

Overlapping realities

**Exploring how the culture and management of an early
childhood education centre provides teachers with
opportunities for professional dialogue**

Christine Healy

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Abstract

This research project investigated teachers' use of professional dialogue in one EC education centre in New Zealand. The qualitative case study highlighted the teachers' understanding of professional dialogue, the perceived purposes for professional dialogue and the cultural and organisational opportunities for professional dialogue.

The theoretical understanding of dialogue was drawn from educational and organisational literature. The term professional dialogue was also supported in the literature and captured the identity and ethos of the EC teachers' role as a professional.

Cultural historical activity theory was the conceptual framework which informed the methodology and was used for the data analysis. Multiple perspectives were acknowledged in a collective understanding of professional dialogue.

The research found that issues of time are important: the timing of the dialogical space and the lack of time for professional dialogue. In addition, opportunities for professional dialogue within an education centre are limited, social and ad hoc conversations support a team approach to professional dialogue, and the presence of student teachers enhance teachers' professional dialogue.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 What is professional dialogue?

Dialogue was a term which became apparent to me in the literature I was reading and within my conversations with teachers and other professional colleagues. I was interested in how dialogue impacted on early childhood (EC) teaching and whether it made a difference for EC teachers' practice. I wondered about the significance of the term and the relationship with EC teachers' conversations within early childhood education (ECE) centres. I wanted to know if Carlina Rinaldi's assertion of the importance of dialogue was true for EC teachers in New Zealand:

It is of absolute importance. It is an idea of dialogue not as an exchange but as a process of transformation where you lose absolutely the possibility of controlling the final result. And it goes to infinity, it goes to the universe, you can get lost. And for human beings nowadays and for women in particular, to get lost is a possibility and a risk, you know. (Rinaldi, 2006, p.184).

During the preparation for this research project it became apparent the word *dialogue* may not capture the focus of the study. I decided to use the term *professional dialogue* which was increasingly used in the literature. Professional dialogue denoted greater emphasis on the content of the EC teacher's dialogue and suggested some content was more professional than others. I wanted to investigate the way teachers had professional dialogue with each other, the time they had to dialogue and the organisational and cultural affordances which made it possible or made it difficult for teachers to have professional dialogue with each other.

I called the project “Overlapping realities”. I sought to capture the teachers’ voices within the context of the education and care centre. Literature I was reading offered constructs of teachers’ professional dialogue and I wondered how this equated with the teachers’ reality within the ECE centre. Lastly I wanted to understand how the organisation and the culture of the education and care centre affected opportunities and support for the teachers’ engagement in professional dialogue.

This research project was undertaken during a change of political emphasis in ECE in New Zealand. The National Party had entered their first term of government since 1996 (Dalli, 2010). Subsequently the policy direction of the strategic plan *Pathways to the Future; Ngā Huarahi Arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002) altered (Dalli, 2010). The world had plunged into an economic crisis and New Zealand was not immune to the fallout. This resulted in the euphoria of 20 hours free education for 3 – 5 year olds being tempered by decreased Government funding through a changed policy focus (Connell, 2010). The government reduced the targets for qualified teachers in ECE centres from 100% qualified to 80% (Dalli, 2010) resulting in the removal of the higher funding bands. The Early Childhood Education Taskforce was commissioned, produced a report in June 2011 and gave recommendations (Mintrom, 2011). At the time of writing the National Government has re-entered parliament for a second term. The government has not confirmed if they will implement the Taskforce’s recommendations and if they do what changes will result for the ECE sector.

Changes to accountability processes have also occurred. After much consultation new regulations and licensing criteria emerged in 2008. Re-licensing of EC education centres by the Ministry of Education under the new regulations *The Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations* (Ministry of Education, 2008) and *Licensing Criteria for Early Childhood Education and Care Centres 2008 and Early Childhood Education Curriculum Framework* (Ministry of Education, 2008) has begun and is to be completed by 2014. Education Review Office reviews of ECE centres continue on a triennial schedule.

1.2 Rationale for the research project

During my teaching career as an EC teacher, it was often difficult to find opportunities during the day for professional dialogue with my colleagues. As a facilitator of professional development contracts, in ECE centres, I had also experienced the challenges teachers faced in engaging with complex and new ideas. I found a teacher's ability to engage with professional development was often mirrored by how Management provided opportunities for teachers to have professional dialogue with others. More recently, as a Team Leader of several ECE centres, I am aware of the barriers in time and lack of opportunities for teachers to have professional dialogue with their colleagues.

My anecdotal evidence signified the increasing accountability for EC teachers to provide effective care and education for young children. This was sometimes in stark contrast to the teachers' working conditions. Centres' long opening hours and teachers' working rosters allowed little time to gather as a teaching team. This was often the norm within the ECE sector. Usually the manager, director or Head Teacher was also a teacher and their time for engagement with other teachers was limited. Non-contact¹ or professional time was sometimes minimal and often the first thing to be forfeited when staff were sick or numbers of qualified teachers were low. Staff meetings, the traditional times for gathering and meeting together, were usually held after work and at night. They were sometimes held infrequently (Mitchell & Brooking, 2010), otherwise monthly, fortnightly and more rarely weekly.

The title of the research project "Overlapping realities" reflected my experience of the anomalies of teachers' working conditions within an ECE centre. The rationale for the research project was an opportunity to explore these factors and their impact on the teachers' availability for, and engagement in, professional dialogue.

¹ Non-contact time is a term to denote teacher release time in an ECE centre in New Zealand.

In my search of the literature there seemed to be little research regarding teachers' professional dialogue in ECE centres. The educational research concerning dialogue was mainly focused on secondary or primary teachers and schooling. Although this gave some insight into the opportunities for professional dialogue it did not provide a New Zealand ECE perspective.

1.3 Research questions

The purpose of this study was to understand if teachers had opportunities and support for professional dialogue and how teachers understood the purpose for professional dialogue. The questions were:

- *What are EC teachers' understandings of the purpose for professional dialogue?*
- *How does the culture of the ECE centre support EC teachers' engagement in professional dialogue with their colleagues?*
- *How does the organisation of the ECE centre support EC teachers' engagement in professional dialogue with their colleagues?*

A qualitative case study was an appropriate methodological approach. The case study provided a description of the teachers' professional dialogue in an ECE centre. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology including data collection and analysis.

1.4 Structure of thesis report

This first chapter has outlined the rationale for this research project. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature and research concerning dialogue and professional dialogue. The review draws on the influence of professional dialogue on teachers working as a team. The literature concerning a teacher's identity as a teacher is also included. The last section of the literature review focuses on culture and organisational culture and the opportunities for and barriers to professional dialogue.

Chapter 3 is the Methodology chapter. This chapter describes the methodology used for the qualitative case study. It outlines how the data was collected and analysed. Chapters 4 and 5 are the findings chapters. These chapters report the analysis of the data and the key findings of this project. Chapter 4 focuses on teachers' understandings of and purposes for professional dialogue. Chapter 5 focuses on the opportunities for and barriers to professional dialogue.

Chapter 6 is the discussion chapter. This chapter discusses the findings and connects with the broader field of research, identifies contributions and limitations and looks at possible future research options.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

A key focus for this research project was EC teachers' dialogue with others and how that dialogue is supported both culturally and organisationally within the ECE centre. In the literature dialogue between teachers is proposed as a contributing factor to teachers' understanding of teaching and learning (Grey, 2011; MacNaughton, 2005). Through dialogue a culture of inquiry (Nimmo and Park, 2009) and transformation (Rinaldi, 2006) may develop within a teaching and learning environment. Through dialogue a teacher's identity is fostered and their vulnerability exposed (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009).

The term *organisational culture* (Schein, 2004) is depicted in the literature as the underpinnings of an organisation (Schein, 2004). The literature suggests that organisational culture has an impact on teaching and learning (Gibbons, 2005; Hatherly, 1999; McLeod, 2002), the community's view of the child (McLeod, 2002) and opportunities for teacher's professional learning (Fleet & Patterson, 2009; Grey, 2011). Teachers establish a learning environment where questioning and continuing to learn is fostered when critical and reflective dialogue is encouraged and supported (MacNaughton, 2005; Grey, 2011). Through dialogue teachers critique their relationships with others (MacNaughton, 2005) and encourage collaborative thinking (Hedges, 2007).

2.1 Dialogue

For the purposes of this research project, the meaning of dialogue has been drawn from organisational and educational literature. Gergen, Gergen and Barrett (2004) suggest dialogue is more than an individual act through the expression of ideas and meaning. Dialogue as an interactive act with others is a means to meet “the service of social ends” (p.42). Gergen et al. (2004) highlight five key aspects of dialogue as: a public event; “historically and culturally situated” (p. 43); occurring through “joint-action” (Gergen et al. 2004, p. 42) between the actions of the speaker and the reaction of the listener; dialogue is undertaken both for “positive and negative” (p. 44) intentions; and the meaning and understanding of the dialogue are “contextually embedded” (Gergen et al. 2004, p.43).

Bakhtin (1981, 1986) explored the social and contextual nature of dialogue. He proposed dialogue evolved in social situations through an utterance and through an interpretation of the utterance. Meaning is constructed through interpretation of the other’s utterances within the space between hearing and responding (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986). Wegerif (2008) analysed a transcript where young children shared their thinking with a teacher. He found when a reflective space occurred the children’s reasoning was articulated. A reflective moment is resonance where one person’s understandings and experiences are connected with another’s (Wegerif, 2008).

Moro (1999) explains this reflective space as an “inner voice” (p. 170). Voice can occur in various ways. For example, Bakhtin (1981) contrasts an “authoritative voice” (p. 343) which tells and demands with a “persuasive voice” (p.343) which provides opportunities for a creative response. Voice may also be the interpretation of an artifact, such as writing or a painting, or visual, such as children’s play or teachers’ practice. Through dialogue the meaning of the artifact or observation may be substantiated or altered into new meanings and understandings (Bakhtin, 1981; Moro, 1999).

White and Nuttall (2007) focus on the reflective nature of dialogue. They suggest an understanding of Bakhtin's concept of "*dialogic exchange*" (White & Nuttall, 2007, p. 21, author's italics), where meaning is interpreted in relationship with others, is helpful for teachers when assessing children's learning. In the assessment process the teacher is encouraged to step into the dialogue and then step out of it to reflect and further assess the child's learning (White & Nuttall, 2007). In this assessment process, the teacher as the narrator of events acknowledges "the narrative is not necessarily based on shared understandings, but on multiple and different understandings, all of which are constantly in the process of formation by both the educator and the child" (White & Nuttall, 2007, p. 23).

Narration comes in many forms and a recent research project emphasised the use of video recording and on-line journaling as avenues for dialogue (Bayat, 2010). Bayat's (2010) research investigated a graduate programme for extending teachers' interactions with children and teachers' curriculum participation. Participating teachers consented to engage in on-line journaling with the researcher as a form of inquiry into their teaching practice. Bayat (2010) required the teachers to video-record a teaching episode to analyse their teaching and then share this in the on-line journaling. The research concluded both on-line journaling and video recording were powerful tools for reflective dialogue and making changes to teachers' teaching practices (Bayat, 2010).

Anagnostopoulos, Smith and Nystrand (2008), Grey, (2011) and Wegerif (2008) all identify the importance of creating a dialogic space where there is "exchange of competing perspectives, practices and tools" (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2008, p. 7). Within this dialogic space teachers and students "develop new insights into and understandings of discussion" (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2008, p. 7). Issacs (1993) suggested the intent of the speaker and the recipient within the dialogical space extended dialogue beyond conversation to "a sustained collective inquiry into the processes, assumptions, and certainties that compose everyday experience" (p. 23). An understanding of *space*; as in Bakhtin's theoretical perspective of the interchange in dialogue; and in *place* as providing an opportunity for dialogue has been helpful for this study.

Participants in dialogue learn skills of openness to opposing ideas (Barrera & Kramer, 2007), an ability to suspend judgement (Bloom, 2000), a willingness to listen, reflect and to inquire more deeply (Barrera & Corso, 2003), and to value others and their perspectives (Rinaldi, 2006). There is a personal commitment to challenge and critique pedagogy through active participation in dialogue with others (MacNaughton, 2005). Edwards (1998) suggests participants in dialogue should be prepared to be intellectually engaged and for conflict as this “is the engine of all growth” (p.191).

Through rigorous inquiry, dialogue has a “capacity for transformation” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 184). This dialogue does not forecast the outcome or the final result as it allows one to be open to the unknown and to future possibilities (Brown, Issacs & World Café Community, 2005; Rinaldi, 2006). Transformative dialogue allowed participants to cross boundaries to new understandings and meanings (Rinaldi, 2006). Gergen et al. (2004) cautioned against dialogue as an “ideal interchange” (p. 41). They suggested transformation occurred when people are guided through alternatives and a vision emerged which supported change and exonerated blame (Gergen et al., 2004).

Therefore, openness and trust (Brown et al., 2005; Rinaldi, 2006) are essential components of this dialogue as through trust in oneself and others (Covey, 1989; Rinaldi, 2006) learning evolves through the sharing of ideas, thoughts and feelings (Rinaldi, 2006; Wegerif, 2008). Cosner’s research focused on how a school fostered an environment of “collegial trust” (p. 249). The research was undertaken with 11 principals over an 18 month period. Cosner (2009) suggested when principals undertook three actions — promoting more teacher engagement at meetings, establishing times for teachers to meet outside regular meetings, and focusing on the context and content of the teachers’ engagement with others, — an environment of trust was established. This was beneficial for the school and the teachers (Cosner, 2009).

Through dialogue teachers collaborate and teaching practices potentially change as opportunities occur to improve learning and outcomes for students (Bowne, Cutler, DeBates, Gilkerson, & Stremmel, 2010). A 3 year research project investigated the weekly meetings between pre-service teachers and

tutors (Bowne et al., 2010). The project investigated whether pre-service teachers valued dialogue with others and documentation of children's learning (Bowne et al., 2010). Previous observational data indicated the pre-service teachers had contributed little and were ill prepared for the weekly meetings with tutors. The researchers changed the weekly meetings to world café style meetings which encouraged focused dialogue in small groups and sharing documentation of curriculum events, resulting in the pre-service teachers being more involved in the meetings (Bowne et al., 2010). Subsequently the pre-service teachers made changes to their teaching practices, became more involved with the curriculum and valued the documentation of children's learning (Bowne et al., 2010). This finding is similar to Kroeger, Pech, and Cope's (2009) research which found when experienced and inexperienced teachers dialogued and shared knowledge reciprocal relationships within a collaborative and expanded environment of "professional understanding" (p. 344) were built.

Building relationships and staying on task were two findings of Paulus' (2007) on-line research with ten groups of distance students. Paulus (2007) found "off topic" (p.1) conversations were an important aspect of cohesion between the groups to complete the task. Chen and Wang (2009) studied groups of students completing on-line tasks. They affirmed social talk was an important contributor, rather than a distraction, to students working together to complete tasks (Chen & Wang, 2009).

2.1.1 Professional dialogue

This research project aims to investigate *professional dialogue*. This term is also used in the literature (Grey, 2011; Potter, 2001). *Professional* denotes the dialogue's relevance to a profession (Grey, 2011); in this case the EC teaching profession. Professionalism "is a socially constructed concept" (Grey, 2011, p. 22) giving credibility through official standards and ethics to the EC teaching profession (Grey, 2011). Grey's study was timely and pertinent as EC teachers were the focus and parallels can be applied to this study.

Professionalism is a difficult term to identify. It is often steeped in the teacher's personal relationship with their role as a teacher. Data from a survey of 594 EC teachers in New Zealand identified professionalism in terms of pedagogy, teaching practice and teachers' knowledge, and teachers working collaboratively (Dalli, 2008). However, Dalli and Urban (2010) cautioned against defining professionalism and suggested "professionalism as a discourse" (p.151). They challenged the notion of professionalism as static and determined by specific criteria such as teacher qualifications or regulations. Instead they suggested professionalism is linked with uncertainty, inquiry and a profession which has confidence to define its own professionalism (Dalli & Urban, 2010).

Moss (2010) questioned the use of the term "professionalism". He suggested the changing political and world scene has impacted on education and teaching requiring a rethink of the role of the teacher (Moss, 2010). Duhn (2010) cautioned against the use of a neo-liberal perspective of professionalism as a signature of quality. In her analysis of the Kidicorp website, Duhn highlighted the corporate view of professionalism and the link with perceived quality. She suggested this model raises doubts about teachers' autonomy to make changes when compared with the autonomy and leadership of an owner-operated centre (Duhn, 2010).

Grey (2011) defined *professional dialogue* from a "critical inquiry" (p. 22) perspective. Her definition proposed professional dialogue was "dialogue with a purpose, as it provides opportunities for teachers to engage in analytical discussions about teaching that extend on conversation about daily routines" (Grey, 2011, p. 23). Her investigation of four early childhood teachers' experiences of professional dialogue highlighted the benefits and the challenges in providing time for dialogue (Grey, 2011). Team building and greater understanding of colleagues together with an awareness of teaching practices and the link with the centre's philosophy were some of the benefits (Grey, 2011).

The benefit of dialogue was highlighted in a qualitative collaborative research project inquiring into literacy within the home and undertaken between teachers and university researchers (Potter, 2001). The research suggested teachers and researchers could, through professional dialogue, move from an individualised expression of speech to a “social dialect” (Potter, 2001, p.10) which engaged all. Through this collaborative research teachers’ voices were heard and the teachers’ ideas on teaching and learning evolved rather than being imposed on them by others (Potter, 2001). Fleet and Patterson’s (2009) research highlighted the importance of listening to the teachers’ perspective. They suggested when professional learning moved from a focus of expert knowledge and telling to one of building relationships, teacher inquiry and understanding of the context, that teachers were more engaged and changes in practice occurred (Fleet & Patterson, 2009).

2.2 Purposes for professional dialogue

This research project inquired into the purposes for professional dialogue. The literature highlights many purposes for professional dialogue, (e.g., collaboration, interdependency, change, pedagogical understanding and developing a teacher identity). The next section of this chapter reviews literature on each of these aspects.

2.2.1 Collaboration

The concepts of *community of learners* (Rogoff, Matusov, & White, 1996), *communities of practice* (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) and *professional communities* (Borko, 2004; Lomos, Hofman, & Bosker, 2011) have emerged as a means to explain how individuals contributed to the learning within their communities. The similarity within these concepts is the collaborative nature of participation and their emphasis on shared learning and knowledge. EC teachers work in teaching teams of two or more. This requires teachers to work collaboratively with others in the organisation and pedagogy of the early childhood education centre. Dalli (2008) defined a collaborative person as

having “Openness to learning, good communication skills and having knowledge alongside humility” (p.182).

Rogoff, Matusov, and White (1996) noted shared endeavours are a characteristic of a *community of learners*. The individual learns through activity with others rather than the transition of knowledge by a more knowledgeable other. Emphasis is on learning and participation in collaboration with others who may be more skilful in an authentic social context (Rogoff et al., 1996; Rogoff, et al., 2007). The different roles in a community of learners’ are highlighted by Rogoff (1998) as some participants lead and others follow, with some “initiating and managing the shared endeavours whilst others are in a complementary and supporting role” (p. 723).

Wenger et al. (2002) suggested organisations harnessed the knowledge base of a community through a *community of practice* as this is important for a knowledge based economy (Wenger et al., 2002). In a community of practice participants gather to create an empowering voice for the community through sharing and reflecting on knowledge and working towards common goals (Wenger et al., 2002). However, Hedges (2007) proposed a community of practice limited participants’ engagement and contribution to the community. She suggested a community of practice ignored participants’ current understanding and knowledge and the creation of innovative knowledge, and does not acknowledge the outside influences such as political and policy influences (Hedges, 2007).

Hedges’ (2007) case study research took place in two ECE centres in New Zealand. The year long fieldwork and co-constructed discussions between teachers and Hedges sought to understand how teachers and children co-constructed a curriculum focused on children’s interests (Hedges, 2007). A community of inquiry focus, including children, parents and teachers, emphasised the collective knowledge of the community. This resulted in teachers’ and parents’ questioning how they dialogued and engaged in children’s inquiry and learning (Hedges, 2007).

A quantitative research project undertaken with 130 mathematics teachers in Dutch secondary schools inquired into the teaching and learning characteristics which provided a “positive contribution to student achievement” (Lomos, Hofman, & Bosker, 2011, p. 723). The researchers found mathematics departments operating as a *professional community* made a difference for students’ achievement (Lomos et al., 2011). They identified four characteristics of a professional community. These were: a shared vision, teachers’ participation in reflective dialogue, collaborative teaching practices and a focus on students’ achievement (Lomos et al., 2011).

2.2.2 Interdependency

Rinaldi (2006) suggested the focused, structured and interactive nature of dialogue was better understood as interdependency. Interdependency from this perspective is seen as a mutual arrangement which empowers individuals to work together in a group. Interdependency enables a focus on communal relationships and benefits to the community whilst addressing historical and traditional ways of being (Rinaldi, 2006). Dialogue within this structure provided opportunities to question power relationships within the organisation. Emphasis is on unpacking beliefs and ways of being rather than solving problems (Rinaldi, 2006). The focus on dismantling power structures and questioning of values and beliefs is one also proposed by MacNaughton (2005) who suggested “power relationships” (p. 7) are challenged when the focus moves from the individual to the reason for the power relationship. Rinaldi’s and MacNaughton’s understandings of dialogue provided a base for this study to build a perspective of dialogue as deep, challenging and supportive of ECE.

Within an organisation, interdependency can be fostered when participants are encouraged to uphold the organisation’s vision and to act within a culture of collective intent. However, this interdependency may also result in disorganisation (Gergen et al., 2004). Dialogue can lead to *group think* (Irving, 1972) where only one voice is dominant and alternative perspectives are not permitted or heard (Gergen et al., 2004; Irving, 1972). In this environment interdependency may lead to an organisation that remains static and disorganised (Gergen et al. 2004).

Group think is counter to interdependent dialogue which evolves and disrupts dominant perspectives (MacNaughton, 2005). Beliefs are challenged in an ECE setting when teachers have opportunities to dialogue and question, challenge, reject, discuss or negotiate with others. MacNaughton (2005) provides vignettes of teachers' experiences of how anomalies in teaching practices could be identified and disrupted. She suggests power relations within an ECE centre require teachers to critically reflect on their assumptions regarding teaching and learning (MacNaughton, 2005).

2.2.3 Change

The literature has highlighted how change in pedagogy and organisation can occur through dialogue with others. Change can occur in various ways; through political decisions (Dalli, 2010) or a personal desire to find other ways to address issues (MacNaughton, 2005). Professional learning offers opportunities to initiate professional dialogue and instigate change where "working practices, knowledges, theories, experiences and contexts of teachers [are] valid starting points" (Edwards & Nuttall, 2009, p. 134).

Research undertaken by Nuttall, Coxon, and Read (2009) focused on how two teachers unpacked traditional teaching practices and extended their professional learning and understanding of a socio-cultural curriculum. Through dialogue at regular meetings with an academic facilitator, the teachers questioned their agency within their education and care structures (Nuttall et al., 2009). Subsequently the group dialogue provided an impetus for the teachers to initiate ideas and change teaching practices within existing structures. This impetus led to management making organisational changes. These changes emphasised a focus on a socio-cultural curriculum which ultimately benefited both the teachers and the children (Nuttall et al., 2009).

Grey's (2011) study also highlighted how change, in teaching practices and working in a teaching team, occurs through professional dialogue with colleagues. However, Grey (2011) found in the initial stages of the formation of the group that "discomfort and anxiety" (p. 25) were often evident. She suggests trust can emerge when the purposes for dialogue are clear and when ideas are presented as a means of extending learning and understanding (Grey, 2011).

Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett, and Farmer's (2005) research also highlighted how change can cause concern for teachers. In a collection of vignettes, EC professionals shared their experiences of change within the ECE sector. The authors proposed change takes time, can be challenging and cause disruptions and concerns amongst the participants if their feelings and perspectives are not taken into consideration (Arthur et al., 2005). Fleer and Richardson's (2004) research followed teachers in an ECE centre as they made changes to their practices of assessing children's learning. The 12 month inquiry found when teachers made theoretical and philosophical changes to their teaching practices the process took time. Before teachers could participate in socio-cultural assessment practices they needed to observe and then become active participators and model for other teachers (Fleer & Richardson, 2004).

2.2.4 Pedagogical understandings

Within an ECE environment, dialogue provides an avenue for teachers to deconstruct their practice through reflexive and critical theorising (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007; Rinaldi, 2006). Nuttall's (2003, 2004) research questioned teachers' understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of curriculum. She found teachers' practice was often misaligned with the theory then espoused. Dialogue was proposed as a means to challenge dominant voices and expose teachers' beliefs and assumptions. She suggested teachers can then examine their teaching practice and its effect on children's learning (Nuttall, 2003, 2004).

Hedges (2003) questioned the emphasis on "best practice" (p. 5) which suggested there was only one way of teaching and learning. An emphasis on "wise practice" (p. 5) highlighted theoretical reasoning as the basis for teaching

practice (Hedges, 2003). Hedges' (2007) later research drew on the concept of teachers', children's and parents' "funds of knowledge" (p. 182). Funds of knowledge are the formal and informal knowledge that participants bring to the learning environment. Hedges (2007) proposed teachers' knowledge developed when teachers shared their knowledge and participated in enquiry into theoretical understandings of teaching and learning.

A Swedish writer, Taguchi (2010) suggested there are "two contradictory movements within education: one of complexity and diversity increase, and one of complexity and diversity reduction" (p. 6). In the former movement, diversity is celebrated with parents, children and teachers collectively providing input and diversity to the learning community. The latter movement highlights accountability and assured outcomes for teaching and learning from political and administration bodies that focus more on developmental models of learning and teaching. Across these contradictory movements enlightenment and change can occur through teachers unpacking their theoretical understandings of teaching and learning (Taguchi, 2010).

Taguchi (2010) explained how she worked with EC teachers in Sweden, unpacking the teachers' present teaching practices in order to understand those practices. The focus was on understanding teaching practice and seeing how it could be re-shaped rather than introducing new ideas and practices. Taguchi (2010) argued sustained changes are made when teachers identified theory and practice as interdependent. She tells of a student teacher's project which explored boys' interest in making guns from sticks. The teacher experienced the other teachers controlling the behaviours. Taguchi (2010) explained when the teacher decided to engage differently with the boys she practised theoretical understandings of interaction and listening. This resulted in changing the focus of the boys' play from guns to other creative utilisation of the sticks.

When communities fostered disagreement rather than consensus "conventional understandings" (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 204) were challenged, opening new opportunities to address theory and practice. Within a socio-cultural curriculum

(e.g. *Te Whāriki*²) teachers' documented learning assessments provided opportunities for multiple perspectives (Carr, 2004). In this environment teachers are required to listen to others while possibly disagreeing and being uncertain (Cullen, 2001). This notion of uncertainty sits within the poststructuralist discourse of hearing "multiple truths" (MacNaughton, 2005, p.59). In a vignette Kylie Smith, explained how poststructuralist theories exposed her to other perspectives of teaching and learning. Those theories encouraged her to reflect on her teaching rather than give a prescribed response to children's learning (MacNaughton, 2005).

Co-construction as a teaching strategy also requires a familiarity with uncertainty. Jordan's (2003) research was with four ECE centres where she acted as a facilitator of the teachers' action research. The focus of the research was on teachers' co-construction of learning with children. When teachers co-construct they see the child as a knowledgeable other. Jordan (2003) proposed there were several individual and team benefits when teachers co-constructed learning with children. Teachers developed an ability to listen and to adapt to the children's thinking, acknowledged the benefits of research and planning and the articulation of their understanding with other teachers. Within the teaching team, teachers were seen as learners and contributors rather than more knowledgeable others (Jordan, 2003).

Co-construction provides a contrast to a discourse on quality. Dahlberg et al. (2007) questioned the usefulness of quality as a guide for teaching practices. They suggested quality predetermined requirements and provided certainty in prescribed ways of doing and being. Bown and Sumsion's (2007) study recorded three teachers' perceptions of how statutory regulations impacted on their teaching and their identity as teachers and professionals. The findings suggested "early childhood teachers may operate behind a metaphorical regulatory 'fence', which contributed to their perceptions of safety but impinged on their professional freedom, integrity and passion for teaching" (Bown & Sumsion, 2007, p.30).

² *Te Whāriki* is the New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum, (Ministry of Education, 1996)

Critical and challenging dialogue may be necessary for teachers to move beyond normalising what is knowledge and learning and engage with other perspectives (Dahlberg et al., 2007; MacNaughton, 2005; Rinaldi, 2006). A “practice orientated” (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p. 127) project in Stockholm lead by Dahlberg as scientific leader challenged pedagogues’ present understanding of teaching and learning. The Stockholm experiment, as it was known, was an evolving, collaborative research project of project leaders, pedagogues, one EC institution and six networked institutions. The aim was to introduce Reggio Emilia pedagogical philosophies within the early childhood institutions. To facilitate change, cultural norms and teaching practices within the EC institutions were unpacked by the pedagogues. Subsequently, the project highlighted the pedagogues’ unfamiliarity with pedagogical critique and cultural understandings of disharmony. Change only occurred through the pedagogues’ willingness to confront and discuss the barriers to critiquing pedagogy in the institutions (Dahlberg et al., 2007).

2.2.5 Developing teacher identity

The literature suggested dialogue and reflection contributed to teachers forming their identity as a teacher (Gibbs, 2006; Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009; Rinaldi, 2006). Through dialogue with others attributes of self-understanding and vulnerability (Kelchtermans, 2005); insightfulness, collaboration and reflection (Gibbs, 2006); an inquiring persona (Rinaldi, 2006) and a willingness to be intellectually stimulated (Nimmo & Park, 2009) may develop.

Kelchtermans (2009) drew on a body of research to develop a framework for teacher identity. Kelchtermans (2005, 2009) proposed a teacher’s identity evolved through five components. Teachers had a perception of themselves as a teacher and were aware of how well they were doing the job. They had ideas of what a teaching job entailed, what prompted them to be a teacher and how they perceived their teaching career (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009).

One means of challenging assumptions was through teachers' engagement with the code of ethics (Early Childhood Code of Ethics National Working Group, 2001). Dalli and Cherrington (2009) suggested advocacy by academics, teachers and others led to the development of the code of ethics (Early Childhood Code of Ethics National Working Group, 2001). The code of ethics supported the EC teachers' developing identity as professionals by addressing, through dialogue with others, difficult and complex situations which arose during their teaching practice in ECE centres.

Gaining an understanding of the complexity of EC teaching and developing a culture of inquiry within a shared learning environment was fostered in the Centre of Innovation programme (Meade, 2005, 2010). This government-funded research programme within New Zealand ECE centres intended practitioners, supported by academics, to undertake action research within their centres to highlight innovative teaching practices. The teachers developed their identities as inquirers and innovators as they familiarised themselves with research within a supportive environment and publications raised awareness of teachers' innovative practices (Meade, 2005, 2010). Meade (2011) suggested the programme supported teachers to be inquiring about their teaching practices and to disseminate their understandings by articulating their ideas both verbally and in writing. This culminated in others agreeing or disagreeing with the ideas and contributed to a stimulating learning environment (Meade, 2011).

However, when teachers rely solely on others' interpretations of his or her teaching ability, misunderstanding of the teaching role may eventuate (Nuttall, 2003, 2004). These interpretations can position teachers in dominant and subordinate roles culminating in teaching practices being less exposed to challenges through dialogue with others. Nuttall's (2003, 2004) research revealed how differences and discrepancies emerged between teaching practice and the theories and beliefs espoused by the teachers. An example of this anomaly was teachers were expected to be flexible in their teaching practice and to respond to a child's growing interests. However, the learning environment emphasised routines and a constructed timetable of the day's events. Nuttall (2003) argued the lack of dialogue and negotiation of the meaning of curriculum positioned teachers "as having conflicting teaching styles or being 'difficult' to work with" (p. 9). As a means to address these conflicts,

Nuttall (2003) suggested teachers examine their understanding of curriculum and teaching and learning through the reflective questions in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). Nuttall's case study research with EC teachers in an ECE centre provided a foundation and a comparison for this case study.

This section has reviewed the purposes for professional dialogue. The literature highlighted how professional dialogue provided opportunities for teachers to challenge their teaching practices and ideas on teaching and learning. Through dialogue teachers developed their identity as a teacher. The next section reviewed the literature concerning organisation and culture and how both provided opportunities and support for professional dialogue.

2.3 Culture and organisation

Previous sections of the literature review have reviewed the literature concerning dialogue, professional dialogue and purposes for professional dialogue. This next section reviews the literature regarding the influences of culture and organisation on support and opportunities for professional dialogue. For the purposes of this research project, the meaning of culture and organisation has been drawn from organisational and educational literature.

2.3.1 Culture

Culture can be viewed in various ways. While culture may be portrayed as steeped in tradition and fixed, focused on ethnicity and place (Dahlberg et al., 2007) an alternative view sees *culture* as evolving, complex, consisting of multiple perspectives and constructed by people as they relate to others (Barrera & Corso, 2003; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Rinaldi, 2006). This post-structural view positions culture as influenced by politics and the language used to describe ourselves and others (MacNaughton, 2005; Moss, 2010). Within the ECE context, an official view of culture was found in the licensing criteria

(Minister of Education, 2008) as “understandings, patterns of behaviour, practices and values shared by a group of people” (p.5).

Values and beliefs are portrayed through the language and culture of an organisation. In EC education the view of the child emerges through language and the espoused values and beliefs which informed pedagogy. The child can be viewed as helpless and dependent on society or as confident and competent and contributing to society (Carr, 2001; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Rinaldi, 2006). In New Zealand EC teachers are guided by the curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), which describes the child as competent and confident.

Lubeck, Jessup, de Vries, and Post’s (2001) research highlighted the impact of culture when they reviewed the effect of the Head Start programme on children’s learning in three EC settings. The researchers highlighted the communal presentation of the Head Start programme. However, they found the culture of the institution and the communities’ social context was a determining factor in the improvements made for children’s learning. They suggested culture was not “a bounded and unified entity [but] takes shape in different ways through dynamic interactions in particular contexts” (Lubeck et al., 2001, p. 519). The researchers proposed any changes made to the Head Start programme should take local contexts into account. This required enquiry into how the programme and its outcomes were implemented locally rather than nationally (Lubeck et al., 2001).

2.3.2 Organisational culture

The term *organisational culture* emerged from an approach to understanding the underpinnings of organisations (Schein, 2004). Organisational culture addressed less tangible elements within an organisation but which affected how people worked together. This perspective identifies culture as the relationships and communication which occurs in people’s everyday lives (Schein, 2004).

Schein's work provided the study with a broader perspective of how organisations function and adapt. Schein (2004) defined an organisation's culture as:

“...a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (p.17).

Therefore the view of the child can be perceived as cultural with many diverse perspectives. This was reflected in a case study of sixty personnel from ten EC education centres (McLeod, 2002). The research inquired into the management and leadership practices within these centres using organisational culture as a conceptual framework. McLeod (2002) suggested the person who originally led the centre had a profound influence on the communities' view of the child. The view was promoted within “centre discourse and activities” (McLeod, 2002, p. 299) and in turn influenced new members, teachers and parents. McLeod (2002) argued new teachers' and new parents' developed a similar view of the child as the centres' view and this became ingrained in the philosophical understandings and cultural organisation of the centre (McLeod, 2002). Engagement with *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) was more problematical when children were seen as needy and care was the dominant discourse within the centre. McLeod (2002) argued a review of leadership and the centre management's view of the child was necessary for assumptions to be challenged.

Gibbons' (2005) qualitative case study research was undertaken in two playcentres.³ The study inquired into educators' and parents' assumptions concerning being a “social community” (Gibbons, 2005, p. 22) which prevailed through their “thoughts and actions” (p.11). The playcentres' philosophy encouraged educators, parents and children to socialise and engage with each other. For example, morning tea was seen as a social event. However, Gibbons

³ Playcentres are early childhood education centres in New Zealand which are organised and lead by parents of the children who attend. Often the parents stay with their children during the sessions and are regarded as educators.

(2005) suggested an anomaly of this assumption was the educators' and parents' actions which encouraged children's independence and individualism rather than social engagement with others. Gibbons' and McLeod's research were both New Zealand ECE-based and provided, —this study—, with increased understanding of the complexities of management and teachers' roles in ECE.

Kiley and Jensen's (2003) mixed method research explored the shaping of an organisation through beliefs incongruent with their vision. The research arose from a concern of less parent involvement within the centre. They found that previously appointed staff were hired because they exemplified the centre's values and vision. Later teachers were hired who did not uphold the vision. Communication between staff and parents broke down with parents being less involved within the centre. The researchers concluded an institution's vision was upheld when supported by strong leadership (Kiley & Jensen, 2003).

Mentoring programmes were a means of addressing philosophical understandings within an ECE centre. Cameron (2007) suggested teacher registration mentoring programmes supported teachers' ongoing professional learning. She argued an effective mentoring programme could impact on teachers' "attitudes and practice when they are part of professional learning environments that support and challenge all teachers to use evidence to inform their teaching decisions" (p. 70). This was in contrast to a restricted mentoring programme which was limited in time, did not include others, and was limited in content and support for both the mentor and the inductee teacher (Cameron, 2007).

2.3.3 Barriers for dialogue

This research project intends to investigate how the culture and organisation of the ECE centre supports and provides barriers for teachers' professional dialogue. There was limited literature regarding support for professional dialogue which identified the barriers which could occur in ECE centres.

Grey's (2011) study identified the importance of providing time for professional dialogue and for teachers to feel comfortable with the process of having dialogue with their colleagues. She suggests challenges for teachers were finding time to participate and personally committing time outside work time for professional dialogue (Grey, 2011). Taylor (2011) also highlighted the importance of teachers' readiness to commit time outside work hours to engage in professional dialogue, referring to her research where teachers arranged time after work to have "professional conversations" (p.15). Taylor (2011) suggested teachers look for inventive means to talk about organisational and routine matters during the day so that meetings could be devoted to more in-depth dialogue which challenges beliefs and values. MacNaughton (2005) also identified structures, including meetings with other teachers with similar interests and persuasions were an important contributor to teachers addressing issues of power and social justice. Rinaldi (2006) suggested that time for teachers to meet during the working day was essential for the organisation of the centre and pedagogical understanding.

In order for dialogue to be part of teachers' practice, barriers in organisational and cultural considerations needed to be addressed (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Rinaldi, 2006). The issues included: a lack of allotted time for teachers to meet (Mitchell and Hodgen, 2008; Mitchell and Brooking, 2010) and to engage in professional dialogue (Grey, 2011; Hatherly, 1999; Taylor, 2011); minimal or no non-contact time (Mitchell and Hodgen, 2008; Mitchell and Brooking, 2010); teachers' responses to the critique of their own teaching practice (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Grey, 2011; MacNaughton, 2005) and teachers' willingness and ability to engage in dialogue which addressed values and beliefs (Grey, 2011; Taylor, 2011; Rinaldi, 2006).

A research report for the Ministry of Education (Smith et al., 2000) identified staff wages and conditions as significant structures that indicated the value appointed to staff and was a variable which contributed to quality teaching and learning (Smith et al., 2000). Moss (2010) also suggests EC teachers' working conditions and status need to be addressed, citing the OECD (2006) report which highlights concerns regarding teachers' status, pay and conditions in contrast to teachers in other sectors (Moss, 2010).

The limited research available on ECE is highlighted in a report on leadership for the New Zealand Teachers' Council. Thornton, Wansbrough, Clarkin-Phillips, Aitken, and Tamaiti (2009) argued there is a lack of research on leadership in ECE in New Zealand. They suggested ECE leadership has little support from Ministry of Education or an official co-ordinated approach compared with the support given to primary and secondary principals. McLeod (2002) also argued there were concerns regarding leadership and management in ECE centres and called for a review.

2. 4 Summary

This literature review drew on education and organisational literature to explore current understandings and research regarding teachers' dialogue with others, particularly within EC settings. The literature highlighted the importance of dialogue for teachers' practice and for providing a stimulating and inviting learning environment. The review also explored how dialogue contributed to a teacher's identity and promoted and questioned EC teacher's professionalism.

The literature and research regarding organisational culture contributed to further understanding of the concepts of culture and organisation. Leadership was briefly addressed in the literature review. A more in-depth account of the literature regarding interdependency and collaboration, both of which the literature indicated as contributors to dialogue, is given.

The literature review highlights gaps in the research regarding teaching practices in an ECE centre. The review indicated there was limited research regarding teachers' professional dialogue and the cultural and organisational support for professional dialogue. This research project attempts to fill that gap.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research “is a field of inquiry in its own right. It crosscuts disciplines, fields, and subject matters” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.3). The methodology can be approached in various ways including case study or appreciative inquiry. Multiple methods are used to gather data including interviews or observations and analyse data, including interpretative or discourse analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Many research paradigms and approaches may be undertaken under the qualitative research umbrella (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

In qualitative research the researcher’s epistemological, ontological and methodological beliefs influence the design of the research project (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). These beliefs were pertinent for this study in the following ways. Epistemology asks moral questions of the researcher and her view of the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) and in particular her relationship with the research participants. Ontology questions the researcher’s view of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) and how she viewed the teachers’ role and the context in which they teach. Methodology questions the way knowledge is acquired and the effective means of inquiry to gain knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) about dialogue within the ECE centre.

Multiple images describe the qualitative researcher and one metaphor is “*bricoleur*” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 5). A *Bricoleur* pieces together information then through interpretation endeavours to understand it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Denzin and Lincoln (2008) used the metaphorical images of a quilt maker, a jazz musician and a film producer to epitomise how the qualitative researcher follows a process of data analysis. The metaphors represent the

qualitative researcher using multiple methods to piece together and interpret the pertinent data before presenting the final analysis in a documented form (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

The qualitative researcher is located within a “natural setting” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4) where they observe, take field notes, interview others or source artifacts relevant to their research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Through these methods, and the resulting analysis of the collected data, the qualitative researcher tries to understand and make sense of the participants’ world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The findings are documented to provide opportunities for others to view the phenomena and for the participants’ reality to surface (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996).

The role of the qualitative researcher is to approach the fieldwork with an open mind, to listen (Yin, 2009) and to observe and then interpret those events within the line of the inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The research design determines the methods used to undertake the inquiry within “specific methodological practices” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 34), e.g. case study.

3.1.1 Rationale for qualitative research

A qualitative research approach was appropriate to answer the research questions. The approach provided a framework for the researcher to observe and engage with the research participants – EC teachers – in the research setting, the ECE centre. To understand the teachers’ experiences multiple methods of data collection were used including interviews, observations and participants’ journals. Through data collection methods and data interpretation the teachers’ perspective of their world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) emerged.

Qualitative research was used as opposed to quantitative research which usually adheres to an objectivist approach whereby “reality exists independently of the researcher” (Gray, 2009, p.201). Qualitative researchers are linked to a constructivist paradigm that “sees truth and meaning constructed and

interpreted by individuals” (Gray, 2009, p. 201). Gray (2009) and Crotty (1998) maintain this epistemological stance separates qualitative and quantitative researchers. However, Flick (2006) proposed the social influences which affect research are difficult to avoid. Distinctions between quantitative and qualitative research may be less clearly defined. Through a qualitative approach this study aimed to inquire into the teachers’ understanding of professional dialogue and opportunities for professional dialogue within an ECE centre. This approach allowed for the teachers “lived reality or constructed meanings” (Mutch, 2005, p. 43) to be uncovered.

The researcher is subjectively present within qualitative research, through the collection and analysis of data. Subjectivity is value orientated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) and does have an impact on the research findings whilst bringing a richness and reality to the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Subjectivity was present in the researcher’s representation of the teachers and interpretation of the data. Efforts were made to acknowledge how interpretation of the data was influenced by my subjectivity, beliefs and values. (See section 3.6 for further discussion). Subjectivity was present in the researcher’s representation of the teachers’ interpretation of their contribution to the data.

3.1.2 Constructivist-interpretive paradigm

An interpretive framework or paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) guided this research project. Interpretivism is a post-positivist stance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) which emphasises capturing how participants within the research project viewed their reality (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). Within a constructivist-interpretive paradigm multiple realities are encouraged, research is undertaken in the real world and a subjective approach is used to understand data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The paradigm tests reality and modifies understandings of the world through language and symbolic systems (Mutch, 2005). These influences are evident when “[t]ruth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8).

An interpretive approach is not necessarily decided on in advance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). It is a process somewhat determined by the researcher's gender, culture and social norms (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Mutch, 2005). In this study, my social and cultural experiences, including being a female teacher familiar with the ECE profession, influenced how I approached data collection and analysis. These issues are discussed more fully below. Within an interpretive paradigm *how* and *what* questions provide a process for understanding how people interpret their reality and social norms (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008). *How* questions encourage the researcher to unsettle the assumptions concerning social realities. *What* questions ensure caution in the actions taken to locate those realities (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008).

A constructivist-interpretivist approach underpinned this study's focus on understanding *how* the culture and organisation of the ECE centre presented opportunities for teachers' professional dialogue. In addition, the study sought to identify *what* were the teachers' understandings of professional dialogue and the purposes for professional dialogue within the context of the centre. Within the interpretive paradigm there was a focus on how the participants made meaning (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008) of professional dialogue.

3.1.3. Ethnography

Ethnography is a qualitative research paradigm anthropologists traditionally used to study others in their natural settings (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). This paradigm has since evolved and is now used as an approach to understand people in their "everyday context" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 3). The focus of ethnography is on a few participants at any one time. The data is gathered from a range of sources not fully determined before-hand. The analysis emerges from the data rather than being defined within a prescribed framework (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

The ethnographic researcher attempts to focus on their understanding of a few phenomena in order to bring meaning to those phenomena (Tedlock, 2003). In this project the focus was on one group of EC teachers in one ECE centre in

New Zealand. The researcher sought to gain an understanding of the phenomena of teachers' professional dialogue within the centre.

3.1.4 Case Study

This research project used case study methodology. Case study is a legitimate mode of qualitative research (Stake, 2008; Yin, 2003) concentrating "on experiential knowledge of the case and close attention to the influence of its social, political and other contexts" (Stake, 2008, p. 120). A case study is a process of inquiry from which a product such as a written report, a film or a biography emerges (Stake, 2008, p.121). In this project, case study provided a methodological approach for the inquiry and analysis of research data (Stake, 2008; Yin, 2003, 2009).

A case study is bounded by several factors (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Stake, 2008; Yin, 2009) including time, place and a group of individuals. Yin (2003) defines a single case study as "*representative or typical*" (p. 41, author's italics) of other similar situations. In this project the case study is representative (Yin, 2003) of EC teachers and their engagement in professional dialogue with other teachers within an ECE centre.

The purpose of the project was to provide a description of the case within a given context (Yin, 2009). Therefore this research project is an instrumental case study as it attempts to increase understanding through awareness and support for an issue (Stake, 2008), The issue is to understand the *how and what* (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008) of teachers' professional dialogue and to provide an avenue for teachers' articulation of their understandings within the context of an ECE centre in New Zealand. The research questions for this research project are:

- ***What are EC teachers' understandings of the purpose for professional dialogue?***
- ***How does the culture of the ECE centre support EC teachers' engagement in professional dialogue with their colleagues?***
- ***How does the organisation of the ECE centre support EC teachers' engagement in professional dialogue with their colleagues?***

A case study may use multiple sources of data such as interviews, observations and written documentation (Gray, 2009; Mutch, 2005; Yin, 2009). For this case study I used interviews, teachers' journals, observations and artifacts including meeting notes and physical features (e.g. staff room). Yin (2009) cautions the inexperienced researcher can be overwhelmed by data. I dealt with this possibility by cataloguing data as it was collected, and following an analysis trail. To ensure the object (Engeström, 1999a) of the case study, teachers' professional dialogue, was the focus during the analysis of the data (Yin, 2003, 2009) a theoretical framework – *Socio-cultural historical activity theory* – (CHAT) (Engeström, 1999a), was identified before field work began. (See section 3.7.4 for further discussion of the framework).

3.2 Data Collection Methods

Multiple data collection methods were used for this research project. These methods were appropriate for a case study methodology and the conceptual framework (CHAT) which underpinned the research, data collection and analysis.

3.2.1 Interviews

Interviewing is a powerful way of helping people to make explicit things that have hitherto been implicit – to articulate their tacit perceptions, feelings and understandings (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p. 32).

Interviews are an important source of case study data (Yin, 2009). These can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured conversations with participants (Gray, 2009; Yin, 2009). A semi-structured interview (refer to Appendix A) provides an opportunity to probe an idea. This requires the interviewer to listen well and then re-construct the questions or direction of the conversation depending on the interviewee's response (Gray, 2009). Therefore, care is needed in the presentation of the interview questions. The challenge for the interviewer is to retain the intention of their inquiry whilst allowing the interviewee to contribute their perspective and their input into the inquiry (Yin, 2009). Through this method of interviewing, interviews do provide rich data as participant's responses expose their thoughts and understandings of their lives (Gray, 2009).

3.2.2 Observations

Observation is a complex combination of sensation and perception (Gray, 2009, p. 397).

A case study occurs within a setting which provides opportunities for focused observations (Yin, 2009). The purpose of such observations is to contribute to the description of the case study setting. Through these observations interactions between participants are observed and noted providing another source of data. Observations are overt in this type of study as those observed are aware of the observer and of being observed (Flick, 2006). There are drawbacks to observations as the observer may influence the behaviour of the participants, therefore not seeing a true record of events (Gray, 2009).

The literature refers to participant and non-participant observers (Flick, 2006; Gray, 2009; Mutch, 2005; Yin 2009). Non-participant observation occurs when the observer removes themselves from events and does not interact with the research participants, whilst a participant observer gradually involves themselves in the research field through interviews and observation (Flick, 2006). In this study participant observations occurred. Richards (2009), however, maintains everyone is a participating observer. The craft of skilfully observing through the accurate noticing of pertinent information followed by the able recording of the detail is required for any research project (Richards, 2009).

3.2.3 Artifacts

Artifacts are historical or contemporary materials written within a social context (Delamont, 2002) which record a happening at a certain point in time. Artifacts can be personal and private reflections or accounts of public events sometimes displayed for public scrutiny. In this project the researcher's fieldwork notes and the research participants' written documentation, called journals, were artifacts. Artifacts also included some physical features of Pohutukawa Early Learning Centre. For example, the staff room and the children's learning environment which included displays of children's learning, information boards and staff meeting notes.

A broader perspective (Yin, 2009) can be gained through artifacts which highlight the issues that are important to the participants. However, caution needs to be applied to artifacts including participants' journals as they may be written for the researcher (Delamont, 2002). They can also be open to unknown bias as the recorder's name may not be evident (Gray, 2009).

3.3 Selection of the case study

This research project undertook a case study into EC teachers' professional dialogue with other teachers, their understandings of professional dialogue and its purposes, and factors, organisational and cultural, impacting upon opportunities for professional dialogue. The research site for the case study was selected according to the following criteria: that it was an ECE centre where entry was enabled, with a teaching team of six or more teachers, who consented to participate in the research project.

3.3.1 The research setting

I approached an ECE centre which met the criteria and with whom I had a previous relationship (Berg, 2004) as a professional development facilitator. I sent a letter to Pohutukawa Early Learning Centre (pseudonym), requesting entry (Appendix B) and the centre consented. The manager/teacher and teachers all chose pseudonyms as well the pseudonym for the early learning centre.

Pohutukawa Early Learning Centre is a community-based-full-day education and care centre⁴ affiliated to an umbrella organisation. It is licensed for 36 children and is divided into an over-two year area (26 children) and an under-two year area (10 children). The children can attend all day between 7.30am – 5.30pm or they can attend for a morning or an afternoon session. Children have to attend a minimum of two sessions per week. Many children attend the centre because of its affiliation to the umbrella organisation. The majority of families are fee-paying. There are two places dedicated for children whose parents cannot afford to pay fees.

⁴An education and care centre is a licensed ECE institution in New Zealand. In this centre children were aged one to five years. The centre license is governed by the Ministry of Education, New Zealand.

At the time of data collection, the centre was managed by Daisy, the manager/teacher and two senior teachers, Rachael (in the over-two's area) and April (in the under-two's area). The centre has a management board which has representatives from the teaching team and the umbrella organisation. However, Daisy has overall responsibility for the organisation and financial viability of the centre whilst the umbrella organisation plays more of a supportive role. Daisy also worked as a teacher within the learning environment. In addition to Daisy, Rachael and April there were eight other teachers employed at the centre. The manager/teacher, two senior teachers, and three other teachers were qualified registered teachers. Four teachers were in various stages of teacher training. One teacher completed her qualification during the research and one teacher resigned to go overseas. Table 3 provides further detail of the staff team at Pohutukawa Early Learning Centre.

Table 3.1 Teaching staff at Pohutukawa ELC

Name	Title	Qualified/ non-qualified	Working full-time/ part-time	Under-2's or over-2's
Daisy	Manager	Qualified	Full-time	Both over and under-two's
Rachael	Senior Teacher	Qualified	Part-time	Over-two's
April	Senior Teacher	Qualified	Full-time	Under-twos
June	Teacher	Qualified	Part-time	Under-two's
Julia	Teacher	Qualified	Part-time	Over-two's
Jo	Teacher	Qualified	Full-time	Over-two's
Zara	Student teacher	Completed qualification during research	Part-time (student) Full-time (qualified)	Under-two's Over-two's
Kerry	Student teacher	Unqualified– in training	Part-time	Over-two's
Pip	Student teacher	Unqualified– in training	Part-time	Over-two's
Roimata	Student teacher	Unqualified– in training	Part-time	Over-two's
Barrie	Relief teacher	Unqualified	Part-time	Over-two's and under-two's

Many teachers worked less than full-time with the majority working between 9am – 3pm. This commitment by the centre to cater for teachers' preferred working hours resulted in a high retention of teachers. Many student teachers remained employed at the centre after they qualified. A part-time administrator was also employed.

All the teachers attended two-hourly fortnightly staff meetings held on Monday's between 5.30pm – 7.30pm. The teaching team began the meeting together and then separated into their areas of responsibility, under-two's and over-two's. Staff meetings included discussions about routines and organisational topics, (e.g. rosters) as well as routine tasks (e.g. cleaning the paint pots). However, the major purpose of the staff meetings was for teachers to discuss teaching practices and to plan for children's learning.

Non-contact time was dedicated to documenting assessments of children's learning. Non-contact time for teachers was based on the number of children's portfolios for whom the teacher was responsible. The over-two's teachers had a longer period of non-contact compared with the teachers in the under-two's area because the ratios of teacher: children were lower and there were more children on the over-two's rolls.

3.4 Ethics

An 'ethic' is a moral principle or a code of conduct which actually governs what people do. It is concerned with the way people act or behave (Mutch, 2005, p. 76).

Ethics are rules of practice that guide the researcher in their fieldwork, relationships with participants, interpretation of the data and the final written report (Flick, 2006). In qualitative research, methods for data collection can be more expansive than in quantitative research as the research site allows for openness to questioning and observing. Flick (2006) suggests the data collection methods should be only focused on collecting data relevant to the research project. Data gathering was restricted to teachers' dialogue with other teachers and occasionally observed with parents. Dialogue with children was excluded from the data analysis although this was seen as peripheral to the study.

Ethical consent for this research project was guided by the Victoria University Human Ethics Guidelines (Victoria University, 2003). I received ethical approval from the Faculty of Education Ethics Committee (13 July 2010, FOE/2010/54: RM 17792). The notion of informed consent is paramount for ethical research within an educational setting. It provides a safeguard against participants feeling that they were coerced into participating for the greater good (Christians, 2005).

After consent was gained for entry to Pohutukawa Early Learning Centre the manager and teachers were given the information sheet (Appendix C) and the consent form (Appendix D). The consent form clearly indicated the teachers could consent or decline to participate in the research and how they would be involved in the data collection methods. These included recorded interviews, in-centre observations, staff meeting observations and recordings, journal writing and analysis of artifacts. The manager and the teachers, except the relief teacher, consented to participate in the research. The relief teacher consented to being included in observations and staff meetings but declined to be interviewed and to complete a journal.

The teachers gave informed consent that I audio-record the interviews and staff meetings. These were subsequently transcribed by a professional transcriber who signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix E). I also received informed consent to use artifacts, including staff meeting notes, as data.

I was mindful that having once consented to participate in the research project that the teachers may find the process demanding. I consulted with them throughout my field work, giving prior notice of my observation visits, negotiated my attendance at staff meetings, and accepted some teachers' decision not to participate in a second interview.

3.5 Data collection

Data collection for this project consisted of interviews, observations and artifacts.

3.5.1 Interviews

The interviews with the manager and teachers, enabled data to be collected concerning teachers' experiences of professional dialogue with other teachers within the context of Pohutukawa Early Learning Centre. The interviews were semi-structured (Gray, 2009; Yin, 2009).

I initially interviewed Daisy in her role as manager, to gain an understanding of the context and organisation of Pohutukawa Early Learning Centre. This interview focused on the number of teachers, their qualifications, and teachers in training, working part-time or full-time, and when staff meetings occurred. Daisy also shared her vision for the teaching team and described the culture of the centre. She suggested they valued teachers' commitments to their families which influenced their part-time working hours.

Following this initial interview, semi-structured interviews with Daisy and nine teachers were held within the first month of fieldwork. These interviews focused on teachers' understandings of professional dialogue, its purpose, and how the culture and organisation of the centre supported professional dialogue. Semi-structured interviews follow a thematic approach which was flexible in the delivery and the variety of questions posed (Gray, 2009). I was mindful of Yin's (2009) suggestion to listen to the interviewee in an unbiased way that allowed the conversation to evolve and the teachers' voices to be heard (Guba & Lincoln, 2005)

Towards the end of my fieldwork I again interviewed the manager and five teachers. One teacher had left to go overseas, one teacher was away and two teachers declined to be interviewed again. Whilst this follow-up interview was also semi-structured I was interested in specific examples of when and if professional dialogue had initiated change in the centre. Participants were given advance warning of this focus through an email.

I had another interview with Daisy and senior teachers as a result of email discussion with Daisy and shared with all teachers. I had analysed six sets of staff meeting notes and sought clarification of some statements. I was interested how the teachers had joint understandings of statements concerning children's learning. As a result of this discussion and because I was returning to the centre to have a second interview with April a decision was made to hold a joint interview with a few teachers. However, because of staff absences and the logistics of maintaining enough qualified teachers in ratio⁵, it was decided, by the teachers, the three senior teachers would attend the interview. This interview was again semi-structured and focused on the teachers' professional dialogue at the staff meetings.

All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. In total there were 14 hours of recorded interviews.

3.5.2 Observations

I observed for nine hours during the programme at Pohutukawa Early Learning Centre. These observations occurred at the beginning, middle and end of the field work (See Appendix F). I observed twice in the morning session and once in the afternoon.

During these observations I focused on teachers' dialogue with other teachers, although some teachers' dialogue with parents and children was also observed.

⁵ In ratio means there are a certain number of teachers required to be with the children. This ratio, of teacher: children, is a regulatory requirement set by the Ministry of Education.

However, this latter dialogue was peripheral to my research focus. Flick's (2006) caution to limit the collection of data to the focus of the research questions rather than being drawn into collecting everything was a helpful reminder during these observation visits. I was particularly interested in how teachers dialogued with other teachers whilst teaching in the learning environment and how the staff room and non-contact time provided an opportunity for professional dialogue.

I also observed at two staff meetings, a total of four hours. All the teachers attended the first part of the staff meetings, and then split into two teaching teams under-two's and over-two's groups. As I was unable to be present at both meetings after the teachers split into two groups I recorded one and attended the other. I then alternated this for the second staff meeting observation.

3.5.3 Artifacts

As noted earlier, artifacts form an important part of CHAT (Engeström, 1999a) framework and were included in my data gathering. During my observation visits I noted artifacts available to teachers. These included wall displays in the learning environment and information on the whiteboards⁶, diary entries, staff meeting notes and children's portfolios. During my field work I took notes concerning the various methods teachers used to communicate. I also accessed four sets of staff meeting notes and a policy review for data analysis.

Seven teachers completed journals. These were intended to be completed over a one-week period but due to time constraints and the teachers' teaching commitments, they were completed intermittently over a month of the field work. The journals were used as another source of data to capture the times and events when teachers thought they had professional dialogue with their colleagues. Before the teachers started their journals I gave them a written focus.

⁶ Whiteboards are display boards which are used to share information. The information is easily removed similar to on a black board.

Intermittent emails between myself and the manager, which were shared with the teachers, were also kept as artifacts. These related to the research process, confirming my attendance at staff meetings and when I was doing my observation visits. They also included reflective inquiries from me and responses from the teaching team.

3.6 The role of the researcher

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) maintain that qualitative research locates the researcher in the participant's world and through interpretive practices the researcher makes sense of that world. My role as researcher was to gain an understanding of teachers' professional dialogue within the context of Pohutukawa Early Learning Centre. I used the conceptual framework CHAT (Engeström, 1999a) to focus my understanding through data analysis.

I was mindful that my previous professional relationship with Pohutukawa Early Learning Centre could cloud my judgment, allowing an avenue for bias. However, the relationship I already had with these teachers had addressed issues of trust (Yin, 2009) and respect. I consulted with management and the teachers throughout my field work, giving prior notice of my observation visits, negotiated attendance at staff meetings, and valued the time teachers gave to participate in the interviews. The ethical principles of confidentiality and anonymity were observed in relation to Pohutukawa Early Learning Centre and to the individual participants in the research project.

In the interpretation of the data, bias (Olesen, 2008) could be evident as my perspective was influenced by my values and beliefs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Mutch, 2005) and some preconceived understandings of the research setting and the data. My previous experience as a teacher practitioner and as a professional development facilitator within the ECE sector had some influence on my interpretation of the data. This familiarity with the teaching profession brought benefits in my understanding of the teachers' role. However, in my ontological interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) of the data there were

opportunities for bias (Olesen, 2008) in the questions I posed, my observations and the value and emphasis I gave to the data. I mitigated this potential bias by listening and being open to other perspectives and asking for clarification of information if I was unsure.

The epistemological interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) of the data was influenced by my present role as researcher and my previous relationship with management and teachers as a professional development facilitator. The methodological interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) was influenced by my own experiences of gaining knowledge and especially of how to undertake research, my enquiry approach as a novice researcher and my views of professional dialogue, teaching, and children's learning. For this study I sought advice from other more experienced researchers and checked the transcripts for leading questions which asked for predetermined answers.

3.7 Data Analysis

A post-modern approach to qualitative research sits the researcher within the research, not outside it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Kincheloe & McLaren 2008; Richardson & Adams St Pierre, 2005). This positions the researcher as someone who is continually learning from the data gathered, questioning their beliefs and values, and re-constructing their world (Kincheloe & McLaren 2008; Richardson & Adams St Pierre, 2005).

3.7.1 Cultural historical activity theory (CHAT)

Cultural historical activity theory (referred to as CHAT) has emerged from the historical – cultural school of Psychology in Russia that was led by Vygotsky, Leont'ev and Luria in early 1900's (Engeström and Miettinen, 1999; van Oers, 2008). This is an analytical theory used as a tool (Engeström and Miettinen, 1999) for analysis of research data.

Leont'ev (1981) maintained that there is a distinction between activity and action. Activity is socially situated whereas action is an individual process (Leont'ev, 1981). Engeström (1999a) proposed the relationships between activities and actions needed to be more evident for CHAT to be advantageous as an analytical framework. He proposed Vygotsky's triadic model which consisted of three components, subject, mediating artifact and object, on a simple triangle did not exemplify "the collaborative nature" (Engeström, 1999a p.30) of the individual's actions. Engeström (1999a) more complex triadic model of activity highlighted the relationships between activities and actions. The purpose (object) of activity theory is to show the connection between "individual actions to the collective activity" (Engeström, 1999a, p.31). Through projection from object to outcome more understanding of the activity is conveyed (Engeström, 1999a).

For this research project CHAT provided a framework of – artifacts, roles and rules – to analyse the data and answer the research questions which were formed within a theoretical proposition (Yin, 2009) that within an ECE centre there are activities which "dialectically link the individual and the social structure" (Engeström, 1999a, p. 19). The activity was teachers' professional dialogue and the object (Engeström, 1999a) of the data analysis was a deeper understanding of teachers' professional dialogue within an ECE centre.

3.7.2 Data analysis procedures

I listened to the interview and staff meeting tapes three times and checked these against the transcribed transcripts. My initial analysis of all the data focused on key words which I interpreted as being pertinent. *Talk, discussion, learning, students, improving, change, teaching practice* were some of the key words from which themes emerged (Huberman & Miles, 1995). I was particularly interested in the teachers' descriptions of professional dialogue and the opportunities for professional dialogue. I also analysed my field work notes and teachers' journals looking for clarification of themes which had emerged from the interview data. I noted any crossover in themes between the three data sources then determined which themes I would focus on for the findings.

Data analysis was an evolving process as I identified how the components of the complex triangle – roles, rules and artifacts – mediated my understanding of the activity (Engeström, 1999a) of professional dialogue, within Pohutukawa Early Learning Centre. I listed the themes, then categorised these themes within the components of rules, roles and artifacts. For example, for the theme *teachers' understandings of professional dialogue*, I categorised the data within each component, roles, rules and artifacts. This analysis allowed a “broader meaning” (Engeström, 1999a, p.31) of the data. A theme emerged of *social talk different from professional dialogue*. Analysis of this theme was undertaken within the rules component to identify activities (e.g. *professionalism* and *connecting with colleagues*) which mediated the teachers' understandings of the difference between social talk and professional dialogue. The findings from the data analysis are reported in Chapters 4 & 5.

3.7.3 Editing the transcripts

For ease of reading and understanding the transcript data in the findings chapters, I edited the material of verbal pauses, and repeated words and phrases. For example, in Roimata's second interview she pondered how the teachers had supported a child. The dialogue was interspersed with 'um' or acknowledgement from me 'mmn'. These were edited from the transcript and Roimata's phrases joined to show a continual flow in her narration. This editing was intended to convey to the reader the participants' voice in a coherent manner.

3.7.4 Managing the data

I was mindful that as a novice researcher I had never kept quantities of data before. I adhered to my ethic guidelines (Victoria University, 2005) with data kept in a locked file and on a password-safe computer filing system. I was mindful of Huberman and Miles' (1995) warning the data could become overwhelming and knowing how to retrieve the data was important. I filed the data and dated and recorded progress of my data analysis. I was very much a

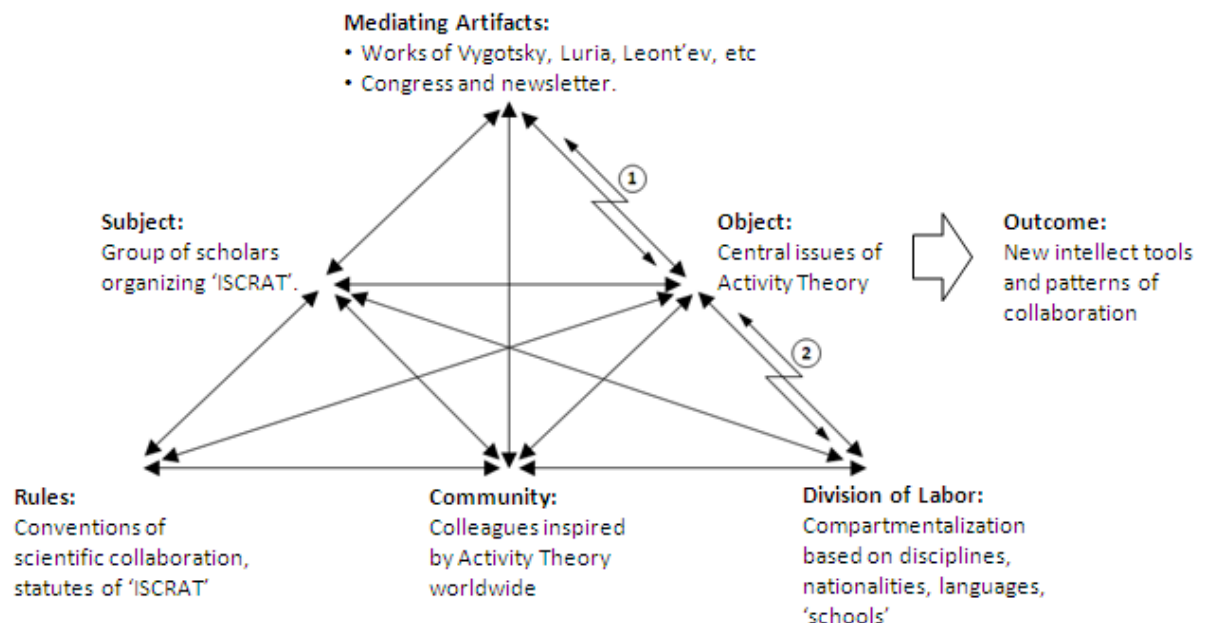
learner in the process of what was important and what could be set aside. I sought the expertise of others and drew on the literature to guide me (Yin, 2009).

3.7.5 CHAT – data analysis framework

The conceptual framework CHAT (Engeström, 1999a) identifies the relationship between the object of the research project – teachers’ professional dialogue – and my actions as researcher within an “activity system” (Engeström, 1999a, p. 30). This framework is depicted in the complex model developed by Engeström (1999a). See Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 (Reproduced from the original)

“Figure 1.2 A complex model of an activity system” (Engeström, 1999a, p.31)

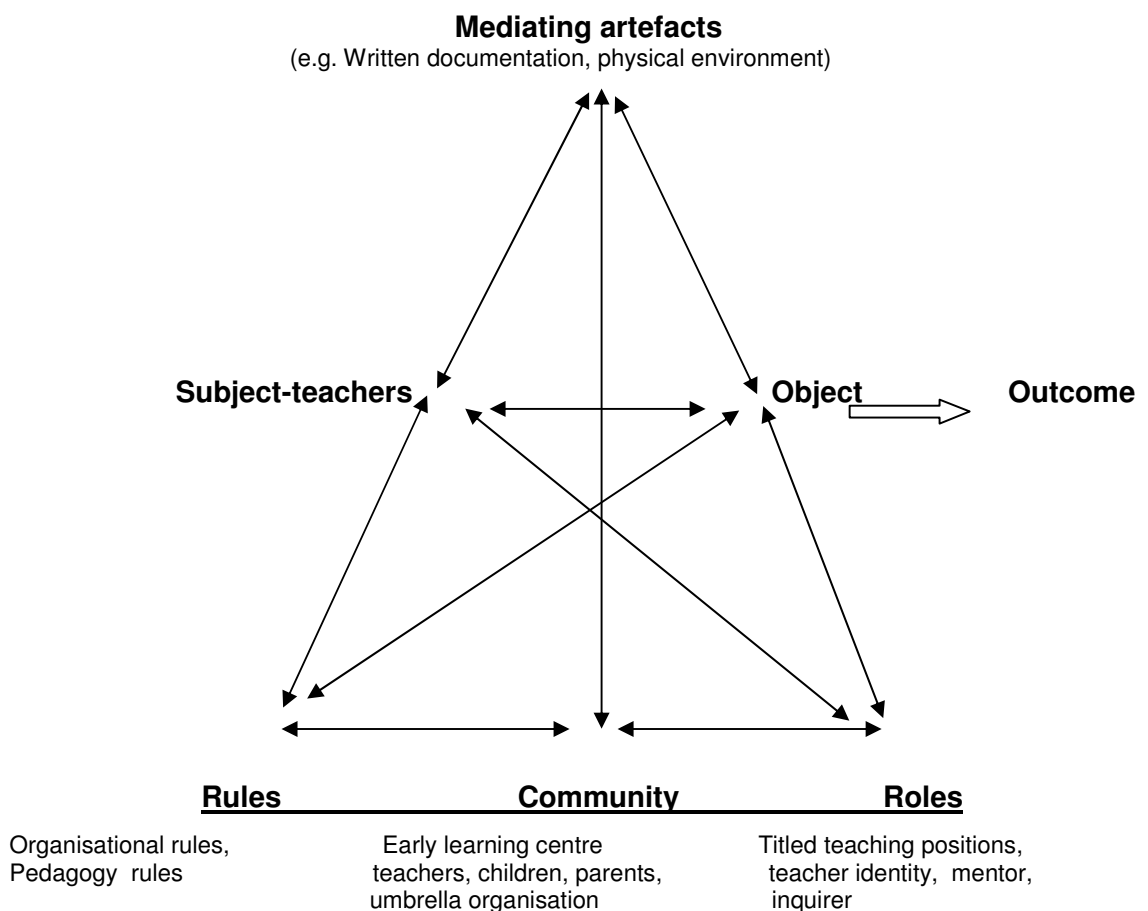


Vygotsky (1987) proposed learning occurs through mediation with artifacts. The artifacts are social tools of engagement which mediate a person’s present understanding with more complex learning. This research project investigated how artifacts (e.g. displays of children’s learning, teachers’ journals, staff meetings, staff room and learning environment) mediated an understanding of professional dialogue.

Socio cultural historical activity theory is a legitimate framework for investigating educational settings (van Oers, 2008). Giest (2008) proposed activity theory meant “active adaptation” (p.105) and initiates change, in contrast to a constructivist view of a passive adaptation to society. Research grounded in activity theory proposed new ways of providing education and adapting teaching practices to foster other ways of learning (Giest, 2008). Professional dialogue for this study was viewed as an activity which initiated change within an ECE centre, both personally for the individual teacher and collectively for the centre and its community.

Figure 3.2 is adapted for this project from Engeström’s (1999) complex diagram as depicted in Figure 3.1

Figure 3.2 (adapted from Engeström, 1999a, p. 31)



In this study the object (Engeström, 1999a), is EC teachers' professional dialogue in an ECE centre. The subjects are the teachers; the community are teachers, parents, children and the management body; the mediating artifacts include written documentation (meeting notes, displays) and the physical environment (staff room, learning environment); rules include personal and professional, cultural and organisational rules; roles included titled roles of manager or student teacher and professional attributes of the roles including collaboration and sharing. The actions (Engeström, 1999a) for this study are twofold. Firstly, the teachers' actions provide the data through sharing information during interviews, in their journals and their teaching practice; secondly, my actions in carrying out the fieldwork and in the interpretation and data analysis.

CHAT highlights the collective relationship rather than the individual construct of these mediated activities (Engeström, 1999a; van der Veer, 2008). No one component of this complex triangle was more dominant in its representation than another. The influence of these activities was multi-faceted and evolved (Engeström, 1999a) as the impact on the research became more apparent during data analysis.

3.8 Validity

Validity is a means to address the "link between the relations that are studied and the version of them provided by the researcher" (Flick, 2006, p. 371). There are various methods of validation of research data and two methods were used for this research project: trustworthiness and triangulation.

3.8.1 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a means of validating the research data (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). It is an authentic construct of validation which relies on certain criteria to ensure authenticity for the research project. For this study these criteria included fairness (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) as the participants' views were sought through interviews, feedback to emails, conversations during observation visits and a final feedback meeting. The teachers' views were then portrayed ethically within the findings chapters so the teachers' voices were heard (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

In the collection and analysis of data, trustworthiness was evident in the interpretation and the valuing of the data (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The analytical framework, CHAT, was used to provide an authentic interpretation of the data. The framework was an appropriate analytical tool as the interpretation of the data was questioned, analysed, modelled, and examined before being implemented (Engeström, 1999b, p.383) into a written form. This gave a richness to the research project and allowed for "sometime conflicting realities" (Gray, 2009, p.194) to emerge that added further to the authenticity of the research.

3.8.2 Triangulation

Triangulation is an appropriate research tool to ensure the validation of research data (Stake, 2010). As a research tool triangulation encourages the researcher to continuously question their data analysis and research findings to conclude if alternative findings are applicable (Stake, 2010)

For this study several triangulation methods were used to validate data. Multiple methods were used to collect data, e.g. interviews, observations and participant journals. These methods helped to correlate answers (Stake, 2010) to the questions which arose during the research process. My research journal recorded the direction of the research and "monitored progress" (Stake, 2010,

p. 129). My supervisors provided impetus for further analysis and to question and to rethink the findings. The participants responded to my inquiries and feedback via email from the manager, Daisy. The last interview with three participants resulted from questions raised after my observations at staff meetings and analysis of staff meeting notes.

3.9 Summary

This chapter has presented the methodology which has guided this research project. The theoretical conceptual framework of a qualitative case study was discussed. The methods used to undertake the research were described. The analytical framework, CHAT, was explained both conceptually and as a tool for analysis of the data.

The object of the methods and data analysis was to answer the research questions. The findings are recorded in the next two chapters.

Chapter 4

Teachers define their understandings of professional dialogue

4.0 Introduction

This chapter explores how the teachers at Pohutukawa Early Learning Centre defined professional dialogue and understood the purpose for professional dialogue. A thematic approach identified key ideas which emerged throughout the interviews, journals and observations. These themes were then interpreted in relation to the three components - roles, rules and artifacts - on the complex triangle of the CHAT framework (Engeström, 1999a) as illustrated in Chapter 3 (page 47). This socio-cultural perspective allows crossover between the mediating activities.

This chapter presents data relating to the first research question:

- *What are EC teachers' understandings of the purpose for professional dialogue?*

“Talk”, “conversations” and “discussion” were words frequently used by the teachers during the interviews to describe and explain professional dialogue. Teachers also used these words, in their journals, to explain how they communicated with other teachers. The content of the talk, conversation or discussion and when and where it took place often determined whether the teachers perceived themselves as having professional dialogue or whether they were engaging in social and/or casual talk.

4.1 Teachers' understandings of professional dialogue

Teachers were asked for their understandings of professional dialogue during the interviews and to describe their understandings in their journals. Observations provided another perspective as I interpreted the teachers' verbal engagements with each other. Data analysis highlighted several understandings of professional dialogue including communication between teachers and others as a means to share ideas and interests and to reflect on their teaching practice and their understanding of teaching and learning. Sometimes this communication was a means to agree or disagree. A distinction was made by the teachers between social talk and professional dialogue.

4.1.1 General understandings

The teachers' understandings of professional dialogue emerged during the interviews. There were many similarities in the teachers' understandings although they described the process differently, i.e. "talk", "discussion", "conversation" and "communication". Teachers were mostly in agreement when describing the content of the professional dialogue as broad.

Rachael described professional dialogue as talk. She suggested there was a 'mixture' of topics and no single topic had more relevance than another:

...the talk...about practice, your practice in the classroom, the children's learning and I guess teachers' own professional development....so it's [professional dialogue] a mixture of all sorts of different talking that happens during the day and at night at meetings.
(Rachael/interview/1/p.1)

She suggested the content of professional dialogue was broad as sometimes the dialogue could be more about "housekeeping" and "standard talk" (Rachael/interview/1/p.2) when it involved the organisation of the centre.

Professional dialogue could also be academically orientated as the focus could be a theoretical discussion with a student teacher about children's learning (Rachael/interview/1/pp.2-3). Kerry also referred to professional dialogue as talk and broad. "I would see it as talking about things that matter in your work but that could be, to me that could still be really broad" (Kerry/interview/1/p.1). Zara also suggested professional dialogue was talk, describing professional dialogue as the "opportunity to talk with your colleagues" (Zara/interview/1/p.1).

The idea of professional dialogue as an "opportunity" was one also suggested by Daisy. She, too, drew on the broad nature of the talk. Daisy explained:

It's opportunities to talk with other teachers at any time...covers everything to do with the work environment. I think if you're talking about anything, timetables, what's happening with one teacher or another teacher, that sort of thing to me that would be professional dialogue. (Daisy/interview/1/p.1-2).

April understood professional dialogue as a conversation "that relate[s] around everything that happens during the day" (April/interview/1/p.1) whereas Jo, Julia and June's understanding of professional dialogue was a discussion. Jo suggested professional dialogue was "anything discussed between teachers" (Jo/interview/1/p.1). Julia suggested professional dialogue was a discussion "of...our practice really...about what we are doing at the moment" (Julia/interview/1/p.1). June was more specific in her understanding of the content of the professional dialogue as she linked the discussion with theories of learning and children (June/interview/1/p.1)

Roimata described professional dialogue as communication with teachers, parents and children. She suggested "it's all the communication...the professional things that happen" (Roimata/interview/1/p.1). In contrast Pip was unsure how to define professional dialogue. She pondered the question as she linked her understanding with the length of time she had been at the centre, being a student teacher and teaching only one day a week. Pip suggested:

Professional dialogue...well it could mean a number of things to me actually. Professional dialogue with parents. Professional dialogue between people I work with, other educators and the children of course. (Pip/interview/1/p.2).

Initial analysis identified the teachers' general understanding of professional dialogue. To understand the significance of these interpretations and the relationship with organisational and pedagogical matters within the centre further analysis was required. The data was then considered and interpreted in relation to how artifacts, rules and roles mediated teachers' understandings of the activity, professional dialogue.

4.1.2 Artifacts-mediated understandings

Data analysis highlighted how artifacts mediated the teachers' understandings of professional dialogue. These artifacts included written material, literature, curriculum documents and wall displays. The next section presents these findings.

June suggested theoretical literature concerning teaching and learning instigated her professional dialogue with other teachers. She often referred to literature which had prompted her to have a *serious* discussion. June distinguished between everyday discussions and conversations which were "deeper" (June/interview/1/p.15). She liked "to bounce off my ideas" (June/interview/1/14) which led to these deeper discussions. Artifacts including literature, information from the internet and from student teachers' studies all contributed to June's professional dialogue:

...like a theory I have read somewhere. I'd be discussing it with April and Zara. Its something that we see a child doing and we think 'oh is that so and so theory or is that just how they are as a child?...It's more serious. (June/interview/1/pp.1-2)

June's journal also indicated she liked to have serious dialogue with other teachers on a variety of subjects. Her journal included a description of a discussion with Kerry about attachment theory and what June had learnt about Russian orphans. Subsequently they decided to attend an evening meeting on child psychotherapy. At the meeting they met Rachael. Kerry wrote this "prompted more discussion and an awareness of advocating for children, speaking out when things aren't right" (Kerry/journal).

The sharing of ideas and literature readings was suggested by Roimata as a means for prompting professional dialogue:

I read this reading and it was about understanding Asian parents and their families and it was quite relevant because we had just had a new...child start and she had just come from... Hong Kong...and she didn't speak a word of English...and her family hardly spoke any English either...and it was quite confusing...We found it hard to try and understand the way they did things...So this reading was quite interesting. So I brought it to share with the other teachers just to see what they thought...it was really helpful to train [teachers] how to include them [Chinese family] more and us to have a better understanding...kind of shifted my whole thinking of understanding of cultures as well...I've always been quite open to things like that...kind of helped a lot...promoted professional dialogue with my colleagues...We discussed it quite a lot and we discussed if there were strategies we could use to try and help them [Chinese family]...we built a really good relationship in the end. (Roimata/interview/2/pp.2-4)

Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996) mediated Kerry's understanding of professional dialogue. Kerry, a student teacher, suggested she was "trying to work her way through *Te Whāriki* and make sense of it" (Kerry/interview/1/pp.7-8). She did this through conversations with other more experienced teachers in the staff room:

...often just interrupt them [teachers] with their cup of tea...do you know where this might be or where it might fit in with *Te Whāriki*...it's the sensible way to get the information rather than sitting there going through the book...when you've got people around you who might know the answer more quickly. (Kerry/interview/1/p.7).

Zara's understanding of professional dialogue was also mediated through *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). She suggested she was "still coming to grips with *Te Whāriki*" (Zara/interview/1/p.10). As a student teacher, Zara understood professional dialogue as talk "around my assignments...if I'm stuck" (Zara/interview/1/p.1). Through talk with other teachers she was able to make sense of her studies and the curriculum document. Similarly Jo acknowledged the importance of student teachers discussing curriculum documents in the centre:

It really depends on the day and who initiates the conversation but I notice with a lot of...mixture of qualified teachers and students...and with student assignments a lot of the discussion can be about *Te Whāriki*, *Kei Tua o Te Pae*⁷ and the regulations. (Jo/interview/1/p.6).

Conversations concerning displays documenting children's learning in the over-two's area were also understood as professional dialogue. These conversations enabled teachers to share ideas and to reach a consensus on the purpose for wall displays of children's learning (interviews with Roimata, Julia, Daisy and Rachael).

Daisy shared how, for a while, she had been concerned about these displays. A prompt from a visitor about the purpose of wall displays had instigated "talking a lot about what we put up on the walls and who is it for" (Daisy/interview/1/p.42). Rachael said the questioning of the wall displays had:

...created quite a lot of conversation throughout the teaching team and also [with] the under-two's teachers, cause [they] came and saw what we were doing. That sort of started a whole lot of informal discussions that went on all day and have continued through the week...created quite a lot of informal dialogue about our environment so that was quite cool. (Rachael/interview/1/p.18).

⁷Kei Tua o te Pae Assessment for Learning: early childhood exemplars, is a Ministry of Education publication of 20 books to support and guide teachers' assessment practices in line with the curriculum *Te Whāriki*.

Julia also referred to the wall displays and suggested they were a means for professional dialogue:

...we're thinking more about our displays and who they're for and what they look like and making them more aesthetically pleasing...so things like that have been quite exciting. (Julia/interview/1/p.18).

The CHAT framework identified how artifacts mediated teachers' understandings of professional dialogue. The next section presents findings illustrating how rules mediated teachers' understandings of professional dialogue.

4.1.3 Rules-mediated understandings

Data analysis identified explicit and implicit rules to mediate the teachers' understandings of professional dialogue. Artifacts depicted rules as explicit, (e.g. centre policies or teachers' job descriptions). Other rules were implicit and usually verbal, (e.g. assumed difference between social and professional dialogue and teachers' understandings of being professional). Rules included shared understandings between teachers such as protocols concerning confidentiality when talking with parents or rules were developed individually by teachers in their understanding of their teaching role.

The first section presents rules which mediated the teachers' understandings of professional dialogue. The next section then presents the theme of *social talk being different from professional dialogue*. This theme, which emerged from the data, identified that the rules for teacher engagement were different between professional dialogue and social talk.

4.1.3.1 General rules

Teachers suggested their understanding of professional dialogue included conversations with other teachers concerning confidentiality, working collaboratively and protocols.

Roimata's understanding of professional dialogue was influenced by her perception of being professional. She regarded protocols as indicative of professionalism and described professional dialogue as: "...all communication, well the professional things that happen and keep all the protocols all that kind of thing together" (Roimata/interview/1/p.1). Roimata also drew on her knowledge of working in a teaching team to mediate her understanding of professional dialogue: "...talking about the environment of the centre and things like that. How we function as a team and our teaching practice." (Roimata/interview/1/p.14).

Similarly rules mediated Pip's understanding of professional dialogue. These rules also included centre protocols which concerned talking with parents (Pip/interview/1/p.4). Pip identified her professional persona as a teacher was important. She suggested professional dialogue meant she would "...always try to be warm and friendly and helpful...just try and be there and say the right thing" (Pip/interview/1/p.15). A reflection perhaps of her in-training status, and how the rules may change, Pip suggested she would "...learn more over time" (Pip/interview/1/p.6) about how to have professional dialogue with teachers and parents.

An understanding of professional dialogue as a skill which was guided by rules was highlighted by Jo who referred to:

...there's a real specific art of how you discuss certain issues with parents because you always want to build relationships. You don't really want to kind of hinder the relationship or build tension between yourself, the centre and the family. So it's really important how you actually express and communicate what their child's interest is to the parent. (Jo/interview/2/p.26).

Rules concerning confidentiality also mediated Jo's understanding of professional dialogue. Professional dialogue was "...anything discussed between teachers that was confidential to families and that's regarding children and families" (Jo/interview/1/p.1). Confidential conversations which were understood as professional included children's "Behavioural issue...just settling in...expressing their emotions" (Jo/interview/1/p.2).

There were written centre rules regarding professional dialogue with parents. Centre policies and teachers' job descriptions provided clear indicators of protocols and how information should be relayed to and from parents and when teachers were to share the information with other staff members (Daisy/1/p.27).

Sometimes rules were more implicit and personal. Zara identified her understanding of professional dialogue with her university studies (Zara/interview/1/p.2) and her engagement with literature (Zara/interview/1/p.30). Rachael suggested although the content may be different, all dialogue concerning matters in the centre constituted professional dialogue. She suggested professional dialogue was a collective action of collaborative dialogue with other teachers or a personal action of reflection. These professional dialogues included children's learning, teaching practice, professional development and the "running" (Rachael/interview/1/p.2) of the centre.

However, rules which mediated June's understanding of professional dialogue were more explicit. She proposed when teachers made references to literature or theory and children's learning this was professional and "serious" (June/interview/1/p.2) dialogue. In this type of dialogue June wanted to "...figure out a problem" (June/interview/1/p.2) and found it "stimulating" (June/interview/1/p.4).

This section has identified some rules which mediated teachers' understandings of professional dialogue. The next section presents findings regarding the differences between social talk and professional dialogue and the place for social talk within Pohutukawa Early Learning Centre.

4.1.3.2 Social talk

The distinction between social talk and professional dialogue was often implicit. Daisy suggested professional dialogue was "Opportunities to talk with other teachers at any time" (Daisy/interview/1/p.1-2). She then made a distinction between social and professional talk: "Apart from the social chatter you might have it covers anything to do with the work environment" (Daisy/interview/1/p.1-2).

Dialogue between teachers and parents which concerned children was regarded as professional dialogue whereas more general conversations were often regarded as social talk. The rules regarding these conversations were personal, implicit and verbal. My field notes confirmed teachers had conversations with parents in the centre at the beginning and end of the day. These conversations began with a greeting and sometimes shared information about a social event which had occurred or was to occur. Sometimes parents talked about a specific concern or asked for or gave information e.g. regarding lunch boxes or toileting.

The teachers nominated specific times and environmental areas for social talk. These rules mediated artifacts clarified the distinction between social talk and professional dialogue. Jo suggested social talk happened when teachers had their meal breaks as "...it's a really good time just to unwind and...just get to know your team and the teachers better" (Jo/interview/1/p.21). Daisy also suggested the staff room was an avenue for social talk. She said an essential part of the non-contact time was to connect with other teachers:

...otherwise you would go through the whole day not connecting with each other.
(Daisy/interview/1/p.15).

June identified an explicit rule to distinguish between social talk and professional dialogue. She suggested when teachers are “joking around” (June/interview/1/p.2) the talk is social as the teachers talk about their own children and families. However, June liked to build relationships with her colleagues and she did this through both professional and social talk. June disseminated her interest in teaching and children’s learning in a social environment. Rules identified social talk as a “conversation starter” (June/interview/1/p.7) and consequently professional dialogue often merged into June’s social talk. June suggested lunch breaks, was an ideal time to initiate these conversations. However, lunch breaks were also identified as social time:

At lunchtime I may be looking up a book and say ‘hey what do you think about this or read this article ‘cause this is really good about so and so’. (June/interview/1/p.5).

April knew about June’s appreciation for “...searching for answers” (June interview/1/p.6) and intellectual conversations. She was also aware June was more likely to engage when the conversation was more intimate and social (April/interview/pp.1-2). She suggested a casual approach to professional dialogue sometimes encouraged June “to speak up” (April/interview/1/p.37) about professional matters rather than at a formal staff meeting. April also appreciated the social engagement with her colleagues. She suggested a “casual conversation” (April/interview/1/p.23) was crucial to knowing the teachers and “how they think” (April/interview/1/p.24):

I might have heard a casual conversation which had a clue in it as to what the person was thinking...or feeling and...often it is the more casual conversation that actually holds the key to the bigger issues...a lot of it comes back to that casual chit chat. (April/interview/1/p.23-24).

Zara suggested it was important for teachers to connect socially during the day:

I think...it’s good to have the freedom just to talk. On a Monday morning you want...[to] ask the teacher how was your weekend kind of thing. What did you get up to? I mean its just I think...part of the conversation you do have with the teachers...so I think the freedom is also needed. (Zara/interview/1/pp.33-34).

Rules concerning which areas of the centre environment were appropriate for professional dialogue or social talk were personal and usually implicit. Rachael suggested it was frustrating when teachers talked of social matters whilst in the learning environment. Rachael distinguished between the content of the talk suggesting:

I have to be careful that I'm fair in what I expect and don't expect. If they're talking about professional stuff then I think that's fantastic but if it becomes just general chattering about daily life and things I start getting a bit frustrated because there are children there that should be being talked to. (Rachael/interview/1/pp.11-12).

April also suggested the "weekend stuff" (April/interview/1/p.28) should not occur in the learning environment. "I don't think it's a good look to be discussing your weekend in front of parents...that's a professional thing isn't it...that weekend stuffs in the staffroom" (April/interview/1/p.28). April highlighted the staff room as an appropriate area for social talk. Her understanding of the rules which govern the difference between professional dialogue and social talk was mediated through artifacts i.e. the learning environment and the staff room.

However, Kerry highlighted the ambiguity of implicit rules. She acknowledged the importance of socially connecting with her colleagues whilst also trying to understand where social talk and professional dialogue should occur:

When you are on the floor you're there to work with the children. Yeah that's the conflict, not there to talk to another teacher...this side part is catching up over our weekend sometimes...Adults do crave that I think to a degree when you're working together and that's what helps you gel as a team [to] know about each other. (Kerry/interview/1/p.28).

Daisy also regarded social events as a legitimate means to elicit professional dialogue which had not emerged at other times in the centre. Daisy suggested these were a means to let the teachers "know they have been heard" (Daisy/interview/1/p.34). She wanted to build relationships with the teachers and

to understand what was important for them. Daisy told of arranging a dinner for the teachers and board members. This social and informal gathering was an opportunity for the teachers to give feedback in a non-threatening social environment and with people with whom they were not directly working (Daisy/interview/1/pp.29–33). Daisy acknowledged teachers needed to:

...talk quite openly without the feeling of offending the person...because you have to be comfortable in your work environment. (Daisy/interview/1/p.31).

She accepted teachers were not always able to share their concerns with her and her senior teachers. Daisy suggested sometimes teachers needed a third person to bridge the gap in order to “break down the barriers” (Daisy/interview/1/p.31).

Data analysis identified rules mediated the teachers’ understanding of professional dialogue. For example, social talk should happen in the staff room and professional dialogue could occur in the learning environment. Professional dialogue was identified by the teachers as different from social talk. However, social talk could overlap with professional dialogue and provided cohesion for the teaching team as teachers engaged socially and professionally. Data analysis highlighted some rules were implicit including what dialogue should occur in the learning environment. Other rules were more explicit for example talking with parents. The next section presents how roles mediate teachers’ understandings of professional dialogue.

4.1.4 Roles-mediated understandings

Data analysis within the CHAT framework identified the different roles held by teachers influenced their understanding and engagement in professional dialogue. These roles were sometimes signified by titles such as centre manager, senior teacher, teacher and student teacher or signified by personal attributes of being a teacher including being reflective, a listener or being open-minded.

Professional attributes of being a teacher such as reflection and questioning mediated Julia's understanding of professional dialogue:

...discussion of our practice really... about what we are doing at the moment and why and maybe...questioning what we're doing and seeing looking at ways to improve it and...I guess gaining an understanding of ourselves as teachers and reflecting on how things are. (Julia/interview/1/p.1-2).

While April suggested being "excited and passionate about what we do and we really want each other to know where we're at" (April/interview/1/p.28) were important attributes to instil within the teaching team.

As a student teacher, Zara appreciated the more experienced teachers' attributes of support and guidance. Her role mediated an understanding of professional dialogue as, "...communicating really with your other colleagues" (Zara/interview/1/p.2) and "...constantly asking questions" (Zara/interview/1/p.15). The focus of Zara's talk was on her assignments and her need "to see" (Zara/interview/1/p.2) in practice the theoretical concepts she had learnt through her study.

Roimata, also a student teacher, suggested the teaching team's open approach to sharing and guidance was helpful. Her understanding of professional dialogue was the other teachers' willingness to share as she obtained "a better perspective [and] different ideas" (Roimata/interview/1/p.15). Roimata said "It was a good way...I'm finding to get used to that kind of dialogue 'cause it's not something that I really had thought about" (Roimata/interview/1/p.15). Kerry, another student teacher, suggested learning through professional dialogue was a reciprocal arrangement between students and teachers:

It [learning] shouldn't really...stop and the more...you learn the more professional you are and the professional you can feel because you know you've got the knowledge as well. And to me if you just stop talking about it where's the knowledge gone...because it's not been shared. (Kerry/interview/1/p.34).

Daisy also referred to the importance of sharing knowledge. She suggested in her role as centre manager she was a guide for the teaching team together with being manager. Daisy's role as mentor for the provisionally registered teachers⁸ mediated her understanding of professional dialogue:

I think that's quite important that you meet and talk [in the teacher registration programme]...but I see more of it as a guiding discussion trying to help the teacher get to the point that you want them to get to and setting goals. (Daisy/interview/1/p.19).

Julia, who had just become a fully registered teacher, appreciated the dialogue with other teachers. She missed the one-to-one dialogue which occurred during her teacher registration mentoring programme:

Christine: So in the teacher registration [programme] did you actually have an allotted time with a teacher registration supervisor?

Julia: Yep...It was probably every two or three months we'd have a meeting and discuss things I was struggling with or things that I was enjoying and then we'd review it all the...next meeting...I think it would help especially...a newly qualified teacher to have a sort of mentor...the whole way through really. I mean...just 'cause you are registered doesn't mean you know everything suddenly...And there's not always opportunities to be really discussing things. (Julia/interview/1/p.6-7).

Julia suggested the teacher registration programme as one way to have professional dialogue and to improve teaching practices. Jo, a newly graduated teacher, was also in a mentoring programme. He understood professional dialogue as listening and then going back to the literature "to support what I know" (Jo/interview/2/p.7). Jo was learning about teaching and what it meant to teach. He understood professional dialogue as "being open to the idea of having another perspective...cause pretty much teachers can be really rigid and with their ideas...they can be black and white rather than taking up another's perspective" (Jo/interview/2/p.7). Jo liked the teacher registration meetings because:

⁸ Provisionally registered teacher is a term used for a teacher who has not yet achieved full registration as a teacher. A mentoring programme occurs for 2 years usually after the teacher finishes their teacher education.

...personally it's good to speak one-to-one...It's just easier to talk one-to-one with the person because if anyone is in the room or involved...you need to be considerate of another person...If there's a certain issue I needed to raise I'd probably be more comfortable speaking one-to-one. (Jo/interview/1/p.29).

Daisy, in her role as leader and manager, found there were challenges when speaking with teachers about their teaching practice. She suggested she needed to find multiple ways to have professional dialogue with teachers:

I think it's always one of the challenges of the role when you kind of critique a teacher and their practice. Some will take it on board and you will see an instant change and others will silently go away and you don't see a change and whether you need more dialogue with that teacher to get the point across perhaps...yes I think you do...I think ...sometimes like I'm learning that you have to be very direct and say...In the last year I've tried to be more direct with some of the teachers about things that I need to critique them on...I've always found that early childhood has this very PC approach about...criticising or critiquing...there's strategies you have to go through...let them know they have to up their performance...I have found that it doesn't get you anywhere that softly, softly approach...have to be very direct...just say this is an area of your performance that is just not happening or this is an area that you need to improve on. (Daisy/interview/1/pp.22-23).

As a senior teacher Rachael also found challenges in her role in guiding the over-two's teaching team. Rachael understood professional dialogue as "open communication" which was sometimes an illusive quality (Rachael/interview/1/p.13) as teachers did not always share how they felt (Rachael/interview/1/p.12). Rachael valued her relationship with Daisy, manager, and April, the other senior teacher. She suggested because they communicated well the centre operated well:

I think the beauty of the three of us is that we actually get on incredibly well and we're relatively similar in what we expect and think for the centre...so it's really good because...we often have different things we're different on but because we communicate quite well find it very easy to work with...and manage the centre together. I find it works really well. (Rachael/interview/1/p.28).

These teachers' roles mediated their understandings of professional dialogue. These roles were designated roles including manager and teacher or attributes including questioning, willingness to share and improve. The next section presents the findings regarding the teachers' understandings of the purposes for professional dialogue.

4.2 Purposes for professional dialogue

Data analysis identified several purposes for professional dialogue. These included talking about organisational and pedagogical matters, finding ways to improve teaching practices and bringing about changes in practices and centre organisation,

4.2.1 Organisational and pedagogical matters

Teachers' assumptions, concerning organisational (care and routine) and pedagogical matters (education and learning) and whether one was more professional than the other, were identified as rules which mediated teachers' understandings of the purposes for professional dialogue.

Rachael suggested both organisational and pedagogical matters were important for the centre to function effectively. Therefore teachers' engagement in conversations concerning both matters was professional dialogue:

There's a lot of housekeeping and care routines that become just part of the daily routine which is probably quite standard talk but...I consider that part professional because that's how the centre needs to be run well and the children need to be cared for in a certain way. I think when you are talking about their [children's] learning you tend to get more academic. (Rachael/interview/1/p.2).

Julia suggested there were challenges for teachers as they had to prioritise between routines and care and education matters:

There's this whole tug between the children's learning and the basic routine. I find that quite challenging to keep the balance like sometimes I feel like if I'm putting attention to the children's learning sometimes some of the basic stuff can slip up but then I'm just focusing on routines and I can see the children's learning is suffering and they're getting bored. So I find that extremely challenging...there's an underlying kind of dichotomy there, kind of routine versus learning...in a day care centre...I see that the routines have to be there learning is kind of extra. For when you have got extra time, energy. (Julia/Interview/1/pp.21-22).

Daisy had a personal preference for and valued more the professional dialogue concerning pedagogical matters. However, she acknowledged the purposes for professional dialogue was to discuss both organisational matters and pedagogy as this was important for the operation of the centre. Daisy gave an example of how care and education are interrelated and how professional dialogue with April and later the staff addressed a pedagogical and organisational issue within the centre:

Our under-twos and over-twos join at 3.30pm when its end of a shift in our centre. One afternoon the under-twos arrived and it was absolute chaos. So that afternoon April and I sat down at the end of the day and talked about the next week and how we would avoid the chaos and what we needed in the room to meet the needs of the children that arrived and things like that. So for me that was a meeting of those two things, talking about the needs of the children and their learning but also about how what the staff do impacts on that. So to me the discussion that April and I had later on was quite professional. (Daisy/interview/1/pp.4-5).

My observation visit notes indicated teachers talked frequently about children's routines and the organisation of the centre. Conversations between teachers focused on sharing information. This information pertained to the teachers' rosters (including the teachers' morning tea breaks, their roster duties), reminders about events (including Roimata being on extended non-contact), resources to be made available for the children, and children's routines (including toileting and nappy changing).

Teachers' journals suggested they often shared information during the day:

Rachael letting me know the plan for the morning. (Kerry/journal).

April and I meet together to work out the roll for 2011. Lots of dialogue about spaces, making it work for families and children, talking to prospective families and checking in with Daisy about roll numbers. Lots of negotiation and compromising was occurring between April and I and the point to make the 2011 roll work. (Rachael/journal).

Rachael acknowledged professional dialogue could sometimes be more complex than at other times (Rachael/interview/2/p.26). Such professional dialogue challenged teaching practices in the centre (Rachael/interview/2/p.15). She suggested there was "value in actually talking to one another" (Rachael/joint interview/p.15) rather than concentrating on 'paperwork'. Rachael had found when she spent more time talking with the teachers "I actually go home and think about...what I can talk about the next day and on the way in the morning I'm planning what we can do with the children based on where their learning is at...as opposed through the paperwork" (Rachael/joint interview/p.15).

The teachers understood a purpose for professional dialogue was to address both pedagogical and organisational matters. They acknowledged sometimes these different demands made them question their roles as teachers and the importance of the different roles of education and care. The teachers acknowledged that through professional dialogue issues could be addressed and changes made. The next section addresses this purpose for professional dialogue.

4.2.2. Change and improvement in teaching practices

The theme of change in teaching practice and in the organisation of the centre was identified as one of the purposes for professional dialogue. Data analysis identified roles mediated teachers' understandings of the purposes for professional dialogue. Professional dialogue led to changes in teaching practice through being open to others' ideas and providing teachers with opportunities to suggest other ways of teaching and organising the centre. Such change could be personal and achieved through reflection, reading of literature and questioning, and change could also occur through team endeavours.

The notion of professional dialogue leading to change was suggested by Daisy:

I see that professional dialogue leads to change...that's my interpretation of it...often I begin talking about things because I think that we might need to change something and so the professional dialogue starts with an idea or something you've read and it grows like it spirals from there so I think it leads to change. (Daisy/interview/1/pp.50-51).

April also suggested professional dialogue led to change. She said it was important for teachers to have opportunities to converse, reflect and act. This professional dialogue provided:

Opportunities for the teachers to become greater and opportunities for us to learn how to extend the children the best way that we can...to reflect on what we do during the day and how it's going. A big opportunity for reflection. (April/interview/1/pp.1-2).

Julia drew on the individual actions required for change to occur. She referred to the actions of questioning and reflection which she suggested initiated improvement. However, Julia suggested "it's quite hard to see outside of yourself" (Julia/interview/1/p.2) and through a team approach and dialogue with other teachers "an avenue to be more critical about what they're doing" (Julia/interview/1/p.8) occurred.

June also drew on the idea of improvement and suggested the purpose for professional dialogue was about teaching practice:

...trying to work out...what's best for the child so trying to work out what we should do and read further...I want to know if there's something that's helpful that we can help the child with. (June/interview/1/pp.2-3).

This notion of teachers working together and “trying to work out” how to bring about change was one raised by Rachael. Rachael suggested the process of communication was:

...more complex and [you] just try and get that comprehension...as you...just learned again that whole what you assume and not assuming that people have that same understanding or that same idea of why you do things. It took quite a lot of conversations to actually get to the same result...it opened my eyes up to conversations and listening and talking properly. (Rachael/interview/2/pp.26-27).

Through talk with other teachers there were opportunities for teachers to reflect on their teaching practices, both individually and within the teaching team. For example, Rachael shared how the teachers had had concerns with regards to a child's social competence. She explained how the centre had supported the child and her family with professional support. Rachael suggested hers and other teachers' thinking was “pushed” (p.17) through dialogue with a psychologist. The teachers accepted the psychologist's advice to change some of their teaching practices in order to support the child more effectively after “a whole load of professional dialogue that changed our practice hugely” (Rachael/interview/2/p.5). The professional expertise and subsequent discussions within the teaching team was:

...an amazing learning experience for the teachers...having some other form of information that actually provides you with another direction...got us thinking about why we do what we do...and we thought our strategies were quite up to date and modern...but he took us that next step...so it really pushed our thinking...has led to a change in our behaviour management...a massive change in thinking and practice really. (Rachael/interview/2/pp.15-18).

Pip also acknowledged the expertise of others when making changes to her teaching practice. She suggested it was through dialogue with other teachers that she learnt and “made sense” of the theory concerning EC education and care (Pip/interview/1/pp.28-29). Similarly communication with other teachers shaped Roimata’s teaching practice:

I think they’re definitely shaped my teaching practice...I came into the centre with a little bit of experience...I was actually quite nervous because of this bad experience and unsure. With so many positive role models and good communication and things like this came so easily and I feel every week I’m learning something new and becoming more confident to be able to do more and provide more as a teacher. (Roimata/interview/1/p.23).

Teachers’ willingness to engage in ongoing learning facilitated change and improvement. For example, a parent had questioned a centre policy and as a result Daisy and the teaching team had reviewed the policy and their teaching practice. Daisy explained:

...often if you can add or change something you have in your practice that helps the parent feel that you’ve listened to what they’ve said. It isn’t an answer to the problem but it helps the problem. It helps teachers become more aware of what good practice is...it creates discussion about....how we should each deal with those kind of situations...so that then creates dialogue amongst the staff...then everyone starts talking about it and that’s when you come up with the ideas of how to resolve it. (Daisy/interview/2/p.4).

Although there were opportunities to discuss and to critique present teaching practices some teachers felt it was difficult to do this when the culture of the centre emphasised solidarity. Kerry suggested:

Critical conversations do happen from time to time where people might read something and think there might be a new way to do something. Usually prompted by things not going well...those conversations do happen...more in an individual nature. I think the culture of the centre is not to upset anybody when we...do work really well together and...have a good relationship with each other so people are more wary of critiquing each other. (Kerry/interview/1/p.112).

Julia suggested it was difficult when teachers shared new or different pedagogical ideas which were not always readily received. She suggested:

...we report back in the meeting about our professional development so that's where some of the new ideas come in but not always you know taken on board. It's whether it's a fit...usually there's dialogue but the changes don't always happen and that's fair enough. I mean we don't have to take on board everything from professional development. It has to be in keeping with the culture of the centre. It is a little frustrating if you've kind of got this knowledge and things don't change at all. (Julia/interview/1/pp.31-32).

Daisy, the manager and Rachael, senior teacher over-two's, also conceded ideas may not be so readily received and changes in teaching practice did not always occur. Rachael suggested:

We've let teachers down in the past because they've wanted to try something new and we've just haven't had the time or...I haven't had the energy...sometimes it's about understanding especially when you're more in a leadership role. (Rachael/interview/1/p.7).

Daisy surmised how:

...people like to know they have been heard...someone's taken on board what they said...you can't completely fix what they are worried about...they know that you're sharing what they're worried about. (Daisy/interview/1/p.34).

In a later interview Daisy told of how when teachers do not agree then there are opportunities for them to be heard: "we've said 'ok well let's try your way', give them a chance to try it their way and then revisit it" (Daisy/interview/2/p.7). She described how a teacher raised concerns about their teaching practices when supporting children to sleep at the centre. "We talk[ed] about it for quite a long time and there was lots of toing and froing...cause you can get into a culture of saying 'oh we've tried that before and it didn't work'" (Daisy/interview/2/pp.8-9). Daisy said consensus was reached and changes in practice were now policy.

Jo suggested change was ongoing and only through sustained professional dialogue with other teachers and listening to others were problems solved:

For our whole teaching team it's about sharing, like we do actually share and we're a really good teaching team but like anything you could always do better...when it's time to actually express what I've listened to or address what I've listened to there's...always another issue comes in...that's normal...solve one and another one comes along. (Jo/interview/2/pp.36-38).

This section has presented findings that identified how professional dialogue facilitated change and improvement of teaching practices and organisational issues. Teachers acknowledged change did not always occur or ideas readily accepted. The teachers suggested through professional dialogue teachers did change how they listened to others and accepted new or alternative ideas.

4.3 Summary

This chapter has explored the teachers' understandings of professional dialogue and the purposes of professional dialogue. The findings of how artifacts, roles and rules mediated teachers' understandings of professional dialogue were presented. Differences between social and professional dialogue were highlighted, as well as the relationship which existed between social talk and professional dialogue. Teachers articulated two main purposes of professional dialogue: organisational and pedagogical; improvement and change. In the next chapter, data related to research questions two and three are presented.

Chapter 5

Opportunities and support for professional dialogue

5.0 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the data analysis findings of teachers' understandings of professional dialogue and the purposes for professional dialogue. This chapter presents the findings of how the centre's organisation and culture provided opportunities and support for teachers' professional dialogue using the CHAT framework (Engeström 1999a) as outlined in Chapter 3 (page 47) for data analysis.

This chapter presents the data relating to the second and third research questions.

- *How does the culture of the ECE centre support EC teachers' engagement in professional dialogue with their colleagues?*
- *How does the organisation of the ECE centre support EC teachers' engagement in professional dialogue with their colleagues?*

Data analysis identified several key themes, including staff meetings, ad hoc and 'little conversations' and student teachers in the centre as a dialogical space (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2008); the barriers of time and busyness for professional dialogue; and the cultural underpinnings of working as a teaching team. These findings are presented in this chapter. The first section presents the findings concerning staff meetings.

5.1 Staff meetings

Staff meetings were analysed in this research project as a dialogical space (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2009). Data analysis considered how staff meetings provided opportunities and support for professional dialogue. The findings are presented in this section of the chapter.

5.1.1 Format of staff meetings

Staff meetings were governed by rules regarding the timing, the environment, and length of the meeting, the format and the purposes for the meeting. These rules identified when and how the teachers had opportunities to engage in professional dialogue within the context of staff meetings.

The staff meetings occurred fortnightly for two hours (between 5.30pm - 7.30pm) on Monday evenings after the centre closed. The meetings were included in the teachers' employment conditions and there was an agreement teachers would attend or tell Daisy if they were not attending. Daisy, as manager/teacher, also attended the staff meetings. Staff meetings provided teachers time to talk with each other about routines, teaching practices, assessment and planning for children's learning, family and whānau⁹ and organisational issues within the centre (Daisy/initial interview). They provided a traditional and professional means of communication for the teaching team:

...we rely on our staff meetings for the planning side...for keeping in touch...it's a good chance to keep up with what the other teachers' [are] doing with that child...Although we do it on the hop sometimes. They [the teachers] might have written four or five learning stories that they haven't shared. So the staff meetings is a good chance for everyone to pull out what they have observed,...photo,...stories...so we can all share...so we make connections that we might have missed. (April/interview/1/p.3).

⁹ Whānau is a Māori word meaning family including parents, caregivers, siblings, and extended family.

5.1.2 Inclusion of artifacts

Written documentation, artifacts, was identified as mediating understandings of how the organisation of the centre supported professional dialogue. Artifacts included agendas, diaries, notebooks, assessment documentation and staff meeting notes. Agendas were organised before the meetings and provided a written guideline for the staff meeting and prior notice of the issues which were to be addressed:

...we'll have an agenda...what we are going to talk about. Then if a teacher has something they would like to ...discuss, write it down on the agenda. So it's better all about collaborative, that community of learners. You can sort of say five minutes we'll talk about this, ten minutes we will discuss this. (Jo/interview/2/p.17).

Diaries and notebooks also gave direction to the staff meeting and the professional dialogue which occurred. Teachers recorded events prior to the meeting which they wanted to share and may have forgotten:

We've got a recording book where we will write our thoughts, how we think the day went...to take note...so we'll bring that to the meeting and discuss different things or anything. We'll go through the programming and everything which is good. (Roimata/interview/1/p.2).

However, the frequent use of the diaries and notebooks was questioned by Pip although she did understand the benefits of these artifacts:

...we've started a diary...we write down activities that were on the day that were enjoyed so you could look back at them...I have written in it when something's happened...that's been of big interest for the group of children...The idea was to help with planning...when we have our meetings to refer to but I don't think it get[s] utilised that much. (Pip/1/pp.28-29).

Teachers also brought their documented assessments of children's learning to the staff meetings. My observations of a staff meeting noted teachers shared their documentation of children's learning:

Roimata talks about the possibilities for a child making links with an interest in being with the teachers as they do tasks. Roimata suggests she [child] may be interested in helping with the washing and hanging out the clothes.

Rachael tells of children playing a board game, learning the rules and listening to instructions.

(Observation/ 1st staff meeting/over 2's)

During the meetings one staff member wrote meeting notes. These were a reminder for teachers of what had occurred at the meeting:

...a lot of teachers use them after we've had a meeting to go back to. I know the under two's teachers use them a lot, they go back to the minute book. Over two's staff do as well ...as a prompt, what we talked about and what we should be doing in the next fortnight....they all know where they are. They've told if they want to access they can...they are sitting on a shelf in the office. (Daisy/interview/1/p.44)

However, Julia felt they were not so readily available:

Staff meeting notes [are] kept in the office...We don't often go into the office every day because it's not really our space...and its just getting time to access it all...You tend to just try and keep it in your head what's been planned and everything but often by the end of the two weeks you've kind of forgotten. (Julia/interview/1/pp.38-39).

I analysed data from six sets of staff meeting notes which were in addition to the two staff meetings I attended. One teacher was assigned to write the notes at each meeting. The name of the scribe was not evident. The notes were generally brief in sentence structure and sometimes diagrammatical as the scribe conveyed the context of the dialogue. The main points of the dialogue were conveyed in the notes when I compared two sets of minutes with my observational data. There were gaps in two sets of staff meeting notes indicating the scribe's engagement in the dialogue (confirmed in conversation with Daisy). Teaching strategies were more evident in the notes when there seemed to be an issue, e.g.:

Profile works well for him too

Try to encourage peer interactions

Encouraging independence, interactions with others" (part of the staff meeting notes, over-two's, 27 September 2010)

5.1.3 Staff meeting structure

Data analysis identified rules mediated many teachers' interpretation of how the organisation supported professional dialogue within the centre. The structure of the staff meetings was similar for each meeting and determined whether the direction of the professional dialogue was organisational or pedagogical.

All the teachers met for approximately the first 30 minutes of the staff meeting. Daisy usually facilitated this section of the meeting with Rachael and April, as senior teachers, being contributing facilitators. They also encouraged the teachers to contribute:

... [we] try and go round the table and...each person gets an opportunity to present their idea of what's happening. (Daisy/interview/1/p.12).

Sometimes Daisy encouraged other teachers to lead the meetings in order to increase their input into the meeting:

...my experience is that some teachers get there and say 'no I haven't got anything to say' ...and my strategy for that, one of the teachers, was to let them run the meeting and I thought I would try that with one of the others as well...give them a chance to, to be the leader. (Daisy/interview/1/p.12).

During this period, Daisy would discuss with the teachers organisational matters concerning the whole centre and issues would be addressed. The staff meeting initiated sharing organisational information which concerned the whole team and which focused on routines, teachers' tasks and up coming events:

...the first part of the meeting's more about housekeeping. It's how the school [centre] runs as a whole. Then towards the...second half is more about planning for the children's learning...that's the general format. It's the whole centre meeting first and then the over two's planning meeting second. (Julia/interview/1/p.22).

After organisational matters had been addressed the teachers would disperse into their teaching areas. April, June and Zara, (teachers for the under-two's area) would go to another room and the over-two's teachers led by Rachael would meet together. Daisy would attend either meeting. During the research project fieldwork Daisy attended the over-two's meetings as she was concerned about their planning (Daisy/interview/1/p.11). During this period of the staff meeting teachers shared information concerning children and planned for their learning.

The tone of the meetings, once the teaching teams split into two groups was distinctive. The teachers in the over-two's, which were a larger group of seven, indicated this section of the staff meeting remained formal although focused on pedagogy:

...we talk about how we're going to plan the room for the next two weeks or what should we set up on each individual table and there's a little notebook we write down what works, what's worked really well. (Pip/interview/1/p.20).

Speaking among teachers that have noticed other things so that you can have that collaborative approach.....cause its part of the planning...its more professional. (Jo/interview/1/p.3).

The teachers in the under-two's, a smaller group of three teachers, perceived this part of the meeting as less formal:

...so the first hour is more formal. Policies and procedures, management and then we split off and then it's teaching...The individual teaching meetings are probably the more informal. (April/interview/1/p.36).

...[staff meetings with under-two's] we're not...quite heavily structured. We want to get the things done but at the same time it's not really intense...we have a laugh and all that kind of stuff...I'm not sure why sometimes wonder if it's the time of the night as well...5.30pm to 7.30pm. (Zara/interview/1/p.8).

My observation notes confirm the ease with which the under-two's teaching team conversed. Generally these teachers agreed with each other as they shared information concerning children's learning and communication with parents. For example, when I observed at the second staff meeting two teachers, April and June were completing the end of year evaluation of each child's learning. This was a management requirement that teachers evaluate each child's learning and provide feedback to parents in their profile books (Daisy/email). Generally April and June agreed on the children's learning and confirmed the documentation in the child's profile. On one occasion there seemed to be a difference of opinion. I noted the easy flow of the conversation had changed (2nd staff meeting observation notes):

Midway through the meeting they disagreed on how a child had learnt the names of the people in the centre. April suggested photos. June murmured it could be something else. An impasse seemed to have occurred.
April asked June a direct question:
"How do you think she learnt the names?"
June suggested through language and songs. April agreed.
(2nd meeting observation notes)

I talked with April about this at a subsequent interview. She replied:

I agreed with her in the end...that's probably so typical...there was quite a lot to get through. (April/interview/2/pp.9-13).

This scenario raised two issues, one of time and busyness and the other of the place of disagreement within professional dialogue. The avoidance of debate may be about a lack of time or it may be a personal choice. Rachael saw staff meetings as a time to debate issues although she also alluded to the lack of time for debate:

...we actually spend an awful lot of time debating issues, talking about professional development...different theorists and then we have to stop because...we have to get into the planning because otherwise we wouldn't get the planning done for the next fortnight. (Rachael/interview/1/p.6).

Zara, a student teacher, suggested the staff meetings were a time to discuss theory and to gain more understanding of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996):

I'm still coming to grips with *Te Whāriki* at times...I'll bring it up in the staff meetings and I will say "this is what they're interested in but what would be the best links or here's one link, here's one of the things they are interested in but what does that link to in *Te Whāriki*?" Like I'm really confused. And so we'll have a little discussion, we'll have a look through it and then we'll often come up with the general consensus...we think it links to this one...*Te Whāriki* often has those like evaluation sort of questions to do with your plan. (Zara/interview/1/p.10).

In contrast, Pip suggested talk regarding theory did not occur at staff meetings; rather at other times during the day:

Theory...it never seems to come into...staff meetings...It gets talked about but never...come up at staff meetings. Staff meetings seem to be more about the individual child and the planning, how we plan the room and what's going to [be] best for the children in the next so many days, what we should do outside more than the theory side. (Pip/interview/1/p.26).

This section presented the findings concerning staff meetings. The data analysis identified how two components of Engeström's (1999a) triangle, rules, (e.g. the structure and the tone of the meeting) and artifacts, (e.g. diaries, notebooks and staff meeting notes) mediated opportunities for teachers to engage in professional dialogue at the staff meetings. Data analysis identified artifacts supported teachers' preparation for the meetings as well as recorded information for teachers to refer to later. A variety of organisational and pedagogical matters were evident in their professional dialogue.

5.2 Time and busyness

The teachers suggested a lack of time and busyness were issues in their work and, and at staff meetings. This section presents these findings, firstly the general issue of time and busyness within EC teaching and secondly the timing and busyness of the staff meetings. Data analysis identified rules and artifacts mediated teachers' engagement in professional dialogue.

5.2.1 General issues

During the interviews all the teachers referred to a lack of time and being busy in their roles as EC teachers and suggested this affected their engagement in professional dialogue with their colleagues. Julia suggested time for professional dialogue was limited:

Often we're busy with the routines and everything. It tends to be on our breaks and in our own time that we have professional dialogue...there's always lots of extra things that are expected from you in addition to all your work hours...the job is very tiring anything extra feels very extra...it tends to all add up...it tends to get very tiring just having to scatter your attention the whole time is quite challenging. (Julia/interview/1/pp.5 -10).

Kerry referred to the demands of the teaching role:

I just think the job itself is so demanding...it would be difficult to carve out some time where this [professional dialogue] could happen efficiently and easily within the role. (Kerry/interview/1/p.32).

Rachael felt the children were the priority and this had an impact on the teachers' ability to have professional dialogue:

I guess the biggest barrier for early childhood teachers is that they are so passionate and caring about the children that they always put the children first. So professional dialogue always tends to come second and it's frustrating because you just don't get the time and...there's never enough hours in the day to talk about what you love to do. (Rachael/interview/1/pp.27-28).

In contrast, April suggested it was important to overcome the feeling of a lack of time:

We make time. It can definitely [be busy] but if it's a busy day what gets missed one day we make up for the next. We find time even if it's at the end of the day. (April/interview/1/p.41).

A lack of time and busyness was a general issue for teachers and also regarding the organisation of the staff meetings. The next section presents findings regarding time and busyness of staff meetings.

5.2.2 Time and busyness within staff meetings

Data analysis identified timing of the staff meetings was an issue and teachers perceived staff meetings as busy which affected the amount of time teachers had for professional dialogue and to address issues.

The scheduling of staff meetings after work was a barrier for teachers' engagement. Some teachers worked until 5.30pm and then attended the staff meeting. Other teachers who started work at 7.30am and finished early stayed at the centre usually in the staff room completing teaching jobs or relaxing. Others, such as Julia, sometimes went home and then returned for the staff meeting:

Often everyone's tired especially if you've woken up at 5.30am to do the early shift. You go right through the day and it [staff meeting] starts at 5.30pm to 7.30pm and by that time I am pretty brain dead. You do your best and have lots of coffee...you do have a rest. Occasionally if I'm feeling really motivated usually I go home to have a shower, get

changed, having something to eat and then go back. That's my normal routine...But if you're doing the 9am to 5.30pm shift I find that very challenging too cause you're basically going straight onto the meeting...so no break in between. (Julia/interview/1/pp.15 – 16).

The issue of tiredness and the timing of the staff meetings was raised by other teachers:

You know 5.30pm to 7.30pm you kind of reach that 7.30pm period and you're hungry and you're thinking I just want to get out of here so you just sometimes I'll admit I probably don't bring things up. (Zara/interview/1/p.8).

...the planning and learning...try to dedicate about an hour and a half. Sometimes you find the motivation is lost in that first half hour. Because everybody's just finished work at 5.30pm or most of us have and its hard to get that passion going in that short period of time at the end of the day. (Daisy/interview/1/p.9).

However Rachael suggested staff meetings could be 'exciting'. She indicated that relaxing after those meetings was difficult:

...at the meeting they can get very exciting if you've got children doing all sorts of amazing things and teachers are coming up with strategies linking it to *Te Whāriki*...practice...new ideas that can be very exciting. Then the other problem is you go home at 7.30pm at night and you've gotta try and reenergise for it again the next morning so you kinda lose a little bit of the energy. (Rachael/Interview/1/p.19).

Teachers voiced their concern about their discussions being rushed and not enough time for allotted dialogue:

I find our staff meetings...it's like a race. Like you have a race in which you have to fit all these things into that small two hour period to talk to staff and...it's quite tricky I find and often you only get a moment of time to talk about something that...was quite important. (Daisy/interview/1/p.8).

Jo drew on previous conversations with other teachers in the early childhood sector. He inferred a lack of time for professional dialogue was common within the sector:

A lot of staff meetings are like...you're doing planning...and then you just kind of rushing through issues to meet...like time frames...if there's some important point you want to discuss you might only have a minute to discuss it. But I feel that is common 'cause I spoke with students and that happened to them at work. (Jo/interview/2/p.17).

Daisy, Rachael and April discussed how teachers in a staff meeting have limited time to unpack the detail of children's learning:

...say for example helping them [children] to obtain and develop friendships. What does that mean and what does it actually look like...that can be a half hour discussion and...you've still got five other kids that you've got to aim for in a two hour session...you're not only just doing that you're doing the admin stuff...you could spend all evening just planning for one kid. (Rachael/joint interview/p.6).

There was an acceptance, busyness and a lack of time, were part of the EC teachers' role:

I think it is just part of the job and the reality is you're never going to get all the teachers out during the day 'cause the children need consistent care givers.
(Rachael/interview/1/p.5).

Time also influenced whether teachers had opportunities for professional dialogue about curriculum documents:

...because your meeting time is so limited to two hours and you've got quite a lot of housekeeping and then planning and then [the] room. I mean the environments stuff to look at, you often don't get a chance to discuss that stuff [*Te Whāriki*] in depth...unless you go to a professional development day and of course that's not usually with your colleagues.
(Rachael/interview/1/p.4).

Curriculum documents are artifacts and mediate professional dialogue. The relationship between professional dialogue and curriculum documents was highlighted by Kerry. She felt, as a student, professional dialogue concerning curriculum documents was important but could not envisage time for this:

I think it should be part of our professional dialogue but I don't think there's any time where it happens. (Kerry/interview/1/p.7).

June referred to past experiences when *Te Whāriki* had mediated their professional dialogue:

We use to I think go over and...do questions as a group and use them but haven't done that lately. (June/1/p.7).

However Jo and Roimata suggested *Te Whāriki* was woven into their staff meeting discussions:

I feel we do especially when we're linking the curriculum to what's the child learning. Obviously we use *Te Whāriki* the most. (Jo/interview/1/p.5).

We often link our programme planning to *Te Whāriki*...I think it's good to kind of keep that in practice...Like I'm a student and so that's good for me as well. It's kind of affirming all the things 'cause I'm looking at everything from that point of view because that's what I'm having to do. (Roimata/interview/1/p.5).

Data analysis identified how staff meetings were affected by a lack of time and busyness limiting opportunities for professional dialogue. To overcome tiredness and to increase teachers' engagement with the content of the meetings management looked for alternative formats. These alternatives are discussed in the next section of this chapter.

5.3 Overcoming barriers to engagement

Data analysis identified how management used alternative strategies to engage teachers at staff meetings. Roles identified how teachers overcame barriers to professional dialogue.

Daisy described changing the format of staff meetings and involving teachers more in professional dialogue. She suggested, during one of my observation visits, an emphasis was sometimes placed on building relationships within the teaching team and opportunities were provided for teachers to socialise and to eat together. Daisy also suggested sometimes they disregard organisational matters and “We try to have meetings where the teams don’t meet [separately] to try and discourage that lethargy that seems to set in every now and then...we just dedicate our whole meeting to the children.” (Daisy/interview/1/p.10).

Changing the content of the meetings was another means to overcome lethargy. I asked April:

Christine: With three of you how do you generate that...enthusiasm and it's late at night. You've been working all day.

April: We've changed it last year 'cause it was dry 'cause we used to go individual child by child...and then plan the room from there...and we've got quite bogged up...in the process...but now we do try and like Rachael was saying just sitting around and talking and we try and do a bit more of that... because particularly Zara and her vibrance...will come out and go 'oh this happened and that happened' and then I can pick up points from there. (April/interview/2/pp.14-15).

Teachers engendered enthusiasm within the teaching team when they had a particular interest in a topic. Zara told how she introduced new ideas which had emerged from a self review¹⁰ she undertook for her University studies. In discussion with April, Zara decided to have the paints more readily available for

¹⁰Self review is a whole centre research tool EC centres are required to use under the Licensing Criteria for Early Childhood Education and Care Centres 2008.

the children in the under-two's area. She explained how she introduced the idea to her colleagues and the children:

...it kind of annoyed me that it [paint] went everywhere...I wanted to figure out that kind of thing...then after doing the research and talking with the teachers...it was [a] good change in my thinking...it really did change the way I thought and then...as a teaching team discussed it in staff meetings. So for me after talking to staff and at the staff meeting...we realised as a teaching team we actually needed to have the art out more...it changed my thinking. (Zara/interview/2/p.4).

Roimata shared how she raised her concerns about a child with English as a second language. Roimata had previously left literature in the staff room and encouraged the other teachers to read it. Then at a staff meeting she raised the issue and talked about the changes the teaching team could make to their practice:

We had to make sure everyone was on board and was thinking about it the same way and I decided it was important to discuss because she was feeling quite isolated and very alone...I decided it was important to discuss...I even brought it up at a meeting. (Roimata/interview/2/pp.7-8).

Resolving issues were one reason for professional dialogue. However, Daisy suggested professional dialogue could be supported and promoted by other means:

If we took a topic to table at a meeting and started talking professionally about theory or something I could see the teachers would become more skilled at expressing...articulating...If you did it at a staff meeting I think it would be...a good tool for learning about participating or articulating. (Daisy/interview/1/pp.51-52).

Julia shared her experience of this happening in a previous teaching position:

[A centre] that was very theoretical...we'd be given like articles to read before the meeting, not that you always had time to do that, then you'd discuss the articles and you'd be like reflecting on the philosophy...it was more kind of high level thinking. (Julia/interview/1/pp.45-46).

Daisy, as manager, was aware of the difficulties of staff meetings after work. She suggested an ideal situation would be:

In a perfect world it would be to have a half day where the centre could be closed...each week and the teachers spent the time [together]...similar to a kindy scenario. (Daisy/group interview/1/p.20).

Rachael had also heard of another centre who was finding time during the day to meet once a month. This was Rachael's dream:

...it would be fantastic if once a month you could just get all the teaching team to just sit and just talk. (Rachael/interview/1/p.6).

In a later interview Rachael explained:

I'm not sure what I think of it where they actually have a team of relievers and they're very familiar relievers so it's not like random's come and actually relieve the team once a month. So they do fortnightly meetings and then once a month...the whole team gets a half a day out to plan...[at a seminar] they talked about that they have the exact same problem and that's how they got around it. (Rachael/group interview/1/p.20).

Data analysis identified strategies used by the teachers to overcome barriers to professional dialogue at the staff meetings. Strategies included teachers addressing issues and bringing ideas to meetings and looking for alternatives to staff meetings after work. The next section presents data concerning teachers' use of *little conversations* and *ad hoc conversations* as a means for professional dialogue.

5.4 “Little conversations”

“Little conversations” (Rachael, Zara & Kerry) and “ad hoc conversations” (Pip, Jo, Kerry, Rachael) were labels used by the teachers to describe the intermittent dialogue which occurred during the day. Data analysis within a CHAT framework identified rules, roles and artifacts mediated how little conversations and ad hoc conversations contributed to teachers’ professional dialogue. The interpretation of data identified artifacts (e.g. learning environment, staff room, and meal breaks) as significant mediators.

Rachael said “I think during the day there are lots of little conversations” (Rachael/interview/1/p.15). These conversations were a means to share information. They were often brief encounters which sometimes led to more dialogue at staff meetings. June suggested these conversations were “...important...I want to be able to say my bit or I want to put a theory forward...I use it as a conversation starter” (June/interview/1/pp.6-7).

June often started these conversations in the staff room during her break. She said she was interested in and liked to talk with others about children’s learning. For June, talking with others during her meal breaks was part of her teaching role. Kerry also liked talking with others. She suggested:

...the ad hoc conversations are quite important because...they’re usually topical and relevant...and adds to something you haven’t noticed or seen or you’re sharing something with someone else that they may not have noticed or seen...So they are important to still be able to have. (Kerry/interview/1/p.33)

“Casual conversations” is how April referred to the intermittent dialogue which occurred in the under-two’s area. April valued these casual conversations suggesting:

I might have heard a more casual conversation which had a clue in it as to what that person was thinking...or feeling...[put] two together and often it is the more casual conversation[s] that actually hold the key to the bigger issues...that's why I put so much value on that casual conversation 'cause I get...so much more out of...them. (April/interview/1/pp.23-40).

Zara also welcomed the ongoing dialogue generated through “little conversations”. In addition to brief conversations within the learning environment Zara suggested the children's and teachers' meal breaks were an ideal time to have these conversations:

I'll sometimes come out with a question that I've got...cause it's quite quiet on the floor when you sort of start thinking about things that you can ask....so...yesterday I asked them a question and I was able to discuss it with them what they thought and I was able to have a bit of a discussion...Sometimes in the staff room for like morning tea breaks or like lunch breaks you have a bit of a [discussion]...I did that again yesterday. (Zara/interview/1/p.3).

Ad hoc conversations in the staff room during a teacher's non-contact time were also identified as ideal. Jo suggested:

If you're on the computer and another teacher notices a photo on the computer and then asks...what does such and such doing and then it kinda initiates conversation socially and then you can maybe talk more about what learning is happening here. (Jo/interview/1/p.5).

April also suggested the conversations in the staff room were valuable as they often helped her to “make sense” of previous information. She suggested “stuff comes out” and it gives clues as to why certain things have happened (April/interview/1/p.22).

I had spent time in the staff room during my observation visits, and observed teachers dialoguing with each other as they did non-contact tasks or had a meal break. The congregation of teachers in the staff room was more evident in the morning when teachers were on non-contact. The teachers' desire for these ad hoc conversations was evident in my observations and at the first staff meeting I attended. Daisy reminded the over two's teaching team of the length of morning

tea breaks, commenting the tea breaks had gone on for an excessive amount of time the day before. When I observed in the afternoons the teachers were less likely to be in the staff room together. A conversation with Daisy during my third observation visit confirmed this observation as she clarified several teachers went home at 3pm and generally teachers did not have non-contact time in the afternoon.

Whilst teachers valued ad hoc conversations in the staff room they were less comfortable with talking with other teachers in the learning environment. Kerry suggested:

...one of them was guilt for me...talking to another teacher while I'm on the floor...seen as not appropriate maybe...then the time and then being interrupted anyway because if you are on the floor like I said someone could be drawing on the wall...you're suddenly pulled away from half a conversation...you might not even get around to finishing that conversation...how busy the role is...how demanding the role is...and the space to do it. (Kerry/interview/1/pp.40-41).

Pip also felt talking with other teachers in the learning environment was problematical:

I try not to [do] that [talk with teachers] so much because I'm conscious of the kids...you've got to be really careful of what you say...I'll try not to go off into too much adult conversation...you're conscious all the time of them [children] listening...I'm always aware of my surroundings. (Pip/interview/1/pp.28-29).

The unwritten and implicit rules of when adult conversation was possible in the learning environment were different for the over-two's teachers and the under-two's teachers. Rachael felt it was easier to have ad hoc conversations in the under-two's area rather than the over-two's area:

I find when I am down in the under-two's I get more chance to talk to the teachers about different ideas we've had, different ways we could look at running things, different practices. You get a lot more space to do that. (Rachael/interview/1/p.9).

April, Sue, Zara and Daisy also indicated they had more opportunities for professional dialogue when in the under-two's learning environment. They suggested there were times during the day when they could sit and talk whilst also being with the children.

I guess for me the best time would be actually on the floor in the afternoon...when they're waking up...eating their food...I'll just have a little conversation with a couple of the teachers about what they think about this or whatever. (Zara/1/p.5).

April suggested teachers' assessment of children's interests generated professional dialogue and that ad hoc conversations were an opportunity to discuss assessment and make decisions without waiting for a staff meeting:

Usually something exciting...happened during the morning...a child doing something new...used a resource in a different way...a new interaction...a new friendship...between the two or three of us we work out that there's something bigger about to happen. Without that dialogue we'd only have our piece of the puzzle. (April/interview/1/p.28).

My field notes confirmed under-two's teachers were able to have professional dialogue whilst in the learning environment. I noted the ease the children had with adult talk and how they sometimes went to sit on an adult's knee or beside an adult to engage non-verbally when two adults were talking.

Daisy acknowledged the conflicting demands for teachers when working within a teaching team of three or more. She regarded ad hoc conversations as important and encouraged them as a means for teachers to share information and ideas. However, Daisy was realistic about how and when this dialogue could happen:

I never think negatively about the teachers taking that opportunity because I know myself I have to do it as well but I'm annoyed that have to do it, that's the way it has to happen...for communication to happen you have to have it there and then on the floor rather than in the staff room two or three hours later. (Daisy/interview/1/p.25).

Ad hoc and little conversations were ideal lead-ins for professional dialogue as teachers talked together and shared ideas. The space for these conversations was also significant. Data analysis identified the staff room as a dialogic space when teachers were on meal breaks or on non-contact time. Dialogue was more limited in the over-two's than the under-two's learning environment. The next section presents findings identifying student teachers as inquirers who prompted professional dialogue stimulating new ideas and understandings of theory and practice with the teaching team.

5.5 Student teachers in the centre

The community of Pohutukawa Early Learning Centre had a cultural and organisational intention to support the training of ECE teachers (Daisy/initial interview). There were four student teachers in the centre during the research project. In addition, four of the qualified registered teachers had been students at the centre during their training. Data analysis identified student teachers created a dialogic space (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2008) where rules, artifacts and roles (Engeström, 1999a) mediated opportunities for professional dialogue.

5.5.1 Student teacher enquiry generates professional dialogue

Student teachers commented how, through dialogue with other teachers within the centre, they questioned their ideas and their understanding of theoretical perspectives of teaching and learning. The students' assignments were one reason for the dialogue:

For me it [professional dialogue] is probably based...more around my assignments...if I'm a bit stuck...I'll come and talk to them [teachers] about that. (Zara/interview/1/p.16).

Every week I have a home centre task...so often that will reflect different things...so I will talk with different teachers...and get different feedback on what they think just to get a better perspective, different ideas. (Roimata/interview/1/p.15).

Teachers also commented on how student teachers shared their assignment tasks with them:

[Zara] would bring in her assignment a lot and talk about it a lot on the floor and we would do group things together and link it with what she was doing. (April/interview/1/pp.16-17).

Jo suggested curriculum documents were often a focus of student teachers' dialogue and their assignments:

With student's assignments a lot of the discussion can be...about *Te Whāriki...Kei Tua o te Pae* and the regulations...it may be part of their assignment they're doing. I feel it's worthwhile 'cause...you're always kind of keeping up to date on what changes are happening in early childhood. (Jo/interview/1/p.6).

Student teachers' talk with more experienced teachers enabled them to unpack theoretical information from their studies and relate that to their teaching practice. Zara explained how she put theory into practice:

...like...disposition thing...it was explained quite clearly to me one day [at university]...[then] I was able to see it at work so then I'd talk to them [teachers] about that. (Zara/interview/1/p.2).

The sharing of ideas was also helpful for trained teachers as it renewed their understanding of pedagogy and theoretical perspectives. Teachers commented that through the student teachers' inquiry they revisited theoretical perspectives of children's learning and development:

I find when you've got students in the centre there's a lot more academic talk 'cause of course it is fresh on top of their minds and they are always talking to you about it. (Rachael/interview/1/p.3).

I think it's more the ones that are studying at the moment who kind of bring in the theorists more because they are currently reading these articles and, and things but if you are not studying that tends to be seen as kind of frivolous extra stuff. (Julia/interview/1/p.15).

It's one of the things why I like having the students in the centre because we'll be talking about a particular aspect of learning and a student will say 'oh but that's Vygotsky' and that's when we will go into discussion...about interactions, what it all means. (Daisy/interview/1/p.37).

Jo also described how the students' inquiry provided an opportunity to refer back to an understanding of theoretical perspectives:

I feel like... 'cause I'm really into childhood research and development I'm always...talking to students about...what I've just read...and just kind of like bouncing off ideas and just....sharing knowledge about student's development ...and research. (Jo/interview/1/p.7).

The sharing of current literature was seen as beneficial by other teachers:

[Student teachers] have access to more newer readings or latest articles or information...that someone may not have...so the learning is completely ongoing. (Kerry/interview/1/p.34).

...you always look to your students for those resources because you know they've got the most current. (Daisy/interview/1/p.16).

Trained and experienced teachers commented how student teachers stimulated professional dialogue:

I think because we've got so many teachers studying at the moment they sort of do bring in the fresh ideas. (Julia/interview/1/p.23).

...it's mainly the...student teachers who are still at university that have all these bubbling ideas that they want to do things all the time and they'll come and say 'hey can I do this?' and I'm like 'yeah go for it'...so that's really cool yeah. (Rachael/interview/1/p.15).

The relationship was reciprocal as student teachers commented how trained and experienced teachers stimulated their understanding of pedagogy:

...with the more experienced teachers and those who have got their degree I would be hoping that through just even talking with other people sometimes clarifies ideas for you in your own head...they might be able to add some new information and look at it from a different perspective that you hadn't before and then...they might be able to give you an example, this is what it looks like. (Kerry/interview/1/p.29).

Pip observed other experienced teachers and explained how Rachael acted as a role model for her:

Because I'm a student teacher...I watch Rachael all the time because I love the way she sorts situations out. I can't quite get that yet so I often watch her. (Pip/interview/1/p.39).

The teachers explained what it was like when they had finished studying. They thought theoretical understandings of teaching and learning may not be so to the fore. Julia suggested:

...when you're a bit more removed from studying you sort of lose touch with all of that a bit and you sort of need to be refreshed and kind of somehow have an avenue to be more critical about what you're doing. (Julia/interview/1/p.8).

Rachael also suggested practice was more to the fore than theory when a teacher completed their study:

...when you've been out of being a student you get more into...the running of the centre and its [theory] always in the back of your mind but it's not necessarily the first thing you think of or maybe it's just more that it's so ingrained that it becomes a natural part of what you do anyway. (Rachael/interview/1/p.3).

Zara was thinking ahead to when she finished her studies and what she would have to do to stay in touch with current theory and practice:

I would also have to make sure that [I] actually have to find readings and things like that just to...keep me thinking kind of thing. (Zara/interview/2/p.30).

This section has presented the results indicating how student teachers provided a space for professional dialogue. The next section presents data identifying how working in a teaching team provides opportunities and support for professional dialogue.

5.6 Working together in a teaching team

The teachers suggested that professional dialogue occurred through discussion, talk and conversations with other teachers. How professional dialogue mediated collaboration and interdependency within the teaching team was a question which emerged during data analysis. Data analysis identified roles and rules were mediators of teachers' understandings of how the community supported a collaborative teaching team resulting in opportunities and support for professional dialogue.

In my initial interview with Daisy, she highlighted the importance of teachers working well together and indicated this began with the organisation and values which underpinned the centre (Daisy/initial interview/pp.3-8). An example of this was the support from management for some teachers to be employed for a shorter working week:

It's quite a big staff base. And we try and work here where we meet staff's family needs. So a lot of our teachers work only school hours...some are only part-time...a bit of a jigsaw puzzle fitting everyone together but that's how it works...it seems to work. It means the culture is quite a relaxed...friendly culture we have a good positive environment with the staff. (/Daisy/initial interview/4).

Other teachers, Rachael, Pip and Julia, commented they worked shorter hours and how this was important in finding a work/family and/or work/stress balance in their life. Julia suggested:

I think because it's [work] three days it's OK...But I know the ones that only come in one day a week it's really quite challenging knowing what's been going on and everything. But they do come to the meetings and we tend to get an overview at the meetings too...so I pick up anything I've missed, concerns or important things that have happened. (Julia/interview/1/p.11).

Rachael shared she is a mother and has chosen to work three days a week. She suggested:

Daisy does a brilliant job at...working the rosters so that families come first which I think fantastic. I know it's really hard and when I was working full-time I used to find it quite frustrating that I'd have to fill in all the gaps when mothers went and had time with their children. But now...I totally appreciate that...but it's hard because you don't have a consistent teaching team...but then it also brings a real richness to the team culture...it's not so intense...people get on better. (Rachael/interview/1/pp.23-24).

Zara suggested the part-time staff made a difference in how the team collaborated:

I think it's a very collaborative centre...I guess because you have got all the part-time people and you've got your full-time you know we don't have a set day...a couple have a set roster but everyone else...we vary our days...So for that you have to be collaborative and you have to be working together so...you're passing on information...constantly providing the information...We definitely are a collaborative organisation and I really enjoy that and I think it works well within the community and based with [the umbrella organisation]. (Zara/interview/1/pp.16-17).

Organisational factors contributed to the teachers' ability to work together and to have professional dialogue. April suggested Daisy's leadership was "a big part" (April/interview/1/p.18) in instigating a culture where teachers were empowered to work together:

She's quite good at knowing all the strengths of all the teachers and how to boost them and empower them in their own individual ways...So each teacher has their role and...extending themselves...So I guess that grows a confidence within them to work as a team a bit more. (April/interview/1/pp.17-18).

Roimata confirmed a “relaxed and calm” environment was an important aspect of the teaching team being able to work and communicate together:

I think everyone is just so relaxed and I think because the teachers are relaxed and calm and everyone gets along that the children are and so that kind of means that we can all kind of communicate a lot better and everyone's comfortable and happy to just go out of their way and talk and communicate and stuff like that yeah I think...everyone's just so easy going and helpful. (Roimata/interview/1/p.10).

Other teaching experiences had alerted Roimata to the potential for differences in team dynamics:

I've worked in other places. If I'm not comfortable with the people I work with or my environment I'm less likely to discuss issues or ideas I might have cause you know the chance it won't be recognised or it just be like shoved to the side kind of thing. But [here] everyone is open to new ideas and trying anything out and helping everybody that you kind of feel like you can say anything. (Roimata/interview/1/p.11).

Other teachers also suggested there was a culture of openness and a willingness to discuss issues. Jo said:

The good thing about...our teachers, they're open to discussion and we can discuss those things [at times]...I don't feel there's a hierarchy that one older, one senior teacher will say, 'this is how it's going to be' and we have to follow. (Jo/interview/1/pp.12-13).

Rachael commented on the teachers' relationships with each other and especially her relationship with Daisy and April:

We're very lucky that we all of us here have a very good relationship, well I feel we do, very good relationships with each other that we can...especially between Daisy and April we can actually just talk it out...say 'hey I thought more about this and this is what I think' and it just becomes an on-going conversation. (Rachael/interview/2/p.29).

An appreciation of the other teachers was important for team relationships. April shared how the centre's support of a family had resulted in the teachers' contribution being acknowledged:

I think all the staff are appreciated...we are all given a chance to celebrate...it was quite a long journey in supporting a family alongside (the umbrella organisation) and...came to a successful end. Everyone got together and celebrated that...everybody's feeling empowered and proud of their achievements and that just builds confidence, doesn't it and then no one has to feel like they're in competition I guess with somebody else and so naturally everyone grows together. (April/interview/1/pp.25-26).

The teachers' willingness to communicate with the other teachers was seen by Roimata as collaborative:

I think [collaboration] is a really strong aspect of our centre...after talking to others [student teachers]...I know a lot of teams are not necessarily as good at communicating as us. (Roimata/interview/1/p.24).

Everyone's really good so it's nice to have a team that you can approach every single person. You feel you can talk about everything. (Roimata/interview/2/p.18).

During my visits I observed the teachers collaborating about teaching practice and the organisation of the centre. This was especially noticeable on my first observation visit when I spent some time in the staff room. As the teachers came and went during their morning tea breaks, Roimata, who was on non-contact, was engaged in ongoing conversations about the resource she was making to promote more te reo Māori¹¹ in the centre. My observations noted that these ongoing conversations during the tea breaks were social and affable. Staff were interested in Roimata's resource, shared information concerning possible uses for the resource and demonstrated a willingness to listen.

¹¹ Te reo Māori means the Māori language.

5.7 Summary

This chapter presented the findings identifying the connection between opportunities and support for professional dialogue and the organisation and culture of the centre. Data analysis identified staff meetings, time and busyness, overcoming barriers, ad hoc and “little conversations”, student teachers and a collaborative teaching team all contributed support and opportunities for professional dialogue in Pohutukawa Early Learning Centre. The next chapter presents the discussion concerning findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 6

Discussion and possible directions

6.0 Introduction

In chapters 4 and 5 I presented the findings from the research data. The focus for the findings and research project was teachers' professional dialogue within an ECE centre in New Zealand. My research had emerged from an interest in the opportunities and support for teachers' professional dialogue. My experience as a teacher, professional development facilitator, and more recently, as a team leader of several centres had made me aware of the lack of time for teachers to engage in professional dialogue.

Recent changes in political support and direction for ECE in New Zealand has culminated in an emphasis on fewer qualified teachers in ECE centres (Connell, 2010; Dalli, 2010). This resulted in a lowering of government funding for many ECE centres (Connell, 2010; Mintrom, 2011). The increased accountability through documented evidence of assessment practices (Te One, 2008) and self review (Education Review Office, 2009) are all contributing factors to a changing environment in ECE in New Zealand. It is within this realm I attempted to understand the "overlapping realities" of teachers' professional dialogue.

I began this research project defining *professional dialogue* as EC teachers verbal critical examination of their teaching practice and children's learning. I surmised at the time that *professional* denoted the EC teacher's ethos (Grey, 2011), captured and exposed the role of the EC teacher and similarities and differences to other teaching fraternities. My understanding of dialogue as transformative was influenced by Carlina Rinaldi (2006). This dialogue evolved, was deeper and there maybe uncertainty about the direction or outcomes (Rinaldi, 2006). Time was an important aspect of this dialogue and a set time

was provided during the teachers' working day to engage in dialogue with colleagues (Rinaldi, 2006).

Since embarking on this research project I am more aware of other perspectives of professional dialogue. I have been influenced by reading a variety of literature which challenged me to have a more diverse understanding. I was increasingly aware *professionalism* did not lie in the separation of pedagogy and organisation (Taguchi, 2010) while children's care floundered in the middle as this seemed a poor rendition of EC teaching.

Subsequently, analysis of the gathered research data identified a more complex model of professional dialogue than my original understandings. Professional dialogue was identified as broad covering many aspects of the centre organisation and pedagogy. Dialogue could be sometimes deep and evolving (Rinaldi, 2006). However, ongoing conversations during the day and night and over periods of time were also construed as professional dialogue. My definition of professional dialogue became more flexible and uncertain (Rinaldi, 2006) as other perspectives emerged as relevant.

Three key findings emerged from the data. Firstly, the teachers' understanding of professional dialogue was more aligned to an organisational perspective (Gergen et al., 2004; Grey, 2011) than the transformational dialogue suggested by Rinaldi (2006). Secondly, teachers' perception of themselves as teachers (Gibbs, 2006; Kelchtermans, 2005, 2009) and their understanding of professionalism (Dalli & Urban, 2010) were closely aligned with organisational and pedagogical matters (Grey, 2011). Finally, the issue of *dialogical space* (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2008), where student teachers and ad hoc conversations were perceived as support, and time and busyness as barriers, was in this study a key component for understanding professional dialogue (Grey, 2011).

6.1 Understandings of professional dialogue

The results presented in Chapters 4 and 5 suggested the teachers did have an understanding of professional dialogue. Their understandings were aligned to Gergen et al.'s (2004) organisational definition and they incorporated elements of Grey's (2011) definition of professional dialogue as "analytical discussions about teaching that extend on conversation about daily routines" (p.23). Gergen et al. (2004) identified dialogue as an interactive act through "coordination in the service of social ends" (p. 42) and identified engagement, context, dissidence, authenticity and culture as elements of dialogue.

In this study teachers understood professional dialogue as opportunities for teachers to engage (Gergen et al., 2004) with other teachers concerning everything which happened in the centre. The focus of this professional dialogue was organisational and pedagogical matters which concerned the EC centre. This is important as there was little attempt to favour one over the other and it was apparent in the results that organisational and pedagogical matters entwined. However, some professional dialogue was less analytical (Grey, 2011) and more *talk* or *conversations*. This is incongruent with the literature which defines dialogue as more than conversations (Brown et al., 2005; Issacs, 1993; Rinaldi, 2006).

The results support an understanding of professional dialogue as more process bound and questioning rather than the unpacking of values and beliefs (MacNaughton, 2005; Rinaldi, 2006). When the teachers' understandings were mediated by artifacts including *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) and literature the dialogue had potential for being deeper (Rinaldi, 2006) as teachers reflected on their teaching practices and the reasons they occurred (Grey, 2011). This link with literature supports MacNaughton's argument that the unpacking of philosophical literature, e.g. Foucault, supports teachers' understandings of the social and moral implications of their teaching role. Professional dialogue aligned with issues including supporting a child's learning or a parent's concern has the potential for this unpacking only when it is planned

and focused with clear objectives (Brown et al, 2005; MacNaughton, 2005; Rinaldi, 2006).

The findings identified social and professional contexts (Gergen et al., 2004) often merged. Teachers distinguished between professional dialogue and social talk with implicit rules and artifacts mediating the distinction between the two. Social talk was viewed as personal and should occur in the staff room whereas professional dialogue could happen in the staff room and learning environment. However, some teachers suggested talking with other teachers was important as this helped teachers *to connect with one another* and build relationships. This supports Cheng and Wang (2009) and Paulus' (2007) research which identified the importance of social talk in working with others in completing on-line tasks. This research found participants' intermittently shared personal information whilst also focusing on the assigned task. This study supports those arguments as results identified teachers entwined social talk with professional dialogue.

Ambiguity was apparent when teachers' understandings of professional dialogue were mediated by artifacts that were environmental structures including the staff room and learning environment. The results highlighted how the implicit rules of engagement guiding social talk and professional dialogue were ambiguous with some teachers having clear guidelines between the two whilst others saw a cross-over where social talk merged with professional dialogue. This ambiguity could lead to friction within the teaching team when teachers had social talk within the learning environment and appeared less engaged with children. However, as Daisy acknowledged and Pip suggested social talk in the learning environment helped teachers to connect and to work together. The staff room rules were also implicit as teachers' negotiated non-contact time and meal breaks. Clearly, the staff room environment stimulated professional dialogue and provided teachers with an opportunity to talk theory and practice. A contradiction (Engeström, 1999a) emerged as the rules which supported the interruption of non-contact time, and even viewed social talk as enhancing, were considered a barrier in the learning environment for children's learning. This is in contrast to Brennan's (2007) research which highlighted children's desire to be involved in adult's social talk. The implicit rule of social talk not being acceptable in the learning environment might minimise, rather than enhance, children's engagement with adults.

Research identified several social conditions which influences teachers' ability to build team relationships. Grey (2011) suggests "cultures of silence" (p.26) are detrimental for teachers' professional dialogue. Nuttall (2003, 2004) argued dominant voices minimised teachers' ability to unpack their understandings of the curriculum. Irving (1972) argued group think emerged when a culture of compliance with dominant ideas prevails. This study revealed another aspect of engagement when Daisy suggested the politically correct nature of EC teachers' talk. Social events were used by management as a means of breaking down barriers and to hear the teachers' voices in a non-threatening environment. These findings suggested social talk was an important precursor (Schein, 2004) and contributor to professional dialogue as teachers built relationships within the teaching team.

In summary, teachers did have an understanding of professional dialogue as closely linked with the organisation and pedagogy of the centre and their teaching role. In defining their understanding of professional dialogue the teachers provided examples which identified purposes for professional dialogue. The next section discusses these findings within the context of *developing a teacher identity*.

6.2 Developing a teacher identity

The findings identified the teachers perceived their roles as closely aligned with organisational and pedagogical matters and that professional dialogue was conversations which concerned those matters. The teachers suggested through professional dialogue they addressed e.g. protocols which guided their teaching practices; ways to make improvements and question their teaching practices; and situations when teaching practices and children's learning appeared to be compromised. The findings identified professional dialogue supported the addressing of issues and through dialogue, teachers reflected, questioned and learnt about themselves as teachers. However, Grey's (2011) study suggested that there needs to be opportunities for teachers to unpack the "invisible and submerged" (p. 23) parts of their role as a means of "alleviating the tension" (p.

23) which can form in a teaching team. The findings in this study identified that lack of time was an issue which affected teachers' ability to engage in professional dialogue (see section 6.3.4).

The teachers did suggest change, which they perceived as an individual and collective characteristic, occurred through professional dialogue. For example Pip, a student teacher, highlighted her vulnerability (Kelchtermans, 2005) in her teaching role. She suggested role modelling and professional dialogue with her colleagues had given her confidence. Rachael suggested being challenged by outside influences resulted in professional dialogue which enabled the teaching team to make changes to their teaching practices. These findings support the literature highlighting external influences, including researchers (Meade, 2011), and professional learning facilitators (Nuttall, et al., 2009), provided opportunities for professional dialogue and influenced change within ECE centres. The findings identified student teachers as an outside influence and this is addressed in section 6.3.3.

Grey (2011) argued that teachers need to articulate their ideas about teaching so a culture of learning is instilled amongst teachers. Nuttall et al. (2009) and Taguchi (2010) argued the benefits of ongoing professional learning where teachers unpack issues to bring about change. The findings in this study highlight how the teachers looked for opportunities to unpack their ideas whether it was addressing an issue or trying to understand a teacher education assignment. This professional dialogue was often unplanned and sometimes individually focused although staff meetings could be construed as professional dialogue time. (See section 6.3.1 for discussion of staff meetings). These are not congruent with Grey's (2011) findings which suggested dialogue was a focused communication where teachers unpacked their personal philosophies on teaching and learning and how these philosophies reflected their teaching practices. Grey's (2011) study argued a specific time for professional dialogue with clear rules, where the environment is conducive in supporting trust and overcoming anxiety is essential for professional dialogue.

Change was also instigated through collaboration and working together as a teaching team. Grey (2011) argues that cohesion in the teaching team occurs through professional dialogue. This is in contrast to findings in my study which suggested forming relationships occurred prior to professional dialogue through ad hoc conversations and social talk rather than through sustained professional dialogue. The teachers' views that team building occurred through *getting on well together* or *being relaxed* suggests time for professional dialogue was seen as an extra rather than a necessity. Nuttall's (2004) research highlighted how teachers' practice could be misaligned with theoretical understandings and that it was only through dialogue this could be addressed. The findings suggest teachers cope with the day to day issues. Creating a space for professional learning becomes secondary to addressing everyday occurrences in the centre.

The results indicate that issues concerning the centre's organisation and pedagogy were purposes for teachers' professional dialogue. Change and improvement were also considered purposes for professional dialogue whether change was collective or focused. The next section presents the findings concerning how dialogic space (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2008) provides opportunities for professional dialogue.

6.3 Space for professional dialogue

Anagnostopoulos et al. (2008) proposed a dialogic space was created when teachers were open to "horizontal expertise" (p.10) from other teachers, researchers and students. These discussions unpacked ideas and sustained teachers' and students' interest and curiosity. Such spaces for professional dialogue are an artifact which mediated the teachers' understanding of professional dialogue. Some artifacts were effective (e.g. student teachers in the centre) and others less so (e.g. time and busyness). This section discusses these findings.

6.3.1 Staff meetings

Staff meetings provided teachers at Pohutukawa Early Learning Centre with space for professional dialogue (see Chapter 5). Staff meetings brought all the teachers together each fortnight where they shared and sometimes debated pedagogical and organisational ideas and information. Artifacts including meeting notes and diaries mediated professional dialogue during and after the staff meetings

However, staff meetings were at times problematical as avenues for professional dialogue as after 5.30pm many teachers were often tired after working their full teaching day. Subsequently, teachers were sometimes less engaged with the content of the meeting and thus management looked for alternative means to engage teachers. These findings support Bowne et al.'s (2010) and Cosner's (2009) research which suggested dialogue is more beneficial for teachers' when they are fully engaged. Finding creative ways to encourage engagement included creating the environment (Bowne et al. 2010; Brown et al., 2005), deciding and focusing the dialogue content (Brown et al., 2005) and being receptive and aware of how individual teachers engage with each (Cosner, 2009).

In this study looking for alternatives to staff meetings was explored by Daisy and Rachael who had suggested monthly meetings during the day. They acknowledged difficulties with this proposal as finding regular relieving qualified teachers who were familiar with the children was of paramount importance. The logistics did seem insurmountable and the financial cost also needed to be considered. Grey (2011) suggested even an hour a week of professional dialogue can make a difference for team relationships and working together.

It was apparent, in the interview data, that it was important for management to look for substitutes to these issues. The teachers told of how professional dialogue which was sustained (Issacs, 1993), mediated through artifacts

(Engeström, 1999a) and looked for solutions to issues had made a difference to children's learning, to the building of relationships with teachers and families and to teaching practices.

6.3.2 Ad hoc conversations

Findings identified ad hoc conversations, also referred to as "little conversations", as a support and prerequisite for professional dialogue (see Chapter 5). These conversations, which occurred throughout the centre environment, were perceived as essential for the teaching team. They often provided opportunities for teachers' sustained (Issacs, 1993) participation in the professional dialogue until a decision was reached, usually at a staff meeting. Teachers recognised the usefulness of ad hoc conversations which often led to changes in their teaching practices and organisational matters.

Ad hoc conversations provided a dialogic space for professional dialogue. Wegerif's (2008) study suggested resonance was a means of drawing out children's ideas and thinking. Similarly, ad hoc conversations provided resonance for these teachers as they built on ideas, giving them time to think, peruse and then decide. They were an important adjunct to addressing issues. Anagnostopoulos et al. (2008) argued for a dialogic space which engaged others beside those in the immediate school or classroom. Ad hoc conversations provided this space giving others, including visitors, parents and teachers, an opportunity to contribute to the professional dialogue whilst building relationships within the centre community. This was evident in the findings regarding the wall displays where many contributed to the professional dialogue and the final decision. Student teachers also played a role in building team relationships and stimulating professional dialogue in the centre and the next section presents this discussion.

6.3.3 Student teachers in the centre

The impact of student teachers within the centre was identified as an opportunity and support for professional dialogue. Artifacts including *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), assignments and literature mediated the student teachers' roles as enquirers and learners practising through professional dialogue rules of engagement which guided their teaching practice. For example, student teachers suggested that through inquiry with qualified teachers they developed an understanding of theory and practice. In a reciprocal relationship (Kroeger et al., 2009) where qualified teachers were identified as both experienced and learners, student teachers promoted professional dialogue and extended the qualified teachers' engagement with *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), current literature and theory.

Nuttall (2003, 2004) argued there were concerns for teachers' engagement with the curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), when teaching practices were not congruent with the theories espoused. These findings identified that student teachers can provide a constant reminder of theoretical underpinnings of teaching practice. When a centre provides an environment of acceptance of student teachers, from both management and qualified experienced teachers, questioning and learning can be to the fore both for the student teacher and the experienced teacher. Student teachers were a source of professional learning in an environment where opportunities for professional learning are limited through a change in focus of government funding (Dalli, 2010).

In this inquiry student teachers provided a dialogic space for professional dialogue. They contributed to inquiry at Pohutukawa Early Learning Centre and stimulated professional dialogue with experienced teachers, challenging qualified teachers to reflect on their teaching practices. The next section identifies how time impacted on the teachers' professional dialogue.

6.3.4 Time — a barrier for professional dialogue

The results indicated time was a barrier for teachers' engagement in professional dialogue with their colleagues. Teachers suggested busyness had an affect on their ability to engage in professional dialogue during the day. April conceded they made time for professional dialogue sometimes outside their teaching hours. However, some teachers were overwhelmed by the physical demands of teaching and giving more time for professional dialogue outside work hours was difficult.

A lack of time impacted on these teachers' ability to engage in prolonged dialogue. Teachers' discussions seldom reflected elements of transformation (Rinaldi, 2006) where prolonged and in-depth dialogue could occur. Grey (2011) argued for analytical conversations where change and improvement could occur. However, in this study limited time during the day and at staff meetings restricted the opportunities for teachers to create a space where they could lose themselves in professional dialogue which was not issue orientated.

These findings reflect previous studies. Grey, (2011), Hatherly (1999), Nuttall (2003, 2004) Mitchell and Hodgen (2008) and Mitchell and Brooking (2010) all suggested a lack of time minimised teachers' dialogue and the unpacking of teaching practices. Grey's (2011) and Taylor's (2011) studies both argued for making time for professional dialogue. Grey (2011) indicated monthly meetings which unpacked teaching practices supported teachers' professional dialogue whilst Taylor (2011) suggested time outside work time was also an option. MacNaughton (2005) and Rinaldi (2006) also supported regular meetings where pedagogical understandings were unpacked through professional dialogue.

This section has presented discussions concerning the dialogical spaces for professional dialogue. The next section addresses organisational culture and the opportunities for professional dialogue.

6.4 Organisational culture provides opportunities for professional dialogue

I began this research project viewing organisation and culture as separate components. I did this in the belief that each component — organisation or culture — provided support for professional dialogue in a different way. On reading the literature and gathering my data I was aware an understanding of organisational culture provided a more succinct perspective of the support and opportunities given for professional dialogue in an ECE centre.

Schein (2004) suggested “a pattern of assumptions” (p. 17) built a team approach to working together. Within Pohutukawa Early Learning Centre these assumptions concerned *getting on well together, liking each other* and *being passionate about being a teacher* and embodied the principles of working as a teaching team and having professional dialogue. In an endeavour to hear other perspectives (Rinaldi, 2006) the manager and senior teachers looked for alternatives to include less engaged teachers or those on the periphery of the teaching team. As a result management provided other avenues for engagement. For example, teacher involvement was encouraged through listening to new ideas and providing opportunities for the initiation and implementation of these ideas. These findings of how the centre’s culture supported teachers to voice their ideas is congruent with Grey’s (2011) study where she argued that a code of silence limited teachers’ engagement in professional dialogue.

With agreement comes dissidence which was sometimes a more difficult perspective for teachers to manage. These teachers had a cultural and communal (Gergen et al., 2004) understanding of professional dialogue as a willingness to share information within a team environment where they *get along together*. However, there was a contradiction (Engeström, 1999a) in the teachers’ desire to be open to new ideas (Rinaldi, 2006) and their actual ability to engage with the conflict (Edwards, 1998; Dahlberg et al., 2007) which new ideas sometimes brought to the team relationships. Teachers, including Daisy, Rachael, Kerry and Julia, acknowledged teachers were sometimes not heard or

their ideas not well received. Their concerns alluded to cultural and historical perspectives (Gergen et al., 2004) of a lack of time and of *not upsetting anyone* as barriers to initiating change. Grey's (2011) study found disagreement was an important aspect of professional dialogue. She suggested "ground rules" (Grey, 2011, p.25) were essential and needed to be agreed to by all participants to provide an environment where teachers are listened to and trust is ensured.

Data analysis identified professional dialogue at social events was a means to address dissidence. Daisy had talked of arranging a meeting between the teachers and management personnel from the umbrella organisation. She did this to encourage dialogue and to ensure the teachers' voices were heard. Daisy and Rachael were not immune to criticism and they explained how difficult it was getting the feedback and knowing they could have addressed some of the issues. In this situation Daisy and Rachael balanced their own personal concerns of criticism with a cultural focus of teacher collaboration (Wenger et al., 2002). They addressed the ethical considerations (Dalli & Cherrington, 2009) of teachers being able to express their own perspectives in order to overcome teachers' anxiety and silence (Grey, 2011).

The organisation of the centre did influence how and when teachers could engage in professional dialogue. A culture of accommodation existed within the centre management which flowed on to the teaching teams' approach to the organisation of the centre and pedagogy. This was highlighted in the interviews when teachers talked favourably of the teaching team even when issues were raised. The next section presents how CHAT contributed to this project through the provision of a framework to gain an understanding of these complex situations.

6.5 Cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) - a framework for analysis.

The CHAT framework is a useful tool in educational research as data analysis identified how learning is transformed “through meaningful cultural activities” (van Oers, 2008, p.9). Therefore CHAT was ideal for data analysis of this case study, to gain an understanding of professional dialogue. My data analysis identified how the teachers’ individual actions including attendance at staff meetings, ad hoc conversations and addressing issues were connected to the “collective activity” (Engeström, 1999a, p.31) of professional dialogue.

Engeström (1999a) highlights the role of mediation in activity theory and how mediation breaks down barriers for the individual and allows for collective actions. Artifacts are significant as mediators of the “activity system” (Engeström, 1999a, p.26). Data analysis identified the significance of mediating artifacts (Engeström, 1999a), including, in this study, the staff room, learning environment, and documentation (e.g. staff meeting notes, teachers’ journals and wall displays). Time and busyness were also identified through data analysis as artifacts. For example, analysis of Julia’s discussion of staff meeting notes enabled artifacts to be identified as mediators of her understanding of professional dialogue:

Staff meeting notes [are] kept in the office...We don’t often go into the office every day because it’s not really our space...and its just getting time to access it all...You tend to just try and keep it in your head what’s been planned and everything but often by the end of the two weeks you’ve kind of forgotten. (Julia/interview/1/pp.38-39).

Julia highlighted barriers to reading the staff meeting notes. The office (artifact) presents one barrier; the ownership of space (artifact) “not really our space” presents another barrier; whilst time (artifact) to negotiate access for the space and then to read the notes is limited. I suggest all three artifacts mediated Julia’s engagement with the staff meeting, with the professional dialogue at the staff meeting and ultimately with the outcomes from the meeting and teachers’ planning for children’s learning.

In this study, the application, of the CHAT framework for data analysis contributed to an awareness of how activity theory (Engeström, 1999a) can enhance knowledge and understanding of complex situations. This theoretical approach can be utilised for further study of ECE and increased understanding of EC teachers' work providing multiple perspectives to a contextual and complex teaching fraternity.

6.6 Contributions to research

This study has provided several contributions to research. It has provided an understanding of how data analysis within the CHAT framework can provide an understanding of ECE and the work of EC teachers.

Several insights were identified into how the centre supported teachers' professional dialogue. Within the centre a supportive working environment existed with a teaching team who liked working together, who had social dialogue with each other, who were willing to engage in and had opportunities for ad hoc conversations, and management who supported outside influences and in particular the contribution of student teachers. Data analysis identified a lack of time for professional dialogue, which is supported by several previous studies over several years, and is still pertinent today. Evening staff meetings minimised the dialogic space (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2008) and made it difficult for teachers to engage in in-depth professional dialogue because of tiredness.

The research builds on Grey's (2011) study which highlighted the benefits of professional dialogue for New Zealand EC teachers. Findings similar to Grey's (2011) identified how professional dialogue can enhance and improve teaching practices through the questioning of current practices and the provision of intermittent opportunities for teachers to link theory and practice. Professional dialogue does address issues when teachers share ideas with each other, refer to literature and curriculum documents, and seek other professional support. The teachers relied on ad hoc conversations and social talk to sustain the professional dialogue and to build a cohesive teaching team. Increased

understanding of EC teachers work provides opportunities to investigate the complexities which influence ECE. The limitations of the research are discussed in the next section.

6.7 Limitations of the research

There were several limitations to this research project. Firstly, the research project was a single qualitative case study. As such my research provided a perspective of an ECE centre in New Zealand. However, this single case study which was bounded in its focus of professional dialogue and EC teachers did provide richness to the research project which may not have emerged through other methodology approaches. I overcame the limitations by interviewing all ten teachers and having subsequent interviews with six teachers. This provided a wide perspective within the centre although it did not provide cross-centre perspectives. There are, therefore, opportunities to build on this research and to provide a more comprehensive understanding of EC teachers' professional dialogue.

Secondly, the methodologies were interpretive and therefore open, as the researcher, to my assumptions and beliefs. However, CHAT provided a valid data analysis framework which provided opportunities to identify and question these assumptions and beliefs as I analysed the data. I was familiar with the centre and had worked with many of the teachers in a professional learning capacity. This was helpful in gaining entry and building a rapport with the teachers. However, I was aware discussions with teachers could revert to a facilitator role as teachers were interested in learning more about professional dialogue. I addressed this by talking less and listening more and reminded myself and teachers of my new role as researcher in the centre. Thirdly, the data collection relied strongly on interviews with the teachers although this counted through triangulation with data from observations and journals. My lack of interview experience and being a novice researcher all had some impact on the data collection. For example on listening to the tapes and reading the transcripts I discovered at times during the interviews I concentrated more on collecting data than following the teachers' direction and their line of thinking. As I interviewed more and listened to the tapes I was more aware of my influence on

the data collection. Practising before interviewing minimised this and the strategies used were more evident in the later interviews.

The research project did not address issues of leadership in depth. It is acknowledged leadership would influence teachers' engagement in professional dialogue. However, I suggest an emphasis on leadership may have minimised the collective contribution of all the teachers, e.g. the effect of student teachers in the centre and organisational issues including staff meetings, time and busyness. The focus on leadership does provide opportunities for further research. The next section highlights the implications and further directions for research.

6.8 Implications and further directions

I began this research with the title "Overlapping realities". I was interested to know if and how other teachers experienced these "overlapping realities" of understanding professional dialogue and having time and opportunities for professional dialogue.

I propose organisational alternatives need to be found to address the limited opportunities for professional dialogue. The overlapping realities of teachers' spending hours documenting children's learning and then having minimal time for dialogue about the documentation is one which should be addressed through research. There was little evidence in my data of teachers' documentation of children's learning contributing to professional dialogue. I suggest the present adherence of attributing non-contact time solely (Daisy initial interview) to documentation of children's learning limits other opportunities for teachers to engage in professional dialogue. A lack of ongoing engagement with the documentation once it has been put in the children's profiles seems to me to minimise documentation as a pedagogical tool (Rinaldi, 2006) and the teachers' input and accumulated knowledge.

The results of this, and earlier studies, indicate it is beneficial for a teaching team to have sustainable time together and to engage in professional dialogue (Grey, 2011; Rinaldi, 2006). Further research into the influence of EC management and organisational structures is timely in order to determine the impact of government policy (Dalli, 2010) and the impact of teachers' working conditions (Smith et al., 2000) on effective ECE in New Zealand.

6.9 Summary

This research project sought to answer the questions regarding teachers' understandings of professional dialogue, the purposes for professional dialogue and the cultural and organisational support and opportunities for professional dialogue. The research contributes to an understanding of professional dialogue including the overlapping realities that EC teachers experience. I conclude with a quote cited in Issacs (1993, p. 24):

"I think there is a beginning to dialogue, but I do not think there is an end"
President of local union, United States Workers of America.

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Appendices:

Appendix A : Interview questions and journal suggestions

Initial interview - Manager

Years at centre, teaching experience

Position – managerial, teaching

centre operations – hours, number of children, sessions

management systems – committee, profit , non-profit

teachers – number, trained, registered, contracts, rosters, non-contact, job description

staff meetings – when, time, attendance

1st Interview_- teachers, manager

Professional dialogue – define, understanding

Topics – pedagogy, organisational, curriculum, parents, children, students, issues, change, resources

Dialogue – challenges, critical, agree, disagree, shared understanding,

Culture, organisation, staff room, learning environment, non-contact – support, opportunities, barriers

Work – rosters, part-time, full time,

Prompts – notes, displays

Barriers

2nd interview – teachers, manager

Dialogue changed perspective -example

Context – who's involved?

Outcomes – team, personal

Support – organisational, pedagogy, management

Barriers

Journals

Time, date, other participants, reason, outcomes, barriers, own learning

Appendix B: Letter of introduction to the centre and request for entry

Dear

I am a post graduate student at Victoria University of Wellington and I am looking to undertake a research project to complete my Masters of Education degree. I am writing to ask you to consider my undertaking the research project in your early childhood education and care centre.

The research is a case study. My point of interest is how teachers have opportunities to engage in professional dialogue with each other. Another aspect of that interest is to understand how professional dialogue amongst teachers impacts on the implementation of policy documents such as Te Whāriki, Kei Tua o te Pae and Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua. I am also interested in exploring how non-contact and attendance at staff meetings facilitates professional dialogue amongst teachers.

The research would require me to spend time observing in your centre, to interview you and the teachers, to ask the teachers to keep a journal for 1 -2 weeks and to attend two staff meetings. I would also need to collect and analyse data such as staff meeting minutes, daily diary communication and other artifacts that may show how teachers engage in professional dialogue.

I believe that my research may provide a picture of the early childhood teacher's role and the impact of working conditions and entitlements. I believe that may be beneficial in providing the public and the government with an understanding of the early childhood teacher's role and the environmental considerations that support and/or hinder that role.

I have enclosed the information form and consent form for your perusal.

I look forward to your response. If you wish to have more information please contact me on 042368573 or 0276478919.

Yours sincerely
Christine Healy

Appendix C: Participant information sheet

Researcher: Christine Healy: Faculty of Education, Victoria University of Wellington

I am a Masters of Education student at Victoria University of Wellington. As completion of my degree I am undertaking a research project leading to a thesis. My research project is to study the opportunities teachers in an early education and care centre have for professional dialogue. I am particularly interested in how the culture and the managerial organisation of the early education and care centre influences and facilitates these opportunities for teachers to have professional dialogue with each other.

I am inviting you to participate in this research project. If you consent to participate I ask for your consent to collect data between July and December 2010 from the manager and teachers in your education and care centre. I ask for consent to be able to attend two staff meetings, to visit and observe in your centre three times for three hours at each visit. I ask that you keep a journal for 1- 2 weeks during the research project and that I interview those teachers who agree to an interview and the manager both at the beginning and at the end of the research project.

As I want to capture the opportunities that you have for professional dialogue I will use a variety of methods to collect the data. I am asking for your consent to use audio tape both at the staff meetings and the interviews. I believe that this will give me valuable data in both a group situation and in your 1:1 interviews with me, the researcher. Each interview will be for approximately one hour. It is intended that the interviews be held at your education and care centre in a room separate from the other activities of the centre. I am asking for your consent to take field notes both at the staff meetings and at my observation visits. During my observation visits I am asking for your consent to have intermittent conversations with me, the researcher, from which I will also take field notes.

In order to gain your perspective about the opportunities that you have for professional dialogue with other teachers at your education and care centre, I am asking for you to consent to keeping a journal for 1- 2 weeks during the research project. I ask that the journal is your documented perspective of the opportunities you have for professional dialogue during that 1 – 2 week period. I ask that we coordinate this process with other staff members and you will be able to choose the 1 -2 weeks, probably in September/October when you have become more familiar with the research project focus.

I am asking for your consent to document artifacts that are relevant to the research project such as staff meeting notes, recordings of white board and daily diary information. I am not looking for information from parents and children. However, I am aware that these conversations might provide contextual information for the research project.

All data will be kept safe in a locked container. All the data including the audio recordings will be subsequently destroyed 5 years after the completion of the research project.

Your responses together with my observations as well as access to the artifacts will form the basis of my research project. All written reference to this data will remain confidential and only be used with your consent. I anticipate that the data collection stage will begin in July and continue till December 2010. I am looking to complete my thesis by September 2011.

When the research project is in the preliminary stage the centre will receive a copy of the preliminary research project and you will have the opportunity to comment.

Your involvement in this research project is voluntary and you may request not to participate in the research project. If you do decide to voluntarily participate in this research project I am asking you to consent to not withdrawing from the research project until after the data is gathered, that is in December 2010.

The research project will be presented for the completion of a Master of Education degree. The data collected may be used for conference papers and/or publication. At all times these reports will adhere to the confidentiality clauses in the consent agreement.

If you consent to participate in this research project please sign the consent form. If you wish, however, to have further information and/or clarification of the research project please contact me. My contact details are email candjhealy@xtra.co.nz and phone 042368573 or 0276478919.

I am looking forward to spending time in your centre.

Christine Healy

Appendix D: Consent form

Consent form for the teachers at Pohutukawa Early Learning Centre.

Please tick the boxes to signal your agreement to the following statements:

- ☐ I have read and understood the purpose for this research project, the commitment I will be making, the research conditions and give my consent to be a participant in this research project.
- ☐ I understand I am able to ask questions and gain more information and clarification of the research project.
- ☐ I understand that if I consent to participate in this research project I am able to withdraw, without needing to explain why, until the end of data gathering in December 2010.
- ☐ I understand that I will be asked to be interviewed by Christine Healy and that I can consent or decline to be interviewed. I also understand that I am able to decline to answer some or all of the questions during the interview.
- ☐ I consent to being observed by Christine Healy at staff meetings and during the course of her visits.
- ☐ I understand that during her visits that Christine Healy may have intermittent conversations with me and that I am able to consent or decline to be included in those conversations.
- ☐ I consent to being asked to keep a journal for 1- 2 weeks during the research project. I understand that I am able to decline to keep a journal during the research project.
- ☐ I consent to my journal entries forming part of the content for my second interview with Christine Healy
- ☐ I understand that all the data collected will be treated confidentially and that my name, the names of the other participants and the name of the centre and its location will be protected by the use of pseudonyms.
- ☐ I understand a preliminary summary of the findings will be made available to me to read and comment on.
- ☐ I understand that if I have concerns or complaints in regards to this research project I can contact:

The Chair of the Ethics Committee,
Dr Allison Kirkman,
Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee
PO Box 600, Wellington
Phone: 04 463 9502

Or Christine Healy's research supervisors:
Sophie Alcock, Senior Lecturer,
Victoria University of Wellington,
PO Box 600
Wellington
Email: sophie.alcock@vuw.ac.nz or phone 04 463 9993

Or
Sarah Te One, Lecturer,
Victoria University of Wellington,
PO Box 600
Wellington
Email: sarah.teone@vuw.ac.nz or 04 463 5716

Signed:

Date:

Name written:

Appendix E: Transcriber's confidentiality agreement



FACULTY OF EDUCATION

TE WHĀNAU O AKO PAI

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON, PO Box 71-310, Donald St, Karori, Wellington 6147, New Zealand

Phone + 64-4-463 9500 Fax +64-4-463 9649 Email education@vuw.ac.nz Web www.victoria.ac.nz/education

Confidentiality agreement

I,....., transcriber, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentation received from Christine Healy related to her Master's study on "Overlapping realities". Further more, I agree:

- 1 To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents.
- 2 To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerised files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Christine Healy.
- 3 To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
- 4 To return all audiotapes and study-related documents to Christine Healy in a complete and timely manner.
- 5 To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any backup devices.

I am aware that I can be legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name:

Transcriber's signature:

Date:

Appendix F: Research schedule

Proposed date	Task to be undertaken	Completion date
16/7/10	Letter sent to Pohutukawa Early Learning Centre requesting entry	26/7/10
26/7/10	Centre approval	30/7/10
2/8/10	Met with teaching team and manager, gave overview of the research project.	2/8/10
6/8/10	Manager interview	6/8/10
12/8/0	1 st observation visit	12/8/10
August 2010	Interviews – teachers, manager.	24/8/10, 25/8/10
13/9/10	1 st observation staff meeting.	13/9/10
October 2010	2 nd observation visit	October 2010
October 2010	Teachers start reflective journal	October 2010
8/11/10	2 nd observation staff meeting	November 2010
December 2010	3rd observation visit	14/1/11
December 2010	Final interviews – teachers, manager	19/1/11
April 2011	Sharing of preliminary findings with manager and teachers	December 2011
September 2011	Thesis submitted	January 2012

