilising sound research processes, including being explicit about the way the study has been shaped by both theory and research, as well as utilising a systematic approach to data analysis.

Additional specific limitations of this study include the process for selecting teacher and parent participants. The decision of the teachers to take part in this study may have been influenced by the manager’s own enthusiasm for being involved. This concern was minimised by providing teachers with multiple opportunities to withdraw at any time prior to the analysis of the interview data and explaining that their withdrawal would not cause a major disruption to the research. In addition, interviews were timed, in consultation with the centre manager, to minimise disruption to the centre routines.

Finally, the centre manager’s role in selecting parents to take part in the parent focus group may have resulted in some bias, as the manager knew these parents well. It is therefore possible that she invited only those parents that she felt would provide responses that would reflect positively on the centre. However, it is equally likely that

the manager focussed on parents that she felt would be most likely to take part. This limitation is mitigated to some degree by the fact that the views of these parents provided just one of several data-sets analysed within this study.

6.6. Implications for Further Research

This study has raised a number of questions about the notion of ‘community’ within ECE that would benefit from further research. In particular, a more extensive investigation of the views of teachers, centre leaders, parents and children on what ‘community’ means to them, as well as the practices that reflect these views of ‘community’, both within private and community-owned ECE services would be valuable. In addition, this study has highlighted that teachers appear to be influenced by the business model of the ECE centre in which they are based. However, the diversity between teachers also signals that their views of ‘community’ are shaped by their personal and professional experiences, values and beliefs. Therefore, further study of the various influences on teachers’ views of ‘community’ would additionally be valuable.

6.7. Concluding Statement

To conclude, it is clear from this study that the term ‘community’, despite its regular use within policy and practice within the ECE sector, needs to be problematised. This study has contributed a small ‘comment’ in what needs to be a much larger social and political discussion and debate about the notion of ‘community’ within the wider ECE sector. In this regard, this centre, like many privately owned centres, was ‘formed on a financial premise’ and that prerogative had a strong impact on how ‘community’ was defined within the centre. Despite this, the teachers and the manager also expressed broader views of the meaning of ‘community’ that reflected their own unique personal and professional perspectives (conversely, community-based centres’ notions of ‘community’ are also defined by their distinctive purpose, focus and ‘community’). Ultimately, at the heart of this debate on the notion of ‘community’ are much bigger questions about the role and provision of ECE, not only in terms of the care and education of children but within society as a whole.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Manager Information Sheet

SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY AND PEDAGOGY

TE KURA MĀTAI HINENGARO TIKANGA

FACULTY OF EDUCATION, PO Box 17-310, Donald St, Karori, Wellington 6147, New Zealand

Phone + 64-4-463 9500 Fax +64-4-463 9521 Email sepp@vuw.ac.nz Web www.victoria.ac.nz/education

Date Month 2013

Name

Manager

Address

Address

Dear Manager

Re: Early childhood teachers' views of 'community'

I am Judy Hamer and I recently rang you to see if your centre might be interested in this research. I am a Senior Lecturer with the Open Polytechnic and am undertaking a research project as part of my MEd studies at Victoria University of Wellington under the supervision of Dr. Judith Loveridge, School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy. My research aims to find more about the views of teachers within an early childhood centre in relation to the idea of community. I hope this research will provide some insights into the ways in which early childhood education teachers conceptualize notions of community and factors that influence the nature of community engagement in early childhood education.

I am writing to you to request your permission to undertake this research in your early childhood centre. I hope that your centre's participation in this research will be a positive experience and stimulate your thinking about community and early childhood education.

What will this research involve?

- I would like to individually interview you and 6 to 8 members of your teaching team, and conduct a focus group discussion with around 6 parents of your centre parents.
- Each interview and focus group discussion will last no more than one hour and will be scheduled at times convenient for the individuals involved and least disruptive for the centre. I would like to complete these in October of this year.
- I would also like to examine any relevant centre documents including your centre philosophy, relevant policies, procedures and planning documents so I can understand the broader context in which teachers' views about community are occurring.
- Depending on the outcome of interviews, I might also wish to undertake observations of teachers and possibly parents to gain a better understanding of how their views are reflected within centre practices.
- I would appreciate meeting with you and your teaching team before I begin to discuss my research.

What will happen with the information (data)?

- All individual interviews will be recorded and then transcribed. These transcriptions will be shared with the participants to ensure we agree on what was said and meant within the interview.

- If observations are completed, I will make my notes that refer to observations of individuals available to those individuals to read.
- I will do my utmost to protect the identity of individuals and your centre through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of identifying details. However discussion amongst participants of the content of their own interviews may make it more likely that others may identify the source of statements or points used in my findings.
- All information (data) that I gather will be kept confidential and viewed only by the transcriber and focus group assistant (who will both sign a confidentiality agreement), my Victoria University of Wellington supervisor and assessors, and myself.
- All data will be stored in secure password protected files at my home and will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the research.
- Once I have completed the interviews, focus group discussion, examination of documents and any observations, I will analyse them in light of research on community in early childhood.
- I will be reporting my findings in my Master's Thesis which will be deposited in the in the Victoria University of Wellington library. I may also present this research in papers or presentations at conferences that are concerned with learning, teaching and researching in early childhood education.

Your rights

- You are under no obligation to accept this invitation to participate in this study.
- If you do consent to participate you may withdraw XXX centre from this research at anytime up until the end of my data collection without having to explain. This right to withdraw without explanation is also extended to all participants.
- I will provide your centre with a summary of the project findings when it is concluded for all participants to access. I would also appreciate meeting with all participants at the end of my research to feedback my findings.
- This research has been assessed and approved by Victoria University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee. If you have questions about the way the research is being conducted you may contact Dr Allison Kirkman (Allison.kirkman@vuw.ac.nz), Chair of the Victoria University of Wellington Ethics Committee.

For further information

If you have any questions or want more information about this study, please feel free to contact me at any time. You can contact me on: ph: 06 355 9159, mob: 027 705 8245, email: judy.hamer@openpolytechnic.ac.nz. You are also welcome to contact my supervisor Dr. Judith Loveridge (ph: 04 463 6028, email: judith.loveridge@vuw.ac.nz).

I will contact you again shortly to discuss whether you and your centre would like to participate in this research. I have attached letters and consent forms for the teachers, and parents, as well as for you.

Yours sincerely

Judy Hamer

Manager Consent Form (Research)

- I have had the research about early childhood teachers' views of 'community' explained to me.
- I understand what would be required of myself, as well as centre teachers and parents who participate in the research.
- I understand that my participation and that of centre teachers and parents in the research is voluntary and that anyone involved may withdraw from it during the data gathering. I also understand that I have the right to withdraw the centre from the research up until the end of data gathering.
- I understand that the researcher will endeavour to protect the identity of both the centre and individuals involved by removing all identifying information and using pseudonyms for both the centre and individuals.
- I understand that all data would be stored in secure password protected files at the researchers house and will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the research.
- I understand that responses of myself, teachers and parents will be used in the researcher's Masters Thesis and may be used in papers or presentations that are concerned with learning, teaching and researching with in early childhood education.

I consent to XXX centre being part of the research. Yes ☐ No ☐

I consent to provide the researcher with any relevant centre documents including the centre philosophy, relevant policies and procedures, and planning documents. Yes ☐ No ☐

I consent to being interviewed. Yes ☐ No ☐

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C: Teacher Information Sheet

SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY AND PEDAGOGY

TE KURA MĀITAI HINENGARO TIKANGA

FACULTY OF EDUCATION, PO Box 17-310, Donald St, Karori, Wellington 6147, New Zealand

Phone +64-4-463 9500 Fax +64-4-463 9521 Email sepp@vuw.ac.nz Web www.victoria.ac.nz/education

Date Month 2013

Dear Teachers

Re: Early childhood teachers' views of 'community'

I am Judy Hamer and I am a Senior Lecturer with the Open Polytechnic and am undertaking a research project as part of my MEd studies at Victoria University of Wellington under the supervision of Dr. Judith Loveridge, School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy. My research aims to find more about the views of teachers within an early childhood centre in relation to the idea of community. I hope this research will provide some insights into the ways in which early childhood education teachers conceptualize notions of community and factors that influence the nature of community engagement in early childhood education.

Your centre manager has agreed for XXX centre to be involved in this research and I would like to invite you to take part in this. I hope that your participation in this research will be a positive experience and stimulate your thinking about community and early childhood education.

What will this research involve?

- I would like to individually interview you. This interview will last no more than one hour and will be scheduled at times convenient for you and least disruptive for your centre. I would like to complete this interview in October of this year.
- Depending on preliminary findings of this research, I may also undertake observations of you teaching and interacting with parents/whanau to gain a better understanding of how your views are reflected within centre practices.
- Prior to doing the interviews I would like to meet with you and the other teachers in your centre taking part in this research so I can explain what my research involves and answer any questions you may have.

What will happen with the information (data)?

- Your individual interview will be recorded and then transcribed. This transcription will be shared with you to ensure we agree on what was said and meant within the interview.
- If any observations are completed, then I will make any notes that refer to you available for you to read.
- I will do my utmost to protect the identity of you and your centre through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of identifying details. However discussion amongst participants of the content of their own interviews may make it more likely that others may identify the source of statements or points used in my findings.
- All information (data) that I gather will be kept confidential and viewed only by the transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement), my Victoria University of Wellington supervisor and assessors, and myself.

- All data will be stored in secure password protected files at my home and will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the research.
- Once I have completed my data gathering, I will analyse this in light of research on community in early childhood.
- I will be reporting my findings in my Master's Thesis which will be deposited in the in the Victoria University of Wellington library and may also present this research in papers or presentations at conferences that are concerned with learning, teaching and researching in early childhood education.

Your rights

- Your participation in this research would be voluntary and you are under no obligation to accept this invitation to participate in this study.
- If you do consent to participate you would be able to withdraw from doing the interviews or being observed at anytime without having to explain why.
- At the end of the study I will provide XXX centre with a summary of my research findings that will be available for you to read.
- This research has been assessed and approved by Victoria University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee. If you have questions about the way the research is being conducted you may contact Dr Allison Kirkman (Allison.kirkman@vuw.ac.nz), Chair of the Victoria University of Wellington Ethics Committee.

For further information

If you have any questions or want more information about this study, please feel free to contact me at any time. You can contact me on: ph: 06 355 9159, mob: 027 705 8245, email: judy.hamer@openpolytechnic.ac.nz. You are also welcome to contact my supervisor Dr. Judith Loveridge (ph: 04 463 6028, email: judith.loveridge@vuw.ac.nz).

If you agree to take part in this research, please complete and sign the Consent Form for Teachers that is attached.

Yours sincerely

Judy Hamer

Early childhood teachers' views of 'community'
Teacher Consent Form (Research)

- I have had the research about early childhood teachers' views of 'community' explained to me.
- I understand what would be required of my participation in the research and I agree to be interviewed and observed (if required).
- I understand that my participation in the research is voluntary and that I may withdraw from it anytime during the data gathering.
- I understand that the researcher will endeavour to protect my identity by removing all identifying information and using pseudonyms for the centre and individuals involved.
- I understand that all data would be stored in secure password protected files at the researchers house and will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the research.
- I understand that my responses will be used in the researcher's Masters Thesis and may be used in papers or presentations that are concerned with learning, teaching and researching with in early childhood education.

I consent to being interviewed.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I consent to being observed (if required).

Yes ☐ No ☐

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E: Parent Information Sheet

SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY AND PEDAGOGY

TE KURA MĀTAI HINENGARO TIKANGA

FACULTY OF EDUCATION, PO Box 17-310, Donald St, Karori, Wellington 6147, New Zealand

Phone +64-4-463 9500 Fax +64-4-463 9521 Email sepp@vuw.ac.nz Web www.victoria.ac.nz/education

Date Month 2013

Dear Parent

Re: Early childhood teachers' views of 'community'

I am Judy Hamer and I am a Senior Lecturer with the Open Polytechnic and am undertaking a research project as part of my MEd studies at Victoria University of Wellington under the supervision of Dr. Judith Loveridge, School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy. My research aims to find out about the views of teachers within an early childhood centre in relation to the idea of 'community'. Because parents are significant members of a centre community, I am also interested in understanding your views and perspectives.

The manager of XXX has agreed for your early childhood centre to be involved in this research and I would like to invite you to take part in this. I hope that your participation in this research will be a positive experience and stimulate discussion about community and early childhood education within your early childhood centre.

What will this research involve?

- This would involve you taking part in a focus group discussion along with 4 or 5 other parents of XXX centre, which will last up to an hour. This will be in October of this year and will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you and other parents attending.
- At the start of the focus group discussion I will explain what my research involves and answer any questions you may have.
- I may also undertake observations of parent-teacher interactions to gain a better understanding of how teacher views are reflected within centre practices.

What will happen with the information (data)?

- The focus group discussion will be recorded and I will provide you with a summary of the key points we discuss so that you can check that you agree that this is what was discussed.
- If any observations are completed, then I will make any notes that refer to you available for you to read.
- I will do my utmost to protect your identity through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of identifying details. However any conversations you or other participants have with others about the focus group discussion may make it possible for others to identify the source of statements or points used in my findings.
- All information (data) that I gather will be kept confidential and viewed only by the focus group assistant/ transcriber (who will sign a confidentiality agreement), my Victoria University of Wellington supervisor and assessors, and myself.
- All data will be stored in secure password protected files at my home and will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the research.
- Once I have completed my data gathering, I will analyse this in light of research on community in early childhood.

- I will be reporting my findings in my Master's Thesis which will be deposited in the in the Victoria University of Wellington library and may also present this research in papers or presentations at conferences that are concerned with learning, teaching and researching in early childhood education.

Your rights

- Your participation in this research would be voluntary and you are under no obligation to accept this invitation to participate in this study.
- If you decide to participate you can withdraw from taking part in the focus group discussion or being observed at anytime without having to explain why.
- At the end of the project I will provide XXX centre with a summary of my findings from the research that will be available for you to read.
- This research has been assessed and approved by Victoria University Faculty of Education Ethics Committee. If you have questions about the way the research is being conducted you may contact Dr Allison Kirkman (Allison.kirkman@vuw.ac.nz), Chair of the Victoria University of Wellington Ethics Committee.

For further information

If you have any questions or want more information about this study, please feel free to contact me at any time. You can contact me on: ph: 06 355 9159, mob: 027 705 8245, email: judy.hamer@openpolytechnic.ac.nz. You are also welcome to contact my supervisor Dr. Judith Loveridge (ph: 04 463 6028, email: judith.loveridge@vuw.ac.nz).

If you agree to take part in this research, please complete and sign the Consent Form for Parents that is attached to this letter.

Yours sincerely

Judy Hamer

Appendix F: Parent Consent Form

Faculty of Education

Early childhood teachers' views of 'community' Parent Consent Form (Research)

- I have had the research about early childhood teachers' views of 'community' explained to me.
- I understand what would be required of my participation in the research and I agree to be part of a focus group discussion and observed (if required).
- I understand that my participation in the research is voluntary and that I may withdraw from it anytime during the data gathering.
- I understand that the researcher will endeavour to protect my identity by removing all identifying information and using pseudonyms for the centre and individuals involved.
- I understand that all data would be stored in secure password protected files at the researchers house and will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the research.
- I understand that my responses will be used in the researcher's Masters Thesis and may be used in papers or presentations that are concerned with learning, teaching and researching with in early childhood education.

I consent to being part of a focus group discussion.

Yes ☐ No ☐

I consent to being observed (if required).

Yes ☐ No ☐

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix G: Individual Interview Schedule

Interview schedule for semi-structured interviews with teachers and centre manager.

Research: Early childhood teachers' views of 'community'

Time: up to 1 hour

- Greeting and introductions.
- Brief overview of research focus.
- Discussion of consent, confidentiality, right to withdraw, audio recording, use and storage of data, dissemination of findings.
- Selection of Pseudonym. Suggest from a list.
- Explain that I will show them a transcript at a later date to check that this accurately reflects their views.

Interview questions:

1. People talk about 'community' in early childhood education. What does 'community' mean to you?
2. What are your views on developing community *within* your centre? (e.g. with teachers, children, families ...) such as partnerships with families?
*How do/might you go about that in practice?
3. What are your views on promoting children's engagement with the wider community?
*How do/might you go about that in practice?
4. What are your views on the centres' role in promoting community wellbeing?
*How do/might you and your centre go about that in practice?
5. Revisiting the first question 'What does 'community' mean to you?'. Is there anything you would like to add? Are there any other ways that you can see your views of 'community' reflected in the practices of this centre?

[*Manager interview - How do you see this happen in your centre practices?]

Prompts (as required):

- You mention xxx, can you tell me some more about your views on this?
- You mention xxx, is this something you think is important? Why?
- You mention xxx, can you explain what you mean a little more?
- Can you give me an example of how you and your centre go about that in practice?
- *Additional questions may be added depending on findings from an analysis of centre documents.

End: Thank participant for sharing their views and their time.

Appendix H: Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement

TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I, will be the transcriber for the data collected from the research project *Early childhood teachers' views of 'community'*.

No names or identification of institutions will be provided to me. Furthermore, all the information that is provided will be deemed confidential and I will ensure that it is not released to any third party.

Signature of the transcriber

Date

Appendix I: Focus Group Interview Schedule

Interview schedule for focus group discussion with parents.

Research: Early childhood teachers' views of 'community'

Time: up to 1 hour

- Greeting and introductions.
- Brief overview of research focus.
- Discussion of consent, confidentiality, audio recording, transcribe/note-taker, use and storage of data, dissemination of findings. Reassurance of right to withdraw before we begin.
- Explain that I will provide an outline of key points of discussion at a later date to check we agree on these.
- Reassurance of right to withdraw before we begin.

Interview questions:

1. People talk about 'community' in early childhood education. What does this mean to you?
2. What are your views on developing community *within* your centre? (e.g. with teachers, children, families ...) such as partnerships with families? How do you see this happen in this centre?
3. What are your views on this centre's role in promoting your children's engagement with the wider community? How do you see this happen in this centre?
4. What are your views on this centres' role in promoting wider community wellbeing? [add an e.g. if necessary] How do you see this happen in this centre?
5. Are there any other ways that you can see your ideas of 'community' reflected in the practices of this centre? [NB: This may be answered in each of the above questions]

Prompts (as required):

- You mention xxx, can you tell me some more about your views on this?
- You mention xxx, is this something you think is important? Why?
- You mention xxx, can you explain what you mean a little more?
- Can you give me an example of how you see this happen in practice?

*Additional questions may be added depending on findings from an analysis of

End: Thank parents for sharing their views and their time.

Appendix J: Assistant Confidentiality Agreement

FOCUS GROUP ASSISTANT CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I, will be the focus group assistant for the data collected from the research project *Early childhood teachers' views of 'community'*.

All the information arising from my duties as a focus group assistant (including names of participants and the early childhood centre) will be deemed confidential and I will ensure that it is not released to any third party.

Signature of the focus group assistant

.....

Date

Appendix J: Ethical Approval

FACULTY OF EDUCATION
PO Box 17-310 Wellington 6012, New Zealand
Website www.victoria.ac.nz

7 October 2013

Judith Hamer
MEd student
Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education
C/- School of Educational Psychology and Pedagogy
Donald Street
Wellington

Dear Judith

RE: Ethics application SEPP/2013/66 RM 20249

I am pleased to advise you that your ethics application '**Early childhood teachers' views of 'community'**', with the required changes, has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education Ethics Committee. Please note that the approval for your research to commence is from the date of this letter.

Best wishes for your research.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Andrea Milligan'.

Andrea Milligan

Co-Convener
Victoria University of Wellington Faculty of Education Ethics Committee