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**Discursive Constructions of Teachers' Professional  
Identities in Early Childhood Policies and Practice in  
Aotearoa New Zealand: Complexities and Contradictions**

A thesis  
submitted in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of  
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by

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## ABSTRACT

Over the last two decades, neo-liberal education reform has notably transformed the landscape of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Aotearoa New Zealand. From an increasingly supportive approach, aiming to ensure access to and the participation of all children in quality ECEC provision, the country has swung towards a 'hands off' approach, which allowed the market to define who provides early childhood services, to whom and how. Increasing privatisation, competition and individualisation in the sector left teachers with many challenges, such as how to secure financial sustainability in the market and yet meet needs of children, families and community. The time of rapid transformation and challenge has also created an opportunity for teachers individually and the early childhood profession collectively to re-think their understanding of the purpose of ECEC, professionalism, and ways of 'being' a teacher and 'doing' early childhood education in the contemporary context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Drawing on a framework of poststructural discursive studies and theoretical ideas of feminist poststructuralists, this thesis examines discursive constructions of teachers' professional identities in ECEC policies and practice in Aotearoa New Zealand over the last two decades. Through an analysis of some key ECEC policy documents, and collective and individual interviews with teachers, professional leaders and managers from both community-owned and for-profit services, the study shows the shaping of complementing and opposing discourses on teachers' work and professional identities.

The thesis argues that the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC has been torn between tensions created through an interplay of divergent and opposing discursive windows, which set a powerful context for constructions of complex and fluid teachers' professional identities. It shows that discursive windows of enterprise, economic investment and vulnerability have promoted competition, individualism, entrepreneurship and social-intervention emphases in the sector, and frequently overpowered discourses of collectivism, collegiality, and empowerment, in which democratic education and professionalism have been rooted. Through a constant struggle to resolve tensions among the confronting and yet simultaneously coexisting interests and priorities in ECEC, teachers need to constantly re-invent their professional selves.

This thesis adds to the scholarship about possible impacts of policy developments on teachers' professional identities specifically and the teaching profession generally. By discussing some complex issues in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC, the study contributes to an understanding of how contemporary early childhood discourses may weaken capacity for constructing advocate-activist teachers' identities, which are both a priority and necessity in ECEC at times when the market drives teachers' work, requiring them to favour for-profit and enterprise interests over the wellbeing of children, families and community.

However, the study also gives us some hope that discourses of democratic education, which have been strongly embedded in the New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum *Te Whāriki* and the sector's political activism, could be used as a counterbalance to the discourses which have inhibited ECEC from being a more democratic, socially just and equitable place for all citizens. As being oddly in the contrast to the increasing dominance of the privatised and market-led provision, this study suggests that the curriculum's discourses and the discourses of political activism constitute a powerful foundation that could move teachers towards constructing advocate-activist professional identities and teaching profession in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC.

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It is the people we meet along life's roads who help us appreciate the journey. (Author unknown)

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BPSP	Better Public Services Programme
CECUA	The Combined Early Childhood Union of Aotearoa
COI	The Centres of Innovation Programmes
CYF	Child Youth and Family
ECEC	The Early Childhood Education Sector
ECE centres	Early childhood education centres
ECE managers	Managers of education and care centres
ECE teachers	Teachers in education and care centres
ECEC workforce/ECEC teachers	All teachers working in the ECEC sector
ELPs	Educational Leadership Projects
ECS/ECSs	Early childhood service/services (mainly refers to teachers-led services in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC)
ECWU	The Early Childhood Workers' Union
NZEI	New Zealand Institute of Education Te Riu Roa
NZCA	The New Zealand Childcare Association
KTA	The Kindergarten Teachers' Association
PPTA	The Post Primary Teachers' Association
TAP	Targeted Assistance for Participation Grants
TLRI	Teaching and Learning Research Initiative

## **PROLOGUE**

### **WHO AM I? MY PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL EPISTEMOLOGIES**

I now believe that the biographical journeys of researchers greatly influence their values, their research questions, and the knowledge they construct (Banks, 1998, p. 4)

As a little child, growing up in Serbia, I spent a lot of time with books in my hands. Although I could not read ‘for real’ yet, I remember looking at pictures in books and reading out of an imagination to my two-years younger brother what a book was about. One of my favourite books was an old geographic atlas of the world. Most of all, I loved imagining places, people and things and how it may look like somewhere so far away. When someone would ask me where I would like to go, I would show on the world map Aotearoa New Zealand. Everyone would be surprised by my answer and could not resist the temptation to ask: “Why there?” I would say “It looks very green and blue over there, and their ocean is so big”. My response did not make sense to anyone, until recently...

I completed my Bachelor of Education (Pedagogy) at the Department of Pedagogy, at the University of Novi Sad (Serbia). This four-year programme builds on disciplines of Philosophy, Psychology, Educational Sociology, Comparative and Social Pedagogy, Theories of Education, to name a few. It develops a professional capacity in student pedagogues to hold leadership roles and bring in improvements in educational, social and cultural establishments and public administrative bodies. Through my studies, I developed my belief that teachers and pedagogues are key for creating a competent educational system that aspires to help students at all levels of education to realise and develop their full potential. On this premise, I pursued the Master of General Pedagogy at the same university department. My masters study was about teachers’ professional development programmes in Serbia, proposing a conceptual framework for their improvements.

During my master studies, I was offered the position of an assistant lecturer in the Department of Pedagogy. While lecturing students in two courses – Pedagogy and Andragogy, mentoring their work and evaluating practical placements in educational institutions, I became more interested in understanding what makes

educators be agents of change in educational policies and practices. My interest in this topic was further deepened through my work as a teaching associate in Preschool Teacher Training College in Novi Sad. By lecturing student preschool teachers, and working on projects with preschool institutions, I observed complexity of preschool teachers' work and their professional capacity to bring in improvements in their own practice and institutional contexts.

After four years of teaching student pedagogues and two years of teaching student preschool teachers, I started questioning what discourses are driving our education policies and practices and forcing educators to accept the 'reality' and take up particular 'imageries' of themselves and their work. I wondered whether and how educators can create spaces from which they can challenge and resist the given 'reality' and examine alternative ways of being an educator and doing 'education projects'.

In 2011, I was awarded the Erasmus Mundus Scholarship to study in the International Master Programme in Early Childhood Education and Care (IMEC). Over the course of two years, I lived and studied in Norway, Ireland and Malta within a group of education professionals from 17 countries across the world. Our studies asked us to examine early childhood education and care (ECEC) of the three countries and to share perspectives of ECEC systems of our home countries. This enormously enriched my knowledge of ECEC policies and practice, adding cross-cultural dimensions to my previous experience.

The IMEC courses were taught by visiting scholars from Europe, Australia and New Zealand. During one course, *Professional Reflections*, we were introduced to Aotearoa New Zealand's ECEC system. I was fascinated with its history of teachers' activism and advocacy, the bicultural curriculum, teaching and assessment practices, and policies supporting ECEC as a child's right. What I learnt about the Aotearoa New Zealand's ECEC seemed to justify quite well my childhood 'imagery' of this 'very green and blue' country. It made me think of going there to research discourses that have informed their ECEC system, teachers and practices.

To complete the IMEC, I carried out research in Norway, examining the concept of teachers' professionalism in Norwegian early childhood policies and practice. The study enhanced my interests in the politics and policies of ECEC in different national contexts. Considering the educational and preschool system in my home

country and the countries I studied in, I came to understand that the ways in which the systems have been governed, regulated, funded, priorities assigned to all children and families or not, and teaching workforce well regarded or not are deeply embedded in country's histories and traditions, as much as their socio-cultural, political and ideological stances. By critically engaging with and challenging discourses driving diverse ECEC systems, I could better understand discourses driving preschool system and teaching practices in my home country, as well as, my personal, professional and political perspectives as a person, an educator and a researcher.

In 2014, my doctoral research proposal was accepted by the University of Waikato and I was awarded the University Doctoral Scholarship. My desire to study one of the most developed systems of ECEC policies and practices, and my childhood dream to see the 'very green and blue land' was fulfilled. I brought to my doctoral research a belief that our personal and professional epistemologies are greatly influenced by socio-cultural, political and historical discourses that shape places and spaces from which we construe our perspectives of ourselves, others and the world we live in.

Moving from one country context to others and from one construct of being a teacher and doing 'education' to other constructs and alternatives, I realised that teachers' professional identities, as much as my own identities, are always under reconstruction. This process demands critical re-thinking of our own personal and professional attitudes and knowledge and opens our 'mindsets' to vastly different perspectives of being a teacher and doing 'education projects'.

My inquiry into teachers' professional identities thus embraced a view that identities are "never singular but multiply constructed across different often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions" (Hall, 2003, p. 4). On this premise, I grounded my study in a belief that while being constructed by antagonistic discourses, teachers hold the power and wisdom to actively challenge discourses shaping their work and professional identities and choose critically and deliberately discourses and subject positions to identify with.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE

This study analyses constructions of teachers' professional identities within discourses of early childhood education and care (ECEC) policies and practice in Aotearoa New Zealand from 1996 to 2016, a two-decade period of change in policy developments and the state's approaches to the sector. In the centre of analysis are:

- the significant legislated policy documents and additional professional resources that were implemented in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC over the set timeframe, conveying diverse state's interests and political agendas towards understanding of teachers and purposes of ECEC.
- the perspectives of teachers from teacher-led services, specifically from two service types - kindergartens and education and care (ECE) centres.
- the perspectives of professional leaders, ECE centre managers and a centre director working for early childhood organisations, kindergarten associations and/or early childhood business companies.

### **Setting the Research Context – The Aotearoa New Zealand Early Childhood Education and Care Sector**

The early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector in Aotearoa New Zealand has been described as 'a paradigm of diversity' (A. Smith & May, 2006). It encompasses various types of services, including both centre- and home-based programmes. To distinguish how early childhood services (ECSs) operate and are funded, there has been a recent classification of parent/whānau-led and teacher-led services (Ministry of Education, 2014a).

Parent/whānau-led services are managed and supervised by parents and *whānau* (meaning extended family in te reo; the language of Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand), and include licensed services, such as playcentres and *kōhanga reo* and certificated playgroups (Ministry of Education, 2009b). Parent/whānau-led services cater for children from birth to school age, and focus on children's learning, parents/whānau involvement and education (Ministry of Education, 2009b). *Kōhanga reo* provide services with total immersion in te reo and tikanga Māori environment (Ministry of Education, 2009b), fostering the language, cultural identity and self-determination of Māori (Mitchell, Tangaere, Mara, & Wylie,

2006b). Similarly, Pasifika playgroups and centres have a language and culture basis, offering a service in their Pasifika language, and maintaining Pasifika cultures (Ministry of Education, 2009b).

In contrast, the educational programme in teacher-led services is overseen by a registered and qualified teacher, and the services are required to meet set registered teacher qualification criteria (New Zealand Government, 2017). Teacher-led services include kindergartens, ECE centres (childcare) and home-based services (family daycare). My research study is concerned specifically with teachers in kindergartens and ECE centres.

Kindergartens, historically, catered for children between three and five years and operated on a sessional basis. However most kindergartens have now shifted from the traditional sessional model to offer longer sessions each day, and to take children from a younger age (Davison, Mitchell, & Peter, 2011). ECE centres have always predominantly catered for younger children from birth to five years, offering all-day sessions or flexible-hour programmes (Ministry of Education, 2009d).

New Zealand governments have never had a direct role in fully supporting ECEC, and the state is not a provider of ECSs (Mitchell, 2013). Instead, ECSs are a mix of community and private ownership. All kindergartens are community-based, while only 33 percent of ECE centres are community-based, with 66 percent in private ownership (Mitchell & Meagher-Lundberg, 2017). Importantly, ECE centres make up a majority of licensed ECSs with 55.4 percent, with kindergartens representing only 14.1 of licensed ECSs (Education Counts, 2018a).

The wording and definition of “privately owned” and “community-based” derive from the Ministry of Education classification of “authority”, described as “the ownership of the early childhood service that the child is enrolled in. This can be Community based or Privately Owned” (Education Counts, 2018b, para. 2). “Community-based” is defined as owned by an incorporated society, a charitable trust, a statutory trust, a government department, a health board, a local authority, a trading enterprise, a public education institution, the Crown (Education in New Zealand, 2018). “Private ownership” is defined as a centre being privately owned by a sole teacher, a company, a partnership, a private trust, or a state owned enterprise (Education in New Zealand, 2018).

Distinctions in use of funding are clearly elaborated: private services are able to make financial gains and distribute these to their members, while community-based

services may charge fees, but are prohibited from making financial gains that are distributed to their members (Education in New Zealand, 2018). Furthermore, the community-owned services are obliged to provide a detailed financial report to the Ministry of Education with a full statement of financial performance, including their profit, loss and balance sheet (Mitchell, 2017). In contrast, for-profit centres need to provide only a special financial report of funding received from the Ministry of Education and detailing how that funding is spent (Mitchell, 2017). In this way, their other profit- makings (e.g. fee charging) remain out of the Ministry's control. While the context of individual kindergarten settings and ECE centres vary, the distinctive historical, socio-cultural and operational characteristics of these two service types set a strong foundation for teachers' understanding of their work and positioning of themselves as teaching professionals. Apart from institutional and service types' differences, the shifting macro- (the governmental) policies and politics in ECEC have also contributed to complexity and diversity to being a teacher and 'doing' ECEC (i.e. teaching) in Aotearoa New Zealand. Of a particular interest to this study are policy developments from 1996 to the 2008 – the 'golden era' of the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC, and from 2009 to 2016 – the end of the 'golden era'.

The study examines discourses driving policy developments over these two time periods and their shaping of teachers' work, professionalism and professional identities. A detailed account of both time periods, policy developments and the state's approaches to ECEC is given in Chapter 3. However, here I offer a short overview of some emphases in the sector, which constituted fertile ground for multiple and yet confronting constructions of teachers and their professional identities in a specific context and time.

The 'golden era' marked an increasingly supportive state's approach to ECEC as a child's right to access and participate in a quality early childhood service led by qualified and registered teachers, the professionalised ECEC workforce. Of a particular research interest in this time period are a number of policy developments which ushered in significant improvements for ECEC. The first was the introduction of Aotearoa New Zealand's first early childhood curriculum framework *Te Whāriki* (1996) and related professional resources, including *Kei Tua o Te Pae. Assessment for learning: Early Childhood Exemplars. Book 1-20* (Ministry of Education, 2004a, 2005, 2007, 2009a), and *Ngā arohaehae whai hua:*

*Self-review guidelines for early childhood education* (Ministry of Education, 2008). These policy documents focused on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment practices in ECEC, and are discussed and analysed in Chapter 5. The second significant event of this time period was the development of the first 10-year strategic plan for the ECEC sector *Pathways to the Future- Ngā Huarahi Arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002). The strategic plan included strategies for the sector's professionalisation, increasing participation of all children in quality ECEC, and enhancing collaborative relationships between government and the sector, which is also discussed in Chapter 5.

Conversely, the end of 'golden era' represented a radical shift from increasing state support of the sector to minimal support. The latter included severe budget cuts, with no differentials in funding between community-owned not for-profit and privately-owned for-profit ECSs. Consequently, policy directives over this time period intensified the sector's privatisation, marketisation, competition and fragmentation. Apart from such market-led emphases, the period from 2008 to 2016 also illustrated the state's increasing concern to support "vulnerable children" who for various reasons were not participating in ECEC in order to give them "a strong platform for their compulsory school years" (Parata, 2012, paras. 8–10).

As a result of the last two decades' shifting policy directives and approaches to ECEC, the vision of ECEC as a child's right, no matter their family circumstances, has been recast, making it commodity to those who can afford it, and a social-intervention focusing on 'priority learners' in 'high needs' communities. The contradictory political aims and interests placed ECSs and teachers under pressure to change their teaching practices, operation and priorities, and to face challenges such as how to support 'high needs' communities but also remain financially sustainable and competitive in the market. At the same time, the turbulent times also created an opportunity for teachers and services to (re)consider their professional responsibilities and obligations, the concept of professionalism, and the purposes of 'doing' ECEC and being a teacher in a specific context and time.

This thesis aims to examine some of the prevailing discourses at the macro-level (the state's policies) and micro-levels (institutional contexts, teaching practices) of ECEC, and their impacts on teachers' professional identities. It aspires to look critically at how and why particular teachers' professional identities have come to existence in a particular context of ECEC. The thesis also questions what identity



constructions on offer ‘say’ about available perceptions of teachers’ work, professionalism and the purposes of ECEC.

## **Research Questions**

The main research question in this study is:

How have teachers' professional identities been constructed in early childhood policies and practice in Aotearoa New Zealand over the period from 1996 to 2016?

To answer the main question, the following sub-questions were developed:

1. How have discourses from the early childhood policies constructed teachers’ professional identities, and what are their effects?
2. How have discourses from early childhood practice corresponded with discourses from early childhood policies?
3. What constructions of professional identities have teachers accepted and resisted in their work, and why?

## **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

The conceptual framework is a matrix comprised of conceptual and theoretical underpinnings that informs and drives the main research question, sub-questions and aims, and ensures the alignment of the ontology, epistemology and methodology of the research. A feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework was selected as appropriate for understanding and inquiry into the central research phenomenon – in this case, teachers’ professional identities in ECEC policies and practice in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The conceptual framework for this study consists of *four main reference points* – discourse, professional identities, professionalism and the context of ECEC in Aotearoa New Zealand. I briefly outline these reference points here and elaborate on them further in Chapters 2 and 3.

The first reference point is *the concept of discourse*. In its broadest sense, discourse is defined as the place in which the subjects (teachers), subjectivities (teachers’ professional identities) and the context of ECEC at large are constructed and contested. The second reference point is *the concept of teachers’ professional identities*. Drawing on the notions of subject and subjectivities (Baxter, 2003; Weedon, 1997), teachers’ professional identities are conceptualised as never-fixed

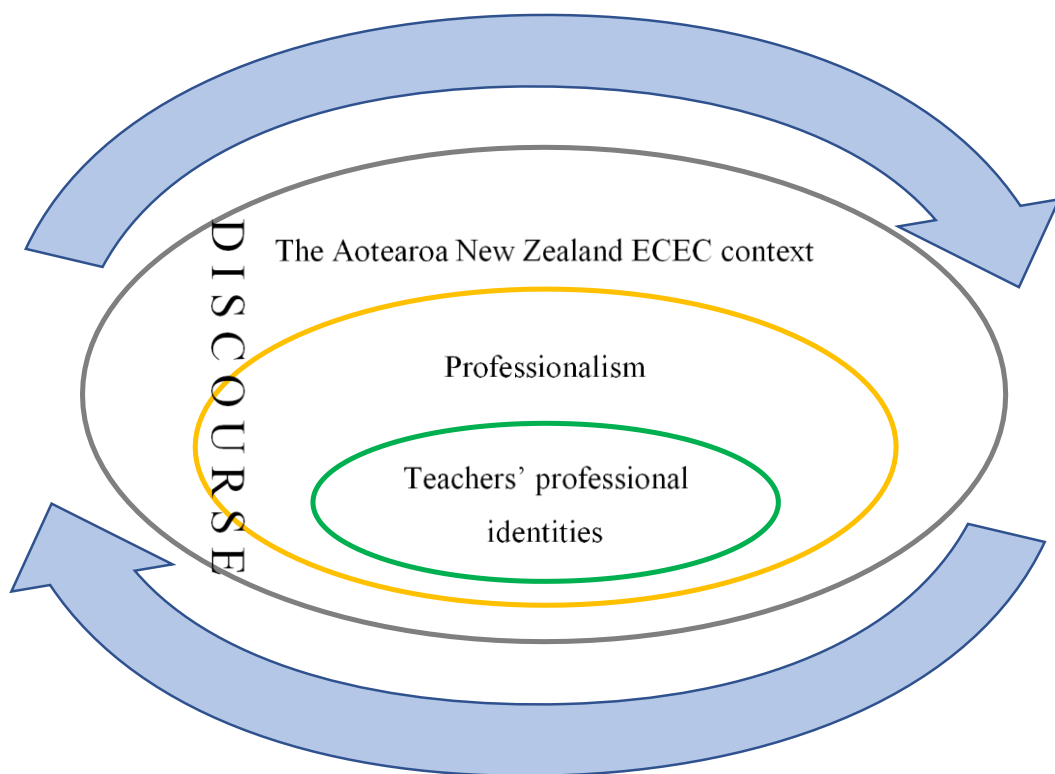
but a provisional phenomenon that is shifting and evolving in its nature and is always open to challenge and change (Scheurich, 2013; Zembylas, 2005).

The third reference point, *professionalism*, is observed as a conceptual and a political issue that is discursively constructed in a specific context and time in ECEC. As such it offers various possibilities for teachers to identify and critically engage with the multiple meanings of professionalism and construe themselves as teaching professionals in diverse ways. I closely examine two prevailing discourses of professionalism in ECEC – democratic (occupational) and managerial (organisational) professionalism, looking at their shaping of teachers' professional identities.

The fourth reference point is *the context of ECEC* in Aotearoa New Zealand, which I touched upon above. As embedded in shifting socio-cultural, historical and political discourses, the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC is viewed as offering and imposing a specific discursive context that enables diverse understandings of teachers' work, professionalism and a purpose of ECEC, and constructions of multiple teachers' professional identities.

Figure 1 below illustrates the structure of the conceptual and theoretical framework for this study. The reference points - the concept of discourse, teachers' professional identities, professionalism and the ECEC context – represent four important keys to understanding *what* is to be researched. The four reference points are closely interconnected. Each reference point informs, builds on and impacts the others. Given the structure of the conceptual framework, the concept of discourse is like a thread that connects all reference points. It also shows that each reference point is discursively constructed in a specific context, and offers a foundation for multiple ways of reading, thinking about and examining the central research phenomenon – teachers' professional identities in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC.

**Figure 1.** The structure of the conceptual framework



### **Research Design of the Study**

Drawing on the conceptual and theoretical framework for this study, I positioned my research within a framework of poststructural discursive studies. This qualitative study was designed as an investigation into *how* teachers' professional identities have been discursively constructed in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC policies and practices, and *why* the phenomena have been constructed in such ways. To conduct this study, three different sets of data, in the form of written and spoken texts, were generated. *The first data set* consists of a selected number of significant legislated policy documents and additional resources that were developed and implemented in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC over the last two decades. *The second data set* includes transcripts of focus-group interviews with teachers, professional leaders, ECE centre managers and a centre director. *The third data set* comprises of individual interview transcripts with eight selected participants from the focus group interviews.

The data was treated as discourse in this study, entailing a presupposition that language in the texts does not reflect and describe 'a real world', as it is (Bacchi,

1999; Baxter, 2003; Weedon, 1997). Rather, language constructs particular ways of seeing the world and being particular kinds of subject ('a provisional being') in the world (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016). Accordingly, this study did not set out to discover 'truths' ('real facts') about the subjects (teachers) and subjectivities (teachers' professional identities). Instead, the focus was on an action orientation of language as discourse (Wood & Kroger, 2000), and its constitutive force to produce the subjects and subjectivities in particular ways in a specific context and time of ECEC.

To examine language as a site for the construction and contestation of social meanings and social realities (Baxter, 2003; Lessa, 2006; Weedon, 1997), a discourse-analysis approach was developed and employed in the data analysis process. The discourse-analysis approach was grounded in the conceptual and theoretical framework for the study, and included diverse analytic steps, questions and analytic tools which enabled an examination into diverse ways of thinking about being a teacher and doing early childhood education. The analytic steps, questions and tools were inspired by the work of a few authors, including Weedon's (1997) concept of subjectivity and subject position, Bacchi's (1999) *What's the Problem?* approach, and Gee's (2014) toolkit for discourse analysis. A detailed explanation of the use of the discourse-analysis approach, its analytic steps, questions and tools are provided in Chapter 4.

The discourse-analysis approach allowed critical re-readings of research data, and an identification of prevailing discourses and the subjects' positions within the discourse. It created a space for multiple readings and interpretations of constructions of teachers' professional identities on offer, and for asking critical questions, such as how and why some identity constructions were taken up, but not others, in a specific context and time of the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC. The use of discourse-analysis approach, furthermore, enabled the notion of professional 'selves' to be explored as shifting, as context-dependent, provisional and fluid in nature, and thus was a good complement to poststructural theoretical and conceptual framework for this study.

### **Significance of the Study**

The changing landscape of ECEC policies and their impacts on different layers of the ECEC sector have been a focal point of many scholarly discussions and critics

in Aotearoa New Zealand (Dalli, 1994; Davison, 1997; Duhn, 2010; May, 2007; May & Mitchell, 2009; Mitchell, 2015, 2017; A. Smith & May, 2018). Interestingly, issues associated with teachers' professional identities during the time of the rapid policy changes have been very rarely at the centre of political debates and decision-making. Only a few research studies (Farquhar, 2010; Warren, 2013) have touched on how teachers' identities have been produced through multiple policy discourses (e.g. authority discourse of qualifications, professionalism) in Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC.

On a global scale Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) have determined a need for more research studies investigating teachers' identity in relation to a broader educational context. Other authors have addressed a need to study teachers' identities in relation to rapidly changing socio-political and educational contexts and the diverse institutional places and spaces of early education and care (see Skattebol, Adamson, & Woodrow, 2016; Sumsion, 2007; Thomas, 2012). It has also been signalled that impacts of contemporary policy directives and changes (e.g. marketisation, corporatisation) on teacher's identity may stay relatively hidden (Press & Woodrow, 2009), and yet teacher identity is one of the key aspects in introducing and sustaining a policy change and bringing in an improvement (Sumsion, 2006, 2007).

After two decades of intensive policy reforms in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC, it seemed timely to consider the effects of inconsistent early childhood discourses on teachers' work, professional identities, professionalism and the teaching profession at large. As its contribution to this research area, this study examines teachers' professional identities as constructed through multiple, competing and confronting discourses in a specific context and time of ECEC. It reveals the powerful impacts of shifting discourses within ECEC policies and institutional practices on teachers' professional identities specifically, and professionalism and the teaching profession generally. While offering an insight into dramatic changes in ECEC policies and practices, the study reveals how teachers' professional identities change and evolve in response to oppositional political and institutional imperatives. It will contribute to theoretical knowledge and thus enable an understanding of the fluid and unstable nature of teachers' professional identities in a changing ECEC environment. Furthermore, it will add to practical knowledge about some of the key factors that strengthen teachers and the teaching profession

and nurture their individual and collective agency and critical engagement in a time of transformation of the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC.

## **Organisation of the Thesis**

This thesis comprises of eight chapters. Chapter 1 has provided a brief background to my inquiry into teachers' professional identities in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC policies and practice. Attention has been drawn to two distinct service types - kindergartens and ECE centres and to the changing policy landscape which together constituted a rich environment for multiple constructions of teachers' professional identities in ECEC. Chapter 1 highlighted research questions guiding the inquiry into the main research phenomena. It also described the conceptual and theoretical framework and research design for the study and underlined the significance of this research.

Using a feminist poststructural lens, Chapter 2 explains three of the four reference points of the conceptual and theoretical framework for the study – the concept of discourse, professional identities and professionalism. Chapter 3 explains the fourth reference point – the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC context. It provides a broad overview of the key shifts in the state's policy from the latter half of the 1980s to the present.

A description of the study's methodology is provided in Chapter 4. It outlines the research design, the collection and management of data, and describes analytic steps and tools included in a discourse-analysis approach to data analysis. My positioning as a researcher within the study is discussed, including ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 constitute the three data chapters. Chapter 5 examines significant policy documents, focusing on the purposes of ECEC and teachers' professional identities as discursively constructed in policy texts. Chapter 6 discusses how some concepts from the analysed policy documents were interpreted differently in the participants' specific institutional contexts, shaping their teaching practices and views of teachers. Chapter 7 consists of three case studies, each investigating discursive constructions of teachers' professional identities in different service types – kindergartens, community-owned ECE centres and privately-owned ECE centres. Each of the three data chapters concludes with a section that illustrates, in a figure, discourses that enabled constructions of teachers'

professional identities in a specific service type.

Drawing on main arguments from the three data chapters, Chapter 8 is the conclusion. It highlights how four prevailing discursive windows in ECEC policies and practice have shaped constructions of teachers' professional identities, the concept of professionalism, the purpose of ECEC and teaching profession at large. Chapter 8 also outlines recommendations for strengthening teachers' professional identities and the teaching profession in ways that could lead to a more democratic, more equitable and socially just ECEC, and a better world.

## **CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In Chapter 2 I draw on poststructural discursive studies and the theory of feminist poststructuralists to explain three of the four reference points constituting the conceptual and theoretical framework for this research. First, I discuss the concept of discourse, specifically language as discourse and policy as discourse. Then I describe the concept of the subject and subjectivities, which gives a foundation to the second reference point - the concept of teachers' professional identities. By offering an overview of discursive studies of identities, I define the notion of teachers' professional identities in the context of my research. I close this chapter by examining the third reference point - the concept of professionalism. In particular, I focus on two prevailing discourses – democratic (occupational) and managerial (organisational) professionalism, and their shaping of teachers' professional identities and ECEC at large.

### **Positioning of the Research Study and Main Concepts**

Discourse-based studies in education have been influenced by broad theoretical movements including psycholinguistics (Chomsky, 1957; Fodor, Bever, & Garrett, 1974; G. A. Miller & Isard, 1963), sociolinguistics and the ethnography of communication (Gumperz & Hymes, 1972; Labov, 1966; Trudgill, 1974); and poststructuralism (Baxter, 2003; Butler, 1990; Davies, 1993; Foucault, 1972; Weedon, 1997). As a result, a range of rich and diverse theoretical strands and analytical approaches in discourse-based studies have been developed, offering a variety of directions for conceptualising discourse, understanding how discourse emerges and operates, and how a discourse analysis can be conducted.

For instance, sociolinguistic and ethnographic discourse analyses of communication focus on culture-specific rules of rhetoric. The analysis of discourse is therefore concerned with discovering patterned regularity in language use, such as variability in pronunciation and grammatical forms (sociolinguistics), or an organisation and patterning of communicative units and their interrelation in a systematic way (ethnography of communication) (Saville-Troike, 2003). As they focus mainly on the patterns of the language used, Gee (1990) argued that many



sociolinguistic and linguistic analytic approaches fall short of identifying explicit political and ideological consequences of discourses in local contexts.

To address these shortfalls, critical discourse analysts (Fairclough, 1989, 1992; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Luke, 1995; van Dijk, 1993), move to theorise and examine how broader political, economic and cultural formations of discourse and power manifest in patterns of language used in local discourses (e.g. everyday classroom life). Hence, critical discourse analysis extends the understanding of discourses from text analysis to links between texts and society and cultural processes and structures (Fairclough, 1992, 2001). In this manner, discourse and discursive practices are viewed as forms of social practices, which both construct the social world, shaping people's perceptions and identities, and are constructed through social actions and social practices (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

The most recent turn in discourse-based studies has been, however, influenced by poststructuralism, the intellectual movement often associated with Michel Foucault (1972, 1980, 1998), and its scepticism towards structuralists' views that an eternity of a system can be known based on static relationships between structures in the system (Luke, 1995; Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, & Joseph, 2005). Poststructuralism is "not a monophonic philosophy" (Baxter, 2002, p. 8), but a range of diverse theoretical positions developed in and from the work of intellectuals such as Althusser (1971), Bakhtin and Holquist (1981), Derrida (1991), Foucault (1980), Kristeva (1984), and offering competing perspectives on discourse, language, meanings and identity.

From a poststructuralist stance, discourse exists both in written and spoken language and social practices, and individuals are never outside of discursive practices, but always subject to them (Baxter, 2016; Weedon, 1997). As it is always socially and historically located in discourse, language does not describe 'a real world'. It rather produces meanings and ways of knowing the world, and of being particular kinds of subject ('a provisional being') in the world (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016).

Considering the theoretical shifts in discourse-based studies in education referred to above, I position my study among poststructuralists' discourse studies. Therefore, the key theoretical concepts, particularly the concept of discourse and teachers' professional identities, and my discourse-analysis approach, are broadly informed and influenced by the work of poststructuralist thinkers. Of a particular

significance are the ideas of feminist poststructuralists, especially the work of Weedon (1997), Bacchi (1999, 2000; Bacchi and Goodwin 2016), and Baxter (2002, 2003, 2016).

Although different forms of poststructuralism vary in their practice and political implications, they share certain fundamental assumptions about language, meaning and subjectivity. I draw on these commonalities of poststructuralism in the subsections below to map a theoretical and conceptual terrain for the understanding of the central phenomenon under investigation – teachers’ professional identities.

## **The Concept of Discourse**

To conceptualise discourse in the context of my study, first I draw on a poststructuralist perspective of language as a constitutive force which forms any subject and object of which it speaks. Then, I look at policy as discourse, and discuss a power relation between *policies*, positioning subjects and producing subjectivities (i.e. teacher professional identities) in specific ways; and *subjects*, as being produced within a framework of predetermined potentialities offered in the policies.

### **Language as discourse**

The concept of discourse in my study is grounded in the poststructuralist notion of language as a site for the construction and contestation of social meanings and social realities (Baxter, 2003; Lessa, 2006; Weedon, 1997). From a poststructural stance, written and spoken language does not simply name and reflect things or ideas as they already exist. Social meanings, actual and possible forms of social organisation, and their social and political consequences are rather defined and disputed in language as discourse (Bacchi, 1999; Weedon, 1997).

Poststructuralism, thus, pays attention to a “fictionalizing process”, which means that its inquiry is concerned with creating a world through language, or “world-making” (Baxter, 2003, p. 6). In this sense, language is the place where the subjects’ sense of themselves, their subjectivities and identities are discursively constructed (Baxter, 2016; Weedon, 1997). As a constitutive force, language gives various meanings to social reality, and creates particular ways of seeing the world and being in the world (J. Smith, 2008). Therefore, it has power to establish ‘appropriate’

patterns of behaviour that suit specific individuals and groups, and can shape how we act on and talk about particular subjects and topics (Gee, 2014).

Accordingly, discourse is defined as “powerful sets of assumptions, expectations, explanations”, or in other words various “forms of knowledge”, which govern and constitute social and political practices (Baxter, 2003, p. 46). Hence, there is “no form of knowledge that can be separated from the structures, conventions and conceptuality of language as inscribed within discourses” (Baxter, 2003, p. 6).

As I am focusing on analysis of texts of policy documents and group and individual interview transcripts, my research study is concerned with language as inscribed within socially and historically specific discourses in New Zealand’s ECEC policies and practice. In a broad sense, I take language within the texts as a location in which actual and possible ways of being an early childhood teacher are constructed, and as a constitutive force that produces particular ways of doing ECEC (e.g. providing services) and seeing its purpose. I define discourse as a corpus of different statements/language constructions that are used to describe, position and constitute the subjects and objects of which they speak (i.e. teachers, teacher professional identities, a topic of discussion).

As such, discourse consists of competing ways of giving meanings to the purpose of ECEC and of organising early childhood institutions and processes (e.g. teaching). Based on this, teachers are positioned in discourse in specific ways (e.g. baby-sitters, teaching professionals), and offered a range of diverse ways of being (i.e. subjectivities). Therefore, they use these available discursive resources to make sense of themselves, their context, social institutions, and ECEC policies and practices.

### **Policy as discourse**

As discursively constructed, policies are viewed as offering a specific context for the construction of a teacher and teacher professional identities in ECEC contexts. A number of policy theorists and researchers have described and examined policy as discourse (Bacchi, 1999; Ball, 1990, 1994; Beilharz, 1987; Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996; N. Goodwin, 1996; S. Goodwin, 2011). From this standpoint, policy is considered not just a text but also a power relation, in which power is exercised through “a production of ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’, as discourses” (Ball, 1994, p. 21).

Drawing on a Foucauldian definition of discourse, Ball (1994) therefore argues that policy as discourse does not simply identify the objects of which it speaks, but constitutes them. In other words, policy offers a set of “preferred discursive truths” (Gee et al., 1996, pp. 19–21), or dominant discourses, which determine not only “what can be said and thought, but also who can speak, when, where and with what authority” (Ball, 1993, p. 14). However, it is important to note that discursive truths do not necessarily reflect what is more right to do and be like, but rather reveal what and who has more political power to define the ways of ‘being’ and ‘doing’ in a particular context and time.

By combining written and spoken words in a specific order and structure, and by excluding other combinations, policy often favours particular ways of thinking and speaking about an issue and a subject (Turunen, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2013). Because of this, Trowler (1998, 2003) warns, policy as discourse not only creates but also ‘disguises’ the nature of social reality. By using discursive repertoires (e.g. language from business, marketing, finance, etc.) in framing policies, “policy makers can and do constrain how we think about education in general and about specific education policies in particular” (Trowler, 2003, p. 132). Consequently, the discursive repertoires used can become part of everyday discourse and shape the way people think about the purpose of education, and exclude alternative ways of thinking (Trowler, 1998, 2003).

Writing of the power of policy as discourse, Ball (1994, p. 22) further argues:

[We] do not speak a discourse, it speaks us. We are the subjectivities, the voices, the knowledge, the power relations that a discourse constructs and allows. .... [W]e are spoken by policies, we take up the positions constructed for us within policies.

Given the power of policy as discourse, I consider that ECEC policies are creating specific discursive contexts within which the purpose of ECEC, early childhood teachers and their professional identities are produced and governed through the discursive truths on offer. Based on this, ECEC policies tend to portray teachers as those who are ‘lacking power’, as being constructed in discourses, and others (e.g. the state, policy makers) as those ‘holding power’, as being producers of the discourses (Bacchi, 2000).

While admitting discursive effects of policy in shaping teachers’ thinking and limiting their responses to change, I observe that discourse can be “a hindrance, a

stumbling block”, and yet can also be “a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposite strategy” (Foucault, 1998, p. 101). In other words, although discourses hold the power to construct the subjects (i.e. teachers) and subjectivities (i.e. identities), yet the power is not reducible to one source (e.g. policies). The produced subjects and subjectivities are rather implicated in power relations, which exist in a dynamic of control, compliance and resistance between discourses and the subjects constructed by the discourses, who are their agents (Weedon, 1997).

By leaving possibility for the subjects to resist discourses, policy can be viewed as illustrating a range of different representations from which actions *might be chosen* (Adams, 2011). In this sense, teachers can be viewed as being influenced by policy to adopt the desired directions, but at the same time they are seen as capable of choosing how to interpret discursive truths, locate themselves within the predetermined potentialities in policies, and thus create alternatives.

By observing the subjects, teachers, as constructed in discourses, but also as social agents of discourses, I assume that there is a space for teachers to challenge discursive truths given in government ECEC policies, and therefore create other possibilities, introducing “new boundaries” (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999, p. 34). From this position, the power of policy as discourse becomes to some extent reliant on the created understandings, interpretations, commitments, and capabilities of their social actors and the actions they choose in their local places and spaces.

By drawing on poststructuralists’ concept of language as discourse and policy as discourse, I view subjects and subjectivities as being constructed within discourses, and yet I assume the subjects’ capacity to re-construct discourses constructing their subjectivities through their *chosen* actions. In this way, discourse offers the subjects a framework of multiple and competing possibilities for making sense of themselves and their subjectivities. The produced meanings and understandings are thus dependent on the subjects’ discursive context and are, however, open to constant rereading and reinterpretation. As the context constantly shifts to serve conflicting power interests, it offers competing versions of reality, shifting a location of subjects within discourses between being powerful and powerless.

## **The Concept of Identity – Discourse and Subjectivity**

Taking poststructuralist stands on language, discourse, subjectivity, and power (Baxter, 2003, 2016; Davies, 2004; Weedon, 1997), now I proceed to explain the concept of subjects and subjectivity as discursively constructed. Poststructuralists' concept of subjectivity gives a foundation to the understanding and inquiry of the main research phenomenon in this study – teacher professional identities. To conceptualise teacher professional identities, I draw on characteristics defining poststructuralist conception of subjectivity: the plural, not-fixed and not-unified aspects of the subject; subjectivity as a site of constant struggle and challenge; and its changing continually over time (Baxter, 2003, 2016; Weedon, 1997).

From poststructuralist perspectives, through the acquisition of language, subjects learn how to give meanings to their experience and to understand it in accordance with particular ways of thinking, particular discourses (Weedon, 1997). Hence, experience has not an inherent essential meaning, but the meaning that may be given to it in language through a range of discourses (Weedon, 1997). The discourses produce the subjects' consciousness and the positions from which they create their subjectivity.

Subjectivity thus refers to conscious and unconscious thoughts, the ways subjects make sense of themselves and their relation to the world they live in (Weedon, 1997). From a poststructuralist's viewpoint, subjects (individuals) are shaped by "the possibility of multiple (though not limitless) subject positions" (Baxter, 2016, p. 38), a point or a location of the subject within and across different and competing discourses. Subjects are therefore in a continuous process of positioning, a process of locating themselves in agreement with or in opposition to discourses.

Poststructuralists consider subjects and subjectivity as constructed in "a whole range of discursive practices - economic, social and political - the meanings of which are a constant site of struggle over power" (Weedon, 1997, p. 21). Since the discursive practices are in a process of constant movement, subjectivity is never fixed, as humanist discourses claim, but rather precarious and contradictory, always open to challenge and change, disagreement and conflict.

Considering that subjects and subjectivities are constructed in discursive practices, one may ask: How much 'control' or 'power' do subjects have over the constructions of their subjectivities, their ways of being in the world? In this regard,

Weedon (1997) argued that the forms of socially and historically specific discourses (such as language) cannot produce social and political effects “except in and through the actions of the individuals who become its bearers by taking up the forms of subjectivity and the meanings and values which it proposes and acting upon them” (p. 34).

As Davies (2004) argued, agency is “not freedom from discursive constitution of self” (p. 4). Agency rather refers to subjects’ capacity to recognise the discursive construction of self, by identifying, challenging and better understanding the discourses through which they were constructed. In other words, the agency of the subject does not mean being an autonomous individual standing outside of social structures and processes. It implies “the freedom [of the subjects] to recognize multiple readings such that no discursive practice, or positioning within it by powerful others, can capture and control [their] identit[ies]” (Davies, 1991, p. 51). Although socially constructed in discursive practices, subjects are social agents, “capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices” (Weedon, 1997, p. 121). This stance emphasises that subjects can reflect on discursive relations, which construct the society they live in, and yet can choose from available options which subject positions they might adopt or carry forward in future conversations (Baxter, 2003). In this sense, it is more likely that subjects accept the subject positions which they assume to be within a particular discourse fully established by them with their own interests. On the contrary, if there is a gap or a conflict between a subject position offered by a discourse and subjects’ own interests, it is more likely that a space for resistance towards that subject position can be created (Weedon, 1997).

Given the agency of subjects and fluidity of the concept of subjectivity, I employ poststructuralists’ views as a foundation for the understanding and inquiry into teacher professional identities in my study. Accordingly, I define the concept of teacher professional identities as a fluid, continually changing and evolving nexus of shifting subject positions. I view teachers as being subject to a range of discourses (e.g. institutional, societal, discourses of early childhood policies), which offer knowledge about expected and legitimised ways of being an early childhood teacher and doing an early childhood education. In this sense, I view discourses as holding power to define the ways in which teacher professional identities are regulated and produced in ECEC policies and practices. At the same

time, however, I view the constructions of teacher identity as simultaneously managed through the *agency* of teachers, who are “as individual language users ... subjectively motivated to take up particular positions within multiple discourses”, and through the ways teachers are “variously *positioned* as subjects by the social, normalizing power of discourses” (Baxter, 2016, p. 37).

Taken together, I understand and examine teacher professional identities by looking at locations of teachers within discourses (subject positions), and uncovering possible ways of being a teacher (subjectivities), which are made available within a discursive context of the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC policies and practice. Drawing on the concept of the subject and subjectivities, in Chapter 4 I will outline the *Subject Positioning Tool* and the *Identity Construction Tool* which were employed in the investigation of the subject positions and subjectivities (i.e. constructions of teacher professional identities). Now, I move on to explain the notion of teachers’ professional identities.

### **The Concept of Teachers’ Professional Identities**

In addition to education, studies of teacher identity have drawn on a number of theoretical disciplines, including philosophy (Mead, 2009; Taylor, 1989); psychology (Erikson, 1959) and socio-cultural psychology (Bruner, 1986; Cole, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991); anthropology (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998); sociolinguistics (Fairclough, 2010; Gee, 1999); sociology (Bourdieu, 1986; Jenkins, 2004); and poststructuralism (Butler, 2011; Davies, 2000). Here, I outline two perspectives on teacher identity in literature, the traditional modernist and the postmodernist, and locate my study under the latter. While acknowledging studies in the research area of teacher identity, I align my study with those investigating teacher identities in a broader socio-cultural and political context and discourses in ECEC.

#### **Perspectives of teachers’ professional identities**

The importance of the concept of teachers’ professional identities is grounded in an understanding that who we think we are (i.e. our ways of ‘being’) impact on our development as professionals and our professional actions (i.e. ways of ‘doing’, in this case, ECEC practice, teaching, and approaching change) (Beijaard et al., 2004;



Cameron, 2001; Nias, 1989; Watson, 2006; Woodrow, 2011). In this sense, there are complex, reciprocal, and open to change connections between constructions of teachers' professional identities ('being') and professional actions ('doing'). Professional actions construct teachers' professional identities – we are becoming what we do, and at the same time we are becoming/re-constructing who we are because of what we do (Cameron, 2001; Watson, 2006). Given this complexity, teacher professional identities have become a key consideration in implementing and sustaining a change agenda in ECEC policies and practices (Sumsion, 2006, 2007; Woodrow, 2011).

Under traditional modernist frameworks, the notion of identity pre-supposes a fixed 'core' of self (Watson, 2006), a 'true' self that is able to generate its own unique version of the world (Coldron & Smith, 1999; Jameson, 1988). The teacher's 'core' professional self is thus associated with the concept of professionalism, a fixed set of professional knowledge, actions and relationships (Gibson, 2015; Watson, 2006). According to these perspectives, professional identities are viewed as remaining constant over time.

Conversely, under postmodern frameworks identities are viewed as multiple, complex, discursively constructed, and continuously changing entities (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Kapitzke, Cheung, & Yu, 2000; Stenberg, Karlsson, Pitkaniemi, & Maaranen, 2014; Varghese, Morgan, Johnston, & Johnson, 2005). As it is located within a postmodern epistemology of knowledge and truth, a poststructural perspective challenges the notion of a stable self, and views teachers' professional identities as constructed through a range of discourses (Osgood, 2012; Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark, & Warne, 2002; Zembylas, 2003a, 2003b; Gibson, 2015; Thomas, 2012).

As discussed earlier, while the subjects and objects (i.e. teachers, professional identities) are constructed through discourses, the subjects also actively shape and enact the discourses they are constructed in. Therefore, there is a possibility for teachers to choose to resist some discourses, while accepting others. Accordingly, constructions of professional identities are considered as constantly shifting, changing and evolving in relation to discourses at play.

In this study, I invoke the poststructuralist view of identities as phenomena which are 'fragile', 'contingent' and open for re-construction, encompassing shifting subject positions and selves (Zembylas, 2003a, 2003b, 2005). Teachers'

professional identities are conceived as in a process of ongoing becoming (Wenger, 1998), context dependent and constructed through the range of discourses shaping (in this study) Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC policies and practices.

The process of constructing professional identities comes about “from an active engagement and negotiation of the discourses through which [teachers] are shaped and in which they are positioned” (Osgood, 2006, p. 7). Ambiguous, confronting and conflicting in their nature, discourses set ‘the conditions of possibilities’ (Foucault, 1972) for who teachers ought to be in ECEC. As such, teachers’ professional identities are perceived as “stand[ing] at the core of the teaching profession”, and as “providing a framework for teachers to construct their own ideas of “how to be”, “how to act” and “how to understand their work and their place [subject positioning] in society” (Sachs, 2005, p. 15) and in ECEC. Furthermore, teachers’ professional identities are associated with the concept of professionalism, which through a poststructural lens implies that historical, socio-cultural and political constructions of knowledge are diversified, multiple, uncertain and messy in nature (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998; Weedon, 1997). In this manner, the ways of knowing are enabled by “the social and historical constraints on what is allowed, though what is allowed is always open to challenge and change” (Scheurich, 2013, p. 33). As grounded in a poststructural view of professionalism, teachers’ professional identities encompass a complex array of constructed stories about themselves as teaching professionals, others (e.g. stakeholders, community, etc.), ECEC policies and practice, and the purpose of ECEC at large, which are all entwined in the socio-cultural, historical, political and institutional context of ECEC. Accordingly, professional identities in this study are viewed as never ‘given’ to teachers, but teachers are rather in a process of creating themselves like ‘works of art’ (Foucault, 1984) within a particular context and time.

By understanding identities as fluid, never fully constructed, and always potentially changing formations, a poststructural lens allows diversified readings of teachers’ professional identities. As Sumsion (2005, pp. 196–197) argued “no discursive practice, or positioning within it by powerful others [or by the dominant discourses], can capture and control one’s identity”. Unlike the modernist stances that may impose a totalising construct of teachers’ identities (e.g. ‘experts’), the poststructuralist views create opportunities for “the affirmation of difference” (Mouffe, 1993, p. 2), allowing teachers to produce new and transform existing

professional identities and critically reflect on those identity constructions.

Given the complexity and variety of approaches to teacher professional identities, a poststructuralist framework is taken as a valuable account in my study. First, it enables an understanding of how teachers position and reposition themselves within and through various discourses in a particular context and time of ECEC, and how these discourses have constructed multiple professional identities. It also allows an inquiry into teachers' professional identities as dynamic phenomena, changing in response to shifting discourses in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC policies and practice.

Moreover, by allowing diverse angles of understanding and studying teachers' professional identities, poststructural worldviews imply a belief in teachers' capacities to deal with uncertainties created through ECEC's ever-shifting, ambiguous social, cultural, political and institutional discourses. Importantly, this framework creates a possibility for teachers to rather construe themselves as "embodied agent[s] with multiple and contextualized identities" (Zembylas, 2003a, p. 233), rather than as 'bearers' of a given, fixed and unchangeable identity which undermines teachers' agency in constructing their identities like 'works of art' (Foucault, 1984).

### **Studies of teachers' professional identities**

Over the last three decades, the literature on teaching and teacher education has shown a substantial interest in the concept of teacher professional identity, establishing this as a distinct research area (Androusoy & Tsafos, 2018; Beijaard et al., 2004; Bullough, 1997; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Knowles, 1992; Kompf, Bond, Dworet, & Boak, 1996; Olsen, 2008). A number of educational studies have been conducted applying multiple analytic and methodological approaches in exploring various aspects of and issues related to teacher professional identities.

Beijaard, Maijer and Verloop (2004) undertook a systematic analysis of 25 studies on teacher identity conducted from 1988 to 2000. The analysis identified three main categories in these studies: 1) the formation of student teacher identity; 2) general and specific characteristics related to teacher professional identity; and 3) stories of professional identities that were told or written by teachers (Beijaard et al., 2004). At the time, small-scale and in-depth qualitative studies, and the use of narrative (e.g. life histories, autobiographical stories, 'stories to live by') dominated the

research area (Brooke, 1994; Carter, 1993; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Connelly, Clandinin, & Ming Fang He, 1997; Estola, 2003; Goodson, 1997). Based on their analysis, the authors addressed the need for more studies considering a broader educational context and its effects on teacher identity (Beijaard et al., 2004).

Over the last decade, however, the number of studies considering impacts of historical, socio-cultural, political and institutional contexts and discourses in ECEC on teachers' work, identities and subjectivities has increased (Cumming, Sumsion, & Wong, 2013; Farquhar, 2010; Gibson, 2015; Ortlipp, Arthur, & Woodrow, 2011; Pupala, Kascak, & Tesar, 2016; Sisson & Iverson, 2014; Thomas, 2012; Warren, 2013). Unlike the earlier studies grounded in a rather linear modernist approach to teacher identity, recent studies have predominantly drawn on postmodernist frameworks, and applied discourse-analytic lenses to exploring identities as complex, multifaceted and dynamic phenomena (Cumming, Sumsion, & Wong, 2015; Fenech & Sumsion, 2007; Gibson, McArdle, & Hatcher, 2015; Søreide, 2006; Thomas, 2012).

While the number of studies related to issues of early childhood teacher professional identities has increased and theoretical and analytical approaches taken in the investigations are varied, there is yet a need for more studies in this area. For instance, Skattebol, Adamson and Woodrow (2016) identified in Australia and internationally a lack of studies about professionalism and professional identities considering not only teachers in mainstream but also non-mainstream services (e.g. playgroups, mobile services, other intervention services). In addition, several authors (Sumsion, 2006, 2007; Thomas, 2012; Woodrow, 2011) have identified a need for large-scale studies about teacher professional identities in the context of a rapidly changing ECEC provision, to look at how professional identities may drive and sustain various policy discourses in circulation, and how the policy discourses may affirm taken-for-granted assumptions of early childhood teachers and their work, and constrain or expand particular identities.

Considering the research area of teacher identity, my study is aligned with the recent studies that apply postmodern and discourse-analytic lenses to investigate teacher professional identities in a broader social and political context and discourses in ECEC. While contributing to the existing body of knowledge and research literature, my study focuses specifically on issues related to teachers' professional identities in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC policies and practices over the last

two decades or so. The study also contributes to the national debate on early childhood teachers, professional identities, and ECEC policies and practices in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In the New Zealand ECEC context, only a few studies (Dalli, 2012; Duhn, 2011; Farquhar, 2010; Ritchie, Duhn, Rau, & Craw, 2010; Warren, 2013) have investigated explicitly or touched implicitly issues associated with professional identities in ECEC. Some studies approached teacher identities/subjectivities in relation to multiple readings of and experiences in teaching practices, leadership and professionalism in ECEC (Dalli, 2008, 2012; Duhn, 2011; Ritchie et al., 2010; Warren, 2014). Other studies revealed discourses (e.g. economic, qualification, relational professionalism) that have shaped teachers' views of themselves as professionals, their relation to and positioning of other stakeholders, including children, families, other teaching professionals and communities (Farquhar, 2010; Warren, 2013). However, there is a need for a further investigation of teacher professional identities in relation to the broader context of Aotearoa New Zealand's ECEC policies and practices, and in response to complementing and confronting discourses (e.g. democratic and managerial professionalism, privatisation, neoliberalism), which have shaped the landscape of the ECEC sector and teachers' work.

### **The Concept of Professionalism**

Professionalism in early childhood education and care (ECEC) is a complex and multi-faceted concept deeply embedded in a unique historical, socio-cultural, institutional, economic and political context. As a discourse and a phenomenon, the concept of professionalism is never static. It is constantly under re-construction, shifting and evolving in response to changing conditions in society, public debates and developments in the scholarly arena (Dalli, Miller, & Urban, 2012; Grey, 2012; Hargreaves & Goodson, 1996; L. Miller & Cable, 2010; Sachs, 2003).

Given that complexity, professionalism in ECEC has been an area of constant struggle over meaning among the various parties involved (i.e. the state, teaching professionals, the public), and is highly contested and open to different interpretations. Perspectives on professionalism in the literature, however, vary, ranging from a traditional/modernist and postmodernist to alternative approaches (Bottery, 1996; Campbell-Barr, 2018; Dalli, 2008; Duhn, 2011; Ingersoll & Perda,

2008; Kinos, 2013; Park, 2013).

For instance, a traditional/modernist view of professionalism is established in functionalist discourses of expert-knowledge, which supposedly grants professionals public recognition, professional status and high pay rate (Block, 2011; Langdon, 2013; Small, 2008). Yet, in New Zealand and internationally, early childhood professionals have held lower status than other teaching professionals, with maternalistic discourses being associated with their work (Ailwood, 2007; Bown, Sumsion, & Press, 2011; Dalli, 2010; Duncan, 1996; Warren, 2013). Traditional/modernist views of professionalism are, thus, criticised for rather operating as a technocratic mechanism for controlling those working in ECEC, as much as for being a top-down formation and failing to address the complexities of teaching in ECEC (Campbell-Barr, 2018; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Fenech, Sumsion, & Shepherd, 2010; Osgood, 2006, 2009).

Conversely, in a postmodern and alternative framework professionalism is viewed as the open-ended, ongoing construction of a professional knowledge-base that embraces multiple ways of knowledge coming from within ECEC, and recognises the ethical, emotional, relational and political aspects of teachers' work (Campbell-Barr, 2018; Dalli & Cherrington, 2009; Dalli et al., 2012; Grey, 2012; Osgood, 2012; Rinaldi, 2006; Rué, 2006; Urban, 2008; Warren, 2014). Such a view of professionalism creates opportunities for consciousness-raising (L. Miller, 2013). It asks teachers to go beyond the rationalist logic of professionalism, to critically reflect upon accounts that inform their professional actions, open up and become more publicly vulnerable and accessible to children, families and communities (Oberhuemer, 2005; Sachs, 2003).

Although offering different views of professionalism and teaching professionals, postmodern and alternative accounts do not, however, necessarily reject the traditional/modernist views of professionalism (Campbell-Barr, 2018; Sachs, 2003). These perspectives rather challenge the certainty of a modernist knowledge-base in ECEC, and raise a critical awareness of the complexity and uncertainty of teachers' work, which cannot be considered without regard to its local context or reduced to a set of skills or qualities, measurable outcomes and technical standards (Dalli et al., 2012; Moss, 2010; Urban, 2012).

A growing body of national and international literature also confirms that traditional/modernist, postmodernist and alternative constructs of professionalism

often coexist side by side in ECEC, and the switch from one to another form is not only possible but necessary (Bottery, 1996; Dalli, 2008; Fenech et al., 2010; Lenz-Taguchi, 2008; Sachs, 2003). For instance, the application of a mixed approach to understanding professionalism is apparent in Aotearoa New Zealand's ECEC policies, where regulated standards for ethical behaviour and effective teaching practice are tightly prescribed in *Practising Teacher Criteria* (Education Council, 2015) and *Code of Professional Responsibility and Standards for the Teaching Profession* (Education Council, 2017), in contrast to the permeability of the Early Childhood Curriculum *Te Whāriki* (1996), and professional resources (Ministry of Education, 2004a, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009a).

The concept of professionalism in this study draws on characteristics of a so-called transformative professionalism, including collaborative and collegial, activist and enquiry orientations and knowledge-building (Sachs, 2003). In its attempt to offer a middle ground among traditional, postmodernist and alternative approaches to professionalism, the fundamental motive of a transformative professionalism is to serve the best interests of *all* those interested and participating in ECEC, improve opportunities for personal growth and democratic education, and contribute to social change (Kinos, 2013; Sachs, 2003).

Therefore, professionalism in this study is viewed as a discursive construct made up of a wide range of ideas and practices that are open to challenge and change. This concept of professionalism is always flexible and progressive, responsive to change, and self-regulating (Sachs, 2003). It aims to offer continuous possibilities for teachers to identify and critically engage with the multiple meanings of professionalism, and make tensions among these meanings visible. Furthermore, it endeavours to create spaces for teachers to identify and question discourses underpinning the available forms of professionalism, and to understand how the discourses inform ECEC practice and shape their professional identities. By employing a broad view of professionalism, I hope to provide understanding and exploration into new, multiple and potentially unexpected ways of thinking of professionalism in ECEC and the constructing of early childhood teachers' professional identities.

I now move on to outline two discourses of professionalism prevailing in international and national debates in the public and scholarly arena in ECEC - democratic (occupational) and managerial (organisational) professionalism (Duhn,

2011; Evetts, 2011; Sachs, 2001, 2003; Woodrow, 2008). Although different in many aspects, both discourses coexist simultaneously in ECEC policies and practices, and provide a foundation for constructions of entrepreneurial and activist teacher identities.

### **Discourses of Professionalism**

Over the last more than two decades, early childhood education and care (ECEC) has come to the top of the political agenda in Aotearoa New Zealand and, internationally, across the OECD countries and beyond. The interest of governments and policy-makers in ECEC has been driven by a cross-national study of early childhood policies (OECD, 2001, 2006), and research studies from different fields (e.g. education, economics, neuro-psychology) suggesting that a state's 'investment' in early learning is a key for its future social and economic development.

To ensure the future success of the nation, countries have set ambitious policy directives for more and better quality ECEC provision. Through an interplay of the existing discourses of professionalism and emerging political and economic discourses, the contexts in which early childhood teachers understand and undertake their work and view themselves as professionals have rapidly changed (Duhn, 2011; Fenech, Sumsion, & Goodfellow, 2006; Pupala et al., 2016; Woodrow, 2008, 2011).

As a result, a new form of professionalism has emerged in ECEC, with a twofold meaning. First, it potentially improves the quality of ECEC, empowers early childhood practitioners and improves their low-professional status (L. Miller, 2008); and second, it is a part of the neoliberal 'regulatory gaze' (Osgood, 2006) apparatus for a state's control of early childhood professionals and ECEC provision. Like other authors (Day & Sachs, 2004; Oberhuemer, 2005; Sachs, 2003), I refer to this form of professionalism as **a managerial (organisational) professionalism**. An alternative to the increasing control over ECEC and teachers is a democratic form (Apple, 1996; Sachs, 2001, 2003, 2016), or differently occupational professionalism (Evetts, 2011) emerging from within the teaching profession. I refer to this form of **professionalism as a democratic (occupational) professionalism**.



Education reforms in New Zealand, Australia, the UK, the US, and many European countries have reflected at least one of, and often both, discourses of professionalism (Day & Sachs, 2004; Duhn, 2010; Groundwater-Smith & Sachs, 2002; Pupala et al., 2016; Reeves, 2018; Sisson & Iverson, 2014; Woodrow, 2008, 2011). Sachs (2016) comments that there is “a chasm” (p. 419) between aspirations and beliefs of teachers and governments, in that the governments and employers tend to apply the organisational/managerial professionalism, while teachers and professional bodies most likely prefer the occupational/democratic professionalism. As the two discourses of professionalism simultaneously circulate in ECEC policies and practice, overlapping one another, they do, however, set a powerful context for teachers to speak and think of professionalism, their work and themselves as professionals in particular ways.

### **Managerial (organisational) professionalism**

Managerial (organisational) professionalism has emerged through an ideological shift from a welfare state model to a global neoliberal model in the governance of public sector organisations. The shift is driven by an ‘economist rationalism’ mindset (Sumsion, 2006), assuming that free market agendas such as privatisation, deregulation and competition can always, at least in principle, provide better outcomes than states and government (Codd, 2008; Pusey, 2003; K. Smith, Tesar, & Myers, 2016).

As a result of its economising of education project (Ozga, 2000), a state’s role and investment in the provision of public services has been downsized, while the private sector has expanded and the profit interests favoured over social benefits (Pusey, 2003). Education is viewed like any commodity, with institutions selling, assorted services from which individuals can ‘choose’ what is good for them. By allowing this to happen, the state normalises inequalities between the individuals and groups, treating these as “natural” characteristics of society that cannot be “cured” by the state’s taking “socially remedial actions” (Ozga, 2000, p. 60).

While governments may say that they are obliged to offer equity, in reality neoliberal doctrines re-create and augment injustices and inequity, while pretending to offer ‘fair’ opportunities and ‘freedom’ of choice (Rawolle, 2013; K. Smith et al., 2016). Under the domination of the free market ideology and enterprise culture in education, participatory citizenship and democracy become less important than

the notions of individual productivity, performance, profit and the freedom of choice that is maximised through competition (Codd, 2008; Moss, 2014; K. Smith et al., 2016; Sumsion, 2006).

Shaping of neoliberal discourses on ECEC is addressed and documented nationally and internationally (Mitchell, 2013; Penn, 2013; Sumsion, 2012). As Peter Moss (2014) sums up in “a story of control and calculation, technology and measurement”, the neoliberal thinking in ECEC policy making operates as follows:

[f]ind, invest in and apply the correct human technologies – aka “quality” – during early childhood and you will get high returns on investment including improved education, employment and earnings and reduced social problems. A simple equation beckons and beguiles: “early intervention” + “quality” = increased “human capital” + national success (or at least survival) in a cut-throat global economy. Invest early and invest smartly and we all live happily ever after in a world of more of the same – only more so.  
(p. 3)

Therefore, ECEC is now rooted in what Ball (2003) described as ‘smart technologies’ of the market, managerialism and performativity, and driven by the principles of efficiency and business. These technologies serve to align public services, with the culture, standards and ethical system of the private for-profit, the business sector (Ball, 2003). Neoliberal principles thus determine understandings of professionalism, quality and the role and purpose of ECEC.

With the repositioning of ECEC as a commodity rather than a community focal point, parents become consumers of ECSs rather than citizens who contribute to and benefit from the public service, while children are an investment towards the economic good of a nation (Press & Woodrow, 2005; K. Smith et al., 2016). Early childhood teachers are held accountable for providing evidence that a state’s investment in ECEC brings adequate economic ‘outputs’, substantiated in the development of a ‘productive’ citizenry (Woodrow, 2011)

With ECEC operating on contractual and competitive relations between the producers, ECSs, and the consumers, those consumers’ individual ‘rational’ economic choices replace collective political decisions (Harvey, 2007; Ozga, 2000; Rose, 1999). Moreover, boundaries that divide “non-market parts of our lives” are removed, and the life-spheres on which “social solidarity and active democracy have always depended” become open to commodification and profit-making

(Apple, 2005, p. 12). From this point “the social and political [in our lives] collapse into the economic and managerial” (Moss, 2009, p. 6).

By applying a business-management model in ECEC which is rooted in an idea of the new public management (Hood, 1991), professionalism comes to be demonstrable primarily through teachers’ efficacy in achieving corporate goals and contributing to the accountability of an ECEC organisation. To measure and prove professionalism, the organisation increasingly requires its professionals to perform their work in alignment with explicit auditing and accounting organisational principles. In return, the managerial requests for the control of the efficacy of the professionals’ performance are reinterpreted as “the promotion of [their] professionalism” (Evetts, 2011, p. 412).

Within the framework of the managerial (organisational) professionalism, public servants/teachers construct new roles and identities, and position themselves as ‘business managers’, ‘purchasers’ and ‘marketers’ deriving ideas about the logic of institutional change based on formal managerial principles (Clarke & Newman, 1997). By invoking “essentially *rational/calculative* representations of managerial [and business] roles and practices” (Clarke & Newman, 1997, p. 92), the managerial (organisational) form of professionalism promotes discourses of efficiency, enterprise, competition and individualisation in teachers’ work (Day & Sachs, 2004; Evetts, 2011).

Discourses underpinning this professionalism discipline its ‘managerial subjects’ by offering new patterns of identification, and reshaping the culture of ECEC institutions that is built through team-work and collegial support. By promoting competition in the achievement of often profit-oriented targets and performance indicators, discourses of managerial (organisational) professionalism limit “professionals-clients” relations and constrain any “service ethic”, formerly one of the key characteristics of teachers’ work and professionalism (Evetts, 2011, p. 408). Moreover, the discourses of managerial professionalism construct very different workplace realities for early childhood teachers. They may have no control over their work, but rather be controlled ‘from above’ by their organisations and organisational managers. This form of professionalism is often a threat to professionalism emerging from within the teaching profession, and may act against “generative politics and active trust” (Sachs, 2003, p. 145) on which the transformative and alternative forms of professionalism are established.

## **Democratic (occupational) professionalism**

Democratic (occupational) professionalism is viewed as an alternative to the conceptualisation of professional roles of teachers in a time of increasing control over the education system (Apple, 1996). As a counterbalance to managerial (organisational) professionalism, democratic professionalism emerges from ‘within’ rather than from ‘outside’ an occupational group (Evetts, 2011; Sachs, 2003, 2016). It draws on “collegial authority”, “autonomy”, “discretionary judgment”, “trust and confidence” (Evetts, 2011, p. 411), and participatory relationships and alliances between teachers and other educational stakeholders (Sachs, 2003).

Democratic (occupational) professionalism demands an ECEC provision of open democratic spaces of negotiated power-sharing, reciprocal and responsive relationships among various stakeholders (e.g. teachers, children, families, community). Such a professionalism is construed through “a story of democracy, experimentation and potentiality” in which ECECs are “public spaces and public resources, places where democracy and experimentation are fundamental values, community workshops for realising the potentiality of citizens” (Moss, 2014, p. 2). This form of professionalism is thus supported within the notion of ECEC as democratic practice that flourishes through the coexistence of multiple meanings and practices, and the recognition that the differences that each person brings to a meaning-making process constitute an opportunity for growth and change (Duhn, 2011; Moss, 2007). Such a professionalism allows each person to open up to a potentially uncomfortable position, act and transform the ‘self’ through the meaning-making process, and create a space for freedom which is very different from the ‘freedom’ of choice created through competition in a consumer-driven context of ECEC (Duhn, 2011). Professionalism of this kind refers to making connections with politics, history and policies driving ECEC provision, informing teachers’ work and construing them as professionals, as much as uncovering and understanding discourses limiting and making these constructions possible.

Furthermore, under a democratic (occupational) professionalism project, teachers are asked to develop professional skills and attitudes that position children and other stakeholders as social agents, actively participating in and constructing their own lives (Oberhuemer, 2005). At a leadership level, democratic professionalism encourages “a participatory culture of peer learning, and of managing and

evaluating organisational change” (Oberhuemer, 2005, p. 13). It implies working together with *all* parents of children attending an ECEC setting, especially with those missing out from the formal school discourses (Oberhuemer, 2005). Finally, in relation to the professional-knowledge base in ECEC, democratic (occupational) professionalism emphasises that knowledge is highly contestable and contextual, and it is therefore necessary to recognise and draw on multiple forms of knowing, being and doing in ECEC.

Moreover, I view democratic (occupational) professionalism as fitting comfortably with a resistance-based professionalism (Fenech et al., 2010), positioning teachers as activist professionals (Sachs, 2003), capable of challenging established meanings and practices, and critically engaging with discourses which hinder democratic practices. In a democratic (occupational) professionalism framework, teachers are at all times expected to be consciously aware of their individual and collective responsibility towards children, parents, community, as much as to themselves as members of the teaching profession.

### **Discourses of Professionalism and Teachers’ Professional Identities**

It has been shown that there are two forms of professionalism in ECEC – democratic (occupational) and managerial (organisational) professionalism (Evetts, 2011; Oberhuemer, 2005; Sachs, 2001, 2003, 2016). Although different in many aspects, both forms of professionalism share a common desire, which is to improve the performance and expertise of teachers, and enhance students’ learning outcomes (Day & Sachs, 2004). However, the main differences between them are reflected in the approaches taken to achieve that common aim, and in who takes control over the process of the improvement (Day & Sachs, 2004).

Discourses of democratic (occupational) and managerial (organisational) professionalism coexist in ECEC policies and practices, and set a powerful foundation for diverse discursive constructions of professionalism, teachers and their professional identities. Two particular identity constructions of teachers emerge from the discourses of professionalism. These are described as the *entrepreneurial* and the *activist* teacher (Sachs, 2001, 2003; Woodrow, 2011). While managerial discourses of professionalism create conditions for the entrepreneurial teacher identities to flourish, democratic discourses advocate for professionalism driven by professionals themselves, creating an opportunity for

activist teacher identities.

Although these two identity constructions are confronting in nature, it is unlikely that teachers locate themselves only within one dominant discourse, and construe their professional identities on that base (Sachs, 2003). It is more likely that teachers *make choices* about which discourses to subscribe to in a particular context and time of ECEC (Day & Sachs, 2004), allowing their professional identities to be “forever re-established and negotiated” (Sachs, 2001, p. 155). In this sense, these oppositional discourses of professionalism are viewed as integrated into professional roles of teachers within government structures.

Therefore, neoliberal discourses and identity constructions are not simply imposed from above, and democratic discourses and identity constructions are not simply a response of teachers to macro-level structures, policies and processes. Rather, the identity constructions are emerging out of multiple and contested discourses and practices in circulation. Hence, “working within the discourse” (Duhn, 2011, p. 153) and understanding its limitation, contradictions and possibilities creates opportunities for teachers to recognise its various effects on their practice and identities and to act upon that knowledge.

Below, I explore some core features, values and beliefs underpinning the entrepreneurial and activist teacher identities. It is important to consider that although they are discussed separately here, neither the entrepreneurial nor the activist teacher identities is a fixed formation, constructed entirely in democratic or managerial discourses, nor do they illustrate ‘good’ or ‘bad’ ways of being an early childhood teacher. These identity constructions are rather to be viewed as open, intertwining, and confronting and challenging one another, and thus creating spaces for new and surprising ways of being an early childhood teacher and doing ECEC.

### **The entrepreneurial teacher identities**

By imposing the notion of business management as one of ‘the best’ ways of running schools, managerial discourses moved education away from the culture of welfare to the culture of profit and production (Ball, 1994). By valorising enterprise, competition, and ‘freedom’ of choice, managerial discourses control educational services through the invisible hand of the market, and require teachers to compete to meet the needs of consumers/clients (Smyth, Dow, Hattam, Reid, & Shacklock, 2005).

The managerial emphases provide a stimulating context for entrepreneurial teacher professional identity/ies to emerge in education (Menter, Muschamp, Nicholls, Ozga, & Pollard, 1997; Sachs, 2001, 2003). An entrepreneurial teacher is urged to identify with an idea of more efficient, effective and accountable public service, established in the managerial business model, and to comply with external performance indicators, measuring ‘quality’ teaching and securing better learning outcomes of learners (Sachs, 2001, 2003).

The impacts of managerial discourses on teachers and the teaching profession, the notions of agency, autonomy, collegiality and collectivism particularly, have been enormous (Duhn, 2010; Fergusson, 1994; Menter et al., 1997; Park, 2013; Sachs, 2001, 2003; Woodrow, 2013; Woodrow & Busch, 2008). In this sense, Fergusson (1994) argues that under managerial diktat teachers’ capacities to take autonomous and independent actions and to challenge the well-grounded regimes are likely to lessen, while their sense of belonging to the larger body - the teaching profession – are diluted.

Managerial discourses furthermore encourage the enterprise culture in which competitiveness and individualism are viewed as central for teachers’ success and survival on the ECEC market. The enterprise culture is in striking contrast with the notions of caring, collegiality, collectivism and community which have been traditionally at the heart of the teaching profession and professional identities (Moyle, 2001; Woodrow, 2013). By imposing an environment of isolation and privacy and narratives of human capital formation and economic prosperity (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013), the emerging discourses maintain “conservative, even reactionary, practice(s)” that stand in opposition to democratic emphases in ECEC as “a change-embracing culture” (Sachs, 2003, p. 130).

Moreover, in a framework of managerial professionalism and entrepreneurial identities which reduce professionals’ autonomy, teachers are forced to be more individualistic, compliant and technical in their work. The forms of managerial professionalism and identity constructions weaken a capacity for building effective advocacy and leadership in ECEC, and for taking a collaborative and collective action and addressing issues for social justice and inequality (Woodrow & Busch, 2008). However, while some of the effects of the emerging discourses are visible, more subtle impacts of such a trend on teacher professional identities may remain relatively hidden.

## **The activist teacher identities**

The activist teacher identities are constructed in democratic discourses which view professionalism as regulated from within the teaching profession, grounded in its collegial work and activism, and thus moving beyond reform agendas proposed from above (Day & Sachs, 2004; Sachs, 2003). The theoretical foundation of an activist teacher identity draws from a long-standing tradition of democracy and democratic schooling (Dewey, 1916, 1976), which proposes that democracy is not “as something institutional and external”, but is “a personal way of individual life” (Dewey, 1976, p. 4).

Democracy is, rather, controlled by “a working faith in the possibilities of human nature” and a personal faith in “[the] capacity of human beings for intelligent judgment and action” (Dewey, 1976, pp. 2–3). An idea of democracy in ECEC rests on cooperation, teachers’ “personal day-by-day working together with others”, and “giving differences a chance to show themselves because of the belief that the expression of differences is not only a right of the other persons but a means of enriching one’s own life-experience” (Dewey, 1976, p. 4).

On the basis of these notions, activist teacher identities are constructed on the explicit commitment and attempt of teachers to create opportunities and set up strategies, structures and processes that bring democracy to all aspects of school life (Sachs, 2001, 2003, 2005). Being rooted in the principles of equity and social justice, the activist teachers’ identities support “emancipatory aims” of democratic education to “reduce or eliminate exploitation, inequality and oppression” (Sachs, 2003, p. 131). The activist teacher identities advocate for democratic experiences, equitable opportunities, participation and inclusion of all stakeholders in an educational project.

Furthermore, the development of activist teacher identities rests on the foundation of “the democratic way of life”, which, according to Apple and Beane (1999, p. 7), ensures:

- the open free flow of all ideas, regardless of their popularity, and that people are as fully as possible informed;
- faith in the individual and collective capacity and the willingness of people to resolve problems;



- the use of critical reflection and inquiry in the evaluation of ideas, problems and policies.
- concern for welfare of others and the common good;
- concern for the rights and dignity of all individuals and minorities;
- the awareness that democracy is not like ‘an ideal’ to be accomplished as an ‘idealised’ set of values that we *must* live and guide our life by as people;
- the structure and organisation of social institutions that advocate for and extend the democratic way of life.

By ensuring these conditions, it is possible for ‘deliberative’ democracy (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996) to be a sustaining aspect that leads to the development of the activist teachers’ identities. Such identity developments require individual and collective teachers’ awareness, willingness and often bravery to make explicit and deliberate attempts to put in place the conditions and arrangements, and create opportunities that bring democracy into the life of their ECEC settings.

Furthermore, for the activist teacher identities to emerge, it is important that teachers make the existing and emerging “contradictions and tensions visible and disrupt monolithic, apparently seamless and overwhelmingly ‘big’ concepts, such as neoliberalism and ... professionalism” (Duhn, 2011, p. 145). By taking time to critically examine and communicate with one another often tacit and taken-for-granted perspectives of knowledge, discourses and the purpose of education, teachers’ individual and collective self-narratives provoke a critical dialogue about ECEC policies and practices, and promote the emancipatory objectives of democratic education (Sachs, 2003, 2005).

Moreover, by recognising that ECEC is a political work, and teachers are political beings who individually and collectively exercise democratic acts (Millei & Kallio, 2018), teaching professionals can take a role in mediating the push towards enterprise culture through an understanding and recovery of democratic practices that help resist the effects of global neoliberalism. In this sense, the communities of learning become places which advocate for:

...“good citizenship” [as an idea of ] acting for “the community” in general, and with regard to generally politicized issues, rather than for the particular communities that one is familiar with and where one has personal positions, which allows forming opinions and acting based on one’s *experiential existence as a political subject*. (Millei & Kallio, 2018, p. 41)

By becoming critical and aware of the political agendas they mobilise as part of their pedagogies and ‘caring’ work, the communities of practice set a powerful context for nourishing activist teacher identities and the activist teaching profession (Sachs, 2003). Moreover, the communities of learning are viewed as holding a key for the real transformation of both, teaching practice and teachers’ professional identities, as much as contributing to a more just, democratic and equitable ECEC.

### **Challenges and Opportunities in a Time of Commercial Managerial Culture in ECEC**

The continuing neoliberal reform in Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally has created in ECEC a commercial managerial culture preoccupied with performativity and economic viability (Codd, 2008; Mitchell, 2011; Woodrow, 2011). The purpose of ECEC has thus changed from being imbued with democratic values and beliefs of education as a public good (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007; Codd, 2008; Dahlberg et al., 1999; Skrivens, 2002). Early childhood teachers, once the state and the community’s servants, have become “employees” who need to produce profits for their business-owners and investors, becoming the “subject[s] to market discipline” (Apple, 2005, p. 12).

Under a neo-liberal framework in ECEC, managerial performativity and financial savvy become new hallmarks of professionalism and what it means to be an early childhood teacher. The images of teachers as ‘autonomous’, ‘change agents’, ‘activists’ and ‘reflexive’ professionals (Codd, 1994; Peeters, & Vandebroek, 2011; Sachs, 2003; Urban, 2012) seem to have been redefined. Rather, early childhood teachers seem now to be expected to be compliant, ‘skilled technicians’ obeying pre-set policies and procedures (Adams, Vossel, & Scrivens, 2005; Codd, 1994, 2008), and “economically savvy” professionals (Gibson et al., 2015, p. 329) capable of doing more with less. These images of the compliant, ‘skilled technicians’ and ‘economically savvy’ teachers fit comfortably with the construction of entrepreneurial teachers, while the qualities of ‘activist’, ‘autonomous’, ‘reflexive’ teachers underpin the construction of activist teacher identities.

Given the dominance of neo-liberal discourses in ECEC, one may assume that professionalism and professional identities are mainly shaped by enterprise culture and managerial dictatorship. It may also be expected that the corporatised ECEC

environment most likely favours compliant employees over activist teaching professionals, capable of moving beyond the neo-liberal emphases and choosing deliberately to promote democratic practices.

Nonetheless, it is important to highlight that the entrepreneurial teacher identities are not, and must not be seen as, the only identities emerging in a neo-liberal ECEC context. As Sachs (2001, 2003) argues, teachers need to actively choose which discourses they will subscribe to in a particular context and time. The tensions among the emerging and existing discourses in ECEC thus need to be considered as an opportunity for re-thinking and reflecting where we are as educators, as people, and as a nation and what we want to be, and to critically examine whether we can reassert diversity and build new partnerships (Moss, 2010) for creating not only a more democratic ECEC, but a better world.

I now move on to illustrate some of the premises which lead to a democratic ECEC, and how the early childhood profession and professionals contribute to that.

### **Democratic ECEC and Activist Early Childhood Teaching Profession**

In a time of neo-liberal emphases, imposing “a dictatorship with no alternatives” (Moss, 2010, p. 13) on educators and education, building and strengthening ECEC on democratic politics is of paramount importance. Here, the meaning of politics extends beyond governments and political parties, and includes “the macro-politics, concerning the daily experience of ordinary life”, “wider questions of resource allocation” and “the self-determination of communities” (Kenny, 2004, p. 74). Democratic politics in ECEC implies a range of commitments of multiple stakeholders (e.g. the state, teachers, communities, families, children) to one another, including particularly a commitment to creating together a more democratic, more plural, more just, and less unequal world.

The democratisation project in ECEC springs from the recognition that institutional spaces of children and childhoods are “always inherently political” and inevitably encounter “existing political realities” (Millei & Kallio, 2018, p. 32), of which neoliberalism is one among many others. On this premise, all stakeholders involved in an ECEC setting, adults and children, are equally political beings – active players in the ‘mundane’/everyday (Millei & Kallio, 2018) democratic politics of the ECEC setting and beyond, with a capacity to act based on their personal experiences, aspirations and purposeful agencies. The agendas they all bring to the ECEC

setting, although rarely composing the entire world of politics, are an important part of political pedagogies and practices in that centre. For the purpose of my study, I, however, focus specifically on teachers and their role as political beings in re-establishing democratic politics and practices in ECEC.

Within the framework of democratic politics, the purpose of education and roles of educators need to be considered as part of a wider and complex societal context. To initiate social change, education must therefore be associated with other discourses and movements which are embedded in the basic values of democracy, social justice, diversity and sustainability (Moss, 2010). Seen through this lens, ECEC settings, like other educational institutions, are social sites, “expressing the community’s responsibility to its children [and adults], and both a public space where citizens encounter each other and a collaborative workshop where many possibilities and projects are created through dialogue and collective choices” (Moss, 2010, p. 15).

Accordingly, democratic ECEC is grounded in the ethics of care and encounter, requiring decision-making that is grounded in a specific context, responsibility, and a commitment to ‘the Other whom I cannot grasp’ (Dahlberg, 2003, pp. 270–272). It also reconciled to the understanding that knowledge is always partial and provisional. Unlike managerial discourses, which require teachers to apply the same formulae regardless of context and content, democratic ECEC necessitates teachers to hear and include a diversity of stories in their work, and be open to new knowledge and experimentation (Dahlberg et al., 2013; Moss, 2015).

As a result, the conception of democratic education makes possible multiple ways of being a child (e.g. a social agent, a co-creator of knowledge), a teacher (e.g. learners, educators, political beings), and of thinking of ECEC (e.g. a democratic site for all citizens) (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). Moreover, by allowing and embracing such alternative modes of being and thinking, ECEC becomes a place in which ‘minor’ democratic politics flourish, and the capacity for building democratic politics in society is promoted (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005).

However, in a time of growing enterprise emphases which favour performativity and economic viability in education, undertaking a democratisation project in ECEC may be a highly challenging task for teachers and the ECEC environment. It requires determination and the capacity to choose consciously between conflicting alternatives, and taking responsibility for the choices made, instead of delegating it

to ‘experts’ from outside the field (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg et al., 2013). As many have argued (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; L. Miller, 2008; Oberhuemer, 2008; Woodrow, 2011), a democratisation project in ECEC should be grounded in an effective resistance which interrupts the fluency of prevailing discourses, and avoids the risk of replacing one dominant discourse with another.

That effective resistance requires teachers to critically examine available discourses (e.g. neoliberalism, marketisation, democracy) and envision alternatives, showing that “it is possible to think and act differently” and that “the dominant discourse is *a choice, not a necessity*” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 134, emphasis added). To deliberately resist dominant discourses, it is argued that teachers must re-position themselves as leaders rather than observers (Goffin & Washington, 2007), and as activists rather than advocates (Sumsion, 2006); and from the new positioning to start actively shaping the future of ECEC as an enterprise.

The repositioning of teachers requires a move beyond speaking on behalf of others and oneself from the existing political, social, and economic frames to resisting and challenging the assumptions which underpin those frames (Kenny, 2004; Sumsion, 2006). Such a repositioning is fundamentally concerned with individual and collective control, recognition, participation and problem-solving-oriented actions (Fasoli, Scrivens, & Woodrow, 2007; Groundwater-Smith & Sachs, 2002; Kenny, 2004); and together these will enable a strong leadership and activism to develop in ECEC.

In this sense, a strong leadership and activism are established on shared and collaborative experiences and actions, which are built through active engagement of all stakeholders in everyday practice of ECEC, going across the boundaries of professional, parent and community (Fasoli et al., 2007; Woodrow & Busch, 2008). Furthermore, the strong, activist-oriented and community-based leadership model is considered to be a foundation for robust identities and the teacher-as-activist early childhood teaching profession (Goffin & Washington, 2007; Sachs, 2003; Woodrow, 2007; Woodrow & Busch, 2008), capable of critically examining and resisting dominant discourses.

The notion of an activist teaching profession is established in a resistance-based professionalism (Fenech et al., 2010) which is rooted in the transformative professionalism (Sachs, 2003) discussed earlier. The resistance-based professionalism requires teachers’ critical engagement with discourses that may

hinder their ethical decision-making and agency to reject taken-for-granted assumptions. A key aspect of such a professionalism is the “ethics of resistance” that is driven by teachers’ deliberate commitment to a “displacement and transformation from within” of what they think, believe and do as being “correct” and “right” (Lenz-Taguchi, 2008, p. 272). Resistance-based professionalism views teachers as ethically obliged to continually re-examine and challenge prevailing discourses, allow new understandings of themselves and other stakeholder, and make conscious choices for ethical practice (Lenz-Taguchi, 2008).

By bringing discourses of leadership, resistance and activism to ECEC, the establishment of an activist early childhood profession has the potential to establish a strong platform for teachers to reveal, challenge and disrupt discourses that shape their living and working realities, inform their decision-making, and construct their professional identities. It would also support teachers’ participation in creating and allowing alternative discourses in their workplace, and uphold its democratic politics and practices. Importantly, strengthening an activist early childhood profession and professionals makes it possible to increase individual and collective consciousness in the field of our moral obligation to insist upon the right to create and participate in democratically governed workplaces (Groundwater-Smith & Sachs, 2002). By doing so, we can go beyond “the personal and individual ‘profit’ into the realm of the public good” (Woodrow, 2008, p. 278), and start favouring children’s well-being, democratic politics and practices, and the building of communities.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I positioned my study within a framework of poststructural discursive studies, and drew on theoretical ideas of feminist poststructuralists in defining the central phenomenon studied – teachers’ professional identities. I explained three out of the four reference points which constitute the conceptual and theoretical framework for this research: discourse, teachers’ professional identities, and professionalism. To contribute to theoretical knowledge about the fluid and evolving nature of teachers’ professional identities, I will continue to use this theoretical and conceptual framework to examine teachers’ professional identities as constructed through shifting and often inconsistent early childhood discourses which drive policies, institutional practices, teachers’ professionalism and the

teaching profession in a specific context and time of ECEC.

By reflecting on changing trends in the national and international arena of ECEC, in Chapter 2 I discussed two prevailing discourses of professionalism - democratic (occupational) and managerial (organisational), which give rise to two identity constructions – the entrepreneurial and the activist teacher. Drawing on these two discourses of professionalism and identity constructions on offer in the literature, I intend to explore discourses of professionalism and teachers' professional identities that have been constructed during the two decades of intensive policy reforms in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC policies and practices. While these discourses of professionalism and identity constructions contradict and confront one another, my argument is that they may co-exist simultaneously in teachers' work, with a strong potential to either strengthen or constrain the development of the activist teaching profession and the view of ECEC as a democratic place for all citizens.

## **CHAPTER 3: THE CONTEXT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND**

In Chapter 3, I move from the global trends and perspectives of early childhood education and care (ECEC) and teachers to the local context of the ECEC system in Aotearoa New Zealand. I offer an overview of the ECEC sector and shifts in policy directions, focusing on the period from the introduction of the first New Zealand ECEC curriculum in 1996 to the end of 2016, when my data collection was completed. Taken as a whole, the context of the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC was considered as setting a foundation for the understanding of and inquiry into the main phenomenon under investigation - constructions of teachers' professional identities.

### **Integration of Early Childhood Services and Increasing Support to the Sector in the Late 1980s/the Early 1990s**

Prior to 1986, the funding and administration of ECSs in Aotearoa New Zealand was split among the Departments of Education (which from 1989 became the Ministry of Education), Social Welfare, and Māori Affairs (Ministry of Education, 1998). In 1986, the administration of childcare moved from the Department of Social Welfare, and all ECSs became integrated under the administrative umbrella of the Department of Education.

The integration of ECSs meant that government funding for staffing and operations transferred from the government's Social Welfare budget to the Education budget (Meade & Podmore, 2010). The integration also required, for the first time, the Department of Education to take responsibility for developing policy inclusive of education *and* care and across community and privately-owned services (May & Mitchell, 2009).

In addition, a deep historical division between kindergartens and ECE centres, and their staffing, funding and regulation, was supposed to narrow with the integration of ECSs. To this end, a significant achievement was the establishment of three-year unified early childhood teacher training in 1988, which was comparable to the primary teaching qualification (May, 2009). This replaced a separated two-year training of kindergarten teachers and one-year childcare courses of teachers in ECE centres (May, 2007).



Outside of the government initiatives, the ECEC sector integration was further strengthened after the Kindergarten Teachers Association (KTA) and the Early Childhood Workers Union (ECWU) amalgamated. They formed the Combined Early Childhood Union of Aotearoa (CECUA), which presented an industrial union for teachers over the whole ECEC sector and advocated for the betterment of teachers in all ECSs (May, 2007, 2009; May & Bethell, 2017). Yet, the existing inequality across the ECEC sector and with the school sector could not be removed entirely (CECUA, 1993). ECSs still received different levels of subsidy from the Government, with kindergartens notably getting the most per child (Meade & Podmore, 2010).

In 1988, the report *Education to be More* (known as “The Meade Report”) advocated for high quality state funded ECSs, which were “equally accessible for all families at a price they can afford” (Working group, 1988, p. vii), and also advocated to address issues around the public perceptions of childcare “based on the view that a woman’s place was in the home” (p. 11). Public response to the report was invited and the government (at that time the Labour Government) released its policy reform report *Before Five* (Lange, 1988).

Under the *Before Five* reform, the government proposed an integrated framework “at all levels of education”, and promised that “the early childhood sector will have *equal status* with other education sectors” (Lange, 1988, p. 2). By 1989, when the *Before Five* policy was enacted, the government’s interests and roles in early childhood were embedded. The government’s commitment to ensuing funding equity was reflected in a 125 percent rise in funding to ECSs in 1990, to be phased in over a period of three years (Wells, 1999).

However, the new bulk grant mechanism, based on the number and ages of children enrolled, was criticised for being a highly competitive mechanism (Mitchell, 2005) that did not consider individual needs and costs of ECSs. As Mitchell (2005) argued, bulk funding made it more possible for the government to remove itself from responsibility for paying the cost of teacher salaries – the major cost in teacher-led early childhood provision. Such a system foreshadowed that government aimed to be “a purchaser of education” rather than its “provider” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 182).

The state’s increasing investment in the ECEC sector during the late 1980s and the early 1990s, however, attracted the attention of economists aiming to decrease the

state's role in public services, which was seen as a major drain on government finances. According to the Treasury (1987, p. 56), education and care of the very young should be “universally seen as primarily the responsibility of parents”, and on this basis government provision to ECEC should be “partial”. New policy directives of the 1990s justified Dalli’s (1994) observation that “the [sector's] optimism was short lived”, and the gains achieved in the sector would become “swiftly undermined” (pp. 225–226). The following sections will outline a shift from the increasingly supportive state’s approach, during the late 1980s and the early 1990s, to a minimal, targeted state support of the next decade.

### **Towards a Minimal State’s Support and Privatisation of ECEC in the 1990s**

An ideology based on neo-liberal or ‘New Right’ ideas became internationally influential during the mid to late 1980s. Accepting the view that the free market is “a superior ... mechanism for the distribution of scarce public resources” (Marshall, 2000, p. 191), the neo-liberal perspective advocated for private services, rather than state ones. It was believed that a competitive atmosphere among the services would enable the more efficient, responsive services to succeed in a market, and the inefficient, non-responsive services to fail.

When applied in the ECEC sector, neo-liberal theory implied that the state should not have full responsibility to regulate and financially support ECSs, and that private and community providers should take on that role (The Treasury, 1984, 1987). Given the framing of ECSs, children became positioned as a personal responsibility of their parents, while parents were consumers of the ECEC commodity. According to the neo-liberal ideals, the philosophy of individualism, competition and free market became main discourses guiding ECEC, and dictating its standards (Davison & Mitchell, 2008; Te One, 2013)

Amongst the major legislative and policy vehicles used to introduce the process of privatisation of the educational sector were the education reviews set up by the Economic and Social Initiative of the newly elected National Government in 1990 (Lauder, 1991). These educational reviews were designed to reduce state expenditure on education and to shape the educational sector according to market principles, leading eventually to its privatisation (Lauder, 1991). The responsibility of the state to the sector was set to become decentralised, and the power in decision

making was assumed to remain in education institutions (Codd, Gordon, & Harker, 1990). However, unlike the school sector, ECEC was not required to have parent and community representation in its decision-making structure, which made it easier for private individuals and businesses to operate in this sector without accountability to their community.

The education reviews in ECEC were concerned with aspects of property of ECSs, (e.g. health, safety, outside space), staffing (e.g. ratio, qualifications), funding, and the Early Childhood Development Unit (Lauder, 1991). The outcomes of the reviews were used as a preparation by the National Government for the Budget 1991.

However, the Budget 1991 was highly detrimental to ECSs and teachers. The government funding in centres for under two-year-olds was reduced, the adult-child ratio worsened and registration of kindergarten teachers ceased to be compulsory (Meade & Dalli, 1992). Moreover, kindergarten salary bulk funding was introduced to start in 1992, aiming to bring kindergartens' funding into line with other less funded ECSs (L. Smith, 1991). In addition, funding for advisory support programmes delivered by the Early Childhood Development Unit became contestable (Meade & Dalli, 1992).

The severe budget cuts and the lowered qualification requirements introduced by Budget 1991 sent a clear message that ECEC was not high on the National Government's agenda. Moreover, it implied that the quality of ECEC and the professional qualification of its teachers was of little value. The National Government thus foreshadowed that its future policy directives would be based rather on principles of individualism than on the collective or public approach to ECEC (Wells, 1999). Instead of supporting the processes of education through setting high standards for staffing, tagging funding for particular spending purposes (such as teacher pay), and demanding financial accountability, the government left spending decisions to individual providers. In addition, the previously supportive state approach which had ensured the universal funding of ECSs thus shifted to a targeted approach, giving a greater priority to funding of low-income families in paid employment or training through a social welfare subsidy.

## **Eroding Impacts of the 1990s Policy Shift**

As noted above, the social and economic reforms of the 1990s arose out of Treasury's long-term aim to downsize the state's support of the ECEC sector, and to establish a form of full self-management which would allow its privatisation. The outcomes of these reforms for ECSs and teachers were severe. Instead of taking all ECSs up to the funding level of kindergartens, as advocated in *Before Five* (1988), the 1990s policy directives deviated towards taking kindergarten funding down to the level of other underfunded ECSs. As a result, the country's kindergartens were about to face some of the most significant challenges in their history (Dalli, 1994).

### **Policy impacts on kindergartens**

Before the restrictive policy directives of the 1990s, kindergarten was considered 'the flagship of government support' for the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC (Wylie, 1992, 1993). Distinctive characteristics differentiated kindergartens from other ECSs, and in return secured the Government's responsibility for this service type. These criteria included: the separation of teacher salaries from the service operational funding; compulsory teachers' registration; and the centrally negotiated national award system (Dalli, 1994).

Kindergarten teachers were covered by the *State Sector Act 1988* and were subject to the state sector regulations and conditions of employment. Their salary was determined by the collective employment agreement and was paid directly by the Government. By 1990, as Wylie (1993) reported, the Labour Government had allocated funding for covering over 80 percent of building costs (with a limit, not met after 1989, of six new kindergartens a year), free building sites (until 1990), actual teacher salaries and a national career structure. Some support was also provided for the national network of employing associations (then New Zealand Free Kindergarten Union Inc.), and a national system of professional support through senior teachers (later dispersed to associations) (Wylie, 1993). Overall by 1990, kindergartens were established as a reasonably uniform, nationwide free service with parents being asked to make voluntary donations according to their ability, without any expectation to pay fixed fees (Wylie, 1992).

However, in the early 1990s, the government relinquished responsibility for negotiating and paying teacher salaries and removed the regulation forbidding

kindergartens from charging fees, thus opening the door for fee charging (Davison, 1997, p. 199; Davison & Mitchell, 2008). Kindergarten associations became responsible for managing large amounts of funding that were however insufficient to cover costs (Wylie, 1992, 1993). Failing to resist the neo-liberal agenda, four of the largest kindergartens associations (the Auckland, Waikato, Wellington and Central North Island) separated from the New Zealand Free Kindergarten Union (NZFKU), and the national body of kindergarten associations became divided (Dalli, 1994; Davison, 1997; Mitchell & Wells, 1997).

Overall the bulk funding was leading to the transformation of kindergartens to a private model of childcare, which would eventually become less reliant on the state's funding, and as such better suited the neo-liberal agenda of the sector's privatisation. By fostering "user-pays policies" and "private gain tenets", the Government aimed to "avoid over-professionalisation" of the sector, and to encourage "alternative providers" to take responsibility for ECEC in general (Davison, 1998, p. 156).

Bulk funding became one of the most powerful mechanisms that the state used to lower its involvement in the sector. By transferring its responsibilities to associations, the state slowly released itself from setting working conditions and paying kindergarten teachers. Given the context, the state was well on the way to accomplishing its long-term plan to create a 'self-managed' ECEC sector.

### *The advocacy and struggle in the 1990s*

The 1995 Budget was not promising, and led to a minimal increase in kindergarten funding (NZEI, 1995). Consequently, a combined national campaign was launched in 1995 by New Zealand Institute of Education (NZEI) Te Riu Roa, which had amalgamated with CECUA to become a major education union covering primary and ECEC teachers and school support staff (Davison, 1997; May & Bethell, 2017). Over one year, the campaign wrestled with the inadequate funding and the privatisation of the sector. The NZEI advocated for a free, accessible and high quality ECEC for all children. The aim was to ensure a fair settlement of the collective employment contract of teachers in both kindergartens and ECE centres, and to move ECEC to a unified teaching pay-scale and parity with primary teachers (Mitchell & Wells, 1997).

After 1995, and after heated debates and accusations between the Government and

the union activists (Ministry of Education, 1995; Mitchell, 1996) due to the political climate<sup>1</sup> and the pressure from a 17 month public campaign by kindergarten teachers and kindergarten employers, the government announced an improved funding offer for kindergartens and for kindergarten teachers' pay. Although not perfect, the offered 'betterment' was significant for the union to agree to settle the employment contract and the Government to ensure more votes from the public (Duncan & Rowe, 1997; Mitchell & Wells, 1997). It also raised hopes that kindergartens might once again become the 'flagship' of the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC.

In a backlash against the successful campaign in 1997, the Government invoked urgency procedures of Standing Orders, and announced that "the *State Sector Act 1988* [...] no longer applies to kindergarten associations or their employees" (New Zealand Government, 1997, p. 1). The *State Sector Amendment Act 1997* was not subject to a normal process of Select Committee scrutiny and became law immediately. In this way, the state released itself immediately from its responsibility to negotiate and fund kindergarten teachers' salaries. Instead, teachers' salaries were to be negotiated directly between kindergarten associations and NZEI, without support from the State Services Commission.

Taken as a whole, then, the 1990s showed the state's firm determination to start an ideological shift from a democratic ECEC, financially supported by the state as the universal right of a child, to ECEC as a commodity which is sold to customers (parents and caregivers) by individual enterprises. As time was to confirm, the state's investments in public sectors would be downsized, while individual employing enterprises would be encouraged.

### **Policy impacts on education and care centres (Childcare)**

Unlike kindergartens, ECE centres were always seen as "a purely private sector operation" (Wells, 1991, p. 119), and not of government interest in terms of policy, funding and mainstream training (May, 2007, 2009). As legislation, regulation and policy requirements were variously interpreted by multiple providers of ECE

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<sup>1</sup> It was the year of the first MMP (Mixed Member Proportional) election for New Zealand, and the media, politicians and opposition MPs began to pay more attention to the funding campaign and the employment campaign, calling for the 'women's work' to be adequately funded and recognised (Duncan & Rowe, 1997; May, 2009).

centres, different employment conditions and a range of qualifications were in play. The status of teachers in ECE centres was, and still is, lower than the status of kindergarten teachers. While fully qualified staff in kindergartens were called ‘teachers’ by the public, staff in ECE centres were usually termed ‘workers’.

The 1986 integration of childcare within the Department of Education was not sufficient to position ECE centres and ECE teachers on an equal footing with kindergartens, and the rest of the education sector. Unlike kindergarten teachers, who were state servants under *the State Sector Act 1988*, there was not substantive state funding for ECE centres and ‘childcare workers’. With staff having only one year’s training at that time, the division between kindergartens and ECE centres remained.

Moreover, the position of teachers and quality in ECE centres worsened with the Budget 1991 cuts to funding to centres for under two-year-olds (Mitchell & Wells, 1997). This resulted in the closure of some centres, and staff redundancies, with many ‘childcare educators’ falling out of contract coverage because their individual employers refused to negotiate salaries (Mitchell & Wells, 1997).

The existing difficulties were further fuelled by growing concerns about the quality of ECSs, the outcomes for children, and the discrepancy in staff qualifications and status across the sector. These concerns have been addressed elsewhere by researchers, advocates and policy makers (Early Childhood Education Project, 1996; Hendricks, Meade, & Wylie, 1993; Mitchell, 1996; Podmore, 1993, 1994; Podmore & Craig, 1991; A. Smith, 1996; Wylie, 1994).

In 1993, Ministry of Education staffing returns showed that 97.9 percent of kindergarten teachers were qualified, mainly with the Diploma of Teaching (ECE), while only 30 percent of ‘workers’ in ECE centres held that Diploma or an equivalent, and 50.5 percent had 100 licensing points (acquired from an assortment of courses that did not represent a coherent qualification), or no qualification (Ministry of Education, 1994). Given such discrepancies, the gap between kindergartens and ECE centres increased, with the lower status of ECE ‘workers’ in the educational sector and society being reinforced. As argued elsewhere, the ‘work’ of women in ‘childcare’ was typically perceived as ‘minding’, ‘working’ and ‘caring’, rather than ‘teaching’ (Duncan, 1996; Duncan & Rowe, 1997; May, 2007).

Taken as a whole, the status of the whole ECEC sector, which was almost entirely

staffed by women, was causing concern. The Ministry of Education observed:

[t]he concern with these teachers is not their low status relative to male early childhood teachers but low status of early childhood teachers as a whole compared with teachers in other sectors and with similar qualified employees in other sectors of the economy. (Cited in Slyfield, 1992, p. 13)

Interestingly, at the same time as the quality of ECEC and its benefit for children and the status and qualifications of its teachers were under serious scrutiny, the Government heralded the development of its first national early childhood curriculum. A ‘new’ era in ECEC, which I discuss next, was about to start.

### **Beginning of a ‘Golden Era’ in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC**

The ‘new’ era in ECEC spanned the period from 1996 to the first decade of the 2000s. It marked a shift towards a supportive state approach to ECEC and teachers, leading to the sector’s professionalisation and quality practice in teacher-led services. The new era also witnessed some of the most influential events in the New Zealand ECEC policies and practice – the introduction of the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework *Te Whāriki* (1996), and the development of *Pathways to the Future- Ngā Huarahi Arataki* (2002), the first 10-year strategic plan for ECEC. In the following sections, I explain the major consequences of these events for teachers and the sector.

#### **Development of Early Childhood Curriculum Framework *Te Whāriki* (1996)**

Alongside the reforms in ECEC during the late 1980s and early 1990s, a process of curriculum reform began. Implementation of *Before Five* (1988) reforms raised a new debate concerning the quality, philosophy and principles of ECSs, and the status of ECEC in relation to other levels of education (Lange, 1988). The need for common philosophical principles underpinning high quality ECEC practice across diverse services became clear (Carr & May, 1993).

In 1988, the Department of Education engaged sector representatives in a series of discussions at Lopdell House in Auckland to help frame its policy initiatives (May, 2009). The 1988 Lopdell Curriculum Statement identified 15 basic curriculum principles, which were subsequently reflected in the strands of *Te Whāriki*, and the



following definition of curriculum as “the sum total of the child’s direct and indirect learning experiences” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 10).

The Government planned to develop an early childhood curriculum framework parallel to the New Zealand primary and secondary school curricula (Ministry of Education, 1991). This, however, increased concerns across ECEC organisations and the sector that the primary school curriculum might diffuse through the early childhood curriculum, affecting its concept of childhood and programmes (Carr & May, 1993; Nuttall, 2013). Given this anxiety, it was seen as imperative to develop a curriculum specifically for ECEC which would protect the interests of children before they started primary school, and to acknowledge its difference from the primary school curriculum (Carr & May, 2000). By creating its own curriculum while also establishing its clear links with school, it was believed that ECEC could acquire additional strengths and improve its professional status in the educational sector (Te One, 2013).

The development of the early childhood curriculum spanned the period from 1991 to 1996. After an extensive consultation process with diverse groups from the sector, a draft of the curriculum document was published in 1993, entitled *Te Whāriki: Draft guidelines for developmentally appropriate programmes in early childhood services* (Ministry of Education, 1993b). The final curriculum framework was published three years later in 1996, and was entitled *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Matauranga Mo Nga Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood Curriculum* (1996). (I refer to this document as *Te Whāriki*.) *Te Whāriki* was developed jointly by the respected academics Margaret Carr and Helen May in partnership with Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust, which appointed Tilly Reedy and Tamati Reedy as Māori lead writers, of the Māori immersion curriculum for kōhanga reo.

Crucial to the development of *Te Whāriki* (1996) was the use of a collaborative and consultative approach. The curriculum aimed to satisfy the interests of the Government in an efficient and competitive economy and of families and community, and to meet diverse cultural perspectives and national and international views (Carr & May, 2000). Furthermore, it aspired to provide links between the diverse teacher- and whānau/parent-led ECSs and their staff.

Moreover, *Te Whāriki* promoted equitable educational opportunities for all children, and high quality ECEC policies and practices (Carr & May, 2000). It strongly advocated for quality ECEC grounded in holistic learning, development

and care, democratic education as the universal right of a child, and the engagement and contribution of each member of the learning community (that is, the children, families/whānau, ECEC staff, community, and all others associated with ECSs). In the sections following, I outline general principles, strands, and aspirations underpinning *Te Whāriki*. I also explain its national and international significance.

### *Curriculum principles, strands and aspirations*

The curriculum framework used a metaphor, *whāriki*, meaning “a mat for all to stand on” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 11). With its broad collaborative approach, inclusive of all diversity, *Te Whāriki* (1996) became a key means for embracing the diverse ECSs, pedagogical and cultural perspectives. It clearly articulated a philosophy of high quality ECEC which is inclusive of care and education for children from birth to school age (Carr & May, 2000; May, 2007, 2009).

The core of *Te Whāriki* (1996), and its foundation for quality ECEC, was outlined through curriculum principles and strands, which were expressed in both the Maori and English languages. The principles and strands were not, however an exact translation of the other, but complementary domains, which acceptable cross-cultural structure and equivalence were discussed and transacted early in the curriculum development process (Carr & May, 2000).

The curriculum’s principles are:

- Empowerment – *Whakamana*. The early childhood curriculum “empowers the child to learn and grow”;
- Holistic development – *Kotahitanga*. The early childhood curriculum “reflects the holistic way children learn and grow”;
- Family and community – *Whānau tangata*. “The wider world of family and community is an integral part of the early childhood curriculum”;
- Relationships – *Ngā Hononga*. “Children learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places and things”. (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 14)

The curriculum strands arose from the principles, and set goals for essential areas of learning and development and care (Ministry of Education, 1996). The strands are all couched as domains of *mana* – the power that a child brings with them –and include:

- Well-being – *Mana Atua*, stating that “[t]he health and well-being of the child are protected and nurtured”;
- Belonging – *Mana Whenua*, requiring that “[c]hildren and their families feel a sense of belonging”;
- Contribution – *Mana Tangata*, advocating for “equitable” learning opportunities for each child and that “each child’s contribution is valued”;
- Communication – *Mana Reo*, emphasising that “[t]he language and symbols of [children’s] own and other cultures are promoted and protected”;
- Exploration – *Mana Aoturoa*, promoting that “[t]he child learns through active exploration of the environment” (Ministry of Education, 1996, pp. 15–16).

Furthermore, the curriculum principles and strands support a broad aspirational vision of *Te Whāriki* (1996) for children, childhood, and the purpose of ECEC. It envisions children as being able to “grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to the world” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9).

### ***International and national significance of Te Whāriki (1996)***

*Te Whāriki* (1996) is the first bicultural curriculum in the world. It has been presented internationally as a good example of a competency-based curriculum that is “learner-centred” rather than “teacher-directed” (McLachlan, 2011, p. 39). The curriculum was widely recognised as being innovative and open to diversity, with principles and strands clearly interconnecting diverse ECSs within an integrated system that covers children, families, whānau and communities (Moss, 2008).

*Te Whāriki* (1996) to a great extent promoted the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC worldwide as an advanced and competent system. With its comprehensive curriculum and integrated ECSs, the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC was referred to as “education-in-its-broadest-sense”, with learning and care interconnected with many other purposes beyond education (Moss, 2008, pp. 7–8). This made New Zealand a leader in ECEC innovation, and a “surprising exception” to the general picture of early childhood, as it successfully confronted the divided system and superiority of “technical practice” (Moss, 2008, p. 7).

At national level, for the first time, *Te Whāriki* (1996) demonstrated “what children

might do on a daily basis in early childhood centres” (May, 2007, p. 138). Very different from a traditional curriculum, *Te Whāriki* prioritised a holistic approach to learning and emphasised learning dispositions and working theories as learning outcomes (Nuttall, 2013). This meant that learning in ECEC focused not on discrete domains of knowledge but on a child’s attitudes, skills and competences which combine together to form a working theory, and help the child develop learning dispositions, as a foundation for life-long learning (Carr, 2001; Carr & Lee, 2012; Carr et al., 2010).

The curriculum’s holistic approach to learning and development had a significant impact on ECEC practice. With its indicative rather than definite outcomes (Ministry of Education, 1996), *Te Whāriki* asked teachers to take an adaptive rather than adoptive approach (Lee, Carr, Soutar, & Mitchell, 2013) and thus develop individual programmes with emphases from their specific ECEC context. Such ECEC programmes are deemed to be appropriately responsive to the specific needs and interests of children, parents and community.

However, given this flexibility, it has been argued that the open curriculum approach might limit opportunities for teachers and ECSs to rationalise pedagogical actions in their curriculum implementation (Hedges, 2013; Stephen, 2010). There has been also evidence that *Te Whāriki* (1996) was not easy for all ECSs to implement and evaluate (Cullen, 2003; McLachlan, Carvalho, Kumar, & de Lautour, 2006; Nuttall, 2003). One of the reasons for such difficulties were perhaps associated with budget cuts and constraints for teachers’ professional development, and the low qualification levels in some ECSs that preceded the curriculum implementation. Furthermore, some ECSs struggled to move from an inherited developmental psychology to fully implement the multiple theories and broad philosophical underpinning of *Te Whāriki* (Education Review Office, 2013). Therefore, to bridge the gap between the complex theoretical foundation of the curriculum and ECEC practice, support through teachers’ training and continual in-service-professional development was considered key for a successful implementation of *Te Whāriki* (Cullen, 2003; Hedges, 2013; Nuttall, 2013).

### **The first strategic plan for ECEC- *Pathways to the Future* (2002)**

In 1999, the Labour Government came to power and promised a strategic plan for ECEC. After 15 months of open consultation with representatives of ECEC

organisations, academics and parents, the Government developed the strategic plan for the sector, *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002). (I refer to this document as the Strategic Plan.)

The Strategic Plan was launched in 2002, and clearly stated the Government's vision of ECEC for the next decade (2002-2012). It focused on creating equitable opportunity for all New Zealand children “to participate in quality early childhood education, no matter their circumstances” (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 1). To achieve this, the Government committed to enhancing quality of the ECEC, increasing children's participation, and promoting collaborative relationships with and across the sector (Ministry of Education, 2002).

To improve quality, the Government set targets to increase the number of qualified teachers in ECE centres to 100 percent levels, matching those in kindergartens (Ministry of Education, 2002). A growing literature about the significance of teachers' education for the long-term positive outcomes for children and ECEC quality additionally convinced the Government to stay resolute in its decision (Burchinal, Roberts, Nabors, & Bryant, 1996; Burchinal et al., 1996; Podmore & Meade, 2000; A. Smith, 1996; Wylie, 1996).

The Government offered a more supportive funding and regulatory system for ECEC. The Diploma of Teaching (ECE) became the benchmark qualification for licensing (Ministry of Education, 2002). This qualification referred to a three-year diploma or undergraduate degree in teaching, approved by the New Zealand Teachers Council, a professional body for teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand (renamed the Education Council in 2015). All teachers in teacher-led services were expected to meet the same professional registration requirements as those that required in schools and kindergartens (Ministry of Education, 2002).

These professional standards were leading the sector towards development of a fully qualified ECEC teaching profession. The target for registered and qualified teachers was set at a minimum of 50 percent by 2007, 80 percent by 2010, and 100 percent by 2012 (Ministry of Education, 2002). Teacher registration in New Zealand is a public “assurance that a teacher is qualified, safe and competent” (Teachers Council, 2012, p. 2). To be fully registered, or in other words to be issued with a full practising certificate, a qualified teacher must have undertaken a period of induction and mentoring and met the *Practising Teacher Criteria* (replaced with *Code of Professional Responsibility and Standards for the Teaching Profession* in

2017), and thus have demonstrated the teaching service requirements specified in the Education Act 1989 (Education Council, 2016).

To support ECSs to achieve the registration and qualification target a new funding scheme was introduced. The funding scheme allowed ECSs with a higher proportion of registered teachers to receive more funding. Incentives in forms of mentoring, grants, scholarships, and other resources were available to support the teacher registration process (Ministry of Education, 2002).

Improvements across ECEC and professionalisation of its staff empowered the sector to compete equally with the school sector towards an equitable pay scale. In 2000, kindergarten teachers were returned to the *State Sector Act 1988* yet teachers in ECSs who were not covered by the *State Sector Act 1988* remained at their historically lower status. In 2002, a unified pay scale was negotiated, and kindergarten teachers finally achieved pay parity with school teachers (May, 2009). For the first time, society acknowledged that teaching in ECEC was as important as teaching in schools, and as such required qualified and equally paid teachers. As many commented, this was a crucial step towards the recognition of early childhood as a profession and its teachers as qualified teaching professionals (Dalli, 2008; May, 2007, 2009; Mitchell, 2005; Te One, 2013).

In 2007, the target of 50 percent of registered and qualified teachers in teacher-led services was reached, although not all ECE centres met the set professional standards (King, 2008). Based on this, it was forecasted that the 2010 target of 80 percent of qualified and registered teachers would be hard to achieve across all teacher-led services, so the date was extended to the end of 2012 (Meade et al., 2012). Taken as a whole, however, the findings of the *Locality-based Evaluation of the Pathways to the Future* (Mitchell, Meagher-Lundberg, Mara, Cubey, & Whitford, 2011), highlighted that, in combination, policy initiatives in the Strategic Plan (2002) had improved quality in ECSs and increased participation rates (Mitchell et al., 2011).

### **Improving quality of ECEC and professional capacity of teachers**

With the Strategic Plan (2002), the professionalisation of the workforce and quality of ECEC were again high on the Government's agenda. To this end, the Strategic Plan (2002) included supporting ECSs to effectively implement *Te Whāriki* (1996), with professional development programmes and research projects being funded by

the Government.

Through *the Centres of Innovation* (COI) programme and the *Teaching and Learning Research Initiative* (TLRI), ECSs got an opportunity to undertake research in their own setting in collaboration with researchers. In this way, teachers could engage in critical and reflective investigations, enhance their knowledge of a wider context, develop ‘models of excellent practice’, and share these across the sector (Meade, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009). In addition, the development of professional and pedagogical leadership in the teachers themselves and in their organisational culture was emphasised through *Educational Leadership Projects* (ELPs) (see Lee, 2008).

The Strategic Plan (2002) also supported the development of professional resources – *Kei Tua o te Pae. Assessments for learning: Early childhood exemplars. Book 1-20* (Ministry of Education, 2004b, 2005, 2007, 2009a), *Te Whatu Pōkeka: Kaupapa Māori Assessment for Learning* (2009c), and *Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua: Self-review Guidelines for Early Childhood Education* (Ministry of Education, 2008). Of particular interest for this study were two professional resources, the Assessment for Learning, Book 1-20 and the Self-review.

The Assessment for Learning (2004a, 2005, 2007, 2009a) included a series of 20 exemplar books promoting an innovative approach towards the assessment process in ECEC. The Assessment for Learning exemplars aimed to transform teachers’ accounts of assessment from checking to see whether children acquired “skills for school”, to establishing “learning places for children and to document the learning in them” (Carr, 2001, p. 1). The Self-review (2008) was created to help ECSs and teachers consider what high quality looks like and how their might evolve.

Both Assessment for Learning and the Self-review drew on the curriculum principles and strands and were not meant to be prescribed approaches of learning and assessment in ECEC. They were developed to create diverse opportunities for all members of the learning community to engage in a dialogue about teaching, learning, assessment and quality of ECEC practice in their individual ECSs, and then work jointly towards improvements (Ministry of Education, 2004a, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009a).

An evaluation of the implementation of the professional resources and the programmes for teachers’ professional development (COI, TLRI, ELPs) confirmed many positive impacts on ECEC quality (Education Review Office, 2009, 2010;

Gibbs & Poskitt, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2011; Stuart, Aitken, Gould, & Meade, 2008). Some of the benefits were that ECSs extended their collective practice, and expressed a strong commitment to development of a learning community, by engaging children, parents and local community in the process of assessment, teaching and learning (Stuart et al., 2008). Teaching practice significantly improved with teachers' quality models of assessment and in-depth reflective and critical reviews, with both learning environments and children's learning being enhanced (Education Review Office, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2011; Stuart et al., 2008). Furthermore, the evaluation of the implementation of the Strategic Plan also showed that uptake of opportunities arising from the policy initiatives (e.g. improved qualifications, professional development, usage of professional resources, involvement in COI) had very positive outcomes for teaching and learning strategies (such as, assessment, planning and self-review), teachers' understanding of *Te Whāriki* and relationships with parents.

Apart from the Strategic Plan, the various supportive policy initiatives, and the professional resources, there were also legislated documents, such as *Registered Teacher Criteria* (2010) and *Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008* (2013), which set standards and regulations for all licensed ECEC services and the registered workforce. The former document aimed to ensure the minimum professional standards for quality teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand. The latter document prescribed minimum standards for securing safe and healthy environment for children, a delivery of curriculum programmes for quality learning and development, and that staffing requirements were met.

While many benefits from the implemented initiatives were recognised, however, further developments in ECEC were necessitated. It was argued that the implementation of the professional programmes would not on its own ensure high quality of ECSs, learning, teaching and assessment if other factors were absent (Education Review Office, 2009). Moreover, it was highlighted that to establish and maintain quality practice ECSs needed to have experienced and knowledgeable leaders with effective leadership styles who did not focus only on managing day-to-day service activities but were capable of leading effectively the learning, teaching and assessment processes (Education Review Office, 2010).



The new millennium brought more investments in teachers' professional development and quality of ECEC provision. The recommendations for improvements from the evaluation reports looked achievable and well on track.

### **New Millennium and New Investments - Supportive State's Approach to ECEC Continues**

In comparison to the early 1990s, the policy directives to ECEC significantly changed during the first decade of the new millennium. From minimal state support, with limited funding, low-regulated staffing standards, and an increasingly market-driven approach, the state's approach to ECEC shifted significantly between 1999 and 2008. The Fifth Labour Government took an increasingly favourable approach to the sector, and during the implementation of the Strategic Plan (2002) the Government's expenditure on ECEC increased nearly fourfold (Ministry of Education, 2011b).

In 2005 a new funding system provided increases in funding to reflect cost increases accruing from the Strategic Plan (2002), to ensure that ECSs not pass the cost of quality improvements on to parents. There were two components to most funding rates: a basic component, reflecting standard operational costs for all ECSs (e.g. administration, utilities, educational resources); and a variable component, reflecting costs that differentiated between different service types. Accordingly, five quality funding bands were developed in teacher-led ECSs and were linked to the proportion of registered and qualified teachers (0-29%; 29-49%; 50-79%; 80-99%, 100%). The bands aimed to encourage ECSs to employ qualified registered teachers and meet their high pay rate (May, 2014; Mitchell, 2011, 2015).

In addition, the universal funding system included two targeted funding streams: a Childcare Subsidy, and Equity Funding. The Childcare Subsidy provided income-tested assistance to offset costs for eligible parents and was directly paid to ECSs (Ministry of Social Development, 2014). Equity Funding was available to community-owned chartered (licensed) ECSs that met one or more components of the set criteria (e.g. low socio-economic and isolated communities; children with special needs, etc.) (J. King, 2008; Mitchell & Meagher-Lundberg, 2017).

Equity Funding was intended to reduce educational disparities between various groups, support participation of under-represented groups in ECSs, and support ECSs to raise their level of educational achievement (Mitchell, Tangaere, Mara, &

Wylie, 2006a). In addition, a Discretionary Grant Scheme was intended to increase participation rates by providing capital assistance to eligible community-based ECSs in areas with low participation rates and estimated high population growth (J. King, 2008; Mitchell, 2015).

In 2007 the Labour Government introduced *20 Hours Free ECE* for three- and four-year-olds. By providing free-of-charge hours of early childhood education, the state strongly promoted ECEC as a universal right of a child. The policy initiative aimed to increase the participation rate by removing cost barriers to families and making ECEC more affordable. Parents could not be charged compulsory fees for the *20 Hours Free ECE* hours, but could be asked for voluntary donations and optional charges, neither of which were mandatory (Ministry of Education, 2016). ECSs had to decide on their involvement in *20 Hours Free ECE*.

The new funding system and increased investment in ECEC were also associated with longer operational hours of ECSs and enhanced access of three- and four-year-olds to ECEC. With the funding incentives offered by the *20 Hours Free ECE*, sessional services could increase or adjust their operation hours to better meet needs of parents who wanted more hours of ECEC. As a result, from 2005 to 2009, the enrolment of children substantially increased (Education Counts, 2009), and fees paid by households significantly fell from June 2007 to June 2008, implying improvements in the affordability of ECSs (Education Counts, 2014b).

Taken together, the shift towards increasingly supportive policy directives illustrated a meaningful transformation in both “fiscal priorities and in philosophical principles” (Te One, 2013, p. 21), while allowing the gap in the education sector to be “partially closed” (Te One, 2010, p. 6). As the political commentator, Colin James (2008, paras. 5–8), summed up, the state’s support to ECEC under the Labour-led coalition government

takes us into a deep zone of policy debate: on citizens’ access to participation in our economy and society. That debate is no longer just about the absence of legal administration impediments. It is about what constitutes genuine capacity to participate .... There is a moral argument that society as a whole should act to maximise access for its least connected citizens .... So early childhood education is investing in infrastructure, just like building roads. It is arguably Labour’s most important initiative, its biggest idea.

Soon after this, unfortunately, the ‘golden era’ of ECEC in Aotearoa New Zealand

came to an end. With the governmental change in 2008, things in ECEC were no longer as they had been from 1999 to 2008.

### **The End of the ‘Golden Era’ in ECEC – 2009 to 2016**

In 2008, the National-led government came to power. Faced with a worldwide economic recession and an unexpected deficit left by the previous Labour government (McLachlan, 2011), the new government introduced an entirely different approach to ECEC. A radical shift in policy directions in ECEC, followed by budget cuts and restraints, came immediately after the election.

Funding for COIs was cancelled. Grants for teachers’ training and professional development and the implementation of *Te Whāriki* and the Assessment for Learning were removed or stopped by the end of 2009 (May, 2014; Mitchell, 2011). The target of 100 percent registered teachers in teacher-led services was reduced to 80 percent, and the time-frame for reaching the new target extended to 2012.

In addition, the Budget 2010 announced that the extra funding for ECSs with fully qualified staff would be removed in 2011, meaning that those ECSs would be funded at the same rate as the ECSs with 80 percent qualified teachers (Meade et al., 2012; Mitchell, 2011). The only way for ECSs to keep 100 percent qualified teachers would be to increase fees to parents, which would lower the participation rate. This made it obvious that the future sustainability of ECSs with all qualified teachers would be difficult, if not impossible.

In 2011 the regulations for the existing maximum centre size of 50 children over two years and 25 children under one year were replaced, so that ECSs were allowed to operate with a maximum roll of 150 children and 75 children respectively (New Zealand Government, 2017). As the maximum centre size had been the only way of regulating the size of ECSs in New Zealand, by replacing this regulation there was no longer control over the numbers of children in individual groups (Dalli & Pairman, 2013).

By lowering service regulations, cutting support to ECSs with 100 percent fully qualified teachers and undermining the professionalisation of ECEC generally, the National Government’s approach to the sector wiped away the earlier initiatives for improving the quality of ECEC. While the New Zealand Childcare Association (NZCA) described the National Government’s cutbacks and restraints as a “brutal blow” which could affect more than 2000 teachers and 93,000 children”, the public

questioned “But did childcare centres ever need to be fully staffed by trained teachers?” (“Preschool budget cuts right move”, 2010a, paras. 6–11). In response, politicians from the one side argued that requiring fully qualified staff in ECSs was “a matter of personal belief” (“Young thrive with skilled teachers”, 2010b, para. 3). The Minister of Education, Anne Tolley, claimed that there was, anyway, no research evidence to prove that ECSs staffed with 100 percent qualified teachers were better than ECSs with 80 percent (A. Smith & May, 2018).

On the other side, the advocates for quality ECEC for *all* children claimed that having 100 percent qualified teachers makes a huge difference in the long run, leading to equitable and quality outcomes for *all* children (Carr & Mitchell, 2010). Moreover, NZCA undertook a small-scale research project (Meade et al., 2012) which demonstrated significant differences in child-staff interaction, learning and development between ECSs with 100 percent and those with 50-79 percent qualified teachers (Meade et al., 2012). The study highlighted that the positive effects in ECSs with 100 percent qualified teachers were a result of the “greater pedagogical expertise” of the teams, that were capable of linking theory and practice in planning their teaching, assessment and self-review, and in communicating with parents and whānau (Meade et al., 2012, p. 107).

Despite the claims for quality of ECEC for all children, the Government focused on increasing ECEC participation of ‘priority learners’ in ‘high needs’ communities with mainly Māori and Pasifika learners (May, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2011a; A. Smith & May, 2018). The Government justified its decision-making with the fact that despite the growth in funding over the last years, ‘priority learners’, who were supposed to benefit most, were still missing out on attending ECEC. Consequently, in the foreseeable future, the state “must more than ever [...] invest in the areas that will make the biggest difference to children and their families” (as cited in A. Smith & May, 2018, p. 543).

Eventually the state removed itself from supporting ECEC as a democratic right of all children. The policy directives promoting the universal approach to ECEC were pushed away by the state’s targeted approach to ECEC, which instead focused on ‘priority learners’ in ‘high need’, ‘vulnerable’ communities.

### **Targeting and interventionist approaches to ECEC**

In 2009 the National Government dropped the word ‘free’ from the *20 Hours Free*

*ECE* policy initiative, and announced that the subsidy, renamed *20 Hours ECE*, would not have an inflation adjustment (May, 2014). It was anticipated that that the freeze of the subsidy would make thousands of families pay more for ECEC, and leave two-thirds of ECSs with a reduction in funding (May, 2014).

The universal policies intended to enable “all children to participate in quality ECE” (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 1) had changed to approaches directed at increasing the participation of ‘priority’ learners, and supporting ECSs in ‘vulnerable’ communities. The *ECE Participation Programme* was introduced, targeting areas with a high percentage of children who had not attended ECEC before starting school. The programme included a package of six individual initiatives, encouraging families to enrol their children in ECSs.

Notably, one of these initiatives, *Targeted Assistance for Participation (TAP) Grants*, designed for the establishment of new ECSs and child spaces (Ministry of Education, 2012), replaced discretionary grants for capital works funding and were made available to both for-profit and not-for-profit ECSs (Mitchell, 2015, 2017). In this way, business owners were able to receive taxpayer funding for privately owned property as their own capital asset (Mitchell, Meagher-Lundberg, Arndt, & Kara, 2016; Mitchell, Meagher-Lundberg, Davison, Kara, & Kalavite, 2016).

The Government’s targeting of social and economic policy directives was strongly criticised, particularly after the *Green Paper on Vulnerable Children* (Ministry of Social Development, 2011) was released, raising questions about how the state could do better to protect ‘vulnerable’ children. The paper highlighted statistics of vulnerability in lives of children and youth (e.g. poverty, abuse, neglect, leaving school early), stigmatising “15 percent” of New Zealand children as “vulnerable” and being “at risk of not doing well” in the future (Ministry of Social Development, 2011, p. 1). In response to this, 80 key New Zealand organisations and child advocates submitted a collective briefing, arguing that “the best way to do better for vulnerable children is to do better for all children” (UNICEF NZ, 2012, p. 1). They urged the Government to keep the existing universal and free ECEC for *all* children, and rather focus on addressing issues that were causing the vulnerability in society (such as the globalised labour market, an unwieldy welfare system, inadequate housing).

However, submissions to the *Green Paper on Vulnerable Children* (2011) led to the *White Paper for Vulnerable Children, Vols. I and II* (Ministry of Social

Development, 2012). The *White Paper* proposed solutions for targeting and supporting the most ‘vulnerable’ children to access services they need, and included legislative changes, better information sharing among agencies, targeting ‘vulnerable’ children, tougher monitoring of abusers, screening of children workers, and local children’s teams (Ministry of Social Development, 2012). To implement aims set in the *White Paper*, *The Children’s Action Plan* (New Zealand Government, 2012) was developed, providing a framework with actions for identifying, supporting and protecting ‘vulnerable’ children. Among others, the actions included: the development of the children’s team model; bringing agencies to work together to meet needs of ‘vulnerable’ children; the introduction of the *Vulnerable Children Act 2014* (in the text, the Vulnerable Act); child protection policies; and minimum standards for competencies of those working with children across various sectors (i.e. children’s workers).

With the enactment of the Vulnerable Act, the education sector was obliged to ensure safety checking of all those working with children (i.e. children’s workers), and to have child protection policies in place (New Zealand Government, 2014). To ensure that the sector and children’s workers understood these requirements, the Ministry of Education released the *Vulnerable Children Act 2014: A practical guide for Early Childhood Education Services, Ngā Kōhanga Reo, Playgroups, Schools and Kura* (2014b). (I refer to this document as the VCA Guide). Both documents, the Vulnerable Act (2014) and the VCA Guide (2014b), are explored in more detail in Chapter 5.

To connect agencies working with ‘vulnerable’ children and families and improve the responsiveness of their public service, the Government also brought out the *Better Public Services Programme* (BPSP) (State Services Commission, 2013). In accordance with the second theme of the BPSP – Supporting Vulnerable Children – the Government aimed to increase ECEC participation, so that by 2016 98 percent of children starting school would have participated in quality ECSs (State Services Commission, 2013).

Over time, however, it became obvious that the state’s intention was to use ECSs primarily as a form of social intervention, targeting ‘priority learners’. This seems to imply that the term ‘priority learners’ was subsequently replaced with ‘vulnerable’ children. Based on this, an aim was to “target resources” for “vulnerable children who are currently not receiving sufficient support in

education”, and “do not attend ECE for a variety of reasons”, to give them “a strong platform for their compulsory school years” (Parata, 2012, paras. 8–10). Interestingly, the funding for the targeted children, families and communities was not placed on top of, but instead replaced universal ECEC subsidies (May, 2014). Unease about these targeting and interventionist policies increased after ECEC participation became a social obligation for beneficiaries with three and four-year-olds. In 2013, under the *Social Security (Benefit Categories and Work Focus) Amendment Act* beneficiaries became officially obliged to “take all reasonable steps” to enrol their children at recognised ECEC programmes, and ensure regular attendance (New Zealand Legislation, 2013, p. 36). Non-compliance of with these obligations could lead to reduction of their benefit payments of up to 50 percent (New Zealand Legislation, 2013).

In this way, the state confirmed its vision for ECEC as a way of forestalling social problems perceived as related to ‘vulnerable’ children and families. Moreover, the policy directives perpetuated the state’s movement away from a purpose for ECEC ensuring that all children, no matter their families’ circumstances, have a right as citizens to free education (May, 2014). By leaning towards targeting and interventionist strategies, the state missed an opportunity to reduce inequalities of access to ECEC and enable the participation of all children, no matter their socio-economic circumstances, in ECEC.

### **A story of the growing privatisation and marketisation in ECEC from 2009 to 2016**

The introduction of *20 Hours Free ECE*, subsequently changed into *20 Hours ECE*, resulted in a great expenditure on the private for-profit ECEC sector (Ritchie, 2008; Ritchie & Johnson, 2011). The Equity Funding was extended to private ECSs services in 2011, while the discretionary grants, supporting capital works of community-based services, were replaced with the TAP grants, and also made available to private ECSs (Ministry of Education, 2013). In this way, differentials in funding between for-profit and non-profit ECSs were entirely removed. Hence, as Linda Mitchell (2013) explained, Aotearoa New Zealand became one of the few countries where capital assets of the private sector are funded by taxpayers. Between 2007 and 2011 the private ECEC sector increased by 47 percent, while community-owned services grew by only 2.8 percent (Education Counts, 2012).

The number of kindergartens steadily declined over the same time period (Education Counts, 2018c).

The imbalance between privately-owned for-profit and community-owned, non-profit ECSs brought many challenges (May, 2014; Mitchell, 2017; Ritchie, Harvey, Kayes, & Smith, 2014; A. Smith & May, 2018). It has been argued that the model of market-based provision “has clearly not worked for New Zealand’s poorest and most vulnerable children” (Ritchie & Johnson, 2011, p. 153), and could not deliver equitable access to ECSs in low-income communities (Ritchie, 2008; Ritchie et al., 2014). There is also evidence of a notably lower percentage of qualified staff and worse working conditions in privately-owned services, all of which have impacted on quality outcomes of ECEC (Mitchell, 2002; Mitchell & Brooking, 2007; Mitchell et al., 2011; A. Smith, 1996).

The issues of equity, affordability and quality of ECEC have placed a question in the centre of policy debate: what is the purpose of ECEC and who should be responsible for providing it? Nonetheless, the state has continued to rely on market-led provision, while corporate, private, publicly listed companies have continued to thrive in the neoliberal environment (Mitchell, 2013, 2014, 2017).

Unfortunately, Aotearoa New Zealand has not been the only country where private providers are taking ownership of the ECEC sector. Similar trends are also dominant in the US, Canada, Australia and the UK where big companies listed on the stock market are able to obtain capital far beyond what is available to individual centres or even larger community providers to fund the expansion of ECEC (Blackburn, 2012; Lloyd, 2009; Meagher & Cortis, 2009; Newberry & Brennan, 2013; Woodrow & Press, 2017). While the problems associated with increasing market-led provision have been exemplified and addressed nationally and internationally, yet New Zealand has done nothing to take over ownership, downsize or exclude the private for-profit providers from the ECEC sector.

However, the participation rate has overall improved in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC, while the cost of using ECSs is still the main barrier for families (Mitchell, Meagher-Lundberg, Arndt, et al., 2016; Mitchell, Meagher-Lundberg, Davison, et al., 2016). It is still the case that the state must resolve the problems of affordability, which constitute the most significant factor impacting on participation (Cleveland, Krashinsky, Colley, & Avery-Nunez, 2016). Therefore, better mechanisms for regulating the private for-profit ECSs must be put in place, instead of allowing the



market to rule. Below, I describe a national project arguing that a fairer alternative for the early childhood provision in Aotearoa New Zealand was possible.

### **A possible solution: Towards a mutually supportive state and community ECEC provision**

To address the increasing discrepancy between the growth of state-provided and private for-profit ECSs, a coalition of representatives from nine early childhood organisations introduced the Quality Public Early Childhood Education (QPECE) project, presenting “a fairer alternative” for childcare provision (Mitchell, 2013, p. 107). The QPECE was grounded in the idea that each child as a citizen has the right to participate in free high quality ECEC, which is a public good, and therefore needs to be provided through a cooperation between Government, community, whānau and ECSs (May & Mitchell, 2009).

The QPECE project group required a move from the market approach, in which ECEC provision is an individual responsibility of an ECS, towards a partnership model, in which the Government and ECSs work together and build a solid network of provision in every community (May & Mitchell, 2009). The QPECE promoted a democratic approach in the decision-making process at local and national levels, enabling communities to equally participate, contributed and shaped the nature of the ECEC provision (Mitchell, 2013). This would develop new models of mutually supportive state and community ECEC provision committed to high quality community ECSs and responsive to children's lives in a wider context (Mitchell, 2013).

Although the QPECE project itself ended in 2009 with the publication of the report, the aspirations for public education were kept alive and promoted, particularly by NZEI and community groups. However, the state did not move away from market-led ECEC provision and a targeted approach to ECEC. Moreover, the state signalled that it was likely to continue to uphold a neo-liberal ideology and market philosophy (Mitchell, 2013). Such an intention was clearly seen in the policy directives removing the funding differentials between the non-profit and for-profit ECSs and focusing on targeted groups of children and communities (the ‘vulnerable’). The state had distanced itself from the vision of a democratic ECEC which the QPECE project aimed for. Even more, the state’s approach to ECEC, as it was from 2009

to 2016, implied that it would be very difficult to optimise the trade-off between affordability, participation, equity and quality of ECEC in the near future.

### **Changing Landscape of the ECEC Sector**

Over the period from 1996 to 2016, the landscape of the New Zealand ECEC sector notably changed. Changes included a growing number of licensed ECSs and increasing children's enrolment and attendance, and reflected significant structural, organisational and ideological changes in ECEC generally.

Based on participation criteria, Aotearoa New Zealand was ranked in the top third of OECD countries in 2013, with 96 percent of children starting school having attended ECEC (Education Counts, 2014a). The *20 Hours ECE* initiative particularly contributed to the boost of the enrolment rate (Education Counts, 2013). The 2017 ECEC census indicated the number of enrolments/attendances in ECEC continued to rise (Education Counts, 2018d).

As well as the participation boost, the number of ECE centres and the home-based services, was growing faster than the rest of the sector (Education Counts, 2018a). In 2017, ECE centres made up a majority of licensed services with 55.4 percent, with kindergartens representing only 14.1 of licensed ECSs (Education Counts, 2018a).

Besides structural and organisational changes, the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC underwent significant ideological shifts over the last two decades. The shifts presented a remarkable story of the sector's strong advocacy for quality and equitable ECEC for all children, and its progress and struggle in achieving legitimacy and recognition with the rest of the educational sector. The story also reflected the deep divide between country's left and right wing ideologies regarding the purpose of ECEC.

From offering universal funding for ECEC as a child's right, the state started moving towards rather targeted and interventionist approaches to ECEC, focusing on 'priority learners'/'vulnerable' children, families and communities deemed those most in need. Furthermore, by employing 'New right' principles in its decision-making, the state let the market guide the sector, eventually leading to privatisation and marketisation.

Overall the changing context of the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC has provided a strong foundation for constructions of teachers and teachers' professional identities.

Given the importance of the shifting policy landscape for this study, in Table 1 (pp. 72-75) I outline some of the most significant policy developments (i.e. policy ‘events’ and directives), which have driven the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC from the 1980s to 2016. The table summarises governments’ approaches, goals/agendas, funding models and professional requirements relating to ECSs and teachers. By illustrating the chronological shifts in ECEC, Table 1 provides a framework for the understanding of policy directives and the implications for their long-term impacts on the ECEC sector and profession generally, and teachers’ professional identities specifically.

**Table 1.** ECEC policies in Aotearoa New Zealand from the 1980s to 2016

Time framework	The 1980s	The 1990s		The 2000s	
	1986 -1989	1990-1995	1996-1999	2000-2008	2009-2016
Significant events	<p>The ECSs integrated within an education administration</p> <p>Three-year unified ECE training</p> <p><i>Education to be More</i> (1988) and <i>Before Five</i> (1988) advocating for equitable treatment of ECEC with the school sector</p> <p>Lopdell House course on development of curriculum framework</p>	<p>Economic and social initiative (1990) – Education reviews</p> <p>Budget cuts</p> <p>Development of Te Whāriki</p>	<p>Kindergartens removed from the <i>State Sector Act</i> 1988</p> <p><i>Te Whāriki</i> published</p>	<p>The Strategic Plan (2002)</p> <p>Pay parity between kindergarten and school teachers</p> <p>Qualified teacher requirements and incentives</p> <p>The professional resources published and associated professional development provided</p> <p>COI, TLRI, ELPs funded</p> <p>20 Hours Free ECE</p>	<p>Funding cut for professional development programmes</p> <p>Reduced funding for ECSs with all qualified teachers</p> <p>20 Hours Free ECE</p>

(continued)

(continued)

Time framework	The 1980s	The 1990s		The 2000s	
	1986 -1989	1990-1995	1996-1999	2000-2008	2009-2016
Policy agendas/ Goals	Quality ECSs, accessible and affordable for all families  All ECSs to be funded at the kindergartens' level	Neoliberal ideology intensified  Full self-management, deregulation and privatisation  Kindergarten taken down to the level of other ECSs	Increasing market approach  <i>Te Whāriki</i> to embrace and balance diverse perspectives and bring in quality practice	Better quality, increased participation, collaborative relationships  Towards a qualified ECEC profession	Increasing the participation of the 'priority learners'/'vulnerable' children
State's approach	Increasingly supportive	Minimal state support State 'buys' ECEC from ECSs	Minimal state approach	Increasingly supportive	Minimal state support Targeted and interventionist approaches  Conflicts between protecting quality and market-led interests

(continued)

(continued)

Time framework	The 1980s	The 1990s		The 2000s	
	1986 -1989	1990-1995	1996-1999	2000-2008	2009-2016
Funding model	Bulk grant funding Funding increased and planned	Targeted funding Focus on families in genuine need	Targeted funding	More supportive funding system More funding for ECSs with qualified teachers	More funding for the targeted groups
Professional standards	Minimum standards in ratios, qualified staff, type of qualifications (charter)	Lowered professional standards (teachers' registration, qualification, ratio)	Lowered professional standards remained	Improved staff qualification, ratios, registration requirements To reach 100 percent qualified teachers in teacher-led ECSs by 2012 Diploma of teaching (ECE) becomes the benchmark qualification for licensing	The target of 100 percent qualified teachers lowered to 80 percent

(continued)

(continued)

Time framework	The 1980s	The 1990s		The 2000s	
	1986 -1989	1990-1995	1996-1999	2000-2008	2009-2016
Evaluation of the shifts	The integrated system of care and education Increasingly supportive state role Market mechanisms applied	From increasing to minimal state approach From universal to targeted funding From collective sector's voices to individualism From more to fewer qualification requirements	<i>Te Whāriki</i> signals a shift towards the integration of the diverse ECSs	Better quality of ECEC, teachers' qualifications More funding Collaborative approach in policy developments	To minimal state support More private for-profit ECSs Targeted funding, ECEC for 'priority' groups
Ensuing issues	Discrepancies in ECSs funding, staffing, regulations, quality Competition among ECSs	Growing marketisation and privatisation Budget cutbacks Divided sector, the collectivism weakened Increased workloads, quality compromised	Continuing issues of marketisation, privatisation, funding	Participation and accessibility of services Mixed market mechanisms	Imbalance between non-profit and private-for profit ECSs Growing issues of affordability, participation, equity and quality

## Postscript - The Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC in 2017/2018

Since I completed my data collection in October 2016, the New Zealand ECEC has undergone many changes. Although the policy directives of 2017-2018 did not shape the phenomenon under my investigation, these are important pieces of the puzzle about the context of ECEC. Here, I outline ECEC policy developments over the two years since 2016, up to the shift from the right-leaning National Government to the left-leaning Labour Government.

Throughout 2017, the targeted and interventionist policy directives of the National Government continued to strengthen. In April 2017, the government agency Child Youth and Family (CYF), which held legal power to intervene to protect and help ‘vulnerable’ children, was replaced by a new Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki. Since the CYF had been criticised for intervening only once a child was exposed to dangerous situations, the new Ministry was set to plan for and take early actions to prevent avoidable tragedies (Tolley, 2016). The “new, dedicated child-centred Ministry” aimed to ensure “the safety and long-term well-being of our most at-risk children and young people” (Tolley, 2016, para. 13).

Interestingly, the announcement of the Ministry of Vulnerable Children was made just a few days after *the Guardian*, a British daily newspaper, published an article: “New Zealand's most shameful secret: ‘We have normalised child poverty’” (Roy, 2016). The article stated that “one-third of the country’s children, or 300,000, now live below the poverty line – 45,000 more than a year ago”, which provoked robust public debate (Roy, 2016, para. 12). While the daily news might be ‘sensationalist’, an earlier UNICEF (2012) report had also suggested that 30 percent of New Zealand children lived below the official poverty line<sup>2</sup>.

Given these disturbing statistics, the Social Development Minister Anne Tolley stated that:

[t]his new name [referring to the Ministry of Vulnerable Children] makes it crystal clear that it exists to support and protect vulnerable children. That is its only job. We cannot shy away from this. We can’t hide it ....we are determined to tackle this head on. (Tolley, 2016, paras. 33–37)

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<sup>2</sup> Child poverty rate indicates a percentage of children living in households with income lower than 50 percent of the national median income (UNICEF, 2012).



While the obviously serious problems inevitably reinforced the already established targeted and interventionist approaches to ECEC as a way of reducing child vulnerability, an existing body of research literature was arguing that such vulnerability could be reduced only by considering the whole environment a child lives in (Child Poverty Action Group, 2013; Gibb, Fergusson, & Horwood, 2012; Lievore & Mayhew, 2007; Perry, 2017). These studies suggested that the state needed to take an inclusive approach, and focus on redressing inequalities, improving incomes of families, providing sufficient resources for services assisting children and families with the ‘highest’ needs and creating safe environments for *all* children (Child Poverty Action Group, 2013). In this way, the state could also ensure that it fulfil its obligation under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) and the Treaty of Waitangi. Despite the growing evidence, though, there was no shift at a state level towards more inclusive approaches to help redress social hardship.

However, the government focused on updating *Te Whāriki* (1996), which has shaped early learning in New Zealand for the past 20 years. The new version of *Te Whāriki* (2017a) aimed to better reflect the 21<sup>st</sup> century context children living in, and align with contemporary ECEC policies and practices (Ministry of Education, 2017b). The updated curriculum has a stronger focus on bicultural practice, local priorities and interests, and as such promotes the importance of language, culture, and identity, and the inclusion of all children (Ministry of Education, 2017c). The implementation of the curriculum was supported through professional development programmes, a series of *Te Whāriki* webinars, and a portal, *Te Whāriki Online* (Ministry of Education, 2018b).

In addition to the curriculum update, a new code of professional responsibility and standards for the teaching profession, *Code of Professional Responsibility and Standards for the Teaching Profession* was released in June 2017, replacing the *Code of Ethics for Certified Teachers* (2004). The new document proposes high standards of ethical behaviour for all certified teachers and describes expectations of effective teaching practice (Education Council, 2017). The new codes and standards are grounded in the core values of the teaching profession – *whakamana*, *manaakitanga*, *pono* and *whanaungatanga* (see Glossary of Māori Terms), and the commitments to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the teaching profession, learners, families and whānau and society. Interestingly, the updated codes and standards seemed to stress

more than the previous code teachers' roles in protecting learners and "maximis[ing] learners' physical, social, cultural and emotional safety" (Education Council, 2017, p. 20), echoing the wording of the Vulnerable Act (New Zealand Government, 2014).

Targeted and interventionist policies in ECEC eventually started to weaken when the Sixth Labour Government came to power in October 2017. I now move on to describe the most recent policy improvements in the sector.

### **Towards a free and public education for all: Is a 'Golden Era' of ECEC back?**

The new government's first 100 days plan prioritised lifting children from poverty, raised the minimum wage, and expressed its strong commitment to a high-performing economy that would deliver decent work conditions and fair wages and do better by all women (LabourVoices, 2018). It also signalled a significant return to the vision of democratic ECEC as a universal right of children as citizens.

In December 2017, the Families Package was passed, providing targeted assistance to improve incomes for low- and middle-income families with children (Robertson, 2017). Some of the highlights of the package are:

- parental leave extended to 26 weeks by July 2020;
- a Best Start payment, with an extra \$60 a week, for families with new-borns, until the baby turns one;
- a Winter Energy Payment to help one million Kiwis to heat their homes during winter;
- a better taxation system (Robertson, 2017).

In December 2017, the Ministry for Vulnerable Children was renamed, with the word 'vulnerable' being dropped. The Minister for Children, Tracey Martin, commented that labelling children as "vulnerable" was "stigmatising, impacting negatively on both children and the Ministry's workers" (Cheng, 2017, paras. 5–6). From the Budget 2018, \$945.4 million over a four-year period was allocated to Oranga Tamariki, the Ministry for Children, to put in place new services, systems and processes to improve the wellbeing of every child, not just those labelled as 'vulnerable' (Oranga Tamariki, 2018). In January 2018, the Child Poverty Reduction Bill had been introduced to set targets for child poverty reduction, and to facilitate political accountability for and transparent reporting of the set targets

(New Zealand Parliament, 2018).

In its first 100 days of action, the new government had already made a radical departure from the approaches of the National Government. By applying democratic and inclusive approaches to resolve problems at all societal levels, the Labour Government had shown its strong determination to establish a platform for social democratic politics in New Zealand. Its slogan “Investing in our people, and making sure our kids get the best possible start in life” (LabourVoices, 2018, para. 2) nicely captures the Labour Government’s ongoing intentions and priorities.

The government vision is to ensure that New Zealand is the best place in the world to be and grow up as a child (LabourVoices, 2018; The Treasury, 2018). The Prime Minister and Minister for Child Poverty Reduction, Jacinda Ardern, argues that it is the government’s responsibility to guarantee children are free from the burden of poverty (LabourVoices, 2018; The Treasury, 2018). Therefore, “the Government has committed to reducing child poverty rates to historically low levels” and putting children’s wellbeing at the centre of all its work (The Treasury, 2018, para. 5).

To build a better future for New Zealand children, the Government’s major investments are in health, education, housing and justice to improve thousands of children’s lives (The Treasury, 2018). To put this into practice the Government plans, among other things, to: increase ECEC participation; increase access and investment for additional learning support; get more accurate statistics of children’s wellbeing; and establish Child Poverty and Child Wellbeing Units to improve the Government’s efforts to reduce child poverty (The Treasury, 2018).

In May 2018, the Education Budget was released, distributing an extra \$1.6 billion into the education sector and funding for 1500 more teachers (“Budget 2018”, 2018). The ECEC sector was given \$590 million to fund more places and allow for a 1.6 per cent increase in funding for ECSs. While some in the sector are not satisfied with the budget boost, the Ministry of Education, Chris Hipkins explains that “the 1.6 per cent funding increase is a fiscally responsible adjustment”, and gives us hope that it is “the first step in our plan to lift ECE quality” (“Budget 2018”, 2018, paras. 11–15). However, it is the first universal cost adjustment to the rates paid to ECSs since 2008 (“Budget 2018”, 2018).

One of the most encouraging pieces of news for the ECEC sector is the announcement of a new Early Learning Strategic Plan clarify its vision for the next ten years (Ministry of Education, 2018a). The draft plan is to be jointly developed

by a Ministerial Advisory Group, a large Reference Group including sector representatives, and the Ministry, with public consultations planned for October 2018.

The new strategic plan will offer a shared vision for the ECEC sector that “gives all children genuine opportunities for high quality early learning and development that supports their identity, language and culture and enables them to learn and thrive” (Hipkins, 2018, p. 2). The key themes of the plan are associated with:

- raising quality of ECEC provision, by achieving 100 percent qualified teachers in all teacher-led ECSs, improving group size, and teacher-child ratios for infants and toddlers;
- improving educational equity so that all children regardless of their background access high quality ECEC;
- supporting parents and whānau in understanding high quality ECEC and making informed choices about their children’s early learning, which would also prevent quality ECSs being undermined by competition. (Hipkins, 2018).

Moreover, the Government is committed to removing the barriers to ECEC participation at all levels, with a specific focus on removing financial barriers by “returning to the principles of a free public education that is available to all New Zealanders throughout their lives” (Hipkins, 2018, p. 4). To this end, the Government will re-introduce the *20 Hours Free* initiative for all three and four-year olds, and those five-year-olds who have not yet started school (Hipkins, 2018).

## **Conclusion**

Taken together, the last three decades in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC have been, as Helen May calls it, “a roller-coaster of curtailment and gain” (May, 2017, p. 14). The roller-coaster has represented the contradictory political aims and interests of the two main parties in Aotearoa New Zealand – the centre-left Labour Party and the centre-right National Party. The Labour Government has leaned towards supporting the purpose of democratic ECEC as a universal right of a child as a citizen. The National Government, on the other hand, has used ECEC as a targeted social intervention for redressing societal issues associated with the ‘vulnerable’ and vulnerability.

Since the election of the current Labour-led Government the ‘roller-coaster’ of the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC has started moving again in the direction of a

democratic, free and public ECEC. By making radically different policy directives from the previous government, the new Labour Government has set a sympathetic context for ECEC to offer better quality and more just places and spaces for all children, no matter their circumstances. Currently, the sky above the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC is bright, signalling that the 'golden era' of the sector may have returned.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

In Chapters 2 and 3, I explained the theoretical and conceptual framework and set a foundation and context for the understanding of the main phenomenon under investigation, the constructions of teachers' professional identities in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC. In this chapter, I move on to discuss the research design, methodological issues and the analytic procedures taken in my examination of the central research phenomenon.

First, I list the research questions and explain the research design of the study. Second, I explain the three data sets – texts of policy documents, group and individual interview transcripts. Research methods, research samples, and data collection processes are described for each data set. Third, I illustrate the data management and analysis process, focusing specifically on a discourse-analysis approach taken in data analysis. Fourth, I outline my positioning within the study, and then finally discuss the validity of the study, ethical considerations and limitations.

### Research Questions

The main research question in this study is:

How have teachers' professional identities been constructed in early childhood policies and practice in Aotearoa New Zealand over the period from 1996 to 2016?

To answer the main question, the following sub-questions were developed:

1. How have discourses from the early childhood policies constructed teachers' professional identities, and what are their effects?
2. How have discourses from early childhood practice corresponded with discourses from early childhood policies?
3. What constructions of professional identities have teachers accepted and resisted in their work, and why?

### Qualitative Research

This was a qualitative study, exploratory and explanatory in its essence (Matthews & Ross, 2010). It aimed to describe *how* teachers' professional identities have been

constructed through discourses in the New Zealand ECEC, and to explain *how* and *why* the phenomena have been constructed in such ways. The decision to use a qualitative approach was driven by the nature of the research questions (Patton, 1990; Punch, 2005), and the theoretical and conceptual perspectives of the research phenomenon, that were grounded in poststructuralism.

As an umbrella term for various approaches (e.g. ethnography, case study, grounded theory) used in studying social life (Creswell, 2007, 2007), qualitative research provides scope to look to at “complexities of the social world” (A. Edwards, 2001, p. 117). By including diverse “interpretive, material practices” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3), qualitative research enables a detailed understanding of the central phenomena through a series of representations, such as recordings and field notes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, 2005).

In the context of this study, constructions of teachers’ professional identities were examined in the texts of ECEC policy documents, as were in the texts of individual and focus group interview transcripts with teachers, managers and professional leaders. By enabling the multiple representations of a social world through the policy documents and participants’ own stories, a qualitative approach enabled an “access to the web of interactions” (A. Edwards, 2001, p. 117) related to the phenomena studied. In addition, it created a space for the participants to offer their own meanings of events and actions they had been involved in which may not be mentioned in the literature, and to discuss issues that may not be expected to be found (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2005). This expanded a potential for identifying unanticipated aspects of the research phenomena and generating new insights about it.

The nature of a qualitative research process is “emergent” rather than “tightly prescribed” (Creswell, 2007, p. 47); and hence is open for changes after the researcher enters the field and starts collecting data (Cohen, Lawrence, & Morrison, 2011). This was consistent with a poststructural worldview of identities as being rather fluid and unpredictable than fixed phenomena, and allowed an examination of complex and unpredicted aspects within the discursive constructions of teachers’ identities. Through the use of a qualitative research approach and poststructuralist methodology, I was able to examine prevailing constructions of ‘being’ a teacher and ‘doing’ ECEC, as well as alternatives.

## Research Design

The research design is informed by an interactive set of guidelines which links theoretical paradigms, strategies of inquiry and methods for data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Unlike linear approaches, the interactive research design in this study consists of components that are not fixed and chosen from “a prior menu” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 2), but are instead evolving, interacting with and impacting on one another. Therefore, the research design itself is like a “reflexive process operating through every stage of a project” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 21). This study draws on poststructural research paradigms, which reject an idea of universal truth and knowledge as objective. Under a poststructural framework “truths are always partial and knowledge is always ‘situated’ – that is, produced by and for particular interests, under particular circumstances, [and] at particular times” (MacLure, 2003, p. 175) and thus need to be examined as not only subjective but also as political (Grieshaber, 2007). As I was aiming to explore multifold constructions of teachers’ professional identities, Maxwell’s interactive model *of and for* research (Maxwell, 2009, 2013) was deemed an appropriate guideline for developing a research design in this study.

The interactive model of the research design illustrates interconnections between five research components: *goals, the theoretical and conceptual framework, the main research question, methods and validity* (Maxwell, 2009, 2013). Each research component represents a specific set of concerns, while actual relationships among the research components are at the centre of the interactive research design. A map of the research design below (see Figure 2) pictures the five research components with the arrows showing how they fluidly interconnect with one another. The different parts of the research design create an integrated and interacting whole, with each research component being closely connected to several others (Maxwell, 2005). The links among the research components are not “rigid or fixed implications”, and allow for a “certain amount of ‘give’ and elasticity” in the research design (Maxwell, 2005, pp. 5–6). Like a rubber band, the interactive research design allows for “considerable flexibility”, but there are also “constraints” imposed by the different research components which, “if violated, make the design ineffective” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 6).



**Figure 2.** The research design map (based on An Interactive Model Research Design by Maxwell, 2005, p. 5)

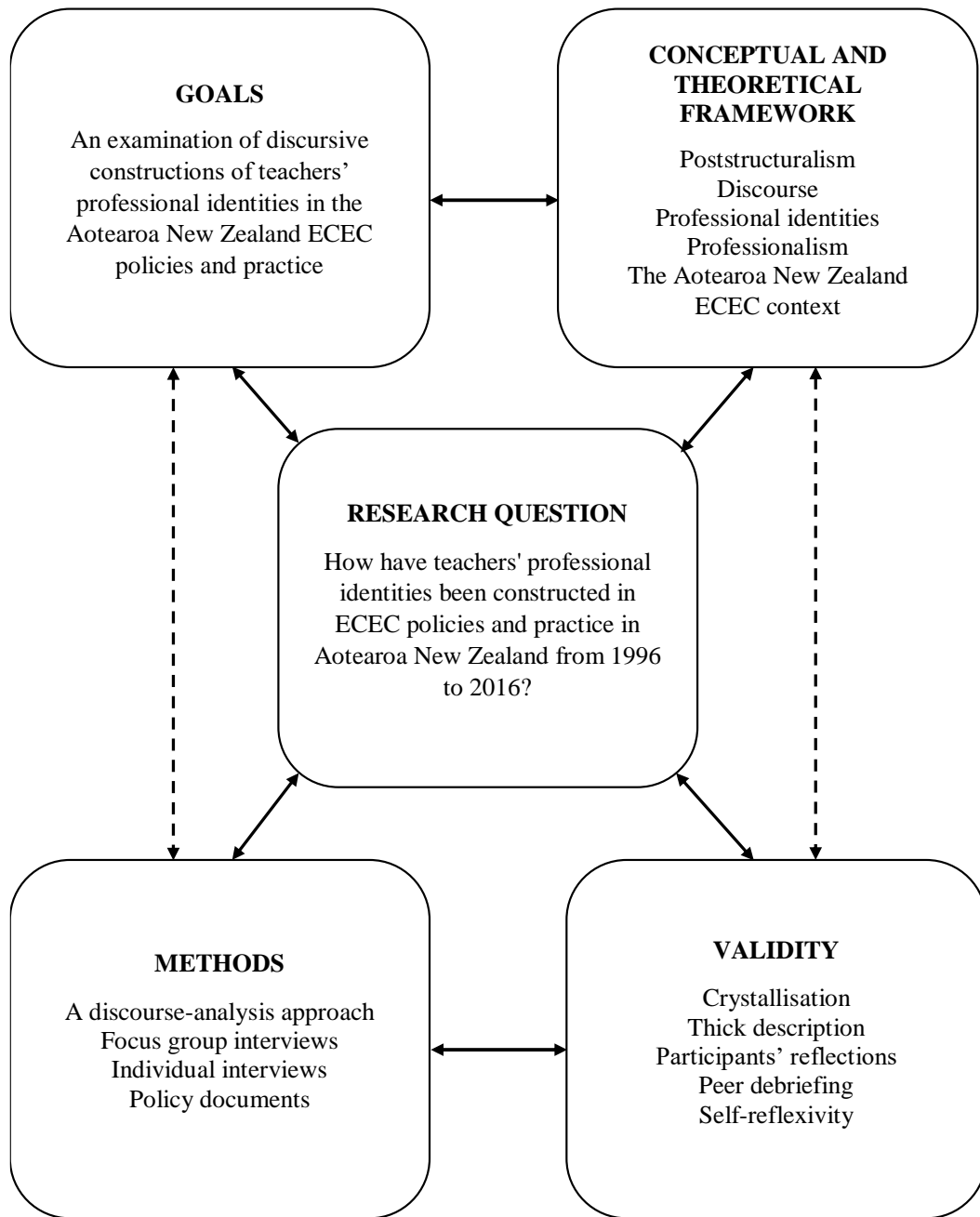


Figure 2 pictures two overlapping triangles. The upper triangle consists of the goals, the conceptual and theoretical framework and the research question, together creating an integrated whole. The research questions are closely related to the research goals and are informed by the conceptual and theoretical framework offering a foundation for an understanding of the central phenomena. In return, the goals of the study are informed by the theoretical and conceptual foundation, while

a decision-making about the theoretical and conceptual framework relies on the goals and research question.

Similarly, the bottom triangle illustrates a closely integrated whole consisting of the research question, methods and validity. The selected methods ensure that the research question is answered, and the validity of the answers is secured. In turn, the research question is framed by taking into account the feasibility of the methods and the seriousness of the validity components of the study, while the validity relies on the asked question and chosen methods (Maxwell, 2005).

The main *research question* is the “heart of your research design” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 73), explaining what the study is intended specifically to examine, understand and/or learn. The research question is most directly connected with other research components as depicted in Figure 2, and therefore can be the most directly affected by other components.

The next component within the research design are its *goals*. In a broad sense, goals include motives and purposes for conducting the study, with the function of guiding its planning and justifying (Maxwell, 2009). This study is driven by intellectual goals for an understanding of teachers’ professional identities as discursively constructed in the specific context of the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC. The study goals also reflect the researcher’s eagerness to explore and understand teachers’ professional identities as a never fixed but constantly changing and evolving phenomenon within a broader socio-cultural and political context of ECEC.

The *conceptual and theoretical framework*, as a research component, was illustrated in Chapters 2 and 3. Drawing on a framework of theoretical ideas of feminist poststructuralists and the socio-cultural, historical and political context of the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC, the conceptual and theoretical framework offered “a tentative theory” or “a story” of how teachers’ professional identities are understood, what is happening with the researched phenomena in a particular context and time, and why (Maxwell, 2009, pp. 222–223). It consisted of the four reference points – discourse, teachers’ professional identities, professionalism and the New Zealand ECEC context, each contributing to an understanding of the central research phenomena.

*Methods* within the research design explain strategies for selecting the research sample, negotiating relationships with research participants, and collecting and analysing data (Maxwell, 2009). Data consisted of the texts of policy documents,

and the texts of focus group and individual interview transcripts, while a discourse-analysis approach was taken in the data analysis.

The last component of the research design is *validity*. In the interactive model, validity does not suggest “any objective truth” of which accounts can be made, and refers to “credibility” in describing, explaining, or developing the accounts of the phenomena studied (Maxwell, 2013, p. 122). The validity in this study relied on appendix description, the audit trail, crystallisation, self-reflexivity and peer debriefing (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Maxwell, 2013; L. Richardson, 1998; Tracy, 2010).

Besides the five research components of the research design, other factors impacted on the study. The factors belonged to the “environment within which the research and its research design exists” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 6), and referred to the researcher’s experience and positioning in the research, gaining access to participants, participants’ experience, and the specific context of ECEC settings. While not included directly in Figure 2, the factors shaped the design and how the study was conducted, allowing the study to respond to the emerging circumstances.

### **Discourse-Analysis Approach**

Discourse analysis (DA) was used as a methodological approach in this research. This was consistent with the study’s poststructural theoretical lens of identities, and its goal of exploring teachers’ identities as discursively constructed in a particular context and time of the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC.

DA emerges from quite different disciplines and theoretical traditions (Edley, 2001; Gee, 2014; Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Punch, 2009; Silverman, 2006), which, although distinct in nature, concur that language is not “simply a neutral means of ... describing the world”, but “an action-orientation” constructing the world (Gill, 1996, p. 141). DA combines diverse “meta-theoretical assumptions, theoretical ideas, analytic orientations and bodies of work” (Potter, 2004, p. 200). Therefore, it is often referred to as “an epistemology” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 3), explaining how the phenomenon is constructed in a specific context, and between particular groups or individuals (Gergen, 1999; Phillips & Hardy, 2002).

As such, DA moves a research focus from what ‘really’ happened to how the accounts of the research phenomena were discursively constructed and what their function was in a broader social context (Gill, 1996; Potter, 1996; Wood & Kroger,

2000). By drawing attention to the *hows* and *whats* of the reality constituting process (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011), the discourse-analysis approach in this study examines *how* participants discursively construct their understanding of the world (e.g. the purpose of ECEC), and *what* “contextual configurations of meanings” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2013, p. 255) inform their reality and identity-constructing activity. As meaning-making is constantly modified in the light of new experiences (Schwandt, 2003), reality and identity-constructions are always on the move, while an interpretation of data is always “provisional, perspectival, and context-driven” (Baxter, 2003, p. 59).

While being constructive in its nature, DA is also critical. It examines repertoires of discourses available to people at a given position in a specific context and time, and looks at how people use those discursive repertoires to make sense of themselves and their context (Sapsford, 2006). In this study, DA enables an insight into a dialectical relationship (Sapsford, 2006) between discourses offered in ECEC policies and practice, which potentially construct teachers’ professional identities, and how teachers engage (or not) with the discourses in their own identity-construction process. As such, DA is sensitive to how language is used in the written and spoken texts, how accounts are constructed and warranted in particular contexts, and what relationships are designed between the accounts, social structures and ideologies (Gill, 1996; Punch, 2009).

Being aligned with a feminist poststructural lens, DA opens possibilities for an understanding of “a greater recognition and connection between people of competing viewpoints”, which “may prompt social and educational transformation” (Baxter, 2002, p. 5). It allows new and diverse ways of thinking critically about *being* a teacher and *doing* early childhood education and enables the notion of selves to be explored as multiple, shifting and fluid in nature. It should be noted that no attempt whatsoever has been made to create any fixed or permanent meaning or a broad generalisation of the research phenomena. Rather, the discourse-analysis approach was intended to examine teachers’ professional identities as constructed through discourses possible and available in a specific context and time of the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC.

## Research Data

To conduct this research, I generated three different sets of data in the form of written and spoken texts. The data consisted of:

1. legislated policy documents and additional resources developed and implemented in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC from 1996 to 2016 (*first data set*);
2. focus-group interview transcripts with teachers, professional leaders and managers (the *second data set*); and
3. individual interview transcripts with the selected research participants (the *third data set*).

Each data set will be explained in separate sections, including rationale and criteria for selecting the policy resources and research participants, and strategies for gaining access to the participants and their background information. Methods for gathering data will also be outlined.

However, before moving on, it is important to acknowledge that the data were treated as discourse in this study. The view of data as discourse entails three general assumptions of spoken and written language (texts) as “an action”, “a focus or topic”, and as having a particular function (Wood & Kroger, 2000, pp. 4–10). First, *language as an action* refers to the viewpoint that texts have power to construct things (i.e. identities), and produce specific effects on their hearers and readers (Gill, 1996). Second, language in use defines *a focus or topic* of a discussion and reveals a way in which the central research phenomenon is discursively constructed (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 9). Hence, from usual interests in describing the research phenomena, the attention moves to discourse itself (Wood & Kroger, 2000). Third, *a particular function of language* pertains to “what the talk or text is doing” (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 7), or, differently, what the language in use aims to achieve, and what effects it produces.

By treating the data as discourse in this study, texts of the policy documents and additional resources, group and individual interview transcripts were not considered as “transparent media” or “a relatively straightforward path to ‘real’ beliefs or events”, mirroring “the way things are” (Silverman, 2010, pp. 135–137). Rather, the data is viewed as revealing an “action orientation of discourse” that was used to

“do things” (Gill, 1996, p. 142), and therefore, offers an insight into how and why the research phenomena were constructed in a particular context and time.

### **First Data Set - Policy Documents and Additional Resources**

To enable an examination of how teachers’ professional identities were positioned and discursively constructed in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC policies, the first data set included legislated policy documents and additional resources developed and implemented from 1996 to 2016. The time framework spanned a period from the introduction of the first New Zealand’s early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (1996) to the time when the data collection process was completed.

The policy documents and additional resources (in text, ECEC policies) were viewed not as simple descriptions of social actions but as powerful tools for creating a specific version of social reality, and shaping the context and audience they are written for (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004; Dunne, Pryor, & Yates, 2005; Potter, 2004). On this premise, the analysis of the first data set was assumed to provide an insight into discourses that construed the purpose of ECEC, teachers’ work and professional identity in a particular context and time.

The legislated policy documents and additional resources were selected based on the following criteria:

1. the significance and relevance of the policy documents in guiding and regulating the ECEC sector, ECSs and teachers’ work over the period from 1996 to 2016;
2. the applicability of the policy documents in ECSs and organisations/associations;
3. the currency of the policy documents, referring to the timespan from 1996 to 2016.

Initially, six key ECEC policies were identified as having a significant effect on teachers, their settings, and employing organisations/associations. They were:

1. *Te Whāriki: Early childhood curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1996)
2. *Ngā Huarahi Arataki. A 10-year strategic plan for early childhood education* (Ministry of Education, 2002)
3. *Kei Tua o te Pae: Assessment for learning: Early childhood exemplars. Book 1-20* (Ministry of Education, 2004b, 2005, 2007, 2009a); excluding examples from ECEC settings at the back of the books

4. *Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua: Self-review guidelines for early childhood education* (Ministry of Education, 2008)
5. *Registered teacher criteria* (Teachers Council, 2010)
6. *Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008* (New Zealand Government, 2013)

However, the list of policy documents was left open in case participants brought new documents to the group and individual interviews. The initially selected policy documents were analysed before the second and the third data sets were generated and served as a foundation for the focus group discussions (the second data set).

After the focus group interviews, the list of selected policies was extended by two documents:

1. *Vulnerable Children Act 2014* (New Zealand Government, 2014)
2. *Vulnerable Children Act 2014: A practical guide for early childhood education services, ngā kōhanga reo, playgroups, schools and kura* (Ministry of Education, 2014b)

These two documents were viewed by some participants as being very influential on teachers' work and professional identities in their settings, and therefore were analysed in the first data set.

In this section, I have listed the official legislated policy documents. In Chapter 5, I outline authorship, writer(s), parties involved in consultation (if any), the document type, and the stated purpose of the eight documents (see Table 6).

## **Second Data Set – Focus Group Interviews**

To gain an insight into the potentially shaping effect of policy discourses on teachers, their work and professional identities, the second data set was mainly gathered through focus group interviews with teachers, professional leaders and managers. The focus group interviews were informed in two ways by the analysis of the six initially selected policy documents in the first data set.

First, the analysis served as an inspiration for me to develop booklets – textual materials which I used to provoke discussion in the focus group interviews about the New Zealand ECEC policies and their impacts on teachers. Second, the focus group interview questions were to a certain extent informed by the first data set, setting a tone for a group conversation.

In this section, I provide detailed accounts of the booklets, the focus group interviews, the research participants, developing the research sample and gaining access to participants.

### **Booklets**

The booklets were textual materials containing quotations from the six policy documents which had been analysed in the first data set. The booklets were developed in order to create communicative places for the research participants to engage, individually and collectively, in critical dialogue and to reflect on policy developments in the New Zealand ECEC. The booklets also enabled participants to share their own “socially constructed stories” (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 265) about events and circumstances that had impacted on their work, professional identities and teaching practice in a the specific context of their ECSs.

I developed two booklets, one for teachers and the other for professional leaders and managers; each was 22 pages long. The booklets outlined four main themes identified through the initial policy analysis. Each theme contained quotations from the policy texts and questions for initiating critical thoughts (Appendix A presents an example of the Booklet for Teachers). Quotations were selected to underpin key issues around the purpose of ECEC (e.g. social justice, equity, democracy) and positioning of teachers (e.g. adults, non-experts) in the policy documents.

The first theme in the booklets mirrored policies’ perspectives on *learning, development and care*, and revealed different views of the purpose of the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC. The second theme referred to *reciprocal and respectful (collaborative) relationships* among different stakeholders and suggested potential power relationships in an ECS and beyond. The third theme threw light on *the (bi)cultural context* of ECEC and alluded to expectations for and positioning of teachers in (bi)cultural teaching practices. The fourth theme referred to *quality ECEC* in its broadest sense, alluding to teachers’ roles in achieving and maintaining high quality practice, and their different positioning within the policy documents. Questions and quotations in each theme aimed to trigger the participants’ thoughts about:

- policy developments and their impacts on the views of ECEC, teachers’ work and identities in general;



- how ECEC policies shaped teachers and teaching practices in their specific settings;
- how teachers were positioned in a policy context (e.g. what are teachers expected to be like and do?), and how such positioning may shape teachers' identity constructions.

While the same quotations were used in both booklets, the questions for teachers and professional leaders/managers differed in their focus. Specifically, questions for teachers focused on how policies might inform *their own* work, teaching practice and professional identities. The questions for professional leaders/managers asked the participants to *reflect on the possible effects of policy documents on teachers* in their settings and organisations.

The booklets were sent to the participants by post approximately three weeks prior to the focus group interviews. This allowed the participants to engage with the research topic in advance and get an insight into issues that might be discussed in a group. Participants were invited but not obliged to write their reflective notes in the booklets and were asked to bring the booklets to the focus group interviews. A time was allocated for participants to share their reflective notes with their group if they wished. The notes were not analysed in detail in the second data set, and were used primarily as background information, enabling me to deepen my understanding of the data gathered throughout from the focus group interviews.

### **Focus Group Interviews**

Focus group interviews create a space for “collective conversation” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 887) among people with one another and with the research topic (Bryman, 2012). Unlike individual interviewing, accounts shared through a collective dialogue go beyond what an individual participant alone might construct. Therefore, focus group interviews enable participants not only to explain why they hold particular views, but also to challenge other people's reasons for holding their views, and to compare these with their own (Bryman, 2012; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Ryan & Lobman, 2013).

The reason for conducting the focus group interviews in my study was multifold. First, it elicited different perspectives on how policy developments shaped the ECEC sector, services and teachers in a specific context and time of the New Zealand ECEC. Second, it enabled participants to share experiences and views

about impacts of ECEC policies and events that were of a particular significance for teachers and practices in their specific ECEC context. Third, collective conversations created an opportunity for participants to hear one another, and through a dialogue and interaction raise issues and concerns that were beyond the scope of the first data set. As a result, the two added documents were brought into a discussion, allowing new and unanticipated accounts of the research phenomena to emerge.

### **Focus group participants**

In total, 24 research participants were engaged in five focus groups. Participants held different positions, roles and responsibilities in their ECEC settings or employing organisations. There were 14 teacher participants – kindergarten teachers (KT) and teachers from ECE centres (ECT) – and 10 participants in a managerial, leadership and/or advisory position – professional leaders (PL), and education and care centre managers (ECM). Background information about the focus group participants is summed up in Table 2 (see the next page).

The 14 teacher participants were all qualified and fully registered, and working in teacher-led services: kindergartens (6) and ECE centres (8). They were all females from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Most of them had been teaching between 16 and 25 years in community-owned settings.

The 10 participants in other than teaching positions were professional leaders (5), early childhood centre managers (4), and one centre director. Participants were predominantly female, with one male participant, and came from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Professional leaders and the centre director were in a leadership and/or advisory position in an ECEC organisation, working with community-owned teacher-led services, while the centre managers worked for a private for-profit early childhood company. Participants' managerial, leadership and/or advisory experience varied, as did their overall working experience in the sector. Professional leaders and the centre director had worked significantly longer in the ECEC sector than the managers from the for-profit early childhood company.

**Table 2.** Focus group participants background information

Participants	KT (n=6)	ECT (n=8)	PL (n=5)	ECM (n=5)
Service ownership	Community (6)	Community (5) Private for-profit (3)	Community (5)	Community (1) Private for-profit (4)
Current working position	Head Teacher (6)	Teacher (5) Head Teacher (3)	Professional Leader (5)	Centre Manager (4) Centre Director (1)
Years of Teaching Experience				
6 – 10		1		3
11 - 15	1	1	1	1
16 - 20	2	3		
21 - 25	2	2	3	
26 – 30	1	1		
35 - 40			1	1
Years of managerial/advisory/leadership experience				
2 - 5			3	3
6 - 10			2	1
11 - 15				1
Gender	Female (6)	Female (8)	Female (4) Male (1)	Female (5)
Ethnicity	Māori (1) Pākehā (5)	Indian (1) Māori (1) Pākehā (6)	Pākehā (4) Māori (1)	Pākehā (3) South African (1) Māori (1)

### *Selecting the research participants*

General and specific criteria were applied in the selection of the research participants for the focus group interviews. The general criteria aimed to allow a gathering of informed and multiple perspectives of the research phenomena and ensure a participation of participants with diverse characteristics in the study (C. Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Based on general criteria, participants were expected to be:

- interested in discussing the research topic;
- willing to dedicate some time from their busy schedules to participation in this study;
- if possible, not necessarily, of diverse ethnic background and gender (male/female teachers; Māori/ Pākehā and other ethnicities).

The specific criteria in selecting the teachers were for them to:

- have more than five years of working experience in kindergartens and/or ECE centres in Aotearoa New Zealand;
- be qualified and fully registered early childhood teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The specific criteria in selecting the professional leaders/managers were for them to:

- have in total more than five years of working experience in ECEC in Aotearoa New Zealand;
- have been in a professional advisory/managerial/leadership role for at least two years;
- work with teachers from kindergartens or/and education and care centres;
- be knowledgeable about ECEC policies and policy developments in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The rationale for the criteria used in selecting the research participants was to enable access to teachers and professional leaders/managers who were already registered and qualified teachers, and who had worked in teacher-led services which were required to comply with most of, if not all, the six initially analysed policy documents. The length of working experience in ECEC was particularly significant, as it would increase chances that the participants had worked in ECEC during a time of intensive reform. Presumably these participants had developed accounts about the policy changes and could talk about their impacts on teachers' work, professional identities and ECEC generally.

Above all, it was important to access participants who were available and interested in participating in the study about ECEC policies. It was expected that this would ensure that all parties involved in the research felt free to share their perspectives and experience while working on a topic of common interest. Finally, it is important to highlight that the selected research participants were not deemed to be representative of all teachers and professional leaders/managers in teacher-led

services across the country. However, it is likely that they might share some similar working conditions and accounts of the researched phenomena with other teachers and professional leaders/managers.

### *Gaining access*

My being an international student who had lived in Aotearoa New Zealand for only a few months and did not have many firmly established contacts in ECEC made access to research participants quite challenging. To overcome the challenges and constraints, and locate “information-rich key informants or critical cases” (Patton, 1990, p. 176), a snowball or chain sampling strategy was considered suitable (Bryman, 2012; Matthews & Ross, 2010; Patton, 1990).

*First*, I asked my PhD colleagues and university staff to suggest settings and employees who might be interested either in participating themselves or be able to help me recruit possible participants. Approximately 30 teacher-led services were contacted via email, and the request was further followed up via phone call. This strategy enabled me to get in touch with several teachers, professional leaders and managers who were willing to discuss my research project in their settings, and to invite others to participate.

*Second*, my research supervisors linked me with a number of ECSs, teachers and professional leaders/managers/advisors from their professional networks. This helped me establish some contacts with ECSs and their staff and gave me an opportunity to present and discuss my study on various occasions. The first and second strategies were continuously applied over the entire period of recruiting research participants, from June 2015 to October 2015.

*Third*, three kindergarten associations were contacted to help in accessing the participants working under their administration. Two associations were particularly supportive and interested in discussing the research proposal with their staff and encouraging their participation. *Fourth*, teachers and professional leaders/managers interested in participating in the study were invited to share the “Information Letter” (Appendix B), “Inviting Expressions of Interest Form” (Appendices C), and “Consent Form for Participation” (Appendix D) among their professional networks, and thus help in accessing other potential participants.

As a result, I received 24 informed consent forms signed by the participants confirming their participation in the study. The participants provided background

information about themselves (i.e. gender, ethnicity, working position, experience in ECEC), their ECSs and employing organisation (see Appendices C), satisfying the participation criteria.

### **Focus group interview composition and interviewing process**

In total, five focus group interviews were conducted – two with teachers in ECE centres (ECT), one with kindergarten teachers (KT), one with centre managers, including the centre director (ECM), and one with professional leaders (PL). Information about the composition, the length and schedule of the group interviews is provided in Table 3 below.

The composition of the focus group interviews was carefully planned. Participants with a similar or the same position in early childhood settings/organisations (e.g. teachers, managers, professional leaders) were interviewed together to avoid a possible uneven power balance in a group. There were four to six participants in each of the focus group interviews to allow time for all to share their views. Each focus group was audio-recorded and lasted for 80, 100 or 120 minutes. The venue of the focus group interviews was the University of Waikato, the participants' settings or the employing organisation's workplace. I was the facilitator of each focus group.

**Table 3.** Information on focus group (FG) interviews

FG Number	Group Size	Composition	Duration (minutes)	Date (2015)
FG 1	(n=4)	ECT	100	Oct 8
FG 2	(n=5)	PL	80	Oct 29
FG 3	(n=5)	ECM	120	Nov 11
FG 4	(n=6)	KT	120	Nov 29
FG 5	(n=4)	ECT	120	Dec 4

The interviewing process in each focus group was guided by a protocol with open questions (Appendix E). The protocol served to prompt a group conversation and keep the discussion focus on issues related to the research phenomena (Ryan & Lobman, 2013). The protocols for group interviews with teachers and professional leaders/managers differed in that teachers discussed impacts of ECEC policies on

their own practice and professional identities, while the professional leaders/managers shared their views of how policy developments shaped the ECSs, teachers and the sector at large.

Each focus group began with an opening question that enabled everyone to be introduced to each other and build a sense of connection (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The opening question was followed by introductory and transition questions. The former was intended to get the participants to talk about their links and views related to the phenomena studied, while the latter served to move the discussion closer to the key interview questions (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

The key interview questions were related to the analysed policy documents and policy developments in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC generally. My intention was to create an opportunity for the participants to share their notes from the booklets, if they wished, and discuss themes from the policy analysis which they perceived as significant for teachers' professional identities. It was an opportunity for all to hear from one another how the policy documents were understood and implemented in different settings, and, if inclined, to compare these with their own practice. A group discussion also allowed the participants to challenge each other's accounts and raise awareness of some common and uncommon influences of the policy discourses on teachers' professional identities.

Furthermore, the key interview questions also served to initiate a dialogue about policy developments in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC and their influence in shaping teachers, services/organisations and the sector. This created an opportunity for participants to reflect on ECEC policies beyond the scope of the initially analysed policy documents and to discuss issues which for them personally and collectively were significant and may not have been asked. After the key questions, room was left for participants to make final comments on the discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Although I had outlined the protocol with the guiding questions before conducting the focus groups, my intention as the researcher and the group facilitator was not to control the interviewing process and enforce a discussion topic. I considered and used the protocol as a framework of indicative rather than obligatory questions that participants could discuss. My primary interest was to ensure “a fairly free rein to discussion” (Bryman, 2012, p. 508), and hear what participants themselves identified as significant in relation to teachers' identities in a different context and

time of the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC. Therefore, my main role as the facilitator was to create an atmosphere of collaboration, trust and respect in the group and make sure that all voices could be heard and listened to.

It was often challenging for me to find a balance between allocating time for discussion of issues that were addressed by majority participants, and issues raised by smaller number of participants, but yet being equally relevant for the research topic. This left me feeling that some issues could have been explored in greater depth in the group conversations, which I resolved by conducting individual interviews with a number of the focus group participants.

### **Third Data Set – Individual Interviews**

The third data set was gathered through individual semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2012; Matthews & Ross, 2010) with eight of the focus group participants. The individual interviews aimed to create a space for the research participants to clarify, construct and explain some of their accounts about the research phenomena that they had perhaps not shared during the focus group interviews. In addition, the interviews enabled me to explore more deeply subject positions and identity constructions of teachers that were identified through an initial analysis of the focus groups' transcripts and needed further clarification.

However, no attempt was made to consider the semi-structured interviews and the data gathered as a way of uncovering 'real facts' behind the participants' talk (Kitzinger, 2004; Wood & Kroger, 2000). The third data set was viewed as an "account" or "repertoire" representing *an available* and *a possible way* of "packaging experience" (Kitzinger, 2004, p. 116) and constructing the research phenomena in the specific socio-cultural, political and institutional milieu in which the participants worked.

#### **Interview participants**

In total, eight individual semi-structured interviews were conducted – five with teacher participants and three with participants in a managerial/leadership or advisory position. Background information about the interview participants is summarised in Table 4 (on the next page).



Teacher participants were all females, working in both service types, kindergartens (2) and education and care centres (3), with different ownership. The lengths of their teaching experience differed, with teachers in community-owned services having taught in ECEC longer than the teacher from a private for-profit service. Similarly, all the participants in managerial/leadership or advisory positions were female. Overall, working experience in the sector of the professional leaders and the centre manager from community-owned early childhood organisations was longer than the working experience of the centre manager from a private for-profit early childhood company.

**Table 4.** Information on interview participants

Participants	KT (n=2)	ECT (n=3)	PL (n=1)	ECM (n=2)
Service ownership	Community (2)	Community (2) Private for-profit (1)	Community	Community (1) Private for-profit (1)
Current working position	Head Teachers	Teacher	Professional Leader	Centre Manager (1) Centre Director (1)
Years of Teaching Experience				
6 - 10		1		1
16 - 20	1	1		
21 - 25	1		1	
26 – 30		1		
35 - 40				1
Years of managerial/advisory/leadership experience				
2 - 5				1
6 - 10			1	
11 - 15				1
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female
Ethnicity	Māori (1) Pākehā (1)	Pākehā (3)	Pākehā	Pākehā (1) Māori (1)

### **Selecting interview participant and gaining access**

By the time the individual interviews were conducted, the researcher and the participants had already known one another for several months and had established good communication channels. This made the selection of the participants for the individual interviews and gaining access less challenging.

Three main criteria were applied for selecting the interview participants. These were related to:

- an interest, experience and knowledge that a participant shared in a group interview about the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC policies and their impacts on the sector generally, and teachers and ECSs specifically;
- participants' experience of working in diverse service types or early childhood organisations, and the possibility that they could share multiple perspectives of the impacts of the policy developments on their organisation/service type and teachers;
- their willingness and availability to participate in an interview.

Initially, 10 participants were invited via email for a follow-up individual interview (see Appendix F), that is, two participants from each focus group interview. The "Consent Form for Participation in Individual Interviews" (Appendix G) was attached to the invitation email.

While the contacted participants confirmed their participation in an individual interview, family and health issues prevented two of those participants from taking part in it. My first thought was to replace these two participants with two others meeting the interview participation criteria. However, after conducting an initial analysis of the individual interview transcripts, I realised that the gathered data had already provided rich and valuable accounts to answer the research question and sub-questions. Therefore, the data generation process was completed.

### **Interviewing process**

Individual interviews were conducted between August and October 2016, approximately eight to ten months after the second data set was generated. Each participant was interviewed once, and each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. The venue of the individual interviews was the University of Waikato, the participants' settings or the employing organisation's workplace.

Prior to conducting the individual interviews, I undertook analyses of the second data set (the focus group transcripts), which enabled me to outline some of the main issues associated with the research phenomena. I also identified multiple subject positionings of teachers in a specific context of their settings/organisations and teaching practices. The analyses of the second data set served as a framework for developing interview protocols with indicative questions.

The interview protocol consisted of open guiding questions about key issues discussed in a focus group interview in which an individual participant was involved (Appendix H). Along with the interview questions, each participant received a group interview transcript in which segments related to the indicative interview questions were highlighted. The group interview transcripts and interview questions aimed to remind the participants of issues discussed in the focus group and make them familiar with possible topics of discussions in their individual interview.

The individual interviews took the form of “active interactions” (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 698) between a research participant and the researcher. The interviewing process focused on co-constructing knowledge, and meaning-making about teachers’ identities, not on evacuation of these (Mason, 2002; Wood & Kroger, 2000; Holstein & Gubrium, 2004).

As the researcher and the interviewer, my role in an interviewing process was like “a traveller” - to “walk and wonder” with a participant about issues associated with the research phenomena (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 48–51). This positioning allowed me to discover aspects of the research phenomena that I had not previously considered. At the same time, my ‘traveller’ positioning encouraged participants to construct and share their own stories (i.e. meanings, perspectives, concerns) about ECEC policies, their impacts on the ECEC sector, teachers’ work and identities.

Moreover, my having an open and flexible approach rather than a firmly predetermined approach to the interviewing process created a space for participants to take a role as researchers in their own right (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). It aimed to encourage the participants to actively construe and explore multiple perspectives of the issues discussed during an interactional and informational interviewing process. The participants were also sent a transcript of their individual interviews to read, approve, add comments to and edit their accounts. This led to the generation of additional data - interview notes (IN). The interview notes consisted mainly of

comments, which a few participants added to their interview transcripts, and were also included in the data analysis.

## **Pilot Study**

Prior to conducting the second and third data set, small-scale pilot studies were carried out to get feedback on the booklet and the protocols with guiding group interview questions. The piloting of the study happened in August and September 2015 and consisted of: two audio-recorded focus group interviews, two audio-recorded individual face-to-face consultations, and peer-discussions.

The first focus group interview involved three participants who had worked as early childhood teachers in New Zealand for between 7 and 15 years and were involved in doctoral studies at the time of the piloting process. This research sample was quite specific in terms of the participants' experiences and aspirations, and although useful for trialling my approach I felt they might differ greatly from the actual research sample. Therefore, a second group interview was conducted with four qualified and registered teachers who had been working between six and nine years in ECEC in New Zealand.

The pilot scheme also included two individual consultations with university colleagues who worked closely with early childhood teachers on action research projects and were teachers themselves prior to working for the university. I also often had peer discussions with my doctoral colleagues, who were more experienced than I was in conducting focus group interviews.

Drafts of the booklet and guiding interview questions were shared with the pilot research participants. They were invited to offer their opinion and comment on how the booklet, group interview questions and interviewing process could be improved. Using that feedback I made changes to the length of the policy quotations, wording of the questions and layout of the booklet. Instead of having one booklet for both groups of participants, I designed two booklets, one for teachers and another for professional leaders/managers, with slightly different wording of the questions, and allowing a space for personal reflections. Both booklets were redesigned several times and the changes were discussed again with some pilot focus group participants, my doctoral colleagues, and my PhD supervisors.

My experience in conducting the two pilot focus group interviews was valuable too. It signalled that the focus groups should be kept small (up to six participants), and

that more time needed to be allocated for participants' sharing. As a result, the protocol with the actual focus group questions was rather open and flexible, and included a few guiding questions.

## **Data Management and Analysis**

Research data was complex and multifaceted, incorporating the texts from eight policy documents, five group interview transcripts and eight individual interview transcripts with teachers, professional leaders, and managers. In total, the three data sets were made of approximately 450 pages of the policy texts, 133 pages of focus group transcripts and 112 pages of individual interview transcripts.

NVivo software was applied as a tool to manage the data – the texts. The software was particularly helpful in storing, sorting and organising the data sets, and coding and grouping textual statements (nodes) into themes (parent nodes). It enabled a visual representation of main themes and concepts, helped in reducing data, reviewing data separately and accessing it promptly. However, the software function was not consistent with the discourse-analysis approach applied in this research, and its use was therefore restricted to data management only. The software could not replace multiple re-readings of data, close examinations of textual statements (discourses) and their interpretations within the discourse-analytic framework I developed and used in this study.

Data management and analysis process were conducted in several phases. *First*, the policy documents (first data set) were unloaded and organised in separate folders in NVivo software. The texts were re-read and policy statements on the same issues/topics were grouped under the same theme. Four prevailing themes were identified in the policy documents, and these were given deeper analysis. The themes referred to 1) learning and/or development and care; 2) collaborative relationships; 3) (bi)cultural practice; and 4) quality ECEC, and are presented and discussed in Chapter 5.

*Second*, some thought-provoking policy quotations outlining the four themes were included in the booklets for participants to reflect upon (see Appendix A). As explained earlier, the booklets were designed, piloted and sent to participants prior to the focus group interviews.

*Third*, the focus group interviews were transcribed, and the transcripts were re-read and coded (the second data set). As discussed earlier, a critical reading of the focus

group interview data suggested that the policy analysis should be extended by two policy documents, and issues of ‘vulnerable’ children and ‘vulnerability’ in ECEC examined along with the four other themes from the policy texts.

Transcripts from each focus group interview were re-read, coded and analysed, at first separately to allow an examination of perspectives from diverse participant groups and institutional contexts. The data analysis pointed out two common discussion points across the focus group transcripts. The first discussion point was related to constructions of teachers through participants’ interpretations of policy concepts (discourses) offered in the booklets. The second discussion point referred to discursive constructions of teachers in relation to different types of ECSs (e.g. kindergartens, community-owned ECE centres, private-for-profit ECE centres). As they offered two angles on investigating the research phenomena, these two discussion points are analysed and discussed separately in Chapters 6 and 7.

*Fourth*, eight individual interview transcripts (the third data set) were organised, re-read, coded, grouped and analysed in the same way as the focus group transcripts. The analysis of the individual interview transcripts enabled a deeper insight into the two points of the focus group interview discussions, and also extended the examination of how policy discourses shaped teachers’ professional identities in different service types, contexts and times of New Zealand ECEC. Therefore, the individual interview transcripts were also analysed and discussed along with the focus group transcripts in Chapters 6 and 7.

*Fifth*, separate analyses of the three data sets were brought together. Links were made across the data sets, with connections located between and across the policy texts, individual and group transcript texts. Prevailing, complementing and confronting discourses and identity constructions in each data set and those overlapping across the data sets were interpreted, discussed and problematised in relation to, first, how they have contributed or not the purpose of democratic ECEC, and second, what sorts of teachers’ professionalism they have promoted.

By applying this lens in the data management and analysis processes, the central research phenomenon was studied in two contexts - ECEC policies and ECEC practice – and from the perspectives of various players (e.g. the state/the sector as the policies’ writers; diverse research participants). The study aspired to bring together macro-level analysis of ECEC policies (the first data set) and micro-level analysis of ECEC practice (the second and third data set) and examine their

influence on the construction of teachers' professional identities. The purpose of the macro- and micro-analysis was to answer the main research question through an investigation of the central research phenomena within the broad socio-cultural, political and historical context of the New Zealand ECEC and within the specific context of an early childhood setting/organisation. The data management and analysis process are summarised in Table 5 following. Then, I move on to describe a discourse-analysis approach taken at the macro- and micro-analysis of the data.

**Table 5.** Summary of data management and analysis

Analysis level	Macro-analysis (ECEC policies)	Micro-analysis (ECEC practice)
Data set	Data set one – Eight policy documents	Data set two – five focus group interviews with teachers, professional leaders, managers and a centre director  Data set three – eight individual interviews with teachers, professional leaders, managers and a centre director
Data material	Policy texts	Transcript texts
Data management	NVivo applied	NVivo applied
Analysis phases	Reading, coding, grouping, reducing the policy texts Analysis of policy documents to inform design of booklets Re-reading, coding, grouping focus group transcripts Reading the booklets for background information Re-reading, coding, grouping individual interview transcripts Discourse-analysis of data	
Research question	How have teachers' professional identities been constructed in ECEC policies and practice in Aotearoa New Zealand from 1996 to 2016?	

### **Discourse-analysis approach: Analytic steps and tools**

A discourse-analysis approach to the data analysis drew on the theoretical and conceptual framework of this study. It helped me to challenge and problematise identity constructions on offer, and ask critical questions, such as how and why

some particular identity constructions were legitimised, but not others, in a specific context and time of the New Zealand ECEC; and what their effects might be on the early childhood teaching profession, professionalism and the purpose of ECEC.

The discourse-analysis approach in this study consisted of four interrelated steps informing, complementing and overlapping one another. The analytic steps were: 1) *identification* of discourses 2) *description* of teachers' locations within discourses (subject positions) 3) *interpretation* of possible ways of being a teacher (identity constructions) 4) *problematization* of identity constructions of teachers.

In the centre of the discourse-analysis approach were two analytic tools, first, the *Subject Positioning Tool*, allowing an identification of teachers' location in discourse, and second, the *Identity Construction Tool*, uncovering how identity constructions came into existence. The use of analytic tools was accompanied by *a framework with questions*. The questions helped me maintain a critical lens when re-reading and analysing key pieces of data related to the central research phenomena and main issues associated with that. Furthermore, the questions served to provoke critical thinking and a problematisation of identity constructions produced in specific contexts and times of ECEC.

### *Identification*

The identification step aimed to identify discourses within key pieces of data directly or indirectly associated with teachers and teachers' work in ECEC. The step consisted of a critical re-reading of the texts, giving central attention to a corpus of statements (language constructions) through which teachers and teachers' work in ECEC were described and represented.

My critical re-readings of the texts were guided by two questions: What is a main topic of discussion (a problem) about teachers and teachers' work represented in the ECEC policies/practice? (Bacchi, 1999), and What discourses underpin and define the main topic of discussion (a problem)? The questions were informed by Bacchi's (1999) *What is the Problem?* approach. They created space to consider competing constructions of problems associated with teachers' work, professional identities and the purpose of ECEC, while other problems were left unmasked. For instance, ECEC was represented in the *Vulnerable Children Act 2014* as a place for 'fixing vulnerability', as providing early learning and care for 'vulnerable' children, while issues causing vulnerability in society were not considered.



The questions helped in identifying how teachers and problems associated with ECEC were represented through language as discourse in the three data sets – the policy documents, individual interview transcripts and group interview transcripts. Points of contestation and contradictions around discourses underpinning the problem representations were also identified for further examination. In Appendix I, I offer a visual representation of main problems that were initially identified in the first data and excerpted from NVivo.

### *Description*

The description step aimed to locate subject positions of teachers within discourse. I understood language constructions in the texts as shaping a location in which particular ways of seeing a problem were produced and specific ways of seeing teachers by means of that problem representation were offered. To describe a location of teachers in an identified discourse, my critical re-reading of texts was guided by two questions: How are teachers represented in discourses defining a topic of discussion (a problem)? and What conditions do the topic/problem representation impose on teachers for understanding themselves and others in this particular way?

Along with these two questions, the analysis was guided by the *Subject Positioning Tool*. In the centre of the *Subject Positioning Tool* was Weedon's (1997) concept of subjectivity and subject position, which also presented key reference points in the conceptual framework of this study. Considering that subjects are produced through meanings given in language through a range of discourses (Weedon, 1997), the *Subject Positioning Tool* consists of two guiding questions which focus on constructed meanings of teachers and teachers' work in ECEC. I asked: What are teachers expected to be like in this particular discourse(s) shaping this particular issue, context and/or time of ECEC? What is teachers' work expected to look like from perspectives offered through that particular discourse(s), context and time of ECEC? The *Subject Positioning Tool* revealed expectations, values, and images that were associated with teachers and teachers' work as being located in particular discourses available in a specific context and time of ECEC.

The analysis of the second and the third data sets, for instance, revealed 28 subject positions of teachers, which located teachers and teachers work in multiple discourses, and set a foundation for various identity constructions. In Appendices J

and K, I offer a list with the subject positions along with identity constructions, which I shall explain more in the section following.

### *Interpretation*

The interpretation step focused on a closer analysis of available ways of being a teacher (identity constructions) in the data, and was guided by two questions: What are available identity constructions of teachers in this specific context and time, and why not others? and What identity constructions do teachers take up as their own, and how do they negotiate them? By approaching an interpretation of subject positions and subjectivities through this lens I hoped to explain how and why some constructions of being a teacher and doing ECEC practice were more acceptable than others in a particular context (e.g. policy, institutional) and time of ECEC.

To interpret identity constructions that teachers accept as their own, or resist, I drew on Weedon's (1997) concept of subjectivity and subject positions from my theoretical and conceptual framework, and was inspired by Gee's (2014) toolkit for discourse analysis. Considering these references, the *Identity Construction Tool* was grounded in a view that subjects use a particular language to build particular actions, relationships, positions and identities.

The *Identity Construction Tool* complemented the *Subject Positioning Tool*, with the difference that identity constructions were viewed as a broader category than subject positions. As some subject positions complement one another, they form a cluster, suggesting particular 'imageries' of what it means to be a teacher in ECEC (see Appendices J and K). The 'imageries' are like a framework encompassing features, attitudes and qualities that strengthen one another, and as such impose particular ways of being, behaving and thinking as a teacher (i.e. an identity construction).

By taking up a cluster of complementing subject positions (e.g. 'career', 'baby-sitter', 'doing ECEC for love'), teachers accept particular values and norms which may construct their views of themselves, others, teaching practice, and the purpose of ECEC. By accepting particular ways of seeing the world, and being in the world, a teacher may accept being a particular sort of person, bearing an identity that is seen as 'appropriate' for/in a specific context, situation and circumstances.

I applied the *Identity Construction Tool* to closely examine identity constructions that were both in agreement and in opposition with one another. By locating a

tension arising between colliding subject positions (e.g. a teacher-advocate for children and a business manager making profit for a company), I looked at how teachers simultaneously exercised multiple identities, and negotiated these in their work. This created a space for an inquiry into the complexity and fluidity of the phenomena under investigation.

### *Problematization*

In the final analytic step, problematization, I engaged closely with prevailing identity constructions that were identified as complementing and confronting one another across the data sets. I wanted to challenge prevailing identity constructions, and questioned whether/how and why some particular teachers' professional identities may be accepted and legitimised in ECEC, and why not others. Taking up again the critical lens of the *What is the Problem?* approach (Bacchi, 1999), I asked three guiding questions when critically re-reading the texts, which produced prevailing identity constructions. The questions were: What identities are accepted or legitimised in ECEC policies and practice, and why? Why not others? (Bacchi, 1999) What are effects of such identity constructions on the teachers' professionalism, the teaching profession and the purpose of ECEC? and What is left unproblematic in the prevailing identity constructions of teachers? (Bacchi, 1999).

Taken together, the analytic steps, tools and questions encompassing the discourse-analysis approach set a solid structure for deconstructing discourses that came together to construct teachers' professional identities in the New Zealand ECEC. I exemplify its practical application in Appendix L. The approach directed attention to how some prevailing identity constructions came into existence in a specific context and time in ECEC, and what "possibilities of sense-making [were] available within the discourses within a particular sense-making community" (Davies, 2004, pp. 4–5).

### **My Positioning within the Research and Negotiating Relationships with Participants**

Since in social studies all researchers are "a part of the world they study" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 14), "the epistemological and personal baggage

they bring with them to the research site” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 305) will influence the research process, outcomes and interpretations. My positioning in this research was informed by my earlier experiences of working with early childhood teachers and student-teachers, studying ECEC systems in different countries in Europe, and living in places and spaces with different socio-cultural, historical and political contexts. The ‘selves’ I brought to this research – my beliefs, worldviews and experiences – have affected and informed the ways in which I approached the data, viewed the phenomena studied, understood my role in the research process, and negotiated my relationships with research participants.

These multiple brought selves compelled me to put up front a questioning of my interpretations of the data, by re-listening and re-reading the transcripts again and again, not to discover ‘truths’, but rather to better understand accounts on which I made meaning of the data. The questioning helped me to become more aware of the ‘selves’ in which I located myself throughout the meaning-making process (Hays & Singh, 2012; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Reinhartz, 1997).

My brought selves were also shaped and informed by “research-based selves” (Reinhartz, 1997, p. 5), which I have created by doing this research in the socio-cultural, historical and political context of the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC. Therefore, my interpretations of the research phenomena were likely influenced by both my brought and my created selves (identities), which drew on one another to “facilitate exchange” (Srivastava, 2006, p. 211) of information that I gathered as ‘outsider’ and ‘insider’ of the research context. As an ‘outsider’, I was the one who came from a different socio-cultural, historical and political context to the country, while also being an ‘insider’ who became immersed and shaped by the Aotearoa New Zealand context.

My relationships with participants constituted a process of “ongoing negotiation and renegotiation” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 90), in which I focused on building interactive connections and a “working research partnership” (Weiss, 1994, p. 119). In doing so, I shared my background information and food culture of my home country in our group discussions and invited participants to share their own culture. I have been also eager to learn about people, place and things in the bicultural context and culture of Aotearoa New Zealand, for which I had great support and help from my cultural advisors.

As mentioned earlier, I located myself in the research process as a ‘traveller’ who walks and wonders with the participants in an attempt to examine the phenomena studied (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I also focused on creating a safe environment in which research participants and the researcher could engage in a critical dialogue that allowed diverse voices to be heard and listened to and multiple accounts to be shared. My relationships with participants and my positioning within the research were grounded in a belief that as a researcher “you can get away with phrasing questions awkwardly” and “other errors that will make you wince when you listen to the tape later”, but “you can't get away with a failure to work with [your participant] as a partner” (Weiss, 1994, p. 119).

Considering the effects of my ‘selves’ on my relationships with participants and my positioning within the research, I resist any claim that my research is neutral. While locating myself as a researcher clearly within the data, I also regarded my readings as not being ‘truths’ but rather as being among many possible ways of approaching and interpreting the data or discourses. Therefore, my role as a researcher was not to make an evaluative judgment of participants’ accounts from my insider/outsider positions, and my multiple selves, but to examine and offer some possible and available readings of the phenomena studied.

### **Validity of the Study**

Considering that qualitative studies aim not to discover universal truths but to examine social phenomena in a specific context and time, some qualitative scholars (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) view the concept of validity as too closely tied to quantitative assumptions. Therefore, researchers have suggested a number of alternatives for assessing a qualitative study. They include trustworthiness and authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011), and fidelity, confirmability and credibility (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995; Silverman, 2005; Wolcott, 1990b). In addition to these markers, a pedagogical model of “Eight ‘Big Tent’ Criteria” of quality in qualitative research included among others the importance of a “worthy topic”, “rich rigour”, “sincerity” and “resonance” (Tracy, 2010, pp. 839–848).

However, no matter what alternative terms have been applied, validity in qualitative studies has been widely accepted as fundamental to effective and high quality research (Bryman, 2008, 2012; Cohen, Lawrence, & Morrison, 2007; Cohen et al.,

2011; Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2013). Although controversial, the concept of validity raises the question of what standards a study must meet to count as “qualified academic research” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 171).

In this research, validity refers to “the credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 122), showing how accurately participants’ accounts are represented and credible to them (Schwandt, 1997). The concept of validity also made it possible for me, as the researcher, to test and challenge my interpretations of data, to try to understand ways in which conclusions might be wrong, and to think of other possible ways of reading the research phenomena (Maxwell, 2013).

Considering the concept of validity within the framework of a poststructuralist study, different strategies were used to address possible validity ‘threads’ and enhance the study’s validity. These included crystallisation, thick description, participants’ reflections, peer debriefing, and self-reflexivity (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Maxwell, 2013; L. Richardson, 1998; Tracy, 2010).

To deepen understanding and provide consistent interpretations of the collected data, this study included three different data sets (i.e. policy texts, individual and group interview transcripts), three methods (i.e. interviews, focus groups, policy analyses), and two analysis levels (i.e. micro- and macro-analysis). Multiple sources and methods also give more credibility to a conclusion than just one source and/or method (Maxwell, 2013).

Richardson (1998) describes such a validity practice as “crystallisation”, rather than triangulation, since it enables a researcher to approach the world from more than “three sides” (p. 522). As a metaphor for validity, “crystalline” combines a “variety of .... multi-dimensionality, and angles of approach ... [which] reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different ... arrays, casting off in different directions” (L. Richardson, 1998, p. 522). To allow an inquiry into multi-dimensional aspects of the research phenomena, I used diverse methods and sources of data, and encouraged the perspectives of various players to be heard (e.g. teachers, professional leaders, ECE managers). Additionally, the discourse-analysis approach enabled data to be critically re-read through ‘arrays’ of various questions and tools, which shed light on a variety of ‘multi-dimensionality’ about the research phenomena to be considered.

Along with using multiple methods and sources of data, I created verbatim transcripts of the individual and group interviews, rather than just a summary, and this provided a thick description of the data (Maxwell, 2013). Audio records of interviews enabled me to re-visit the original forms of the materials, identify and unpack tacit knowledge, and test my conclusions (Tracy, 2010).

In addition, I kept in mind that any singular account and interaction, when divorced from its specific context, could have very different meanings. While re-reading my data, I thus considered the context of the New Zealand ECEC and my participants' institutional contexts. I outline these contexts to enable readers to come to their own conclusions (Tracy, 2010).

Furthermore, I created an opportunity for participants' reflections. Participants could discuss and reflect on my initial policy analyses that were conveyed by the booklets (Appendix A). I also shared the group and individual interview transcripts with the eight interview participants, inviting them to check and validate their talk, ask questions and comment on the data and initial analysis. Participants' reflections gave me an opportunity to go far beyond testing whether research findings were 'right', and stimulated a deeper analysis and understanding of the phenomena researched (Tracy, 2010).

In addition to participants' reflections, I invited an external review of data analysis and conclusions through a peer debriefing process with 'informed readers' (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Wolcott, 1990a). I asked my colleagues and supervisors to play a 'devil's advocate' role (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), by questioning my arguments, identifying biases and assumptions, and checking for flows in the methods and interpretations (Wolcott, 1990a). I also presented my research findings on various occasions (e.g. conferences, a students' colloquium, teachers' symposiums), which provided me with new insights into my data, and helped me stay open to multiple interpretations.

My self-reflexivity was an important contributor to research rigour. Within a discourse-analysis and poststructuralist research framework, self-reflexivity is like a reminder that in "using language, producing text, drawing on discourse, the researchers ... are a part and parcel of the constructive effect of discourse" (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 2). Accordingly, my own discourses, as the researcher, are "no less constructed, occasioned and action oriented" (Gill, 1996, p. 147) than the discourse that has been examined.

Therefore, I engaged myself in a process of self-scrutiny by taking time to access, acknowledge and reflect on my personal and professional epistemologies – my own values, assumptions, my ‘brought selves’ and ‘research-based selves’ (Reinharz, 1997), and to examine how these influenced the research process and shaped my relationships with participants. Self-reflexivity helped me remain sensitive to my own biography and identities, which I described along with my positioning within the study and negotiating relationships with participants. Finally, self-reflexivity kept me aware of the paradox that “we know more and doubt what we know” (L. Richardson, 1997, p. 92).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethics in research constitute “universal end goals of qualitative quality itself” (Tracy, 2010, p. 846), and require researchers to be and act as “responsible moral agents” in both “the purpose” and “the process of doing research” (Soltis, 1990, pp. 250–255). This project was completed through the guidelines set in the *Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations 2008* (University of Waikato, 2015). Ethical approval for conducting the study was granted by the Faculty of Education Human Research Ethics Committee (Ethical Approval - Student EDU088/14).

Informed consent was obtained from participants (i.e. teachers, professional leaders, and managers), and their employing organisations. Prior to the group and individual interviews, an information letter and consent form (see Appendices B, C, D, F, G), were sent via email to ensure that decision-making of all parties involved in the research was based on their informed consent (Patton, 2002; Ryen, 2004; Silverman, 2005).

The information letter contained details about the purpose and the process of the research. The consent form aimed to ensure that participants were aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and the right to privacy regarding their own identity and the identity of their institutions at all times (Bryman, 2012; Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2005). The consent form also informed participants of their right to refuse to answer questions which delved into information they did not want to make public, regardless of the fact that the conducted interviews were strictly confidential (Bryman, 2008, 2012; Kvale, 2007). Both, the information letter and consent form, were discussed with participants at the beginning of a group and an



individual interview to clarify their understanding of their involvement in this study (Bryman, 2008).

As well as the requirements of the procedural ethics (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Tracy, 2010) set by the University and the Ethics Committee I was committed to the relational ethics (Ellis, 2007; Tracy, 2010) of the study. Relational ethics deal with the researcher's responsibilities in relationship with participants, and any actions and consequences the research may have for others (Marvasti, 2004; Tracy, 2010). As discussed earlier, I endeavoured to build a high quality "working research partnership" (Weiss, 1994, p. 119) with participants and their working communities, that is, one which enables relationships of mutual respect, grounded on dignity and connectedness (Brooks, 2006; Ellis, 2007; Lincoln, 1995).

Furthermore, to prevent uneven power-relationships to impact on participants' accounts and feelings, I conducted focus group interviews with teachers, professional leaders and managers separately. I also invited participants to review, validate and comment on their individual interview transcripts to ensure that they felt comfortable with how their accounts were interpreted. They also had an opportunity to explain, delete and alter the accounts they offered in interviews, which some did.

Besides, to predict and prevent situations that might cause harm to participants and their institutions over the course of the study and afterwards, I kept audio records and interview transcripts in a locked file (Hays & Singh, 2012). I reported findings in a way that would not allow the identification of participants, their settings or organisations (Ryen, 2004; Silverman, 2006). Therefore, details of participants' biographies were altered or omitted to secure confidentiality of their identities, while not transforming the meanings of their answers (Bryman, 2012).

## **Limitations**

By taking a poststructuralist orientation to research and a discourse-analysis approach in interpreting data, my study resists any claim that research is neutral (Lather, 2000) and that readings of data are objective. Being a part of the world, I could not under any circumstances escape the world to study it (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Therefore, to a certain extent, my study supports a claim that "objectivity is a chimera: a mythological creature that never existed", and is perhaps

“[only in] the imaginations of those who believe that knowing can be separated from the knower” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 208).

By re-listening to and re-reading individual and group interviews with participants, I noticed that I have shared my own perspectives on discussed issues on several occasions, which could have shaped participants’ views. Similarly, participants’ accounts could also have been driven by my initial analysis of the policy documents conveyed through the booklets. Furthermore, the policy quotations in the booklets aimed to illustrate some concepts and ideas that potentially shaped teachers’ professional identities. Although inviting participants to bring into the discussion other discourses and issues, which were not necessarily included in the booklets, just by reading the quotations their views could have been largely informed by the initial policy analysis.

The number of participants involved in individual and focus group interviews was rather small and included only participants from teacher-led services. The Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC sector is, however, quite diverse, incorporating other service types too (e.g. playcentre, kōhanga reo, home-based centre). Therefore, this study does not make any generalisations from the analysis, but rather maps *some* available discourses in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC policies and practice and offers *some* possible readings of how teachers’ professional identities were constructed in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC policies and practice.

## **Conclusion**

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 together comprise the conceptual, theoretical and methodological architecture of this study. Chapter 2 outlined the main concepts (reference points) – discourse, professional identities and professionalism, while Chapter 3 described the Aotearoa New Zealand historical, socio-cultural and political context of ECEC, in which the central research phenomena were examined.

In Chapter 4, I moved on to explain the discourse-analysis approach used in the analysis of the three data sets of this study (i.e. policy texts, group interviews and individual interview transcripts). I also addressed methodological issues concerning research sample, methods, validity and ethics of the study, and outlined research limitations. Besides, I shared my positioning within this study and challenges I

faced as a researcher - an 'outsider' and an 'insider', undertaking a research project in a socio-cultural and political context that was not my own.

In the three following chapters I will present the analysis of the three data sets of this study. Taken as a whole, these three chapters will offer responses to the main research question and the sub-questions about how teachers' professional identities have been discursively constructed in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC policies and practice over the last two decades.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONSTRUCTIONS OF TEACHERS’ PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES IN ECEC POLICIES**

In this first of three data chapters I present and discuss the first data set of my research study. The first data set was gathered through an analysis of the selected policy documents; the macro-level analysis (see Chapter 4). The first data set addresses the first sub-question of my study: How have discourses from early childhood policy documents constructed early childhood teachers' professional identities in Aotearoa New Zealand over the period from 1996 to 2016, and what are their effects?

A list of the policy documents analysed (i.e. the first data set) is given in Table 6 (pp. 122-125). I provide the full title of each document, including its shorter title and abbreviations. To refer to a document in my analysis, I use the shorter title. The abbreviations are used only in this chapter to reference the statements from the policy documents, and distinguish the analysed policy text from other literature. Table 6 also shows a publication date; authorship, writer(s), parties involved in consultation (if any); the document type, and the stated purpose of each document. It is important to note that the final editing and writing of five out of the eight policy documents was made by the Ministry of Education, while draft versions of the documents were written by different writers involved in a consultation process. The final versions of documents therefore differed to various extents from the draft versions. However, I analysed only the final versions of the policy documents.

The analysis showed that teachers and teachers’ work were construed through a corpus of policy text statements associated with different topics in ECEC. The statements around the same and interconnected topics were gathered in one general theme. Five prevailing themes were identified in the policy texts, and were related to:

1. Learning and/or development and care
2. Reciprocal and respectful (collaborative) relationships
3. (Bi)cultural practice
4. Quality ECEC
5. ‘Vulnerable/vulnerability’

Each theme defined a purpose of ECEC in a particular way and offered specific constructions of teachers to fulfil the purpose. Drawing on the analysis of discourses

underpinning the purpose of ECEC on offer in the policy texts, in this chapter I share five stories of ECEC in Aotearoa New Zealand. Each story illustrates a particular view of a purpose of ECEC and constructions of teachers associated with that purpose. Some identity constructions complement one another, while others conflict and collide. In separate sub-sections, I critically look at these identity constructions and examine discourses in the policy texts which make some particular ways of being a teacher more possible than others. I end this chapter by bringing together shifting views of the purpose of ECEC and identity constructions of teachers, and I discuss how the changing policy directives and discourses underpinning ECEC in Aotearoa from 1996 to 2016 sanctioned some particular constructs of ECEC and teachers while disallowing others.

**Table 6** An overview of the analysed policy documents

Title/Author/Date	Writers	Consultation	Document Type	Purpose(s) of the document
<p><i>Early Childhood Curriculum Framework Te Whāriki</i> (Ministry of Education, 1996)</p> <p>[referred to in the text as <i>Te Whāriki</i> and in references as ECCF]</p>	<p>Respected academics and professors</p> <p>Margaret Carr Helen May</p> <p>Tilly Reedy Tamati Reedy</p> <p>Kōhanga Reo National Trust</p>	<p>Ministry Advisory Group</p> <p>Widespread consultation on the curriculum draft (Ministry of Education, 1993a) with working groups - infant and toddler, young child, Māori Immersion groups (Kōhanga Reo), Pacific Island Language groups (Tagata Pasifika), home-based services, children with special needs group</p>	Policy document	<p>A framework for the consistent delivery of a high-quality curriculum in the diverse range of ECSs in New Zealand</p>
<p><i>Pathways to the Future-Ngā Huarahi Arataki. A 10-year strategic plan for early childhood education</i> (Ministry of Education, 2002)</p> <p>[referred to in the text as the Strategic Plan and in references as SP]</p>	<p>The Ministry of Education</p>	<p>A New Zealand Government working group (ECEC sector, Māori and Pasifika representatives, academics, parents)</p> <p>A subsequent technical working group</p>	Policy document	<p>A vision for ECEC from 2002 to 2012 aspiring towards increasing participation in quality services, the improvement of quality and collaborative relationships</p>

(continued)

Title/Author/Date	Writers	Consultation	Document Type	Purpose(s) of the document
<i>Kei Tua o te Pae. Assessments for learning: Early Childhood Exemplars. Books 1-20</i> (Ministry of Education, 2004a, 2005, 2007, 2009a) [referred to in the text as the Assessments for Learning and in references as AFL1-20, with the number indicating an assessment book in the centre of analysis]	Margaret Carr, Wendy Lee, and Carolyn Jones, advised and assisted by Rita Walker and Bronwen Cowie	The Ministry of Education parents, teachers Early Childhood Learning and Assessment Exemplar Project Team and advisory committee consisting of sector representatives and academics	Professional resource	Designed to enable learning communities to develop their own assessments of children's learning and to re-think the existing assessment practices
<i>Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua: Self-review guidelines for Early Childhood Education</i> (Ministry of Education, 2008) [referred to in the text as the Self-review and in the references as SRG]	Ministry of Education project team	Ministry of Education Individual Maori and Pasifika experts, an advisory working group, ECSs, an early writing team and academics	Professional resource	Intended to support ECEC services in evaluating the impacts of their practice on children's learning and improving the existing practices

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Title/Author/Date	Writers	Consultation	Document Type	Purpose(s) of the document
<i>Registered Teacher Criteria</i> (Teachers Council, 2010) [referred to in the text as the Teacher Criteria and in references as RTC]	Teachers Council	The New Zealand Teachers Council Consultation with a sector-wide reference group	Legislated policy document	Describes the minimum professional standards for quality teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand
<i>Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008</i> (New Zealand Government, 2013) [referred to in the text as the Services Regulations and in references as ECSR]	New Zealand Government	Governor-General in Council	Legislated regulations	Prescribes minimum standards that each licensed early childhood service must meet

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(continued)

Title/Author/Date	Writers	Consultation	Document Type	Purpose(s) of the document
<i>Vulnerable Children Act</i> (New Zealand Government, 2014)  [referred to in the text as the Vulnerable Act and in references as VCA]	New Zealand Government	New Zealand Government	Legislated act	Offers guidelines for developing child protection policies; applying the safety checking requirements for children's workers; and improving well-being of vulnerable children
<i>VCA 2014: A practical guide for Early Childhood Education Services, Ngā Kōhanga Reo, Playgroups, Schools and Kura</i> (Ministry of Education, 2014b)  [referred to in the text as the VCA Guide and in references as VCAPG]	The Ministry of Education	The Ministry of Education The New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA)	Supplementary resource	Supports the education sector and all children's workers to clearly understand what the Vulnerable Act (2014) means and what their responsibilities are

Note. In this chapter, I use the shorter title of a document instead of the full titles provided in Table 6. I also use the abbreviations for the policy document titles to make a distinction when referring to the analysed policy documents and other literature. When referring to the Assessment for Learning and Self-review together, I use the collective term the professional resources. When referring to each document individually, I use their short titles.

## **ECEC as a Public Space of Holistic Learning and Development and Care in its Broadest Sense**

The story of ECEC as a public space of holistic learning and development and care in its broadest sense emerged through the discourse-analysis of *Te Whāriki* (1996), the Assessments for Learning, Book 1-20 (2004a, 2005, 2007, 2009a) and Self-review (2008).

The policy texts argued for ECEC as a place for fostering children's learning, development and care as a whole through the active participation, contribution, and shared responsibilities of all stakeholders, that is, members of the learning community (children, parents, teachers, adults, communities). Being grounded in discourses of democratic education, such an institution creates an environment for dialogue, collective decision-making, diverse socio-cultural and educational worldviews, and collaborative teaching and learning practices. In this context, democratic discourses are associated with certain qualities and values – cooperation, “conjoint communicated experience” (Dewey, 1916, p. 87), sharing of common interests, respect for differences, individual freedom, the common good, and collective decision-making - as “a way of life” (Dewey, 1976, p. 246), both personal and collective within the learning community in ECEC.

*Te Whāriki* defines curriculum as “the sum of the total experiences, activities, and events” occurring in an environment “foster[ing] children's learning and development” and care in their broadest sense (ECCF, p. 10). This definition resonated with the holistic, child-centred philosophy of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand, and as such highlighted that a curriculum is not a set of prescribed aims and content, but is rather ‘everything’ that happens in an ECEC context (Cornbleth, 1990; McGee, 1997; Ritchie, 2003).

The metaphor “whāriki” highlights that the curriculum is “a mat for all to stand on” (ECCF, p. 11), and reflected “the critical role of reciprocal and responsive relationships ... with people, places and things” and “socially and culturally mediated learning” (ECCF, p. 10). This meant that teachers, parents and children are required to explore and create collaboratively what counts as teaching, learning and knowledge in their context, and based on that co-construct their own whāriki. Though theoretically complex, with interconnected principles and strands, the curriculum offered a framework for the individual curriculum programmes - the

mat/whāriki. Individual whāriki followed the same principles and strands contributing to the aim of fostering children's learning, development and care as the whole. The curriculum principles focused on empowerment (Whakamana), holistic learning (Kotahitanga), family and community (Whānau Tangata) and relationships (Ngā Hononga). The curriculum strands arose from these four principles, and outlined "essential areas of learning and development": well-being (Mana Atua), belonging (Mana Whenua), contribution (Mana Tangata), communication (Mana Reo) and exploration (Mana Aoturoa) (ECCF, p. 14).

In its focus on the empowerment, well-being, belonging, participation and contribution of child, family and community, the curriculum framework advocated for the integration of education and care, collaborative teaching and learning practices, and collective democracy (Mitchell, 2015). Children's learning, development and care in their broadest senses were viewed as a foundation of the child-centred, holistic, collective and democratic whāriki. Based on this, the purpose of ECEC was to encourage children "to grow as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society" (ECCF, p. 9).

The term holistic, in the curriculum context, means "tending, as in nature, to form a unity made up of other 'wholes', where the new unity is more than the sum of the parts, and in which each element affects, and is affected by, each other element" (ECCF, p. 99). It requires all aspects of children's cognitive, social, cultural, physical, emotional, and spiritual learning and development to be reflected and interwoven in curriculum practices. To make this possible, ECEC needed to create "a responsive, stable, safe environment" in which the "inner well-being", "sense of self-worth", "identity", "confidence" and "enjoyment" of a child were nurtured through the "consistent warm relationships", "encouragement" and "acceptance" of all "people, places and things" (ECCF, pp. 43-46).

Accordingly, an ECEC setting was viewed as "a caring home; a secure and safe place where each member [of the learning community] is entitled to respect and to the best of care" (ECCF, p. 54). This view of ECEC was based on the belief that only by making "a strong connection and consistency among all the aspects of the child's world" can ECEC practice support and ensure "the unity" of children's learning and development and care (ECCF, p. 42). Moreover, only by building a

collaborative teaching and learning community can ECEC fulfil its broad aim of democratic, equitable quality learning, development and care of a child in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Assessment for Learning, Books 1-20 (2004a, 2005, 2007, 2009a) emerged from the philosophy of *Te Whāriki*; the curriculum principles are also the principles of assessment and the strands are woven together. The assessment books promoted the ideas of children's holistic learning, development and care, and teaching as a democratic and a socio-culturally co-constructed process. The books advocated for a complex weaving of knowledge, skills, and attitudes into learning dispositions and working theories, as a basis for the child's lifelong learning in any domain and promoted diverse learning pathways in ECEC practice. The goal of ECEC was grounded in the commitment of the learning community to the "belief that our development is our learning is our development" (AFL3, p. 6) which highlighted that development and learning are the same process sited in relationships of mutual participation and respect.

Like the Assessment for Learning, the Self-review (2008) continued to advocate for children's learning, development and care as a whole, and for ECEC's being grounded in democratic and collaborative teaching and learning practices. It offered a guide to the learning community to evaluate impacts of their collaborative teaching and learning practice on children's holistic learning, development and care, and to examine the whāriki they weave. It proposed that members of the learning community share responsibilities for quality teaching in ECEC. Members of the learning community were therefore invited to critically review the extent to which teaching practice reflects the holistic nature of learning, how well teachers foster children's learning, development and well-being (SRG, pp. 12-13), and how well they govern and manage services and practices to support children's learning (SRG, p. 15), amongst other things. In this way, the Self-review required members of the learning community to engage in dialogue, critically reflect on their practice, consider multiple understandings and ways of teaching and learning, and thus strengthen teaching and learning as a collective and a democratic process.

Taken together, *Te Whāriki* (1996) and the professional resources (AFL1-20; SRG) were underpinned by the holistic, child-centred philosophy of ECEC. As a collaborative and democratic endeavour, ECEC practice is co-constructed through the active engagement, participation and contribution of all members of the learning

community, who together weave their whāriki and contribute to all aspects of children's cognitive, social, cultural, physical, emotional, and spiritual development. By supporting the collective and democratic education and care of all children, families and communities an ECEC was construed in the policy texts as "a public space where citizens encounter each other" or as "a social institution expressing the community's responsibility to its children" (Moss, 2010, p. 15). Furthermore, such an ECEC institution is a form of social life, in which interests and worldviews of members of the learning community are "mutually interpenetrating", and where their shared common interests, "conjoined communicated experience" (Dewey, 1916, p. 87) and collective decision-making set a foundation for collaborative and democratic teaching and learning practices. By presenting itself as the collective responsibility of the democratic and collaborative teaching and learning community, ECEC is viewed in these texts as creating opportunities for each member to co-construct knowledge, teaching and learning processes, engage in collective decision-making, and thus actively contribute to high quality and equitable education and care for all children. Such a construct of ECEC reflects the qualities of democratic education and the value of pedagogies drawing on the cultural capital and worldviews of the diverse children, families and communities living in Aotearoa New Zealand.

### **ECEC as a Collaborative Workshop**

Being deeply embedded in the discourses of democratic education, collaborative teaching and learning practices, *Te Whāriki* (1996) and the professional resources, both Assessment for Learning, Books 1-20 (2004a, 2005, 2007, 2009a) and Self-review (2008) promoted reciprocal and responsive (collaborative) relationships as a foundation of equitable and effective ECEC. In this sense, the way members of the learning community involve each other and engage with each other in a dialogue became central to the fostering of children's learning, development, and care as a whole, and the development of curriculum programmes, assessment and review practices in ECEC. Rooted in that commitment to collaborative relationships, ECEC was construed in the text as a collaborative workshop, in which members of the learning community build ethically responsive relationships and treat each other with respect and dignity in their teaching and learning together.

Drawing on the curriculum principles of empowerment (Whakamana), family and community (Whānau Tangata), and relationships (Ngā Hononga), and the curriculum strands of well-being (Mana Atua) and belonging (Mana Whenua), the Self-review described collaborative relationships through the concept of raranga and whanaungatanga. The policy text emphasised that these concepts were grounded in the notions of “unity and togetherness, weaving together children, their families, whānau, and communities into the life of early childhood education service” (SRG, p. 49). In the context of ECEC, collaborative relationships were defined as “a source of learning, empowerment, and identity for all of us [referring to the members of the learning community]” (SRG, p. 39).

By highlighting “the co-operative nature of learning”, the Self-review further explained that “strong relationships, based on respect, reciprocity, trust” and commitment and care for one another are a basis for a collaborative learning community in ECEC: “‘whakawhanaungatanga’ – an environment of trust and reciprocity” (SRG, p. 39). To build such an environment members of the ECEC learning community are required to critically reflect and act upon ethical principles of justice (e.g. How are processes fair for everyone?), autonomy (e.g. In what ways do we ensure that our process enables important issues to be raised?), responsible care (e.g. What are our moral, legal, and social responsibilities as advocates for children in our review?), and truth (e.g. How do we ensure that we gather, analyse, and report the outcomes of our review truthfully whilst doing no harm?).

Furthermore, acting ethically in the learning community requires a critical consideration of relationship factors. These factors are related to questions about culture (e.g. What is our service culture, and how does it influence our review?), gender and age (e.g. Who will be involved based on gender or age, and why?), ethnicity (e.g. What do we know about ethnic groups in our services, and how do we work appropriately with them?), community (e.g. What are our unique relationship obligations within our local community?), and geographic location (e.g. What are the unique aspects of our location that might influence our review?). In this sense, ethics in the learning community are concerned with “the attention we give to the people” and with “the implications of everyone's actions on others, now and in the future” (SRG, p. 45). Accordingly, all involved in ECEC were ethically obliged to accept that it was “everybody's obligation to respect others' rights and act towards them with dignity” (SRG, p. 45). Furthermore, “at all times” all needed to

“seek to ensure that everyone is safe”, and “the well-being and rights of each member must be respectfully considered” (SRG, p. 45).

As established in the ethical principles, ECEC becomes a collaborative workshop in which each member of the learning community is committed to listening, “caring, sharing, respecting, helping, relieving, reciprocating, balancing, nurturing, and guardianship” (Hirini, 1997, as cited in SRG, p. 39). This empowers the members of a centre to work with an ethics of care and ethics of encounter (Dahlberg, 2003; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Moss, 2010), with everyone being entitled to care and everyone being ethically obliged to demonstrate care. An ethics of care focuses on “how to interpret and fulfil responsibility to others” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 75). It values a relationship with the Other based on responsibility and the recognition of differences. As such, an ethics of care necessitates the capacity of everyone in the learning community to deal with “diversity and alterity, with the fact that subjects [the Others] are different and in this sense both “strange and knowledgeable” to each other” (Sevenhuijsen, 1998, p. 60). In addition, an ethics of encounter ask members of the learning community to think of the “Other whom I cannot grasp”, and treat the diversity and alterity of the “Other” with respect rather than “make the ‘Other’ into the Same” (Dahlberg, 2003, p. 270). To do so, members of the learning community need to be open to the Other, which reinforces the importance of communication, interpretation and dialogue in their working together (Sevenhuijsen, 1998).

In advocating for ECEC as a collaborative workshop, Assessment for Learning, Book 1-20 (2004a, 2005, 2007, 2009a) emphasised further the significance of recognising and dealing with diversity and alterity within the learning community. In this manner, the policy text highlighted that members of the learning community “bring different and sometimes conflicting viewpoints about appropriate objectives and goals for the child and ways to help the child achieve them” (AFL9, p. 9). To find a common ground, they need to understand and be aware that collaborative and democratic teaching and learning practices in ECEC are “not a matter of 'either/or” but rather “of communication, integration, and accommodation, allowing all participants’ voices (those conflicting included) to be heard” and listened to (AFL9, p. 6). It conveyed a belief that in so doing ECEC establishes itself as a collaborative workshop, in which each member of the learning community is committed to



listening, understanding and treating the diversity and alterity of other members with respect and dignity.

Taken together, the analysis of the curriculum and the professional resources texts construed ECEC as a collaborative workshop, in which democratic and collaborative teaching and learning practices are co-constructed through dialogue, caring, sharing, respecting, reciprocating, and balancing differences among members of the learning community. An ECEC community expects its members to work with and act according to an ethics of care and ethics of the encounter in their practice (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Moss, 2010). In so doing, the community encourages the perspectives of the Others and enables them to be integrated and accommodated in its collaborative and democratic teaching and learning practices. The story of ECEC as a collaborative workshop complements the story of ECEC as a public space of children's holistic learning, development and care in its broadest sense, discussed in the earlier section. As both were grounded in the discourses of democratic education and collaborative teaching and learning, these stories together promote an environment of trust, collaboration and reciprocity and shared responsibilities in ECEC. Being engaged in a democratic and collaborative endeavour, all stakeholders in ECEC – members of the learning community (e.g. children, families, whānau, community members, ECEC staff and teachers) – were positioned in the texts as equally participating in and contributing to children's holistic learning and development, to curriculum and care, and to assessment and review practices.

In the sub-section below, I explore how teachers were construed in ECEC acting as a public space and a collaborative workshop, and what professional identity constructions the policy texts offered through discourses of collaborative and democratic teaching and learning.

### **Constructing teachers' professional identities through discourses of collaborative and democratic teaching and learning: Adults and members of the learning community**

ECEC as a public space and a collaborative workshop grew from the notion of respectful, ethical and reciprocal relationships among the members of the ECEC community. In the context of these discourses of democratic education and collaborative teaching and learning, ECEC was construed as a democratic and

collaborative site that creates equitable opportunities for all its stakeholders to co-construct knowledge and actively engage and contribute to children’s learning, development and care. As a result, all stakeholders in ECEC were defined in the policy text, by collective terms, such as adults (ECCF, p. 99) or members of the learning community (AFL1-20) or the community of weavers (SRG, p. 5).

*Te Whāriki* defined “adult” within the text as “any person beyond school leaving age who may be involved in an early childhood setting” (ECCF, p. 99). The collective notion of adults included whānau, parents, extended family, staff, members, supervisors, child care workers, teachers, kaiako (educators, all teachers, other adults, parents in parent-led services), kaiāwhina (an assistant in te reo), specialists, and caregivers. In its aim to invite and strengthen the democratic participation, contribution and sense of belonging of its diverse stakeholders, the curriculum text did not directly specify responsibilities of teachers in teaching and learning in ECEC. A reason for not using the term teacher was that in the services that are not teacher-led (e.g. playcentre, kōhanga reo) parents and whānau have collective responsibility for the curriculum and undertake specific training to be educators/kaiako.

However, the responsibilities of teachers are implied in the curriculum text under the heading “the adults’ responsibilities in management, organisation and practice”:

[t]o enable the curriculum to meet the needs of all children, adults working in early childhood education *need to be knowledgeable* about children’s development and early childhood curriculum, *skilled* at implementing curriculum, *thoughtful* about what they do, *aware of their role* as models for learning, *willing to try alternatives*, and *well supported* by management. (ECCF, p. 27, emphasis added)

To fulfil these responsibilities, training “must” be made available to the adults to secure the knowledge and skills necessary to support the children’s learning and development and implement the curriculum in their everyday practice (ECCF, p. 27). Management “must” also ensure that “staffing” meets requirements and guarantee the safety of children at “all times and in all situations” (ECCF, p. 27).

Like *Te Whāriki*, the professional resources (AFL1-20; SRG) continued to apply collective notions regarding teachers. All stakeholders involved in ECEC were named as members of the learning community or the community of weavers in the texts of the professional resources. It was made clear that “we” in the texts signified

an inclusive approach to teaching and learning practices in ECEC (SRG, p. 4), in which all members of the community co-construct knowledge, contribute equally to children's learning and care, and take responsibilities collectively. Each member was viewed as committed to and ethically responsible for encouraging the participation, knowledge co-construction, sense of belonging and well-being of all other members.

The collective notion of adults and members of the learning community in the policy texts was consistent with their theoretical principles, arising from the “socio-cultural, constructivist curriculum” (Ritchie, 2003, p. 167). Given the importance of “the critical role of socially and culturally mediated learning” and “reciprocal and responsible relationships” (ECCF, p. 9), children and all adults/members of the learning community were understood to actively contribute to ‘everything’ that happens in an ECEC context (Cornbleth, 1990; McGee, 1997; Ritchie, 2003).

Accordingly, knowledge, teaching and learning are co-constructed through reciprocal and responsive relationships of children and adults with people, places and things. There was no place for one person (e.g. a teacher) to occupy the position of an ‘expert who knows it all’ and constructs teaching and learning based on his/her individual funds of knowledge or worldview. Rather, all involved in ECEC were understood in the texts to actively participate in teaching and learning, leadership, curricula and pedagogies, with opportunities to ask critical questions, research different ideas and engage in dialogue with one another. The use of collective terms in the policy texts furthermore acknowledged that all stakeholders in ECEC have equitable opportunities to participate, and that their multiple, complementing and possibly conflicting, ways of thinking, being and doing need to be welcomed and encouraged in ECEC as a democratic and collaborative endeavour.

### **ECEC as a Response to Social Justice Issues**

The story of ECEC as a response to social justice issues in Aotearoa New Zealand was constructed through the discourse analysis of several policy documents, including *Te Whāriki* (1996), the professional resources (AFL1-20; SRG), the Strategic Plan (2002), the Teacher Criteria (2010), and the Services Regulations (2013).

The analysis of the policy texts revealed two main roles of ECEC in response to social justice issues. First, *Te Whāriki* and the professional resources; Assessment

for Learning and Self-review; looked at the social justice issues from a strong bicultural foundation. These highlighted the role of ECEC in supporting the identity, language and culture of Māori children and families through collaborative teaching and learning practices. Second, the Strategic Plan (2002), the Teacher Criteria (2010), and the Services Regulations (2013) indicated that social justice issues are fundamental for ECEC's ensuring equitable learning opportunities for all children in Aotearoa New Zealand's increasingly multicultural society. In addition, within the Strategic Plan the role of ECEC in providing equitable opportunities for all children was further viewed as a way of overcoming possible obstacles to the country's economic success.

Given the differences in these views of ECEC as a response to social justice issues in the policy texts, I focus first on how ECEC as a bicultural site responds to social justice issues. Second, I discuss the role of ECEC in ensuring equitable educational opportunities for culturally diverse learners, and the relevance of this to the country's economic success. Third, I conclude this section by reflecting on the constructs of teachers as kaiako and children's advocate in relation to these different roles of ECEC.

### **ECEC as a bicultural site**

In *Te Whāriki* and the professional resources (AFL1-20; SRG) social justice issues were inextricably linked with issues of biculturalism, or in other words bicultural development in educational settings in Aotearoa New Zealand. The understanding of bicultural development and bicultural context of ECEC in Aotearoa New Zealand are grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, a treaty, first signed in 1840, between the tangata whenua (people of the land, the indigenous people) and the British Crown to establish the political organisation of the country (Orange, 1987).

Te Tiriti o Waitangi set the foundation upon which Māori and Pākehā (New Zealanders of non-Māori ancestry) would build their relationship in a commitment to "live together in a spirit of partnership and the acceptance of obligations for participation and protection" (Ministry of Education, 2017a, p. 3). Te Tiriti o Waitangi has implications for New Zealand education generally, and ECEC specifically, and implies ongoing movement towards an equitable bicultural society.

A central goal of bicultural development is to increase Pākehā commitment to supporting Māori aspirations for tino rangatiratanga. Tino rangatiratanga is to be understood as meaning “full authority, status and prestige... [and self-determination over Māori] lives and resources”, this being considered fundamental to [Māori] well-being (Ritchie, 2003, pp. 80–86). To address bicultural educational development in the context of ECEC, *Te Whāriki* and the professional resources advocated for the engagement of Māori children and their whānau in the development of the bicultural curriculum, assessment and review practices. Māori culture and language, identity and sense of belonging were also to be supported.

The policy texts also highlighted the importance of developing bicultural and democratic ECEC practices as ways of addressing social justice issues in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Te Whāriki* and the professional resources viewed ECEC as having established discourses of biculturalism and democratic and collaborative teaching and learning. In this sense, reciprocal, ethical and responsive relationships in ECEC were regarded within the texts as basic values of the teaching and learning in ECEC as a bicultural and democratic site. The policy texts required that all involved in ECEC must, first and foremost, recognise, reflect and respect the culture, language and heritage of Maori as the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand, and similarly acknowledge and respect other cultural diversity. In this way, ECEC as a bicultural site, supporting bicultural development, and a democratic site, respectful of other cultural diversity, would provide equitable educational opportunities for all children. (See below, “ECEC for equitable educational opportunities and the country’s future success”).

The vision for ECEC as bicultural and democratic, and responsive to social justice issues was grounded in the moral obligation of members of the learning community in ECEC to respect “the [fundamental] principle of partnership inherent in Te Tiriti o Waitangi”, and to “reflect the unique place of Māori as tangata whenua [indigenous people, or the people of the land]” (AFL3, p. 2). In this regard, the policy texts offered strong reminders of the historical and continuing inequitable learning opportunities, underrepresentation and the lack of understanding of Māori people, language and culture in education and society at large (Bishop, 2003; Te Puni Kokiri, 1998).

Members of the learning community were obliged to “understand the reality within which Māori live, as children, students, and whānau” (AFL3, p. 3). It was

emphasised that bicultural ECEC practice is “more than just letting community members voice their concerns” and “more than just acknowledging diversity” (SRG, p. 40). This implies that “the non-indigenous partners must listen with their hearts and not merely their ears” (SRG, p. 40). In other words, the members of the learning community need to be aware of their obligation and the commitment to “take the time to listen and respond, rather than persuade and coerce others to see things in the same way” (SRG, p. 40). In setting these expectations for the members of the learning community in the bicultural ECEC, the policy texts echoed the principles of ethics of care and ethics of encounter discussed earlier (Dahlberg, 2003; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Sevenhuijsen, 1998). In particular, the need to listen, not to “make the Other into the Same” (Dahlberg, 2003, p. 270), and the importance of reciprocity, trust and dialogue were highlighted in the bicultural ECEC.

These concepts were also reflected in the requirement for teachers to know how to facilitate a whanaungatanga approach. The whanaungatanga approach values “the contribution each individual brings to the collective process” of teaching and learning (AFL2, p. 2). It recognises the centrality of “responsive, respectful, and reciprocal relationships with children, whānau Māori, and other adults”, and “a climate of collaboration and genuine power sharing” in ECEC (AFL5, p. 4). As such, the whanaungatanga approach is consistent with the curriculum principle of family and community (Whānau Tangata) and relationships (Ngā Hononga).

Taking all the above into account *Te Whāriki* and the professional resources would, it was hoped, go towards redressing the historic power imbalance and inequities between Māori and non-Māori, within the ECEC context. The policy texts were drafted in the belief that only by requiring power-sharing relationships can ECEC practice “contribute to and develop ‘two world’ participation and mutual respect for Māori and Pākehā ... [and] protect and develop children’s identities as competent and confident citizens of a bicultural society” (AFL3, p. 7).

Accordingly, reciprocal teaching and learning (ako), and power-sharing relationships in the learning community were taken as central to the bicultural ECEC, and fundamental to its response to social justice issues in Aotearoa New Zealand. Within the ECEC context teachers are construed not as an ‘expert’, but as kaiako, teachers and learners at the same time. This identity construction is discussed under the final sub-heading of this section. I now move to the role of

ECEC in securing equitable learning opportunities and the country's future economic success.

### **ECEC for equitable educational opportunities and the country's future success**

The Strategic Plan (2002), the Teacher Criteria (2010) and the Services Regulations (2013) took a different approach from *Te Whāriki* and the professional resources in addressing the role of ECEC regarding social justice issues in Aotearoa New Zealand. While *Te Whāriki* and the professional resources discussed more specifically the issues of bicultural development (biculturalism) in ECEC, these three policy documents addressed in a more general manner biculturalism and cultural diversity as interconnected issues. Therefore, the documents required ECEC to safeguard equitable status, rights and educational opportunities for Māori and Pākehā, and for all other children living in the increasingly multicultural Aotearoa New Zealand. These requirements were grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, which assures all residents of Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori and non-Māori, of being included in the agreement, and thus having equitable status and rights. Although approaching social justice issues differently, the policy texts together advocated for ECEC as a bicultural and democratic site, leading to a more just ECEC and a more just society.

As legislative and/or strategic documents, the Strategic Plan, the Teacher Criteria and the Services Regulations set standards and regulations for licensed ECSs and registered ECEC staff to follow. These criteria are intended to ensure quality of ECEC practice, professionalism in the teachers' work and equitable educational opportunities for all children. By ensuring that these standards and regulations respond to the issues of multiculturalism, biculturalism, and social justice, the policy documents intended to achieve quality, equity and professionalism in ECEC. In this manner, the Services Regulations legislate for all licensed ECSs to be run in a way that secures a safe and healthy environment, and supports and enhances learning and development of all enrolled children in an ECEC setting. ECEC was to be a place for children's "positive learning and development", where their cultures and identities are encouraged (ECSR, p. 33). To fulfil its vision, the Services Regulations provided "curriculum standards" for ECEC services to follow (ECSR, p. 33), and required 50 percent of ECEC staff to hold an "early childhood

teaching qualification recognised by the New Zealand Teachers Council for registration purposes” (ECSR, p. 7).

The curriculum standard demanded that ECEC service providers and qualified teachers create individual programmes to “encourage children to be confident in their own culture and develop an understanding, and respect for, other cultures” (ECSR, p. 34). The policy text further stressed that “the unique place of Māori as tangata whenua” and “the aspirations of parents, family, and whānau” need to be acknowledged in all licensed ECSs (ECSR, p. 34).

To achieve this, the Services Regulations text viewed qualified teachers as formally responsible for making “all reasonable efforts” to “work effectively” with the parents and the extended family or whānau of the enrolled children, to encourage their contribution to children’s learning and development, and to support their participation in decision-making in ECEC (ECSR, p. 34). The Services Regulations were thus intended to ensure that ECEC establish itself as a multicultural and democratic place, which is respectful of Māori as tangata whenua, and provides equitable learning and development for all children attending licensed ECSs.

The Teacher Criteria addressed the issues of biculturalism and multicultural diversity and social justice by means of the “essential professional knowledge and capabilities [of qualified teachers, necessarily] for quality teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand” (RTC, p. 1). The policy text stated that “all [registered and qualified] teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand” had “a particular responsibility” to “promote equitable learning outcomes” of all ākonga [learners] (RTC, p. 9). They need to understand that “the Treaty of Waitangi [Te Tiriti o Waitangi] extend[ed] equal status and rights to Māori and Pākehā” (RTC, p. 9). Equally, the teachers must “be aware of and respect the languages, heritages and cultures of all ākonga in the increasingly multi-cultural Aotearoa New Zealand” (RTC, p. 10).

The Teacher Criteria implied that the professional knowledge and capabilities necessary for addressing issues of biculturalism, equity and cultural diversity are integral features of professionalism and high quality teaching in ECEC. Accordingly, ECEC and the qualified teachers seemed to be required to play an advocacy role in promoting the well-being, belonging and individuality of all children, thus ensuring their equitable educational outcomes. This led to the obligation for ECEC and education at large to be a more just forum for all learners in the bicultural and multicultural Aotearoa New Zealand.



Like the Services Regulations and the Teacher Criteria, the Strategic Plan continued to advocate for increasing participation of children in good quality ECEC that promotes equitable learning opportunities for ‘all’. The plan argued for effective curriculum implementation and the professionalisation of teachers in teacher-led ECSs. To this end, the plan introduced strategies to increase the number of qualified teachers. These included incentive grants to services to cover some of the costs of staff upgrading their qualifications; promoting ECEC as a career to those potentially interested in teaching in ECEC; and offering scholarships and providing mentoring to students undertaking early childhood programmes (SP, pp. 14-15).

In line with the Services Regulations, the Teacher Criteria, and the curriculum principles and strands, the Strategic Plan further highlighted that:

[c]hildren’s learning and development are fostered if the well-being of their family and community is supported; if their family, culture, knowledge and community are respected; and if there is a strong connection and consistency among all aspects of the child’s world. (SP, p. 16)

Through this statement, the Strategic Plan made plain the Government’s interest in securing the learning, development and well-being of all children through effective teaching and learning in ECEC. Equally, the policy text acknowledged the Government’s “specific” intention to work with:

both ECEC services and teacher education providers *to improve ECEC teachers’ understanding and appreciation of the Treaty of Waitangi [Te Tiriti o Waitangi], biculturalism, Te Reo and Tikanga Māori* so that they can support and encourage the learning of Māori children and the involvement of Māori parents. (SP, p. 10, emphasis added)

The same promise was made to Pasifika children and families to ensure teachers’ appreciation for the cultural heritages and languages of Pasifika communities, as “Pasifika peoples share a number of the same challenges as Māori” (SP, p. 10). Although sharing a similar vision for ECEC with Te Whāriki, the Services Regulations and the Teacher Criteria, the Strategic Plan observed biculturalism, diversity and social justice in their relation to securing learning outcomes and the future economic success of the country. This was made obvious by the reasoning behind the Government’s “specific” interests in encouraging the learning of Māori and Pasifika children, which was grounded in its concern that these particular groups of children “do not currently participate in ECEC ... at the same rate as other

New Zealand children” (SP, p. 10), yet these children will form “a larger population of this country’s birth-to-five-year-olds within the next 10 years” (SP, p. 10). The Strategic Plan seemed to imply that ensuring children’s participation in high quality education would eventually contribute to “the social, educational and economic health of the country” (SP, p. 1), and that those groups missing from ECEC might be less academically ‘successful’ in the future. As a result, these children may contribute less to, or, even worse may hinder, the country’s “social, educational and economic health” (SP, p. 1), and thus the country must do something about it.

These views of children and the main purpose of ECEC in the Strategic Plan seemed to reflect its attempt to meet both – the political interests in children’s culture, identity and well-being and to respond to the issues of biculturalism, multiculturalism, and social justice; and the aim for ECEC to play a part in the future economic success of the country. Therefore, the Strategic Plan required centres and qualified teachers to provide a high quality early learning foundation for children “missing out” on ECEC (SP, p. 6) to help the nation improve children’s socio-economic circumstances in order to contribute to its future economic success. The Strategic Plan’s emphasis on the economic success of the country seemed to dilute ECEC’s primary role of fostering children’s education and well-being, which the curriculum and professional resources viewed as integral aspects of children’s holistic learning development and a response to social justice inequities.

To sum up, discourse analysis of the Strategic Plan, the Teacher Criteria and the Services Regulations threw light on conflicting stances of ECEC in responding to the issues of biculturalism, multiculturalism and equitable learning opportunities. On the one hand, the policy texts all emphasised the importance of highly qualified ECEC teachers in establishing ECEC as a democratic institution able to contribute to a socially just, bicultural and multicultural society. This view of ECEC construes teachers as children’s advocates, encouraging and supporting children’s right to well-being and cultural identity. (This construction of teachers is discussed in the section following.)

On the other hand, however, the Strategic Plan text also revealed the positioning of ECEC as an economic investment. This view of ECEC as grounded in economic discourse revealed a possible shift in policy directives from children’s overall well-being to the future success of the country. This view of ECEC is discussed in more detail in a separate section, which looks at the story of high quality, investments

and returns in ECEC. The construction of the teacher's professional identities in this ECEC context is also examined.

### **Constructing teachers' professional identities through discourses of biculturalism and social justice: Kaiako and children's advocate**

ECEC's response to social justice issues construed the teacher as a non-expert, and as kaiako (teachers and learners) and children's advocate. These identity constructions complemented each other, and emphasised teachers' role in empowering children's well-being and cultural identity as integral aspects of their holistic learning and development. The role of teachers in creating an environment of genuine, respectful power-sharing relationships, in which all children have the right to equitable educational opportunities, was also stressed.

The construct of teachers as a non-expert but kaiako was grounded in a whanaungatanga approach and the understanding of teaching and learning as "ako" – a reciprocal process in which the teacher does "not just teach, but also learns all the time too" (AFL3, p. 4). Being inclusive of all children and families, the whanaungatanga approach required the concept of the teacher as an expert to be reconceptualised in ECEC. Therefore, the policy texts argued that in order to build "responsive, respectful, and reciprocal relationships with children, whānau Māori, and other adults" through a whanaungatanga approach the teacher needs to recognise that they "cannot be experts in another person's culture if they do not share that cultural background" (AFL3, p. 4). This implies that "non-Māori cannot speak for Māori" (AFL3, p. 4), meaning that "teachers from the dominant [Pākehā] culture require humility and sensitivity, so that they can avoid misrepresenting [Māori] cultural symbols and meanings and be vigilant about the limitations of the role of a [Pākehā] facilitator of bicultural development" (Ritchie, 2001, p. 25).

Inviting non-Māori teachers to take the non-expert position created opportunities for Māori to voice their own perceptions in ECEC. This respectful orientation was believed to foster "a climate of collaboration and genuine power-sharing relationships" through the whanaungatanga approach (AFL3, p. 4), and to encourage the involvement of Māori families and whānau in all aspects of ECEC's teaching and learning.

In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC as a bicultural as much as a democratic site, teachers were, therefore, expected to be kaiako. In the Assessment

for Learning, the term kaiako captured the idea of teaching and the learning at all times; “the notion of pedagogy in one word” (AFL3, p. 4). By positioning teachers as kaiako ECEC practice enables ako – meaning in te reo reciprocal learning that is, learning and teaching at the same time. The reciprocal nature of teaching and learning (ako) and power-sharing relationships are the core of bicultural and multicultural ECEC, in which all, Māori and non-Māori, children and whānau, can participate and contribute to all aspects of ECEC life.

By establishing teaching practice in the concept of ako and equitable power sharing, teachers/kaiako become an advocate for all children generally, and particularly for those traditionally underrepresented and marginalised in ECEC. The position of kaiako implies that traditional constructions of the expert and power relationship structures in ECEC must be deconstructed and reconfigured to create a new social order that disturbs, and hopefully destroys, the longstanding system that has privileged certain children and families (Gaetane, Normore, & Brooks, 2009; Hard, Press, & Gibson, 2013), in this case the non-Māori - while underrepresenting others – Māori. By occupying the position of kaiako in ECEC, teachers as children’s advocates are like “architects .... of the new social order” (Gaetane et al., 2009, p. 4) in which Māori are granted equitable learning opportunities. Moreover, it was believed that the construction of the teacher as kaiako enables “a move towards biculturalism”, and an ECEC practice established on “a climate of collaboration and genuine power sharing” (AFL3, p. 4).

Accordingly, the policy documents set clear requirements for teachers/kaiako and other members of the learning community to take “a particular care ...to understand and be willing to discuss bicultural issues, actively seek Māori contributions in everyday life of their service, and ensure that Māori children develop a strong sense of self-worth” (ECCF, p. 40). All were expected to acquire specific knowledge of Māori culture, language and heritage, to support tikanga Māori and the use of the Māori language in their centres and to establish appropriate connections with local iwi (tribe) and hāpu (kinship group) (ECCF, 1996; AFL3, 2005).

Engaging local Māori and communities in ECSs, and advancing the notion of teachers as kaiako is considered part of democratic ECEC practice. Teachers as kaiako contribute to making ECEC a bicultural and multicultural as well as a democratic site in which all children, Māori and non-Māori, have the right to equitable learning opportunities. This was evidenced in the curriculum’s principles

of empowerment (Whakamana), family and community (Whānau Tangata), and relationships (Ngā Hononga), and the strands of belonging (Mana Whenua), contribution (Mana Tangata), and communication (Mana Reo). These highlighted ECEC's need to foster "[c]hildren's confidence in, and identity with, the cultures of both their country of origin and of New Zealand" (ECCF, p. 55).

The curriculum and professional resources also implied the role of ECEC and teachers as advocate for rights of all children. This is further safeguarded through the policy documents that set standards and regulations to ensure quality, professionalism and equitable educational opportunities for all children in-bicultural and multicultural Aotearoa New Zealand (SP, 2002; ECSR, 2013; RTC, 2010). Teachers in these policy texts were construed as qualified educational specialists with professional knowledge and values and who would encourage power-sharing relationships and provide equitable learning opportunities for all children.

Taken together, by setting out to increase the stock of understanding, acceptance, and equitable power sharing the policy texts demonstrated ECEC's strong stance as a democratic site advocating for the rights and equitable learning opportunities of all children. Furthermore, the policy texts implied that by occupying the position of kaiako and children's advocate, teachers are empowered to extend the scope of advocacy for social justice well beyond the ECEC walls. In other words, as kaiako and children's advocate, teachers become architects of the new partnerships for creating a world that is more democratic, more plural, more just and less unequal (Moss, 2010).

### **A Story of High Quality, Investment and Returns**

The concept of an ECEC that requires high quality and investment and in return secures significant outcomes for both children's development and/or educational success and for the country's economic success has been presented to varying degrees in Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood policy directives from the 1980s to the present day. The analysis of ECEC's the Strategic Plan (2002) and the Teacher Criteria (2010) added weight to this interpretation by revealing relatively recent strategies for high quality ECEC which is delivered by highly professional teachers and benefits a high number of children.

The "shared sector vision for the next decade" of the Strategic Plan intended "all New Zealand children to have the opportunity to participate in quality early

childhood education, no matter their circumstances” (SP, p. 1, emphasis added). The vision was rationalised in the text on the basis that ECEC represents “the cornerstone of our education system”, since it is “a vital stage” and “a critical step” in building “the lifelong foundation of success, not only for our children, but also for New Zealand” (SP, p. 1).

On the principle that ECEC is crucial for the lifelong success of its children and the country, three main goals for ECEC were set in the Strategic Plan text: to increase children’s participation in quality ECEC services, to improve quality and to promote collaborative relationships between the Government and the sector. To achieve these, the policy text announced “major changes in the ECEC sector” (SP, p. 3). These changes included: a) “a new funding system to support diverse ECEC services to achieve quality”; b) “better support for community-based ECEC services”; and c) “the introduction of professional registration requirements for all teachers in teacher-led services, such as those already applying in the school sector and kindergartens” (SP, p. 3).

To justify the investment in ECEC which was promised through “the new supportive funding system”, the policy text emphasised that “[o]ur social, educational and economic health *can only benefit from* efforts and resources focused on young New Zealanders” (SP, p. 1, emphasis added). Given the perceived key role of ECEC in building the “lifelong foundation for success” and “social, educational and economic health” of the country, it was asserted that the nation “cannot leave to chance the quality and accessibility of early childhood education” (SP, p. 1). Therefore, the Strategic Plan supported access to high quality ECEC for “*all children, no matter their circumstances*” (SP, p. 1, emphasis added), reflecting its vision of ECEC as a democratic value and the right of every child in Aotearoa New Zealand.

However, by taking a critical look at the language used in the subsequent Strategic Plan text, the policy’s determination to ensure the participation of “all children” (SP, p. 1) moved to the participation of targeted groups of children - those “who are still missing out” on attending ECEC (SP, p. 6). Purportedly drawing on research but without providing a reference to any specific research study the policy text argued that “having access to quality education in early childhood offers the greatest benefits for the very children who are least likely to be attending” (SP, p. 1). ‘Very

children' in the text referred to children from low socio-economic backgrounds, rural communities, and Māori and Pasifika children.

Several reasons were offered in the Strategic Plan text to explain why particular groups of children “miss out” on ECEC (SP, p. 6). These reasons included: parents not being well informed of the importance of ECEC; services not responding to diverse needs and cultural aspirations of families and children; and lack of access to ECEC in rural communities (SP, p. 6). However, “two [particular] factors sharpened [the Government’s] focus for the future of Māori” (SP, p. 10) and Pasifika children in ECEC. These were:

[f]irstly, [Māori and Pasifika children] do not currently participate in ECEC services at the same rate as other New Zealand children. Secondly, [they] will form a larger proportion of this country’s birth-to-five-year-olds within the next 10 years. (SP, p. 1)

This statement echoed the Government’s concern that Māori, Pasifika children and all other children ‘missing out’ on ECEC will form the larger population of children starting school without having “the foundation for ongoing learning” (SP, p. 4) and “lifelong success” (SP, p. 1), which was presumed to be gained through their participation in ECEC. These very children thus seemed to become a ‘threat’ to the country’s “social, educational and economic health” (SP, p. 1) in the future.

To prevent this happening the Strategic Plan proposed that ECSs and teachers must reflect biculturalism in their teaching and learning practices through the use of Māori language and culture, and show their appreciation of the unique place of Māori as tangata whenua. In this way the Strategic Plan text implied that the role of ECEC in responding to biculturalism issues is not only to foster children’s and families’ well-being, belonging and cultural identity; the text also highlights the importance that ECEC attaches to children becoming “valued” contributors to the “social, educational and economic health” of Aotearoa New Zealand (SP, p. 1). This highlights the view of ECEC as an economic investment, aiming to accommodate and contribute to the country’s economic priorities and success. This view opposed the earlier statements of ECEC that advocated for the well-being and cultural identity of children and families, putting these ahead of the state’s interests.

Furthermore, the Strategic Plan highlighted that the Government is “committed to raising the level of educational achievement of all New Zealand children” (SP, p. 4) in the years before starting school. “Quality” ECEC was expected to ensure

“early learning” and to build “a strong learning foundation” for children, particularly those “missing out” (SP, pp. 6-10). By making the early learning of the targeted groups of children the focus of ‘quality’ ECEC, the Strategic Plan narrowed the curriculum’s vision of ECEC as providing care, learning and development in their broadest sense, and fostering well-being and cultural identity. At the same time, it also echoed the struggle to meet both the Government’s and the sector’s priorities and interests as outlined in the possibly conflicting aims of the country’s future success and children’s educational success and overall well-being.

The Strategic Plan also claimed to improve the quality of ECEC by supporting the implementation of the curriculum *Te Whāriki* and providing resources for professionalisation of the ECEC workforce. To this end, the Diploma of Teaching (ECEC) was set as “the benchmark qualification for licensing in ECEC by 2005” (SP, p. 14). The Strategic Plan also set a registration target of 100 percent qualified and fully registered teachers in the teacher-led services (kindergartens and ECE centres), to be met by 2012.

Given the importance of good quality ECEC for the country’s success, “a strong correlation between quality ECEC and teacher qualifications” and registration was strongly emphasised in the policy text (SP, p. 6). The qualified and registered teachers were construed as professionals, “suitable for joining and remaining in the teaching profession” (Teachers Council, 2015, p. 4). These teachers hence were key players in delivering quality ECEC programmes in teacher-led services. Thus, they were called upon to secure everything - the country’s future economic success, children’s educational success and children’s and families’ general well-being.

The teachers’ role in balancing these priorities was complex and required the state’s investment in teachers’ professionalisation. The importance of qualified ECEC professionals made early childhood teachers worthy of equal professional status with other teachers. This served as a rationale for the Strategic Plan to argue for their professionalisation.

Analysis of the Teacher Criteria (2010) further emphasised the correlation between teachers’ qualifications, quality teaching practice and academic achievement of ākonga (learners). Drawing on “the expertise of a writing group and teacher practitioner working groups” (RTC, p. 1), the criteria aimed to promote “quality teaching for all learners in diverse education settings (e.g. schools, kura and early childhood education services)” (RTC, p. 3). Teaching was recognised, in the criteria



text, as “a highly complex activity drawing on repertoires of knowledge, practices, professional attributes and values to facilitate academic, social and cultural learning for ākonga in diverse education settings” (RTC, p. 9).

Acknowledging the complexity of teaching, the text articulated “the essential professional knowledge in practice, professional relationships and professional values required for successful teaching” (RTC, p. 3). The purpose of the professional requirements was to “promote the status of the teaching profession through making explicit the complex nature of teachers’ work”, and “to strengthen public confidence in the profession” (RTC, p. 3).

Like the Strategic Plan, the Teacher Criteria text conveyed a belief that successful teaching is delivered by professional – qualified and registered – teachers. Registered and qualified teachers guaranteed quality teaching, by ensuring learners’ academic achievement and well-being. Therefore, six out of 12 professional criteria for successful teaching were associated with learning of all ākonga/learners (RTC, p. 10-14). The Teacher Criteria text argued for the importance of teachers’ professional knowledge in building “a learning environment”, promoting “success” and ensuring “educational achievement” of learners (RTC, p. 12-14).

Taken together, the analysis of the Strategic Plan and the Teacher Criteria highlighted the crucial role of quality ECEC programmes in fostering children’s learning and academic success, which consequently contributes to the country’s future economic development. Although acknowledging the importance of children’s well-being too, children’s early learning and educational achievement as elements of the country’s future success remained a top priority.

Analysis of the Strategic Plan and the Teacher Criteria texts thus echoed a possible shift in policy from an emphasis on advocacy for the well-being, belonging and cultural identity of all children and families as integral aspects of children’s learning and development. The earlier concerns of ECEC were increasingly being viewed as “contributing to a narrow range of [the] future focused outcomes” (Mitchell, 2010, p. 333). This concern was approved through the Government’s directions focused on early learning of the particular groups of children, their academic success and the country’s future prosperity.

Given the importance of ECEC in contributing to the country’s economy, teachers were constructed as professionals serving the country’s economic success, or a so-

called ‘investment brokers’ (Gibson et al., 2015). I examine this identity construction in the following sub-section.

### **Constructing teachers’ identities through economic investment discourses**

The analysis of the Strategic Plan (2002) and the Teacher Criteria (2010) illuminated the policy directives which emphasise the role of ECEC in enabling children’s educational success and securing the country’s future economic success. Given the new priorities, the purpose of ECEC as a democratic site fostering wholeness of care, learning and development for all children and families, seemed to dwindle. ECEC instead came to be regarded as an economic investment which, by providing quality service to children, particularly those seen as ‘missing out’, could help ensure the country’s prosperity today and in the future.

The view of ECEC as an economic investment has direct implications for how a child and teachers may be positioned in ECEC, and what teachers’ roles and priorities might be. When their learning, development and care and academic success are viewed through discourses of economics, investment and productivity, children become ‘economic units’ (Gibson et al., 2015) contributing to the country’s economic development. Consequently, teachers are expected to ensure that children as economic units make a valuable contribution to the country’s economy. To fulfil the country’s expectations, ECEC practice needs to ‘produce’ knowledge that ensures that children’s early learning supports their future academic success. In this sense, teachers as qualified professionals must serve the country’s economy. The teachers’ professional knowledge, competences and skills ensure quality teaching that leads to children’s academic success. Furthermore, the professional attributes of teachers also guarantee their ability to manage the complex task of lifting children’s academic achievement and supporting the country’s economy, while also nurturing children’s holistic learning, development, sense of belonging, well-being and cultural identity. Based on this, the policy texts can be seen as positioning teachers as “investment brokers”, in charge of “overseeing the investment” (Gibson et al., 2015, p. 321) of the government in children and in the professionalisation of the ECEC sector.

The shifting policy directives and new priorities signalled in the policy texts implied that the earlier constructs of teachers presented in the policy text may have been

compromised. This particularly referred to the construct of teachers as primarily advocates for children's interests, needs, and well-being which were emphasized in the curriculum and professional resources texts. If ECEC was to be seen as an economic investment, teachers as qualified professionals, were now required to negotiate children's holistic learning and development with the economic health of the country. Playing a key role not only in children's learning and development, but apparently just as importantly in the country's economy, teachers were expected to find a way to satisfy the diverse needs and expectations of children and families and the country, and yet to justify that the investment in teachers and the sector was worth.

### **ECEC as a Social Intervention: Catering for the 'Vulnerable'**

More recent policy initiatives under a National-led government (2008-2017) introduced a new approach to ECEC in Aotearoa New Zealand, the so-called social interventionist approach (May, 2014; Mitchell, 2017; Penn, 2011). Using this approach, the existing aim to increase the participation of targeted groups of children 'missing out' on ECEC was narrowed down even more, so that a focus of ECEC became to provide support to 'vulnerable' children and investment in 'high needs' communities. This was justified by the fact that between 20,000 and 30,000 citizens out of Aotearoa New Zealand's 4.4 million had been identified as 'vulnerable' (Ministry of Education, 2011a). 'Vulnerable' children included those from low socio-economic status backgrounds, Māori, Pasifika, children with special education needs (Mitchell et al., 2014, p. 88), and those "at a significant risk of harm to their well-being now and into the future" (Ministry of Social Development, 2012, p. 6).

In this section, I discuss a discourse analysis of two policy documents: the Vulnerable Act (2014) and the VCA Guide (2014b). In the texts of these documents, which were shaped by social interventionist policy directions and discourses of vulnerability and risk, ECEC is construed as a place of caring and catering for 'vulnerable' children and families. In this context, the ECEC teachers are constructed as a specialist ('experts') in caring for the 'vulnerable'. I shall discuss this in a separate sub-section.

Becoming law in 2014, the Vulnerable Act was intended to promote “the best interests of vulnerable children (having regard to the whole of their lives), including (without limitation) taking measures” to:

- protect children from harm, abuse and neglect;
- improve their physical and mental health and cultural, emotional, social and economic well-being;
- enable children's education and participation in recreational and cultural activities and decision making about them;
- strengthen children's connections to people, places and things forming their personal and cultural heritage. (VCA, p. 5)

To achieve these aims, ministries, agencies and professionals from different sectors (e.g. Social Development, Health, Education, Justice, the New Zealand Police, ECEC, amongst others) were obliged to act jointly to ensure an adequate and prompt service for vulnerable children.

As a supplementary resource, the VCA Guide (2014b) supported those employed in the education, welfare, health and other sectors - so-called children's workers - to develop “a clear understanding of what the Vulnerable Children Act means to them” (VCAPG, p. 3). It intended to incorporate the knowledge and experiences of ‘vulnerable’ children and families themselves and “knowledge of the professionals” in “nationally consistent support” (VCAPG, p. 13). Using a consistent approach in supporting children’s workers to understand their responsibilities and actions in protecting and caring for these vulnerable children was expected to strengthen the culture of child protection across the diverse services which together formed an integrated child protection system.

Unlike other analysed policy documents, which were mainly developed by the Government and/or the ECEC sector (see Table 6), the Vulnerable Act and the VCA Guide were the only analysed documents developed by professionals outside education (e.g. welfare, social justice, health). These texts give particular attention to topics that were not discussed in other analysed policy documents, such as factors causing ‘vulnerability and risks’, and measures for protection of and care for ‘vulnerable’ children. Therefore, the Vulnerable Act and the VCA Guide needed to accommodate different sectors’ interests and worldviews regarding ‘fixing’ issues of social vulnerability and the situation of ‘vulnerable’ children.

Both policy documents were based on a firm belief that child protection was not just the responsibility of parents and families, but “everyone’s responsibility” (VCAPG, p. 9). The texts indicated that by making the issues of ‘vulnerability’ in families visible to the “outside world”, “the wellbeing of [vulnerable] children including the identification of and response to those at risk of harm” would be seen as “a joint responsibility” of the multiple parties involved in the integrated protection system (VCAPG, p. 9). Accordingly, “no single agency alone can protect vulnerable children” (VCAPG, p. 11) nor ensure an adequate service.

Roles and responsibilities of diverse services and children’s workers were outlined in the texts. In particular, it was outlined what services ‘must’ do to adopt and implement child protection policies in their individual contexts, ensure safety checking of all employees working with children, and reduce the risk of harm (VCA, 2014). All children’s services, including ECEC, ‘must’ be aware of ‘vulnerable’ children, families and communities; knowledgeable about the requirements of and responsibilities for the ‘vulnerable’ under the Vulnerable Act; and capable of working collaboratively to take informed decisions and actions related to identified concerns regarding children’s ‘vulnerability’.

Although working collaboratively with other services, children’s workers were set specific expectations. These were described under the responsibilities of a lead professional. This person was defined as “a front-line practitioner working with vulnerable children and their families” and coordinating other professionals (VCAPG, p. 13). In that role, children’s workers needed to acquire “core competence” equipping them with specialized knowledge for the purpose of ‘recognising’ and ‘identifying’ circumstances of a potential harm or risk to a child (VCAPG, p. 10). The lead professional was described as “ideally placed to influence a positive change” in lives of ‘vulnerable’ children (VCAPG, p. 13). This ideal place of influence was assumed to position the lead professional as “a powerful force acting as a safety net to protect vulnerable children” (VCAPG, p. 10).

The language in the policy texts describing children and families as ‘vulnerable’ and a lead professional as a powerful force implied a number of challenges and concerns regarding the position of the children and families, and of the lead professional, teachers, in an ECEC context. First, the view of children as ‘vulnerable’ and in need of ‘a safety net to protect them’ (VCAPG, p. 10) differed

significantly from the picture of “competent and confident, independent learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit” (ECCF, p. 9), which was offered in *Te Whāriki* and further promoted in the professional resources. The image of a child as ‘vulnerable’ reflected a child’s limited agency, creating a space for the lead professionals/teachers to decide on their behalf.

Second, by viewing families too as ‘vulnerable’ the policy texts raised doubts about the families’ agency in ECEC’s collective decision-making. It challenged the practicability of establishing reciprocal power-sharing relationships between diverse members of the learning community (e.g. ‘vulnerable child’, ‘vulnerable families’, the ‘lead professionals’). ECEC practice grounded in the whanaungatanga approach was thus called into serious question. This could be particularly the case in situations in which teachers and centres may view ‘vulnerable’ children and families as incapable of contributing to collaborative and democratic learning and teaching practices in ECEC.

This implicit imbalance in relationships in the learning community suggested in the texts, moreover questioned the possibility of ECEC establishing itself as a site for collective, collaborative and democratic learning and teaching and the power sharing relationships which were offered in the earlier analysis. Given the emphasis on vulnerability and risk, ECEC was construed, in these texts, as a place in which those in positions of power care for and cater to the less powerful – the ‘vulnerable’. With these shifting discourses the purpose of ECEC was also changed in the texts. Along with becoming a more likely place for looking after ‘vulnerable’ children and families, ECEC was now defined as a social intervention, with the function of ‘fixing vulnerability’ and ‘saving the vulnerable’. ECEC was now to be considered as an important factor in redressing the nation’s social ills, thus ensuring the country’s future economic success.

The policy texts thus seemed to imply the view that the life challenges faced by ECEC’s children and families were “a closed world from which there is no exit”, rather than “a limiting situation which [‘vulnerable’ children and families] can transform” (Freire, 2000, p. 49). Such a view is likely to limit opportunities for the teachers to engage with principles of social justice and “take up the demanding and complex task of transformation”, which includes creating “new possibilities and opportunities” for and also with vulnerable children and families (Hard et al., 2013, p. 326).

Taken together, the Vulnerable Act (2014) and the VCA Guide (2014b) offered a different view of ECEC and teachers through the discourses of vulnerability and risk underpinning their texts. The analysis indicated that the original purpose of ECEC as focusing on development, learning and care in their broadest sense for all children was recast by the later social interventionist approach, and ECEC became a place of caring for and catering to vulnerable children.

Thus, the discourse of vulnerability and risk which emanated from health, welfare, social work and other sectors outside education created an opportunity for ECEC services and their teachers to re-consider their vision of all children and families as capable and competent, and the roles of ECEC in learning, development and care as a whole. Moreover, by stressing the role of ECEC in taking responsibility for 'fixing' social issues which resulted from 'vulnerability', the policy texts reinforced the position of teachers as 'specialists' and 'experts'.

**Construing teachers' professional identities through discourses of vulnerability and risk: A specialist/expert caring for and saving the 'vulnerable'**

The image of teachers as specialists and experts who care for the 'vulnerable' was construed through the discourses of vulnerability and risk which underpinned the Vulnerable Act (2014) and the VCA Guide (2014b). This construct was made visible through the roles and responsibilities of the lead professional or children's worker, or a teacher in an ECEC context, when working with vulnerable children and families.

The policy texts, as discussed above, viewed the lead professional as "a powerful force acting as a safety net", protecting 'vulnerable' children, and making a positive change in their lives (VCAPG, p. 10). The lead professional/teacher was expected to undertake specialised tasks of 'checking', 'identifying' and 'recognising' the 'vulnerable' in their ECEC settings (VCAPG, 2014). The actions and measures teachers might then take were backed up by their specialised knowledge and competences, which guaranteed that the specialised tasks were adequately completed.

The teachers were supported in completing those tasks by agencies, services and other professionals involved in the integrated protection system. This served to authorise teachers in the position of "a powerful force" protecting vulnerable

children (VCAPG, p. 10). It also created a space for teachers and other professionals to use their expert position to make their own judgments and decide on actions relating to ‘vulnerable’ children and families. The power and authority of the professionals caring for the ‘vulnerable’ were particularly highlighted by the requirement that children’s workers need to “recognise when something isn’t right [with a child/family] and then know what to do” (VCAPG, p. 10). This task seemed to constitute an intervention, in which teachers are expected, based on the text, to ‘identify vulnerability’ and ‘quickly act to fix it’. Such intervention was considered necessary especially in the situations when harm to children is done by “the very people we trust to keep them safe” (VCAPG, p. 9).

Unlike the discourses of collaboration, empowerment and power-sharing which construed all stakeholders in ECEC as non-expert partners and members of the learning community, as the analysis of *Te Whāriki* and the professional resources showed, the discourses of vulnerability and risk are likely to perpetuate imbalanced relationships in the learning community. Positioning teachers as individual experts caring for the ‘vulnerable’ seems to disregard the fact that ECEC and its teachers cannot ‘stop’ the vulnerability unless other redistributive measures are put in place (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Moreover, such positioning is more likely to force teachers to take responsibility for ‘fixing vulnerability’ and ‘saving the vulnerable’ on their shoulders, while the social factors causing the vulnerability stay masked.

Accordingly, the discourses of vulnerability and risk in the policy texts offered a very different reading of the purpose of ECEC and teachers. These perspectives are in striking contrast to viewing the child as capable and competent, and the teachers’ role as one of fostering the child’s learning development, and providing care in its broadest sense. The construct of the teacher as a specialist and/or an expert in caring for ‘vulnerable’ children and their whanau/family (especially in situations when families were observed as lacking the capability to care and protect adequately their own children) also contradicts the constructs of teachers as non-expert and *kaiako*, as outlined in *Te Whāriki* and the professional resources.

In the section following, I discuss how the discursive constructions of teachers offered in all analysed policy documents (see Table 6) complement and confront each other, providing more legitimacy for some ways of being a teacher and doing ECEC than others.



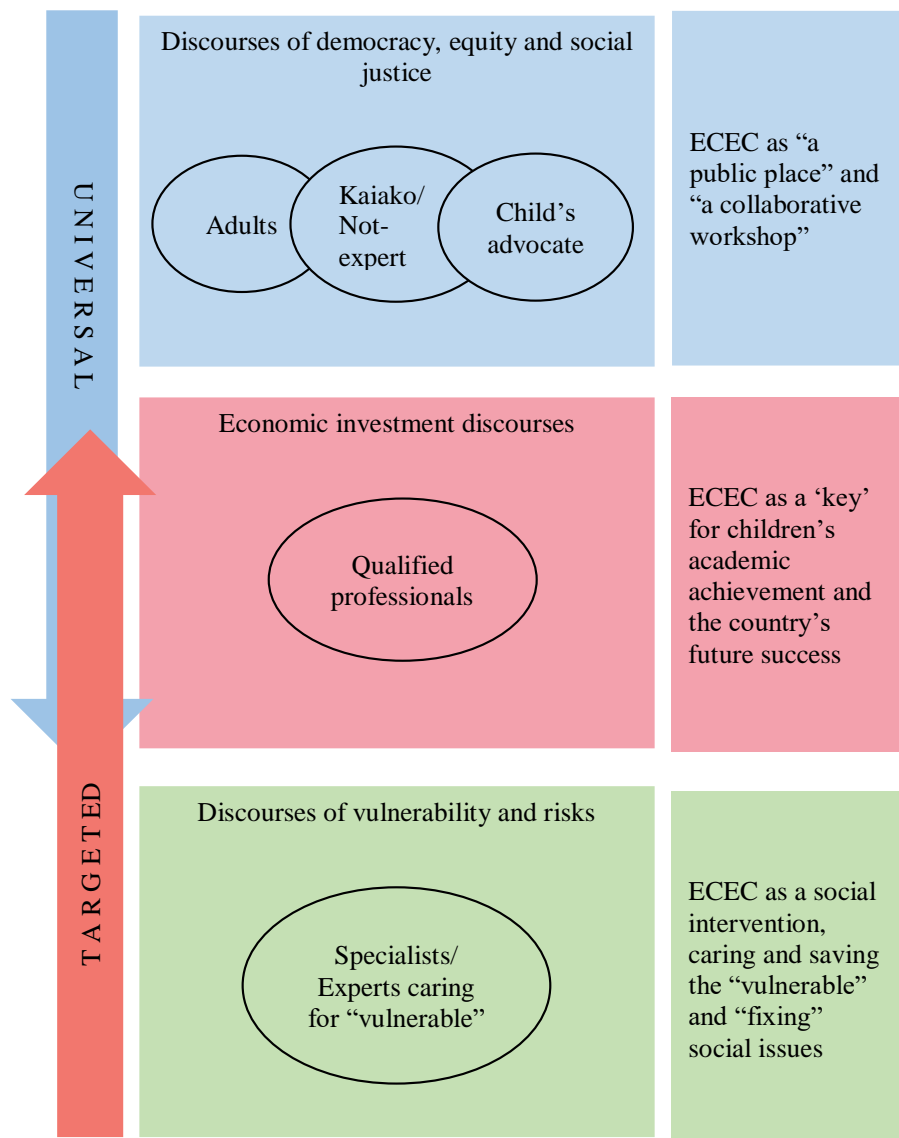
## **Constructions of Teachers' Professional Identities within Discourses in Early Childhood Policies and Their Effects**

The discourse analysis of the early childhood policy documents (see Table 6) offered five different stories of ECEC, spanning a period of political changes in Aotearoa New Zealand from 1996 to 2016. The policy analysis revealed changing policy directives towards ECEC, following the shift from a right of centre government in 1996 to a left of centre government in 1999, and again to the centre right government from 2008. The policy directives pictured a swing in governmental rationale for ECEC, “away from an idea that started to emerge of ECEC as a public good and a child’s right” (Mitchell, 2015, p. 287) to a greater emphasis on ECEC to secure the future economic development of the country and to lift the learning outcomes of children categorised as ‘priority’ or ‘vulnerable’ and living in ‘high needs’ communities.

In Figure 3 (on the next page), I illustrate these shifting policy perspectives of ECEC. I offer a picture of how the purpose of ECEC and the identity constructions of teachers’ have changed in response to the discourses underpinning these perspectives and constructing different realities for those working and participating in ECEC in Aotearoa New Zealand. I refer to Figure 3 throughout this section to illustrate how the discursive constructions of ECEC and teachers changed in the policy texts, offering multiple and often incompatible ways of understanding the purpose of ECEC, teachers’ work and their professional identities.

Analysis of views over time of the purpose of ECEC revealed that the discourses shaped the policy directives were overlapping and often contradictory. To summarise, governments demonstrated two distinct approaches – universal and targeted - to ECEC in Aotearoa New Zealand. The universal and targeted approaches to ECEC differed significantly, and not surprisingly offered contradictory perceptions of children and families, teachers, the purpose of ECEC and the role of the state in ECEC.

**Figure 3.** Shifting discourses and identity constructions in the policy text



The universal approach has been, in the literature, associated with the Labour-led government 1999–2008 (Mitchell, 2015). It viewed ECEC as a right for the young child citizen (May, 2014), the state’s role was, thus, to support and co-operate with the ECEC sector, families, teachers and communities. As grounded in discourses of children’s rights, equity, and collective democracy, the universal approach is in line with the policy documents promoting ECEC as a public place of collaborative and democratic teaching and learning practices, and as a collaborative workshop, established in the commitment, reciprocity and shared responsibilities of the learning community for teaching, learning, development and care. The universal approach therefore respects the views, expertise and experiences of all

adults/members of the learning community as power-sharing participants and contributors to the curriculum, assessment and pedagogy. It advocates for high quality ECEC practice that focuses on well-being, belonging, empowerment, participation and equitable learning opportunities for all children, no matter their circumstances (see Figure 3).

Conversely, the targeted approach was associated with the election of a centre-right government in 2008, and its intention to improve participation in “high needs” communities with “large populations of indigenous Māori children, and Pasifika children whose families had emigrated over several decades from Pacific Islands Nations” (May, 2014, p. 148). In the targeted approach, ECEC is viewed as most beneficial for the selected groups of children – ‘priority learners’ or ‘vulnerable children’ - currently ‘missing out’ on ECEC (Ministry of Education, 2002). Consequently, the role of the state is “to pick up and support” where ‘vulnerable’ or ‘priority’ families “cannot provide adequately” (Mitchell, 2015, p. 297).

Being rooted in economic and investment discourses and discourses of vulnerability and risk, the targeted approach is in line with the policy documents which view ECEC as a place of caring for ‘priority’ or ‘vulnerable’ children and families, instead of all children, and as a social intervention for ‘fixing’ the problems of the ‘vulnerable’, who were perceived as likely to constrain the country’s future economic success (see Figure 3).

In the policy documents reflecting the targeted approach to ECEC, credit is given to multiple agencies and professionals who are responsible for incorporating their professional expertise with local knowledge of ‘vulnerable’ families in the national consistent support system (Ministry of Education, 2014b). By positioning families and children as ‘vulnerable’ or ‘priority’, the targeted approach created a basis for unequal power relationships between those in need of ‘extra’ care and support and those who have professional knowledge and power and are capable of catering and caring adequately for the ‘vulnerable’. From this perspective, ECEC had a social obligation to ‘priority’ families with preschool children receiving the state’s support under the *Social Security (Benefit Categories and Work Focus) Amendment Act* (2013). By making ECEC participation mandatory for ‘vulnerable’ families, this approach strengthened the state’s control over those families. At the same time, it reiterated the role of ECEC as a social intervention designed to ‘fix vulnerability’, and to ensure that those families benefited from ECEC participation.

Along with the different directives, purposes and approaches to ECEC, the shifting policy discourses created a framework of multiple possibilities to what the teachers were expected to be like in a particular ECEC context (see Figure 3). These discourses thus laid a foundation in the policy texts for a number of ambivalent constructions of teachers' professional identities. In my first data set analysis, however, I focused on five broad discursive constructions of teachers which dominated in the preceding two-decade-long policy framework for ECEC in Aotearoa New Zealand. In this framework, teachers were construed as:

1. Adults, as members of the learning community
2. Non-experts, but a *kaiako* - teachers and learners
3. Children's advocates, advocating for all children's right to democratic and equitable education
4. Qualified professionals securing children's well-being, academic achievement and the country's future success
5. Specialists and experts in caring for and saving the 'vulnerable' (see Figure 3).

These five discursive constructions of teachers overlapped, complemented and conflicted with each other in the policy texts, reflecting the complex nature of the teachers' professional identities as never fixed, but rather as shifting and evolving phenomena.

The constructs of teachers as adults, members of the learning community, *kaiako* and children's advocates, were shaped by the discourses establishing ECEC as a site of democratic, equitable and collaborative teaching and learning. As adults and members of the learning community, teachers are expected to participate, contribute to and co-construct *ako* together with other stakeholders in ECEC and to facilitate a *whanaungatanga* approach in teaching practice. Such teachers are not allowed to be 'an expert' in another person's culture, but will listen to, learn and teach from and with the different Other, to establish power-sharing relationships and an environment of trust, honesty, reciprocity and respect in ECEC practice. Such teachers are also construed as advocates for children's rights in general and equitable learning opportunities in particular in the bicultural and multicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

The teaching practice of these teachers is based on "the sociocultural-ecological and bicultural platform of early childhood curriculum in New Zealand" (Carr, Mitchell,

& Rameka, 2016, p. 451), and the professional resources. Such a teaching practice resists a single world-view and recognises and respects diverse ways of being, teaching and learning. Given the context of this teaching practice, teachers understand that learning outcomes are related to the wholeness of children's learning, development and care, and are "situated in—placed within—the lived social and cultural practices of the children as well as their interpretations of those practices" (Carr et al., 2016, p. 452). In this sense, children's learning varies depending on contextual factors, and thus should not be narrowed to universal and measurable educational outcomes derived from human capital theories, which promote ECEC as an investment in the country's future social, educational and economic health.

However, the discourse analysis of the policy texts (e.g. the Strategic Plan, the Vulnerable Act) suggested that the constructions of adults, members of the learning community and advocates for democratic and equitable education for all children was subsequently narrowed and compromised. This was compounded by the state's emerging political intention to manage ECEC's expenditure priorities and improve the academic achievement of selected groups of children, as means of safeguarding the nation's future economy. In claiming that targeting resources at 'priority' or 'vulnerable' learners "will raise participation to give them a strong platform for their compulsory school years" (Parata, 2012, paras. 8–10), the state removed itself from the universal approach to ECEC. By paraphrasing the famous C. E. Beeby's quote<sup>3</sup>, Helen May, thus nicely reminded that the universal approach required the government to ensure that

every child: whatever their family circumstances, whether their parents are solo, separated, married or defacto, at work or at home, whether they be rich or poor, whether they live in town or country, are Māori or Pākehā, should have a right as a citizen to a free early childhood education that meets their

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<sup>3</sup> The original Beeby's statement goes as follows: "The Government's objective, broadly expressed, is that every person, whatever his level of academic ability, whether he be rich or poor, whether he live in town or country, has a right as a citizen, to a free education of the kind for which he is best fitted and to the fullest extent of his powers" (McDonald, 2002, p. 26).

family needs, recognises their cultural heritage and provides a rich learning environment in a community of learning that empowers both adults and children to learn and grow as equal participants in a democratic society (Cited in May & Mitchell, 2009, p. 10).

Instead of enabling ECEC to be a universal right of *every child* and a democratic site for all citizens, ECEC became a social intervention for ‘fixing’ and ‘saving the vulnerable’ and preventing the possibility of any brake on the country’s economy. In such a context, teachers were likely to be construed as specialists and ‘experts’ in caring for, protecting and ‘rescuing vulnerable’ children (see Figure 3).

With this shift of policy discourses, teaching practice grounded in equity and reciprocity and the empowerment of all members of the learning community is jeopardised, especially when the image teachers hold of children and families as ‘vulnerable’ becomes the default. With a huge potential to stigmatise ‘vulnerable’ children and families (May, 2014; OECD, 2006), the policy directives undermined the view of children “as social actors in their own right, as people with agency who make decisions about their own lives in the here and now [not only in the future] within the constraints set by adults” (Penn, 2011, p. 13). Since “the powerful [deficit] imagery that [teachers] may hold may not necessarily change”, then their teaching practice will reflect the deficit view, and “will perpetuate the educational crisis” (Bishop, 2003, p. 234).

While claiming to ensure equitable learning opportunities for priority learners the targeted policy directives, could not, however, curtail inequalities in ECEC access (Mitchell, 2013), neither could they reduce family vulnerability. For this to happen, other measures would be needed, such as redistributive taxation and generous benefits for families with children (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Moreover, the targeted approach could not enable more children to benefit from participation in ECEC irrespective of the socio-economic circumstances of their families. For these reasons, as either the predominant or single approach, the targeted approach must be considered unlikely to be effective. Penn (2011) argues, rather, that the targeted approach puts “a burden on those providing such services to expect them to cure poverty, although they can perhaps make its effects less harsh for those they work with” (p. 12). Furthermore, it is observed that the targeted approach strengthens the view of ECEC as a social intervention that “is done to young children in the hope of (re)shaping their future” (Penn, 2011, p. 13). Conversely, the policy reforms led

by the child rights approach are viewed as encouraging ECEC to be a “collaborative venture” (Penn, 2011, p. 13) that is undertaken together with all children no matter their circumstances and as such includes their active participation, contribution and experiences in the present.

The construction of teachers as qualified professionals arose from the intersections of discourses underpinning the universal approach (e.g. discourses of equity, democratic ECEC, children’s rights, power sharing, empowerment) and discourses shaping the targeted approach to ECEC (e.g. economic discourses, discourses of vulnerability and risk) (see Figure 3). Using their professional knowledge, attributes and relationships, qualified professional teachers seemed to be expected to satisfy the priorities of both the targeted and the universal policy approach while also ensuring effective ECEC rooted in the curriculum principles and strands.

In the increasingly future-focused thinking of ECEC as an economic investment, teaching professionals were likely to be asked to negotiate the complementing and conflicting views of ECEC, and work with both discourses. These teachers were required to keep the focus on the child, and at the same time to be ‘economically savvy’ (Gibson et al., 2015), with their qualifications guaranteeing effective ECEC practice.

Taken together, the discursive constructions of teachers outlined in the policy texts reflected some of many discourses which have been influencing policy directives in ECEC in Aotearoa New Zealand over the last two decades. However, it is important to consider that these constructions represent potentials, not ‘absolute truths’ that teachers must identify with. The discursive constructions and discourses present both:

an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (Foucault, 1998, p. 101)

The point of resistance is created when the discursive constructions of teachers’ professional identities and the discourses shaping these constructions are questioned. If maintained in “silence and secrecy”, the discourses create “a shelter for power”, and the taken-for-granted identity constructions become “regimes of truth” and work to “normalise” (Foucault, 1998, p. 101).

To create a space to challenge and question the available ways of ‘being’ a teacher and ‘doing’ ECEC and thus make it possible to choose and create alternatives, teachers need to engage with the dominant discourses shaping ECEC policies and practice. In other words, they need to critically examine and reflect on the discursive constructions and the assumptions that justify their existence in ECEC.

## **Conclusion**

Chapter 5 examined and discussed how discourses within the analysed policy documents have constructed teachers’ professional identities. Based on the analysis, I have argued that teachers’ professional identities were constructed through three prevailing discourses – democracy, equity and social justice; economic investment and vulnerability and risk. Within the offered discursive frameworks, the purposes of ECEC have shifted from being a public place and a collaborative workshop for all stakeholders to being a key to the country’s economic success, and, recently, to becoming a social intervention for ‘fixing’ social issues, caused by ‘vulnerability’ and the ‘vulnerable’. To ensure that a purpose of ECEC imposed in a particular contexts and time is achieved, teachers are expected to be and act as *qualified professionals*; delivering quality service and justifying the state’s investments in ECEC; *specialists/experts* for the ‘vulnerable’, and *adults* and *members of learning community*, who are capable of building teaching and learning practices in power sharing relationships, collaboration, and democratic participation of all diverse stakeholders.



## **CHAPTER 6: CONSTRUCTIONS OF TEACHERS’ PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES THROUGH INTERPLAY OF DISCOURSES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD POLICIES AND PRACTICE**

Early childhood policies and the settings in which teachers work provided a powerful context for multiple constructions of teachers’ professional identities. The analysis in this chapter moves from the texts of the policy documents (policy discourses) to participants’ reflections on and interpretations of the policy texts in their specific institutional contexts (discourses in ECEC practice).

At the centre of analysis are perspectives of teachers (KT, ECT), managers (ECM) and professional leaders (PL) about a number of quotations from the policy documents, which were conveyed through the *Booklets* (see Appendix A) and discussed in the focus group interviews (the second data set). The analysis also includes some pieces of data from individual interviews (the third data set), which gave more insight into how discourses within policy concepts (e.g. empowerment, reciprocal relationships) were interpreted in participants’ settings, shaping their practices and professional identities.

Chapter 6 as a whole offers some responses to the second sub-question – How have discourses from early childhood practice corresponded with discourses from early childhood policies? and the third sub-question – What constructions of professional identities have teachers accepted and resisted in their work, and why?

The analysis in this chapter exemplifies how meanings of the policy concepts, or, to put it another way, a translation of policy discourses, differed in diverse institutional contexts and teaching practices. It illustrates oppositional views of teachers and of teachers’ professional identities, pinpointing complexities and diversity in understanding of teachers’ work, identities and relationships with other stakeholders (e.g. parents). Furthermore, the analysis indicates that some subject positions and subjectivities (e.g. ‘never an expert’) are more acceptable to some participants and are employed more in some institutional contexts than others (e.g. ‘an expert’).

In this chapter, I focus on five identity constructions of teachers which emerged through an interplay of discourses in ECEC policies and teaching practices. The

identity constructions contribute to an image of teachers as:

1. a ‘partner with parents’
2. a ‘mentor/coach’
3. ‘never an expert’
4. ‘a catalyst for preventing vulnerability’
5. ‘an expert in their own context’.

By taking a critical look at the five identity constructions, I argue that some identity constructions more than others allow teachers to ground their teaching practice in an ethics of care and ethics of encounter (Dahlberg, 2003; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Sevenhuijsen, 1998). I also suggest that some ways of being a teacher and doing ECEC contribute more than others to the idea of ECEC as a democratic site and collaborative workshop, which was discussed in the policy analysis in Chapter 5.

In the sub-sections following, I examine separately the five identity constructions and where they possibly emanated from. I outline implications of the identity constructions for ECEC practice and critique the identities on offer against the views of ECEC as a place of reciprocal relationships and collaborative teaching and learning of all ECEC stakeholders. I close this chapter by discussing how the five identity constructions contribute (or not) to the idea of ECEC as a democratic site and collaborative workshop.

### **‘Partners with Parents’**

The construction of a teacher as ‘a partner with parents’ arose from the participants’ reflections on the policy quotations about relationships, which were offered under Theme Two - *Collaborative relationships in ECEC and beyond and teachers’ identities* - in the *Booklets* (pp. 9-12 in Appendix A). Central was the quotation from the *Self-review guidelines for ECE*, stating:

Relationships are a source of learning, empowerment, and identity for all of us. This is reflected in the concept of whanaungatanga. Paul Hirini (1997) describes whanaungatanga as “a value, which reinforces the commitment whānau members have to each other” (page 44). Such commitment is expressed through a process of caring, sharing, respecting, helping, assisting, relieving, reciprocating, balancing, nurturing, and guardianship. Hirini goes on to suggest that involvement through whanaungatanga “generates observable behavioural processes through which whānau

functioning is promoted and enhanced”. Whakawhanaungatanga, building a collaborative learning community, establishes an environment of trust and reciprocity as an essential base for effective review. (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 39)

This quotation strongly resonated with all participants. It epitomised participants’ agreement with a definition of “relationships [as] a source of learning, empowerment, and identity for all of us” in ECEC (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 39). The concept of reciprocal relationships was further interpreted as “a key word to [teachers’] identity” (FG5 ECT: 429-430), and “vital for [their] teaching” (FG2 PL: 351). Teaching in ECEC was construed as being “all about [teachers’] relationships with family, children, community and other teachers” (FG4 KT: 489-492).

Furthermore, “relationships as a source of teaching, learning and [teachers’] identities” were further related to “a strong word [discourse] of empowerment” (FG1 ECT: 341-342). Depending on how various stakeholders understand and position each other in their relationships, it was contended that “relationships *can either empower or disempower*” other(s) (FG1 ECT: 343, emphasis added). Based on this, participants viewed teachers as those who “need to create opportunities for children to *do things for themselves*”, rather than “forever doing things *for* children, which is disempowering” (FG1 ECT: 344-348, emphasis added). The “empowerment” of a child, as much as any other stakeholder, was established in the understanding that “other[s] already have power to do things for themselves”, and that all stakeholders bring “an important piece to the puzzle [referring to their knowledge, experience, competences, etc.] to teaching and learning” in ECEC (FG1 ECT: 358-361).

Participants’ interpretations of the policy quotation signalled that teaching practice needs to be established in reciprocal relationships, and highlighted that teachers should recognise, and incorporate individual strengths and capabilities of various stakeholders in their teaching. The recognition that each stakeholder involved in ECEC has power in himself/herself was construed by participants as being at the core of the concept of empowerment and a foundation for reciprocal relationships, teaching and identities.

Within the framework of ECEC as established in reciprocal relationships and empowerment participants argued that there was no need for one person to hold

power and knowledge while positioning others as recipients of that reciprocal relationship and empowerment. Rather, all stakeholders were positioned and construed as partners, meaning actively engaged, respected and committed to caring, sharing, assisting, supporting and recognising one another's capabilities. On this premise, ECEC represented a place in which everybody's strengths and capabilities were recognised and valued in teaching and learning, which was seen as a collaborative process engaging the strengths of all stakeholders.

Participants then moved on to discuss and exemplify reciprocal relationships in their actual workplaces. By reflecting on their teaching practices, participants viewed teachers as 'partners' and as being in a 'partnership' with parents (FG1 ECT, FG2 PL, FG3 ECM, FG5 ECT, FG4 KT). While associating the notions of partner and partnership with parents with the policy text's concept of reciprocal relationships, participants' discussions suggested that applications of the concept may differ when considered in specific ECEC settings and participants' actual relationships with parents. For instance, some participants spoke about the 'switch from relationships to partnership' with parents, which enabled teachers and ECEC services to respond better to various needs and calls for help disclosed by the families and communities they worked with. On the other hand, in some institutional contexts and practices, the construct of a partnership with parents and teachers as partners revealed challenges in balancing power relationships between teachers and parents, particularly parents that were described as 'needing extra' help and support in raising their children.

Below, I exemplify how the policy concept of reciprocal relationship was translated in actual teaching practices and relationships with parents. I argue that the notion of partnership with parents and the construct of teachers as partners had multiple meanings across different institutional contexts and practices.

### **'The switch from relationship to partnership'**

Increasing cultural and ethnic diversity, widening income inequalities and child poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand society, changing parental employment patterns and consequent longer ECEC hours for children were all associated with the 'switch from relationships with parents to partnership' with parents. With the growing complexity and demands of society, some participants described relationships with families in their ECEC settings as being significantly intensified. These 'new'

relationships signalled a movement from superficial conversations to deeper discussions about children and family life. From ‘laughing’, “talking about bits and pieces with parents” (FG5 ECT: 935), having ‘a nice chat’ when ‘dropping off children’ and ‘going home’ (FG1 ECT, FG2 PL), teachers found themselves “more invested in relationships with families”, more interested and better informed about “what children are doing not only when in the centre but also at home” (FG5 ECT: 940-944). By bringing new qualities to these relationships, teachers perceived themselves as creating space for families to open up conversations about their lives, issues, concerns and ‘vulnerabilities’ (e.g. unemployment, poverty, ‘challenging behaviours’ in families), and to ask teachers to help not only regarding children’s learning and development but also about different areas of families’ lives (FG2 PL, FG4 KT, FG5 ECT).

With families’ growing trust in teachers, participants construed their ECEC settings as “a place in which relationships with parents switched to the partnership” (FG5 ECT: 945-946). Partnership implied a positioning of teachers and ECEC services as being more engaged than before in the lives of children and families, being more committed and taking up more responsibility for supporting whole families (FG2 PL, FG4 KT, FG3 ECT). With these growing responsibilities and commitments, the purpose of ECEC and teaching practice was undergoing ‘a huge transformation’, which included a shift from teachers supporting children’s learning and development, which was previously teachers’ ‘main responsibility’, to helping the entire families and communities with all sorts of life issues (FG3 ECM, FG5 ECT). With the transformed purpose of ECEC, early childhood settings were construed in some participants’ comments as being “like a hub” – “social institutions well placed within a community” and “integrated with other social services and agencies [e.g. health, social services]”, with “an aim to assist families to access all sorts of support and find answers for issues in different areas of their lives” (IJ: 415-463). The construct of ECEC settings as a hub was illustrated through numerous examples that implied growing responsibilities of teachers and settings in the lives of entire families. The examples ranged from making playgrounds in ECEC settings accessible for children and families over the weekend, and organising social events for families new to the country/local community, to creating a social space in a centre for parents to just have a cup of tea when stressed, meet a friend (another parent) or ‘take a nap on a couch when tired’ (FG2 PL, FG4 KT, FG5 ECT).

Equally, in some predominantly low-socio-economic communities, the partnership with families and ECEC as a hub illustrated an increasing social purpose and function of ECEC settings and teachers. Some ECEC settings, for example, cooked meals for children and families and shared vegetables from their garden with families (FG3 ECM, FG4 KT, FG5 ECT), provided information and different services at their centres (e.g. healthcare checks, employment and immigration advisers, information on driving tests, speech therapist clinics) and offered relief teacher positions to parents (FG1 ECT, FG2 PL, FG5 ECT).

While highlighting that the partnership with parents allowed teachers and ECEC services to do much more for children, families and communities than in the past, constructions of teachers as partners also suggested that “teachers needed to accept many extra roles and responsibilities that have been handed to [them] over time” (FG1 ECT: 630-633). This was particularly relevant for some institutional contexts in which parents were described as ‘needing extra support to raise their children’. Below, I share an example from such a context. I demonstrate how partnership, as built in the concept of reciprocal relationships and acknowledgement of everybody’s strengths, was left behind when a participant was talking about a relationship with a parent ‘needing extra support to raise her children’. I suggest that discourses underpinning a perception of parents as ‘needing extra’ support created a space for a partnership to be based on unequal power relationships between partners (teachers and parents) in some practices and institutional contexts.

### **‘Encroaching on parents’ territory’**

As noted above, the ‘switch from relationships with parents to a partnership’ was related to the increasing engagement of teachers and ECEC services in supporting not only children but entire families. While bringing many benefits to all stakeholders (e.g. reinforcing trust, sharing resources, establishing open dialogue) the construct of partnership posed a question about power and reciprocity, roles and responsibilities that both partners, teachers and parents, share in caring for and supporting one another. Some participants’ talks alluded to challenges in navigating parents’ roles and responsibilities (‘a parent’s territory’) and roles and responsibilities of ECEC settings and teachers (‘teachers’ territory’). These challenges were associated with some particular parents who were described as ‘needing extra’ support to raise their children.

Participants' conversations about these parents initiated a number of discourses that enabled constructions of parents as 'not knowing' how to respond to the complexity of parenting, having busy life and jobs, recently immigrating to the country and 'not knowing' the culture, and dealing with many difficulties and problems (e.g. poverty, unemployment, 'vulnerability'). Partnership with these parents coming from "a specific context" was defined as requiring teachers to "take a step further in supporting them to raise their children", and at the same time as "allowing teachers to encroach into the parents' territory" (FG3 ECM: 580-593). To illustrate this concept of partnership I draw on an example from Jo's setting.

Jo worked in a centre in which "three little kids were staying from 7am to 6pm", as their "mum had a very busy job and needed to work for very long hours" (FG3 ECM: 584-586). This "mum" matched the profile noted above of the parents "needing extra support" and coming from "a specific context". (More specific details on this family's life are confidential, at the participant's request.) (FG3 ECM: 580-593).

Jo explained that, over time, teachers "had conversations with this mum" (FG3 ECM: 582-585) and made "an agreement with the mum to offer her an "extra' support" which included bathing and feeding the children just before they went home, tasks that families usually do when they get home (FG3 ECM: 586-620). Jo described as follows:

we[teachers] would bath the children at 5:30 [pm] and get them done before the mum comes .... She trusted us. There was a mutual respect, and communication with this mum. Although we always felt like we are encroaching on her territory, but she knew that we are doing this for her to help the whole family. (FG3 ECM: 586-620)

While emphasising that the partnership with the mother was built in "a dialogue", "mutual respect" and "trust" (FG3 ECM: 587-600), Jo's account also suggested that to the teachers the partnership with this 'mum' felt different from a partnership with other parents described as not in need of the 'extra' help and support. The main difference was that teachers went beyond their 'regular' responsibilities of care (e.g. washing children and providing meals during the day) to take up some responsibilities (e.g. an evening bath and meals) that other parents would usually do themselves. This allowed teachers not only to provide the 'extra' help and support, but also to enter 'the parents' territory'.

Interestingly, when reflecting on partnership with families not needing the ‘extra’ support, the notion of such a partnership did not imply separate ‘territories’. The partnership with these families suggested that both partners rather worked together, and both were capable of caring for themselves and the others, as much as to reciprocate their roles and responsibilities.

Looking at some participants’ conversations which described teachers as entering ‘parents’ territory’, it appeared that the understanding of partnerships with parents and positioning of partners within the partnership shifted in accordance to discourses that were utilised for constructing views of families and their life circumstances. If drawing on discourses of empowerment, all partners (teachers and parents) in a partnership were construed as capable of taking care of themselves and others. Such a view of partnership in teaching practice echoed the policy concept of reciprocal relationships, which was discussed earlier.

However, when discourses of vulnerability were employed, some parents were construed as ‘needing’ more (‘extra’) support than others, while teachers were viewed as those entering ‘parents’ territory’ and doing things *for* parents rather than *with* parents. This construct of partnership implied that some partners (i.e. parents from a ‘specific contexts, needing ‘extra’ support) might be positioned as disempowered subjects in some relationships and teaching practices, rather than capable and equal partners with teachers in the teaching and learning of their children.

Given the opposing constructions of partnerships and partners, the data analysis suggested that holding onto discourses of reciprocal relationships and empowerment, as proposed in some ECEC policies (e.g. *Te Whāriki*, professional resources) was very challenging in all situations and in relation to all parents. When parents were viewed through discourses of vulnerability, a construct of ‘partnership’ implied that teachers and teaching practices might not credit the unique knowledge and strengths of those parents ‘needing extra’ support to raise their children.

In the section below, I examine further shifts in the construction of partnership with parents in ECEC. In so doing, I throw light on the position of a teacher as a mentor/coach in ‘educating’ parents.



## **‘Mentor/coach’**

The construction of partnership with parents further implied that teachers may also act as a ‘mentor/coach’ to parents, who can ask for guidelines and support in their parenting (FG3 ECM, FG4 KT, FG5 ECT). The construct of mentor/coach emerged through participants’ observations about increasing calls from parents for assistance in understanding their children’s learning, development and care, and in resolving various concerns related to these (e.g. ‘developmental’ and ‘behavioural difficulties’, a child being tired, ‘grumpy’, not eating or sleeping properly).

As a mentor/coach to parents, teachers were construed as ‘educating’, ‘teaching’, ‘mentoring’ and ‘guiding’ parents, not just children (FG3 ECM, FG4 KT, FG5 ECT). The construct of mentor/coach drew on complementing and confronting discourses of empowerment and vulnerability that underpinned participants’ interpretations of partnership with parents.

In some participants’ talks, teachers as mentor/coach was associated with parents having “trust” and “respect” for “teachers’ knowledge”, “support” and “all the work they do for their children” (IM: 125-130). While being a mentor/coach suggested a partnership grounded in reciprocity and working together *with* parents (e.g. ‘caring’, ‘learning’ and ‘teaching one another’), some examples showed that teachers as mentor/coach may also be positioned as more knowledgeable partners, while parents were rather receivers of knowledge.

This power imbalance was particularly apparent in some participants’ observations which construed teachers as mentor/coach with a role in ‘educating’ parents. In the examples below, I draw on statements illustrating positioning of mentor/coach (teachers) and parents in a mentoring and teaching process. Statements related to teachers’ positions are in bold, and underlined statements imply positioning of parents.

We get told every day by parents that they don’t know what to do with their children [referring to the issues stated above] ..... I **listen to them ... I share my information and learning. We hold parents’ nights** and we invite parents to share their experience, talk about their issues and ask for help .... We make the time to answer their concerns. (FG3 ECM: 604-615)

I do a lot of reading on topics about infants and toddlers. If a parent comes to me .. with issues, I would give them books to read. I also invite parents

**to come in and observe how I do things** [e.g. putting a child to sleep]. **I show them what to do.** (IM: 137-147)

**We mentor and guide them.** [...] Several parents have come concerned about their child's behaviour. **We share resources and knowledge, we coach them.** If we have few parents with the same problems... we would get these two parents together to share things and experience ....(FG5 ECT: 151-157)

The examples of mentoring and teaching parents seemed to emerge from practices in which parents were viewed as coming with particular questions and concerns. As mentor/coach, teachers were construed as those who 'listen to' parents' concerns and issues, and, based on that, provide a solution in a form of a book, knowledge and experience, and showing parents 'what to do'. Such mentoring and teaching implies a question about the place and space for parents' unique knowledge and experience in a mentoring process, which seemed to take the form of a linear communication rather than a reciprocal dialogue and relationship. Terms used by some participants to construct teachers as mentor/coach indicated that there were few opportunities for parents to share their own unique knowledge about their children, and thus position themselves as more knowledgeable partners in a mentoring process. The mentoring/coaching as such seemed to rather construe and position parents as in need of guidelines, and teachers as more knowledgeable partners, giving knowledge *to* parents. Moreover, it appeared to inhibit teachers as mentor/coach from seeking and finding out about the expert knowledge of parents. However, contrary to the examples above, in some teaching practices the construct of teachers as mentor/coach was not related to teachers educating and mentoring parents, but "inviting parents' voices in important decision-making about the centre" and "curricula", and "showing that teachers do genuinely care about their children, and them as family" (FG4 KT: 659-669). Being mentor/coach conveyed that teachers were responsible for engaging parents in a dialogue and discussing various issues with them, ranging from "an approach taken to the their children's learning", "why teachers advocate for learning through play" to "challenges and changes happening in the centre and the ECEC sector", such as restructuring in the centre, impacts of ECEC policies on parents, funding, and teachers, amongst other topics (FG4 KT: 670-685). Furthermore, as mentor/coach, teachers were expected to be "not judgmental of parents' issues and concerns", "honest in their

communication with parents about children's learning and development", and "open to work with parents together in shaping their children learning" (FG4 KT: 695-715). Importantly, the construct of mentoring/coaching was "not about teachers knowing everything", but rather "knowing how to assist families to access information and services they need" (IJ: 390-392).

Such a construct of mentoring in teaching practice was grounded in a reciprocal dialogue. The teacher as mentor/coach was perceived as the one who assisted parents to find information for themselves. Importantly, a mentoring/coaching process left a space for teachers as well to share concerns and issues, and to ask parents for help, acknowledging that they do not know everything. This was a clear distinction from the view of mentoring as a linear process in which teachers may fill parents in with 'expert' knowledge.

Taken together, constructions of teachers as mentor/coach suggested that there were ambiguous understandings in circulation in teaching practices of the concept of partnership with parents. The ambiguity of the meanings of partnership emerged though an interplay of two opposing discourses - discourses of empowerment and of vulnerability. A construct of partnership grounded in discourses of empowerment recognised the strengths, knowledge and power of both partners, teachers and parents. This meaning of partnership complemented well the policy concept of reciprocal relationships, which was discussed at the beginning of this chapter. On the contrary, the discourse of vulnerability positioned teachers as those who 'know' and parents as those who often 'do not know' what to do. Such an understanding of 'a partnership' necessitated and allowed one partner (teachers) to take control over a mentoring process and draw predominantly on their own expertise and knowledge in finding a solution for parents' issues. This form of partnership leaves little or no space for parents' knowledge and expertise to inform teaching practice and is in opposition to the concept of reciprocal relationships offered in the policy documents (as shown in Chapter 5).

The analysis of some policy documents suggested that ECEC represents a collaborative workshop established in discourses of reciprocal relationships and collaborative teaching and learning of all stakeholders as equal partners. In addition, the policy texts emphasised the commitment to allowing democratic and power-sharing participation between the partners through the use of the whanaungatanga approach in an ECEC setting. However, opposing constructs of partnership with

parents revealed that sustaining the policy discourses of reciprocal relationships, democratic participation and empowerment was quite challenging in the teaching practices of some institutional settings and teachers. This was particularly evident in constructions of ‘partnership’ and teachers as ‘mentor/coach’ in relation to families that were viewed through the lens of a vulnerability discourse as coming with issues, ‘needing’ information and ‘not knowing’ what to do. Rather than viewing ECEC as a place in which teachers and parents are co-creators and evenly matched partners in collaborative teaching and learning, as the policies implied, some teaching practices seemed to draw on discourses that reinforced and allowed imbalance between educating parents and co-constructing teaching and learning through a partnership *with* parents as equals.

Below, I explore the construct of ‘never an expert’, which construed teachers as those who learn with and from others, rather than the ones who ‘know’.

### **‘Never an expert’**

The construct of teachers as ‘never an expert’ arose through participants’ reflections on the policy quotations under Theme Three, *Bicultural context of ECEC and Teachers’ Identities*, offered in the *Booklets* (pp. 13-16, Appendix A). At the centre of discussion was the quotation from Assessment for Learning (2005), arguing that:

teacher education programmes should aim to equip graduates to facilitate a “whanaungatanga approach” to implement a bicultural curriculum in early childhood centres. This approach is characterised by the following features:

- recognition of whānau as central to early childhood care and education;
- responsive, respectful, and reciprocal relationships with children, whānau Māori, and other adults;
- reconceptualising the construct of teacher as expert;
- teachers recognising that “they cannot be experts in another person’s culture if they do not share that cultural background” and that “non-Māori cannot speak for Māori”. Non-Māori teachers create opportunities for Māori to voice their perceptions and are committed to listening and responding to them;
- “a climate of collaboration and genuine power sharing” (Ritchie, 2001 as cited in Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 4).

When reflecting on this quotation in the focus group (FG) and individual interviews (I), some early childhood (ECT) and kindergarten teachers (KT), managers (ECM) and professional leaders (PL) described their notion of teachers as ‘never experts’ in teaching, learning and knowledge. As ‘never an expert’, teachers were viewed as “open to practise ako – [meaning] learning and teaching through reciprocal relationships” (FG4 KT: 487-489), and capable of practising a “whanaungatanga approach”, which was interpreted as “being collective, sharing experiences, learning and teaching together” (FG1 ECT: 557-578). The construct of ‘never an expert’ was further associated with a “kaiako”, which in te reo the participants explained, means “being always learners and teachers” (FG1 ECT 580-582), “teaching and learning at the same time”, and “being constantly on a journey of learning from others” (FG4 KT: 490-492).

In construing teachers as ‘never experts’, participants drew on discourses of collaborative learning and teaching and reciprocal relationships. Teaching practice, learning and knowledge were seen as co-constructed through a continuity and reciprocity of teachers’ working together with parents/families, children and the entire community. By mobilising discourses of collaboration and reciprocity, the construct of ‘never an expert’ by these participants was presented in opposition to the construct of an ‘expert’, which implies that teachers ‘know it all’ (FG3 ECM). The participants who made this distinction suggested that if teachers view themselves as ‘experts’ they “cannot have reciprocal relationships with parents” and “would be having quite patronising attitude[s] towards parents” (FG3 ECM: 938-943). In this sense, being an ‘expert’ was problematised as a ‘danger’ that may prevent ECEC practice from establishing itself in discourses of reciprocal relationships and collaborative teaching and learning.

To illustrate this point, I share an excerpt from a participant’s discussion about how teachers in her centre raised concerns regarding “parents putting lots of sweets in children’s lunch boxes” (FG3 ECM: 944-952). The teachers in this example were considered to be acting as “experts” by “arguing that eating sweets is not good for children” and they “need to eat more proteins and fruits” (FG3 ECM: 944-952). In sharing this example, a participant questioned the construct of teachers as ‘experts’ in her centre as follows:

I asked them, but, “How do we [teachers] know why... somebody was putting a little chocolate bar in the child’s lunch box? It might be because

the child was dry during the night or they needed to go early, and the child could not finish the chocolate treat or whatever. How do you know? .... So, you cannot judge. If we are experts, we cannot have reciprocal relationships with parents. We may be patronising them .... showing [that] we know it all. (FG3 ECM: 944-952)

The construct of ‘experts’ was assumed to encourage teachers to build their practice and relationships in a discourse of authority, which was perceived as reinforcing knowledge of “one person – the individual expert who knows it all” and imposing “a top-down approach in teaching” (FG2 PL: 576-585). Teaching practice, established in the authority discourse of expert knowledge was construed as compromising the concept of ECEC grounded in collaboration, reciprocity and whanaungatanga approach, and promoted in the policy quotation above.

Furthermore, being ‘never experts’ was associated with the introduction of the curriculum *Te Whāriki* (1996) and the professional resources (Ministry of Education, 2004a, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009a), which introduced discourses of reciprocity, and power sharing relationships in ECEC’s teaching and learning. One teacher said:

Before *Te Whāriki, Kei Tua o te Pae* and the review guidelines, it was that one [a teacher] controls everything but now you are not expected to be the expert. You need to find out others’ viewpoints ... it [ECEC] is based in the atmosphere of collaboration and sharing in a genuine way. It is about taking control away from one person [the ‘expert’] and sharing it collectively. It made a huge difference. (FG1 ECT: 801-807)

Unlike conceptualisations of teachers as being partner and mentor/coach; especially with those parents ‘needing extra support’ and ‘coming with issues’; the construct of ‘never an expert’ draws on collaboration, empowerment and reciprocity in teaching, learning and knowledge. The concept of teachers as ‘never an expert’ reinforced ECEC as a place of collaboration and sharing, allowing viewpoints of both teachers and parents to inform teaching and learning. This stance complemented the construct of ECEC which was promoted in the curriculum and the professional resources, as a collaborative workshop and a public space in which teaching, learning and knowledge were co-constructed through dialogue, encouraging the partners (parents and teachers) to bring their own unique and specialist knowledge and expertise.

### **‘Never an expert in another person’s culture’**

Given the bicultural and increasingly multicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand, participants strongly identified with the policy statement that teachers “cannot be experts in another person’s culture” (Ritchie, 2001 as cited in Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 4). The construct of teachers as ‘never experts’ in another person’s culture was particularly highlighted in talks of participants working with children and families from cultural backgrounds different from their own.

By imbedding teachers in this construct, teaching and learning were defined as “never based on one socio-cultural worldview” and, therefore suggesting that “all” stakeholders involved in an ECEC setting “have certain strengths, knowledge and viewpoints they bring to ako – teaching and learning as a reciprocal process” (CD, Interview Notes [IN]). By being and acting as “never experts in another person culture”, teachers were viewed as allowing the concept of “ako” – meaning, “learning and teaching through the collaborative relationships and reciprocity with a community, family, children, other teachers” (FG4 KT: 487-492).

The discourses which underpin the curriculum principles and strands (especially, Families and Community, Relationships, Belonging, Contribution), and the features of a whanaungatanga approach support the construct ‘never an expert in another person’s culture’ because it requires teachers to “learn from parents ... about their culture” and “accept that their expertise is an important piece of the puzzle to bring in teaching and learning of their children” (FG1 ECT: 734-740). By construing teachers in this way, participants’ discussions implied that teaching practice could be built in diverse socio-cultural perspectives, with an ECEC setting being a place that:

make[s] everybody feel valued, respected and accepted... demonstrat[ing] interest in their [referring to culturally diverse stakeholders] beliefs, experiences, practices and learn about their lives, language and country ... and reflect[ing] all these in [its] teaching and relationships. (FG4 KT: 906-915)

Furthermore, the concept of “never expert in another person’s culture” required teachers’ “courage to have these conversations about culture, language.... [anything ‘unknown’ to them] with parents ... and not making assumptions about them” (FG1 ECT: 733-735). From a position of ‘never an expert’, teachers were considered as capable of challenging authority discourses of their ‘expert’ knowledge and

“critically reflecting on what you don’t know” (IJ: 514-515). In this sense, a kindergarten teacher, Jane, explained, “If you see yourself as never expert you will be more open to engage with others and .... to invite local relationships outside your kindergarten, like local iwi, kaumātua [see Glossary of Māori Terms] and ask questions, [and] learn through these relationships that are beyond your own setting” (IJ: 514-519).

It was further highlighted that “the curriculum encourages us [teachers] to open the door for other cultures and viewpoints” (FG1 ECT: 411-415) and “truly support children’s learning, development, wellbeing, relationships and communication”, by “weav[ing] diverse socio-cultural perspectives in [their individual curriculum] programmes” (FG 4 KT: 847-849). Participants argued that by being and acting as ‘never experts in another person’s culture’ teachers can become more open to new and diverse cultural perspectives, with their teaching reflecting worldviews of various stakeholders engaged in ECEC.

In addition, the necessity for being and acting as ‘never expert in another person’s culture’ in ECEC was further justified through difficulties and challenges that teachers have faced when working with the bicultural curriculum and not speaking te reo and/or understanding Māori worldview (IL). Below, I share Leyla’s views of difficulties which arose for her as a Pākehā teacher working in the bicultural context.

*‘Without learning the language, how can you be bicultural?’ (Leyla’s example)*

Leyla had worked in ECEC for more than 20 years. She identified herself as a Pākehā woman and acknowledged that her father was Māori. Leyla defined “biculturalism” as being “a recurring theme for all those years [she] ha[d] been working in ECEC” (FG1 ECT: 645-647). Biculturalism in ECEC and in Aotearoa New Zealand society generally was construed in Leyla’s talk as “difficult”, “very frustrating”, and “very racist” (FG1 ECT: 645-649).

Drawing on personal and professional discourses informing her everyday (‘mundane’) politics and practices, Leyla acknowledged that “it is hard to separate [her] personal experience [associated with her cultural background] from [her] professional experience, as an early childhood teacher” (FG1 ECT: 649-650). From this stance, “biculturalism [was construed as] a difficult area for many teachers in



New Zealand, including myself [Leyla]“ (IL: 289-290). The “difficulty” was associated with being “Pākehā, who do not speak the language [te reo Māori] and... think as Pākehā think”, which Leyla explained as follows:

... I know that there is not one way of seeing things, but I am still tentative to see and do things [based on] how I view the world, and how I view information that I get. I see it through my Pākehā [cultural] lens (IL: 283-295).

Therefore, understanding things from a “Pākehā world” differed from “a Māori worldview”, which Leyla illustrated by conceptualising the whanaungatanga approach from both worldviews:

[i]n my Pākehā world, whanaungatanga means “I *have* things. I *own* things. Things *belong to me*”. Whereas in the wider Māori world everything is *collective*. *We share* things. (IL: 275-278, Leyla’s tone became louder, emphasising the words in italics).

Her statements suggested that when coming from a cultural background other than Māori, teachers tend to construe knowledge, teaching and learning from their own cultural perspectives, which are not necessarily consistent with the perspectives of Māori children and families, or families and children from any other culture in an ECEC setting. Hence, taking up the construct of ‘never expert in another person’s culture’ was construed as allowing teaching, learning and knowledge to be co-constructed in multiple cultural worldviews, rather than on authority discourses of experts’ knowledge.

Furthermore, the construct of ‘never an expert in another’s person’s culture’ was related to a paradox which Leyla stated in the form of the following question: “Without learning the language, how can we expect our teachers, and New Zealanders, to develop bicultural teaching practices?” (IL: 296-299). To illustrate this point further, Leyla shared that there were “institutionalised culturally sensitive practices” that teachers “don’t do” in their ECEC setting “not to offend Māori parents and children” (e.g. “not stepping over children when they were in bed”, “not putting tea towel on shoulder”) (IL: 300-320). However, though doing these things out of courtesy and respect, teachers seemed to be left with a superficial understanding of another person’s culture.

In considering “all these years of working with the bicultural curriculum” and “learning about biculturalism”, Leyla conveyed her opinion that “little

understandings have been gained” (IL: 306-309) in terms of teachers’ knowledge of biculturalism and Māori concept used in ECEC, but “our [teachers] knowledge has not really advanced that far, I believe” (IL: 325-328). Drawing on her personal and cultural discourses, Leyla concluded that:

after all these years biculturalism still seems to me, personally, to be tokenism. I think until we change who we are as a nation that will remain ... I said last time [referring to the FG] that we have been doing this curriculum for 20 years and actually in reality not a lot has been changed ... (IL: 300-320)

While revealing the complexity of teaching in the bicultural and multicultural context of ECEC, the construct of ‘never expert in another person’s culture’ pinpointed issues arising from a broader socio-cultural, historical and political context of ECEC and discourses shaping the present and past of Aotearoa New Zealand (e.g. discourses of colonisation). This construct also sheds light on the powerful influence of the personal and professional discourses which shaped teachers’ views and positioning within a culture that is different from their own. It suggested that by taking up the ‘never an expert’ identity construct in ECEC, teachers can become more open to diverse socio-cultural worldviews, which would create a space for more equitable teaching and learning opportunities for all children and families, particularly those from different cultural backgrounds.

### **‘Catalyst for Preventing Vulnerability’ and ‘Experts in Their Own Context’**

The constructions of teachers as ‘a catalyst for preventing vulnerability’ and ‘an expert in their own context’ unexpectedly emerged through some participants’ reflections on the policy quotations of collaborative relationships in ECEC and identity constructions represented in the *Booklets* (pp. 9-12, 19; see Appendix A). Interestingly, both these identity constructions were construed *only* in those contexts described as ‘extremely vulnerable’, by participants who worked there (FG3 ECM, FG5 ECT). The construct of ‘catalyst’ was further associated with the recent policy developments of the *Vulnerable Children Act 2014*: (VCA) and the *Vulnerable Children Act 2014: A practical guide for Early Childhood Education Services, Ngā Kōhanga Reo, Playgroups, Schools and Kura* (2014b) (VCAPG). The construct of ‘expert’ arose from conversations about some participants’

experience of working with children and families living in low socio-economic status communities and growing up in difficult circumstances.

In the group and individual interviews, the term ‘extremely vulnerable’ was applied to indicate that some ECEC centres were located in poor communities populated by families with low socio-economic status, and families with ‘challenging behaviours’ (e.g. substance abuse, domestic violence). Drawing on the discourse of vulnerability, most children attending ECEC settings located in these communities were seen as ‘fitting into’ the category of being ‘vulnerable’, which was emphasised in the Vulnerable Children Act (2014). As discussed earlier, the Vulnerable Children Act (2014) intended to promote the best interests of vulnerable children and protect children from harm, abuse and neglect (as discussed in Chapter 5). The term “vulnerable” in the policy texts was associated with groups of children from low socio-economic status backgrounds, Māori, Pasifika, children with special education needs (Mitchell et al., 2014, p. 88), and those “at a significant risk of harm to their well-being now and into the future” (Ministry of Social Development, 2012, p. 6).

The constructions of teachers as ‘catalyst for preventing vulnerability’ and ‘an expert in their own context’ emerged first from focus group interviews (FG3 ECM, FG5 ECT), and were further explored in individual interviews with two participants, Tina (IT) and Karla (IK). Given the significance of the Vulnerable Children Act (2014) and the VCA Guide (2014b) to the participants’ constructions of the ‘catalyst’ and ‘expert’ teachers’ identities, both policy documents were subsequently analysed, as explained in Chapter 5.

In the following sections, I examine these constructions and discuss how the policy developments which targeted ‘vulnerable’ children and families and the communities in which some participants worked shaped the constructions of some teachers and teaching practices. The constructions available to teachers suggested that some ECEC practices were shaped by an increasing need for helping ‘vulnerable’ families to raise their children and ‘succeed’ through hardships caused by adverse circumstances (e.g. poverty, domestic violence) which were common in some of the participants’ communities (FG3 ECM, FG5 ECT).

### **‘Catalyst for preventing vulnerability’**

The construction of a ‘catalyst for preventing vulnerability’ emerged through

participants' discussions about the policy developments that emphasised the role of ECEC and teachers in 'preventing vulnerability in society', and 'helping vulnerable children' (FG5 ECT). Participants who considered their workplaces were located in 'extremely vulnerable' contexts particularly felt a pressure to 'prevent the vulnerability' in society, by supporting 'vulnerable' children they taught. It was said that:

[w]ith the Vulnerable Act, it is ideally our place [referring to ECEC services] in society to help the vulnerable children and families. We seem to be like catalysts to prevent that vulnerability, don't we? .... The fact is that they ['vulnerable' children] are with us and we hear about this stuff that can be a problem [referring to the poverty, alcohol, drug, and violence issues in families]. So, we need to jump on that before this happens. ... We are the catalysts to prevent the vulnerability, aren't we? (FG5 ECT: 565-568)

The development of the Vulnerable Act (2014) and the system of integrated social services seemed to provide a rationale for some teachers to be and act as 'catalysts'. As some participants noted, some teachers' confidence in occupying the 'catalyst' position probably increased, because they felt supported by the policies and the social services professionals. As a result, their approach in working with 'vulnerability' was viewed as shifting from "looking at a child within the family level" to "pulling in outside agencies [such as budget advisers, Housing New Zealand, ECEC centres, social workers, etc.] to support an entire vulnerable family" (IT: 220-228).

By moving the focus from a child to the entire family, this "new holistic approach" that some ECEC settings and teachers used when working with "the vulnerable" was construed as "being similar to a triage situation, like doctors seeing what that family needs and what support they should get" (IL: 228-229). In turning to a rather interventionist discourse, the role of ECEC and teachers within the system of other social services was conceived as 'triaging' the 'vulnerability and the vulnerable'. ECEC was thus "a wrap-around service with everybody involved [referring to the outside agencies] with that child and family" and "working together to support them" (IT: 216-232). By "pulling in outside agencies" to work with ECEC services, "awareness of [the] services and teachers about the increasing number of vulnerable families and children in our society grew" (IT: 240-253). As a result, teachers were construed as

being more on alert than before [the introduction of Vulnerable Act and the integrated service system]. They are more tuned into parents' actions and words, children's actions and words, and their confidence is growing by knowing that “although I may see something that I really don't like I know that I can say something. There is someone else from whom I can get support”. (IT: 287-297)

The discourses from beyond the ECEC sector, particularly discourses of vulnerability and risk, seemed to alter reciprocal relationships between the ‘vulnerable’ and teachers, and bring a certain anxiety into relationships between ‘catalyst’ teachers and ‘vulnerable’ families. Within the ‘extremely vulnerable’ context, teaching seemed to include intervening to ensure that vulnerabilities were ‘prevented’ or even ‘fixed’ in society at large. Teachers’ interventionist actions (e.g. ‘triage’) seemed now to be justified by an assumption that teaching in ECEC could ‘prevent’ vulnerability.

Moreover, it was suggested that priorities in some ECEC settings and teachers’ work shifted. Tina argued:

We used to say “yes, we advocate for children”, but we used to advocate for their education, not for care. Now, it is gone another way. There is first care and then education. So, a child needs to feel safe, feel cared for before they even get to learn. (IT: 298-304, 326-327)

Tina’s observation implied that some teachers and ECEC settings prioritised care for ‘vulnerable’ children over learning. It would be interesting to examine more closely how this position fits with the curriculum requirement for practising learning, development and care in their “unity” – where the unity is “more than the sum of the parts, and in which each element affects, and is affected by, each other element” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 99). Using the lens of vulnerability and risk, would seem to make it difficult for some teachers and settings to foster the ‘wholeness’ of the child’s learning, development and care in their practice while trying to fulfil the child’s basic needs for safety and security.

While showing the powerful effects of discourses emanating from outside of the ECEC sector on teachers and teaching practices in some ECEC settings, Tina’s statements indicated that:

early childhood has changed very much ....it is not just because of our context [working in “the extremely vulnerable community with a lot of

vulnerable children and families”], but it was probably more impacted by the Vulnerable Children Act, the integrated services and perhaps with what is happening more and more with children in our society [Here Tina shared the statistics of high percentage of child poverty, neglect, abuse in New Zealand]. Definitely our stance is more on watching out for the children, and advocating for children’s care first, and afterwards for their education. (IT: 326-334)

The construction of teachers as ‘a catalyst for preventing vulnerability’ reflected significant effects of discourses from outside of the ECEC sectors (e.g. health, welfare, social work, etc.) on some participants’ view of teaching and the purpose of ECEC. As a result, early childhood discourses that reinforced the ‘wholeness’ of learning, development and care, reciprocal and power-sharing relationships; as promoted in *Te Whāriki* (1996), and the professional resources (Ministry of Education, 2004a, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009a); seemed likely to lose ground in some ECEC contexts. Teachers were construed as those ‘watching out’ and caring first for ‘vulnerable’ children, and thus ‘preventing vulnerability’ in society. Such constructions of teachers were in opposition to the constructions of partners with parents and mentor/coach who draw on empowerment discourses, reinforcing reciprocal relationships and recognizing strengths of all partners no matter their living circumstances. The view of ECEC as ‘preventing vulnerability’ and teachers as ‘catalysts’ seemed to fit well with the purpose of ECEC as social intervention and the view of teachers a specialist caring for the ‘vulnerable’, which were discussed in the policy analysis in Chapter 5.

### **‘Experts in their own context’**

The construction of teachers as ‘an expert in their own context’ emerged through discussion of some participants (FG3 ECM) who happened to work in an area which they commonly described as ‘extremely vulnerable’. The construct of ‘extreme vulnerability’ in some participants’ conversations (FG 3 ECM) was related not only to the low socio-economic status of the communities they worked in but also to “challenging behaviours in families” (such as drug and alcohol related issues, domestic violence), which participants perceived as causing “vulnerability for a child and the entire family” (FG3 860-876).

In these communities, the role of ECEC and teachers was explained as “always”

being about “guiding and supporting these vulnerable children and families, going an extra mile and doing everything you need to do for a vulnerable child” (FG3 ECM: 873-876). The policy directives focusing on “vulnerable” children, especially Vulnerable Act (2014) and the VCA Guide (2014b), were interpreted within a group discussion as “show[ing] that the Ministry [of Education] is aware that vulnerability has been in society for a long time” and that “they finally recognise what teachers have been already doing” (FG3 ECM: 879-890).

Within ‘extremely vulnerable’ circumstances, teachers were construed as “an expert in their own context”, who “sometimes need to teach children what is ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ as their families may not do so” (FG3 ECM: 964-997). To set a scene for the construction of ‘an expert’, I share an example from a setting located in an ‘extremely vulnerable community’ (FG3 ECM).

We got one little boy that just continually escapes from the centre. One day he climbed to a driveway to his dad’s house. His dad returned from a jail to home on that day. The little boy escaped to see his dad .... I told his dad that we need to follow up this event face-to-face. I explained to him what had happened. The dad was stoned for a starter, and then he told [me] “He came home, so that it is all fine”. Then, he went inside. We got a back story that the dad was in jail for beating up the mum.... [The participant provided detailed background information about the family which remains confidential]. You know that this child is surrounded by this atmosphere at home, and you hear all these stories. (FG3 ECM: 997-1014)

Drawing on discourses of vulnerability in defining the families and communities in which some teachers worked, the construct of “an expert in their own context” was justified by their experience of “being in the environment [of “the extreme vulnerability”]”, “meeting these families and hearing their background stories”, “having open and honest relationships with them” (FG3 ECM: 997-1018). At the same time, teachers were positioned in the authority discourse, within which they were construed as “*knowing* the situation [the child is living in] and what is happening there” (FG3 ECM: 1000-1003, emphasis added). However, parents with ‘challenging behaviours’ were grounded in vulnerability and risk discourses, and thus viewed as living outside socially acceptable norms and rules. Based on these premises, the ‘expert’ position was rationalised in some ECEC settings, creating a space for teachers to be and act as ‘experts’ who can decide *for* the child and family

what is ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, rather than working *with* them.

Such a positioning of teachers and families further implied possible ‘deficit imageries’ (Bishop, 2003) that may be held of ‘vulnerable’ children and families in some institutional contexts and teaching practices. Such imageries have a tendency to hinder reciprocity, power-sharing relationships and the whanaungatanga approach which the foundation for democratic practices and collaborative teaching and learning in ECEC. On the other hand, in the locations in which parents and children were not perceived through discourses of vulnerability, the construct of teachers as ‘an expert’ was not needed. In those centres teachers were rather required to be and act as ‘never experts’, while parents were regarded as capable of participating in and contributing to their children’s learning, development and care. Below, I show how the construct of teachers as ‘an expert’ changed after it was challenged by participants who construed teachers as ‘never experts’.

### ***Re-thinking the construct of teachers as ‘experts’***

The construction of teachers as ‘experts’ was strongly criticised in participant discussions in which teachers were construed as ‘never experts’ in learning, teaching and knowledge. As a result, the earlier statement that “teachers sometimes need to teach children what is right and wrong as their families may not do so” (FG3 ECM: 964) was modified as follows:

Perhaps, we cannot say what is right and wrong, but in a way, we have to be up there to direct that child down a different path. Because you know that he is in the culture of a gang ... [Participants continued to talk about “challenging behaviours” causing the vulnerability in families and shaping children’s learning]. It is where the little one will go to if you [teachers] don’t *do anything* .... You need to show that there is another way and different expectations in our society.... (FG3 ECM: 1000-1015)

... The more they are in the centre with us, the more we can do something and teach them more socially acceptable behaviours. The more they are out of the centre, the more they are learning other behaviours. (FG3 ECM: 1017-1019)

.. It can happen that the child takes just a small thing from what you said [referring to teaching “socially acceptable behaviours”] and it can shape a



small part of his journey. It is our moral obligation to do this. (FG3 ECM: 1024-1026)

Although moderating the statement (*perhaps* the teacher *cannot say* what is right and wrong), some participants continued to maintain that teachers “know” the child’s situation and thus, “have to be there” to “do something” and “direct the child to a slightly different path” (FG3 ECM: 1000-1026) This seemed to suggest that teaching in some settings was strongly embedded in an authority discourse of ‘experts’ knowledge, which then legitimised teachers’ ‘expert’ positioning in relation to ‘vulnerable’ families and children.

Such a positioning was further fuelled with a concern that “when parents are caught up in that circle of vulnerability, their children became caught up as well, and then their children”, so “it became their normal way of life” (IK: 221-225). From this stance, the ‘vulnerability’ was defined as ‘a closed world’ (Freire, 2000), like a permanent condition, which cannot be transformed by a ‘vulnerable’ child and family. Hence, teachers as ‘experts in their own context’ were observed as key in helping and guiding the “vulnerable children to move to a new life style” and “change the [current] way of living” (FG3 ECM: 1028-1029).

While most participants strongly supported teachers being ‘morally responsible’ to ‘scaffold’, ‘stimulate’ and ‘gently support’ a learning journey of each child, no matter their living circumstances, yet the positioning of ‘vulnerable’ children and families in ECEC settings was questioned (FG3 ECM). In this regard, Charlotte warned that constructing children as “vulnerable” and teachers as “experts in their contexts” enables the “victimising of vulnerable children and families” (FG3 ECM: 1031-1039). She explained this point by sharing her own experience:

I worked in a kindergarten in a very low socio-economic community years ago. There were many children and families living in poverty, with all sorts of issues involved. [Charlotte listed issues like those that the participants described as “the extreme vulnerability”.] One day, a teacher said to me “You know, the trouble with you is that you do not have any expectation from these children”. I listened to her, and it was like being hit by a fist. .... After some time, I realised that she was absolutely right. I felt so sorry for those vulnerable children. I have got myself tied up in the whole world of being sorry and seeing them as being victims. It actually didn't do them any favours at all. I realised that as a teacher I need to have expectations from

all children and believe in their capability. They all have their strengths that we need to recognise and they all matter.... If you know them [children] very well you can gently support, encourage, stimulate, and scaffold them along their learning journey. (FG3 ECM: 1039-1055)

Charlotte's example implied that the construct of teachers as 'an expert in their own context' may allow teachers to construe and position a child as 'a victim' with no agency in their learning. Such a construct of children was in a striking contrast with the curriculum framework's principles and strands, which promote a crucial role of ECEC and teachers as envisioning a child as "capable and competent" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9), recognising and fostering the child's individual capabilities and strengths, and supporting the child to advocate for himself/herself. Discourses of vulnerability in teaching seem to position children as 'disempowered subjects' (Britzman, 1998) rather than agents, with a need to be 'given power and knowledge' by teachers – the 'experts'.

Charlotte further suggested that teachers, no matter their circumstances, "need to think holistically about each child [they] work with and what is good for them all" (FG3 ECM: 1056-1065). Her statements further alluded that the 'deficit imageries' (Bishop, 2003) that some teachers may draw on when construing their views of 'vulnerable' children or any children, might allow them to target a particular group of children (e.g. 'vulnerable') to focus on, while segregating these very children from all other children. Under the pressure to care *for* these targeted groups of children, teachers may also lose an idea of ECEC as a place of holistic learning, development and care of *all* children, no matter their circumstances, as suggested in Chapter 5.

Taken together, the construction of teachers as 'experts in their own context' implied the powerful potential of discourses of vulnerability in construing and positioning some children and families as 'disempowered subjects' in teaching, while strengthening the 'experts' knowledge and agency. While suggesting that discourses of vulnerability significantly impacted on teaching and teachers in 'extremely vulnerable' contexts, it yet remained unclear *why* the construction of teachers as 'experts in their own context' was more supported in the opinions of some participants than others. To explore the reasoning behind this necessity for teachers to be construed as 'experts', I share below the analysis of an interview with Karla, whose comments strongly supported the construction of teachers as 'experts

in their own contexts’.

### *Teachers as ‘an expert in their own context’ in Karla’s accounts*

Karla’s construction of teachers as ‘experts in their own contexts’ revealed how discourses of vulnerability, through which she framed perceptions of her own life history, contributed to her teaching practice and seemed to significantly inform her ‘mundane’ (everyday) politics and teaching practice. Karla stated:

I was brought up in very similar circumstances like a lot of those vulnerable children in our centres.... I was just lucky that my mum decided to move me away after my parents separated. [K described her family context, childhood experiences, which remains confidential. Links were made between her own childhood experience and experiences of children in her centre]. It is how I got to see the different style of life [referring to being outside of the ‘vulnerable’ context]. These all shaped my values and my morals.... and it is how I know that I can make the difference in life of those children, because I have experienced both lifestyles. (IK: 230-254)

Her confidence in “knowing” the “vulnerable” context and its impacts on children and childhood set a basis for Karla’s view of teachers as able to “make a difference” (IK: 230-254). She highlighted the significant role of her mother in enabling her to ‘experience a different lifestyle’ from the one that vulnerable circumstances could offer. She made a strong connection between the powerful role of her mother in her life and teachers working in the ‘extremely vulnerable’ community. Thus, she viewed teachers as “experts who is morally obliged and [has] a right to direct these children to slightly different paths from those available in their surroundings” (IK: 258-260).

By drawing on an authority discourse of ‘experts’ knowledge, Karla further argued that teachers as “an expert in their own context” need to “use their professional knowledge, ethics and relationships” to “plant a seed to help vulnerable children come to some different views and expectations that exist in our society” (IK: 264-266). While highlighting the place of teachers’ professional values and ethics in teaching, Karla strongly implied that teachers’ professional identities are informed not only by their professional but also by their personal and political worldviews and discourses. This was pinpointed in the statement below:

.... what shapes my identity are my morals and values ... and when I go there [referring to the ‘extremely vulnerable context’] I want to shape those values... I am not saying that I am right, but .... I know that I can help by guiding them [‘vulnerable’ children] a little bit differently... and helping them not going their way [referring to parents' ‘challenging behaviours’ causing the vulnerability in an entire family]. (IK: 915-947)

By suggesting that teachers working with ‘vulnerable’ children need to take up the construct of ‘an expert in their own context’, Karla highlighted a significant role of teachers and a place of early education in making a difference in children’s lives. She implied that teachers and ECEC could ameliorate difficult circumstances of the children and families they work with (e.g. “being honest with families and talking about what was really happening at home” and “what the centre can do to help”) (IK: 950-968). At the same time, by reinforcing the construct of teachers as ‘an expert in their own context’, Karla seemed not to acknowledge that it is equally important for teachers to recognise that children and families, no matter their circumstances, are yet capable and are the experts in their own lives. Moreover, by taking up the construct of ‘experts’ there is a chance that teachers accept rather than challenge and critically engage with societal and political discourses that reinforce a view of ECEC as a place of caring for, fixing and preventing vulnerability. Below, I discuss how the construction of teachers as ‘an expert in their own contexts’ possibly contributes to the narrow view of ECEC as a social intervention which was discussed in Chapter 5.

### *Problematizing the construction of teachers’ professional identities as ‘experts’*

The construction of teachers as ‘experts’ which emerged in relation to the ‘extremely vulnerable’ context and teaching of ‘vulnerable’ children, poses many questions. Here, I problematise what it conveys about the purpose of ECEC, and teachers’ work.

Positioning teachers as ‘experts’ in an ‘extremely vulnerable’ context may suggest that the primary purpose of ECEC and responsibility of teachers is not to provide education and care and support children’s holistic learning and development but rather to ‘fix’ issues associated with vulnerability (e.g. poverty) in society. Such a view can mask the fact that ECEC services and teachers cannot substantially

address issues of structural poverty without the determination of the government to put in place anti-poverty measures (e.g. redistributive taxation, generous financial support for families with children, proactive labour and housing policies), which could significantly reduce the number of children and families living in poverty (Bennett, 2006; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009).

By taking up the construct ‘an expert in their own context’, especially in so-called ‘vulnerable’ communities, teachers may implicitly promote the view of ECEC as a social intervention, which was conveyed through some policy developments and documents, as discussed in Chapter 5. On this basis, early learning may become a social intervention that “is *done to* young children [instead of *with*] in the hope of (re)shaping their future” (Penn, 2011, p. 13). Furthermore, the interventionist approach increases the risk of homogenising some groups of children and families to meet the norms of the dominant population, so that vulnerability presents as their personal and individual ‘failure’, rather than a temporary condition they live in. Moreover, factors that have caused hardship in people’s lives and affected their ability to adequately care for their children may be ignored (e.g. unemployment, New Zealand’s ongoing housing crisis, insufficient state support for education and health).

Accordingly, it is necessary to problematise the construction of teachers as ‘experts’ who can resolve the problems of the ‘vulnerable’, and rather think how teachers can use their ‘expert’ knowledge to engage families, children and communities in identifying and recognising the support systems and recourses they need to make changes in their lives (Blundo, 2001). The re-thinking process requires teachers and ECEC settings to challenge the deficit-based thinking that underpins the notions of ‘extremely vulnerable’ communities and children. This also requires them to recognise and engage the capabilities of children and families, and focus on the ideas of resilience and possibility when assisting families to overcome a current hardship (Graybeal, 2001). Creating a climate of equity in relationships with ‘vulnerable’ families and children necessitates:

a change in mindset on the part of facilitators involved so that they perceive parents and their children as “*people with promise*” rather than “*families at risk*”, [and accordingly, support families to move from] “where they are at the moment, to where they want to be, usually by taking small steps at first”. (Biddulph, Biddulph, & Biddulph, 2003, p. 171, emphasis added)

By insisting that issues associated with socio-economic vulnerability are a shared societal responsibility that requires collaborative endeavour, ECEC services and teachers can support a shift from the interventionist approach towards one grounded in democratic participation, social justice and child rights. By supporting the latter approach, ECEC services and teachers promote individuals' agency to make changes in their own lives, and at the same time set a foundation for democratic politics and practices in ECEC settings and teaching. Once ECEC is firmly established in the arena of social justice and child rights, ECEC services, teachers and other stakeholders can be supported to take a "collaborative venture" (Penn, 2011, p. 13) and *work together with* children and families, viewing and positioning them as equitable and active agents in their own lives and in society.

In the concluding section below, I bring together identity constructions exemplified in this chapter, and critically reflect on how they complement and confront one another, and fit with the purpose of ECEC, which emerged through the policy analysis in Chapter 5.

### **Constructions of Teachers' Professional Identities through Interplay of Discourses from ECEC Policies and Practice**

The discourse analysis of focus group and individual interview transcript texts in this chapter offers a framework of five identity constructions of teachers in ECEC: 'a partner with parents', a 'mentor/coach', a 'never an expert', a 'catalyst for preventing vulnerability' and an 'expert in their own context'. The available identity constructions reflected the diverse 'discursive windows' (Danaher, Webb, & Schirato, 2000) that teachers used to make sense of the concepts from policy documents (e.g. reciprocal relationships, *ako*, *whanaungatanga*, vulnerability, etc.), and enacted in their teaching practices. The discursive windows were uncovered through an analysis of participants' conversations about their interpretations of the policy texts and their teaching practices. Discourses were evident in the language participants used to construe teachers and their positioning in relation to other stakeholders, especially parents and children, in diverse ECEC settings.

While throwing light on various ways of being a teacher in ECEC, the analysed data sets demonstrated that teachers draw on complementing and confronting discursive windows simultaneously, and use both to construe views of themselves and other ECEC stakeholders. By exemplifying how constructions of teachers shifted from

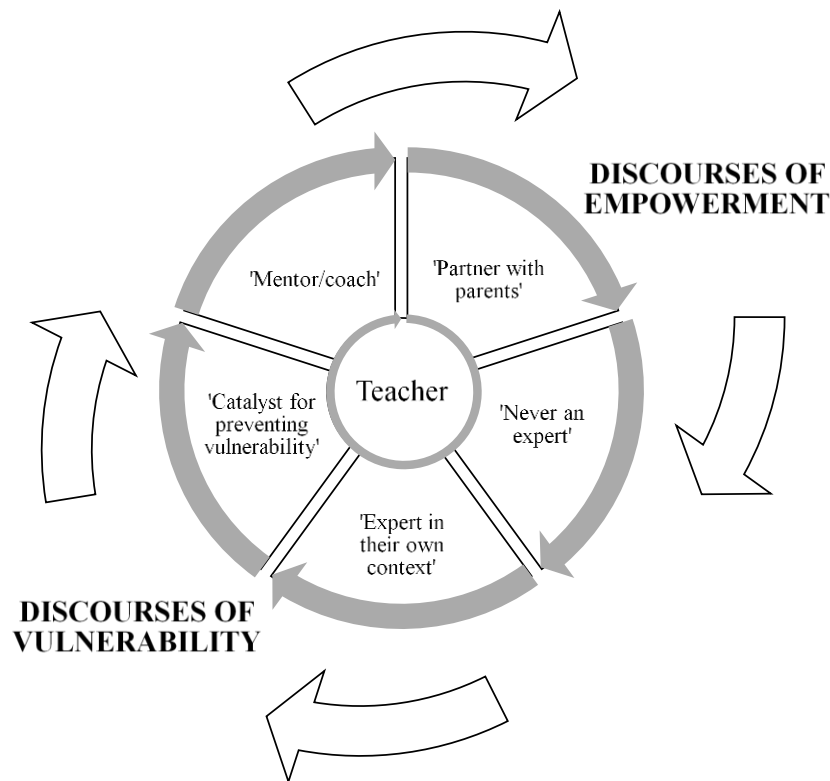
one context and relationship to another, the data sets showed challenges and contradictions in establishing teaching practices on values and principles of ECEC as a bicultural and democratic site and a collaborative workshop which were strongly promoted in some policy documents, especially *Te Whāriki* and the professional resources, as discussed in Chapter 5.

To present prevailing identity constructions of teachers, which occurred in a simultaneous rhythm in teaching practice, I offer Figure 4 (see on the next page). It implies that the identity constructions are multilinear phenomena, like a pool of possibilities offering views of what a teacher can and should (or not) be and do in a particular context of their teaching practice. Circular arrows highlight the shifting, fluid, and never stable nature of the identity constructions. Which identity constructions are, at one place and time, more dominant in a teaching practice seemed to depend on the prevailing discursive windows that teachers apply in constructing and positioning themselves and others.

The data suggested that by choosing, consciously or unconsciously, discursive windows such as empowerment or vulnerability to make sense of children and families and the purpose of ECEC, teachers exercised some identity constructions more than others in their practice and relationships. The predominant discursive windows, empowerment and vulnerability, are viewed as reflecting complexity and diversity of political, personal, professional, institutional and cultural lenses that teachers draw upon in their attempts to construct views of themselves, their work, and others they engage with in their work.

Based on the analysis in this chapter, I argue that constructions of teachers' identities, in their broadest sense, were produced through an interplay of two discursive windows - empowerment and vulnerability, which participants used simultaneously in their discussions. Moving from one to the other, participants interpreted and enacted policy concepts (e.g. reciprocal relationships, *ako*, *whanaungatanga*) differently, and so were able to justify complementing and confronting identity constructions of teachers in their ECEC settings and practices. Reflecting on these oppositional constructions, I question how the discursive windows that teachers take up may shape their identities and may or may not contribute to the view of ECEC as a democratic site and a collaborative workshop, as argued in some policy documents.

**Figure 4.** Constructing teachers' professional identities through interplay of discourses in ECEC policies and practice



Using the lens of discursive windows of empowerment, policy quotations of relationships and the bicultural context of ECEC (see Appendix A, the *Booklet*, pp. 9-11, 15) teachers were required not to be “a fount of all knowledge”, but rather “a partner in the ‘conversation’ of learning” (Bishop, 2003, p. 226). Based on this, an ECEC setting was construed as an active location, established in an environment of trust and reciprocity, in which various stakeholders respect, help, assist, share and care for one another, and co-construct knowledge and decision-making processes. These set a foundation for promoting the rights, agency and voices of all ECEC stakeholders. Given the policy context, the possibility for a teacher to be an individual ‘expert’ in a teaching practice was highly contested. Moreover, an ‘expert’ position was considered to constrain the potential of ECEC to establish itself as a democratic site and a collaborative workshop in which strengths, capabilities and knowledge of various stakeholders were recognised, encouraged and reinforced.

Drawing on discursive windows of empowerment in their interpretations of the policy quotations regarding reciprocal relationships, participants maintained that



teachers can never be ‘experts’ in ECEC. They argued that reciprocal and power-sharing relationships and the expertise and knowledge of all stakeholders need to be the basis for teaching and learning in ECEC. In addition, the ‘never an expert’ construction of teachers was claimed to create a space for parents’ unique knowledge to inform ECEC teaching practice, allowing them to contest and challenge authority discourses of experts’ knowledge.

However, when moving from interpretations of the policy texts and discourses to actual relationships and practices in their own ECEC contexts, the discursive window through which some participants construed relationships and teaching seemed to shift from empowerment to vulnerability. This shift was especially evident in ECEC settings in which parents were construed as ‘needing extra’ help and support in raising their children, and ‘coming with various issues’ that may require ‘experts’ knowledge (e.g. questions about parenting, children’s development and learning), and in which children were construed as ‘vulnerable’. In these contexts and practices, the ‘expert’ position of teachers was justified, and their teaching was construed as providing a solution for parents’ issues or questions, rather than as co-constructing knowledge with them. Teachers in ‘extremely vulnerable’ contexts were thus construed as ‘experts’ capable and morally obliged to, for instance, guide ‘vulnerable’ children towards different lifestyle from those in their families.

Even when they were drawing on the opposing discursive windows in their constructions of teachers, children and teaching, it was interesting to notice that participants still used the same terms (e.g. partnership, reciprocal relationships) to conceptualise ECEC teachers and teaching practices. However, the analysis of some constructs of teachers as partners with parents and as mentor/coach, which were used in discussion, showed that meanings of partnership and the positioning of the partners confronted rather than complemented one another.

For instance, teachers as mentor/coach, and partner with parents ‘needing extra’ support in raising their children were allowed to encroach on ‘parents’ territory’ or instruct parents what to do, by providing their professional expert knowledge, while not leaving a space for parents’ unique and specialist knowledge of their own children to inform ECEC practice. Conversely, in situations and contexts in which parents were not seen as ‘needing extra’ help, the partnership and constructs of teachers as partners and mentor/coach allowed both partners, parents and teachers,

to share their concerns and look for solutions. By mobilising both discursive windows simultaneously, participants were able to rationalise rather ambiguous and oppositional constructions of parents, children, teachers and teaching.

The discrepancy in the opposing meanings offered by participants of main policy concepts (e.g. empowerment, reciprocal relationships) suggested difficulties in the understanding and implementation of the concepts of reciprocal and power-sharing relationships, and empowerment. As these concepts seemed to be not critically examined and explored in some ECEC settings, teachers were likely to be construed as 'experts', while at the same time viewing their relationships as partnership. Therefore, as 'experts' they were very likely to miss opportunities to recognise the strengths and knowledge of other stakeholders and to position them as equal partners, no matter what their current living circumstances and issues.

By illustrating how constructions of teachers and teaching and positioning of children and families shifted in different ECEC contexts, the analysis revealed patterns of dominance and subordination of the different stakeholders. Based on this, I argue that by applying discursive windows of empowerment in their teaching practices, teachers were constructed as equal partners with parents, and ECEC as a place where teaching and learning were grounded in reciprocity, power-sharing relationships, and the recognition of strengths and capabilities of various stakeholders (e.g. 'vulnerable' parents and children). Given the context, teaching practices could be established on the values and principles of collaborative teaching and learning and democratic participation.

On the other hand, when discursive windows of vulnerability were used, teachers were construed in authority discourses as 'experts' having and providing knowledge and solutions to others (e.g. 'vulnerable' children and families). Such positioning was likely to perpetuate an atmosphere of imbalanced power-relationships, in which strengths of other stakeholders could not be recognised or employed in learning and teaching. Furthermore, from the 'expert' position teachers seemed to assume that their teaching could 'fix' issues of vulnerability and 'save' the 'vulnerable'. Such teaching practices of the 'expert' teachers seemed to implicitly support the view of ECEC as a social intervention, which some state policies promoted. If grounding their teaching in the interventionist approach rather than that of social justice and children's rights, the 'expert' teachers' identities were likely to restrict teaching practices that promoted ECEC as a democratic site and a collaborative workshop

that fosters the learning, development and care of *all* children as their universal rights.

To create a context in which “power is shared between self-determining individuals within non-dominating relations of interdependence” (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2007, p. 1), it would be necessary for teachers and ECEC services to critically examine ideologies which underlie the discursive windows informing their constructions of their teaching, themselves and other stakeholders. This would require teachers to become more critically aware of the effects of the discursive window of vulnerability in their teaching practices, and how these consciously and subconsciously support their deficit theorising of children, their families and their life circumstances. This awareness is a necessary step for teachers, a deliberate decision to look through discursive windows of empowerment and to establish their teaching practice in ‘culturally responsive pedagogies’ of relationships (Bishop & Berryman, 2010; Bishop et al., 2007).

By drawing on discursive windows of empowerment rather than vulnerability, teachers could create a context in which power is shared, learning and teaching are “dialogic”, reciprocal, “interactive and spiral” rather than linear processes, cultures of various stakeholders count and connectedness is fundamental for relationships in an ECEC setting (Bishop et al., 2007, p. 14). By reflecting values of ethics of care and ethics of encounter (Dahlberg, 2003; Sevenhuijsen, 1998) and ‘culturally responsive pedagogies’ in relationships (Bishop & Berryman, 2010), the discursive windows of empowerment would enable diverse stakeholders to take agentic positions in teaching and learning, and to achieve increased autonomy over their own lives and futures. Teaching practice grounded in such discourses creates ‘negotiation spaces’ (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005), in which teachers and parents can engage in radical dialogue, actively listen to one another, and co-construct meanings out of the situation. The negotiation spaces do not simply mean an exchange of roles or information which allows teachers and other stakeholders to “take turns as monologic senders” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 101), which some constructs of partnership in ECEC suggested. Within the negotiation spaces, meaning-making occurs in relational activities, through a continuous process of (re)construction of teaching and learning experiences.

To create negotiation spaces in their teaching practices, teachers need to be able to let go of any ‘absolute truths’ and ‘totalising systems of knowing’, appreciate the

impossibility of controlling the Others, and see uncertainties and diversities (e.g. cultural, socio-economic) as ways to co-construct alternative and never complete meanings and identities (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). To engage in the negotiation space, above all, teachers need to be always critically aware of any attempt they might take to prescribe what is right and wrong, and how another person should and ought to live and be. By engaging in such negotiation spaces, they would be more likely to embrace the vulnerability and fluidity of the identity constructions they hold. By recognising multiple facets of their own incomplete 'selves', teachers can allow other stakeholders to present their multiplicities and complexities, and promote trust in human capability as a foundation for democratic politics and practices in ECEC.

## **Conclusion**

Chapter 6 discussed participants' interpretations of some significant policy concepts, such as collaborative and reciprocal relationships, which shaped their constructions of teachers and other stakeholders in ECEC settings. It also threw lights on opposing ways of translating the policy discourses in teaching practices which took place in diverse intuitional ECEC contexts.

Considering the data analysis, I argue that there were two prevailing and yet confronting discursive windows – empowerment and vulnerability, based on which teachers' work and professional identities were constructed. These discursive windows emerged from various policy, political, personal, local-community and institutional places and spaces. As such, these discursive windows constituted a strong foundation for the participants' accounts of teachers and other stakeholders as those who 'know' or 'don't know' and need (or not) 'extra help and support' in some situations and contexts.

In exemplifying how perceptions of teachers and teaching practices have shifted through the application of these two opposing discursive windows, I argued that the constructions of teachers and others through discourses of empowerment supported the idea of ECEC as a democratic site and collaborative workshop, which were emphasised in the curriculum and professional recourses. However, when construing the others and their living circumstances through the discourses of vulnerability, ECEC as established in the notions of democratic participation and power-sharing relationships was less likely to be implemented and sustained.

## **CHAPTER 7: CONSTRUCTION OF TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES IN DIFFERENT SERVICE TYPES**

The historical, socio-cultural and political contexts of the particular service type participants worked in gave a powerful foundation to their constructions of teachers' professional identities. The analysis in this chapter moves from constructions of teachers' professional identities through reflections on policy texts and teaching practices to discursive constructions of teachers in diverse contexts of teacher-led services – kindergartens, community-owned ECE centres and private-for profit ECE centres.

The analysis included mainly the third data set – individual interview transcripts (I) with kindergarten teachers (KT), and teachers in ECE centres (ECT), early childhood managers (ECM) and professional leaders (PL). Some pieces of the second data set - focus group interview transcripts (FG) that contributed significantly to an understanding of policy directives and their impacts on teachers were also analysed with the interview data. As a whole, the analysis allowed a critical look at how policy documents and policy directives of the last two decades have influenced teachers in different service types, and ECEC generally. At the centre of the individual and group discussions were the policy strategies associated with the curriculum *Te Whāriki* (1996) and the Strategic Plan (2002), and the policy directives from 2009 onwards which lead to marketisation and privatisation of the sector.

Participants' individual workplaces differed significantly. The settings were under different ownerships and organisational arrangements (community-owned and for-profit organisations), were of different types (kindergartens and ECE centres) and were in a variety of socio-cultural and economic status communities. By revealing complementing and conflicting identity constructions of teachers, analysis showed the powerful impacts of socio-cultural, historical and political discourses on shaping the diverse service types, and teachers' professional identities. It showed how identities were produced through the interplay of opposing discourses of Aotearoa New Zealand's ECEC policies and practices, and how and why some identities were accepted, rejected and negotiated by teachers in their individual

settings.

This chapter consists of three case studies. Each case study examines what it means to be a teacher in the different service type (kindergartens, community-owned ECE centres, and private ECE centres) and in different time periods in ECEC.

*Case Study 1* study reveals constructions of teacher identities in kindergartens. A distinction is made between identity constructions grounded in historical discourses of professionalism underpinning a 'traditional' kindergarten culture' (e.g. services for the community, not-for-profit purposes, all qualified workforce), and identity constructions emerging through discourses leading to privatisation and marketisation of ECEC.

*Case Study 2* explores identity constructions of teachers in community-owned ECE centres through an interplay of discourses of professionalism, which shaped ECE teachers historically, and the current discourses of marketisation and privatisation.

*Case Study 3* in private ECE centres, discusses twofold positioning of teachers as 'a business manager' and 'a teacher' and portrays a constant struggle in their negotiating of identities, when balancing the 'business' (making money) and the 'social side' (teaching) of their day-to-day practice.

By exploring how teacher identities were constructed in response to the opposing discourses which have shaped the sector, Chapter 7 addresses the first and second sub-questions in this study – How have discourses from the early childhood policies constructed teachers' professional identities, and what are their effects?; and How have discourses from early childhood practice corresponded with discourses from early childhood policies? It also contributes to the third sub-question, What constructions of professional identities have teachers accepted and resisted in their work, and why?

While offering some answers to the research sub-questions, these data sets imply that teachers' identities are "provisional, contingent [and] constructed" ways of being; they are collections of the shifting selves (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013, p. 25). Based on the data analysis, I argue that teachers' identities need to be understood as reflecting *some among many other possible* locations of teachers in discourses and discursive practices – historical, socio-cultural, economic and political - the meanings of which are a constant site of struggle for power.

## **Case study 1: Constructing Teachers' Professional Identities in Kindergartens**

In *Case Study 1*, the transcript texts of a focus group (FG4 KT) and individual interviews with two kindergarten teachers (Sandra and Jane) are analysed and discussed. Interview notes (INS, INJ) consisting of teachers' comments on their interview transcripts (IS, IJ) are also included in the data analysis. Interestingly, over their long teaching careers, the kindergarten teachers said they had worked in no other service type.

I first examine the construction of *advocate-activist teacher*, grounded in discourses of the 'traditional kindergarten culture'. Then, I take a critical look at the emerging construction of a *teacher - entrepreneur*, who must constantly juggle the 'financial sustainability' of a kindergarten and doing what is best for children. I conclude *Case Study 1* with a discussion about how teachers' identities in kindergartens have shifted over time in response to discourses of neo-liberalism, privatisation and marketisation, which changed the 'traditional kindergarten culture' and challenged kindergarten teachers' professional identities.

### **'Traditional kindergarten culture' – A foundation for the activist-advocate teachers' identities**

Under the umbrella of diverse ECEC services, kindergartens had always been distinguished by their unique kindergarten culture. However, individual kindergarten settings had always differed from one another, being located in different communities, meeting unique needs and interests of children and families. In participants' views, key features of the 'traditional kindergarten culture' were related to kindergartens being state-funded, community-owned services, and thus 'free' rather than having to charge fees. The 'traditional kindergarten culture' also referred to a professionalised fully qualified teaching workforce; and teachers being politically active through their union, and advocating for others - children, families, other teaching professionals, and the profession. The features of the 'traditional kindergarten culture' were defined by participants as follows:

.... the culture was that we were leading the [ECEC] profession with pay parity [having the same salary as primary teachers] and with all qualified teachers... The other part of the sector observed kindergartens with a hope

that over time these would set a benchmark for the entire sector... (FG4 KT: 1151-1155)

Kindergartens are based within a community and for the community ... with no fees charged to families ... not making a profit, everything we earn goes back to children and community. (FG4 KT: 191-195)

.... we fought very hard to get that recognition [equitable professional status and pay parity with primary teachers] and I think we did quite well.... We have that sense of being joint and collaborative through our union. (FG4 KT: 570-575)

I remember being involved in the union..... We were politically active, in fact we have always been activists in a way.... speaking up in behalf of others [children, families and communities], we looked after our teachers and our colleagues. (FG4 KT: 585-589)

The features of ‘traditional kindergarten culture’ provided the foundation for the constructions of the advocate-activist teachers’ professional identities. The activists component of the identity construction was associated with teachers’ political engagement in the unions, their attainment of pay parity and high professional status.

The advocate-activist teachers’ professional identities construct became an “inherited legacy kindergarten teachers carried with [them] from the 1970s”, and a “responsibility to maintain the features of [traditional] kindergarten culture to nowadays” (FG4 KT: 591-595). The 1970s were particularly significant for such identity constructions, because of the powerful political voice of the union for kindergarten teachers, the Kindergarten Teachers Association (KTA), which linked itself with a feminist women’s movement (May & Bethell, 2017). The KTA’s direct action tactics addressed ‘longstanding grievances’ over teachers’ salaries and conditions (May & Bethell, 2017), and led in 2002 to pay parity of kindergarten teachers’ with primary school teachers.

Over time, the features of the ‘traditional kindergarten culture’ set a framework for what it means to be a professional qualified teacher and to do quality teaching in ECEC. As the rest of the sector has never achieved professional recognition through pay parity nor met the professional standards of having a fully qualified teaching workforce, kindergartens and kindergarten teachers had a reason to view themselves as “different from the rest of the sector” (FG4 KT: 254-255).



### **Kindergarten teachers – ‘Different from the rest of the sector’.**

Constructions of kindergarten teachers’ identities were deeply embedded in the inherited legacy of kindergartens, as a distinctive service type in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC. This was especially evident in Sandra’s account, in which she identified kindergartens as “a very special word to [her] identity” and viewed kindergarten teachers “as being different from other areas of early childhood that you might choose to work in or might have to work in” (FG4 KT: 254-255). She said:

there are aspects of being a kindergarten teacher that are quite strong in my identity and it is linked to quality practice, all trained teachers, all sorts of things [referring to the features of ‘traditional kindergarten culture’]. (FG4 KT: 257-259)

To Sandra, being a kindergarten teacher meant also “being different from the rest of the sector”, which she associated with the fact that

kindergartens historically had a philanthropic sort of purpose and were designed to cater for children in low socioeconomic areas and with the whole goal of doing good and having free access. (IS: 73-76)

The first kindergartens in New Zealand were basically set up to pick up children from slums, to provide education, to help with their wellbeing, to feed them, and to this day we do that for our children. We provide food, we give them clothes, if they need that, and we do all these sorts of things even now .... (IS: 122-126)

With her image of kindergarten as a free social service in the past and present, Sandra clearly distanced kindergartens from for-profit services specifically and the rest of the sector in general. Her view was based on and strengthened through her teaching practice in a kindergarten in a very low socio-economic status community, with lots in common with the historical kindergartens “picking up children from slums” (IS: 123). As a result, features of the historical kindergartens and their traditional culture were inseparable aspects of Sandra’s construction of kindergarten teachers’ professional identities.

With the purpose of “doing good for children, families and communities”, the historical kindergarten was clearly separated from for-profit ECSs, which Sandra’s comments illustrated:

.... our focus [in kindergartens] is completely different in that we are not focused on making a profit. It is not our objective. We don't run this as a business. Any money that we generate goes straight to the staffing, equipment and resources ... for children... and continual replenishment of the kindergarten.... They [the private providers] are most likely to be in places where they can make a profit. (IS: 79-85)

In outlining a striking difference between the 'traditional kindergarten culture', and the business culture, Sandra rejected any possibility for kindergartens to be somehow related to the business culture of the for-profit services.

Quite the reverse of kindergartens, "for-profit services were [defined as being] set up in affluent areas, where they can make the profit", while kindergartens were located "nation-wide" to "provide free access to early childhood" (INS). With an entirely different purpose, kindergartens were viewed as "not [being] driven by profit motives or marketing" and being "less judgmental of whānau who can't afford to pay" (INS).

With no motives for "making profit", kindergarten teachers were viewed as "free to focus on children and families", "very honest in [their] assessments of children" and teaching, and not "anxious that [their] constructive feedback may cause a parent to remove a child from a centre", and "harm the business" (IS: 97-101). Their "freedom" from for-profit motives made it easier for kindergarten teachers to drive their teaching practice from a basis of "unbiased" and "honest professional viewpoints" rather than having to "worry about the business owner" (IS: 103-105). The advocate-activist identity construction also implied kindergarten teachers' agency, enabling them to feel like "trusted [professionals] in making educational decisions", and "responding primarily to individual needs of communities" (INS). Equally, this construction seemed to empower these teachers to "feel valued and respected" rather than seeing themselves as "just an employee who does as they are told and operates within the boundaries and policies laid out for them" (INS).

Based on the analysis of the data from above, I maintain that the 'traditional kindergarten culture', rooted in discourses of democratic ECEC as a child's right and a public good (as discussed in Chapter 5), offered a foundation for kindergarten teachers to construe themselves as activist-advocates. As such, they viewed themselves as 'free' to do what is best for children, families and community, and to enact this advocacy in their practice. The professional construction of activist-

advocate kindergarten teachers was in striking contrast to that of teachers in for-profit services. By reinforcing profit motives over needs and interests of children, families and communities, teachers in for-profit services were construed as ‘employees’, with no agency to make independent professionally driven decisions in their teaching practice. Consequently, teaching practices wrapped in the business culture and for-profit motives were viewed as imposing what was best for the business owner, not for children and, therefore impeding the democratic and universal ECEC that the advocate-activist kindergarten teachers’ identity was constructed in and proudly advocated for.

### **On the swings of policy change from 1996 to 2016 – Changing the ‘traditional kindergarten culture’**

The recent policy directives of privatisation and marketisation in ECEC, however changed the traditional kindergarten culture, and challenged the activist-advocate kindergarten teachers’ identities. Considering the changes in the sector, the participants distinguished two time periods, which had a significant impact on kindergartens and kindergarten teachers’ professional identities – the first, from 1996 to 2009, and the second from 2009 to 2016.

The 1996 to 2009 period was associated with “the introduction of *Te Whāriki*” in 1996, “the assessment for learning practices”, and “the 10-year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood” (FG4 KT: 130-160). The “positive side [effects]” of these policies were associated with teachers in ECEC “getting the professional recognition by society and the education sector”, and “feeling more professional”, “being valued and regarded” (FG4 KT:133-142).

On the contrary, the time-period from 2009 to 2016 was interpreted as having negative impacts on the sector generally, and the teacher-led services specifically. This period mirrored the change to a right-wing National Government in 2008, and the announcement that the target of 100 percent registered teachers would not be pursued in the Budget 2010, and that the extra funding to support centres with all qualified teachers would be removed in 2011. Given the constraining policy developments, kindergarten teachers observed the period from 2009 to 2016 as showing “the lack of regard and the lack of value [of the Government] to teachers” in ECEC (FG4 KT: 149).

The feeling of not being valued as qualified professional teachers was further

strengthened after the Government changed the conditions of the Strategic Plan (2002), and reduced the funding rate of services with 100 percent teachers to the funding rate of those with 80 percent qualified teachers. In kindergarten teachers' views, this was "a clear message by the Government" that "they are not going anymore to pay for kindergartens to have all qualified teachers", forcing them to "find a way to stay financially sustainable without the state's support" (FG4 KT: 151-153). Since the fully qualified workforce was an integral feature of the traditional kindergarten culture, these directives severely jeopardized kindergarten teachers' professional identities, leaving them with a feeling of being "completely disregarded and unvalued"; "We are not teachers anymore" (FG4 KT: 155-160). Now, I move on to describe participants' perceptions of the policy directions, dating from the 1990s and gaining a momentum from 2009 to 2016, which changed operation and priorities in kindergarten associations, and altered their relationships with individual kindergarten settings and teachers.

*Kindergarten associations – Changing priorities, relationships and the culture of working together.*

In 1992, the system of a direct salary payment to kindergarten teachers through the Ministry of Education was replaced by a bulk funding system and the negotiation of teachers' salaries was delegated to kindergarten associations (see Chapter 3). Bulk funding "placed kindergarten associations in the role of business managers of multi-million-dollar operations" and "gave them our money, as the state's citizens, [referring to money for teachers' salaries] to manage and pay us" (FG4 KT: 600-609). By applying this funding device, the state showed its firm determination to distance itself from paying, setting working conditions and employing kindergarten teachers.

The introduction of bulk funding was marked by kindergarten teachers as "the time when our [teachers] relationships with the association management started to change" (FG4 KT: 613-615). It also made them aware of

the great power of associations in making decisions about how many teachers to employ, hours [of teachers'] work ... They became responsible for negotiating [teachers'] employment contracts – setting the conditions, pay rates, holidays ... (INS)

As a result, power sharing relationships and the culture of collaborative decision-

making in their association changed, which kindergarten teachers depicted as follows.

There was the history of sitting around a table and people contributed to decisions making .... The teacher representative on the board is no longer seen as one person to represent the view of all teachers .... There is a real distance between the board and teachers. ... A manager and senior teachers seem to be under a more direct board instruction than before ... The whole balance of power has changed. (FG4 KT: 261-283)

The relationships in the association became more complex and challenging after funding rates for kindergartens, though improved through the new funding formula implemented in 2005, were eroded when the top funding band for employing 100 percent qualified teachers was removed in 2011. The culture of “real collaboration”, “working together” and “advocat[ing] for teachers” started to disappear, and there “was no feeling of working together now” (IS: 261-283).

The new policy directives obliged kindergarten associations to manage kindergartens on business principles. Teachers were not state servants anymore, like “employees”, “working for the associations” (FG4 KT) – the business managers. The market force discourses seriously obstructed the culture of collaboration, unity, advocacy for one another and power sharing in the kindergarten association, and reinforced “an atmosphere of less trust”, “a feeling of being not valued” and “not engaged in the collective decision making” (INS).

### ***The ECEC sector – Competition and division among services and providers.***

In this section, I discuss recent policy directives which encouraged privatisation and marketisation in the wider ECEC sector, and their impact for kindergartens. At the centre of analysis is the effect of the National-led Government’s decision to abolish and replace the Discretionary Grants Scheme, which had supported capital works of the community-based services with the TAP grants (see Chapter 3). As a result, the only funding differentials between community-based and privately owned ECSs were dissolved as funding for capital works became available to private for-profit providers (Ministry of Education, 2013; Mitchell, 2017).

Kindergarten participants strongly disapproved of the Government’s decision to create equal funding opportunities for capital works for “*those*, who are doing

[ECEC] for a business" and "*us* who give everything back to the centres and communities" (FG4 KT: 192-196, emphasis added). The Government's decision was interpreted as leading to "the proliferation of early childhood services not always with an early childhood focus, but more with the business focus" (IJ: 47-60).

Given the growing business emphasis in the sector, kindergarten teachers expressed firm concerns that kindergartens as being "the service for the community might be forced to end up joining them [for-profit ECSs]" (FG4 KT: 197-201). At the time of the focus group interview, kindergarten teachers only anticipated that the 'business-oriented emphases in ECEC "*may* begin to erode what [they] see as quality [the "traditional kindergarten culture" – the free access, doing what is best for children, all qualified teachers], because [their] employers need to make the budget lines" (FG4 KT: 197-201)

Interestingly, when two individual interviews with kindergarten teachers were conducted approximately 10 months after the focus group interview, some of the problems that participants anticipated earlier were already occurring. The interviewed participants, Sandra and Jane, confirmed that their kindergartens, like all other ECSs in their areas, had "experienced already tons of the impacts because of the marketisation and privatisation of the sector" (IS: 6-8).

One of the biggest changes was that ECEC providers were "pushed so hard to compete among each other" (IJ: 212). With a rapidly growing number of services, "everybody [kindergartens, private for-profit centres and community-owned ECE centres] is struggling to get sufficient children to fill their rolls" (IS: 8-9). Teachers found themselves "spending more energy on marketing, on promoting ourselves, being more present in social media" (IS: 8-15). To be successful competitors, services employed various marketing tools to keep themselves active and visible in their communities. Teachers were pressured to attract more children, and ensure the survival of their services, which Jane exemplified as follows:

other places [referring to for-profit ECSs] call themselves community kindies, but they are a business and not historical kindergartens .... people just use the name kindergarten to market themselves. (IJ: 169-179)

To "get their portion of the pool [referring to the equal funding offered for non-profit and for-profit services]" (IJ: 182-183), services and teachers were regarded as being "ready to do whatever it takes", even if "it may not be what you truly

believe”, but “you utilize it as a way of bringing families and parents to your service” (IJ: 185-188).

The task of “attracting more parents and children”, and “ensuring the financial sustainability of your service” (INJ), became a new priority for kindergarten teachers. The focus of their teaching practice needed to shift from “what is best for children” to “what is best for the financial sustainability” of their service (INJ). Furthermore, a divide across the sector became inevitable, and the distance between services, providers and teachers became greater. In particular, “the divide between the private and community services is growing”, because

the competition just makes it difficult for early childhood teachers and private centres to come together collectively. There is far more pressure on us not to be collective. It is just not in the interest of their business employers... to recommend other services to families. (IJ: 210-213)

With this increasing fragmentation, “a chance for teachers’ collective voice and advocacy for one another [became] practically null” (IJ: 237-257). A clear distinction was made between “the time when *Te Whāriki* was developed” and “now” (IS: 460-465). Sandra said:

when *Te Whāriki* was developed, we [teachers] felt a great sense of pride and national unity across the whole early childhood sector. We don't feel that at all now. Competition has blown us apart. We were working in groups and not inviting each other. We are not engaging with the private centres around here. In the past, we were all together as a sector, respecting each other's philosophy and points of difference (IS: 460-485).

Taken together, the participants’ discussions disclosed the significant impacts of policy developments and the centre-right government’s approaches to the sector. The increasingly supportive centre-left government’s approach, related to the curriculum and the strategic plan, had reinforced the collaboration, unity and advocacy in the sector, making teachers to feel valued as professionals. The subsequent minimal state support of the sector, encouraged discourses of privatisation and marketisation, leading to competition, fragmentation and division within the sector.

## **Institutional changes – ‘Traditional kindergarten’ in the era of privatisation and marketisation**

I proceed to examine the effects at the level of an institutional kindergarten setting of policy directives leading to the sector’s privatisation and marketisation.

First, I offer examples from Sandra’s kindergarten and outline the impacts of the policy directives on teachers’ work and identities. Then, I will discuss how the entrepreneurial discourses of the competition, privatisation and marketisation altered the traditional kindergarten culture and kindergarten teachers’ identities.

### ***Teaching in a kindergarten that has never generated enough money***

Sandra’s kindergarten was located between “two local schools which are decile one and two” [referring to a very low socio-economic status community] and surrounded by “many private for-profit centres recently opening in the area” (IS: 125-127). This kindergarten “frequently had experienced loss of funding through transient whānau, who were moving to other areas of the country because of housing, health issues and all other sort of reasons” (INS). Sandra described how the recent inexorable increment of property prices and the budget cuts in ECEC impacted on families and the kindergarten.

This was an area of state housing ... but 1200 state houses were sold last week. A lot of our whānau come from the state houses ... With the sale looming a lot of them have not had tenancies renewed or have been terminated... They cannot afford commercial rentals. For example, one parent came in to us last week. They have been paying rent \$290 per week for a house, and it went up to \$350 ... (IS: 16-24)

Socio-economic problems in the community “plus funding cuts in the sector, have a significant effect” on Sandra’s kindergarten, making it “one of those settings under the association that has never generated enough money”, and thus it “always needed to be cross-subsidised by other kindergartens” (INS). While acknowledging that “luckily cross-subsidising was still quite acceptable among teachers within [their] association” (IS: 486-489), Sandra recognised that the kindergarten’s “rolls and funding claims are being monitored constantly” (INS), especially after the association went through a re-structuring process.

Kindergartens in this association were, thus pressured to “re-brand” – in order to



“increase advertising in community” and “change their operation to become more flexible” (IS: 14-15). These new demands included the following:

Spending more energy on marketing and promoting ourselves ....; changed working hours and operation of the kindergarten....; a pressure to be providing holiday programmes in term breaks....; reduced non-contact time [time teachers spend away from a group in planning, evaluation, administration] as [the employer] has been reducing the hours of part-time workers to save money. (IS: 13-33; INS)

Consequently, roles and responsibilities of kindergarten teachers and priorities in Sandra’s kindergarten changed significantly, while "the key kindergarten philosophy [the ‘traditional kindergarten culture’] around quality practice” was altered (IS: 52-54). Interpreting the effects of these shifts, Sandra declared:

we [teachers] have always been ... talking about quality .... [and were] very mindful when admitting children .... whether the group is settled .... before we bring more children in. And now, we just bring them in. You just fill the spaces, as soon as you can before they go down the road where the next place will enrol them ... There is more pressure to do that now. (IS: 54-66)

Describing the effects of changes in the state’s policies, the association and the community on teaching in her kindergarten, Sandra argued that priorities of the community-owned service shifted towards “maximising the funding over the quality” (IS: 57-66). Her language made it clear that the operation of her kindergarten was forced to move towards “a more-business like” model; she spoke of “re-branding”, “advertising”, “maximising funding”, “filling spaces”, “competing for children” and “enrolling children straight away” (IS: 54-66). The new priorities overshadowed elements necessary to quality teaching, such as teachers’ non-contact time and time for children to settle in a group before bringing new children into the setting.

As a result, satisfaction of kindergarten teachers with their work and their perceptions of themselves changed, with teachers’ “feeling more anxious”, because of “the pressure to do more, to accept more change and compete with others” (IS: 41-45). Teachers were construed through Sandra’s account as “stressed and overworked”, “resentful”, “not feel[ing] appreciated”, and therefore “less likely to work effectively with children” (INS). It was obvious that the imposed priorities were a great threat to what was defined as quality practice in a traditional

kindergarten intended to serve its community.

*‘Negotiating the edges of traditional kindergarten culture’.*

The new market model thus had a strong potential to entirely alter ‘traditional’ kindergarten teachers’ values, beliefs and philosophy. While admitting that under the growing pressure “there are some stuff around the edges of your philosophy that you have to compromise”, Sandra was determined that “the key essential ingredients of my philosophy I don’t trade off” (IS: 210-211). She stated:

I won’t enforce or keep following up on the payment of donations for example. We don’t charge a fee and ask for a voluntary donation. To me it is a part of the free access – I delete balances they are owing [referring to parents who cannot afford to pay the “voluntary donation”], so that whānau do not feel they are building up a debt. I believe free means being open for everybody’s access – culturally, ability-wise and financially... Yes, there is a pressure to follow up donation payment. For example, we had at one stage only 14% of our whānau who paid anything. I am not going to chase them up, make them feel guilty or scare them away because to me, it is far more important that the child is here [attending the kindergarten]. (IS: 214-221)

Sandra’s statement highlighted a conflict that arose between the traditional kindergarten culture, and the business (enterprise) culture that was imposed on her kindergarten, and the discourses underpinning these two cultures. Drawing on discourses of democratic participation, which underpinned traditional kindergarten culture, Sandra argued for a free access to ECEC as a child right. On the other hand, she was pressured to increase her kindergarten’s funding, stay sustainable and competitive in the ECEC market.

Firmly establishing herself in the traditional kindergarten culture, Sandra resisted enterprise discourses, by “deleting” a debt for “voluntary donation” of whānau (IS: 214-221). She entirely disapproved of any attempt that might stop families and children from attending her setting. In this way, she signalled her determination to align herself with the traditional kindergarten culture and its teachers’ identities.

At the same time, however, Sandra knew that if wanted to keep her job, she could not entirely resist all enterprise discourses. Therefore, she admitted to compromising some of “the key essential ingredients of the kindergarten culture”, such as

admitting every child that comes through the door, on that day (rather than staggering induction or taking the group dynamic into consideration), accepting that we need to market ourselves to attract children and keep the roll full, working after hours, in weekends and term breaks and taking minimal professional time/non-contact time during child contact time. (INS)

In her constant struggle to preserve the traditional kindergarten culture and resist enterprise discourses, Sandra strongly identified with the construct of advocate-activist teacher. Her comments implied that taking up the advocate-activist identity constructs did not mean being outside the enterprise discourses entirely, but rather critically engaging with them, and deliberately choosing to resist them whenever possible as a way of supporting the vision of ECEC as a democratic site and a public space for all children no matter what their circumstances.

For this reason, she emphasized that “no matter what, I do still fundamentally believe in kindergarten, [as] free, the good quality ECE service with all trained teachers” (INS). Her words suggested that being an advocate-activist professional was a matter of bravery and conscious awareness that teachers need to deliberately choose to believe that a better choice is possible, and to resist discourses which impinged on the notion of democratic ECEC in their practice. I discuss the construct of advocate-activist teachers in the era of privatisation and marketisation in a separate section.

### *Increasing ‘fighting spirit’ of teachers to support their association’s ‘financial sustainability’*

With the introduction of uncertainty, confusion and the need for speedy adaptations to new circumstances, the kindergarten teachers were left with not much time to “truly reflect on - What was it that you let go and you will never get back? And, what you have protected?” (IJ: 106-109). Although preserving the traditional kindergarten culture in the time of rapid transformation of ECEC’s was kindergarten teachers’ huge desire, yet the culture changed under the pressure to secure sustainability despite insufficient funding. As a result, the collectively and unity among kindergartens, as features of the traditional kindergarten culture, started fading away. Jane shared her view on this.

I think that the culture has definitely changed .... It is more now like fighting spirit. I think that people are very concerned about the future ... When we

were faced with budget cuts, teachers tried to be very creative about how they can contribute to support the sustainability of the organisation. (IJ: 237-241)

By mobilising discourses of individualisation to ensure the survival of their individual settings, the ‘fighting spirit’ of kindergarten teachers fragmented the collective voice of the sector and weakened their strength as a collective body advocating for the profession. At the same time, this shift signalled that the image of kindergarten teachers being ‘free’, meaning independent in making educational decisions based on ‘what is best for children’, was seriously threatened. Teachers were construed as becoming rather concerned with “how their decision making may contribute to the sustainability of their association” (INJ) – their business manager – and their advocacy and agency was severely limited under the pressure to “compete”, “fight”, and “stay viable” (INJ). Within the framework of possibilities created throughout discourses of competition and marketisation, Jane interpreted kindergarten teachers as placed in:

the position where they have to work to maximize their non-contact time to get the job done ... to work harder than ever with far more demands on their 40-hour week. [Despite all effort], the feeling that the job is never done is [yet] growing. (IJ: 118-121)

With the increasing responsibilities and demands, Jane noticed that “there is a very little time to be collegial. It is very much about working in your own kindergarten and getting the job done” (IJ: 120-124). Her statement implied that chances for kindergarten teachers to stay united, care for other colleagues and advocate for one another and the profession, which were qualities of the traditional kindergarten culture, had become limited.

With the growing competition and marketisation, teachers were preoccupied with managing their individual existence in the ECEC market, and the construct of advocate-activist kindergarten teacher was under major threat. Teachers’ advocacy for children, the profession, and other colleagues through their active political engagement in the union became more difficult for many. Jane reflected on the ongoing discussion among kindergarten teachers about an “upcoming union meeting” and teachers’ “right to attend this paid union meeting with PPTA [Post Primary Teachers' Association] and NZEI [New Zealand Educational Institute]” (IJ: 270-272). While she stressed that kindergarten teachers in her setting were aware

of “their right to attend the meeting” and that they “should be part of the union, and engaged”, because “it is about their collectivism, advocacy and activism”, her words conveyed teachers’ concerns

it is hard keeping your service open and still being able to attend the union meeting and work those hours ... Although it is teachers’ rights to do that. ... You know that funding is difficult all the time, so where your sit for that is difficult. (IJ: 273-276)

Jane’s statements emphasized that being actively engaged in the union was now hindered when they were constantly reminded by their business managers of their tight budgets. She compared the present time [‘now’] in the sector with the past, and said, “Many years ago”, kindergarten teachers “would just think that we are all entitled to attend the union meetings, and [they] will all be there. This is how it will be. Now, it is more shaky” (IJ: 277-281).

The comparison between the past and now also reflected the shift from the discourses reinforcing the notions of democratic teaching professionals and professionalism to the discourses producing an entrepreneurial teaching professional and imposing managerial professionalism in ECEC (Evetts, 2011; Oberhuemer, 2015; Sachs, 2001, 2003). The democratic discourses of ECEC strengthened confidence and trust in teachers, as professionals, to drive the profession by being united and collective, making independent educational decisions based on what is best for children. Conversely, the enterprise discourses, leading to the sector’s privatisation and marketisation, required the democratic teaching professionals (advocate-activist teachers) to become teacher-entrepreneurs, and thus to establish their practice on principles of managerial professionalism (Bottery, 1996; Day & Sachs, 2004; Hood, 1991; Sachs, 2003, 2016). This allowed the market to drive the profession, ECEC providers and settings, and set ‘new priorities’ for teaching practice and teachers, which limited their agency, advocacy and activism.

This section has highlighted the major effects of enterprise discourses on the traditional kindergarten culture, and on advocate-activist teachers’ identities grounded in discourses of democratic professionalism. The financial viability of an individual kindergarten and the organisation overshadowed the values of the traditional culture with its teaching practice grounded in children’s best interests. Kindergarten teachers were forced to become entrepreneurial professionals,

focused on the financial sustainability of their organisation, while ignoring the needs of children and community.

### **Can an advocate-activist kindergarten teacher survive the era of privatisation and marketisation?**

These recent marketisation and privatisation trends in the ECEC sector transformed priorities of the kindergarten association, individual kindergartens and kindergarten teachers, by bringing more ‘business’ emphases into their operation and teaching practices. Despite the evident changes at all levels of kindergarten operation, participants who were kindergarten teachers tried hard to be optimistic and maintain a belief in the construct of qualified, activist-advocate teachers. Their statements conveyed an argument and a hope for the survival of such an identity during an era of the sector’s privatisation and marketisation.

On this basis, kindergarten teachers constructed “[their] key role [as still grounded in] advocating for children, families and the profession” (FG 4 KT: 568-569) and “mak[ing] decisions based on what teachers believe is the best for children and families” (FG 4 KT 551). Although not denying that “some kindergartens were more down the track of commercialisation”, it was yet emphasised that kindergarten teachers, at least under their association “see their roles still as doing the advocacy” (IS: 292). The advocacy was defined as

the core of professionalism in early childhood, [...meaning] that you [teachers] are here for the good of children and whānau, not just to teach and go home at the end of the day. I do think that we feel that still very strongly. (IS: 292-296)

An indivisible link between that advocacy and professionalism in ECEC was especially evident in Sandra’s reflections. She implied that being a qualified professional teacher means being “an advocate and activist” – the one who “do[es] the decision making by the principle “what is best for children and whānau” (INS). Teachers were obliged to take up the advocate-activist position, especially at a time when their agency and advocacy were limited. Sandra’s observations highlighted that teachers’ “responses to [the] proposed changes must be framed according to what is good for children and whānau” (IS: 297-298), and their advocacy “is an essential part of that altruistic belief and the democratic value of education” (IS: 297-300), underpinning the traditional kindergarten culture. Therefore, teachers’

“advocacy needs to stay at the core of professionalism” and as “a key essential ingredient of our teaching practice” (INS).

Furthermore, Sandra argued strongly that “teachers need to be, despite the pressures, politically active, .... remaining abreast of and engaged with what is happening; explaining to others what the implications of certain changes are” (INS). She admitted that “[her] long working experience in the kindergarten” boosted her “confidence to articulate [her] beliefs and stand firm in [her] teaching practice” (IS: 225-227), despite the growing tensions of privatisation.

Identifying herself as an advocate-activist teacher, Sandra stated, “my strong advocate-activist position come from the kindergarten history and the traditional kindergarten culture” (INS). It was also grounded in her “personal and professional commitment to the belief in free access to high quality ECE for all children”, and “my choice and responsibility to fight for what is best for children and whānau” (INS). Furthermore, her “professional development”, “history as a strong union delegate”, and “engagement with NZEI” supported immensely in “[her] understanding of the impact of national ideology and policies on the quality of early childhood education over the years” (INS).

Sandra’s statements implied that the construction of advocate-activist teachers was not only possible but in fact necessarily in the era of privatisation and marketisation. Her arguments for the survival of activist-advocate teachers in kindergartens suggested that the professional identities of such teachers can be empowered and secured through a strengthening of teachers’ understanding and conscious awareness of their roles as political beings, who need to strive to attain the principles of democratic and universal ECEC in their practice. The analysis implied that teachers with a long working experience in kindergartens – a community-owned, not-for profit, teacher-led service, were more likely to sustain a strong commitment to the notion of democratic education. In addition, the traditional kindergarten culture, kindergarten history, and union activism, all promoting democratic professionalism and universal ECEC, offered a strong foundation for producing and reinforcing advocate-activist teachers’ identities. By enhancing teachers’ understanding of “the value of the philanthropic altruistic motives in their practice” (INS), the “traditional kindergarten qualities” were construed as “giving [teachers] confidence for remaining children advocate and politically active” (INS), against the odds of privatisation and marketisation. While highlighting the powerful

shaping of traditional kindergarten culture on some kindergarten teachers and their identities, the data raised the question of whether teachers without experience similar to Sandra can critically engage with the enterprise discourses and continue to establish their practice on democratic principles, and if so, how.

### **Constructing kindergarten teachers' professional identities – Advocate-activist and/or a teacher-entrepreneur**

The *Case Study 1* illustrated an interplay of socio-cultural, historical and political discourses in kindergartens and the ECEC sector generally, and their influence on kindergarten teachers' work and professional identities. The data analysis highlighted the construction of advocate-activist teachers in a kindergarten and showed how such an identity construct was forced to change under the recent marketisation and enterprise-driven policy developments.

As a result, kindergartens and kindergarten teachers were obliged to constantly negotiate between doing what is best for children and securing a financial sustainability by competing with other ECSs on the ECEC market. This juggling act implied the possibility for a teacher to take up (or not) two prevailing identity constructions on offer, and thus act and be advocate-activists' and/or teacher-entrepreneurs. Some participants' discussions implied that the former identity construction may still be favoured and sustained in their practices. The analysis also suggested that in teaching practice the construction of a teacher-entrepreneur most likely coexisted alongside that of advocate-activist.

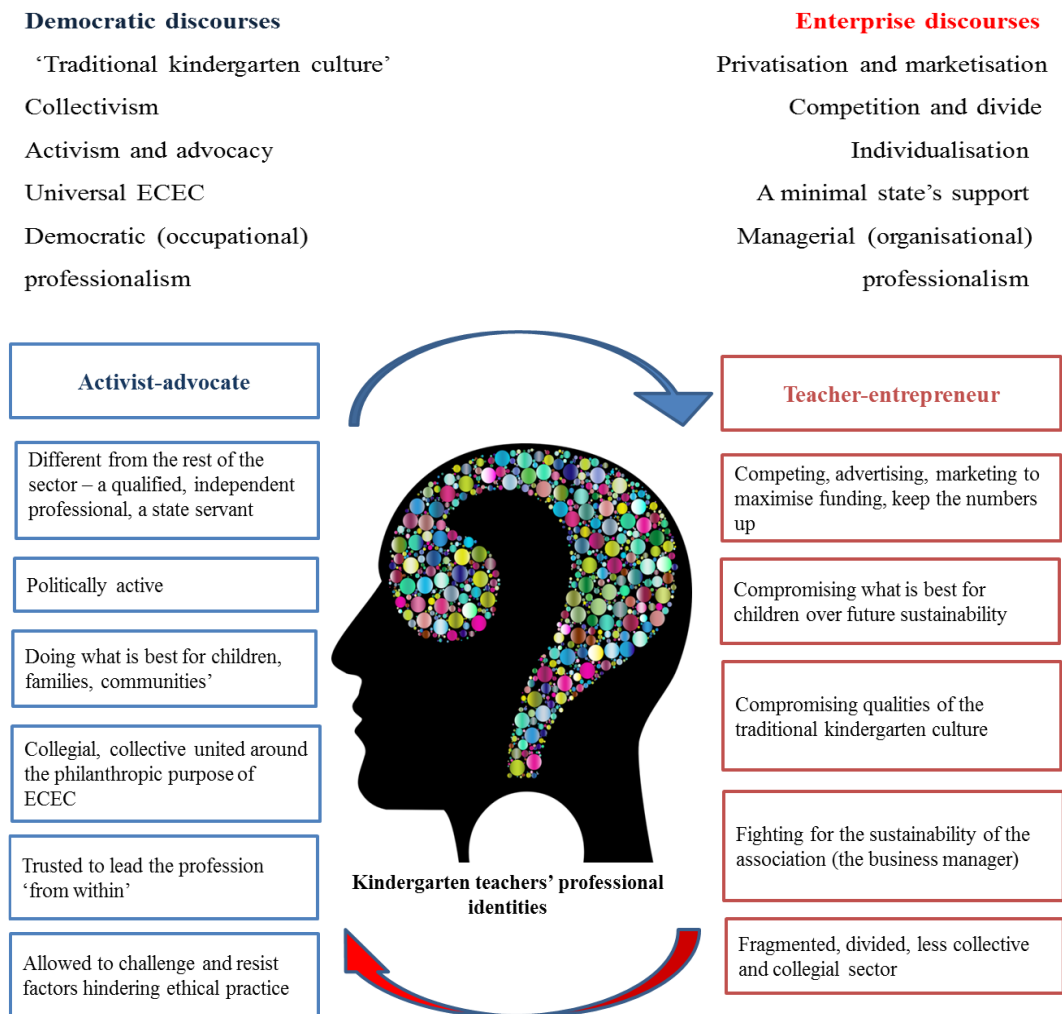
In this section, I discuss the two constructions, of activist-advocate and teacher-entrepreneur, as they relate to a purpose of ECEC and a view of professionalism that they may possibly reinforce in ECEC. I outline some possible limitations of such identity constructions, and their implications for teachers' practice and the teaching profession at large.

In Figure 5 I illustrate some features and practices that possibly underpin both identity constructions based on the analysis of individual and group talks of kindergarten teacher participants. The red and blue arrows on the graph point out that teacher identity constructions are actively and simultaneously exercised and constantly negotiated through teachers' struggle to balance complex and confronting subject positions, professional responsibilities and priorities in their individual kindergartens. As such, although opposing, the identity constructs may



(often do) coexist in a teaching practice and an individual context of an institutional kindergarten setting.

**Figure 5.** Shifting discourses and teachers’ identity constructions in kindergartens<sup>4</sup>



As have been argued, historical and socio-cultural discourses of the kindergarten, as a particular service type, and the changing political discourses of the state’s support of the sector made possible two opposing constructions of kindergarten teachers’ professional identities. The advocate-activist teacher identity was the product of discourses of democratic education, grounded in the “philanthropic motives” of the community-owned ECEC, known as “kindergarten style”, and engrained in the history and culture of New Zealand (Duncan, 2009, pp. 1–2). The

<sup>4</sup> The figure of human head in Figure 5 was retried from <https://pixabay.com/en/human-head-man-male-cranium-1211467/>

features of 'kindergarten style', referred to in participants' statements the traditional kindergarten culture were further reinforced and maintained through increasingly supportive state approach to ECEC as a child right, as discussed in Chapter 3.

The opposing construction of the teacher-entrepreneur was made possible through enterprise discourses, which informed a minimal state's support to the sector (Mitchell, 2015, 2017) and imposed a business model of operation on the community-owned ECSs. By controlling kindergarten associations, individual kindergartens, and kindergarten teachers, through 'the invisible hands of the market', the policy directives prevented teachers acting in the child's best interests and required them rather to be 'economically savvy' (Gibson et al., 2015). It imposed the 'culture of profit' on community-owned ECSs and started moving kindergartens away from the "culture of welfare" (Ball, 1994, p. 71). By the application of mechanism for enforcing the acceptance of "user-pays policies" and "private gain tenets" (Davison, 1998, p. 156), kindergarten teachers were forced to be entrepreneurs rather than advocate-activists.

Given the sector's fragmentation, democratic (occupational) professionalism was likely be submerged under a managerial (organisational) professionalism (Evetts, 2011; Sachs, 2003). Thus, kindergarten teachers' agency to run the profession 'from within' became limited (Bottery, 1996; Day & Sachs, 2004; Hood, 1991; Sachs, 2003, 2016), allowing the market and competition to drive the profession from outside, shaping teachers' ethics, values and their views of themselves as professionals.

Given the increasing conflicts and tensions between democratic and enterprise interests and priorities, it was unlikely that a kindergarten teacher could entirely identify with just one identity construction, and this was borne out by the data analysis. The complexity of circumstances in ECEC policies and practice, demanded that teachers switch from one identity constructions to another, simultaneously exercising and negotiating between opposing discourses, which required them to promote both forms of professionalism.

At the same time, however, the analysis of Sandra's talks clearly showed that to be advocate-activists, in times of growing neo-liberal emphases in ECEC, teachers need more than ever to deliberately choose their roles, priorities and identities. Being an advocate-activist teacher does not mean staying outside of the powerful impacts of prevailing discourses but rather critically engaging with discourses,

looking for alternatives and always finding a better approach for balancing democratic and market practices and future sustainability.

## **Case Study 2: Constructing Teachers' Professional Identities in Community-owned ECE centres**

*Case Study 2* examines and discusses constructions of teachers' professional identities in community-owned ECE centres. The analysis of the data revealed that identities of teachers in ECE centres (ECE teachers in text) have been produced through an interplay of specific socio-cultural and historical discourses shaping community-owned ECE centres historically, and political discourses driving policies in the ECEC sector at large.

*Case Study 2* shows that historical differences in status and qualifications of teachers in the education sector and in ECEC sector specifically provided a fertile environment for constructions of ECE teachers as 'not real'/'not proper teachers'. Such constructions of ECE teachers have been, on the one hand, weakened by the curriculum development and teachers' professionalisation, and then on the other hand, reinforced by the privatisation and marketisation emphases in the sector. While mirroring teachers' struggles to achieve an equal professional status with other teachers and deal with enterprise discourses forcing ECE centres to be self-governed units, *Case Study 2* indicates that few participants from the community – based ECE centres yet strongly claimed and sustained constructions of ECE teachers as activists and advocates for children and the profession.

### **Historical legacies of ECE centres and ECE teachers – 'Not real'/'not proper teachers'**

In this section, I show how ECE teachers' professional identities have been constructed through a complex interplay of socio-cultural, historical and political discourses which have shaped community-owned ECE centres in the past and into the present. As a particular service type within the diverse ECEC sector and education sector, ECE centres have been recognised for their distinctive attributes (e.g. a low paid women-based profession, considered often as 'caring' for small children rather than 'educating'). I argue that these attributes became a historical legacy which continues to determine the position and stratus of ECE centres and

teachers within the education sector and in wider society.

The historical legacy contributed substantially to ECE teachers being seen as ‘not real/proper’ teachers (FG1 ECT), but ‘like parents’, ‘carers’ and ‘baby-sitters’ (FG5 ECT). Examples of such an imagery were dominant through ECE teachers’ discussions of their perceptions of themselves in relation to other teaching professionals.

Leyla shared an imagery of ECE teachers from around two decades ago, when she did her teacher training. She vividly recalled a welcome speech to ECE student-teachers delivered, by a ”headmaster” of a primary school, in which the training took place:

The headmaster welcomed us all and clearly said ‘It is great that you are doing this training in early childhood teaching ... so that one day you all can become the real, the proper teachers’ (FG1 ECT: 654-655).

Later, in an individual interview, Leyla revisited the headmaster’s speech and added:

He viewed the difference between us [ECE teachers] and school teachers. Other people [referring to society] also thought we were just baby-sitters... looking after little kids and changing nappies. That is what they believe we do in early childhood. (IL: 52-54)

Leyla’s observation demonstrated that the construct of ECE teachers was grounded in discourses shaping society’s view of the ECEC sector as a baby-sitting service that did not require its child ‘mindes’ to hold teaching qualifications. By comparison, school teachers were viewed as professionals working in educational institutions and offering a ‘real’/’proper’ teaching for which they needed an adequate teaching qualification. ECE teachers were, thus construed as

not com[ing] along with the professional body of teachers [referring to the fully qualified primary and secondary school teachers], and ... somehow lacking in a professional way. (FG1 ECT: 793-797)

The different positioning within the education sector was revealed in ECE teachers’ talks feelings of “not being professionally recognised” or “as important as other teaching professionals” (FG1 ECT: 798-799). Although all ECE teachers in my study were fully qualified, they yet have felt the powerful influence of this historical legacy on constructions of their professional identities.

The different positioning of ECE teachers and other teaching professionals perhaps

reflected the past administration of ECSs and schools. The ECEC sector was administered by the Department of Social Welfare until 1985, while other education institutions were under the administration of the Department of Education. This may have contributed to society's view of ECE teachers as being "carers" and "baby-sitters" who "look after little kids" and "change nappies" (FG5 ECT 233-311), while school teachers were viewed as offering a 'proper' education. Participants stressed that such views constituted an "injustice towards ECE teachers for the same teaching job [they] do as other teaching professionals" and "the lack of value and respect for the youngest citizens in society" (FG5 ECT: 313-317). In addition, variations among early childhood services' operation and funding, followed by differences in teachers' qualification, working conditions and professional status strengthened the divide between ECE teachers and kindergarten teachers in the ECEC sector. It was construed that "in lots of eyes kindergarten teachers were always viewed as a professional bunch of teachers", while "ECE teachers were considered baby-sitters" (IL: 58-62).

A status of a professional ECE teacher was strongly associated with an assumption that by "getting training like anybody else", and "becoming professionalised", would "enable ECE teachers to gain equal professional status with kindergarten teachers and other teaching professionals" (FG5 ECT: 706-719). By "gaining the formal qualification in ECE", it was assumed that ECE teachers would "prove that we are the professional teachers too" (FG5 ECT: 711-713). However, the equal qualification of ECE and kindergarten teachers, has not changed the views of society and other teaching professionals of ECE teachers (FG1 ECT; FG5 ECT), allowing the historical legacies to influence on constructions of ECE teachers' professional identities.

Below, I discuss how the different status and working conditions of teachers in ECE centres and kindergartens provided a powerful context for such constructions.

### *ECE teachers - Different from kindergarten teachers*

The participants who were professional leaders (PL) held leadership/advisory roles in both types of community-owned teacher-led services – kindergartens and ECE centres. Reflecting on the positioning of ECE teachers and kindergarten teachers in the sector, they argued that the ongoing historical divide between ECE centres and

kindergartens had significantly affected ECE teachers' professional identities. In particular, the fact that kindergarten teachers were employed under the collective employment agreement made for a significant difference between them and ECE teachers.

The collective agreement, "paying salaries to state servants", provided kindergarten teachers with "different terms and working conditions, and a higher pay rate from early childhood teachers" (FG2 PL: 368-380). By setting conditions for a higher professional status and recognition in the sector, the collective agreement enabled "kindergarten teachers to perceive themselves as not just teachers working in early childhood", but rather "as kindergarten teachers" (FG2 PL: 368-460).

Considering these differences in employment conditions, a professional leader, Trudy explained their effects on ECE teachers:

as opposed to when you are on the collective agreement, on the individual agreements ECE teachers are negotiating on their own. Even though, they can have the union representation, people do not tend to do so .... I don't know why .... Maybe they feel it is an individual contract and they need to do it by themselves, or even they don't know how to get hold of a union person to help them to negotiate. Our individual contracts are standard across the organisation. ... You can negotiate for little bits and pieces ... but the contracts get offered and people can say "yes" or "no" to it. They cannot go like "I want this or I want that". (ITR: 13-29)

It is significant that kindergarten teachers negotiated their employment contracts collectively through the union's activism and advocacy for the profession. Through the united voices, kindergarten teachers were probably empowered to affect decision-making and improve their working conditions. Moreover, the collective activism perhaps reinforced their sense of belonging to the profession, and increased their chances to argue for and achieve a better professional status and more recognition in the sector and society.

Many ECE teachers, on the other hand, had to negotiate salaries and conditions with an employer on their own. This most likely created a power imbalance which left little or no room to negotiate. By limiting ECE teachers' agency this way the individual and workplace contracts reduced these teachers' ability to change and improve their professional status and, perhaps, reinforced their compliance to an employer. Moreover, these contracts seemed to create in ECE teachers a feeling of

“isolation” from the profession, creating a sense that they needed to “do it on their own” (INTR).

It can be argued that by setting different terms, working conditions and contexts, the employment contracts, from early on, have significantly contributed to the different positioning of teachers in the sector, impacting on constructions of their professional identities. Over time, with the “funding in ECE organisations becom[ing] tighter and tighter”, ECE teachers’ professional status, recognition and agency deteriorated further. Trudy summarised this as follows:

If you look at an organisation, like ours, if we have got only this pool of money [Trudy drew a small circle], and if the collective agreement increases, then the salary for kindergarten teachers grows [Trudy drew a big circle]. We are bound by the collective agreement and we need to meet those conditions ... There is not so much money in the pool, so people, who are on the individual contracts ... they may not get their salary increased as those people [the kindergarten teachers on the collective agreement]. So, they both [kindergarten and ECE teachers] might start to be a bit closer but as soon as those people move away [referring to a growth in kindergarten teachers’ salaries], those [ECE teachers] stay here [referring to ECE teachers’ salaries remaining unchanged]. It is just because there is not enough money in the pool. (ITR: 59-80)

Trudy implied that with the growing budget constraints on an ECE organisation, the different working conditions of ECE teachers and kindergarten teachers became more evident. As a result, the existing historical divide between teachers in ECE centres and kindergartens began to deepen.

What is more, Trudy was arguing that the position of some ECE teachers in her organisation was becoming more challenging, because “there is the competition among services, as more centres open in the area and there are many qualified teachers” (FG2 PL: 470-474). Therefore “in areas where [ECE] services are more market driven”; particularly in a city with lots of ECE centres and teachers; “we [the organisation - the employer] *get to decide* things that *we would not negotiate with teachers* on the individual contracts, such as working hours or salaries” (FG2 PL: 478, emphasis added). With the increasing agency of the service employers, working conditions were decided *for* ECE teachers rather than *with* them, underlining the fact that they had no power to individually change the employment

terms and conditions that their organisation (a business manager) pre-set *for* them. Taking all this together, I contend that the existing historical divides and differences between ECE centres and kindergartens have been maintained and, moreover, reinforced with the growing competition and enterprise priorities in the sector. Consequently, the historical legacy of ECE teachers as ‘baby-sitters’ and ‘not proper’ teachers, who are ‘less’ in a professional status and regard than kindergarten teachers, has continued to be nurtured, hindering ECE teachers’ agency and a sense of themselves as qualified professionals.

### ***‘Love is a key’ – Acceptance and compliance***

While strongly criticising the factors reinforcing the inequalities between services and teachers in the sector, participants alluded to teachers’ compliance with unsatisfactory aspects of their circumstances, despite the evident dissatisfaction. In this sense, some ECE teachers strongly argued that “to work in ECE *you need to do your job for love*” (FG5 ECT: 249, emphasis added). It was emphasized that “most of teachers in our ECE centres are those who have been doing this job for love” (FG5 ECT: 250). The notion of “doing ECEC for love” was related to teachers’ “passion to do their work no matter what” (FG5 ECT: 242) and was described as follows:

I think you got here two groups of teachers in ECE: those who are passionate no matter what; all what they want to do is to make a difference in children’s and families’ lives ... and, there are those who would say “I am not recognised and I will quit and stuff”. But in the early childhood you cannot be that one. You really cannot be that one. You are going to do it for love. (FG5 ECT: 247-250)

Within the construct of ‘doing ECE for love’, it was further argued that ECE teachers “cannot complain around the professional status”, and “no matter what they [the employers] pay, what are the hours, you are doing it for love” (FG5 ECT 252-254). The construct of ‘love’ in relation to being an ECE teacher and doing ECEC seemed to exclude any possibility for these teachers to challenge and reject the imposed working conditions, despite their dissatisfaction.

Furthermore, within the construct of ‘doing ECE for love’, two different sorts of teachers were distinguished. First, “there are certain teachers that get to work for eight hours, do their job and go home at the end of the day” (FG5 ECT: 255-257).



Second, there are “teachers who are there every day, every hour, every weekend”, and “never complain about anything” (FG5 ECT: 259-262).

The former ‘sort’ of teachers were assumed to be those who most likely ‘does not do ECE for love’, but for some other reasons (e.g. salary). Being such an ECE teacher was construed as “unacceptable” and “not appreciated” in their ECE centres (FG5 ECT: 263). In contrast, the latter construction of ECE teachers alluded to the idea that teachers who ‘do ECE for love’ do not complain about unsatisfactory working hours, salaries, and working conditions, but accept them and comply. Interestingly, all participants in the focus group (FG5) strongly identified with the construct of teachers who accept the unsatisfactory conditions, ‘doing ECE for love’ and ‘not complaining’ (FG5).

The constructions of ‘good’ teachers’; who are dedicated to the job, putting the child, parents and the employers first; and ‘bad teachers’; who put their self-interest, such as working conditions first; were historically documented in the New Zealand ECEC (Duncan, 1996; May, 2003). As Judith Duncan (1996) powerfully argued, the discourses of ‘Children First’ and ‘For the Sake of Children’ allowed for the needs of children, parents and the employers to be perceived by some teachers and society as in conflict with teacher demands. As a result, calls for improvements in teachers’ employment conditions were viewed as unacceptable, arising out of teachers’ self-interest (Duncan, 1996).

Moreover, the construct of a compliant, ‘good’ ECE teachers, “working in an ECE centre for love no matter the conditions” (FG5 ECT 252-254), seemed to remain a norm in some ECE centres, not only historically but also presently. By favouring the construct of such a teacher, participants’ accounts implicitly justified that “never complaining about anything” (FG5 ECT: 255-262) was a proof of teachers’ ‘love and passion’ for their work, tying them strongly with the historical legacy of being ‘less valued and regarded’. This also reinforced an environment in which ECE teachers were pushed to deal with and to accept everyday ‘urgencies’ (e.g. doing their job no matter what the circumstances), while being reluctant to be involved in broader political perspectives and goals (e.g. actively fighting for better pay and working conditions, leading to a stronger ECE workforce).

Besides, ‘working for love’ in ECEC, seemed for some ECE teachers to be a way of living with the paradoxical professional identities and positioning. The paradox underpinning ECE teachers’ work and identities entailed the fact that they were

perceived as ‘not proper’ teachers, and regarded as ‘less’ professional, while at the same time holding the same teaching qualification and “doing the same job ... as other teaching professionals” (FG5 ECT: 313-317). On this premise, it may be assumed that ‘doing ECEC for love’ was like a mechanism helping some ECE teachers to compensate for their ‘less’ professional regard and lower professional status in ECEC, the education sector and society.

Until now, I examined the historical and socio-cultural discourses producing the historical legacies of ECE centres and constructing ECE teachers’ identities. In the sub-sections following, I examine recent policy directives and political discourses and their effects on ECE centres and ECE teachers.

### **On the swings of the policy changes from the 1996 to 2016 – From being a professional teacher to not-having-any-worth as a teacher**

Along with historical discourses from the more distant past, participants reflected on impacts of policy directives from 1996 to 2009, and from 2009 to 2016 on ECE centres and teachers. Like the kindergarten teachers in *Case Study 1*, ECE teachers associated the former time period with the introduction of *Te Whāriki* (1996), the Strategic Plan (2002), and professional resources (Ministry of Education, 2004a, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009a), and construed ECE teachers as becoming professional teachers (FG1 ECT). The latter time-period was related to the recent policy directives which led to funding constraints in ECE centres, lowered the target for qualified teachers in teacher-led services and enforced privatisation and marketisation of the sector. The policy context from 2009 to 2016 set a foundation for ECE teachers to construe themselves as “not-having-any-worth as teaching professionals” (IC).

#### ***ECE teachers: Becoming professional teachers***

Along with acquiring the same ECE qualification as kindergarten teachers, *Te Whāriki* (1996), the professional resources (Ministry of Education, 2004b, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009a), and the Strategic Plan (2002) were especially significant for ECE teachers in supporting them to construe themselves as professional teachers. The construction of professional teachers was related to an expansion of teachers’ understanding of learning and teaching, and the state’s increasing support of the professionalization and professional development of the ECEC workforce.

The curriculum and the professional resources were viewed as “helping teachers to take another step in professionalism”, and “stop doing ECE as parenting” (FG1 ECT: 196-200). The switch from “parenting to “professionalism” was associated with an “awareness that we don’t do our practice because we have always done it, but we do it with accountability and with a purpose” (FG 1 ECT 255-256). With the curriculum, teachers “came to understand that everything we do, it does matter”, and “our professional knowledge about learning and teaching is important” (FG1 ECT: 184-186). ECE teacher participants said:

as a sum of all direct and indirect learning for the children, the curriculum made us aware that teaching and learning was not just about our intention to teach, but about a wider context... Before *Te Whāriki* and the resources we were like parents. We did what we knew really.... We shared personal experience as parents of our own children .... and tried our best to deliver a good teaching .... But then, we came to understand that knowing why you are doing what you are doing is what makes you be the professional teacher. (FG1 ECT: 179-263)

By strengthening teachers’ knowledge and understanding of their work, the curriculum and professional resources enabled teachers to move from a concept of ECE practice as a sum of ‘(un)intentional’ endeavors, to the understanding that ‘all’ that happened in an ECE centre was teaching and learning, and did matter. Based on this, participants’ discussion demonstrated a clear transition from constructing themselves as ‘like parents’, not aware of the wider context of ECEC practice, to professional teachers with professional knowledge of the wholeness of learning, development and care in ECEC.

Besides the curriculum and professional resources, it was also made plain that the Strategic Plan (2002) played a key role in construing the ECE teacher as a professional teacher in the sector and beyond. A centre director Charlotte pinpointed this as follows:

There has always been a lot of struggle with the government's policy. For the first time with the Strategic Plan, a lot of us felt that we are professionals and we are valued. We were given money for people to do their professional registration, which we have not got any more ... But at that time we were very valued. People [referring to ECE centres] believed in qualified teachers. (IC: 11-16)

Charlotte argued that by providing financial resources for ECE teachers' registration and professional development programmes, the Strategic Plan (2002) showed that ECE teachers were recognised and valued like other teaching professionals. In offering different funding bands for different levels of staff qualifications in teacher-led services (see Chapter 3), the Strategic Plan (2002) set conditions for ECE teachers to be taken up to the qualification level of kindergarten teachers, and become fully professionalised workforce. The growing state support of ECE teachers' professionalisation gave a hope to ECE centres and teachers that equal professional status and recognition with kindergartens were on their way. A "true belief in" and "value of having all qualified teachers" made Charlotte "work so hard to achieve that" (IC: 17-18). She highlighted that "the value for children of having all qualified teachers in a centre was clear" and strengthened her "commitment to meeting the target for all qualified teachers", and "get[ting] the best quality practice for children in our centres" (IC: 17-23).

The increasing state support to teachers' professionalisation and the promising aims of the Strategic Plan (2002), probably encouraged Charlotte and many other ECE centre directors to work eagerly towards the target of 100 percent qualified and registered ECE teachers by 2012, and finally achieving equal professional status with kindergarten teachers. However, with the change of government in 2008, strategies supportive of ECE teachers' professionalisation "just disappeared", leading to "a most tragic event ever happened to [Charlotte's] centres and the sector" (FG3 ECM: 150-153). In the following sections, I will examine policy directions repositioning ECE teachers from being 'professional teachers' to 'not-having-any-worth as teachers' (INC), and offer an example of the effects of enterprise discourses on ECE teachers' professional identities.

*'Not-having-any-worth as teachers' in the era of funding cuts and restraints in ECEC (Example from Charlotte's ECE centres)*

Charlotte was a director of a number of ECE community-owned centres. She believed that the Strategic Plan (2002) reinforced "the value of [having] all qualified teachers" and inspired ECE centres "to work hard for several years to meet the target" (IC: 38- 40). When the conditions promised in the Strategic Plan (2002) were removed, ECE centres were put under pressure to find alternative ways of paying qualified ECE teachers, and ensuring their financial sustainability.

Considering the impacts of the policy changes on her ECE centres, Charlotte stated

We were told that they [the Government] are going to be funding us for only 80 percent [of qualified ECE teachers]. We were running at 99 percent [qualified ECE teachers]. So there was nearly 20 percent that we were not going to be funded for.... When you are paying teachers \$25 to \$27 an hour, you are really racking up the money that you are losing from them quick. Although you are a community-based centre, you do need to stay financially viable. (IC: 42-47)

Charlotte's account summed up the impacts of the policy directives moving away from a quality ECEC service for all children, which was to have been achieved through the professionalization of the workforce. By imposing budget cuts and other constraints on the sector, the policy directives replaced quality ECSs with fiscal and economic priorities and announced the reduction of state support to the sector, including ECE centres and ECE teachers. Given the new priorities, ECE centres were forced to be "like business operation-models", to "compromise quality" and undergo "fundamental changes" to ensure their "financial viability" within the tight budget (IC: 42-48).

In Charlotte's ECE organisation, the "fundamental changes" required lowering the numbers of qualified ECE teachers in centres to "save money" and "stay viable" (IC: 46-50). At the level of an individual ECE centre, it meant that "each centre did not have to operate on an individual license", which would require them to "have 99 percent qualified teachers each" (INC). The new operation model proposed that several ECE centres to "operate under one license", meaning that "all centres together have 80 percent qualified teachers" (INC). In practical terms, ECE centres "didn't require anymore as many qualified ECE teachers", and "could operate with two qualified teachers in each centre, which would be 80 percent" (IC: 41-45).

Given the circumstances, Charlotte was under pressure to do "some very tough decision-making" and "negotiate between children's best interest"; which would be met through a quality ECE service, and the "viability of the organisation" (IC: 48-55). The ECE centres thus needed to go through a restructuring process and reduce the number of qualified teachers. In total, seven ECE qualified teachers were affected by the restructuring process. The teachers were given two options. The first possibility was "to take redundancy on the site agreement", and second "to continue to work and be paid under the unqualified rate" (IC: 58-65). Below, I exemplify

how teachers' decisions – taking redundancy (*Example 1*) or accepting the unqualified pay rate (*Example 2*) - impacted on the constructions of their professional identities.

*Example 1 – Taking redundancy*

Three ECE teachers decided to take redundancy. As Charlotte reported, these teachers “have done their study [gained the ECE qualification] and as far as they were concerned they were not going to take the unqualified pay rate” (IC: 67-68). The professional identities of these ‘redundant’ ECE teachers, as Charlotte stated, were grounded in their “personal [and professional] philosophy around what it means to be a professional teacher in ECE” (IC: 75-78). For them, it was “strongly linked to [holding] the ECE degree and being paid under the qualified paid rate” (INC). To accept the unqualified pay rate, “it felt to them like ‘We don’t have any worth as professionals” (IC: 79).

Firmly construing themselves as qualified professional teachers, the ‘redundant’ ECE teachers refused to comply with the imposed working conditions, and to accept being viewed as equivalent to unqualified teachers. These teachers implicitly resisted enterprise discourses, which forced them to comply with the ‘less’ in comparison with other qualified professional ECE teachers in their centres.

*Example 2 – Taking an unqualified pay rate*

Four ECE teachers chose to continue working under the unqualified paid rate. Each teacher coped differently with the decision they made and the circumstances they complied with. According to Charlotte’s description, some teachers “expressed a strong feeling of resentment” and “injustice”, and eventually left the ECE centre (INC). Others were “pleased to have a job and just accepted what happened” (INC). In Charlotte’s opinion, the length of teaching experience, “love” and “passion for work”, and teachers’ “personal traits” significantly impacted on how they managed to deal with their choice to accept “unqualified paid rate” (INC).

For instance, a newly qualified ECE teacher became “very resentful about what happened” and “talked to anybody about ... the big injustice [that had been] done to her” (IC: 74-82). The whole atmosphere in the centre and the relationship of the teacher with a centre manager became uncomfortable. The teacher could not “get on with the choice she made”, and “constantly experienced the conflict” between

being a qualified professional teacher and yet being paid as an unqualified teacher (IC: 83-86). In the end, she left the centre.

Other ECE teachers with a longer teaching experience managed to keep working in ECE centres despite the unsatisfactory circumstances. For instance, one ECE teacher was described as being “very pleased to still have a job in the centre”, and to “work with families that she had grown to love and really enjoyed being with” (IC: 87-89). It was argued that “the passion for teaching motivated this teacher to stay in the centre” (INC). While helping the teacher to endure through time of change, ‘the passion for teaching’ seemed to be a mechanism justifying the teacher’s compliance with the unsatisfactory working conditions. As with a previous example, the love discourse (‘doing ECE for love’) in teaching appeared to be a powerful in assisting ECE teachers to ignore the lack of financial reward and professional status, and accept these almost as normality.

In another instance of an ECE teacher accepting the unqualified pay rate, the teacher “ended up working a half week as an unqualified [teacher] and half week as a qualified teacher” (IC: 90-92). In considering impacts of the imposed conditions on a construction of the teacher’s identity, Charlotte’s talks stressed that “having a strong identity of herself as a teacher” and being “a robust person” helped the teacher to “come to peace about the decision she made” (IC: 94-95). Her ‘strong’ identity as a teacher and ‘robust personality’ seemed to be praised and construed as enabling this teacher to tolerate and comply with the lower professional status and unsatisfactory circumstances. It also left a space for thinking whether teachers’ compliance may be encouraged, as being considered as a proof of the teacher’s ‘strong’ professional identity.

#### *‘Saving money’ by lowering quality (Summary)*

Taken together, *Examples 1* and *2* illustrated deleterious impacts of the policy directives from 2009 to 2016 on ECE centres and teachers. The examples showed under the pressure to survive, ECE centres tended to ‘save money’ by reducing number of qualified teachers and accepting lower quality working conditions. Such decision-making worsened relationships in ECE centres, created a feeling of ‘not-having-any-worth’ in qualified teachers, and reinforced the already low professional status and recognition of ECE teachers.

The examples also implied that fewer ECE teachers chose to resist the inferior

working conditions, while many tended to comply with the work. Compliance with the ‘less’ seemed to be justified and approved in some centres as teachers’ expression of ‘love’ and ‘passion for the work’, and as an indicator of teachers’ endurance and ‘robust’ identities. By choosing compliance for the sake of love for children, families and their work, teachers seemed to be disciplined to work for the less professional status and regard, and normalising ‘less’ as their professional reality.

Given the impacts of the reducing state support of the sector from 2009 to 2016, I argue that these policy directives strengthened the construction of compliant ECE teachers, ‘doing ECE for love’ of children and families no matter how dissatisfying the working conditions. The construction of the compliant ECE teacher complemented well the imageries of ‘not proper’ teachers, and ‘baby-sitters’, which together reinforced the historical legacies of ECE centres. Through the complex interplay of the historical, socio-cultural and political discourses of ECE centres, the unfairness in professional status and recognition of ECE teachers heavily influenced their constructions of their professional identities, approving and encouraging their compliance with the less.

### **ECE centres and ECE teachers in the era of privatisation of ECEC**

In the following sections, I examine how the most recent market-led policy directives impacted on community-owned ECE centres and constructions of teachers’ professional identities. I first share views of Charlotte, a centre director, on this matter, and then offer an example of Leyla’s experience of teaching in both, a community-owned and a for-profit ECE centre.

#### ***Turning community-owned ECE centres to a business model and teachers into observers (Charlotte’s example)***

In Charlotte’s view, the recent policy directives made “early childhood services [to] become corporates for making money” (IC: 242-243). She referred to “a free workshop about a strategic plan for ECE centres that was run by the Ministry of Education”, and delivered to “more than 80 people working in the sector” (IC: 244-246).

Charlotte said, “the person running the workshop was [construed as] a business entrepreneur in early childhood”, explaining “a business model that ECE centres



should put in their strategic plans” (IC: 247-248). Her words conveyed concerns that “the workshop aimed to equip ECE centres with business knowledge” and “ensure that they plan strategically how to make money” (INC), which would eventually make them independent from the state’s funding support.

Charlotte firmly distinguished her community-owned ECE centres from ECE centres operating as a business. Therefore, “the private centres [were defined to be] out there to make money” and “children are not at the centre of their decision making” (IC: 143-146). For this reason, the recent policy developments were criticised for allowing the for-profit ECE centres “to favour a profit-making over children” (INC).

Charlotte’s appraisal also threw light on issues resulting from the fact that for-profit and community-owned centres got an equal access to the governmental funding, despite the significant difference in their operation. This resulted in competition for government funding between the community-owned and for-profit services. Moreover, the state’s decision-making seemed to encourage some for-profit centres to invest that in their other businesses, of which Charlotte sharply critical:

[T]hey are making a lot of money out of running the early childhood business ... if they cut corners [referring to cutting “an expenditure for new equipment, materials for children, qualified teachers”] .... They don’t put back to the early childhood centres what they earned, but rather use that for their personal financial gain ... to buy a holiday house for themselves... (INS)

Charlotte’s observations implied a paradox in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC, in which not-for-profit and for profit ECSs receive equal funding, despite the fact that their operation hugely differed. The former ECSs need to give back to children and community whatever they earn, while the latter services can use the state’s funding to make money for their personal gains.

Given the business-focus in ECE centres, Charlotte stated

in my view, you start compromising teachers' identities [referring to for-profit ECE centre], because you get sucked into the mode of making the profit. So, they [ECE teachers] don't ask for new equipment because they are told that there is no money to buy it ... [and] to make what they get to last for the next six months ... I have heard and seen this. (IC: 257-260)

As ECE teachers focused on reducing expenditure and making profits, ECE

teachers' identities in for-profit ECE centres, in Charlotte's view, were constructed as, "be[ing] swallowed up in all these business priorities" (IC: 261-262). By limiting teachers' agency, business ECE centres positioned ECE teachers as "observers in the decision making" process, because

what teachers say, it doesn't really matter.... If your owner doesn't want you to do A, B, or C [referring to activities that may require financial recourses], you will not going to. (IC: 261-264)

According to Charlotte, decision-making in business-oriented ECE centres may be limited to a business owner and managers, excluding ECE teachers' professional knowledge and professional opinion. While signaling impacts of the recent business-focused policy directives on ECE centres and teachers' professional identities, Charlotte's critique also unpacked resistance and biases of community-owned services and teachers towards a business model of ECE centre. The available teacher constructs of for-profit ECE centres also encapsulated growing distance and divide between ECSs with different operation models.

#### *ECE teachers as workers in a business ECE centre (Leyla's example)*

Leyla happened to have worked in both sides of the sector – not-for-profit and for-profit. By comparing her earlier experience in a for-profit ECE centre with her current experience in a community-owned ECE centre, Leyla was able to report that both centres' operation significantly shaped teachers' professional identities. In particular, it "has a huge impact on whether you view yourself just as a worker or you see yourself as a professional teacher" (IL: 398-409). She said:

If you work for somebody who is just making the profit, they think there are lots of things that are not important for a teacher .... In some places, they do not allow teachers to join the teachers' union. If you are not allowed to join the part of your professional body, what does it say? That is not important... I think a lot of things are seen through the idea that we are just a business like any other business and we are here to make the profit. Then teachers are just like workers really, not professionals. (IL: 398-409)

The construct of ECE teachers as workers was associated with teachers' limited agency to decide what was or was not important for them as professionals, and whether they could or could not exercise their political agency through union engagement. Leyla's account also alluded to the inequitable power-relationships

between the workers (teachers) and the business owner ('somebody who is making the profit'). This was evident in statements, such as "you [an ECE teacher] work *for* somebody", rather than working *with*; "*they* [the business owners] *think*" and "*they don't allow the teachers ....*" (IL: 398-409), rather than owners decide collectively with teachers or ECE teachers deciding for themselves.

Leyla noted that the construct of "worker" was shaped by the centre's decision-making that in turn was driven by "the idea that we are just a business like any other business and we are here to make the profit" (IL: 407-409). Therefore, a main question the workers should be concerned with was "how much it is going to cost?" (IL: 413). Given the circumstances, ECE teachers perceived their teaching in a business-ECE centre "as just a job that I really do not care about" and thus, construe themselves as "just a worker" (IL: 415-418), with no power to contribute to decision-making, and with no agency to make informed professional choices.

Therefore, teachers' professional identities and teaching practice were defined as being limited by funding constraints and dependent on the profit priorities of the business owner. This placed teachers in the position of "do[ing] what [they] always do because they [the centre's owners] are not willing to pay anything for them to go any further really" (IL: 419-421). Given the disempowering circumstances, constructions of teachers' identities seemed to mirror their managements' expectations and priorities, as pinpointed in Leyla's statement below:

Teachers start to think if the management doesn't see it as important, so it is obviously not important for us. They are not going to be bothered to do it, because .... they know they cannot have that resources ... It did impact a lot on how they viewed themselves ... It becomes just a job they really do not care about. (IL: 430-436)

In addition, when taking up the constructions of 'just workers', most of ECE teachers seemed less likely to be interested in investing time in their professional development, and were not encouraged by the management to do so. The following example illustrates this point:

When self-review came out [referring to the *Self-review guidelines for ECE* (2008), which is analysed in Chapter 5], they [the business owners] told teachers "There is no time to discuss this". Each teacher was expected to take it away and read it in their own time. The truth is that teachers didn't

read it, because they didn't see it is important. If you didn't see yourself as a professional teacher, you think this doesn't matter.

My colleague and I read it and discussed it. We put a PowerPoint together and took it to teachers' meeting ... We used half of the meeting to discuss what this document was and why it was important to us. We did it in our own time. (IL: 416-422)

Leyla highlighted that she and the other teacher had yet found a way to do the opposite. These two teachers chose to create an opportunity for themselves and others to critically reflect on the document and discuss "what we should aim for" and "what we really do" (IL: 424), which had prominent impacts on them all. Leyla recalled:

[a]fter we discussed, everybody started to understand this is what we really do and that is .... what we need to provide for children. They started realizing what is quality teaching that we should aim for. If we don't look at our practice and don't take that time to talk about what we do, then it will never get better. (IL: 425-429)

While making evident the limitations that ECE teachers may face in a business-focused environment, Leyla's action demonstrated that the limitations and constraints could yet be a space for resistance and change. It also implied that such action required an individual professional teacher, critically aware of the necessity to challenge the usual ways of being and doing ECE practice, to step out, showing that a change, although tiny, was possible and necessary.

*Enterprise discourses' shaping of ECE centres and ECE teachers' professional identities (Summary)*

The two examples above outlined various impacts of enterprise discourses on ECE centres, their teaching practices and teachers. Positioned to compete for the state's funding, community-owned ECE centres distanced themselves from for-profit services. The growing resistance seemed to deepen the sector's historical divide and eroded the chance for teachers from these two service types to find a common ground.

The analysed examples, furthermore showed that enterprise discourses increased the agency of a centre business owner, and positioned ECE teachers as 'observers' in any decision- making in a for-profit centre. Teachers' professional opinions and

knowledge became irrelevant, forcing and encouraging them to be ‘just workers’ within a business environment. This diminished teachers’ sense of themselves as professional qualified teachers with agency to make informed professional decisions.

The constructions of ECE teachers as observers and workers complemented one another, and perhaps encouraged some ECE teachers to continue complying with the ‘less’, accepting that whatever was given could not be changed. By conditioning ECE teachers to be acquiescent in their dissatisfactory working context, the practices of business ECE centres remained neither responsive to children’s interests and needs nor informed by teachers’ professional knowledge, but led by profit priorities.

However, Leyla’s example yet held out some hope that the current business focus in ECEC might be challenged and changed. She implied that it is necessary for ECE teachers to choose to exercise their agency and resist business priorities in their centres, and instead steer their practice towards favouring what is best for children over individual profits. For this to become regular teachers’ practice, it is essential that the state employ mechanisms that prevent business-owners to prioritising profit-making, while ignoring quality teaching practice, which supposedly was a main reason for them to open an ECE centre.

Now, I move on to examine constructions of ECE teachers which provide some hope that the sector can move towards more democratic and more just ECSs and practices.

### **ECE teachers: Children’s advocates and advocates for the profession**

The previous sections exemplified that *Te Whāriki* (1996), the professional resources (Ministry of Education, 2004a, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009a), and the Strategic Plan (2002) encouraged ECE teachers to construe themselves as professional teachers. However, market-led directives and for-profit emphases worsened teachers’ working conditions and made them doubt their professional worth. The analysis of the accounts of two participants highlighted that being children’s advocates and advocates for the profession, even while going through rapid transformation, could be a basis for teachers’ professional identities.

### *Children's advocates*

In considering the need to negotiate multiple professional demands, roles and identities, one ECE teacher, Leyla stressed that “the children’s advocate ... was the heart of my teacher identity”, and “all other positions just add to it” (IL: 498-501). For Leyla, the construct of children’s advocates reflected both the importance of children’s early learning, and a concern that in Aotearoa New Zealand very young babies may already attend an ECE centre. Because of this, in her view, ECE teachers were responsible for advocating for quality teaching that can best meet the interests of these very young children.

Leyla’s construct of children’s advocate was shaped by discourses of child-centered pedagogy, holistic learning, development and care, and children’s rights, which underpinned *Te Whāriki* (1996), and the professional resources (Ministry of Education, 2004a, 2005, 2007, 2007, 2008). She considered that, as children’s advocates, teachers were expected to confront discourses which prevented their informed decision-making and following practices that responded adequately to children’s individual needs and rights.

Leyla also argued that “ECE teachers need to be advocates for children in a wider world too” (IL: 148), by showing that “what we do in ECE centres is important, and it is not baby-sitting, but the work of professional people” (IL: 149-150). Being children’s advocate was linked to being “a professional teacher”, who “must have professional knowledge to offer the best quality practice to children” (IL: 155-160). As children’s advocates in “the wider world”, Leyla further claimed that ECE teachers “should never let the Government tell them that quality doesn’t matter much because centres need to save more money” (IL: 162-165). In this sense, she argued that as advocates teachers “need to demonstrate professional knowledge in [their] work”, ground their practice in “knowing and listening to children”, “taking [the] work seriously”, and “bringing the advocacy into the heart of teaching” (IL: 166-174). As such, the construction of children’s advocate required ECE teachers to confront discourses, which constrained quality practice, grounded in a child-centre pedagogy and teachers’ professional knowledge.

### *Advocates for the profession*

The construction of an ECE teacher as an advocate for the profession emerged from

the discussions of the ECE teacher Leyla and the centre director Charlotte. Both participants implied that their long working experience in the sector (longer than 25 years), and their engagement in the teachers' union had significantly influenced their constructions of ECE teachers as advocates for the profession. This identity construction arose in response to the participants' reflections on the policy changes from 1996 to 2016, and conflicting constructions of teachers as 'not proper' teachers, 'baby-sitters' and yet professionals. Leyla stated:

even though there are conflicts in these policies [referring to the analysed policy documents and the recent market-led directives to the sector], ... I personally want to believe that I am a strong advocate for our profession. I want to see us [ECE teachers] as a professional body ... that we have the professional standards and the professional knowledge and we bring these to the table in negotiating when we are working in our settings .... I see myself inside the profession, and I am willing to fight hard yet for the professional status. (FG 1 ECT: 778-794)

By highlighting the importance of aspects associated with teachers' professionalism, such as professional 'knowledge', 'status', 'standards'; Leyla's words ('I want to see us') implied that she chose not to allow conflicting perspectives of ECEC and ECE teachers distort her view of them as professionals and advocates. Instead, Leyla was deliberate in construing herself and ECE teachers as professionals and advocates who were capable of standing up for themselves and what they do, and resisting the views of ECE teachers as 'baby-sitters' and 'not proper' teachers.

Charlotte's talk highlighted that advocacy for the profession included political activism, which necessitated teachers' critical awareness of policy directives and an active role in relation to policies. ECE teachers "must be[ing] critical of policy directives", and "their impacts on ECE centres, teachers, and practice" (INC). Charlotte construed herself as a centre manager as "encouraging" and "expecting" her ECE teachers to "be politically active" to "make an impact on the policy directives", instead of "just accepting what policies impose on them" (INC).

By strongly arguing for ECE teachers to be activists for the profession, Charlotte stated:

I guess up to now, in my entire career, I have been very unhappy with the Government's policies, but I have tried just to work around that as best as I

can and have an influence ... There just have been a change with WINZ [Work and Income New Zealand's childcare subsidy that helps families with the cost of pre-school childcare]. So, we [she and her teachers] put a protest about that because the change would not work for our families and centres. (IC: 219 -314)

Exploring further why taking the activist role was important, Charlotte's statement below implied an inseparable link between activism and advocacy for the profession and children:

... why I am talking about this advocacy and activism? It is for children! ... Getting back to the professional identities of my staff, I believe you need to be involved in policies and the political system to know about the world you live in and how it is going to impact on you [ECE teachers] and children, and families and ECEC ... If I am expecting from children to be curious about the world, I need to be curious myself about the world I live in from my role as a teacher. (IC: 318-334)

Charlotte's construct of ECE teachers as activist-advocates for children and the profession emphasized interconnectedness between teachers' professionalism, activism and advocacy. ECE teachers must be critically aware of what happens in ECEC policies, and how it may impact on children, families and their practice, and then take actions for improvement.

Charlotte had suggested that by taking up the advocate-activist identity construct ECE teachers could critically engage with discourses that diminish teachers' professional status and recognition. This could help them to move from being observers to being agents capable of challenging and contributing to the policy directives for the best advantage of children and the profession. This was epitomised in her proposal that as advocate-activists ECE teachers can influence policy directives and challenge the practice of a top-down approach in policy-making.

Although the constructs of ECE teachers as advocate-activists for children and the profession seemed to have much potential to bring in many improvements in ECEC policies and practices, the analysis suggested that it was produced and nurtured in only few ECE contexts, while being silenced in others. This construct of teachers was grounded in discourses which shaped experiences of particularly Leyla and Charlotte and their ECE settings. Constructions of advocate-activists ECE teachers



were also established in these participants' statements, conveying their firm belief that teachers' activism, advocacy and professionalism were inseparable aspects of teachers' work and professional identities.

The analysis of other participants' discussions neither included nor construed ECE teachers as being activists and/or advocates. However, it cannot be claimed with certainty that such identity constructions were not significant in the teaching of these participants. It could be that the historical and socio-cultural discourses strongly predispose some ECE teachers to construe themselves rather as 'less' in their professional status and identities, preventing discourses of activism and advocacy from contributing to their identity constructions. These 'less' discourses perhaps enabled the construction of a compliant ECE teacher to prevail in some ECE settings, which dominated in some groups and individual discussions with ECE teachers. Besides, the fact that, apart from Leyla and Charlotte, most of my ECE participants were not engaged with the teachers' union perhaps further contributed to the underrepresentation of the activist-advocate identity constructions in community-owned ECE centres.

### **Constructing teachers' professional identities in community-owned ECE centres**

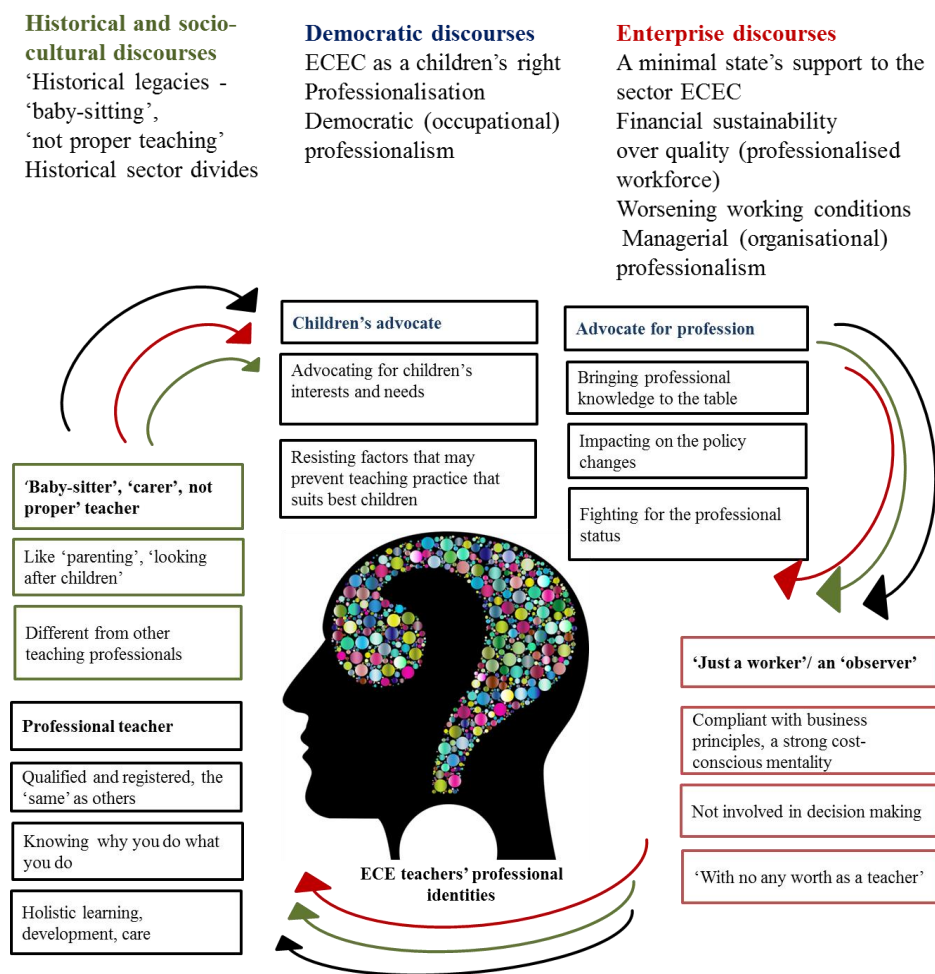
Discourse analysis of the data in *Case Study 2* examined the constructions of teachers' professional identities in community-owned ECE centres. The analysis revealed that socio-cultural and historical discourses, shaping the views of ECE centres in the education sector and society, and shifting political discourses, informing policy directives from 1996 to 2016, constituted a fertile environment for multiple constructions of ECE teachers' professional identities.

In this section, I discuss discourses which make these multiple identity constructions possible and acceptable in different contexts and times of ECEC. I show how constructions of ECE teachers have shifted in response to challenges of those teachers to achieve as equal professional status and recognition with other teaching professionals.

Figure 6 (on the next page) represents the interplay of multiple socio-cultural, historical and political discourses in circulation in ECEC and their influences on ECE teachers' identities. While often opposing one another, these discourses yet have coexisted in ECEC policies and practice, setting a foundation for disparate

constructions of ECE teachers' professional identities. The arrows indicate the coexistence of opposing discourses in ECEC policies and practices (e.g. historical, democratic, enterprise), and highlight the fluid and shifting nature of the identity constructions on offer. The arrows also show that ECE teachers concurrently take up multiple and antithetical identity constructions in their specific context and a time, which requires them to negotiate confronting images of themselves and their work.

**Figure 6.** Shifting discourses and teachers' identity constructions in community-owned ECE centres<sup>5</sup>



Historically, ECE centres were construed by society as places in which a mostly unqualified female workforce looked after children of working parents. The construct of ECE centres as 'looking after children' produced an imagery of ECE

<sup>5</sup> The figure of human head in Figure 6 was retrieved from <https://pixabay.com/en/human-head-man-male-cranium-1211467/>

teachers as ‘baby-sitters’ (see Figure 6). This construct was further reinforced through the historical divide among different levels of the education sector (schools, kindergartens and ECEC), evident through their different regulation and administration systems (see Chapter 3). Consequently, teaching at educational levels other than ECEC was construed as ‘proper’ teaching, while historical discourses have continued to reinforce the imagery of ECE teachers as ‘not proper’ teachers, even after the percentage of the qualified ECEC workforce increased.

Furthermore, within the ECEC sector itself, ECE teachers have never been entirely regarded as professional teachers, at least not in the long term. This was grounded in the historical division between diverse ECSs and their staff (May, 2009; Meade et al., 2012), and was especially noticeable between ECE teachers and kindergarten teachers. The division was created explicitly through different levels of teachers’ qualifications and length of teacher training until these started to be addressed in the 1990s, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Despite all efforts to close the gap and integrate ECSs within an education administration and align teacher qualifications and education, the constructs of ECE teachers as not professional teachers lacking in professional status and recognition has remained to the present time. Such positioning was sustained through a powerful paradox which produced at the same time an integration and a divide among ECSs and teachers. On the one side, there was the paradox of the integration of the very diverse ECSs under the same ministry administration, and the setting up of unified teacher training. The sector’s integration aimed to ensure equitable professional status, operation and funding support to all ECSs and teachers. On the other hand, however, variable policy directives continued to support different operation models, funding and staffing regulations and working conditions in ECSs. As a result, differences continued to divide services and teachers, despite the sector’s ‘integration’. Being equally, ‘integrated’ and divided, ECE centres and ECE teachers continually struggled to overcome the paradoxical positioning and get a chance to be regarded equitably with kindergarten teachers. As a result, equal professional status and regard with other qualified teaching professionals has never become reality for ECE teachers (Meade & Podmore, 2002; Mitchell & Wells, 1997; Wells, 1991).

Although constructions of ECE teachers, as ‘not proper’ teachers have never been fully dispelled, a number of policy directives encouraged ECE teachers to construe

themselves as professional teachers. The implementation of *Te Whāriki* (1996), the professional resources (Ministry of Education, 2004a, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009a) and Strategic Plan (2002) were identified by the participants as especially significant in constructing ECE teachers as professional teachers. From the late 1990s through to the end of 2008, increasing state support towards improving quality of teaching in ECE centres, by offering genuine support for the registration and professionalization of ECE teachers, was a key for teachers construing of themselves as professionals.

Unfortunately, belief in the need for a fully qualified workforce in ECE centres, and ECE teachers' hope of gaining equal professional status with kindergarten teachers did not last for long. After the policy directives changed in 2009, strategies for supporting the ECE workforce professionalisation, quality practice and universal ECEC provision were removed (May, 2014; Mitchell, 2011). The shift from the previously increased state support to minimal state support of the sector led to significant budget cuts and constraints, imposing market-led principles and enterprise priorities on community-owned services (see Chapter 3).

Forced to adapt to a business model of 'childcare' to survive without sufficient state support, ECE centres, as shown above, tended to 'save money' by lowering the number of qualified ECE teachers on their staff. Discourses of universal ECEC and quality teaching were replaced by economic and enterprise discourses, forcing some ECE teachers to be and act as observers in decision-making, and as workers doing what they were told to do (see Figure 6). Although such constructions of ECE teachers were largely associated with business ECE centres, as the analysis of the transcript texts showed, there were some reasons to think that ECE teachers in community-owned ECE centres went through similar circumstances. Analysis of ECE participants' statements made it clear that under the pressure to stay financially viable some community-owned ECE centres were compromising quality for sustainability and in so doing undervalued their qualified ECE teachers. This was particularly evident in community-owned ECE centres which secured sustainability of their organisation, by offering qualified teachers the unqualified payrate, and praising those teachers who tolerated the generally unsatisfactory working conditions.

As some examples in *Case Study 2* illustrated, when forced to operate on economic principles, community-owned ECE centres were more likely to prioritise 'saving

money' over quality teaching for the sake of surviving on the ECEC market. This economic decision-making has a power to remodel ECE teachers as workers and observers, the very constructs which were in the analysed statements were strongly criticised and associated with for-profit ECE centres only. Based on this, it can be argued that unless community-owned ECE centres and teachers actively resist the imposition of business principles, they will reinforce the powerful cost-conscious mindset and establish their practice on the principle of 'how much it is going to cost'; and this in return would make them very similar to the for-profit services from which they had previously claimed to be distanced.

In a worst-case scenario, it could happen that the construct of professional ECE teachers advocating for children's best and for the profession become entirely undervalued, and overwhelmed by the requirement for being primarily 'economically savvy' (Gibson et al., 2015). Under the pressure to survive and 'save money', ECE teachers were apt to conform with the 'less', reinforcing the idea of teachers' being and acting as workers/observers, rather than to critically engage with or resist enterprise discourses. There is a risk that this reinforcement of the compliant ECE teacher construct will revive the historical imageries of ECE teachers, preventing any real change in the way society views them and any improvement in their professional status and recognition.

Fortunately, a few cases in my study showed that there were yet ECE teachers and ECE leaders arguing that ECE teachers needed to be and act as advocates for children and the profession and therefore respond politically to decision-making at a macro-policy level. The construct of advocate-activist ECE teachers was associated with such agency. This construct seemed to be informed by discourses of child-centred pedagogy and holistic learning and development, which were promoted in some policy documents (e.g. the curriculum, professional resources, Strategic Plan), and reinforced through increasing state support in the 2000s of teachers' professionalization and professional development.

Furthermore, the construct of ECE teachers as advocate-activists reflected qualities of democratic professionalism (Evetts, 2011; Sachs, 2003), reinforcing discourses of teachers' collective action, activism and decision-making from within the profession. This was in striking contrast with the constructions of teachers as workers, observers and compliant, which were produced through enterprise discourses, placing economic priorities before the quality practice achieved through

a qualified ECE workforce. By disregarding and underrating teachers' professional knowledge and expertise, enterprise discourses set conditions for business interests to inform teaching practice and decision-making in ECE centres and the sector. In an environment with constraining policy directives and unsatisfactory working conditions, it is more likely that enterprise discourses will hamper teachers' advocacy for children and the profession. As a result, teachers' compliance with the 'less' may be praised, while the divide between ECSs and teachers is likely to deepen. If the profit-related tendencies in ECEC policies and practice continue, discourses reinforcing teachers' political activism and advocacy for children and the profession may become weaker in community-owned ECE centres.

### **Case Study 3: Constructing Teachers' Professional Identities in Private For-profit ECE Centres**

*Case Study 3* examines the transcript texts from the focus group interview with early childhood (ECE) teachers (in text, FG5 ECT), and early childhood centre (ECE) managers (in the text, FG3 ECM), all working in private for-profit (business) ECE centres. In addition, a transcript text from an individual interview with one participant, Karla (IK) was included in the data set. The interview data offered a deeper insight into the conflicting demands and priorities shaping teachers' professional identities in ECE business centres.

The research participants, both ECE teachers and managers, had worked their entire teaching careers in privately owned for-profit ECE centres. Their centres were located in low socio-economic communities in urban areas, which significantly impacted on constructions of teachers' professional identities available to them.

The discourse-analysis of data revealed a range of prevailing identity constructions of teachers in ECE centres operating as a business. These constructions were produced through an interplay of political discourses, imposing enterprise directives and priorities on the sector, and institutional discourses steering a business model of operation in private for-profit ECE centres. The primary driving force in the business operation model was the making of monetary gains, rather than operating primarily as a public education service.

*Case Study 3* illustrates discourses that framed two sides of teachers' 'jobs' in for-profit ECE centres – 'a *business side*' (a profit-making) and 'a *social-side*' (i.e. teaching children, helping families and communities). My analysis focuses on two prevailing identity constructions - 'teachers' and 'business managers'. Along with these, constructions of teachers as children's advocate and an 'agent of change in the company' were also analysed, as being significant for some participants. I close the section on *Case Study 3* with a discussion of how the identity constructions on offer in ECE business centres have come into existence, and what these may indicate about ECE teachers, professionalism and the ECEC sector.

#### **On the swings of the policy changes from 2007 to 2016 – From being recognised as a teacher to becoming a 'business manager'**

ECE teachers and managers identified two time periods as having had the most

significant impacts on teachers and practices in for-profit ECE centres. The first period was linked to the implementation of the *20 Hours Free ECE* initiative in 2007, which aimed to increase the affordability of the ECEC service and children's participation by removing cost barriers (see Chapter 3). The second time period was defined as the time of the Government's increasing neo-liberal agenda, and was related to the policy directives guiding the sector from 2009 to 2016.

Participants' statements emphasized that these two time periods set a foundation for opposing constructions of ECE teachers' professional identities. The former period was associated with ECE teachers and ECE centres gaining recognition in the education sector and society. It was also a time when for-profit ECE centres became available for more families and children, particularly those not participating when the service was not free.

The latter period was defined as a time of increasing conflict between making money (i.e. 'a business side of the job'), and meeting needs of children and families (i.e. 'social side of the job'). Given the conflicting demands, participants talked about ECE teachers finding themselves having to negotiate twofold identity constructions- being and acting as 'teachers' and 'business managers', at the same time.

### **Impacts of the 20 Hours Free ECE – Two sides of the story**

Unlike participants who worked in community-owned service types (see *Case Study 1* and *Case Study 2*), ECE teachers and ECE managers in for-profit ECE centres did not discuss policy documents and policy directives that were published before 2007 (e.g. *Te Whāriki*, the Strategic Plan.). One of the reasons for this perhaps may have been that their teaching experience ranged from 6 to 10 years, starting from 2006. The participants in the community-based services had much longer experience, from 16 to 40 years (see Chapter 4), beginning in the 1980s.

Therefore, the *20 Hours Free ECE* initiative was perceived as being an important contributor to the constructions of ECE teachers' identities in private for-profit ECE centres. The participants said that there were two sides to the story regarding this policy initiative – the 'positive' and 'negative' side (FG5 ECT, FG3 ECM). The 'positive' side was associated with the Government's aspirations to enable children's participation in ECSs, and to support greater recognition of ECE centres and teachers in the education sector and society (FG3 ECM, FG5 ECE). The



‘negative’ side was that the free 20 hours of the ECE service failed to meet the needs of ‘vulnerable’ children and families (FG3 ECM, FG5 ECE).

*A ‘positive’ side of the story – Increasing accessibility and recognition*

On the ‘positive’ side, the *20 Hours Free ECE* initiative created equal opportunities for all three and five-year-olds, no matter their circumstances, to participate in ECSs. This was defined by ECE managers as “the Government’s acknowledgment of the importance of early years in children’s learning”, and “a proof of [the Government’s] commitment to support children, families and early childhood centres” (FG3 ECM: 66-70).

As grounded in discourses of ECEC as a child’s rights, the policy initiative was a step towards making ECSs more affordable and accessible to all children and families no matter their financial ability. Furthermore, the initiative conveyed the importance of children’s learning in ECE centres as comparable to the importance of their learning in schools, and afforded recognition to the work of ECE teachers. The policy was also construed as encouraging parents to enrol their children free of charge in for-profit ECE centres, and thereby “children’s participation in [these] centres increased” (FG3 ECM: 73), while “the recognition of ECE teachers grew”, allowing them to “finally be at the same level as primary and secondary [teachers]”. (FG3 ECM: 84-86).

Taken together, the ‘positive’ side of the *20 Hours Free ECE* initiative was an increasing participation and affordability of ECSs for 3 and 4 year-olds and a growing attendance number of children in for-profit ECE centres. The initiative recognised ECE teachers “as important as primary and secondary teachers”, which were deemed to be “traditionally” and “always [positioned] as higher” and “more glorified than ECE teachers” (FG3 ECM: 74-77).

*A ‘negative’ side of the story – Not meeting needs of ‘vulnerable’ children*

Although making ECSs more accessible and affordable, the *20 Hours Free ECE* was however, criticised in participants’ statements for not meeting individual needs of all children, particularly ‘vulnerable’ children who needed to stay for longer hours in ECE centres. The term ‘vulnerable’, in the participants’ talks, referred to children protected under the *Vulnerable Children Act* (2014): children from lower socio-economic status families, who could not afford ECEC without the

Government's support (e.g. large families with very low or no incomes), and children living in families with 'challenging behaviors' (such as those living in gang communities, dealing with drug and alcohol related issues) (FG3 ECM, FG5 ECT). Most of the children and families attending the for profit-ECE centres met various criteria of 'vulnerable', based on the participants' definition provided above. Participants' statements argued that to provide adequate ECEC service and support to these children, they "needed to be longer than 20 hours in their ECE centres" (FG3 ECM: 86). This was justified by examples illustrating that these children needed to develop "basic skills and competences" [e.g. "social competences", "communication skills", "learn basic hygienic habits", "learn socially acceptable behaviors"], and that ECE centres could offer a "security and protection", which those children may not have in their home environment (FG3 ECM: 76-96).

While arguing for the longer stay of these children in ECEC, the participants also said that the "vulnerability of families", mainly families' financial circumstances, prevented them from "affording for their children to stay longer in the [for-profit] centres" (FG3 ECM: 120-126). It was agreed that "the only reason why these children were in [the] centres was because they got the 20 hours of ECE for free. Otherwise, children would not be there" (FG3 ECM: 127-128). Participants criticised that the *20 Hours Free* failed for "not meet[ing] individual needs of vulnerable children" and "not provid[ing] an individual support to ECE centres operating in vulnerable communities" (FG3 ECM: 131 -135).

Finding themselves unable to "balance between making the profit and supporting the vulnerable children to stay longer in [their] centres", participants blamed the *20 Hours Free initiative* for placing "teachers in for-profit centres in a very challenging position" (FG3 ECM: 137-140). Surprisingly, they seemed to disregard the fact that such teachers' positioning was also affected by the increasing demand for making profit, which was set by their business owners.

The next sub-section examines what it has been like to be 'a teacher' and 'a business manager' in for-profit ECE centres from 2009 to the present. This time period was described as being characterised by "shrinking the budget for ECE centres and teachers" and "placing [teachers] in a very difficult position to juggle between teaching and making the profit" (FG3 ECM: 138-142).

## **Impacts of the increasingly neo-liberal agenda in ECEC from 2009 to 2016: An ECE centre for the community and for the business**

The period from 2009 to 2016 was construed as “a quite difficult time” for ECE teachers and ECE managers in for-profit ECE centers (FG3 ECM: 419). The ‘difficulty’ was associated with the change in 2008 to the National Government and its “neo-liberal reform”, “budget cuts” and “global and economic market priorities” (FG3 ECM: 423-432). Participants saw the focus in education as shifting from “interests of people” (learners) to “what is good for the country” if it is to “perform and compete well” in the global market place (FG3 ECM). Education was, thus construed as a place for “producing particular sorts of learners” that fit well into the agenda for the “future country’s economic success” (FG3 ECM: 429-440). Jo stated:

they [the Government] just care [about] how our learners will act in the global society. It is what we need from our people to be able to economically develop our country. They are looking at education as something that is gained in terms of finances [the profit]. So, if we [the Government] are producing those sorts of people that much we are going to get back financially. (FG3 ECM: 442-445)

It was argued that “free education became like a commodity” that was “traded like goods to those customers who can afford it” (FG3 ECM: 143-150). This argument alluded to the policy change in 2009, when the Government ‘dropped’ the word ‘free’ from the *20 Hours Free ECE* programme (see Chapter 3). Although prohibiting ECE centres from charging real “fees for hours that they claim as 20 Hours ECE”, the centres were still allowed to ask for “voluntary donations” and “optional charges” (Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 8). The optional charges are “a payment that parents may choose whether or not to make for a specific purpose”, such as a dance or a music teacher, excursions, transport, food, and the like (Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 9). From 2011, a service could also request optional charges for having more than 80 percent certificated teachers, if the service falls into 80 percent plus funding band, which was not covered by government funding (Ministry of Education, 2016).

The ability to ask for ‘optional’ charges seemed to give a permission to some business-owners to pressure their centres and ECE teachers to provide ‘extras’ for which they would make ‘optional’ charges. Participants reported that this was

happening in their centres, saying that they were “under a constant pressure to charge for the extras”, but “parents in these [low social-economic status] communities cannot afford to pay for that” (FG3 ECM: 101-115). Participants concluded “our services became affordable to some but not for other children and families”, particularly “not to those with small wages that cannot cover the costs” (FG 3 ECM: 101-110).

As ECSs became “more opened up to the free market” (FG3 ECM: 142), the nature of democratic (free) education changed and this was criticised:

.... the emphases in education now, it is not right anymore. It is now a commodity and it is traded. It is like if you pay this amount of money you can get this school ... It is all decile [referring to a measure of the socio-economic position of a school, which indicates the extent the school draws their students from low socio-economic communities (Education in New Zealand, 2017)]. (FG3 ECM: 143-146)

This statement highlighted a movement towards education as a traded commodity. It also implied an existing socio-economic gap between lower and higher income families and communities and implied that the economic status of families was the main criterion shaping their choices about children’s education.

As located in communities, which were defined in talks as ‘extremely vulnerable’, ECE business centres in which the participants worked were surrounded by low decile schools. Considering their local contexts and the profit-priorities set by their business-owners, “the biggest challenge” for ECE teachers in these centres was “how to juggle between a business and social side of [their] job” (FG5 ECM: 113). Echoing enterprise discourses underpinning the ‘business side’ of their ‘job’, ECE managers said that “[they] needed to make the profit, because [they] are business” (FG5 ECM: 110-118). However, the ‘social side’ of their ‘job’ called on discourses of democratic ECEC, construing participants as “obliged to help these families who cannot afford to pay the extras” and “support [their] children’s learning and development” (FG5 ECM: 88-98). Given the demands from both sides of their ‘job’, ECE teachers in for-profit centres took up a twofold positioning, which I discuss below.

### **A teacher and a business manager in the making**

Overall, the increasing needs for children to attend for longer than 20 hours ECE,

teachers obligation to help children and families who cannot afford and pay ‘extras’, followed by funding restrictions and the obligation to make the profit set a context for ECE teachers to act and take up the construct of being both, the ‘business managers’ and ‘teachers’. However, “juggling between the business and social side of [their] job became very difficult”, given the number of ‘vulnerable’ children in their centres (FG3 ECM: 97-118). Lisa pinpointed the challenges in the ‘juggling’ act:

It puts you as a manager and a teacher in a quite difficult position, because you are seeing this as an urgent need for them to stay for 30 hours, but there is not much that you can do .... You are busy with how we are going to make a profit at the end ... Balancing between these two needs is quite difficult, especially because we are set up as a community kindy [the term they used to connote their similarity to a kindergarten]. We are supposed to be a service for the community, but we also need to make the profit. (FG3 ECM: 78-96)

In outlining the business and market discourses driving the operation of for-profit centres, and economic discourses shaping the sector, the participants’ statements reiterated that priorities of their ECE business centres were likely to be focused on profit-making. Given the opposition between democratic-led and enterprise priorities, the construction of ECE teacher as ‘a teacher’ and ‘a business manager’ came into the existence. This twofold positioning and construction of ECE teachers created ongoing tension in constructing teaching practice and professional identities, which will be pinpointed in the upcoming section.

***Wearing two hats and always juggling the ‘business and social side of the job’ (Karla’s example)***

Karla defined her “company” – a for-profit organisation owning her ECE centres and many others, as “very good in giving money to support children's learning and buying teaching resources” (IK: 45-58). Yet, “the pressure from the business side [of their job] to make the profit” (IK: 59-60), was still evident in teachers’ work, which Karla unpacked:

we still have that expectation ... to get this type of occupancy [referring to enrolment numbers]. We need to be within the given budget, and to still

make sure that business side is getting enough money and that everything is not free. (IK: 60-63)

The demands put on ECE teachers were complex. They included: meeting the set target for the number of enrolled children; ensuring that everything included in ‘a deal’ that the centre was offering to parents was not free of charge, and securing that ‘enough’ money was earned from charging the ‘extras’ to support the company’s profit-making (INK). On top of accomplishing these for-profit demands, ECE teachers also needed to perform tasks related to the ‘social side’ of their ‘job’. These required them to “support children’s learning and development”, “build relationships with parents”, “meet needs of vulnerable children and families”, and “show empathy and understanding for their difficult living circumstances” (IK: 65-75).

In performing these complex and somewhat conflicting tasks, ECE teachers were construed as being under a constant struggle to navigate the ‘business’ and the ‘social side’ of their ‘job’. It made them juggle between being and acting not only as ‘teachers’ but also ‘business managers’, and thus significantly impacted on their identities, which Karla’s statement explained.

It impacts on you in a sense that you want to do more. ... You want to get more for your children and you always try to push that but you are still within the confines of what you can and cannot do. You still have those expectations [referring to profit-making]. You just need to understand there are things that you cannot do, no matter how much you want to. (IK: 78-82)

The positioning of ECE teachers as ‘teachers’ and ‘business managers’ caused significant tension between teachers’ desire to offer a better ECE service and provide more for children and the obligation to stay within the ‘budget confines’ and their responsibilities for profit-making. Since the ‘budget confines’ and profit priorities defined what ECE teachers could and could not do, the ‘business side’ of the ‘job’ strongly influenced the teachers’ decision-making and their work with children. Moreover, the ‘business side’ limited teachers’ agency for informed and independent professional decision-making, requiring them to accept that they could not do anything that exceeded the set ‘confines’ or hinders profit-making “no matter how much [they] wanted that” (IK: 82).

While defining clearly the restrictions in her work, Karla’s account also reiterated that ECE teachers “always tried to push confines”, “ask for more” and “get more

for children” from their company-owners (IK: 78-82). In so doing, they tried to challenge the boundaries and expectations of the centre business-owner, and thus exercise their professional agency. Although aiming to affirm their commitment to the ‘social side’ of their ‘job’, by demanding more for children, Karla’s comment below made it clear that teachers needed to be ready to comply with financial constraints:

You [the teacher] cannot really do like, “Ok, I really felt that children needed this, and I am going to spend \$300” when you do not actually have it .... You are going to be told “That was not in your budget. You should not be spending that”. You do have these restrictions, and you need to make those decisions, like “Ok, we cannot do that”. (IK: 75-97)

The ‘budget confines’ seemed to serve as a mechanism for disciplining ECE teachers to build and exercise cost-effective strategies in decision-making in order to develop a cost-conscious mentality in their work. It is not that teachers in other ECSs across the sector did not have restrictions on what they could spend, but that in ECE business centres enterprise discourses seemed to have much more severe impacts on shaping teachers and on their teaching practice.

Considering the complexity and ambiguity of the tasks that were demanded by the ‘business’ and ‘social side’ of the ‘job’, one may ask how an ECE teacher gets ready to wear these two, perhaps heavy, ‘hats’ on their head. I next examine discourses equipping ECE teachers to wear both ‘hats’.

### *Getting ready to wear ‘two hats’ (Karla’s example)*

To successfully wear the ‘two hats’ of ‘teachers’ and ‘business managers’ in their work, Karla’s narrative emphasized that ECE teachers must understand how each side of their ‘job’ operates, and how each impacts the other. Such an understanding was grounded in discourses of teachers’ specific knowledge and expertise. Karla said:

From my role of the centre manager [Karla became an assistant to the centre manager over the course of my study], I want teachers to start learning from very early about the business side. They need to understand when they get the answer “No, you cannot do it, and this is why” ... I want them to understand that there are restrictions in the business that restricts the learning and that is just the way that this business goes. You cannot expect

that you will be given everything if you are not making money in your centre. You have to learn how to make the profit in your centre. (IK: 130-143)

Constructions of ECE teachers as ‘teachers’ and ‘business managers’ were produced and sustained through teachers’ knowledge of profit-making and understanding of how both sides of their ‘job’ interconnect, influence and limit one another. By acquiring knowledge and understanding of both sides of the ‘job’, teachers seemed to become equipped to perform both, the teaching, which they construe as ‘social side’ and ‘making the profit’ (the ‘business side’).

The complexity and ambiguity of the constructions of ECE ‘teachers’ and ‘business managers’, furthermore implied a significant difference in the professional knowledge and competences for teaching between the for-profit centres and non-profit ECSs. The professional criteria that teachers in non-profit ECSs followed in their teaching have not, at least not yet officially, required them to obtain knowledge of profit-making and managing their teaching as a business. However, the ECE teachers who were also ‘business managers’, as well as having professional knowledge necessary for teaching in ECEC, needed to know how to “support the business operation of the centre by making money” (IK: 127-130). For instance, some of the professional knowledge of ECE teachers as ‘business managers; included knowing how to “keep the full occupancy” in the centre, by “welcoming new parents, showing them around and talking to them. This is what keeps families into the centre. It is about relationships that you form with them as soon as they walk into that door ...” (IK: 135-149).

While emphasising the importance of cordial relationships between ECE teachers and parents, the statements above seemed to suggest that the purpose of such relationships goes beyond the ‘social side’ of teachers’ ‘job’. By stressing the need for being ‘welcoming’ and forming relationships with parents “*as soon as they walk into the centre*”, some may wonder whether this, at first sight, ordinary cordiality, was also a marketing tool for “keeping families into the centre” (IK:135-149).

It was furthermore claimed in discussions that ECE teachers were always supported in obtaining knowledge necessary for doing the ‘business’ and ‘social side of the job’. It was emphasised that ECE teachers “could always count on so many different people from the company to teach them about doing all the aspects of the business side and to understand that side” (IK: 108-113), and thus get professional



development they needed.

Nonetheless, although equipped with a professional support system and knowledge, being and acting from the constructions of a 'teacher' and a 'business manager' caused a conflict in ECE teachers' professional identities. The conflict was evident in teachers' struggle to negotiate the 'social' and the 'business side' of the 'job'. Karla stated:

You definitely need these two different hats. You need a hat to be a teacher and a hat to be the business manager ... You definitely need to juggle ... When I am on the floor I am teaching, but in the back of my head I am also thinking of the business side "how this is going to impact on our business". I am always wearing two hats, and .... always juggling. Every decision that I make on the floor relates to the business side. (IK: 101-109)

This statement conveys the conflicting demands Karla experienced in juggling business and social priorities in her work. She used 'two hats' as a metaphor for the challenges, difficulties and conflicts she needed to deal with in her teaching practice.

Karla's statements also suggested that the 'business hat' might be the one that ECE teachers needed to wear more often in decision-making. This was evident in the statement that "every decision" in her teaching was related to "the business side of [her] "job" (IK: 106-107). The requirement to wear the 'business hat' more frequently was additionally strengthened through an argument that "*teachers need to accept that the first and foremost this is still a business*" (IK: 123-124, emphasis added). Therefore, "to be able to provide best for children's learning, our teachers need to support our [the company's] business running" (IK: 125-126).

The metaphor of 'two hats' represented an interplay of enterprise discourses, which imposed business priorities to teaching in a for-profit centre, and the democratic and professionalism discourses, driving teachers' desire to give more to children and families than their business-owner may allow. To work in the for-profit ECE centre, Karla's story exemplified that ECE teachers need to accept, understand and comply with the fact that the 'business hat' needs to be the one they more often wear. Although the rules and conditions associated with wearing these heavy 'hats' were clear, one may ask: Can an ECE teacher choose to resist enterprise discourses in an for-profit centre, and decide to wear the 'teachers' hat' more often? This question alludes to a possibility for ECE teachers in for-profit centres to choose to

resist enterprise discourses, which I explore next.

### **Being children's advocate in ECE business centres**

The analysis of the participants' statements conveyed strongly that juggling between opposing 'social' and 'business' demands and priorities was not an easy task in ECE business centres. However, some statements suggested that by employing their moral obligations some may 'juggle' better the expectations of business-owners and the needs of children, families and communities. In this sense, the concept of moral obligations emerged as a key to teachers' decision-making. By sharing examples of decision-making grounded in teachers' 'moral obligations', some participants' statements revealed possibilities for ECE teachers to occasionally be and act as children's advocate in an ECE business centre.

Joana, an ECE manager, demonstrated how ECE teachers in her ECE business centre could occupy the position of children's advocate. Her statements highlighted that, to do so, it was extremely "important that teachers understand the funding *really really* well [the word was repeated twice in the original talk]" (FG3 ECM: 191). This understanding required from teachers' the "*knowing of what [their] incomes will be* from the Government and parents" and "what [their] *moral obligations* are" (FG3 ECM: 191-192, emphasis added).

Second, Joana's statements argued for the necessity for ECE teachers to establish "trustful relationships" with the business managers of their 'company' and centre managers (FG3 ECM: 196). Joana stressed that "her confidence in knowing the funding well", and "understanding the business side of the job" were key factors that helped her in "gaining the trust of [her] company to support [her] making decisions" (FG3 ECM: 193-198), which sometimes were not entirely driven by the company's profit priorities.

By indicating strong links between teachers' knowledge of funding (the 'business knowledge'), their 'moral obligations' and the 'trustful relationships' with the 'company', Joana's statements revealed how a space for ECE teachers to be children's advocates emerged in ECE business centres:

When a family comes, it is a case by case, I can say to my centre manager, who is accounted for this [the business management]: "Look, it is how much money we are going to get from the Government funding. This is how much parents' portion would be. So, do you mind if we for a certain person say

‘We understand your situation [explaining issues parents were dealing with in that particular low socio-economic status community], so you can come here for free of charge’. It is something I do. (FG3 ECM: 211-224)

This example pictured a moment and a possibility in which ECE teachers in a for-profit environment may choose to be and act as children’s advocates. This construction seemed to be enabled if/when the ‘company’ gained confidence in teachers’ capability in profit-making and trusted that the teachers’ decisions would not lead to a loss of their profit. After establishing the trust and confidence with the ‘company’, ECE teachers, as Joana construed, could choose to advocate for children and families. Yet, it was noted that teachers’ advocacy was allowed only occasionally, and only under circumstances in which the company would secure at least *some* financial gains.

Joana further unpacked her positioning of children’s advocate by sharing how she argued for two babies to stay free of charge in their centre.

I said to my business manager “At the end of the day we need to make profit, and we will still make the profit because we will get X, W, Z [referring to channels through which they get funding]. I can see this is going to be for a short period, so they will be here for free”. This is how my moral obligation comes in. I do this from my heart [referring to employing her moral obligations in advocating for children] and it is what I feel we all need to do. (FG3 ECM: 209-238)

While implying that being children’s advocate was not possible under all circumstances, Joana was arguing that by “employing their moral obligations” ECE teachers “can still” advocate for children even in a for-profit centre (FG3 ECM: 209-238).

However, her statements provoked responses from other participants who explained their reasons for working in ECE business centres and perhaps not having an opportunity or even not thinking that they can choose to act as children’s advocates. These participants emphasised that “the social side [of their] job is the reason why [they] are in ECE” (FG3 ECM: 257-262), while at the same time they highlighted “we try to do best we can for children with what we have got” (FG3 ECM: 263-265).

While admitting that a possibility for being children’s advocate existed to some extent in their ECE centres, it was also evident that the ‘business side’ of the ‘job’

was crucial in defining whether or not teachers could take up such a construction. This was evident through the participants' statements below:

.. but at the end of the day we still need to make the profit.... (FG3 ECM: 232-238)

... it [the centres' regulations] says black and white, this is what we need to charge parents. (FG3 ECM: 242-243)

... you *really* need to know what funding you are going to get to make good business decisions and make the profit. (FG 3 ECM: 251-253)

To sum up, a space for ECE teachers to construe themselves as children's advocates in for-profit ECE centres was possible under specific circumstances in which business-owners were assured that ECE centres were going to meet the set profit targets. It was also suggested that teachers' sense of professional ethics was a key role to a teacher choosing to disrupt a decisions-making grounded in the profit-making principles and to propose an alternative.

### **ECE teachers – 'Agents of change in their company but not beyond'**

In this section, I move on to examine the construction of ECE teachers as 'agents of change in their company'. By taking up this construction, ECE teachers seemed to find the counterbalance to their feeling of the lack of agency and advocacy in the sector and in the 'company' when their decision-making and teaching practice were limited by the budget confines and for-profit priorities.

The analysis of group discussion made it clear that within their 'company' all employees, including ECE teachers, were 'business partners'. Such a positioning meant that all were considered as valuable assets contributing to the business success and the future sustainability of the 'company'. This was pinpointed in Sara's statements

... our meetings are really different.... It is a whole team and collaborative approach stepping right through .... It is not a top-down relationship with our management. Although there is a hierarchy to some point ["we all got different roles in the company"], but you don't see it as such. ...Our owners and the management do value teachers and relievers because without them they would not have their business .... It is a business, you cannot say that it is not, but you are valued as a business partner. (FG5 ECT: 979-992)

By positioning and construing employees as 'business partners', an ECE company

seemed to create a culture of team-work and collaboration and promoted not top-down relationships among business-owner(s), ECE managers, ECE teachers and others. Although all ‘business partners’ were aware of differences in their roles and responsibilities, the atmosphere of collaboration seemed to create a sense of unity and commitment to the company, leading to its unity and the business success.

In being valued and regarded as ‘business partners’, ECE teachers were construed as being “agents of change in their company”, which participants’ statements depicted:

Our leadership encourages teachers to be solution speakers. If we [the company] got a problem, we are all invited to sort it out. They [the management and the owners] want to hear people’s ideas. So, it is how teachers come and get their voice. They can come and say: “This is how I think we should do it”. It is such a different way of working. ... It is such a nice feel ... If something happens we come as a team and we brainstorm our ideas. We got to say “this happened, we are not happy, we got couple of suggestions”. Their doors are open all the time for us. (FG5 ECT: 999-1017)

While giving ECE teachers an active role in the company, the position of agent of change also implied certain responsibilities that tied teachers to the company. These responsibilities were particularly related to ECE teachers’ professional obligation to contribute to their “company’s overall successes”, and make sure that both the “business and social side of the job [were] performed well” (FG5 ECT: 1116-1118). By construing ECE teachers as agents of change the company seemed to strengthened teachers’ loyalty to the company and their business-focused goals. It also strengthened ECE teachers’ sense of belonging to the company and allowed ECE teachers to be collective in performing the business (company’s) principles in their work.

Teachers’ agency within the company seemed also to be a powerful mechanism that enabled some teachers in ECE business centres to offset their feeling of lack of agency, regard and sense of belonging to the ECEC sector. This was evident in arguments that teachers were “the agents of change in [their] company and *it is as far as our voice and agency goes*” (FG5 ECT: 997-998, emphasis added). In highlighting the lack of their agency beyond the company, it was argued:

...in the private sector like ours, you really do not get teachers who go to the unions or anything like that. We have the voice only in our company, and that far it goes. (FG 3 ECM: 850-890)

... We feel like we are *flying alone at the moment* in the sector ... We never do like other teachers. There is a whole pay parity thing with kindergartens ... *but we still stand alone.* (FG5 ECT: 390-395, emphasis added)

The teachers' statements underlined that the demand for teachers' loyalty to the company may come at cost. It weakened or removed any ties to the union (the professional and industrial organisation representing teachers) and to other teachers in the sector and reduced teachers' capacity to advocate for fair pay for themselves. As totally separated from the rest of the sector, ECE teachers in the private for-profit ECE centres suggested in their discussions their compliance with the fact that "[their] autonomy stays within [their] organisation", allowing them to "make ... the difference at least within [their] organisation, [their] policies and [their] practice" (FG5 ECT: 384-390).

What's more, teachers' bonds to their company could go to the extreme that some lost an interest in 'the rest of the world', meaning other teachers, ECSs and practices in the ECEC sector. This was especially evident in the justification below:

*[F]or us, it is important that we are valued for what we do in our company and the outside world it really doesn't matter ... It is important that we are focusing on these children and families and what we can do for our company.* (FG5 ECT: 556-562, emphasis added)

By contributing to the company's individual profit aims and strengthening the sense of belonging to the business team, ECE teachers seemed to become satisfied with the limited agency within their company, perhaps believing that their professional agency as teachers cannot go beyond these spaces. As standalone agents within their very 'company', with no interests in and connections to other ECSs, some teachers likely became rather advocates for the company's business success, than to the early childhood profession. Consequently, some ECE teachers in for-profit centres were likely to deprive themselves from a possibility to come collectively with other ECEC teachers, be advocates for the profession and agents of change in 'the world outside' that does matter.

## Constructing teachers' professional identities in for-profit ECE centres

The discourse analysis of the data set in *Case Study 3* revealed how ECE teachers' professional identities were constructed through an interplay of political discourses shaping the policy directives in ECEC (macro-level) from 2009 to 2016, and institutional discourses underpinning contexts of ECE business centres (micro-level). Central to the analysis were identity constructions of – teachers and/or business managers, children's advocates and agents of change in the company, but not beyond.

The identity constructions on offer reflected the powerful influence of enterprise and economic discourses on ECE teachers and teaching in for-profit ECE centres. By imposing profit priorities on ECEC practice, the discourses created constant conflicts in teachers' professional roles and obligations, requiring from them to 'juggle' between offering quality teaching, by meeting needs of families and communities and yet also making profit for their business-owners.

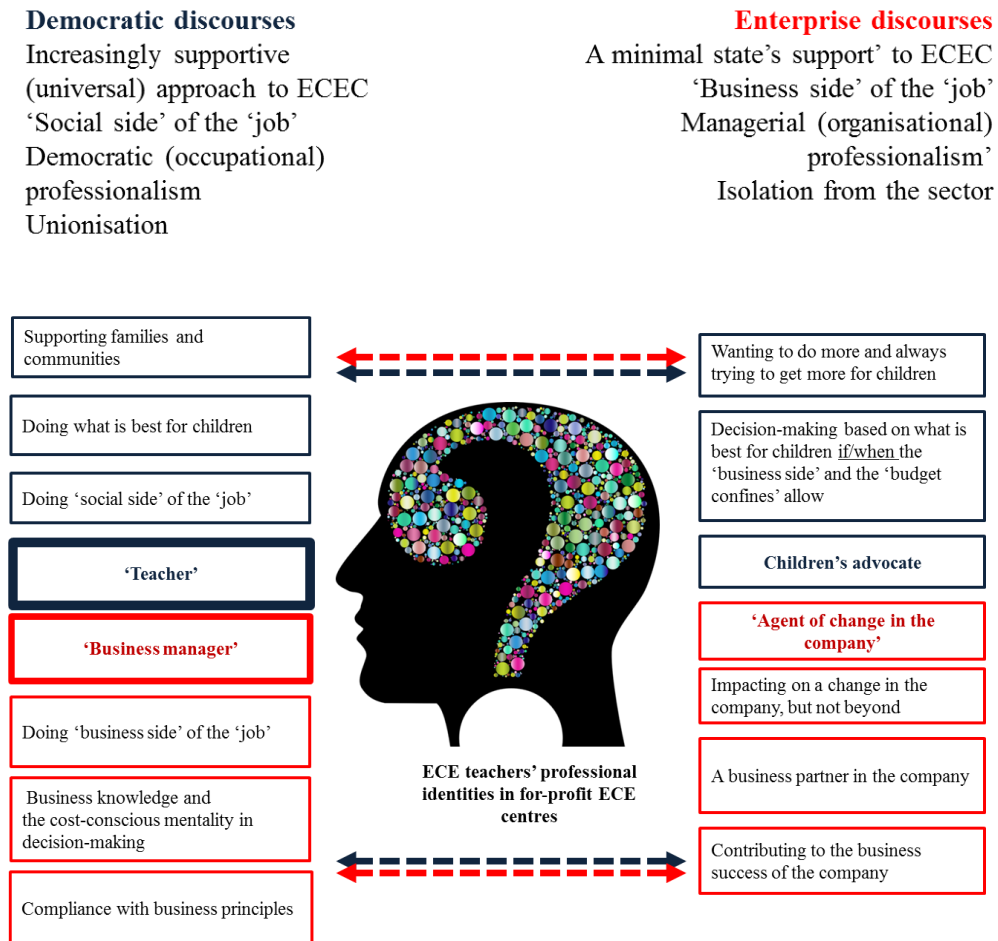
While being predominantly shaped by the economic and enterprise discourses, the identity constructions also revealed tiny traces of other discourses (e.g. professionalism, democratic education) impacting on some teachers' practices and decision-making. Although overpowered by for-profit emphases, some ECE teachers showed that it was occasionally possible to take up alternative identity constructions in an ECE business environment, such as children's advocate.

In this section, I illustrate how teachers' professional identities in for-profit ECE centres were constructed in a response to the tensions created through opposing discourses and priorities in ECEC policies and practice. I discuss how the shifting policy directives in the sector perpetuated particular sorts of teachers' professional identities in a for-profit ECE context. I also question what trends and sorts of professionalism in ECEC these available identity constructions may perpetuate in return.

Figure 7 illustrates an interplay of the confrontation between democratic and enterprise discourses in ECEC. It outlines a constant tension between professional roles and obligations of ECE teachers, and teachers' struggles to negotiate and balance profit-making demands and the needs of children, families and communities. Blue and red arrows on the figure point out that these discourses and identity constrictions, although conflicting and confronting, yet *coexist* in for-profit ECE centres and are reflected simultaneously in teaching practice. The dotted lines

and double headed arrows signify that teachers often take up opposing identity constructions at the same time, and through the interplay of these identities construe images of themselves and their work in a particular context and time.

**Figure 7.** Constructions of teachers' professional identities in for-profit ECE centres<sup>6</sup>



For instance, from the position of being a business manager, who needs to focus on profit-making, at the same time, an ECE teacher may try to find a way to make decision supporting and advocating for children’s interests and needs. While still being shaped by enterprise discourses, the teacher yet may exercise agency, by disrupting the prevailing business practices of the centre, and suggesting, for instance, that some children to get a free of charge ECEC service. Based on this, teachers’ identities are constructed through a constant interplay of the enterprise

<sup>6</sup> The figure of human head in Figure 7 was retrieved from <https://pixabay.com/en/human-head-man-male-cranium-1211467/>



and democratic discourses, which simultaneously coexist, interact, and overpower one another in ECE centres and practices, which the arrows signify.

With ECE business centres becoming affordable with 20 hours free of charge to those who could not otherwise afford ECEC, centres in low-socio economic communities got many 'vulnerable' families who were not financially capable of covering the 'extras' that teachers must charge to make profit. Although bringing in many advantages for families and ECE centres, the universal affordability, without regulation of the for-profit services and their expansions, seemed to create many challenges for some for-profit centres and their teachers. This became particularly noticeable with the budget cuts and restraints, which came with the Government change in 2008.

Given the increasing pressure from the 'business side' of their 'job', teachers were demanded to take up the construction of 'business managers' and meet the profit-making targets. At the same time, the 'social side' of the 'job' obliged them to yet stick with their professional ethics and values, and focus, first and foremost on meeting needs of children and families and giving back to the community. Although the tension between being 'a teacher' and 'a business manager' has perhaps always existed in for-profit ECE centres, the state's minimal support to the sector seemed to strengthen the existing and impose new conflicts in ECE teachers' identities.

As a result, ECE teachers were forced to wear more often their 'business hat', while leaving aside the 'teachers' hat'. Putting the 'business manager's hat' on was especially required in a decision-making about teaching practice in which teachers must remain within the set budget confines and loyalty to the company's for-profit principles. To make ECE teachers more comfortable in wearing their 'business hat', the 'company' offered a professional support to equip teachers with business knowledge necessary for profit-making, applying marketing tools and understanding *why* everything that the 'social side' demands cannot be afforded. In this sense, business knowledge created and delivered by the company and its business staff became a powerful mechanism for disciplining teachers to develop and use a cost-conscious mentality in their work. With that specialised business knowledge, ECE teachers became confident in working in a business ECE environment and capable of securing the company's business success.

While business knowledge was necessary for teachers' work in their business ECE places, it is questionable how such knowledge sits with the established code of

professional competences, ethics and values for the teaching profession and professionals in Aotearoa New Zealand. Looking through the lens of the *Teacher Criteria* (2010), it can be argued that business knowledge is in striking conflict with the repertoires of professional knowledge, values and ethics set in the criteria for quality teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand. The primary focus of the *Teacher Criteria* (2010) is on the well-being and learning of those they teach. On the contrary, business knowledge required ECE teachers to ground their practice in profit-making principles. To do so, ECE teachers needed to put their ‘business hat’ on and ignore the professional ethics and values requiring them to do always what is best for children.

Questions can also be asked about how the user-pay mindset and for-profit emphases sit with the policy concepts of reciprocal relationships and power sharing relationships, as discussed in Chapter 5 and 6. One might ask what sorts of relationship teachers who work in a context which supports the notion of ECEC as a commodity may build with families as ‘consumers’ of their for-profit service. It may be assumed that in a business ECE centre the partnership, collaboration and whanaungatanga approach, the very concepts promoted in the curriculum and the professional resources, may be very hard to be achieve especially when teachers need to balance the interests of children and families and the company.

However, in failing to challenge and resist the imposed enterprise priorities, most ECE teachers seemed to let business principles and knowledge shape their concept of relationships and professionalism. This created a space for the business competences to overshadow principles of professional ethics, as one of the key aspects of professionalism in teaching (Evetts, 2011). The analysed examples of this study’s data complement the literature about business style managerialism in education, and confirm the growing concerns about the power of the business management expertise in transforming democratic teaching practice and professionalism (Bottery, 1996; Clarke & Newman, 1997; Evetts, 2011; Hood, 1991).

To strengthen the profile of the ‘business managers’, ECE teachers in ECE business centres needed to allow the managerial (organisational) professionalism ‘from outside’ to overpower the democratic (occupational) professionalism ‘from within’ the profession (Day & Sachs, 2004; Evetts, 2011; Oberhuemer, 2005; Sachs, 2003, 2016). By doing so, teachers managed to stay committed to business

professionalism, prove their loyalty to the company, while isolating themselves from the ‘outside world’ (the profession, ECEC sector, professional bodies, teachers’ unions).

Ironically, business professionalism at the same time seems to be a key factor in enabling ECE teachers to gain their company’s trust, and perform their business roles and obligations well, which in return allows them occasionally to be advocates for children. While teachers draw mainly on the managerial (organisational) professionalism in their work, under some circumstances glimpses of the democratic (occupational) professionalism may emerge in practices of the for-profit ECE centres. In such situations, an ECE teacher as children’s advocate could perhaps do decision-making based on the principles of professional ethics rather than relying only on the profit-making principles.

While giving some hope that democratic practices may exist in business ECE centres, the data, however, strongly suggested that democratic (occupational) professionalism was neither promoted nor supported in the business places and spaces. Without the awareness or perhaps the temerity to challenge and resist enterprise discourses and business priorities, many ECE teachers were more likely to focus on performing well as ‘business managers’ and drive their teaching on the principles of organisational professionalism, ensuring first the business success of company, and then children’s wellbeing and holistic development, when or if possible.

By creating an impression of agency, professional regard and sense of belonging, the business-owners were likely to secure an absolute loyalty of ECE teachers to their business empire. With the sense of being professionally recognised and valued in the company; while historically being the ‘less’ valued and regarded, these ECE teachers seem to choose to commit first to the principles and priorities set by their ‘business owners’, and then to the ECEC profession and professional bodies.

Given the circumstances, the collective teachers’ voice in the sector became extremely fragmented, while the collective activism running the profession ‘from within’ was weakened. With the growing divide and competition across the sector, the power of the ECE business empires in running the profession and teaching professionals on their organisational-business principles grows. After seeking ‘their place in the sun’ for a long time, many ECE teachers seemed to identify with the

construction of ‘business managers’ and being loyal to an ECE company that provided a sense of value, collectivity and regard.

## **Conclusion**

Chapter 7 examined multiple, complementing and yet opposing identity constructions of teachers in three distinctive service types – kindergartens, community-owned ECE centres and for-profit ECE centres. The analysis highlighted the powerful effects of multiple socio-cultural, historical and political discourses on the services, teachers and the sector at large. It showed that discourses of democratic education and enterprise in ECEC set a fertile ground for constructions of opposing teachers’ identities, which ironically coexist and are exercised simultaneously in teaching practices. While drawing some clear distinctions between these identity constructions in the different service types, the data yet strongly suggested that teachers across all service types struggle to negotiate two prevailing identities on offer asking them to be and act as advocate-activists and teachers-entrepreneurs.

## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS

Over the last three decades or so, the landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC policies has notably transformed, and been the object of much scholarly discussion (Dalli, 1994; Davison, 1997, 1998; Farquhar, 2008; May, 2007, 2009; May & Bethell, 2017; Mitchell, 2011, 2015). Changes within the ECEC policy developments have shifted views of the purpose of ECEC and been a powerful catalyst for constructions of teachers' professional identities.

This study investigated how teachers' professional identities have been constructed through discourses in ECEC policies and practice in Aotearoa New Zealand over the last two decades, from 1996 to 2016. However, the data generated with the participants, some of whose teaching experience in ECEC dated back to the 1980s, allowed for an examination of policy developments over the last three decades or so, which usefully extended the pre-set timeframe of the research.

The study consisted of two analysis levels, which offered a foundation for an understanding of some prevailing discourses in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC policies and practices over the last three decades or so, and their effects on the ECEC sector generally, and teachers' professional identities specifically. The *macro-level analysis* included a discourse-analysis of the significant policy documents in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC, published from 1996 to 2015 (Chapter 5). The *micro-analysis level* offered two different angles on understanding constructions of teachers' professional identities. The first angle provided an insight into how significant policy concepts (e.g. relationships, empowerment) were interpreted and translated differently in the various institutional contexts and practices, construing teachers, other stakeholders (e.g. children and parents), and teaching in different ways (Chapter 6). Second, the *micro-analysis level* also enabled an inquiry into discourses emerging from a broader socio-cultural, historical, political and policy context of ECEC and impacting on constructions of teachers' professional identities in different services types, particularly community-owned not for-profit, and privately-owned for-profit services (Chapter 7).

Chapter 8 outlines some concluding thoughts drawn from arguments shared across the two analysis-levels, and the data sets analysed (i.e. policy documents, group interview transcripts and individual interviews). Therefore, I conclude that there are *four broad* discursive windows, which have simultaneously coexisted and shaped

the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC – discursive windows of *democracy*, *enterprise*, *economic investment* and *vulnerability*. The discursive windows in circulation set a foundation for the development of multiple, complementing and yet opposing constructions of teachers’ professional identities, which I summarise under three overarching identity constructions – *advocate-activist teachers*, *teachers-entrepreneurs* and *teachers-saviours*.

While revealing some common features in teaching practices in a particular context and time of ECEC, professional identity constructions are not perceived as revealing 'real' motives or intentions of the subjects of whom they speak. It should be also noted that no attempt whatsoever has been made to create any fixed or permanent meaning or a broad generalisation of the research phenomena. The identity constructions rather serve as a framework of possibilities upon which we may make sense of how *some* teachers’ professional identities have been discursively produced in a particular context and time.

By discussing how the discursive windows and identity constructions complement and confront one another, I show how prevailing views of the purpose of ECEC and prevailing identity constructions may allow and disallow ECEC to be a more democratic, equitable and socially just place for all children. Furthermore, I claim that teachers’ identities and the ECEC sector generally need to be re-established on an idea of democratic education and democratic professionalism, which are in their broadest sense rooted in the notion of democracy – as “a way of personal life controlled by .... faith in the capacity of human beings for intelligent judgment and action if proper conditions are furnished” (Dewey, 1976, p. 227).

#### **Four Discursive Windows within the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC**

According to my study, the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC is torn between tensions created in the interplay of the four divergent discursive windows, which concurrently overlap, complement and confront one another and define differently the purpose of ECEC. The discursive windows are simultaneously reinforced through the state’s policy directives, and concurrently exercised through practices of diverse ECSs. As shaping a socio-cultural, historical and political context of ECEC, discursive windows set a foundation for complex constructions of teachers’ professional identity, offering teachers a positioning from which they can meet (or not) expectations of a particular purpose of ECEC.

The *discursive windows of democracy* promote ECEC as the universal right any child to access and participate in quality early childhood education. This purpose of ECEC is grounded in the idea of democracy, implying faith in the capacity of each state's citizen (e.g. children, teachers, families, community) to use intelligent decision-making to contribute to both their personal and the collective (societal) development if proper conditions are supplied (Dewey, 1976). Based on this, an early childhood setting is a force of empowerment of a child and an entire community and operates as a democratic space in which strengths of all stakeholders (i.e. the state's citizens) are recognised, respected and engaged in teaching and learning as a collaborative workshop (see Chapter 5).

The discursive windows of democracy were established in the state's increasingly supportive approach to the sector; viewing ECEC as a public good; and was further supported through policy documents (e.g. *Te Whāriki*, the professional resources), which based teaching upon the principles of democratic participation, equity, biculturalism, holistic development, and reciprocal and power sharing relationships, as discussed in Chapter 5. The study showed that the discursive window of democracy was most evident in kindergartens in the values of the traditional kindergarten culture, and as such gave a strong basis for kindergarten teachers to establish their teaching practice in the notions of democracy, empowerment, equity and social justice (Chapter 7, Case Study 3).

However, in an attempt to reduce expenditure in the public sector, the state slowly downsized its role in kindergarten teachers' employment and in ECEC financing and expenditure, letting private and community providers take on these responsibilities. This favoring of the neoliberal practices of the free market, managerialism and performativity, meant the discursive windows of participatory citizenship and democracy in ECEC were confronted and suppressed by discursive windows of enterprise.

*The discursive windows of enterprise* was apparent in the policy directives driven by the state's minimal support to ECEC (e.g. 20 Hours ~~Free~~-ECE), and were exemplified in practices of participants from both, the community-owned and for-profit services, though to a different extent. The notions of individual productivity, profit and the 'freedom of choice', maximised through the competition among the service providers, became a key to defining quality and priorities in ECEC, and shaping teachers' work and identity constructions, which Chapter 7 highlighted.

From being a public good and a democratic space for all citizens, ECEC become a commodity sold to those ‘productive’ citizens who could ‘choose’ to afford what is good for them. On the assumption that all children and families who are offered ‘high-quality’ early childhood programmes have equal opportunities to become ‘productive’ citizens, issues of socio-economic, historical, cultural and other differences in society were left unmasked, which is discussed in Chapter 7. As the study showed, ECEC based on the discursive windows of enterprise impacted most on the affordability and participation of children and families from low socio-economic status communities – those whom the state claimed to support most.

Alongside the discursive windows of enterprise, there are also two other windows – the *discursive windows of economic investment* and the *discursive windows of vulnerability*, which overlapped and complemented one another in ECEC policies and practices. Both discursive windows were evident in the state’s reduced support to the sector and were seen to a different extent in some policy developments (e.g. the Strategic Plan, the Vulnerable Act and the VCA Guide). These discursive windows were also illustrated in ECEC practices, as some research participants exemplified (see Chapters 6 and 7).

The discursive windows of economic investment imposed the idea that ECEC is an effective state’s means of ‘investing’ in the creation of the ‘productive’ citizenry (Woodrow, 2011). Accordingly, the purpose of ECEC is sustained through human capital discourses, which emphasise early investments in the lives of children in Aotearoa New Zealand to secure economic returns and prosperity for the nation subsequently. The economic emphases in ECEC have been further rationalized and strengthened through the statistics of the high vulnerability rate in lives of children and youth in New Zealand, who are stigmatized for being “at risk of not doing well” currently and in the future (Ministry of Social Development, 2011, p. 1). The state’s anxiety about such ‘vulnerability’ holding back its success and productivity has been additionally fueled through cross-national research reinforcing the importance of ECEC as a state’s economic and social ‘investment’ in its future (OECD, 2001, 2006).

By creating imageries of ECEC as a social intervention preventing the ‘vulnerability’ by ‘saving’ and ‘fixing’ the ‘vulnerable’, and as an economic investment for the future prosperity of society, *discursive windows of vulnerability and economic investment* rationalised the state’s decision to increase the



participation rate in ECEC and enable parents to ‘choose’ an ECS from a variety of ‘quality’ options. Eager to increase the participation of the ‘priority’ (‘vulnerable’) groups of children and families in ECEC, while at the same time keeping its responsibility on a minimum, the state placed trust into the market to make ECEC affordable and accessible for those who need it most. However, this did not eventuate and disparities in cost, accessibility and quality continued.

Both, the discursive windows of economic investment and vulnerability moved further away from ECEC as a democratic site established with faith in capabilities of each state’s citizen. As a result, ECEC became rather construed as a place in which some children and families were stigmatised for ‘lacking’ the capacity to become ‘productive’ citizens contributing to the country’s prosperity. These discursive windows reinforced a deficit imagery of the groups of children and families failing to meet the expectations for the ‘productive’ citizenry.

The two discursive windows of economic investment and vulnerability narrowed ECEC’s purpose of improving the statistics of underachievers, and reducing cultural and socio-economic disadvantages. In this way, the huge potential of ECEC to promote democracy, equity, and social justice was neglected, and the state’s responsibility for recognising and empowering all its citizens, no matter their current living circumstances, was diluted. This put pressure on ECEC and its teachers to ‘cure’ societal issues, while the state was allowed to ignore its responsibility for undertaking comprehensive measures to prevent and improve circumstances that have caused the ‘vulnerability’. By treating issues of vulnerability as an individual rather than a collective responsibility, the state perpetuates and deepens the existing issues, evident through uneven power sharing relationships, social injustice and equity issues between those powerful (‘experts’) who can decide for the powerless (the ‘vulnerable’) what is ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ (see Chapters 5 and 6).

## **Who am I? Prevailing Constructions of Teachers’ Professional Identities**

The four discursive windows of ECEC constitute an influential context for constructions of multiple, complex and fluid teachers’ professional identities. Discursive windows of enterprise, economic investment and vulnerability have promoted competition, individualism, entrepreneurship and social-intervention

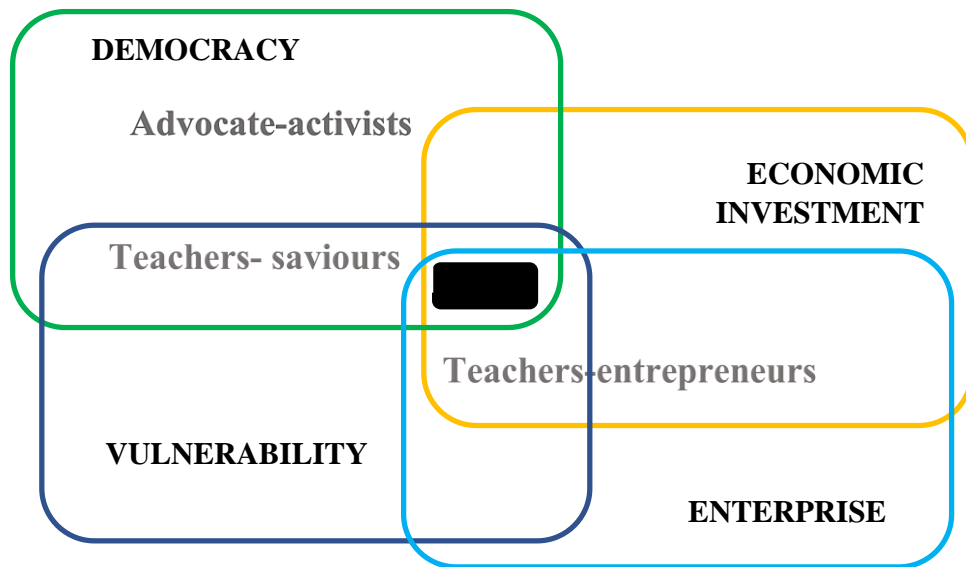
emphases. These discourses intersect and frequently overpower discourses of collectivism, collegiality, and empowerment in which democratic education and democratic professionalism have been rooted. Through their constant struggle to meet expectations and resolve tensions among these confronting and yet simultaneously coexisting interests and priorities in ECEC, teachers are under pressure to constantly re-position and re-invent their professional identities.

My study identified three prevailing identity constructions of teachers in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC – *activist-advocate teachers*, *teachers-entrepreneurs*, and *teachers-saviors*. These identity constructions offer *some* possible frameworks for making sense of and challenging teachers, teaching contexts and practices and the purpose of ECEC. I do not propose the three identity constructions as ‘essential’ characteristics of all teachers in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC. The identity constructions are understood and illustrated in this thesis rather as unstable phenomena that are always in a process of circulation, change and expansion through a dynamic equilibrium among personal, institutional and broader historical, socio-cultural, and political discursive contexts in ECEC. Therefore, it is considered that at any one moment of time and place, a teacher may take up or identify with multiple and confronting identity constructions, while resisting others.

Based on this, Figure 8 (on the next page) represents four prevailing discursive windows and three identity constructions of teachers on offer in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC. Intersecting and overlapping one another, the discursive windows in circulation coexist concurrently in ECEC policies and practice, and as such produce discursive frameworks of multiple possibilities for teachers to be and act in their teaching practice. Each discursive window may reinforce some identity constructions over others in a particular context and time of ECEC. Yet, the black cube at the centre of the discursive intersections signals a location in which teachers swings from one discursive window to another, taking up some identity constructions and rejecting others in a particular context, relationships, and point of time. At the same time, the cube symbolises the place of teachers within the opposing discursive windows in ECEC policies and practice. It highlights the complexities and contradictions of teachers’ work, as a negotiating act of juggling between diverse, and often opposing, needs, interests, priorities and emphases of the state, the sector, their own personal-professional-political stances, and local

communities (children, families). Importantly, the central cube symbolises a place that creates struggle, contradictions and complexities, and yet an opportunity for teachers to critically engage, challenge and ‘shake’ from within the discursive window-constructions on offer in ECEC policies and practices.

**Figure 8.** Discursive windows and constructions of teachers' professional identities in ECEC policies and practice



The construction of *advocate-activist teachers' professional identities* has been especially empowered through the policy developments reflecting discursive windows of democracy in ECEC policies and practices. Along with directives reflecting the increasingly supportive state approach to the sector, the curriculum principles and strands, and concepts; such as *ako*, *whanaungatanga*, biculturalism, and empowerment; were particularly powerful bases for teachers to construe themselves as advocate-activists, which I discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

As the study showed, the advocate-activist identity construction was thus developed and nourished in an environment in which ECEC was treated as a public good. In this environment, teaching practice was associated with the general well-being of children, families and communities, and embraced values of democracy, collaboration and collegiality, while teachers are trusted as professionals capable of intelligent, independent and informed decision-making, which Case Study 1 in Chapter 7 captured well. As a result, examples of advocate-activist teachers' professional identities seemed to be more strongly exercised in the community-

owned ECSs, which treated ECEC as a public good, than in business environments, construing early childhood as a ‘commodity’. This is not to say that advocate-activist identities can never be constructed in private for-profit ECSs, as one example showed it may be possible under some circumstances (see Chapter 7, Case Study 3). It is necessary to highlight that, though, that teachers in community-owned ECSs had a stronger sense of belonging to the profession, were more politically active through teachers’ unions, and therefore felt empowered to advocate and take actions that supported a democratic ECEC and democratic professionalism as a foundation of the teaching profession.

Given the emphases on values of democratic education and democratic professionalism in teachers’ work within the framework of advocate-activist identity constructions, these teachers seemed to have more courage to speak in behalf of themselves and others, and take actions that contribute to a vision of a more democratic, more just and equitable ECEC. While acting as professionals, mentors, partners, learners and educators in open, reciprocal and critical dialogues in an ECEC setting, advocate-activist teachers were able to recognise specialised knowledge and strengthens of other stakeholders and create opportunities for their active engagement in a collaborative and reciprocal teaching and learning process (Chapters 5 and 6).

By strengthening power-sharing relationships, and the commitment of various stakeholders (e.g. the state, sector, community, families) to one another, advocate-activists teachers were likely to act as political beings and drew on collaboration with other stakeholders in their political actions. As exemplified, advocate-activist teachers construed themselves as ethically responsible to individually and collectively challenge and resist discourses hindering democratic and ethical teaching practices and democratic professionalism in ECEC (see Chapter 7, Case Studies 1 and 2).

However, the market-led policy directives increased economic emphases in both, the private for-profit and community-owned ECEC centres, allowing business interests and priorities to suppress values of democratic education and democratic professionalism in ECEC (see Chapters 5). With minimal state’s support, insufficient resources and loose service regulations, teachers were forced to become entrepreneurs – to sell ECEC as a commodity to children and parents, make a profit for their business-owners and/or secure the financial viability of their organisation

on the ECEC market (Chapter 7, Case Study 3). In such an environment, teachers were obliged to choose between economic aims and the general wellbeing of children, families and community, compromising teaching practices grounded in democracy, social justice and equity.

Furthermore, the culture of competition, individualism and enterprise has increased the existing divide among service providers, ECEC settings and teachers, and diluted chances for constructions of advocate-activist identities in ECEC, which was encapsulated in Chapter 7. Teachers are expected to be passive observers of what *is done* to them, complying with ‘the less’, while ‘making more’ for their employers (see Chapter 7, Case Studies 2 and 3). Such a positioning illustrates a framework of teachers-entrepreneurs’ identities, which weakens teachers’ agency to act as political beings, and critically engage with discourses hindering democratic practices in ECEC.

When positioned as entrepreneurs, teachers tend to focus on fulfilling expectations of their employers and align their work with the economic principles and values of their organisations. These teachers seemed to lose a sense of belonging to the teaching profession, with its strong potential to strengthen their capacity to act upon principles and values of the occupational (democratic) professionalism (Evetts, 2011; Sachs, 2003, 2016). Examples of such practices were particularly evident in some for-profit ECEC centres, in which business-knowledge was often a core principle in decision-making, while chances for teachers to act as informed and independent professional resisting the domination of enterprise culture and discourses were lessened or null (Chapter 7, Case Study 3).

Therefore, the study raises an evidence-based concern that teachers-entrepreneurs tend to exercise individualism and competition rather than collegiality and collectivism in their work, which keep teachers-entrepreneurs isolated from the rest of the sector and disengaged from teachers’ unions and the teaching profession at large (see Chapter 7, Case Study 3). This implies that in the business places and spaces, teachers’ agency is likely welcomed only if associated with bringing in a profit-oriented improvement for business-owners. However, teachers’ agency as professionals’ responsible for improving quality of learning and teaching seemed to rely upon a business-principle - ‘How much it is going to cost?’, rather than ‘Is it best for children?’ (see Chapter 7, Case studies 2 and 3).

Besides constructions of teachers-entrepreneurs, another counterpoint to the activist-advocate professional identities in ECEC, was a construction of teachers-saviours' identities. The foundation for this identity construction was set in policy developments aiming to target and support the 'vulnerable' - those hindering the country's economic prosperity (Chapter 5 and 6). By imposing discursive windows of vulnerability in ECEC, early childhood services were construed as places of social intervention for increasing capacity for 'productive' citizenry, while teachers became 'saviours' of the 'vulnerable' and the economic prosperity of the country (see Chapter 5).

Given the emphases on targeting and caring for vulnerable, some teachers construed themselves as partners, mentors, professionals, and/or 'experts' with specialised knowledge and tasks of catering for and 'saving vulnerable' children and families, as discussed in Chapter 6. Such positioning, allowed teachers-saviours to educate parents needing 'professional' and 'expert' knowledge and information for understanding of their children's development and resolving their parenting concerns. Examples of subject positioning featuring teachers-saviours identity constructions were evident in some settings in low-socio economic status communities, in which the participation of 'vulnerable' children and families was higher (see Chapter 6).

The teachers-saviours identity constructions reinforced deficit imageries of 'vulnerable' children, families and communities, which seemed to circulate in some ECEC settings, and teaching practices, as illustrated in Chapter 6. The construction of teachers-saviours disrupted the view of ECEC as a force of empowerment and a place of a democratic participation of all stakeholders, which are the core values of democratic education and democratic professionalism. The emergence of teachers-saviours identities in ECEC raises concerns about understanding and basing teaching practices on the concepts of empowerment, whanaungatanga, reciprocal relationships and teaching, and biculturalism – the very concepts that have a huge potential and purpose to empower teachers to construe their work and professional identities in terms of the values of democracy, equity and social justice (see Chapters 5 and 6). The research made a strong case that if/when establishing their work in these concepts, teachers were more likely to strengthen constructions of advocate-activist professional identities and offer a counterbalance to the teachers-saviours and teachers-entrepreneurs identity constructions.

The three prevailing identity constructions of teachers in ECEC reflected some of complexity, contradictions and fluidity of the phenomenon studied – teachers’ professional identities. In addition, these revealed complex issues and challenges in constructing and strengthening advocate-activists professional identities in the contemporary, increasingly business-focused context of Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC. Yet, the study forecasted that the constructions of the strong, advocate-activist professional identities are both, a priority and a necessity for re-establishing ECEC in values of democracy, social justice and equity, and for reinforcing teachers’ agency through advocacy and activism at a time when the purpose of ECEC has been narrowed to reflect economic and social-intervention measures and enterprise emphases. Therefore, it is timely to consider: How can we reinforce the advocate-activist teachers’ identities and the advocate-activist teaching profession at a time in which competition, individualism and loyalty to the organisational principles drive teachers’ work, asking them to favour for-profit and enterprise interests over the wellbeing of children, families and community?

### **Who do I want to be? Re-establishing the advocate-activist professional identities and teaching profession**

Teachers’ professional identities are highly political constructions, reflecting complementing and confronting, micro- (institutional, daily, ‘mundane’) and macro-politics (governmental). As such, identity constructions are a complex of interconnected and reciprocally interpenetrating ways in which teachers may make sense of themselves, the purpose of their work and contexts they work in.

The confronting micro- and macro-politics can both, constrain and expand possibilities for strengthening advocate-activist professional identities in ECEC. How these opportunities unfold, however is often associated with a strong and effective leadership capacity within the teaching profession, to which teachers can “harness their own agency” (L. Miller, 2008, p. 260) and find strength to resist discourses which disempower their agency (Oberhuemer, 2008; Osgood, 2006; Woodrow, 2011; Woodrow & Busch, 2008).

This thesis presented a number of examples of teachers exercising advocacy, activism and resistance in their work, taking up advocate-activist identities (see Chapter 7). Based on the examples, it can be suggested that there were common

qualities (values, knowledge, expertise, capacity) these teachers shared, and which empowered them to deliberately choose to be and act as advocates-activists.

The qualities underpinning the advocate-activist teachers' practices were closely affiliated with discourses of community, professional ethics, political activism, democracy, social justice and equity. By establishing their work and identities in these discourses, teachers could favour what is best for children, families and communities and the profession over interests and priorities imposed by discourses of individualism, enterprise and the market. The advocate-activist professional identities empowered teachers to resist and find a counterbalance to other identity constructions on offer - entrepreneurs-teachers and teachers-saviours, which the central cube in Figure 8 highlighted.

The study implied that fundamental to advocate-activist identities was the commitment to children families, community and the profession, set in teachers' critical understanding and a belief that professional ethics, teachers' agency, advocacy and political activism are the foundation for teachers' professionalism in ECEC. This understanding was further reinforced by teachers' experiences as political activists through the teachers' unions, as illustrated in Chapter 7, especially in Studies 1 and 2. By strengthening their sense of collegiality, collectivism and belonging to the activist-advocate teaching profession, these teachers seemed to enhance their critical awareness of politics driving ECEC, and their individual and collective responsibility to resist discourses which hampered the broader purpose of ECEC that leads to a more democratic, socially just, and equitable society.

Drawing on the examples of advocate-activist identity constructions in my study (Chapter 7), I would suggest that strengthening values of democratic professionalism and leadership capacity in the sector are the key to re-establishing advocate-activist teachers' identities and the advocate-activist early childhood teaching profession. Effective leadership and democratic professionalism encourage teachers to ground their work in the ethics of care and encounter, and resistance (Dahlberg, 2003; Lenz-Taguchi, 2008; Sevenhuijsen, 1998), and reinforce their critical examination and engagement with discourses which inhibit the exercise of the values of democracy, social justice and equity in their practice.

To reinforce advocate-activists' professional identities and the advocate-activist early childhood teaching profession, various stakeholders (e.g. educational institutions, policy makers, professional bodies supporting teachers, researchers),



and the state need to unite. Their commitment to working collaboratively to bring social change in the form of a more democratic, more plural, more just, and less unequal ECEC, is of a paramount importance. Below, I outline some strategies and actions that these various stakeholders may wish to consider as ways of strengthening advocate-activists teachers' professional identities and the advocate-activist early childhood teaching profession in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC.

### **Critical thinking and understanding of 'a bigger picture' of ECEC and roles of teachers**

Teachers' pre-service education is arguably the cornerstone of high-quality ECEC (Fukkink & Lont, 2007; Jones, 2014), playing an enormous role in preparing student-teachers to work in the changing contemporary contexts of ECEC (Campbell-Barr, 2018; Dyer, 2018; Fenech, 2011; Gibbons, Tesar, Steiner, & Chan, 2018; Ritchie et al., 2010). Institutions of teachers' pre-service education are therefore key sites for developing student-teachers' capacities to critically examine and engage with discourses in the macro- and micro-politics of their profession, particularly with discourses simultaneously allowing and disallowing ECEC to be grounded in values of democracy, social justice and equity. It would be beneficial if pre-service teaching programs were based on critical pedagogies (Groundwater-Smith & Sachs, 2002; Woodrow & Busch, 2008), encouraging critical exploration into early childhood discourses of professionalism, and creating spaces for student-teachers' critical reflections and self-awareness developments (Dyer, 2018; Osgood, 2010).

A crucial area to start the critical examination of early childhood discourses in the Aotearoa New Zealand context would be the curriculum principles and strands, and the concepts of empowerment, *ako*, *whanaungatanga* and biculturalism. As this study has implied, these concepts offer a strong foundation for teachers to understand their work and identities in relation to democracy, social justice, equity, collaboration and community values, and thus constitute a counterpoint to discourses of enterprise and vulnerability. As examples from some institutional contexts in this thesis demonstrated, the understanding and implantation of these very concepts was quite challenging for some teachers, which I discussed in Chapter 6. Programmes extending student-teachers' capacity for critical engagement with discourses of social justice, democracy and equity, pre-service education can train

students to conceptualise ECEC, their teaching practices and themselves in alignment with discourses reinforcing the advocate-activist professional identities in ECEC.

Furthermore, the study revealed that the knowledge of historical, socio-cultural and political context of the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC, and ideologies underpinning the governance, structures and funding system of the ECEC sector enabled teachers to understand the importance of taking activist-advocate positioning in their practice. Therefore, knowledge of the broader ECEC context, funding, governance structures are considered by this study, as by other authors (Skattebol et al., 2016), as essential for teachers working in the rapidly changing twenty-first century ECEC context.

Moreover, it is worth considering other twenty-first century skills that pre-service education programmes could usefully offer to students-teachers to strengthen their capacities to work in the challenging and complex contexts, in which they may be forced to choose economic priorities over children's wellbeing, and juggle for-profit interests of employers and the needs of families and community. To this end, teachers' pre-service education might include professional knowledge-base that cultivates critical mindsets, encouraging student-teachers to view dominant discourses always as "a choice not a necessity" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 134), and to perceive themselves as ethically responsible political beings who need and are able to critically examine and deliberately choose which discourses to take up and which to resist in their work.

### **Creating spaces for critical dialogues and reflections**

Teachers' pre-service education cannot simply set a foundation for constructions of strong professional identities and the advocate-activist teaching profession. Continual opportunities for in-service professional development programmes will be necessary to strengthen teachers' professional knowledge-base that is developed through their pre-service education.

For this study, I developed booklets (see Appendix A, Booklet for Teachers) with quotations from policies, which I considered as communicative places where participants could engage in a critical dialogue and reflection about policy developments and their impacts on teaching practice and professional identities. Through the use of the booklets in focus group discussions, I discovered that such

resources and research exercises can be of an immense value for teachers' professional development. Thought-provoking professional materials, such as the study's booklets, can enhance criticality of ECEC teachers, managers and professional leaders, by encouraging their questioning and challenging of discourses that underpin macro- and micro-politics, and shape their ways of being a teacher and doing teaching practice. By providing a space for individual and collective dialogue and critical analyses, these and similar professional recourses and development programmes could support teachers and ECSs to bring in improvements in their work.

### **Regenerating democratic professionalism, alliance-building and community**

Nurturing a capacity for criticality, resistance-based professionalism, advocacy and activism developed through pre-service education and in-service professional development programmes sets a foundation for an effective leadership model in which an advocate-activist teaching profession is typically established. Effective leadership is not a concept pertaining an individual teacher. It requires 'a field-wide community of diverse leaders' (Goffin & Washington, 2007) to work together, reinforcing, in this case, an advocate-activist teaching profession.

An effective leadership model is a powerful tool for regenerating democratic professionalism, alliance-building and community-transformation, and can strengthen collegiality, collective activism and advocacy within the diverse ECEC sector. By reinforcing the sense of belonging to the professional teaching community, an effective leadership model can help teachers to move beyond the historical divides, individualism and competition, and picture themselves within the broader purpose of ECEC and the teaching profession. By reuniting teachers around the same goal, such a leadership would create spaces for teachers to: unmask political and economic arenas in which decision-making takes place; contest legitimacy of discourses which constrain their collegiality, the sense of belong to the teaching profession, collective advocacy and agency and critically question where the macro and micro-politics are taking our society. By understanding a complexity of the dynamic political trajectories in ECEC, teachers can feel individually and collectively empowered to resist discourses that isolate their work from the broader social and political projects.

Above all, it is important to remember that the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC is not unfamiliar with advocacy and activist-oriented actions and professional bodies, and expects for the teaching profession to stand for democracy and equity, be united and collegial. Teachers' activism and advocacy have been deeply engrained in the history of the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC (May, 2017; May & Bethell, 2017). Moreover, the curriculum *Te Whāriki*, as a deeply democratic document (Duhn, 2011; Farquhar, 2012), further challenges and asks teachers to take up advocate-activists' roles in their day-to-day teaching. Through these roles, teachers could be encouraged to transform the present with the aspiration for a more just, more democratic, diverse and more equitable future for ECEC and Aotearoa New Zealand society.

### **Empowering collective actions and participatory decision-making through unionization of the sector**

Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC has a history of taking collective actions, by engaging committed individuals (e.g. academics, unionists, activists) and organisations to debate and formulate improvements and changes in ECEC policy directives. Powerful stories of incidents of such collective activism, which occurred during the 1990s and early 2000s, were outlined in Chapter 3 of this thesis, and were well documented elsewhere (May, 2017; May & Bethell, 2017; Meade, 1990; Mitchell, 2018; Mitchell & Wells, 1997). These stories convey a persuasive message that though social cooperation and collective actions ordinary people can draw upon diverse expertise and co-construct knowledge that can bring change and improvements. Importantly, such endeavors strengthen democratic institutions and reinforce culture of participatory decision-making, as a hallmark for constructive relationships between knowledge and governments (Ober, 2008).

Using participatory decision-making processes, united individuals and organisations can resist government politics, which maintain the status quo in the sector (e.g. unsatisfactory pay rates, the sector's privatisation) and create alternatives that increase public benefits (e.g. better quality, more affordable ECEC) and advocate publicly for their implementation. As the data analysis suggested (see Chapter 7), and as others too have argued (Mitchell, forthcoming), an effective and prominent teachers' union plays a pivotal role in a participatory democracy. Unions can unite voices of individual teachers and groups, and empower their perseverance

and commitment to collective actions to bring in desired improvements (e.g. better working terms and conditions, better educational policies).

Considering the division and competitions among service providers and teachers' loyalty to employers rather than the ECEC profession (as discussed in Chapter 7), it can be argued that the current trends in the sector promote rather anti-unionization, reducing chances for teachers' collective actions and participatory democracy. Therefore, it may be necessary to propose "social movements to invoke stories... that have potential to move people to invest in their own sense of individual and collective agency" (Giroux, 2014, p. 240) in order to move towards ECEC policies and practices based on values of democracy, equity and social justice, rather than individual profits.

### **Enhancing policy-making through collaboration and partnership**

Although not a rare topic in educational research, issues of professional identities seem still to be a 'seldom feature in policy debates' (Woodrow, 2011). As a result, many intended and unintended effects of the dynamic policy trajectories on teachers' work and identities seem to stay invisible to policy makers and politicians, blocking improvements in both ECEC policies and teaching practices.

This study showed that the constructions of teachers' professional identities have had great relevance to how the policy intentions and expectations played out in teachers' local places and spaces. Similarly to other studies (Lazzari, 2014), it thus argues for the importance of researchers, policy makers and the sector working together to inform political decision making.

The study suggests that policy-making needs to be done within a framework of collaboration and partnership among various stakeholders in ECEC (e.g. researchers, unions, sector organisations, parents, policy makers), and as such would have a huge potential to assist services and teachers to meet more adequately the needs of children, families, and community. An example of such policy development was the curriculum *Te Whāriki*, which engaged the sector, community and the state. As participants' discussions in this study strongly suggested, the collaborative development of the curriculum created a sense of 'unity and collegiality' to the historically divided sector, improved teachers' professionalism,

and made teachers feel as their work as teaching professionals was ‘valued’ and ‘regarded’.

### **Strengthening capacity for change by creating transformational experiences**

While revealing some of the prevailing discourses that have shaped ECEC policies and practices, and teachers’ professional identities, this study did not include spaces for participants to make an actual change in their local institutional contexts. Therefore, it is very important to undertake action-oriented participatory research projects in which teachers, professional leaders, managers and researchers work collaboratively, critically engage with and challenge discourses shaping a specific institutional context and teaching practices. Such research projects could enhance capacity for criticality, activism, advocacy, effective resistance and leadership of all stakeholders in ECEC, allow alternative meanings and understandings, and bring in visible improvement in teachers’ institutional places and spaces. To this end, the re-establishment of research and teaching initiatives, such as the Centre of Innovation (COI) Programmes, which were mentioned in Chapter 3, would perhaps be a good place to start.

### **Consistent and adequate state support to the sector is the key**

This study shows that shifting perspectives on ECEC, reflected in the state’s inconsistent policy directives to the sector, have moved ECEC away from being a democratic site and a universal right of a child, to being an economic and a social intervention. As a result, the possibility for teachers to construct strong, advocate-activist professional identities and reinforce the advocate-activist teaching profession has been significantly reduced.

To support the development of strong, advocate-activist professional identities and an advocate-activist early childhood profession, the study suggests that the government needs to provide better and more equitable working conditions for teachers with equivalent qualifications across the education sector. The data further showed that the historical divide between services and teachers in the diverse ECEC sector, a low professional status, different pay rates and lack of acknowledgement have together significantly weakened teachers’ constructions of themselves as professionals (see Chapter 7). These historical legacies, along with the state’s

increasingly market-led policy directives, deepened the existing division between services and teachers, and impeded the individual and collective capacity of teachers to move towards improving the status of the early childhood teaching profession. To resolve these issues, it would be necessary to expand the collective agreement between the state and the teachers' union to cover the pay and conditions of all teachers in the ECEC sector, and provide even-handed support to teachers with equivalent qualifications.

Furthermore, the study reveals that the state's reinforcement of enterprise priorities in ECEC, has weakened capacity for constructions of strong professional identities and a united teaching profession. By imposing conditions in which teachers need to compete with each another, and compromise children's wellbeing in favour of economic/enterprise priorities, the state's market-led directives made it difficult to teachers to establish their work and identities on the principles of democracy, collaboration, reciprocity, empowerment, equity, and commitment to one another. Any chance for teachers to favour quality ECEC ('what is best for children') over quantity ('How much does it cost?') was lessened, impeding their capacity to maintained quality, ethical and democratic practices in ECEC.

Therefore, to strengthen ECEC's ethical and democratic practices, the state needs to better regulate and fund services and support better the not-for profit community-based ECSs. The project *Strengthening community-based early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand* (May & Mitchell, 2009) offered strategies for such improvements. The study also suggests that an increasing state support for quality teachers' pre-service education and in-service development programmes would be another significant step towards strengthening teachers' professional ethics and the values of democracy, social justice, equity and diversity in their work. While other studies have documented links between teachers' pre-service and in-service training, including appropriate pay and conditions and quality ECEC (Bennett, 2006; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004), this study suggests that the development of advocate-activist teaching profession and professionals is essential to ensure and maintain high quality, meaning democratic and equitable, and socially just teaching practice in the contemporary context of the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC.

## **Concluding thoughts**

The vision of early childhood education as one of the universal rights of a child, and a view of early childhood services as a collaborative workshop, in which citizens (e.g. teachers, families, community) and the state work to support the general well-being of children together make the basis for (re)establishing a more democratic, socially just and less unequal ECEC. While the framework of democratic ECEC may make all stakeholders more committed and ethically obliged to contribute to early childhood education as a social good, the nation's government, has yet a pivotal role in ensuring conditions for creating a strong democratic, socially just and equitable ECEC system.

In partnership with other stakeholders, the government needs to take responsibility for legislating and financing services, developing high quality standards and ensuring that these have been met across the diverse service types in the Aotearoa New Zealand ECEC. There is also a major need for the government to ensure that broad societal values such as democracy, social justice, respect for cultural and economic diversity, human rights and equity are consistently promoted in its macro-policies, and that their implementation in individual early childhood settings is supported by a framework of trust, collaboration and genuine support. To achieve this, it is necessary that the state provide conditions for teachers to construe themselves as advocate-activists for a strong democratic, socially just and equitable ECEC system, and as political agents intent to create a better world for all to live in. However, it is also important to increase awareness among teaching professionals that as political beings we are responsible for insisting upon the right to work in democratically governed places and spaces and go beyond personal and individual (often for-profit) gains into the sphere of the public good.



## GLOSSARY OF MĀORI WORDS

<i>Ako</i>	A reciprocal process of teaching and learning (Ministry of Education, 2005)
<i>Ākongā</i>	Student, learner (Teachers Council, 2010)
<i>Hapū</i>	Kinship group, clan, tribe, subtribe - section of a large kinship group and the primary political unit in traditional Māori society. It consists of a number of whānau sharing descent from a common ancestor, and is usually named after the ancestor, but sometimes for an important event in the group's history. A number of related hapū usually shared adjacent territories from a looser tribal federation (iwi). (Moorfield, 2011)
<i>Iwi</i>	Extended kinship group, tribe, nation, people, nationality, race - often refers to a large group of people descended from a common ancestor and associated with a distinct territory (Moorfield, 2011)
<i>Kaiako</i>	Being a teacher and a learner (Ministry of Education, 2005)
<i>Kaiāwhina</i>	Helper, assistant, contributor, counsel, advocate (Moorfield, 2011)
<i>Kaumātua</i>	Adult, elder, elderly man, elderly woman, old man - a person of status within the whānau (Moorfield, 2011)
<i>Kotahitanga</i>	The curriculum principle which aligns with holistic learning (Ministry of Education, 1996)
<i>Kōhanga reo</i>	A type of centres within the ECEC sector that is administered by Te <i>Kōhanga Reo National Trust</i> . Centres incorporate the total immersion of children from birth to school age in the Māori language, culture, and values. The educators and administrators are parents or elders of the children (Meade & Podmore, 2010, p. 48)
<i>Kura</i>	Formally The Correspondence School, providing distance learning programmes and courses for students

	at all levels in Aotearoa New Zealand (Te Kura, 2018).
<i>Mana</i>	Prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power, charisma - <i>mana</i> is a supernatural force in a person, place or object. In the context of ECEC, it refers the power and potential that a child/adult brings with them.
<i>Mana Atua</i>	The curriculum strand which aligns with well-being (Ministry of Education, 1996)
<i>Mana Aoturoa</i>	The curriculum strand which aligns with exploration (Ministry of Education, 1996)
<i>Mana Whenua</i>	The curriculum strand which aligns with belonging (Ministry of Education, 1996)
<i>Mana Tangata</i>	The curriculum strand which aligns with contribution (Ministry of Education, 1996)
<i>Mana Reo</i>	The curriculum strand which aligns with communication (Ministry of Education, 1996)
<i>Manaakitanga</i>	Creating a welcoming, caring and creative learning environment in which that treats everyone with respect and dignity (Education Council, 2017).
<i>Māori</i>	The indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand
<i>Ngā Hononga</i>	The curriculum principle which aligns with relationships (Ministry of Education, 1996)
<i>Pākehā</i>	New Zealanders of non-Māori ancestry
<i>Pono</i>	Showing integrity by acting in ways that are fair, honest, ethical and just (Education Council, 2017).
<i>Te Tiriti o Waitangi</i>	- a treaty made in 1840 between the tangata whenua (indigenous people, people of the land) and the British Crown (Orange, 1987)
<i>Te Reo</i>	Māori language
<i>Tino rangatiratanga</i>	“Full authority, status and prestige”; “self-determination over Māori people lives and resources”, as fundamental to their well-being (Ritchie, 2003, pp. 80–86)
<i>Tikanga Māori</i>	Māori customary practices or behaviours (Moorfield,

	2011)
<i>Tangata whenua</i>	Indigenous people, the people of the land, Māori (Moorfield, 2011)
<i>Whakamana</i>	The curriculum principle which aligns with Empowerment; “giving power or authority that enables a person to take an action or role” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 99); empowering all learners to reach their highest potential by providing high-quality teaching and leadership (Education Council, 2017)
<i>Whakaaro</i>	Thought, opinion, understanding, idea, intention, gift, conscience (Moorfield, 2011).
<i>Whakawhanaungatanga</i>	A collaborative learning community in ECEC, established on "an environment of trust and reciprocity" (Hirini, 1997, as cited in Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 39)
<i>Whanaungatanga</i>	Relationship, kinship, sense of family connection - a relationship through shared experiences and working together which provides people with a sense of belonging. Each individual contributes to the collective process (Moorfield, 2011). In an educational context, it requires a teacher to engage in positive and collaborative relationships with all learners, their families and whānau, their colleagues and the wider community (Education Council, 2017).
<i>Whānau</i>	“Members of an extended family and its supporting network who form a context for the care and guidance of a child” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 99)
<i>Whānau Tangata</i>	The curriculum principle which aligns with family and community (Ministry of Education, 1996)

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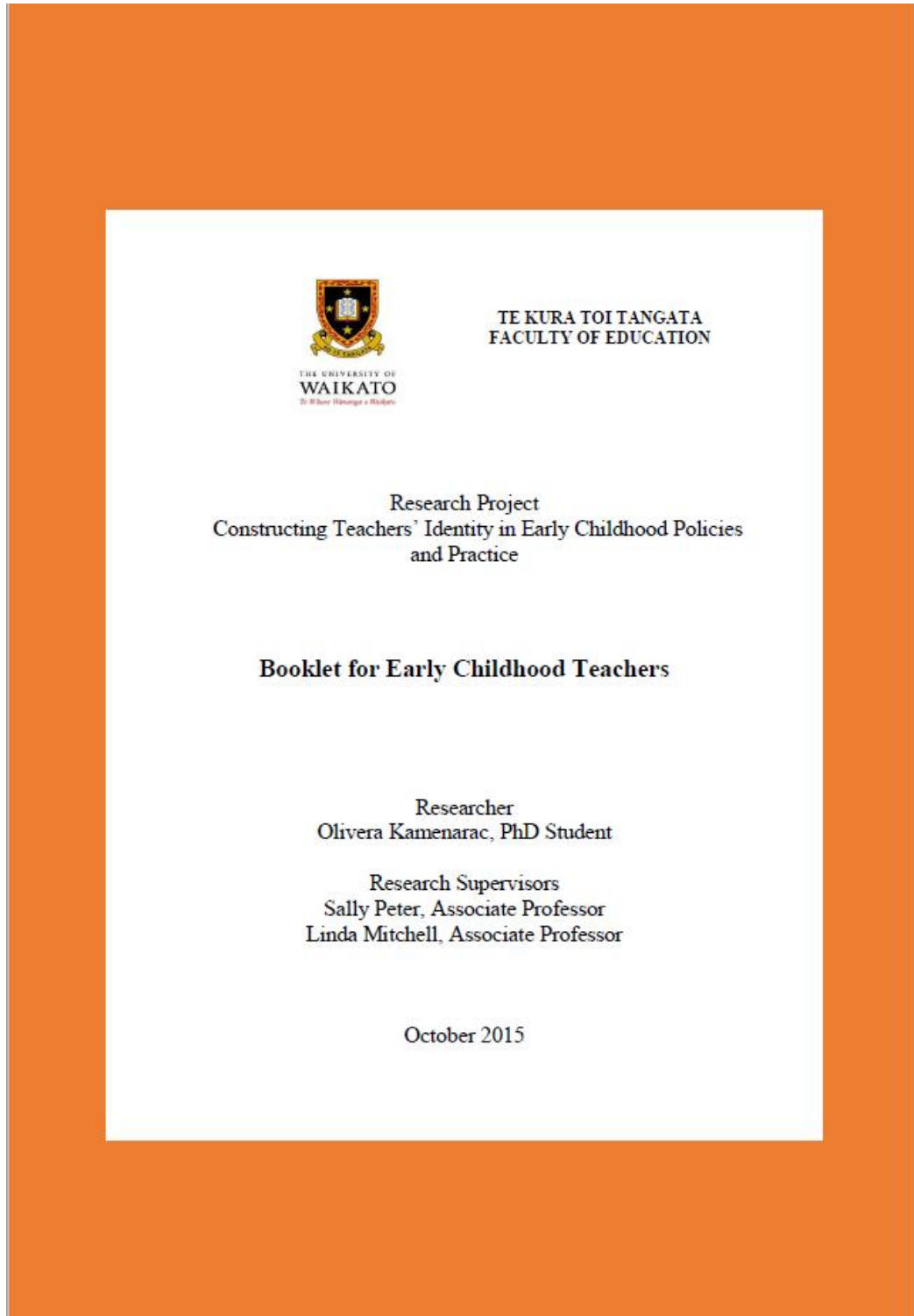
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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A Booklet for Teachers



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Dear Early Childhood Teacher,

Thank you for participating in the research project *Constructing Teachers' Professional Identities in Early Childhood Policies and Practice*.

Here is the booklet with quotations from several early childhood policy documents:

- *Te Whāriki: Early Childhood Curriculum* (1996)
- *Pathways to the Future-Ngā Huarahi Arataki. A 10-year Strategic Plan for ECE* (2002)
- *Education (Early Childhood Service) Regulations* (2013)
- *Registered Teacher Criteria* (2010)
- *Kei Tua o te Pae. Assessment for Learning. Early Childhood Exemplars. Book 1-20* (2004, 2005, 2007, 2009)
- *Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua: Self-review guidelines for ECE* (2008)

The quotations refer to four themes:

1. Children's learning and development in ECEC;
2. Collaborative relationships
3. (Bi)cultural practice of ECEC
4. Quality of ECEC

I am inviting you to:

- ✓ Read the booklet, reflect on the policy quotations, and the questions asked about the themes.
- ✓ If you wish, please write your reflective thoughts about how the policy documents illustrated in the booklet may impact on your work and professional identities.

I am interested in hearing your own opinion, and examples of how these four themes are discussed and understood in your early childhood setting/association.

The booklet with your reflective thoughts will serve as a basis for a discussion in the coming focus group and the interview. The discussion will be focusing on the question: How have early childhood policies constructed teachers' professional identities in different contexts and times of ECEC in Aotearoa New Zealand?

**Please bring the booklet with you to the focus group.**

You do not have to share the notes that you make but if you are willing I would like to take a copy of them.

If you have any questions regarding the given task and the provided booklet, please do not hesitate to contact me. My email is: [ok15@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:ok15@students.waikato.ac.nz) and phone number: 022/432 27 80.

I am very pleased and excited to be carrying out research with you, and I hope that you share my enthusiasm.

Thank you very much for your great effort and participation.

Kind regards,

*Olivera Kamenarac*



**THEME I**  
**UNDERSTANDING OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN ECE AND**  
**TEACHERS' IDENTITY**

*Te Whāriki (1996, p. 9)*

[...]

This curriculum is founded on the following aspirations for children:

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

This is an early childhood curriculum specifically designed for children from the time of birth to school entry, and it provides links to learning in school settings. The learning environment in the early childhood years is different from that in the school sector. This learning environment, the constraints of age, and the special nature of the early childhood years are elaborated on in this curriculum.

*Strategic Plan for ECE (2002, p. 1)*

*Strategic Plan for ECE (2002, p. 9)*

The Government's vision is **for all New Zealand children to have the opportunity to participate in quality early childhood education, no matter their circumstances.** Research shows that having access to quality education in early childhood offers the greatest benefits for the very children who are least likely to be attending (**children from low socio-economic backgrounds**).

If we are to build a strong future for this country, I believe we must firmly establish early childhood education as the cornerstone of our education system. **Our social, educational and economic health can only benefit from efforts and resources focused on young New Zealanders.** We cannot leave to chance the quality and accessibility of early childhood education.

**The education of children under the age of six is not compulsory.** Parents, families and whānau therefore **have to actively choose to involve their children in ECE.** To make this choice parents need information about why ECE is important for their children. They need to know what quality ECE looks like so that they can choose a quality ECE service.

## **Reflective Notes**

How is learning understood in the given policy documents?

How is development understood?

Based on how learning and development are understood in the policy documents, what are you as a teacher expected to be like?

What are you expected to do?

## THEME I: UNDERSTANDING OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT AND TEACHERS' IDENTITY



Are learning and development equally promoted in the given policy documents?

As cited in *Assessment for Learning, Book 10* (2005, p. 4)

Learning dispositions and working theories are closely connected to ideas about identity. Etienne Wenger comments that "Education, in its deepest sense and at whatever age it takes place, concerns the opening of identities – exploring new ways of being that lie beyond our current state."<sup>4</sup> *Te Whāriki* describes learning dispositions as "habits of mind" or "patterns of learning" (page 44). Ron Ritchhart,<sup>5</sup> writing about research in schools, also describes dispositions as "patterns" – patterns of behaviour, thinking, and interaction. Ritchhart links these patterns to a learner identity, explaining that the patterns reveal us "as thinkers and learners". He argues for dispositions as outcomes for education because they turn abilities into action:

*Assessment for Learning, Book 3* (2005, p. 6)

Commitment to the belief that "our development is our learning is our development": Development and learning are the same process when they are both seen as sited in relationships of mutual participation and respect.

*Self-Review Guidelines* (2008, p. 7)

*E mau ō ringa ki ngā akaaka a Tāwhaki kia tārewa tū ki te rangi.*

*May your hands grasp the vines of Tāwhaki, which lead to the sky above.*

*This whakatauhī describes the importance of taking opportunities that lead to understanding. In the context of review, it reminds us of our overarching purpose – to take responsibility for the quality of our practice in order to support and improve children's learning. Through self-review, we know how well our practices are achieving this goal.*

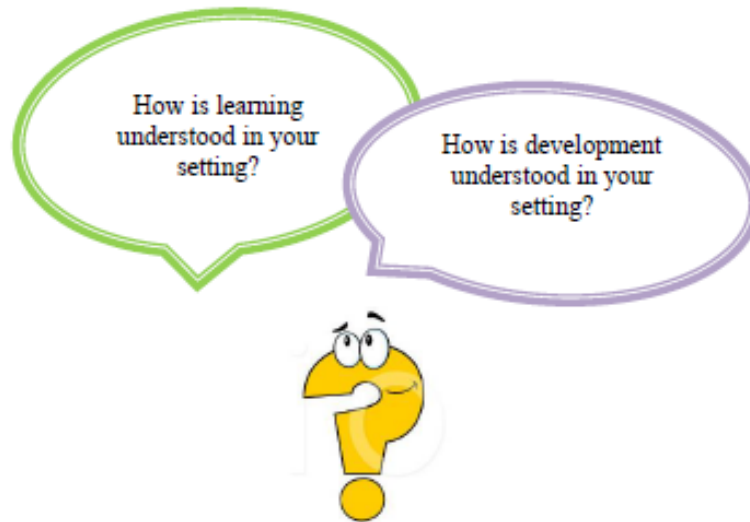
## Reflective Notes

How is learning understood in the given policy documents?

How is development understood?

Are learning and development equally promoted in the given policy documents?

**THEME I: UNDERSTANDING OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT AND  
TEACHERS' IDENTITY**



*Registered Teacher Criteria (2010, p. 12)*

Fully registered teachers make use of their professional knowledge and understanding to build a stimulating, challenging and supportive learning environment that promotes learning and success for all ākongā<sup>4</sup>.

*Education (Early Childhood Service) Regulations (2013, p. 33)*

**43 Curriculum standard: general**

- (1) The curriculum standard: general is the standard that requires every licensed service provider to whom this regulation applies to—
- (a) plan, implement, and evaluate a curriculum that is designed to enhance children's learning and development through the provision of learning experiences and that is consistent with any curriculum framework prescribed by the Minister that applies to the service; and that—
    - (i) responds to the learning interests, strengths, and capabilities of enrolled children; and
    - (ii) provides a positive learning environment for those children; and
    - (iii) reflects an understanding of learning and development that is consistent with current research,

## Reflective Notes

How is learning understood in your setting?

How is development understood?

How has the understanding of learning and development in your ECEC setting impacted on teachers' identity?

**THEME II**  
**COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS IN ECEC AND BEYOND AND**  
**TEACHERS' IDENTITY**

*Self-Review Guidelines* (2008, p. 39)

Relationships are a source of learning, empowerment, and identity for all of us. This is reflected in the concept of whanaungatanga. Paul Hirini (1997) describes whanaungatanga as "a value, which reinforces the commitment whānau members have to each other" (page 44). Such commitment is expressed through a process of caring, sharing, respecting, helping, assisting, relieving, reciprocating, balancing, nurturing, and guardianship. Hirini goes on to suggest that involvement through whanaungatanga "generates observable behavioural processes through which whānau functioning is promoted and enhanced". Whakawhānau, building a collaborative learning community, establishes an environment of trust and reciprocity as an essential base for effective review.

How do you understand the quotation: "Relationships are a source of learning, empowerment and identity for all of us"?

Are relationships a source of your identity as a teacher?



Are there examples of how the relationships might impact on your identity as a teacher?

## **Reflective Notes**

Are relationships a source of your identity as a teacher?  
Can you give examples of this?



## THEME II: COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS IN ECEC AND BEYOND AND TEACHERS' IDENTITY

*Self-Review Guidelines* (2008, p. 5)

As members of an early childhood education service, we belong to a community of weavers, working together to provide the best possible learning and teaching for children.

[...]

Raranga' is the technique used across cultures to weave a whāriki/mat. The metaphor of raranga can provide a way of understanding review. The process of raranga reminds us to pause in our work, to look closely at the way our curriculum whāriki has been woven, and to evaluate our practice.

This document uses raranga imagery to guide us through the process of review. Review is an important part of what we do together to generate growth through improvement. By pausing in our work and evaluating the effectiveness of our curriculum, we have opportunities to transform practice. Such is the nature of review.



How is the concept of 'raranga' understood in your ECE setting?

How does the belonging to "the community of weavers" impact on your identity as a teacher?



Are there examples of these in your ECE setting?

11

## **Reflective Notes**

How does belonging to “the community of weavers” impact on your identity as a teacher?

Are there examples of these in your setting?

### THEME III

## THE BICULTURAL CONTEXT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NEW ZEALAND AND TEACHERS' IDENTITY

10-year Strategic Plan for ECE (2002, p. 10) [...]

### A focus on the participation of Māori

Two factors sharpen our focus for the future of Māori in ECE. Firstly, Māori children do not currently participate in ECE services at the same rate as other New Zealand children. Secondly, Māori children will form a larger proportion of this country's birth-to-five-year-olds within the next 10 years.

Whānau, hapū, iwi and communities are best placed to know the barriers Māori encounter in taking part in ECE services. Our efforts under this goal will focus on working with Māori to uncover these barriers and to develop strategies to foster greater involvement. This will include researching what factors in ECE make the most difference for the development and success of Māori children.

### A focus on the participation of Pasifika peoples

Pasifika peoples share a number of the same challenges as Māori - fewer Pasifika children attend ECE services than other New Zealand children and they will comprise an increasing proportion of birth-to-five-year-olds over the next 10 years. However, the solutions to these challenges may not be the same.



How is the bicultural context understood by teachers in your setting?

Registered Teacher Criteria (2010, p. 9)

### Overarching Statements

1. Teachers play a critical role in enabling the educational achievement of all ākonga / learners<sup>2</sup>.
2. The Treaty of Waitangi extends equal status and rights to Māori and Pākehā. This places a particular responsibility on all teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand to promote equitable learning outcomes.
3. In an increasingly multi-cultural Aotearoa New Zealand, teachers need to be aware of and respect the languages, heritages and cultures of all ākonga.
4. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Code of Ethics / Ngā Tikanga Matatika commits registered teachers to the highest standards of professional service in promoting the learning of those they teach.

## Reflective Notes

How is bicultural practice understood by teachers in your ECE setting?  
How might teaching in the bicultural context impact on your identity as a teacher? Can you give an example of this?

### THEME III: THE BICULTURAL CONTEXT OF ECE IN NEW ZEALAND AND TEACHERS' IDENTITY

*Self-review guidelines for Early Childhood Education* (2008, p. 45)

Acting ethically also requires us to consider the factors associated with the context-based relationships (Cullen, 2005) that comprise our learning community – culture, gender, age, ethnicity, community, and geographical location. These principles and relationship factors are important aspects of ethics, which make up one of the key elements of review.

*Assessment for Learning, Kei tua o te pae, Book 3* (2005, p. 4)

Jenny Ritchie (2001, pages 25–26) argues that teacher education programmes should aim to equip graduates to facilitate a “whanaungatanga approach” to implementing a bicultural curriculum in early childhood centres.

This approach is characterised by the following features:

- recognition that whānau are central to early childhood care and education;
- responsive, respectful, and reciprocal relationships with children, whānau Māori, and other adults;
- reconceptualising the construct of teacher as expert;
- teachers recognising that “they cannot be experts in another person’s culture if they do not share that cultural background” and that “non-Māori cannot speak for Māori”. Non-Māori teachers create opportunities for Māori to voice their perceptions and are committed to listening and responding to them;
- “a climate of collaboration and genuine power sharing.”



How do you understand the policy statement that teachers “cannot be experts in another person’s culture if they do not share that cultural background”?

How does this idea impact on your identity as a teacher?

## Reflective Notes

How do you understand the statement that teachers “cannot be experts in another person's culture if they do not share that cultural background”?

How does this idea impact on your identity as a teacher?

**THEME IV**  
**TEACHERS' OPENNESS TOWARDS CHANGE TO ACHIEVE AND**  
**MAINTAIN THE QUALITY ECEC AND TEACHERS' IDENTITY**



How do the requirements to be surprised, take risks and cope with 'uncertainty' impact on your identity as a teacher?

As cited in *Self-Review Guidelines* (2008, p. 47)

Margaret Carr (2004) suggests that, in reflection, we are “expecting to be surprised, and prepared to change our minds” (page 45). In this way, reflection can be viewed as a disposition to enquire and not give up. We remain open to possibilities amidst the challenge! By being openly reflexive, we have the opportunity to discover new insights about ourselves, our practice, and our human condition. We can make the most astounding discoveries at the most unlikely times because we are focused on making meaning rather than being proven “right”.

*Assessment for Learning, Book 3* (2005, p. 6)

Pathways to bicultural assessment practice will have the following features:

**Acknowledgment of uncertainty:** Teachers will be willing to take risks and to acknowledge that the pathways are not clearly marked out. Advice from the community and reciprocal relationships with families will provide signposts and support.

**Diversity:** There is not one pathway; there are multiple pathways. However, all early childhood settings will be taking steps towards bicultural assessment practice.

**Multiple perspectives:** Listening to children, whānau, kaumātua, and others from the community is part of the journey.

## Reflective Notes

How do the requirements to be surprised, take risks and cope with 'uncertainty' impact on your identity as a teacher?  
Can you give examples of these?



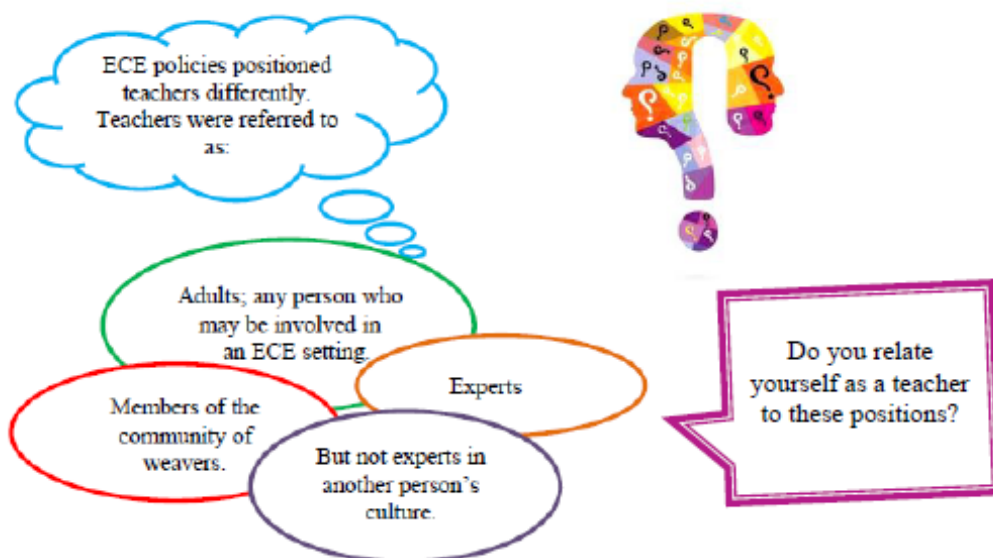
**THEME IV: TEACHERS' OPENNESS TOWARDS CHANGE TO ACHIEVE AND MAINTAIN THE QUALITY ECEC AND TEACHERS' IDENTITY**

*Te Whāriki* (1996, pp. 27)

Adults are an integral part of the curriculum for the early childhood years. Children's physical and emotional dependence on adults' care, support, attention, and guidance is more intense in early childhood than in later years. To enable the curriculum to meet the needs of all children, adults working in early childhood education need to be knowledgeable about children's development and early childhood curriculum, skilled at implementing curriculum, thoughtful about what they do, aware of their role as models for learning, willing to try alternatives, and well supported by management.

*Te Whāriki* (1996, pp. 99)

Adult: any person beyond school leaving age who may be involved in an early childhood setting. This could include whānau, parents, extended family, staff members, supervisors, child care workers, teachers, kaiako, kaiawhina, specialists, and caregivers.



## Reflective Notes

Do you relate yourself as a teacher to the positions given above?  
If yes, what do the positions expect from you as a teacher to be like? What do the positions expect you as a teacher to do?

If you cannot relate yourself to the positions given above, could you suggest positions you as a teacher can relate to? What do the positions expect from you as a teacher to be like? What do the positions expect you as a teacher to do?

## **Reflective Notes**

Please feel free to share your thoughts about how this or any other policies or decision-making in ECEC have impacted on your identity as a teacher.



## **Appendix B Information Letter for Early Childhood Organisations, Kindergarten Associations, Teachers, Pedagogic leaders and Managers**

Title of the research project: Constructing teachers' identities in early childhood policies and practice

### **About the Researcher**

I am an international PhD student at the University of Waikato. Prior to coming to New Zealand, I worked as an assistant lecturer at the University of Novi Sad in my home country Serbia and was involved in projects with early childhood teachers and preschool institutions. I completed an international master programme in Early Childhood Education and Care (IMEC), which took me to live and study early childhood systems in three countries, Norway, Ireland and Malta. My research interests are associated with teachers' identities, teaching practices and early childhood policies in diverse national contexts.

### **Background of the Doctoral Research**

A number of research studies have acknowledged how changing early childhood regulations impact increasingly on the early childhood sector, create uncertainties in early childhood practice, shape teachers' work and transform the teaching profession at large. Contributing to this research area, this study will examine influential national early childhood policy documents from 1996, focusing on *Te Whāriki, A 10-year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education*, *Kei Tua o te Pae, Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua*, *Registered Teacher Criteria*, and *Early Childhood Services Regulations*. A research focus is on how the shifts in early childhood policies inform and influence teachers' work and professional identities.

### **Research Questions**

- How have dominant discourses in the early childhood policies constructed teachers' professional identities in Aotearoa New Zealand over the period from 1996 to 2016, and what are their effects?
- How have discourses from early childhood policies influenced teachers' professional identities?

- How have discourses from early childhood practice corresponded with the discourses from policy documents?
- What professional identities have teachers accepted and resisted in their early childhood settings, and why?

### **Research Activities**

I have created a textual material (a booklet), with quotations from the documents stated above, for teachers, professional leaders and managers to read and reflect upon. I am interested in hearing your perspectives on the selected policy documents and other policies of interest to you, and how these may impact on teachers, their work and institutional settings. Reading and reflecting on the booklet may involve an unspecified length of time. However, it might be expected that approximately an hour and a half to two hours would be enough.

The booklet will serve as a basis for our group discussion, and therefore will be sent to participants at least three weeks before a focus group. I will also ask participants to return the booklets to me when we meet for the focus group, but I am happy to provide a copy of the booklet to anyone who would like one.

One focus group will be organised separately with teachers and professional leaders/managers. Each participant will be engaged in one group discussion. The focus group will be audio recorded and will last from one hour and a half to two hours.

Some participants will be invited to participate in individual interviews a few months after the group discussion. The interview will last approximately one hour to an hour and a half, will be recorded, and scheduled at a time the interview participants are available. Participants can choose whether to participate or not. Interview transcripts will be returned to participants for checking, amendments and approval.

### **Some benefits of getting involved in this project**

This is an opportunity to meet other early childhood professionals, to discuss and share your perspectives of early childhood policies and practice in a friendly and safe environment. As a result, it can increase our understanding of policy documents

that we follow in our teaching and increase critical awareness of policies' impacts on teachers and early childhood institutions.

### **The important information**

- The name of participants and their settings will not be mentioned in my thesis. Participants will be asked to choose a pseudonym that will replace their real name.
- Participants will be asked to keep confidential the identity of other participants involved in the focus group, and information shared.
- All information collected during the research will be kept confidential.
- If a transcriber is employed, the person will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement and will have to keep the materials confidential.
- Participation in this study is voluntary.
- Participants have the right to withdraw from the research project at any time by advising the researcher. During the focus group and the interview, participants may refuse to answer any question or comment on any issue regarding which they do not wish to make their views public.
- If interviewed, participants may choose to withdraw their interview data up until the time they have approved the interview transcripts.
- They may withdraw specific comments from the focus group data by advising the researcher not later than 10 days after the focus group. If they do not do so, the researcher is allowed to use the focus group data in the research project.
- Extracts from data (using pseudonyms) will be used in my PhD thesis and academic publications, and presented in conferences, seminars and workshops.
- An electronic copy of the thesis will be available through the University of Waikato's Research Commons, as required by the University.
- All data with pseudonyms will be kept secured for at least five years after the thesis is complete, and then destroyed.
- At any time, the research participants can ask further questions and express any concerns. The researcher's and supervisors' contact details are provided below.

**Contact details of the researcher**

Olivera Kamenarac, PhD Student

Phone 022 432 27 80

Email: ok15@students.waikato.ac.nz.

**Contact details of the research supervisors**

Associate Professor Sally Peters

Phone: +64 7 856 2889 Ext: 8386

Email: speters@waikato.ac.nz

Associate Professor Linda Mitchell

Phone: +64 7 838 4466 Ext: 7734

Email: lindamit@waikato.ac.nz

If you and other teachers, professional leaders and managers are interested in participating in this research, please fill in the attached form and return it to me.

I am looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Olivera Kamenarac

PhD Student



## Appendix C Inviting Expressions of Interest Form

**Title of the research project: Constructing teachers' identities in early childhood policies and practice**

Please highlight your answer:

- I am interested in participating in this research project and in receiving more information about it.
  
- I am not interested in participating in this research project.

If you are interested in participating in this project, please fill out the details below:

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

The name of your setting: \_\_\_\_\_

The name and contact details of the Kindergarten Association/Education and Care Management you belong to:

\_\_\_\_\_

Your current working position (e.g. teacher, manager/professional leader):

\_\_\_\_\_

Years of working experience in this particular position:

\_\_\_\_\_

Years of overall working experience in early childhood education and working position title(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

### Your contact details

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

The best time to contact you: \_\_\_\_\_

### Your Address:

Street number and name: \_\_\_\_\_

Suburb/Town/City \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Note: I need your address to send the booklet via CourierPost. As explained in the Information Letter, the booklet will be used as a basis for a discussion in the coming focus group.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please, send the completed form to the researcher's email (ok15@students.waikato.ac.nz).

**Thank you very much for your participation in this research.**

Kind regards,  
Olivera Kamenarac, PhD Student

**Contact details of the researcher**

Phone: 022 432 27 80

Email: ok15@students.waikato.ac.nz

**Contact details of research supervisors**

Associate Professor Sally Peters

Phone: +64 7 856 2889 ext: 8386

Email: speters@waikato.ac.nz

Associate Professor Linda Mitchell

Phone: +64 7 838 4466 ext: 7734

Email: lindamit@waikato.ac.nz

## **Appendix D Consent Form for Participation in Research**

**Title of the research project: Constructing teachers' identities in early childhood policies and practice**

### **Contact Details**

Olivera Kamenarac, PhD student/Researcher

Faculty of Education, University of Waikato

Phone: 022 432 27 80

Email: ok15@students.waikato.ac.nz

I, \_\_\_\_\_ [please print your name clearly], understand:

- the purpose of this research project;
- that I will be asked to participate in the study as described in the information sheet; by reading and reflecting on a booklet with quotations from key policy documents and participating in an audio-recorded focus group;
- that I will be asked to take the booklet to the focus group;
- that reading and reflecting on the quotations in the booklet may involve an unspecified length of time. However, it might be expected that approximately an hour and a half to two hours would be enough;
- that I may be invited to participate in one audio-recorded semi-structured interview;
- that I will have an opportunity to check, amend and approve my interview transcript;
- that my participation in this project is completely voluntary;
- that I have the right to withdraw from the research project at any time by advising the researcher. I also may refuse to answer any question or to comment on any issue on which I do not want to make my opinion public;
- that if interviewed, I may withdraw my interview data up until the time I have approved the interview transcripts;
- that I may withdraw specific comments from my focus group data by advising the researcher not later than 10 days after the focus group. If I do not

do so, the researcher is allowed to use my focus group data in the research project;

- that any information provided will be kept strictly confidential with access confined to the researcher, Olivera Kamenarac, and the research supervisors, Associate Professor Sally Peters and Associate Professor Linda Mitchell;
- that I need to keep strictly confidential the identity of each participant involved in the focus group, and the information we shared;
- that my identity and the identity of my working setting will not be disclosed;
- that if a transcriber is employed, the person will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement and will have to keep the materials confidential;
- that extracts from the research data will be used in the thesis and in academic publications, conferences, seminars and workshops;
- that an electronic copy of the thesis will be available through the University of Waikato's Research Commons;
- that the collected data will be kept secured for at least five years after the thesis is completed, and then destroyed;
- that ethical approval for this study has been received from the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee;
- that if I have any questions or concerns regarding this project I can contact PhD student, Olivera Kamenarac, or her supervisors, Associate Professor Sally Peters (ph: +64 7 856 2889 Ext: 8386, email: [speters@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:speters@waikato.ac.nz)), and Associate Professor Linda Mitchell (ph: +64 7 838 4466 Ext: 7734, email: [lindamit@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:lindamit@waikato.ac.nz)).

**Accordingly, I agree to participate in this research project under the conditions of confidentiality set out above in this “Consent Form for Participation”.**

Please print the pseudonym replacing your real name \_\_\_\_\_

Please print your full name \_\_\_\_\_

Please print name of your setting/organisation \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix E Focus Group Interview Protocols**

### **Indicative questions for Focus Group Interviews with Professional Leaders/Managers**

#### **Opening question**

- Can you tell us something about yourself and your role as a professional leader/centre manager?

#### **Introductory question**

- How do you explain the notion of teachers' professional identities? What does it mean to you?

#### **Transition question**

- Have your early childhood settings/organisations and teachers followed the policy documents outlined in the booklet?
- How did you find the themes and the policy quotations from the booklets?

#### **Key interview questions**

- Is there any theme from the booklet that in your view has had a powerful influence on teachers and ECEC settings you work with? Please tell us more.
- Can you think of any other ECEC policy document that has significantly affected teachers and early childhood settings under your organisation? Please tell us more.
- In your opinion, what policy developments, other than the policy documents, have significantly affected the work of your teachers, ECEC setting and organisation over the last two decades or so? Can you give us an example?

#### **Closing questions/comments**

- Is there anything else that you would like to comment on?
- What are highlights of our discussion for you personally?

## **Indicative questions for Focus Group Interviews with Teachers**

### **Opening question**

- Can you tell us something about yourself as an early childhood teacher?

### **Introductory question**

- How do you explain the notion of teachers' professional identities? What does it mean to you?

### **Transition question**

- Have you and your early childhood setting followed the policy documents outlined in the booklet?
- How did you find the themes and the policy quotations from the booklets?

### **Key interview questions**

- Is there any theme from the booklet that in your view has had a powerful impact on you as a teacher and your teaching practice? Please tell us more.
- Can you think of any other ECEC policy document that has significantly influenced your understanding of yourself as an early childhood teacher? Please tell us more.
- In your opinion, what policy developments, other than the policy documents, have significantly impacted your work as a teacher and your professional identities over the last two decades or so?
- Can you give us any example of their impacts on you individually and your setting/organisation collectively?

### **Closing questions/comments**

- Is there anything else that you would like to comment on?
- What are highlights of our discussion for you personally?

## **Appendix F Inviting Expression of Interest for Participating in an Individual Interviews**

### **Email Subject: Update on Olivera's doctoral research and Invitation for Individual Interview**

Dear (name),

I hope you are enjoying the beautiful sunshine.

It has been some time since we had our focus group interview. I have already done some analysis, and I am very pleased to say that the collected data is so meaningful.

I cannot thank you enough for contributing to my PhD research.

However, there are few questions that puzzle me, and I would like to discuss these with you in an individual interview.

Please let me know if you would be interested in participating.

### **Interview**

Only one or two participants per focus group were selected for interviews. The interview will last from approximately half an hour to one hour and will be organised at any time in August and September that suits you best. Please indicate dates/times and venues you prefer.

The interview is an opportunity for us to discuss the focus group transcript, and ask and answer some questions. I will send the transcript and some guiding questions before our meeting, so you will be familiar with topics of discussion.

If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact me (email: [ok15@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:ok15@students.waikato.ac.nz); phone number: 022 432 2780).

Thank you so much for your enormous help, effort and time.

I am looking forward to meeting you soon.

Best wishes,

Olivera

## **Appendix G Consent Form for Participation in Individual Interview**

**Title of the Research Project: Constructing teachers' professional identities in early childhood policies and practice**

### **Contact Details**

Olivera Kamenarac, PhD student

Faculty of Education, University of Waikato

Phone: 022 432 27 80

Email: ok15@students.waikato.ac.nz

I, \_\_\_\_\_ [please print your name] understand:

- the purpose of this research project;
- that I am asked to participate in one audio-recorded individual semi-structured interview;
- that I will have an opportunity to check, amend, comment on and approve my interview transcript;
- that my participation in this project is completely voluntary;
- that I have the right to withdraw from the research project, including this individual interview, at any time by advising the researcher. I also may refuse to answer any question and to comment on any issue which I do not like to make my views public;
- that I may withdraw my interview data up until the time I have approved the interview transcript;
- that any information provided will be kept strictly confidential with access confined to the researcher, Olivera Kamenarac, and the research supervisors, Associate Professor Sally Peters and Associate Professor Linda Mitchell;
- that my identity and the identity of my working setting will not be disclosed;
- that if a transcriber is employed, the person will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement and will have to keep the materials confidential;
- that extracts from data will be used in the thesis and academic publications, conferences, seminars and workshops;
- that an electronic copy of the thesis will be available through the University of Waikato's Research Commons;



- that the collected data will be kept secured for at least five years after the thesis is completed, and then destroyed;
- that ethical approval for this study has been received from the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee;
- that if I have any questions or concerns regarding this project I can contact PhD student, Olivera Kamenarac or her supervisors, Associate Professor Sally Peters (ph: +64 7 856 2889 Ext: 8386, email: [speters@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:speters@waikato.ac.nz)), and Associate Professor Linda Mitchell (ph: +64 7 838 4466 Ext: 7734, email: [lindamit@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:lindamit@waikato.ac.nz)).

**Accordingly, I agree to participate in the individual interview under the conditions of confidentiality set out above in this “Consent Form for Participation”.**

Please print the pseudonym replacing your real name

\_\_\_\_\_

Please print your full name

\_\_\_\_\_

Please print the name of your setting/organisation

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix H Protocol for Individual Follow-up Interviews with Teachers, Professional Leaders and Managers**

### **Indicative Questions for Individual Interview with Kindergarten Teacher Sandra (IS)**

1. In what ways, in your view, are kindergarten teachers different from the rest of the sector? What does it mean in relation to kindergarten teachers' professional identities?
2. In your experience, how has the current Government's focus on privatisation and marketisation in the sector impacted on kindergartens, the kindergarten association and kindergarten teachers? Can you explain this more?
3. How have the policy changes impacted on your teaching philosophy, professional identity and what you believe in?
4. Can you tell me more about your positioning of the advocate for children and families and the teaching profession? Where does this positioning come from?
5. In sharing your notes from the booklet, you stated that your role is to be a partner with families and whānau. Can you explain what informs your positioning as a partner?

### **Indicative Questions for Individual Interview with Kindergarten Teacher Jane (IJ)**

1. In the group discussion, you mentioned that there is a lot of competition between services and teachers. How does it affect you and your kindergarten?
2. In your experience, how have the increasing marketisation and privatisation of the sector impacted on kindergarten culture?
3. How have the policy changes impacted on your teaching philosophy, professional identity and what you believe in?
4. What in your view does it mean to advocate for children, families and the teaching profession? Where does your advocate positioning come from?
5. You also discussed that your role is to be a partner and a mentor with families and whānau. Can you explain that more?
6. You also discussed that teachers are never experts in ECEC. Can you explain

what being “never experts in ECEC” means?

#### **Indicative Questions for Individual Interview with ECE Teacher Leyla (IL)**

1. You discussed in the group interview that Te Whāriki made a significant difference so that from being a parent you became a professional teacher. How did this repositioning shape your identity as a teacher?
2. You also discussed that teachers in early childhood centre have always been viewed as not “the real, the proper teachers”. In what ways do you think this view has shaped teachers’ identities?
3. Talking about the relationships with parents and families, you said that teachers are never experts in relation to parents and especially not in Māori culture. How do you explain these positions?
4. Can you describe more your positioning of being a strong advocate for the profession? Where does it come from?

#### **Indicative Questions for Individual Interview with ECE Teacher Megan (IM)**

1. In your opinion, where does this view of early childhood teachers as carers and baby-sitters come from? Does it inform teachers’ understanding of themselves and their work? If yes, how?
2. You also said that teachers are like a partner and a mentor in relationship with parents. What does it look like in your view to be a mentor and a partner? Would you like to share any example on this?

#### **Indicative Questions for Individual Interview with a Centre Director Charlotte (IC)**

1. In the group discussion, you shared that the funding cuts, competition and the change in the conditions of the Strategic Plan for ECE had huge impacts on your early childhood centres and teachers. Can you tell a bit more, how these changes affected your centres and teachers’ professional identities?
2. It was also discussed in the group that centres in vulnerable communities often face many challenges. As you may remember, we had an interesting discussion around teachers being experts in their own context. It seemed to me that your opinion on this was different. Would you like to comment on

that now?

3. You also discussed that you see yourself and your teaching staff as advocates for children and the profession. Can you explain that a bit more?

### **Indicative Questions for Individual Interview with ECE Teacher Tina (IT)**

1. In the group interview you reflected that teachers' role in educating parents, not only children, is in your view a huge shift in ECEC. Can you explain this more? What did the relationship with parents look like before that shift and how did the shift happen?
2. Teachers also discussed that they are like "a catalyst for preventing vulnerability". Can you describe a bit more about this positioning? How has this impacted on teachers' work and identities?
3. Perhaps you also stated that despite not being respected in the sector and in society, many early childhood teachers do their job for love. In your opinion, is there any potential disadvantage to teachers who teach for love, and do not "complain" about the inadequate working conditions and status?

### **Indicative Questions for Individual Interview with Professional Leader Trudy (ITR)**

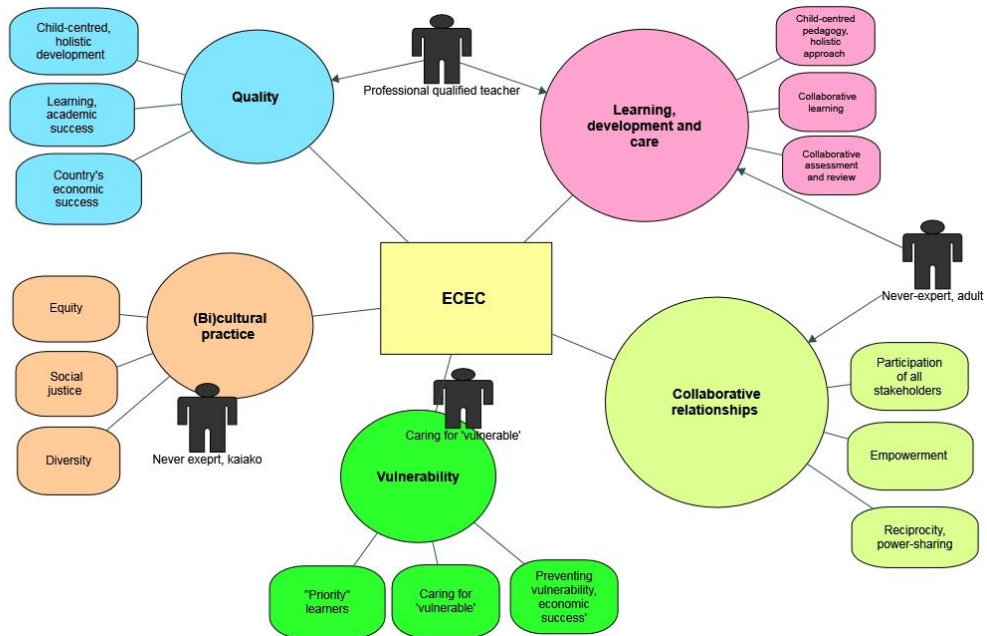
1. In our focus group discussion, there was a lot of talk about the historical and ongoing divide between early childhood education services and kindergartens, and their teachers. How in your view has this divide shaped these services and their teachers' professional identities? Is there any example of this you would like to share from your organisation?
2. It was also mentioned that creating an environment of reciprocity and collaboration with parents and communities is what you, as professional leaders, expect most from teachers you work with. In this environment, teachers were viewed as partners with parents, and never as experts. How does being a partner and never an expert look like in your view? Where does this positioning come from?

**Indicative Questions for Individual Interview with ECE Teacher (and later, Assistant Manager) Karla (IK)**

1. In the group discussion we spent some time discussing positive and negative impacts of the 20 Hours Free ECE (e.g. being equal with other teachers, making ECE affordable to families). You also explained that it was very hard for teachers in your company to find a balance between meeting needs of children “under the Vulnerable Children Act” and making a profit. In your view, how have these conflicts impacted on teachers’ professional identities in your setting/organisation?
2. What are you expected as a teacher to be and do from the business and social side of your job? How do teachers negotiate these different expectations in their work? How does it impact on their professional identities?
3. In your view, does the business-operation of your company in any way shape teachers’ work and professional identities?
4. You also described that many children and families you work with are covered “under the Vulnerable Children Act”. Therefore, teachers’ roles and responsibilities are very different in that specific context than in other contexts, for instance in affluent communities. You explained that teachers sometimes need to be experts in their own context and teach children what is right and wrong. Would you like to explain a bit more about what in your view being an expert in your own context mean? What do you think shapes your positioning of a teacher as expert? Where does it come from?

## Appendix I Visual Representation of Main Topics from Policy Documents

**Figure 9.** A map of prevailing nodes from NVivo



*Note.* Figure 9 is an excerpt from NVivo and illustrates a concept map which I used to organize coding (nodes) of the texts from the policy documents. Circles with different colours present the main themes (parent nodes), defining a prevailing topic of a discussion (a problem) in the policy texts (e.g. quality; learning, development and care; (bi)cultural practice, collaborative relationships, vulnerability). Each main theme was discussed and approached in various ways, which is signalled by smaller unites attached to the circles. Together, the main themes contribute to complementing and confronting constructions of the purposes of ECEC, teachers and their work. The human figures imply possible ways of construing teachers based on the issues discussed within the main themes.

## Appendix J Subject Positions and Identity Constructions of Teachers within Discourses in ECEC Policies and Practice

**Table 7.** Subject positions and identity constructions in discourses in ECEC policies and practice

Data		FG1 ECT IL	FG2 PL ITR	FG3 ECM IC & IK	FG4 KT IJ & IS	FG5 ECT IT & IM
Discourse of reciprocal relationships, collaborative teaching, empowerment						
SP	Partner with parents	X	X	X	X	X
	Mentor/coach				X	
	Trusted person	X			X	
	Whānau					X
Discourse of teaching in a (bi)cultural/multicultural context, empowerment						
SP	Never an expert in knowledge	X	X	X	X	X
	Kaiako	X			X	
	Never an expert in another person's culture	X	X	X	X	
Discourse of vulnerability, teaching and relationships						
SP	Catalyst for preventing vulnerability'					X
	Expert in their own context			X		
	Partner with parents			X		X
	Mentor/coach			X		X

*Note.* Table 7 illustrates subject positions of teachers in discourses emerging through participants' interpretations of the policy texts in their specific institutional contexts.

FG1 ECT, FG 2 PL, FG3 ECM, FG4 KT, FG5 ECT = focus group interview transcripts with teachers (ECT, KT), professional leaders (PL), managers, and a centre director (ECM)

IL, ITR, IC & IK, IJ & IS, IT & IM = individual interview transcripts

SP = Subject positions of teachers within discourses

X = data sets from which discourses and subject positions emerged

Green cubes = subject positions that merged and set a foundation for identity constructions of teachers-saviours

Blue cubes = subject positions that merged and set a foundation for identity constructions of advocate-activist teachers



## Appendix K Subject Positions and Identity Constructions of Teachers in Different Service Types

**Table 8.** Subject positions and identity constructions per service types and ownership

Data	FG1 ECT IL	FG2 PL ITR	FG3 ECM IC & IK	FG4 KT IJ & IS	FG5 ECT IT & IM
Discourses of 'historical legacies'					
SP Professional teacher	C-ECE	C-ECE	C-ECE	KT	
Kindergarten teacher		KT		KT	
Like a parent	C-ECE	C-ECE			C-ECE
Babysitter	C-ECE				C-ECE
Carer	C-ECE				C-ECE
Doing ECEC for love'	C-ECE				C-ECE
Discourses of neoliberalism					
SP Overworked/resentful teacher'				KT	
Business-manager and/or teacher'			P-ECE		P-ECE
Not having any value as a professional	C-ECE		C-ECE P-ECE	KT	
Workers	P-ECE				
Flying alone in the sector			P-ECE		P-ECE

(continued)

(continued)

Data	FG1 ECT IL	FG2 PL ITR	FG3 ECM IC & IK	FG4 KT IJ & IS	FG5 ECT IT & IM
Discourses of neoliberalism					
SP	Agent of change in the company			P-ECE	P-ECE
	Fighting for the viability' of centres/an organisation	C-ECE	C-ECE P-ECE	KT	P-ECE
Discourses of democratic ECEC					
SP	Advocates for free ECEC and what is best for children	C-ECE	C-ECE	KT	
	Advocates for the profession	C-ECE	C-ECE	KT	
	Union activists	C-ECE	C-ECE	KT	
	Children's advocates	C-ECE	C-ECE P-ECE	KT	

*Note.* Table 8 illustrates subject positions of teachers in discourses emerging in relation to teachers working in three different service types – kindergartens (KT, which are community-owned services), community-owned ECE centres (C-ECE), and private for-profit ECE centres (P-ECE). Some focus groups consisted of participants working in different service ownership, and this was indicated with the abbreviations given above.

FG1 ECT, FG 2 PL, FG3 ECM, FG4 KT, FG5 ECT = focus group interview transcripts with teachers (ECT, KT), professional leaders (PL), managers, and a centre director (ECM)

IL, ITR, IC & IK, IJ & IS, IT & IM = individual interview transcripts

SP = Subject positions of teachers within discourses

Green cubes = subject positions that merged and set a foundation for identity constructions of teachers-saviours

Blue cubes = subject positions that merged and set a foundation for identity constructions of advocate-activist teachers

Red cubes = subject positions that merged and set a foundation for identity constructions of teachers -entrepreneurs.

## Appendix L An Example of the Discourse-analysis

**Table 9.** Initial discourse-analysis of interview texts

Individual Interview with Karla (IK), 25.10.16.					
Interview transcript text	Identification		Description	Interpretation	Problematisation
	A main topic/a problem	Discourses	Subject positions What are teachers expected to be like and do?	Identity construction	What are the effects? Is anything left unproblematic?
L: 80-100 In regards to spending, you need to be <b>very careful in how you spend, you need to know your budget, you need to restrict it and make it last.</b> If it is that you want to take children for a trip or excursions out for learning opportunities within the community, you need to look at that, and think 'ok, <b>I got reasoning behind my spending to justify that to my business managers'.</b> So, in terms of the business side... (K. paused) We get funding, but we also need to push our occupancy, we have our budgets, but we need to make the profit.	Budget restrictions - 'business side of the job'	<b>Neoliberalism</b> <b>Marketisation</b>	Focused on managing and justifying budget rather than favouring children's learning - <b>A business person</b>	First business manager, and then teachers	What is the purpose of ECEC? What sorts of professionalism do such practices support? (business emphases and professionalism over democracy, quality, children's best)
L: 100-150 You definitely need <b>these two different hats.</b> You need a hat to be a teacher and a hat to be the business manager ... You definitely need to <b>juggle ...</b> <b>When I am on the floor I am teaching, but in the back of my head I am also thinking of the business side 'how this is going to impact on our business'.</b> I am always wearing two hats, and .... always juggling. Every decision that I make on the floor relates to the business side. So, I think that you definitely need to juggle with the two hats. Luckily being such a big company and having so many different people on the place you got that support to learn about that business side. You get to learn all these things about their business system, they teach you. You need to know to run a centre, you learn everything to the level of being capable to do all the aspects of the business side and also to understand the business side and how to make the profit.	Juggling between being a teacher and a business manager - Getting ready to be a business manager - ECEC as a commodity, and a 'business place for making profit'	<b>Neoliberalism</b> <b>Marketisation</b> <b>Enterprise</b> <b>Business knowledge</b> <b>Managerial (organisational) professionalism</b>	<b>Business manager - knowledgeable how to run the business and make profit</b>	<b>First business manager, and then teachers</b>	Managerial professionalism over democratic professionalism - professional support to obtain business knowledge - Not questioning what the purpose of ECEC is - business emphases and priorities as a 'normality' in teachers' work.

*Note.* The example in Table 9 illustrates how the discourse analysis approach was applied on a small excerpt from an individual interview transcript text. It captures my initial thoughts and questions during my initial analysis of the interview text. The corpus of statements in red color highlight prevailing discourses within the statements, which located teachers (subject positions) in a particular way and offered a specific framework for seeing and thinking of teachers and their work in a given context of ECEC (identity constructions).