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**Understanding the construction of belonging in a for-profit  
ECE centre: An ethnographic study**

A thesis  
submitted in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of  
**Doctor of Philosophy in Education**  
at  
**The University of Waikato**  
by  
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*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

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## Abstract

Participation in high quality early childhood education [ECE] is recognised as having long ranging academic and social benefits for children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Mitchell, Wylie & Carr, 2008). In 2010 the ECE Participation Programme was successfully introduced to increase enrolment in ECE for targeted groups, such as Māori, Pasifika, and low income families. I argue that focusing on increased participation alone is limiting and participation requires being viewed alongside the notion of belonging. With the majority of children participating in for-profit ECE centres in Aotearoa New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2015) I suggest that what children are participating in merits greater investigation.

In this thesis belonging is positioned as not simply obtaining membership, but utilising Rogoff's (2003) understanding of participation, it is viewed as something which is highly influential, where core values are transmitted and transformed.

The research questions guiding this thesis are:

- 1. What affordances and challenges to belonging are identified by stakeholders participating in a privately owned, for-profit, ECE centre?*
- 2. How is the ethical stewardship of Te Whāriki reflected in the leadership's decision making?*

This thesis used a critical ethnographic methodology, and was conducted over a nine month period in a for-profit ECE centre, with the researcher in the role of participant observer. The centre is located in a lower socio-economic area of an inner city suburb and is accessed by families who at the time of the study had only 30% of its parents in paid employment. The majority of children identified as Māori and lived in close proximity to the centre, and all teachers at the centre identified as Pākehā. The stakeholders identified for this study were the children, their parents and the teachers. Three teachers participated in the study and four children were selected for case study, aged between two and four and a half years. Data was generated primarily through semi-structured interviews with the children, their parents and the teachers, and observation of the setting. The data was viewed

utilising Rogoff's (2003) three foci of analysis, with three contributing factors to belonging identified by participants; values, relationships and leadership.

The thesis argues that belonging is complex and participation in for-profit ECE services is an ethical concern, not only for the children and their families but also for teachers. To make sense of the aligned yet often contradicting perspectives of the stakeholders I propose a *belonging framework*, conceptualised to bring understanding to the construction of belonging within the centre. It suggests that belonging to the centre can be viewed from three distinct viewpoints; it can be *observed, lived, and framed*. The study evidenced that the day-to-day lived experiences of the children are not fully known by parents and, while also lived, belonging is primarily *observed* for this cohort. Within the context of *lived belonging* the teachers' and leadership's philosophical and pedagogical approaches meet, and often collide. The child is placed at the heart of the framework where belonging is *lived* and it is here that meaning for this group is primarily created, and cultural values are transmitted and transformed. The third perspective is how belonging is *framed*, with the leaders' operational decision making setting the parameters for the stakeholders' participation. It is in this space that the actual values guiding the setting are revealed.

My thesis aims to explain the impact on the stakeholders' sense of belonging when a government funded centre is driven by agendas not fully aligned with the intentions of the democratic and bicultural curriculum, *Te Whāriki*. This study adds to the literature on for-profit ECE services, participation in ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand, and leadership in ECE.

## Acknowledgements

I begin by thanking the children, parents and teachers who shared their stories of belonging and allowed me to participate in their ECE community alongside of them. Without their generosity and support this thesis would not be possible.

My supervisors, Associate Professor Linda Mitchell and Doctor Amanda Bateman, your supervision has been exemplary. I thank you for sharing your knowledge with me and your confidence in me. I will always be grateful for the consideration and kindness you both extended to me during dad's illness and passing.

I offer my sincere appreciation for the Waikato University Doctoral Scholarship, which enabled me the financial freedom to complete this journey. Professor Deborah Fraser I thank you for your words of encouragement, unfailing positivity and commitment to the postgraduate community.

I am grateful for the collegial friendships I have made over the past four years: Renée, Carrie, Karen, Jinah, Mikaere, Nga, Aminah, Olivera, Suzanna, Gloria and Ignasia. I was not expecting the rich discussions, critique, cultural exchanges, laughter and support (especially when times weren't so fabulous) from such inspiring people who have walked their own doctoral and life journeys alongside mine. Sara and Simon Archard, thanks for your ongoing friendship, kindness and timely injections of humour.

I would like to acknowledge the support of my family. My mum, Rae, sisters and brothers, nieces and nephews, and my mother-in-law, Martha, who have never stopped encouraging and believing in me, thanks. The past year has been difficult but belonging to such a loving family has been a source of great strength. Finally, to Paul and Anna, I thank God to have been blessed with you both – my life is the richer for having you both in it. Thank you for your unfailing support, love, humour, and encouragement.

*I dedicate this thesis to my father, Albert Cathro (1932- 2015).*

*A man of integrity who was loving, kind, generous and just. He had a penchant for a soap box, a good yarn with mates, and the odd flutter. To mixed reception he was graced with a sophisticated and sharp sense of humour (a survival tool).*

*He valued family and believed all people at their core were “bloody marvellous”.*

*Arohanui dad*

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# Whakapapa<sup>1</sup>

<p><i>Teena koutou e hoa ma Ko Taupiri te maunga tapu, Ko Waikato te awa wairua. Ko Aurora te waka tupuna, Angus te iwi. Ko StraCathro te rohe, Ko Albert Cathro raaua ko Rae Cathro oku maatua. Ko Albert tooku paapaa. Kua mate ia. Ko Rae Collins tooku maamaa. Kei te ora ia. Noo Ngaaruawaahia raaua. Ki te taha o tooku paapaa, Ko Henry Cathro tooku maatua paapaa, Ko Dora Woolridge tooku maatua maamaa. Kua mate raaua. Ki te taha o tooku maamaa, Ko Sydney Collins tooku maatua paapaa, Ko Selma Löfroth tooku maatua maamaa. Kua mate raaua. Ko Paul Westerbeke tooku hoa rangatira. Tokotahi a maua tamariki. Ko Anna tamahine, Ko Lynley Westerbeke tooku ingoa. Noo Ngaaruawaahia ahau</i></p>	<p><i>Taupiri is my sacred mountain, The Waikato river is my sacred river. The Aurora is the ship of my ancestors, Angus is my clan. StraCathro is the ancestral land, Albert Cathro and Rae Cathro are my parents. Albert is my dad. He has passed away. Rae Collins is my Mum. She is living. They are from Ngaaruawaahia. On my father's side, Henry Cathro is my grandfather and Dora Woolridge is my grandmother. They have both passed away. On my mother's side, Sydney Collins is my grandfather, and, Selma Löfroth is my grandmother. They have both passed away. Paul Westerbeke is my partner. We have one child. Anna is our daughter, My name is Lynley Westerbeke. I am from Ngaaruawaahia.</i></p>
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<sup>1</sup> I begin my thesis with my whakapapa (genealogy). I acknowledge those who have gone before me who have been influential in shaping my identity and framing my sense of belonging. I thank my sister, Tracy Cathro, for helping to construct this whakapapa, and Lizz Rangiawha who translated the English version into te reo Māori. Throughout the remainder of this thesis macrons will be used to identify long vowels, for words in te reo Māori.

# CHAPTER ONE

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## Introduction to Research

The early childhood education setting should be like a caring home: a secure and safe place where each member is entitled to respect and to the best of care. The feeling of belonging, in the widest sense, contributes to inner well-being, security and identity. (Ministry of Education [MoE], 1996, p. 54)

The framework of Aotearoa<sup>2</sup> New Zealand's early childhood education [ECE] curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, comprises four guiding principles; empowerment, holistic development, family and community and relationships (MoE, 1996). Arising from these four principles are the five broad strands of well-being, belonging, contribution, communication and exploration. The curriculum document is holistic in nature and best viewed when keeping in mind the metaphor of the whāriki, or mat, with each principle and strand regarded as interwoven and interconnected as a whole. While acknowledging the inter-relationship between the principles and strands, this thesis foregrounds the curriculum principle of *relationships*, ngā hononga, and the strand of *belonging* – mana whenua (MoE, 1996), with the central focus of the thesis relating to how belonging is constructed in a for-profit early childhood centre.

This thesis examines the complexity of belonging (Sumsion & Wong, 2011), and utilises the work of Barbara Rogoff (2003), which focuses on the role of participation in the shaping of identity and understanding of what it means to belong to diverse social and cultural groups. The cultural group under examination within this thesis resides within the for-profit arm of the early childhood education milieu,

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<sup>2</sup> I have chosen to use the combined name of Aotearoa New Zealand in reference to both partners of Te Tiriti o Waitangi – the Treaty of Waitangi. Aotearoa is the name used by Māori as tangata whenua, the indigenous peoples of this land.

which in its entirety is a living, continually changing, complexly woven tapestry of humankind and human encounter. Exploring what it means to belong to this single ECE centre required an examination of some of the tapestry's individual threads, acknowledging that this process itself has limitations and is complex.

At the heart of this thesis are the voices of those who claim membership in the for-profit ECE centre; those who participate on a day-to-day basis, those who belong. In order to understand the setting and the multiple layers and relationships contributing to the construction of belonging within this shared group, as researcher, I immersed myself in the day-to-day life of the centre over a nine-month period. During this time a deeper understanding of the complexity of belonging, evident in the setting's structures, values, practices, and proceedings developed, which this thesis now presents. This data was primarily generated through observation, participation and semi-structured interviews.

This introductory chapter begins the account of this research and is divided into three sections. Firstly, an outline of the personal and professional contributing factors giving rise to this research is presented. The focus and significance of the research will then be addressed, with the final section framing the structure of this thesis.

## ***Personal and professional background to this research***

### ***Personal background***

Families, like trees, grow and develop with their surroundings. Seeds are blown by the wind and new trees are born elsewhere. Roots sink into the ground from which the new tree draws life. Children, like branches, stretch out. Families and trees have similar destinies. (Mirella Ricciardi, 1982, as cited in King, 1985, p. 8)

I have always been interested in what it means to belong, how belonging influences a person's participation in their communities, and conversely, how participation impacts upon a person's sense of belonging. To belong is complex, and an aspect intrinsically linked to belonging is cultural identity, which influences how one

participates in the communities one resides in. I identify belonging to a Pākehā<sup>3</sup> cultural group, and it is an association which I have chosen thoughtfully. Reflecting on my great, great grandmother's arrival in Aotearoa New Zealand, on the first settler ship, the *Aurora*, on the 22nd of January, 1840, and the experiences of subsequent generations in this nation, has been instrumental in bringing to consciousness my identity as Pākehā, rather than that of European, New Zealander, or Kiwi. This consideration has been supported by an understanding of the generational transmission and transformation of 'ways of being' (Rogoff, 2003), where belonging to cultural communities contributes to the fluid formation of cultural identity and the shaping of an individual's worldview. Pākehā for me is not about ethnicity, but has an historical connection to the predominantly European peoples who have settled in, and identify with Aotearoa New Zealand; who have put down roots and for whom culture has been shaped in relationship with this place. Historian, Michael King (1991), defines culture as,

the basis of the relationship between the individual and society, the values and the rituals through which people perceive and feel their identity; and by which society accepts or rejects them – for culture, by its nature, is both inclusive and exclusive. (p. 17)

The encounters and relationships engaged in over time and place by family in Aotearoa New Zealand have changed my family's values and perceptions. From a sociocultural perspective, Rogoff (2003) introduced 'participation' as a concept to help understand cultural changes, such as these, in human development. Her theory also provides an indication of the influence and complexity of participation. Through a participation lens, changing involvement in social and cultural practices contributes to the transformation of belonging, one's identity within the community, as well as the community itself (Rogoff, 2003). The following is an impression of how I have applied this understanding to aspects of my formative years which contributed to how I interpret my cultural identity as Pākehā. I do not seek to trivialise a complex concept, and I am aware that by highlighting the following accounts I leave out important context. However, considering some early

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<sup>3</sup> A Māori term for New Zealanders of European descent

experiences and relationships have helped me understand how generational and personal ‘participation’ contributed to the shaping of my identity, worldview, and understanding of what it means, for me, to belong in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Culture and identity are shaped within our early learning experiences. The experience of growing up in the sixties and seventies, as a third generation Pākehā resident of the township of Ngaruawahia<sup>4</sup>, has helped shape my “sense of beingness” (Gibbs, 2006), with formative values, beliefs, customs and attitudes embedded within the relationships and cultural activities I participated in. Like a number of Pākehā New Zealanders my ancestral tree is not culturally homogenous, with family migrating to Aotearoa New Zealand in the mid-nineteenth century from England, Scotland, Sweden and Germany. For some, English was not their first language. Faith affiliations also varied, with family members associated over the generations with the Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran and Roman Catholic faiths. While all fall under the one umbrella of Christianity, each contains its own theologies, doctrines, practices and languages. Not without its issues and no doubt resulting from necessity, interdenominational and intercultural dialogue with acceptance of diverse customs and views was actively engaged in within my family. A firm memory I have is, as an eight year old, debating with my Presbyterian grandmother the merits and disadvantages of Catholicism, to which I was affiliated. It was a heated debate, but occurred within a space where love and acceptance resided, no doubt followed by a cup of tea, a piece of cake and a piano lesson. I learnt that it was all right to have strong convictions about something as long as you accepted that others have an equal right to be passionate about aspects of their belief system, even if at times their viewpoints may be experienced as confronting or challenging.

While primarily influenced by my Christian, European ancestors, a number of Māori concepts and understandings have also been integrated into my family’s values and practices, contributing to my personal understanding of belonging. All

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<sup>4</sup> Ngaruawahia is a township in the Waikato region of the North Island and home to the Māori Kīngitanga or King Movement.

generations of my family have lived and participated in predominantly Māori communities since arriving in Aotearoa New Zealand. The confines of a thesis do not allow for the nuances of such participation to be explored. However, one of many examples of how family values, life and cultural experiences blended to shape my worldview and belief system, is, as a child I held a belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ, and with equal conviction acknowledged the Māori concept of tapu<sup>5</sup>. I do not have a memory of either concepts being specifically explained to me. Having said that, the ‘Christian code’ was injected into my family’s metaphoric DNA over a period of generations, in spite of the fact that my immediate family did not involve themselves in formal expressions of it – they didn’t ‘go to church’. Therefore the concept of Christ’s divinity was culturally situated within my family. As a Pākehā my understanding of tapu was not culturally located and only appreciated through a limited world-lens. Regardless, as a child both were imbued with their own significance, and as a child, I ‘knew’ it was inappropriate to ‘take God’s name in vain’, or to, for example, step onto land I was told was tapu, believing that if the tapu was violated something bad would definitely happen as a direct consequence of my actions. Both beliefs were embedded through active participation in the communities I lived in; involvement in cultural activities, and the implicit observation of others’, mainly adults, engagement in the day-to-day proceedings of life and their lived expressions of values.

Rogoff’s (1995) concept of *participatory appropriation* gives meaning to my differing culturally located spiritual perspectives, where explicit and implicit participation in real life activities and customs work to appropriate new knowledge and understandings, altering the way people engage in present and future activities or interactions. Rogoff (2003) suggests that understanding an individual’s cultural customs and values requires “a generational approach”, or looking back in order to understand the present, as this enables us to consider “the relation of individual cultural participation and changing cultural communities” (p. 77). Listening to stories about my descendants’ participation in family and community activities gives meaning to this claim. I see that it is from this place that I enter into new

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<sup>5</sup> Sacred, holy, prohibited, forbidden, set-apart

spaces and engage in new relationships. Looking back, as Rogoff suggests, offers an understanding of how customs and practices evolve and shape the values infused within them. The essence of who I am is contained, in part, within my family – past and present – as well as within my non-familial relationships, and myriad life experiences which have formed the values, attitudes and belief systems out of which I operate.

Further contributing to my sense of belonging and world view were my formal educational experiences in Ngaruawahia, from early childhood at the local kindergarten to participation at the local high school. Māori viewpoints were embedded throughout my secondary school education, with cultural studies viewed as an essential component of the curriculum. Cultural studies as a curriculum subject at Ngaruawahia High School in the 1970's was progressive and involved learning te reo Māori and the protocols and philosophical beliefs and values embedded within tikanga Māori, with regular visits to Tūrangawaewae Marae<sup>6</sup>. It is important for me not to romanticise my early experiences and view events, such as this, through rose tinted glasses. When cultural studies were introduced as a compulsory subject at Ngaruawahia High School it did not go unchallenged, with a reasonable percentage of Pākehā families believing it had 'no value' and 'no place' in their children's education.

It was not until I left the township of Ngaruawahia as an adult that I discovered the extent to which my worldview and ways of being, where European and Māori values and customs were both respected<sup>7</sup>, was not universally shared by other Pākehā. It was apparent that deficit views of Māori were far more commonplace than I realised, and, it seemed, by association I was on occasion viewed as 'lesser than' because I grew up and was educated in Ngaruawahia, or as some condescendingly called it, 'a Māori town'. As a young adult I felt affronted by the

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<sup>6</sup> Tūrangawaewae means 'a place to stand'. The marae (meeting ground) is significant as it the headquarters for the Māori King Movement (Te Kīngitanga).

<sup>7</sup> The level of respect attached was not in direct correlation to my level of understanding of Māori values and cultural practices, which was intrinsically limited.

lack of appreciation for the richness of Māori culture I had observed and experienced as a Pākehā, and found these viewpoints incredibly prejudiced.

A value embedded within my family was that of social justice, to always stand up for what is right, especially for those marginalised or more vulnerable than yourself, even if that meant losing your job or being ostracised by others; both of which have happened to members of my family on more than one occasion. My paternal grandfather was once the president of the freezing workers' union at AFFCO<sup>8</sup> in Horotiu – Ngaruawahia's biggest employer - and my paternal grandmother was for a number of years the deputy mayor of Ngaruawahia. I grew up witnessing them and other family members across the generations challenging all forms of exclusivity and prejudice. I naïvely held the assumption that to challenge injustice was the norm for most people. It was on leaving the town of Ngaruawahia, as mentioned above, that I realised this wasn't the case, and saw for the first time the influence that diverse life, cultural and relational experiences have in shaping individual cultural perspective, values, and understanding, for better or worse.

During my undergraduate early childhood teaching degree this awareness was expanded further, this time requiring me to examine the construction of my worldview within a colonial paradigm. I gained a new understanding that the way I viewed the world was significantly influenced by *being* Pākehā, by being a member of Aotearoa New Zealand's dominant cultural group, privileged in policy and law (Smith, 1998). As an ECE teaching undergraduate at Waikato University, *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996), the early childhood curriculum, was unpacked throughout my bachelor's degree as a bicultural document which expresses the aim that all children have the opportunity to understand and honour the “cultural heritages of both partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi<sup>9</sup>” (p.9). The differing understanding and subsequent expectations of the partnerships inherent in Te Tiriti o Waitangi were explored, initially in a compulsory two day workshop and then through the papers

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<sup>8</sup> Auckland Farmers Freezing Co-operative

<sup>9</sup> A treaty signed in 1840 between the British monarch (the Crown) and over 500 Māori chiefs. This resulted in Aotearoa New Zealand becoming a colony of Britain. However, the understandings and expectations of the treaty differed between Māori and Europeans.

of the degree, bringing a new awareness of the impact which colonisation had on Māori, and the ensuing injustices which Māori continue to face. I was confronted and challenged by the content of Te Tiriti o Waitangi workshop, which caused me to face my ‘ignorance’ regarding historical realities in Aotearoa New Zealand and reflect on why this was so, as well as accepting my responsibility to apply my newfound knowledge in thought and deed.

Prior to the workshop I had not considered the implications of Te Tiriti regarding Māori participation in Aotearoa New Zealand, in particular for rangatiratanga; self-determination as tangata whenua<sup>10</sup> (Glynn, 2015). I was shocked by my lack of critical mindfulness, genuinely believing that up to that point in time I was reasonably culturally sensitive and aware. King (1991) suggests that it is easy for members of a society’s dominant cultural group to see cultural difference, but difficult for them to identify the unique features within their own culture, which they view as the norm. I feel that this assertion may also extend to the dominant group’s inability to see cultural injustices, which they may have explicitly or tacitly perpetuated. For me, the notion of belonging to the dominant cultural group, whose culture implicitly constitutes what is accepted as the ‘norm’ for wider society (Brown, 2011) required deeper reflection. I had to review how the construction of my participation in society, and my understanding of belonging ‘in’ this society, was enabled by virtue of my cultural identity, as Pākehā.

### ***Professional background***

My undergraduate degree, and the Treaty workshop, became a catalyst for a paradigm shift forever changing the lens through which I viewed Te Tiriti o Waitangi and through which I would eventually engage with *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) as a democratic and bicultural curriculum. As a Pākehā I acknowledge the unique place of Māori as tangata whenua in Aotearoa New Zealand and, also as a Pākehā, I recognise that I can never fully understand what it means to be Māori. However, as a Pākehā, an ECE teacher and a researcher, I endeavour to actively honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi, seeking to be culturally responsible and responsive

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<sup>10</sup> Belonging to the land – indigenous.

through my attitudes, words and actions. In reality I came to appreciate that this aspiration requires continual reminder and commitment.

Prior to this thesis I had ten years teaching experience, in both community and for-profit ECE services. I have supervised over 40 beginning teachers in the Waikato and Auckland regions through the two year induction process of moving from provisional to full teacher registration<sup>11</sup>, which included the ongoing provision of professional development focusing on each criterion for registration. The majority were employed in for-profit ECE services, but six of these provisionally registered teachers resided within diverse philosophical settings; three Montessori teachers, two teaching within a Reggio inspired setting, and one teaching in a community based Christian centre. These experiences in particular were challenging yet rewarding as they required mentoring the teachers through a nationally regulated process while remaining true to their unique philosophical and pedagogical values. It also enabled me to appreciate *Te Whāriki's* flexible framework which celebrates diverse cultural communities and philosophical languages. The teacher registration experience was the subject of my unpublished Master's thesis, entitled, *Journey towards full registration: a study of beginning teachers' externally provided induction programmes in teacher-led ECE services* (Westerbeke, 2011).

I have also assessed the practice of numerous student teachers during practicum visits, in kindergarten, community-based and for-profit centres. All roles have contributed to my awareness that many ECE teachers still grapple with aspects of teaching which are connected to belonging. Concerns raised with me over the years ranged from obtaining the input of parents and whānau (family), to navigating team teaching where philosophical, pedagogical and personality differences are present (often initially concealed to the occasional observer), all issues impacting to varying degrees upon the children, parents and teachers' sense of belonging.

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<sup>11</sup> Teacher registration, now called Practicing certification, is “mandatory for teachers in primary schools, secondary schools, free kindergartens and in most positions in early childhood education services” (Education Council, 2015).

Team teaching is viewed as a factor of strength within ECE, yet it is also recognised as being more problematic and less collaborative than the sector would probably like to acknowledge (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hatherly, 1997). I noted that for many, collaboration within their teams was an area of concern identified by teachers. At times a distinct lack of educational or pedagogical leadership was also evident, primarily in for-profit settings, which, when present, further added to teacher disharmony and a diminishing sense of belonging. I have observed and heard stories of both exemplary and questionable practice in for-profit ECE settings, with both ends of the quality continuum connected to belonging. Above all else, a consistent concern I have heard and witnessed from teachers was their struggle in understanding and applying a culturally responsible and responsive bicultural curriculum. Often a contributing factor for many lay in the context of the setting, with culturally responsible pedagogy and practice recognised as being ineffectual throughout all aspects of the organisation. All of these experiences, both personal and professional, have led to the realisation that the notion of belonging is multifaceted and have contributed to generating an interest in exploring what it means to belong in Aotearoa New Zealand, as a citizen, and as a participant in ECE.

### ***The focus of this thesis***

The primary purpose of this thesis is to understand how belonging was constructed within a for-profit ECE centre, through the research discipline of ethnography. Qualitative research is not neutral, and, as Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013) suggest, to “have a perspective means that you take a position” (p. xix). While remaining open to possibilities this study would reveal, there were four key ontological ‘positions’ which I held from the beginning, which guided this thesis. They are:

1. At any given time children participate within the context of the relationships available to them.
2. Children are prepared for future participation in society by ‘participating’ now. As children participate, relational and societal values, meanings, rules and expectations are explicitly and implicitly conveyed (Rogoff, 2003).

3. What is valued by those in power (teachers, management/leaders) is explicitly and implicitly apparent within their relationships and decision making.
4. Viewing Aotearoa New Zealand as a multi-cultural society must occur through a bi-cultural, Tiriti lens.

Developing an awareness of what influences belonging in Aotearoa New Zealand through participation with others, within the cultural milieu of a for-profit early childhood environment, is the primary objective of this thesis. Encapsulating this and the above ontological assertions, the aims underpinning this research study are in relation to how belonging is constructed within the context of a for-profit ECE centre. They are:

- To explore the nature of the relationships between the teachers, parents and children within a for-profit ECE centre, and,
- To position children's participation in ECE as being influential to their identity and participation within society.

The above edicts and the aims have guided this study's first research question;

***1. What affordances and challenges to belonging are identified by stakeholders participating in a for-profit ECE centre?***

For the purpose of this thesis, children, parents, whānau (family) and teachers are all considered participating stakeholders. In a business model, which a for-profit ECE service pertains to, a stakeholder is defined as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of an organization's purpose" (Freeman, 2010, p. 54).

This research study's second question transpired in situ. As this qualitative study is context specific, the events and experiences occurring during the time of data generation had influence on the study's focus. Newby (2010) asserts that it is typical for problems to arise in qualitative research requiring the researcher to apply reflexivity and problem-solving. In the early stages of this study's data generation phase a significant change occurred at the centre which resulted in six months

without a permanent manager. The context of this event and the details surrounding it are discussed further in the methodology and methods sections of this thesis. This event required a shift in methodology and instigated a further aim of this thesis:

- to problematise the relationship between leadership in a for-profit ECE setting and stewardship of ethical practice.

Relating to the stakeholders' perspective of the leadership's decision-making during this period of change, and seeking to identify how this impacted the children, parents and teachers, a second question was introduced:

***2. How is the ethical stewardship of Te Whāriki reflected in the leadership's decision making?***

A limitation of this study is that no one in leadership, in particular the owners, were interviewed. Not including the owners was a decision made in the original design of the study, based on the understanding that they were not physically present in the centre on a regular basis, and therefore did not have ongoing relationships with the children and their families. There was no permanently employed manager until one month prior to the completion of data generation. Shortly after the conclusion of the study's data generation phase the owners sold the centre and this event combined with the challenging issues around the leadership made it both difficult and inappropriate to pursue their perspectives.

The focus of this study is particularly salient as the drive for increased participation in early childhood education increases participation in for-profit ECE services (Mitchell, 2012). This research topic has significance to early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand as it is an endeavour to engage in debate about what it means to belong in a for-profit ECE service, which is the current experience of the majority of children participating in education and care services, including Māori children. My argument is that we have an ethical commitment to critique and understand the context of for-profit ECE centres, so that we can appreciate 'what' we are encouraging children and their families to participate in.

To do so it is necessary to outline the term ‘belonging’, central to this research study. Sumsion and Wong (2011) caution about oversimplifying the notion of belonging, therefore, it will be explored further in chapter three. I begin here by introducing the concept of belonging with my initial understandings. As noted earlier the interconnected view of learning and development is evident within each strand of *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996), including that of belonging. The goals and learning outcomes within the strand of belonging identify three broad themes; understanding and valuing all that is significant to children and their families is viewed as important, empowered and democratic participation is acknowledged as a right for all, and the building of strong and reciprocal connections within the setting and beyond are recognised as vital in shaping identity and a strong ‘sense of belonging’. The concept of belonging used within this thesis is grounded in *Te Whāriki* and I believe, similar to the whāriki metaphor, belonging can also be viewed as the threads of a complexly woven mat, encapsulating the complexity of the individual child, their family; their cultural identity, values and beliefs, status, experiences and potential.

I believe that belonging can be viewed primarily as an individual notion, but the very nature of belonging is contained within a collective framework, evoking a response and sense of responsibility from members of the collective. Therefore, to belong suggests that one has obtained membership in the community one is participating in, and empowered membership requires issues of power to be considered (Rogoff, 2003). For example, on the surface I can appear to belong, simply because I have met some form of external criteria, such as I am afforded membership due to family or religious affiliation, an employment contract, or involvement in a sporting club. From a parent’s perspective, I may feel I have acquired membership to a learning community because my child is enrolled in an ECE centre. However, for children and their families in ECE settings belonging is not only about participation, in relation to access, but also about ‘how’ I am participating, and how I am ‘enabled’ to participate. The notion of belonging as being, not only fluid as Rogoff (2003) suggests, but for some fragile, for me is powerful and also requires reflection. It necessitates looking closely at individual participation within the collective, and identifying how belonging is being

constructed within the for-profit milieu, uncovering the identified supports and challenges to this deceptively unassuming phenomenon.

### ***The significance of this thesis***

I believe that in order for consistent and ethical education and care to be realised for all children participating in ECE services throughout Aotearoa New Zealand, it is necessary to explore what it means to belong in a for-profit ECE service, where the majority of children are in attendance. According to the 2014 Annual ECE Census Report, of the 4,448 ECE services in operation throughout Aotearoa New Zealand during that year 1,996 were privately owned for-profit education and care services. While accounting for 45% of the total ECE services licensed and operating, privately owned education and care centres accounted for 63.4% (126,804) of the children aged five years and under enrolled/attending ECE in 2014 (Education Counts, 2016). It is within the early childhood setting that participants' words, actions, values and attitudes contribute to an evolving culture which, as King (1991) posited, can be inclusive or exclusive, contributing to a child and their whānau's sense of belonging, and their identity.

During my years of teaching in and observing for-profit ECE centres, I became increasingly convinced that at a managerial level belonging is also about *roles* and *goals*. This begs the question, *who* has the role of overseeing the ethical and trustworthy interpretation and application of *Te Whāriki*, and, are the *outcomes* driving the setting's decision-making processes financial or are they curriculum focused? Both relate to this study's sub-question and hold ethical considerations for the stakeholders (Freeman, 2010), in particular those concerning responsible cultural understandings of children's learning and development and overall high quality ECE (Education Review Office, 2015; Mitchell, Wylie & Carr, 2008; MoE, 2013).

The theoretical framework supporting this thesis is sociocultural and acknowledges the study's positioning of the participants within their social and cultural contexts, proposing they cannot be viewed in isolation from these considerations (Rogoff, 1990; 1995). *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) recognises the importance of sociocultural

theory when considering children's learning and development, positing a child cannot be viewed separate from their family, cultural, or situational contexts, with all seen as being actively influential. Positioning a child within a framework which acknowledges that culture is transmitted and transformed through participation potentially highlights the values and practices of those who are members of the dominant culture within the ECE setting, and potentially reveals the effects of the power distributed throughout the setting.

### ***Structure of this thesis***

Chapter Two locates belonging within the policy context of ECE services in Aotearoa New Zealand. This chapter provides context and reviews the literature relating to Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi), *Te Whāriki*, the organisation and provision of ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand, the regulations, funding, teacher registration requirements, evaluation of ECE services, and participation and access to ECE.

Chapter Three explores the term belonging within literature and reviews literature relating to 'a sense of belonging' and 'the politics of belonging'.

Chapter Four locates belonging within the relevant literature supporting this thesis' theoretical framework; social constructionism and sociocultural theory. The work of Vygotsky (1978) and Bronfenbrenner (1979) in relation to children's learning and development is first explored. The chapter concludes with an examination of Barbara Rogoff's (2003) sociocultural historical theory and the role of participation in understanding human development and cultural communities.

Chapter Five outlines the methodology utilised and justifies the use of a critical ethnographic approach within an interpretive paradigm.

Chapter Six presents a rationale for the methods deemed appropriate to the participants within this study, in particular very young children. A structure for the research is provided which includes the study's ethical considerations.

Chapter Seven presents the first of three findings chapters applying Rogoff's (2003) three planes of analysis. The findings in this chapter focus on the case study parents' three dominant intrapersonal values; family, culture, and social responsibility.

Chapter Eight outlines the findings filtered through Rogoff's (2003) interpersonal lens. The findings focus on the four case study children and present the influences of their relationships with people, places and things.

Chapter Nine presents the findings pertinent to Rogoff's (2003) institutional lens, focusing on the influence of leadership to belonging.

Chapter Ten discusses the findings in relation to the relevant literature. A *belonging framework* is presented.

Chapter Eleven identifies the limitation of the study and presents the implications of the research and provides suggestions for further research.

## CHAPTER TWO

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### **ECE policy context**

Belonging is beginning to be recognised as playing an important role in early childhood education curricula, especially in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia where belonging is centralised within the respective national curriculum documents (Stratigos, Bradley & Sumsion, 2014). This chapter locates the construction of belonging in a for-profit ECE centre within the policy obligations and organisation of licensed ECE services in Aotearoa New Zealand. The policy and regulatory requirements are viewed within the context of *Te Whāriki*; Aotearoa New Zealand's first bicultural curriculum, which will also be addressed. *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) is anchored in Te Tiriti o Waitangi<sup>12</sup> and, therefore, any discussion relating to the curriculum document, or belonging in Aotearoa New Zealand, must first be orientated to the obligations of Te Tiriti.

#### ***Te Tiriti o Waitangi***

The most significant event that occurred between peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand was the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February, 1840 (Consedine & Consedine, 2005; Orange, 1985; Walker, 1990). Te Tiriti o Waitangi is the written agreement between the British Crown and Māori and signed by the majority of Māori rangatira (chiefs), around 540, leading to Aotearoa New Zealand becoming a colony of Britain (Orange, 1987). The document consists of three articles and was written in both English and te reo<sup>13</sup> Māori, which was translated by Crown representatives as an interpretation of the English version. However, the texts do not match and there are significant differences between the two.

Two versions of Te Tiriti have resulted in discussion of the document, for both Māori and Pākehā, being fraught with contestation (Consedine & Consedine, 2005; Walker, 1990). However, the Waitangi Tribunal has said that when interpreting Te

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<sup>12</sup> The Treaty of Waitangi

<sup>13</sup> Māori language

Tiriti o Waitangi the principle of *contra proferentem* applies, an international convention of law, indicating that “in cases of ambiguity, a treaty is to be interpreted against the party drafting it” (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2016, p. 19). In the case of the Tiriti o Waitangi the *contra proferentem* principle means that when concerns of misinterpretation is present between the two accounts, the Māori version takes precedence (Kingi, 2005). Therefore, the following needs to be read with this in mind. In the English version, Article 1 states that Māori cede sovereignty to the Crown. Article 2 guarantees Māori exclusive rights over their land, forestries, fisheries and other properties, for as long as they wanted to retain possession. Article 2 also states that the Crown be given exclusive rights to buy land from Māori, at a price negotiated between a Crown representative and Māori. Article 3 guarantees Māori protection, “rights and privileges” as British subjects (Ministry of Justice, 2016).

In the English version Māori cedes sovereignty to the Crown (Article 1), however, sovereignty was not a concept known to Māori who practised decentralised leadership, and the term sovereignty was therefore translated as *kāwanatanga*<sup>14</sup>, generally meaning governance. In the English text the Crown claims sovereignty and in the Māori text, Māori retain autonomy and control (Consedine & Consedine, 2005; Walker, 1990). It is suggested that Māori believed that they would be allowing the Crown to govern Aotearoa New Zealand in exchange for protection, while maintaining the authority to manage their own concerns without interference (Walker, 1990). In the Māori version of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Article 2 states that *tino rangatiratanga* is guaranteed, meaning Māori are ensured absolute authority, as well as the undisturbed possession of properties and *taonga* (treasures) including intangible *taonga* (Ministry of Justice, 2016).

Introduced at the last minute request of the Roman Catholic Bishop, Jean Baptiste Pompallier (Orange, 1987), a fourth article, not included in the written text, is

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<sup>14</sup> *Kāwanatanga* is a word invented by the Missionaries to make sense of biblical concepts, but for Māori this word had a significantly lesser meaning than ‘sovereignty’ (Crocket, 2013). Considered closer in meaning, if ‘mana’ (authority, prestige, control) was used, as in the 1835 Declaration of Independence, instead of *kāwanatanga*, it is suggested that Māori would never have signed Te Tiriti, as they would never knowingly give up their *mana* (Walker, 1990).

considered part of the Tiriti signed at Waitangi. In Māori the fourth article said: "E mea ana te Kawana ko nga whakapono katoa o Ingarani, o nga Weteriana, o Roma, me te ritenga Maori hoki e tiakina ngatahitia e ia" (New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference, 2010), which means "The Governor says the several faiths [beliefs - wairuatanga] of England, of the Wesleyans, of Rome and also the Maori custom, shall alike be protected by him" (Orange, 1987, p. 53). This article guaranteed religious freedom for all, including Maori.

Māori depended on Pākehā (the Crown representatives and Missionaries) to translate and accurately represent the meaning of Te Tiriti, and while it is not possible to ascertain the full intention of those charged with explaining the implications of Te Tiriti, the fact that the Missionaries had a vested interest in getting Te Tiriti signed (land holding interests) and wanted it quickly signed, was viewed as contributing to the evident discrepancies between texts (Crocket, 2013; Orange, 1987; Walker, 1990). Further, not all Māori rangatira (chiefs) saw Te Tiriti or signed it, but all Māori were finally bound by the settler government to live under its constructs, a government which privileged in policy and deed the intent of the Crown's account of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, in particular the notion of sovereignty to the reigning British monarchy.

In later years intense debate ensued regarding the meaning and application of kāwanatanga and tino rangatiratanga by both parties to Te Tiriti. Eventual recognition by the Crown regarding the dispossession and discrimination experienced by Māori since the signing of Te Tiriti resulted in a permanent commission of inquiry being established in 1975, the Waitangi Tribunal, working through historical and contemporary concerns in direct relationship to the partnership and principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (New Zealand Government, 1975). Thus a period of restitution was entered into (Durie, 1998). The Ministry of Justice (2016) states that the vision of the Waitangi Tribunal is that:

having reconciled ourselves with the past and possessing a full understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi, Māori and non-Māori New Zealanders will be equipped to create a future for two peoples as one nation (p. 1).

A significant outcome of the Waitangi Tribunal, in relation to Article 2 “ratou taonga katoa” (Orange, 1987, p. 257) was the Crown’s recognition of “te reo Māori as a taonga ... [establishing] te reo Māori as an official language of New Zealand” (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2015, p. 60). The knowledge of te reo Māori as a taonga and birthright in dire need of protection saw the formation of Te Kōhanga Reo<sup>15</sup> in the early 1980s, a whānau<sup>16</sup> ECE initiative to revitalise the Māori language and traditional practices, founded on the belief that only Māori can fully understand and meet the needs of Māori (Ray, 2009; Waitangi Tribunal, 2012).

To bring Te Tiriti o Waitangi into a contemporary context and as a means to further understand the intention of Te Tiriti, the 1988 Royal Commission on Social Policy (Department of Social Welfare, 1988) suggested that three broad principles be considered to summarise those within Te Tiriti; partnership (relating to power sharing within the decision making process), protection (acknowledging and valuing Māori knowledge and practices), and participation (referring not only to legal equality, but equality of access). These three principles are commonly used in health and education policy. Significant to this thesis, in article 4.1.1 of the Te Kōhanga Reo claim against the Crown for actions and omissions breaching the principles of Te Tiriti, the Waitangi Tribunal (2012) found that the,

participation rate of Māori children in ECE has increased markedly since 2002. However, the growth in Māori enrolments in ECE does not reflect what the experts would like to see for the transmission of te reo. Rather, the real growth in enrolments in ECE has favoured education and care services with a limited amount of te reo Māori content in their programmes (p. 98).

Historically, the education system in general has been viewed as failing Māori children and in breach of Te Tiriti, with the Tribunal highlighting a lack of protection for te reo Māori and the unacceptable percentage of Māori children not achieving at the level they should (Waitangi Tribunal, 1986). The Tribunal determined that Māori children were not being taught effectively within the

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<sup>15</sup> Usually translated as ‘the language nest’.

<sup>16</sup> extended family, family group.

education system as it stood, and that fact on its own was in breach of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Article 3). Glynn (1998) has also acknowledged that participating in “mainstream education” in Aotearoa New Zealand “has come for Māori at a cost of their own language, culture and identity” (p. 4). The 2012 Te Kōhanga Reo claim suggests that almost 30 years later this fact remains a concern.

In 1840 the Tiriti was presented by Governor Hobson to Māori as “an offer of Crown protection” (Orange, 1984, p. 45) from the growing concerns arising from Pākehā settlement. The offering of the Tiriti by Hobson indicated that through his kawatanga (governorship) a respectful relationship between the Crown and Māori would be entered into. Therefore, the Tiriti is a physical symbol of this intentional and respectful, relational connection between the two treaty parties.

To understand what it means to belong in a for-profit ECE centre in Aotearoa New Zealand, for both partners of Te Tiriti, requires foregrounding policies and practices which ensure the obligations founded within Te Tiriti o Waitangi are honoured. These include working collaboratively in partnership with Māori families building respectful relationships, in the spirit of Te Tiriti, and valuing and incorporating into policy and practice taonga such as te reo and tikanga Māori, and acknowledging the unique place Māori have as tangata whenua (Ritchie, 2013a). The following section positions *Te Whāriki* as a curriculum document reflecting the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and outlines the current policies governing all licensed ECE services in Aotearoa New Zealand.

### ***Te Whāriki***

Published in 1996, *Te Whāriki; He Whāriki Matauranga mo ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa* (MoE, 1996) is internationally regarded as a ground-breaking curriculum document, offering a conceptual framework where, from infancy to primary school age, children’s learning and development can be explored with manifold possibilities (Fleer, 2006; Lee, Carr, Soutar, & Mitchell, 2013; Taguma, Litjens, & Makowiecki, 2012). Child-centred and play focused (Carr & May, 1999), rather than following the path of a prescribed curriculum with narrow learning outcomes, as evident in its educational counterparts of the time, *Te Whāriki* established a learning framework where dispositional learning was emphasised as the desired

outcomes of, and for, learning (Carr, 1997; Carr, 1999). *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) arose positioning itself innovatively as a biculturally focused democratic curriculum, a response “in text and structure” (p. 11) to the obligations of Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership, and written collaboratively and inclusively with Māori (MoE, 1996; Mutch, 2003; Nuttall, 2013; Te One, 2013). Bringing together Western and Māori epistemologies what developed was “a treaty-based model of bicultural partnership” (Ritchie, 2003, p. 86). Tilly Reedy (2013), a Māori lead writer of *Te Whāriki*, celebrates the bicultural document as an appropriate framework for Māori, validating cultural values and belief systems.

The *Te Whāriki* child is represented in the curriculum as a child with rights and agency, aligned with the spirit of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Mitchell & Davison, 2010). A strength-based document, foregrounding children’s interests and funds of knowledge, infants, toddlers and young children are positioned within the curriculum as valued and full of potential (Carr, Hatherly, Lee & Ramsey, 2003). This is apparent in *Te Whāriki*’s statement declaring its aspiration for children:

to grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators,  
healthy in mind, body, spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and  
in the knowledge they make a valued contribution to society (MoE,  
1996, p. 9).

The above objective is evident in *Te Whāriki*’s framework, incorporating four guiding principles and five broad strands. The principles are:

- **“Empowerment** - The early childhood curriculum empowers the child to learn and grow;
- **Holistic Development** - The early childhood curriculum reflects the holistic way children learn and grow;
- **Family and Community** - The wider world of family and community is an integral part of the early childhood curriculum; and,
- **Relationships** - Children learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places, and things” (MoE, 1996, p.14).

Arising from, and woven through the four principles, the five strands create the curriculum's conceptual framework, providing space for spontaneous and planned "experiences ... activities and interactions" (MoE, 1996, p. 11). The flexible nature of *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) allows curriculum to be shaped to the unique characteristics of each learning context, reflecting and responding to the needs of the children, families and community they reside within (Carr & Lee, 2012). Interconnected with the principals of 'family and community' and 'relationships', and expressed within the strands of 'wellbeing' and 'belonging', *Te Whāriki* is clear about the child's identity as one which resides within a supportive network of meaningful relationships.

The curriculum's five strands and their accompanying learning goals, incorporating the learning outcomes of "knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (MoE, 1996, p. 44), are as follows:

#### **“Strand 1: Well-being - Mana Atua**

The health and well-being of the child are protected and nurtured.

**Goals:** Children experience an environment where:

- their health is promoted;
- their emotional well-being is nurtured; and,
- they are kept safe from harm.

#### **Strand 2: Belonging – Mana Whenua**

Children and their families feel a sense of belonging.

**Goals:** Children and their families experience an environment where:

- connecting links with the family and the wider world are affirmed and extended;
- they know that they have a place;
- they feel comfortable with the routines, customs, and regular events; and,
- they know the limits and boundaries of acceptable behaviour.

#### **Strand 3: Contribution – Mana Tangata**

Opportunities for learning are equitable, and each child's contribution is valued.

**Goals:** Children experience an environment where:

- there are equitable opportunities for learning, irrespective of gender; ability, age, ethnicity, or background;
- they are affirmed as individuals; and,
- they are encouraged to learn with and alongside others.

#### **Strand 4: Communication – Mana Reo**

The languages and symbols of their own and other cultures are promoted and protected.

**Goals:** Children experience an environment where:

- they develop non-verbal communication skills for a range of purposes;
- they develop verbal communication skills for a range of purposes;
- they experience the stories and symbols of their own and other cultures; and,
- they discover and develop different ways to be creative and expressive.

#### **Strand 5: Exploration – Mana Aotūroa**

The child learns through active exploration of the environment.

**Goals:** Children experience an environment where:

- their play is valued as meaningful learning and the importance of spontaneous play is recognised;
- they gain confidence in and control of their bodies;
- they learn strategies for active exploration, thinking, and reasoning; and
- they develop working theories for making sense of the natural, social, physical, and material worlds” (MoE, pp. 15-16).

The curriculum framework is intentionally inclusive, flexible and treaty-based. Recognising that there is “considerable variation between individual children as well as different cultural perspectives about appropriate age arrangements” (MoE, 1996, p. 20), *Te Whāriki* offers a curriculum framework suitable for infants, toddlers and young children. The inclusion of a separate Māori section (Part B), outlining a philosophical and pedagogical framework specific to te ao Māori via the medium of te reo, was developed as an intentional immersion curriculum, and

attests to the elevated status of Māori pedagogy within *Te Whāriki* (Te One, 2003). The curriculum's inclusivity and diversity is also evident in the concept of the whāriki, the woven mat, symbolising the inclusion of diverse expressions of “programmes, philosophies, structures, and environments” (MoE, 1996, p. 11).

While the curriculum provides a framework which has breadth and depth the non-prescriptive nature of it can be challenging for some. Nuttall (2013) highlights the abstract nature of these core concepts and suggests that it is actually within the enacted curriculum, which is “left up to the teachers to determine, rather than being explicitly suggested within the curriculum” (p. 181), where teachers' pedagogical strategies are to be found. Critique of *Te Whāriki* since its inception has included concern that it can easily be used in a limited way, creating a gap between the curriculum's ideals and actual practice (Cullen, 1996; Smith, 2011). This is significant as the theory underpinning the curriculum is acknowledged as being complex, and grasping it is important if the full intent of the document is to be realised within the enacted curriculum (Carr & Mitchell, 2010; Cullen, 2003; Hedges, 2013).

The following section focuses on how ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand is currently organised and provided, with the distinction being made between for-profit and not-for-profit services.

### ***Organisation and provision of ECE***

Early childhood education and care is a voluntary educational sector in Aotearoa New Zealand and provides for children from birth to primary school age (traditionally 5 years). Early childhood education services can operate all-day, sessional or flexible hours and are organised under two types; teacher-led, and parent/whānau-led (MoE, August, 2015). All services are licensed or certificated, meaning that they meet the minimum government standards appropriate for their service type, for areas such as, staffing, education and care programmes, health and safety, as well as property and management (MoE, 2015).

In teacher-led ECE services at least 50% of the teachers must be qualified and registered (MoE, May 2015). These types of services include kindergartens, education and care services, home-based education and care services, and Te Kura

(the Correspondence School). Parent/whānau-led ECE services have parents, caregivers, family and whānau significantly involved in their children’s education and care. Whānau-led services are specifically te Kōhanga Reo where children are immersed in te reo Māori and tikanga<sup>17</sup> Māori. Parent/whānau-led services are run co-operatively by parents and family and include playcentres (regionally managed and centrally administered under the New Zealand Playcentre Federation), community-based playgroups (certificated rather than licensed and operating no more than 4 hours per day), ngā puna kōhungahunga (playgroups encouraging te reo and tikanga Māori), and Pasifika playgroups (Samoan, Tongan, Cook Island, Niuean, Tokelauan, Tuvaluan and Fijian) (MoE, August 2015).

A further distinction between ECE services in Aotearoa New Zealand are those holding for-profit or not-for-profit status. This difference refers to the business model and philosophies services operate under (MoE, August 2015). Education and care services can be either for-profit (private) or not-for-profit (community-focused<sup>18</sup>), but are predominantly for-profit; privately owned and operated by individuals, or corporations with shareholders, operating full-days or flexible hours. This thesis is focusing on belonging to a privately-owned teacher-led, for-profit ECE centre, which along with other ECE services is bound by licensing and operating regulations which will now be explained.

### ***Regulations***

All ECE services must meet regulatory requirements in order to be licensed and receive funding. This is a legal framework and falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and is administered under the *Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008* Act (New Zealand Government, 2009), and the *Licensing Criteria for Early Childhood Education and Care Services 2008* (MoE, May 2015). Both pieces of legislation work in tandem with each other. The ECE Regulations outline the minimum standards set and managed by the Department of

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<sup>17</sup> The correct way, procedure, custom or protocol.

<sup>18</sup> May and Mitchell (2009) suggest that one of the tenets of a community-based service is that “the full funding from public resources goes into educating the child and supporting their family” (p. 2).

Education (New Zealand Government, 2009). These include licensing criteria requirements for curriculum, premises and facilities, health and safety, government, management and administration, qualification requirements, and adult-to-child ratios. For example, in teacher-led ECE services a legislative requirement is that fifty percent of the required teachers, and the person responsible<sup>19</sup> in the centre, must hold a relevant teaching qualification. A teacher in their final year of training and the person responsible can also be included in the calculation meeting this requirement (New Zealand Government, 2009).

The principles and strands of *Te Whāriki*, as outlined above, form the curriculum framework each licensed ECE service and certificated playgroup must implement within their programmes and policies (The New Zealand Government, 2009). In order to be licensed ECE services must show that they are implementing curriculum standards, with the criteria for assessment categorised under; professional practice, culture and identity, and children as learners (MoE, May 2015, p. 9). For example, professional practice C2, states that the “service curriculum is informed by assessment, planning, and evaluation (documented and undocumented) that demonstrates an understanding of children’s learning, their interests, whānau, and life contexts” (MoE, May 2015, p. 9). Narrative assessment, using the formative *Learning Stories* format (Carr, 2001), is the primary form of assessment for, and of, learning in ECE services. Every licensed ECE service in Aotearoa New Zealand is required to meet these criteria.

For teacher-led, all-day ECE services, adult-to-child ratios are currently 1:5 for children under two years of age, and 1:10 for children two years of age and over (regulated (ratio) staff hours). However, these are minimum adult-to-child ratios and the Education Review Office [ERO] (2015) identifies, for example, optimal ratios of 1:3 as quality indicators they would be looking for when reviewing ECE for infants and toddlers. Adult-to-child ratios of 1:8 for children two years and over

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<sup>19</sup> The ECE regulations state that “**person responsible** means,(a) in relation to a licensed centre, 1 or more persons nominated for the purpose by the service provider; being persons who are directly involved in, and primarily responsible for, the day-to-day education and care, comfort, and health and safety of the children” (New Zealand Government, 2009, p. 4).

are considered to indicate quality practice and interactions (Mitchell, Wylie & Carr, 2008).

Keeping in mind criterion C2 in the professional practice section of the licensing criteria (assessment, planning and evaluation) making the distinction between all-day and sessional services is an important one to consider. The regulations indicate the minimum adult-to-child ratios are maintained for both service types at all times. In all-day services children are present on the premises from the beginning of the licensed operating hours until closing, which can be up to 12 hours per day. For some services this means teacher non-contact time for assessment, planning and evaluation, as outlined in C2 of the licensing criteria, requires the employment of additional staff to ensure the regulated ratios are maintained. For others, as it was in this study's centre, non-contact time for assessment and planning can be covered by non-teaching members of staff, such as the centre manager, or the office administrator.

The actual amount of non-contact time is not regulated but is allocated to each teacher as determined appropriate by individual organisations, and varies greatly between each. By contrast, in sessional services, such as the traditional kindergarten model, there are periods of the day where teachers have set 'non-contact' time, meaning there are no children under their care on the premises, enabling teachers to work on the required administration tasks such as the assessment, planning and evaluation requirements with some form of regularity and consistency. This distinction is significant for this study as there is an established connection between effective assessment and planning and the provision of quality ECE (Carr & Mitchell, 2010; Mitchell, Wylie & Carr, 2008; Smith, 2013a, 2013b).

The following section will address how the various service types (teacher-led, parent/whānau-led, all-day or sessional) determine the government funding administered to ECE services, with a focus on all-day, teacher-led ECE centres.

### ***Funding***

There are currently four types of funding available for licensed ECE services; ECE Funding Subsidy, 20 Hours ECE, Equity Funding (for targeted communities –

available to all services meeting the criteria), and the Annual Top-Up for Isolated Services (MoE, April 2014).

The primary form of government funding is the ECE Funding Subsidy. The government subsidises each child's place within a licensed ECE service, for up to six hours per day, to a maximum of thirty hours per week. These are referred to as Funded Child Hours. Funding varies based on the service type (kindergarten, education and care, hospital-based, home-based), whether it is operating all-day or sessional hours, the age of the children, the ratio of regulated (teacher/child ratios) staff to registered teachers and whether the service has opted into the 20 Hours ECE scheme (MoE, April 2014). For example, currently if a full-day teacher-led ECE centre employs 80% (maximum funding<sup>20</sup>) of its regulated teachers who are qualified and registered they will receive \$12.12 per hour, per child (up to 6 hours per day/ 30 hours per week) for their children under two years of age, \$6.70 per hour for each child two years and over, and \$11.43 per hour (up to 6 hours per day/ 20 hours per week) for each of their three and four year olds who are in the 20 Hours ECE scheme. The kindergarten rate is currently marginally higher at \$12.48, \$6.95 and \$11.77 per hour, respectively (MoE, April, 2014).

The 20 Hours ECE is a scheme introduced to increase participation in ECE for three to five year olds, by reducing barriers such as cost. The scheme provides a higher rate of funding for this age group, with ECE services receiving extra funding up to six hours per day and to a maximum of twenty hours per week, per child. Early childhood education services can opt into the scheme if they so choose, which the majority do, and can apply an 'optional charge' over and above the funded 20 hours, if they can demonstrate they are providing additional services at a cost to them (MoE, 2016a). The good news is that the introduction of 20 Hours ECE in 2007 has increased participation and affordability for families (Education Counts, 2016a, 2016b). However, this is not the reality for all families who participate in centres which have opted into the scheme. Anecdotally, some for-profit ECE centres have

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<sup>20</sup> The four funding bands are 0-24% registered teachers, 25-49% registered teachers, 50-79% registered teachers, and 80-100% registered teachers. For example, at an all-day, teacher-led, centre-based service the monetary variance between each funding band would be, respectively, \$7.57, \$8.86, \$10.97 and \$12.12 per hour (for children under two years of age).

found a loop-hole and attach enrolment conditions, such as making families enrol their child for ‘full-days’, meaning that parents have to pay for additional hours, regardless of whether they attend, over the maximum 6 hours a day funded within the *20 Hours ECE* scheme (Powley, 2013). However, the Ministry’s website continues to state “Under 20 Hours ECE, the government fully funds ECE for up to 6 hours a day and 20 hours per week for eligible children”, (MoE, 2016a, p. 1) suggesting this option in its own right is available for all children opting into the scheme, which it is not (Powley, 2013).

Teacher registration is directly connected to funding, which is based on the number of registered teacher hours per regulated ratio hours. The teacher registration requirements for licensed ECE services will now be outlined.

### ***Teacher Registration***

In teacher-led ECE services the licensing requirement is that the person in charge is qualified and registered and a minimum of 50% of the required staff are qualified. A teacher in their final year of training can be counted in the 50% licensing requirement, as mentioned earlier, but not for funding purposes. For funding all qualified teachers must be registered, either provisionally or fully, in order to be counted. Teacher registration, or certification, begins once a teacher has successfully completed a recognised teaching qualification. The process of registration recognises that teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand is a profession requiring minimum quality standards be met, a code of ethics is adhered to, and recognises that teaching is complex requiring ongoing commitment, reflection and refinement (Education Council, 2016a).

Once qualified, teachers enter into a two year induction period where their teaching is mentored and monitored throughout by a fully registered experienced teacher. This is a time where learning is consolidated and theory is applied, as Feiman-Nemser (2001) asserts;

New teachers have two jobs – they have to teach and they have to learn to teach. No matter how good a preservice programme may be, there are some things that can only be learned on the job (p. 1026).

Quality induction programmes are recognised as important for the profession of teaching (Aitken, Bruce Ferguson, McGrath, Piggot-Irvine, & Ritchie, 2008; Cameron, 2007; Education Council, 2016a; New Zealand Teachers Council, 2014). An induction programme requires evidence to be gathered identifying that the provisionally registered teacher's practice meets the standards of the *Practising Teacher Criteria* (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2014) which are grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Education Council, 2016a). The *Practising Teacher Criteria* apply to all registered teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand, across all sectors, including ECE centre owners and managers who hold a full practicing certificate. The twelve criterion, relating to professional relationships, professional values, and, professional knowledge in practice, acknowledges the critical role teachers have in regards to learner achievement and are designed to identify what is required for quality teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand (Education Counts, 2016a).

Providing a quality registration induction programme can be challenging, especially within teacher-led settings which have been identified as less likely to have the necessary extensive framework of support for the beginning teacher, or mentors who are confident and competent in designing and implementing a comprehensive programme (Cameron, 2007; Feiman Nemser, 2001). The mentor teacher's role is key as they must endorse the provisionally certificated teacher's documented evidence that they have met each criterion, together with an appraisal of the two year induction and mentoring programme (Education Council, 2016a). Ensuring consistency within the teaching profession the registration practicing certificate is renewed every three years with the registered teacher's educational leader endorsing that the *Practising Teacher Criteria* continues to be reflected in the teacher's practice and pedagogy. Ensuring all regulatory requirements are met, and providing a measure for quality and care in ECE services, the following section will outline the mandatory review of all licensed ECE services by the Education Review Office [ERO].

### ***Evaluation of quality***

The only accountability obligations for-profit ECE services have is through the independent monitoring system of the Education Review Office, an outcome of all services receiving state funding. ERO reviews are flexible, and responsive to the

diversity in “contextual and cultural dimensions that shape each service” (ERO, June 2013, p. 5), such as those which are cultural (Kōhanga reo), structural (sessional or full day services), organisational (kindergarten or education and care), environmental (home-based or centre based providers), philosophical (Montessori, Rudolph Steiner, Reggio inspired). Focusing on quality care and education ERO also reviews ECE settings ensuring regulated standards, informed by the *Licensing Criteria for Early Childhood Education and Care Centres 2008*, and the *Early Childhood Education Curriculum Framework*, are met (MoE, May 2015), qualified teachers are employed and a bicultural curriculum is implemented. The ‘Regulatory framework for ECE’ is comprehensive, and includes detailed codes of practice pertaining to curriculum; premises and facilities; health and safety; as well as governance, management and administration, (MoE, May 2015). Nonetheless, while regulatory compliance remains a key aspect of ERO reviews, more recently there has been a shift away from the reviews prioritising them in favour of focusing on quality practice, which is reflected in ERO’s more recent published national reports, such as *Infants and toddlers: competent and confident communicators and explorers* (ERO, June 2015).

The standard three-yearly review process includes an on-site component where the review team observes practice, reads documentation, and talks to appropriate personnel, such as teachers, parents, managers and centre owners (ERO, June 2013). This typically takes place over one to two days, and not all teachers, or parents, are included in the review process. Anecdotally, and from my own experience, ERO reviews do not provide a full account of the day-to-day experiences in for-profit ECE settings, with centres ‘playing the game’, employing extra relievers during on-site reviews, additional resources bought or borrowed, and ‘troublesome teachers’ not included in the review process. Once everything has been considered ERO will determine how the ECE service is placed in relation to its review criteria. ERO states; “The timing of the next ERO review will depend on how well placed the service is to promote positive learning outcomes for children. There are four options:

- **Very well placed** – the next ERO review in four years. ERO will next review the service in four years when it finds that the service is consistently effective in promoting children’s wellbeing and

learning. High quality performance in relation to ERO's evaluation indicators for Ngā Pou Here will be evident.

- **Well placed** – the next ERO review in three years. ERO will next review the service in three years when it finds that the service is effective in promoting children's wellbeing and largely effective in promoting children's learning. Good performance in relation to Ngā Pou Here will be evident.
- **Requires further development** – the next ERO review within two years. This option is used when many of the factors that contribute to positive learning outcomes for children are not evident or require significant development. ERO will have some confidence that the service can improve with support.
- **The next ERO review in consultation with the Ministry of Education.** This option will be used when a service is not performing adequately, is not meeting legal requirements and does not have the capacity to make improvements without support or Ministry intervention. The service will be expected to address concerns and prevent a continuation of poor performance. There will be licensing consequences for continued poor performance. ERO will not review the service again until the Ministry of Education is satisfied that the service meets licensing requirements". (ERO, June 2013, p. 47).

The Education Review Office encourages ECE centres to share the report with its families, although this is not an obligation, therefore, the findings may not be disseminated with the guardians of the actual stakeholders the review is intended for – the children. While the review documentation is available for public scrutiny on ERO's website it is difficult for the outside observer to obtain a full insight into the quality of an ECE service based solely on the review report, as the wording and message is tempered, and the categories referred to, such as governance, are broad. ECE services which ERO has deemed 'requiring further development', for example, continue to operate, often without parents fully understanding the significance of the reviews, even though "many of the factors that contribute to positive learning outcomes for children are not evident or require significant development" (ERO, June 2013, p. 47). This raises the question regarding ethical participation in ECE.

Foregrounding Te Tiriti o Waitangi in the enacted curriculum is a further requirement ERO expects of all ECE services:

Te Tiriti o Waitangi is a foundation document of Aotearoa New Zealand and guides education with regards to participation, power and partnership for Māori, as tangata whenua, and non-Māori as signatories to the Treaty. The Treaty provides a driving force for the revitalisation of Maori language and culture.

Early childhood services are required to provide a curriculum that acknowledges and reflects the unique place of Māori as tangata whenua. The curriculum must also help children to develop their knowledge and understanding of the cultural heritages of both parties to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

The principle of partnership in the Treaty needs to be reflected in the practices of the early childhood service. Working in partnership with Māori requires inclusive and collaborative practices between the early childhood service and whānau of tamariki Māori for the learning and wellbeing of Māori children. (ERO, June 2013, p. 7).

However, the consistent implementation of *Te Whāriki* as a bicultural curriculum across all ECE settings has proven to be challenging, as ERO (2013a) has reported. During their regular education reviews in Term 4, 2010 and Term 1, 2011, ERO evaluated 374 ECE services on their work in partnership with whānau of Māori children. The report, *Partnership with Whānau Māori in Early Childhood Services*, found that “only 10 percent had built effective and culturally responsive partnerships” (ERO, February 2012, p. 1). An earlier national ERO (May 2010) review of 576 ECE services, detailed in the report, *Success for Māori Children in Early Childhood Services*, identified that in nearly two thirds of the services reviewed Māori children’s identity and heritage was not fully acknowledged or evident in pedagogy and practice. The ERO (May 2010) report states, that:

[w]ith increasing numbers of Māori children attending mainstream services, and the focus on increasing Māori children’s participation, priority needs to be given to helping managers and educators to provide programmes that promote children’s cultural identity. (pp. 29-30).

These concerns were further highlighted in ERO's 2013 national evaluation report *Working with Te Whāriki* which analysed data gathered from 627 early childhood services reviewed in Terms 1, 2 and 3 of 2012, finding significant variability with how ECE services were engaging with the curriculum, concluding “*Te Whāriki* is not well understood and implemented as a bicultural curriculum” (ERO, May 2013a, p. 13).

A number of barriers experienced by teachers have been identified by researchers over the past decade; the irregularity which te reo Māori is used, as well as teachers' lack of confidence (Ritchie, 2003; Ritchie 2008), and not understanding Te Tiriti o Waitangi's principle of partnership (Metge, 2010; Rau & Ritchie, 2005; Ritchie & Rau, 2006). Systemic apathy, and the societal issue of not understanding the significance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Māori ways of being, are also factors impinging upon the rights of Māori children to their language and culture experienced within ECE settings (Rau & Ritchie, 2011). However, Rau & Ritchie (2011) argue that transformative change is possible when teachers work in collaboration with tangata whenua, and embrace respectful pedagogies and practices. With the majority of Māori children participating in privately operated, for-profit ECE services, mostly taught by Pākeha educators, which is the context of this study, this must also be considered as both a challenge and a priority.

The following section presents a brief overview of participation and how ECE is accessed in Aotearoa New Zealand.

### ***Participation and access***

Participation in high-quality ECE has long ranging benefits for children, both academically and socially, with connections between the two strengthened for children from low socio-economic backgrounds (ERO, 2015; Mitchell, Wylie & Carr, 2008; Mitchell, Meagher-Lundberg, Mara, Cubey & Whitford, 2011; MoE, 2002; MoE, 2012; Podmore, 1993). Increasing participation in quality ECE has been on various governments' education agendas for a number of years. This was captured in the 2002 Ministry of Education's innovative ten-year strategic plan for early childhood, *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki*. The plan provided a social policy which sought to improve quality, collaboration and access in ECE,

as the then Minister of Education, Trevor Mallard, stated in the document's introduction:

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 ... Government's vision is for all New Zealand children to have the opportunity to participate in quality early childhood education no matter their circumstances. (MoE, 2002, p.1)

The campaign to increase participation in quality ECE was also seen as a means of supporting women back into the workforce, with links made between employment, particularly for sole-parents, and poverty. Early childhood education was couched as a way to ensure improved outcomes for children, but also enable women to work outside of the home. The Strategic Plan, echoing the rhetoric of the time, aimed to address the identified disparities by specifically targeting participation for these groups in quality ECE:

The children primarily affected come from Māori, Pasifika, and low socio-economic backgrounds. A lack of access to appropriate ECE services is also proving a barrier to rural families and to around 15 percent of parents wanting employment. The Government could increase participation for these groups by becoming more involved in facilitating access to quality ECE (MoE, 2002, p.6).

Dahlberg & Moss (2005) argue that often working mothers of young children do not realise the desired outcome of increased household income which employment brings, as a significant number of mothers end up employed in low-income jobs while having to pay for the cost of childcare.

In 2009 the National led Government introduced a policy overriding the Strategic Plan's previous set targets which would have seen 100% qualified teacher in ECE centres by 2012. The new policy removed the previous expectation for ECE

services to work towards employing a fully qualified teaching staff, purportedly in a bid to reduce centre costs and increase participation. It also reduced the funding cap to 80% and the expected child/qualified teacher ratio to 50% for under-two year olds and 80% for over-two year olds. In reference to this shift in the prioritisation of qualified teachers, Helen Hedges (2013) raised the following concern:

boosting participation in potentially poor-quality centres with either unqualified or under-qualified staff will not begin to address [the achievement] gap [for Māori, Pasifika and other children from low socio-economic groups], nor will it stimulate the relationships necessary with families, communities and schools (p. 278).

Increasing ECE participation continues to be on the government's agenda. In June 2015 the number of children starting school with experience of ECE was 96.2% (Education Counts, 2016a). The government has a current goal that this number will increase and that in 2016, 98% of children beginning school will have participated in quality ECE (Mitchell, Meagher-Lundberg, Davison, Kara & Kalavite, 2016). Article 3 of Te Tiriti o Waitangi promises equal participation for all as citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand. Equal participation is only possible if there is also a guarantee of equal access. In theory all children in Aotearoa New Zealand are free to participate in any type of ECE service they choose. In reality access to participation can be limited for some families (Mitchell, 2012; Mitchell, et al., 2016). The recent *ECE Participation Programme* identified the barriers for families from targeted communities (Māori, Pasifika and low socio-economic) as being:

cost, transport, and in some communities limited choice around ECE, ECE which do not welcome EPF [Engaging Priority Families/whānau], limited knowledge and/or understanding of ECE, and the complex or high needs of families/whānau providers are working with including transience (Mitchell, et. al., 2016, p. 34).

Few would argue with ensuring ECE was available for all, and supporting the children and families who face challenges participating in ECE. However, the question of what children are participating in requires addressing. This concern is applicable to this study as the research site is located in a lower socio-economic

area and accessed by families who have reduced choice. The ability to choose ECE services which consistently provide quality is recognised as being reduced for low income communities as the above barriers indicate, with an identified “quality differential between private and community-based services” (Mitchell & Davison, 2010, p. 19). This disparity in quality is recognised as being due in part to the reduced partnership opportunities in private services between parents/whānau and owners, resulting in less family engagement (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013; Mitchell & Davison, 2010). Market driven factors, such as prioritising profit, are also identified in literature as impinging upon quality practice and outcomes for children in for-profit ECE services (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013).

Government initiatives, such as the *ECE Participation Programme* which show families’ experiences of the programme as being mostly positive, are encouraging, with data revealing increased participation for the targeted groups (Mitchell, et. al., 2016). However, this is not representative of the sector as a whole and does not fully address the complexities of participation in ECE, especially for those families from similar demographics as the targeted groups who are already in the system, and already counted in the 96.2% tally (Education Counts, 2016a). As Hedges (2013) has indicated, there is valid reason to critique the effectiveness of some of the Ministry’s methods to increase participation in ECE, and to go beyond these methods and look at participation as a whole.

The goal to increase participation in early childhood education falls under the umbrella of the 2012 government initiative entitled *Better Public Services: Results for New Zealanders* (State Services Commission, March 2015). The “ten challenging results for the public sector to achieve over the next five years” (p. 1) are organised under the five themes of; Reducing long-term welfare dependence; Supporting vulnerable children; Boosting skills and employment; Reducing crime, and, Improving interaction with government. Supporting vulnerable children through increasing participation in ECE needs to be reviewed alongside the government’s *Better Public Services* theme of reducing long-term welfare dependence, where people will be actively supported to move from welfare to paid employment (State Services Commission, March 2015). The initiative could be viewed as achieving positive results since its inception, with the Ministry of Social

Development (2016) indicating that from June, 2011, to June, 2015, a reduction in the number of working age recipients of the Sole Parent Support. However, historically, the goal of getting sole parents – the vast majority of which are women – ‘off the benefit’ and into paid work has been a goal of the Government’s for well over a decade and the policy’s ethics have been criticised (Ritchie, 2016). This will now be discussed in relation to the goal of increased participation in ECE.

Around the time of the Strategic Plan the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] (2004) released a series of reports entitled *Babies and Bosses*, promoting policies which encouraged women, seen as a labour market resource, into paid work, with ECE regarded as a means for promoting “gender equity in employment opportunities” (p. 49). One of the reports, the third in the series of five, identified a number of issues which needed to be addressed in order to raise the capital for groups of children within Aotearoa New Zealand. These included the health, employment and economic disparities evident between the nation’s ethnic groups. A further concern identified within the OECD report was in relation to children from one-parent households:

Quite uniquely, almost one in four children in New Zealand resides in a one-parent household. As only one in two sole mothers in New Zealand is in paid work, many children grow up in jobless families. (OECD, 2004, p.11). Belonging to a household where there is joblessness is viewed as effecting children’s life-long learning outcomes, contributing to elevated poverty risks for children (OECD, 2011; Social Services Commission, March 2015). The OECD (2004) report also identified that Māori and Pasifika, in particular, were more likely to fall into these categories with lower paid employment, lower educational outcomes, higher teenage pregnancies and higher levels of unemployment. Suggested as a measure to ‘encourage’ women into the workforce financial incentives, such as government benefits for sole-parents, were recommended to be reduced so as to discourage recipients choosing this as a preferred option. A further recommendation was that sole-parents’ be required to actively seek employment, with the continuation of their benefits conditional upon this factor (OECD, 2004). These recommendations were realised in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2012 with renamed benefits and new obligations, in line with the OECD recommendations, introduced as part of the Government’s welfare reforms.

The Domestic Purposes Benefit [DPB], introduced in 1973 providing State funded financial support for single mothers with dependent children aged sixteen years and under. In 2012 as part of the Government of the day's welfare reforms, the DPB became the Sole Parent Support [SPS], or Job Seekers Support [JSS] depending on the age of the youngest child. Currently once the youngest dependent child turns fourteen years of age the parent moves from the SPS to the JSS. Financial changes and conditions outlined in the reforms impacted significantly on sole-parents. From April, 2014, those previously 'on the DPB' who were moved to the Sole Parent Support had their weekly net payment reduced from \$335.18 to \$300.98 per week (Work and Income, 2015a).

A condition of receiving the SPS it that reasonable steps are made to ensure children aged three years and over participate in early childhood education:

- “If you care for dependent children aged three years and over who are not yet in school, you're required to take all reasonable steps to make sure your children are enrolled in and attending:
  - An approved (licensed or certified) early childhood education programme, or
  - Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu – The Correspondence School, or
  - An approved parenting and early childhood home education programme.
- There's a wide range of approved early childhood education programmes to choose from, including Kōhanga Reo, Punanga Reo, Aoga and other programmes with a language and culture focus, parenting and early childhood home education programmes, kindergartens, preschools, childcare centres, playcentres and home-based care services.
- 20 Hours ECE is available for children aged three and over in most situations. A childcare subsidy is also available for eligible parents for hours over and above the 20 Hours ECE, or if you're not able to get 20 Hours ECE.” (Work and Income, 2015b).

Further obligations, or conditions, placed on the recipient of the SPS are that the parent makes reasonable steps to ensure their child/ren are:

- enrolled in and attending school, starting from age five or six years
- enrolled with a General Practitioner (GP) or with a medical centre that belongs to a Primary Health Organisation (PHO)
- up to date with core Well Child/Tamariki Ora checks until they turn five years old.

Once the youngest child is five years of age then the parent must make active, and monitored steps to seek part-time employment, for at least 15 hours per week, and be available to “accept any suitable job” which comes their way (Work and Income, 2012). The consequence of not accepting any ‘suitable job’ is outlined on the Work and Income website, stating:

If you do not take any offer of suitable work, including temporary work, or work that is seasonal or subsidised, without a good and sufficient reason, your benefit will be reduced by up to half (if you have dependent children) or stopped (if you don't have dependent children) for 13 weeks.

If your benefit has been reduced or stopped, and you agree to take part in an approved activity for at least six weeks and you're still entitled to your benefit, it will be increased or restarted. (Work and Income, 2016).

Work and Income does not expand on what it determines as a ‘suitable job’, nor ‘a good and sufficient reason’ for turning one down. However, temporary, seasonal or subsidised work is historically poorly paid. This challenges somewhat the rationale behind the job seeking obligations that, “paid work can provide a better future for you and will help you become financially independent”. (Work and Income, 2012). The welfare reforms could be viewed as a progressive state initiative in line with OECD goals and objectives, ensuring women are empowered to re-enter the workforce, and children’s participation in ECE is assured, both amending the effects of poverty. However, there appears to be little regard for the social or cultural impact placed on sole-mothers, due to educational, gender or ethnic disparities, who are themselves, disadvantaged and remain economically at

risk in low paid jobs, in spite of fulfilling Work and Income's employment obligations.

Comparing statistics over the past five years the Ministry of Social Development identified that from December, 2010, to December, 2015, the total number of SPS recipients steadily dropped between 2012 and 2015 from 89,432 to 68,380, reflecting "changes in economic conditions and the decrease in the number of sole parents" (Ministry of Social Development, 2015). Within this total, sole parents caring for a dependent child under the age of five years reduced from 48,492 to 38,506 during the same period and proposedly for the same reasons. How many sole-parents with dependent children under the age of five who are, instead, struggling in low-income employment is not identified. The quality of the ECE services the children of the sole parents are expected to participate in is neither identified. The 'Better Social Services' policy does little more than perpetuate the possibility of children participating in "poor quality monocultural services being run primarily as businesses for the ultimate profit of shareholders" (Ritchie, 2016, p. 29).

To summarise, teacher-led for-profit ECE services in Aotearoa New Zealand are bound by national regulations, guidelines and reviews, which have been outlined in this chapter. The regulatory requirements and obligations of all licensed ECE services are embedded within Te Tiriti o Waitangi and *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996). Some issues have been highlighted within this section influencing how children and their families participate and belong, with the literature indicating that there is a disparity between for-profit and community based ECE centres. This is evident in the areas of understanding the intentions of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the implementation of *Te Whāriki* as a bicultural curriculum, the 20 ECE hours funding incentive, and participation and access to quality ECE, in particular for Māori, Pasifika and children from low socio-economic families. According to Anne Smith (2011) the implementation of *Te Whāriki* "depends on well trained and qualified teachers who have regular opportunities for professional development, appropriate group size and adequate staff:child ratios" (p. 158). The Government's 'Better Public Services' target of increasing participation in ECE for targeted groups of children needs to be viewed alongside the target of reducing long-term welfare dependence, which is narrow and ideologically framed. This chapter has shown that through the

constructs of the current regulations and funding requirements the government has shaped an ECE context which offers minimal incentive for these ideals to be fully reflected in settings which prioritise profit. These are all factors which provide context to belonging in a for-profit ECE centre.

The following chapter will explore the literature which provides an understanding of the perspectives on belonging.

## CHAPTER THREE

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### **Perspectives on belonging**

*Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) clearly indicates that every child has a right to belong to the ECE setting they are participating in and for their contributions to be valued (Macartney & Morton, 2013). Belonging in its own right, however, is a complex concept to address. Sumsion and Wong (2011) note that conceptually the term belonging has a broad reach, and can be associated with many different things; such as emotional attachment, a variety of identifications, ethical or political values, social (such as gender or race) or economic locations (such as one's profession, or class) (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Locating belonging within the concept of participation (Rogoff, 2003), this chapter examines two relevant concepts in the literature; a sense of belonging and the politics of belonging (Stratigos, Bradley & Sumsion, 2014). It then briefly addresses three factors which provide specific contextual relevancy (Sumsion & Wong, 2011) in the conceptualisation of belonging for this study; the privatisation of ECE, Māori children in mainstream ECE and leadership in ECE.

#### ***A sense of belonging***

Through a sociocultural historical perspective belonging is understood through participation in cultural communities. This includes the development of a sense of belonging resulting from active and valued participation within the individual's respective communities (Rogoff, 2003). *Te Whāriki* prioritises developing "a feeling of belonging", suggesting that "in the widest sense, [it] contributes to inner well-being, security, and identity" (MoE, 1996, p. 54). The importance of belonging is not a new concept, and Maslow (1943) places "the love and affection and belongingness needs" (p. 380), encompassing all of the above traits, on the third tier of his five-tiered hierarchy of needs. Interestingly, Maslow (1943) indicates that love and belongingness occurs once the previous two basic needs are 'gratified'; an individual's physiological needs, for example, the basic need to satisfy hunger, and their safety needs, enabling an individual to feel protected within predictable and secure environments. To experience love, affection and belonging connected

closely with these two fundamental requirements and was considered highly important to Maslow (1943), who suggested some form of maladjustment would be the consequence of not having these basic needs met.

Within literature a sense of belonging is also recognised as a basic human need and closely linked, as it is in *Te Whāriki*, to wellbeing and identity (Brooker & Woodhead, 2008; MoE, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 2011). A sense of belonging is also associated with social and psychological functioning (Hagerty, Williams, Coyne & Early, 1996), feeling valued (Peters, 2010; Stratigos, Bradley & Sumsion, 2014), feeling at home (Stratigos, Bradley & Sumsion, 2014; Woodhead & Brooker, 2008), feeling suitable (Broström, 2002; Woodhead & Brooker, 2008; Yuval-Davis, 2006), and enabling individuals to effectively navigate their way through life (Brooker & Woodhead, 2008; MoE, 1996).

Sumsion and Wong (2011) suggest that belonging is often combined “with other phenomena” in research which “has resulted in limited examination of belonging in its own right” (p. 31). Supporting this view, a sense of belonging was found to be referred to extensively in ECE literature in connection with a range of broader research topics, rather than as a focus on its own. For example, a reference to a sense of belonging is evident in transition literature (Dalli, White, Rockel & Duhn, 2011; Dockett, Mason & Perry, 2006; ERO, May 2015; Firth, Couch & Everiss, 2009; Peters, 2010; Woodhead & Brooker, 2008), inclusion literature (Glass, Baker, Ellis, Bernstone & Hagan, 2009; Peters, 2010) infants and toddlers literature (Dalli et al., 2011; Stratigos, 2015), and cultural identity literature (Dockett, Mason & Perry, 2006; ERO, March 2016; Kidman, 2012; Macfarlane, 2004; Macfarlane, Glynn, Cavanagh, & Bateman, 2007; Rau & Ritchie, 2005; Rau & Ritchie, 2011). While all have a focus other than belonging, one of the threads running through all of these writings is the connection made between responsive and reciprocal relationships between the child, parents, and teachers, and a supported sense of belonging. A consistent view held within the aforementioned research is that these forms of collaboration not only support a sense of belonging but also positive developmental and learning outcomes for children. This is consistent with Rogoff’s (2003) understanding that learning and development occur within a collective and collaborative framework.

In a comprehensive literature review focusing on transition from ECE to school, Sally Peters (2010) offers a definition which also suggests a sense of belonging is a reciprocal concept. Collated from the reviewed literature, Peters (2010) defines ‘a sense of belonging’ as;

knowing one’s self, being known by others and being valued and accepted for who you are (p. 16).

Stratigos, Bradley and Sumsion (2014) define a sense of belonging in a similar way, as “a feeling that one belongs” (p. 177). How a sense of belonging is *constructed* is less evident in literature, although it is possible for associations between the two to be made. Two recent ERO reports are presented here which point to how a child’s sense of belonging and the related notions of wellbeing and identity are actively constructed in practice. Reporting on successful transitions to school (ERO, May 2015) and the successful operation of five Ngā Puna Whakatupu, Māori full-immersion, ECE centres (ERO, March 2016), both ERO reports identified that actively building a child’s sense of belonging and identity was connected to the good practice of these services.

The 2015 national ERO report entitled, *Continuity of learning: transitions from early childhood services to schools* (ERO, May 2015) identified just over half of the services reviewed were implementing a curriculum which supported children’s transitions and continuity of learning. ERO identified that successful transitions were evident in services which actively focused on building children’s dispositions, a strong sense of identity and sense of belonging. How this was achieved was not specifically identified but was universally associated with the ECE services which understood and actively planned for their children’s transitions and who built collaborative relationships with the children’s parents and whānau, schools, and community services. These categories are consistent with those identified in the 2010 literature review, *Transition from early childhood education to school*, conducted by Sally Peters for the Ministry of Education. This suggests that the construction of the children’s sense of belonging, wellbeing and identity, both in their ECE settings and as they transitioned to their new-entrant classrooms, occurs when these support structures are in place.

The 2016 ERO report, *Tuia te here tangata: Making meaningful connections* (ERO, March 2016), is a further example of how a sense of belonging is referred to in association with good practice. The report is the result of a scheduled cluster review of five Māori immersion ECE centres where good practice was identified and investigated further. While ‘belonging’ per se was not the actual focus of the reviews, the findings point out how belonging is being constructed within these settings. The findings indicated that in the five ECE centres relationships were strong, valued and prioritised. Children were immersed in meaningful and loving intergenerational relationships, and in tikanga (correct ways of being) Māori, through which the children came to know their roles and responsibilities as tangata whenua (indigenous people). This connects with Rogoff’s (2003) understanding of generational transmission of cultural values and practices, through intent participation. In the five services ERO identified that everyone’s contributions were respected, expectations were made clear, and that language, identity and culture were recognised by leaders, teachers, parents and whānau as being crucial for Māori children to succeed as Māori. A key element ERO identified within these successful ECE settings was strong professional leadership, which was considered crucial in building learning, well-being and a sense of belonging. In these services the construction of belonging occurs when cultural identity is valued, relationships with key people in the children’s lives are evident, participation is valued, and leadership is strong.

In these instances a sense of belonging is conveyed as fitting in, feeling valued within a group, and knowing that you have a place (MoE, 1996), which are associated with the psychological features of belonging (Stratigos, Bradley & Sumsion, 2014). While not fully articulated, in both of the above examples a sense of belonging was positioned as both an observable *goal*, and a necessary *component* of what was required in order for the goal to be achieved. For example, in the first report an indicator that the child had successfully transitioned from ECE to school was that they had an observable sense of belonging in their new setting, and an identified component of that occurring was an ongoing and ‘transitioning’ sense of belonging from their previous setting. This may connect with the idea offered by Stratigos, Bradley and Sumsion (2014) that for individuals, the essence of belonging’s meaning is a felt sense of belonging.

One of the reasons a sense of belonging is less visible as an enquiry focus in its own right is that it is recognised as being subjective in nature and therefore on its own difficult to research (Stratigos, Bradley & Sumsion, 2014). Within recent doctoral studies conducted at Waikato University, while not the central focus, a sense of belonging and its accompanying political undertones is evident in a vast array of theses and subject genres, such as the following small selection; ageing (Li, 2011), Bogans (Snell, 2012), homelessness (Groot, 2010), Māori men (Rua, 2015), and snowboarding (Thorpe, 2007). These theses suggest that a sense of belonging in one shape or another is experienced by all, and important to all, but as a concept is also specific to each genre and accompanying community, with each residing within its own cultural context. As evidenced to varying degrees within these theses, belonging is also imbued with politics, ethics, and values, holding within its nucleus social categorisation and power axes (Youkhana, 2015) such as those evident in inclusion and exclusion dyads. The following section will explore the complex *politics of belonging* (Hagerty, Williams, Coyne & Early, 1996; Sumsion & Wong, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2011) further.

### ***The politics of belonging***

To understand belonging it is necessary to explore its multi-layered nature (Stratigos, 2015; Sumsion & Wong, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2011; Youkhana, 2015), and the politics of belonging, which, Eva Youkhana (2015), defines as “the political arenas related to different notions of belonging, be they ethnic, national, cultural, and/or religious, or cosmopolitan” (p. 13). Stratigos, Bradley and Sumsion (2014) suggest that the politics of belonging “refers to how belonging operates” (p. 177).

A politics of belonging lens proposes belonging is a dynamic concept, foregrounding notions of participation and boundaries (Castles & Davidson, 2000; Hagerty, Williams, Coyne & Early, 1996; Nutbrown & Clough, 2009; Stratigos, 2015; Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2011), exploring how people make their place in the world, and “how people make their places open to ‘others’” (Sumsion & Wong, 2011, p. 37). The politics of belonging challenges rigid borderlines and suggests new forms of belonging; what does it mean to belong ‘in’ a community/group, rather than ‘to’? (Youkhana, 2015). It embraces many themes which are pertinent

to this study, including social justice themes. Social justice themes of fairness, inclusion, full-participation, identity and equity have long been interwoven with early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand and associated with belonging to our society (May, 1990; May, 2001; MoE, 1996; Smith, Gollop, Marshall & Nairn, 2000; Smith & Swain, 1988).

Social justice themes also underpin Hagerty, Williams, Coyne and Early's (1996) book, *Citizenship and Migration: Globalization and the politics of belonging*, which focuses primarily on the growing number of people disenfranchised from countries of their birth seeking residency in Western democratic nations. Belonging in the context of this text is connected to issues of immigration, democracy, rights, identity, equality, globalization, citizenship, and full-participation. The authors assert that while everyone is meant to participate and belong within a democratic society this is not always the reality for some groups of peoples, even those with formal membership, with ethnicity, gender, race, religion, and ability criteria often hindering full citizenship. Hagerty et al., (1996) propose that an immigrant generation has brought into question the very notion of belonging, resulting from "porous boundaries and multiple identities (undermining) ideas of cultural belonging as a necessary accompaniment to political belonging. There are increasing numbers of *citizens who do not belong*." (Hagerty et al., 1996, p. viii). Two key issues arise from this text in relation to this study; that one can technically 'belong' to a group and be afforded membership yet be disenfranchised, and, the notion of belonging equating full citizenship with full and *active participation*. This supports Rogoff's (2003) assertion that participation is a "more dynamic concept" when considering belonging, than the "categorical concept of membership" (p. 83).

Nira Yuval-Davis (2006) also connects the politics of belonging with citizenship, rights and responsibilities. The author questions what is required of a person entitling them to belong to the collective, and indicates that there will always be requisites to belonging, such as language, a common culture or religion, or even loyalty to a common destiny. In essence, Yuval-Davis (2006) suggests that the requisites of belonging determine the permeability of the boundaries they create, with those relating to location, such as place of birth or race being the least permeable of all. Open, permeable boundaries are those "using a common set of values, such as 'democracy' or 'human rights', as the signifiers of belonging"

(Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 209). This view suggests that understanding belonging requires understanding the boundaries being constructed and imposed within communities, determining how participation is realised. However, the concept of democracy and human rights are not necessarily straightforward. As noted above by Hagerty et al., (1996) democracy is complex, requiring clearly articulated procedures to guide its potential use as a signifier of belonging.

The theorising and critique of belonging is important as it expands the notion beyond the everyday (as sometimes occurs in reference to a sense of belonging) to new possibilities and deeper understandings (Peers & Fler, 2014). Tina Stratigos (2015) provides an example of this, problematising belonging through the theoretical lens of Deleuze and Guattari revealing new and more complex ways of thinking about infants and toddlers belonging in a mixed-age Family Daycare situation.

A framework to examine the notion of belonging is offered by Sumsion and Wong (2011), expanding on Yuval-Davis' (2006) politics of belonging, in their cartography developed to support their critique of the "roles" and "purposes" which belonging can and does "serve as a central motif of the EYLF [Belonging, Being and Becoming: the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia]" (p. 29). Selecting literature for examination which purposefully theorised belonging and "sought to map understanding of belonging in ways that emphasised its many manifestations and dynamics" (Sumsion & Wong, 2011, p. 30) the cartography of belonging foregrounds belonging's complexity and highlights its possibilities. The cartography is presented, not as an analytical tool, but as a "conceptual scaffold" identifying ten interconnected dimensions, or, "ways of experiencing belonging"; emotional, social, cultural, spatial, temporal, physical, spiritual, moral/ethical, political and legal, and, three intersecting axes, or how belonging is enacted; categorisation, performativity, and, resistance and desire (Sumsion & Wong, 2011, p. 32). The axes pose questions such as how are boundaries shaped? how permeable are they? who is being included or excluded, and how is this being determined? (Sumsion & Wong, 2011). Some caveats are presented by the authors for consideration when viewing the cartography. Firstly, the cartography should not be viewed as a compartmentalised framework, as the identified dimensions of belonging do not stand alone, but are interconnected and overlapping. Secondly, it

should be seen as being flexible and open-ended, in a sense demonstrating its own boundary permeability by welcoming critique and extending an invitation for diverse, in particular indigenous perspectives to be added (Sumsion & Wong, 2011).

Peers and Flear (2014) also advocate for belonging in ECE to be further theorised and suggest that the intent of EYLF will not be realised if it is not. They caution about relying on categorisation, suggesting that children's play contains both the everyday and theoretical understandings of belonging, just as opposing concepts co-exist in an episode of play; such as, actual and potential development, and the notion of harmony and conflict.

Sumsion and Wong (2011) recognise that indigenous peoples provide their own perspectives on belonging and that in research indigenous voices must be acknowledged and not silenced. As a Pākehā I am not able to fully represent the voices of tangata whenua<sup>21</sup>, but this study has provided space for their perspectives on belonging to be heard. A person's sense of belonging is recognised as influencing, and being influenced by a sense of cultural identity, as *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) and Rogoff (2003) allude to. Related to identity, for Māori belonging also contains the individual and collective connectedness to the whenua, the land, to their tūrangawaewae<sup>22</sup> (Walker, 1990). Mead (2003) describes the concept of tūrangawaewae as "... one spot, one locality on planet earth where an individual can say 'I belong here. I can stand here without challenge. My ancestors stood here before me. My children will stand tall here.'" (p. 43). Kidman (2012, p. 194) further suggests that the concept of tūrangawaewae in relation to belonging is also political, representing both cultural "solidarity" and identity, and "resistance" to generational land loss. This understanding of belonging can be viewed within Sumsion and Wong's (2011, pp. 42-43) cartography which suggests belonging connects with "a place one calls home" (spatial belonging), has "generational roots" (temporal belonging), and can be a place where forms of power are both embraced and resisted (resistance and desire). However, an application informed by Western

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<sup>21</sup> Indigenous peoples (belonging to the land).

<sup>22</sup> Tūranga (standing place). Waewae (feet). Tūrangawaewae is a powerful Māori concept connecting place, home, ancestors, physical and spiritual worlds, and is usually translated as 'a place to stand'.

belonging theories can be limiting and indigenous critique and perspectives are required, as Sumsion and Wong (2011) acknowledge, if the cartography is to be applied with authenticity to indigenous understandings of belonging, such as the Māori concept of tūrangawaewae.

Further te oa Māori conceptualisations of belonging are whānau (family) and whanaungatanga (supportive whānau-like relationships). More complex than the western notion of the nuclear family whānau encompasses physical, spiritual and emotional dimensions. The perpetuation of cultural values, membership, belonging and identity occurs within whānau (Walker, 1990). For Māori the health and wellbeing of an individual and the collective is inseparable from that of the whānau, as is a sense of belonging (Love, 2004). Likened to the flax plant, central to the whānau is the child, protectively surrounded by parents, grandparents and extended family, joined together collectively in support of each other (Metge, 1995; Royal-Tangaere, 1991).

The notion of whānau is also central to Rangimarie Rose Pere's (1988, 1991) theorising, using the metaphor of the wheke, or octopus, to explain the interconnected development of the child within the family context, which is represented by the image of the octopus' head. The octopus' eight tentacles represent the dimension of; wairuatanga (spirituality); mana ake (uniqueness); mauri (life force); hā a koro mā a kui mā (the breath of life received from forebears); taha tinana (physical side); whanaungatanga (extended family and social interactions); whatumanawa (the heart beat - emotional aspects); Hinengaro (thoughts and emotions) (Pere, 1988). The complexity of each dimension is represented by the number of suckers on each tentacle. To achieve total wellbeing for the individual and the family unit all eight dimensions need be be cared for and in balance. This holistic and inseparable view of wellbeing and belonging occurs in an atmosphere of aroha (love), as each child is a creation of unconditional aroha (Pere, 1991). Fostering an individual and a collective sense of belonging, Pere (1988) advocates that when there is an individual sense of wellbeing, which is located in the whānau, then the collective benefits. Therefore, the wellbeing of the wider community is dependent on the wellbeing of the whānau, which is dependent on the wellbeing of the child, and as Pere (2003) states, the "children are the greatest legacy the world community has" (p.4). This understanding of belonging also

resonates with Sumsion and Wong's (2011) cartography, of which the dimension of cultural belonging highlights a necessity to consider the more complex understandings of traditional meanings, cultural values and practices, challenging assumptions which can often be considered 'common knowledge' by many.

Deriving from the word whānau, James Ritchie (1992) describes whanaungatanga as "the basic cement that holds thing Māori together" (p. 67). Mason Durie (2011) connects the principle of whanaungatanga with that of mauri (life force), with the presence of the first supporting the health and flourishing of the second, individually and collectively. In this sense whanaungatanga is about fostering a sense of belonging by working together as a collective and making decisions for the good of all the community. In an educational setting Bishop, Ladwig and Berryman (2014) suggest that a central component of pedagogical quality are the "processes of whanaungatanga" (p. 190) where Māori language and cultural approaches are central, power is shared and whānau-like relationships are evident. It is where connections are meaningful and responsibility and obligations to the wellbeing of the collective are present. Pere (1994) explains the bonds between the whānau and the commitment to the wider community within this concept, explaining that whānaungatanga;

...deals with the practices that bond and strengthen the kinship ties of a whānau. The commitment of 'aroha' is vital to whānaungatanga and the survival of what the group sees as important. Loyalty, obligation, commitment, an inbuilt support system made the whānau a strong stable unit, within the hapū, and consequently the tribe (p. 26)

A further understanding connecting the influential nature of participation to belonging within the context of learning is offered by Lave and Wenger (1991) who introduced the notion of Communities of Practice [CoP] in their book *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. A CoP proposes a relational, social and contextual, or 'situated' view of belonging, and the authors theorise the stages involved as individuals become fully-fledged autonomous members of the communities they participate in. A key component of Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory is that learning is multifaceted and situated in authentic contexts. Bateman

(2011) also suggests that it is within every day, authentic spaces, children construct meaningful learning. When learning contexts are authentic children's understanding is framed within them, facilitating connections between how learning is gained and applied, with key principles of the acquired learning transferred to other contexts (Hoadley, 2012). This idea connects with Rogoff's (2003) notion of learning through situated participation and the concept of *apprenticeship*, suggesting a component of coming to understand how belonging is constructed within a community involves comprehensively understanding the context and the everyday goings on, and, similar to Sumsion and Wong's (2011) axes of belonging, determine who is framing what is required for full participation?

The notion of belonging, or how one perceives themselves as belonging within a CoP, is intrinsically connected with learning possibilities, participation and identity (Wenger, 2000). How one identifies belonging to the CoP influences their participation and shapes accessibility and receptiveness of learning opportunities (Wenger, 1998). This connects to Sumsion and Wong's (2011) axes of categorisation, and, resistance and desire: what are the CoP's boundaries and categories connected to belonging? How are these being accepted, contested or resisted, and how does this influence one's belonging to the community of practice?

How a child's belonging is constructed in a CoP will influence how they identify with it, how they will engage with the learning possibilities within it and, subsequently, how the CoP influences the construction of their identity. Wenger (1998), referring to culture, history and discourse in relation to belonging, sees education "not just in terms of the delivery of a curriculum, but more generally in terms of their effects on the formation of identities" (p. 270). This idea links with Rau and Ritchie (2011) who argue a connection between *Tiriti* based pedagogies and identity for Māori learners. It is also noteworthy that teachers' pedagogical knowledge is grounded in their own belonging, as it is informed both by learned knowledge and knowledge gained from early experiences (Adam, 2015). This understanding is relevant to this study as it contributes to an awareness that, in practice, pedagogy is not always aligned to curriculum goals and intentions, but can be located in the teacher's personal and historical constructs of belonging.

In summary, belonging in its own right is under researched and is often connected with other phenomena in research. A sense of belonging is acknowledged as being important to an individual's holistic wellbeing, contributing to a strong sense of identity. Understandings of belonging are culturally situated with people experiencing multiple and overlapping ways of belonging which go beyond notions of membership. The complexity of belonging connects with issues of power, citizenship, rights and participation, with boundaries determining how one participates and how one belongs.

Sumsion and Wong (2011) highlight the importance of contextual relevancy in any conceptualisation of belonging. This study is located in a for-profit ECE centre where the majority of children are Māori and all of the teachers identify themselves as Pākehā. To understand the notion of belonging, and appreciate the politics of belonging within this setting, requires a closer look at three contextual factors; the privatisation of early childhood education, the participation of Māori children in mainstream education settings, and leadership within education.

### ***Privatisation of ECE***

The rapid rise of privatisation and commercialisation has been recognised as impacting both the face of ECE and consequently belonging and participation within ECE services (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Mitchell, 2012; Moss, 2012). The view that early childhood education is seen as a commodity, and “producers of private goods tracked on the market” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 42), is a relatively recent phenomenon in the educational landscape. This market approach to early childhood education has been criticised internationally as being unequitable and non-democratic (Mitchell, 2012; Moss, 2012). To counter this, Mitchell (2012) argues for a “supportive state” model where community and state work in partnership to better serve children and families, providing equitable opportunities for participation for all in ECE. Interestingly, a 2006 OECD report signalled a shift towards viewing ECE as *a public good*, although, throughout the report the prime reason articulated for provision of quality ECE is to ensure ‘economic prosperity’, by assisting parents into the workforce, effectively reinforcing neoliberal tenets. These ideas highlight the notion that to research belonging in ECE is not a straightforward process and embedded within each context are the politics of

belonging; the boundaries and conditions determining how belonging is experienced (Sumsion & Wong, 2011). While referring to assessment practices, Haertel, Moss, Pullin and Gee's (2008) idea that what is contained within learning environments is influential in shaping "learning and opportunities to learn" (p. 10) is compatible with this view.

Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013) believe that the market approach has resulted in a "fixation with 'quality'" (p. ix), a concept constructed to bring standardisation and sameness. This point suggests that the concept of 'quality' should not be accepted mindlessly, but be viewed as being very much value laden, requiring a critical eye to be cast over it. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013) argue that the hazard of focusing on quality is that it can make people become compliant, stopping them from being critically reflective of how curriculum is being enacted. ECE then has the potential of being relegated to that of a managerial concern, governed by standardization and regulation.

Within a neoliberal landscape the concept of quality can be interpreted, justifiably by some, as a baseline of standards, and used as a competitive marketing tool – where instead of children's meaning making, tick boxes and 'school readiness' drive the measurement criteria. Within this model, the construction of 'quality' learning experiences could be viewed as contrived, with, for example, learning outcomes focusing on the acquisition of measureable and marketable writing skills, rather than reflecting the child as a powerful and creative individual (White & Mika, 2013), developing life-long learning dispositions and complex working theories as they make meaning of their world (Carr & Lee, 2012; Claxton & Carr, 2010; Hedges, 2008; Hedges & Jones, 2012). A focused market approach to quality does not sit comfortably when viewing belonging through a participatory lens (Rogoff, 2003), which comprehends different view-points, cultural understandings and goals.

Harris' (2008) Australian qualitative study, exploring "women's experiences of choosing quality long day care in a landscape that privileges for-profit child care solutions" (p. 43), highlights the challenges for-profit ECE services have in fostering a sense of belonging when they hold two "incompatible goals" (p. 47); to provide quality childcare and to make a profit. The majority of the twenty women interviewed regarded community-based services as being of a higher quality than

for-profit corporate-based services. They noted a sense of isolation, “high staff turnover, insufficient stimulating activities, high staff-child ratios, lack of a warm and caring atmosphere, [and] unhappy staff” (Harris, 2008, p. 46) as further reasons for their concerns regarding corporate-based services. Harris (2008) also noted that the “women valued child care quality and they wanted their care services to be part of their communities” (p. 46), however, their experiences of corporate-run for-profit centres did not foster the sense of belonging they were seeking. Twenty three of the priority families participating in the Ministry of Education’s ECE Participation Programme (Mitchell et al., 2016) who identified feeling judged and not welcomed going into their children’s ECE services, thereby hindering their sense of belonging, all identified participating in privately owned for-profit centres. Similar to Harris’ (2008) study the MoE’s ECE Participation Programme (Mitchell et al., 2016) identified that “the most important feature in a quality ECE was being welcomed by the staff and connections made to support their sense of belonging” (p. 45).

As established earlier in this thesis the curriculum is a permeable, flexible, framework which allows for different histories, individual contexts and philosophical expressions to be realised. However, as noted, not all philosophical expressions are associated with quality outcomes for children, as defined in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996). A number of for-profit ECE services have been identified as reflecting the philosophical values associated with being another business in the marketplace, and are recognised as adversely impacting the quality of children’s learning experiences (Dahlberg et al., 2013; Lloyd, 2012; Mitchell, 2012; Sumsion, 2012). This view indicates that for some children and their families in Aotearoa New Zealand the ECE environment they are belonging ‘in’ is not reflective of the intent of *Te Whāriki*.

Understanding the significance of children’s meaning-making is not easy and requires a level of teacher competency (Hedges, 2013). Stratigos (2015) would also suggest that it requires a level of theorising. Teachers’ cultural awareness will further influence how they interpret children making sense of ‘their world’, or a child’s belonging in this world. For example, teachers have the power to determine

whether Māori children's birthright to te ao Māori<sup>23</sup> is acknowledged, which includes te reo (language) and tikanga (correct processes and practices) Māori (Rau & Ritchie, 2011). This leads to the need to understand the significance of how pedagogical practice is conceptualised for Māori children in mainstream ECE.

### ***Māori children in mainstream early childhood education***

How belonging is constructed is important for all children, but is particularly significant for Māori children accessing mainstream for-profit education and care services. The annual ECE census summary report for 2014 identified in that year 63.4% of ECE aged children attended education and care services, 15.9% attended Kindergartens, 9.6% home-based services, 6.4% parent-led playcentres, and 4.5% Kōhanga reo (MoE, 2015a). The report also indicates that a significant 54% of Māori children enrolled in ECE services during 2014 attended education and care services. With 9% of all teachers in teacher led ECE services identified by the Ministry of Education in their 2014 census summary report as Māori, and 71% as European/Pākehā (MoE, 2015a), it is reasonable to conclude a significant number of Māori children will be taught by Pākehā teachers. It is also plausible to assume that many Pākehā teachers will be facing the challenges of exploring in any depth biculturalism and multiculturalism, as indicated by the aforementioned ERO reports (2012, 2013a).

For some the first time they have had to consider culturally responsible early childhood education as a legitimate response to Te Tiriti o Waitangi may be through their pre-service training. While teachers who are qualified have had the opportunity through their training to consider the curriculum's te ao Māori expectations and address their response, the current government's expectation is that only 50% of 'teachers' require a teaching qualification. It is then important to explore how belonging is being constructed for the children and families accessing for-profit ECE services in Aotearoa New Zealand, in particular for Māori children who have the right to their culture within their educational experiences. This begs

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<sup>23</sup> Literally translated as "the Māori world".

the questions; *what* is actually being valued within these settings? and, are these values compatible with those of tangata whenua?

The challenges occur when value systems and understandings of valid learning collide by members of different cultural systems, and from an educational stance it is at this point where we can begin to see Rogoff's (2003) concept of *guided participation*, where values are transmitted and transformed, influencing the community's culture within a learning space. This idea will be explored further in the following chapter. Within any social setting it can be assumed that the values of those who are afforded membership of the dominant culture will have greater influence over the changing cultural community than those who are not.

As an ECE learning environment is intrinsically a social domain, day-to-day participation and interactions potentially all, explicitly or implicitly, transmit values, with the adults in the setting holding the balance of power. This idea suggests that being aware of what is valued within the processes of participation potentially facilitates a closer understanding of the pedagogies that are at play. White and Mika (2013) have challenged teachers to reflect on how they understand and apply the curriculum, and whether, for example, they are positioning infants and toddlers with less power and potential than the bicultural framework of *Te Whāriki* intends.

The conceptualisation of bicultural practice is also brought into question. White and Mika (2013) suggest the call has always been to avoid "consuming (perhaps even colonising) Māori content and then regurgitating it as universally relevant or applicable" (p. 105). Rogoff (2003, p. 339) proposes that "western schooling has served as a powerful source of cultural change", where the cultural values, practices and traditions of the minority are at risk of being misinterpreted or dismissed. In essence a 'culture of belonging' for all children within an ECE setting is determined by the nature of these participatory components, which include day-to-day interactions and teachers' pedagogies, regardless of whether those holding the power have awareness or not of their role as change agents. I suggest that this view requires being regarded in the belief that at any given time children participate within the context of the relationships available to them. For Māori children participating in mainstream for-profit ECE centres the question arising from this is,

what does this context look like and how does this effect the construction of their belonging?

The question of who is assuming responsibility for how the curriculum is applied and how belonging is being constructed within an ECE setting draws attention to the notion of leadership, which relates to this study's second research question:

How is the ethical stewardship of Te Whāriki reflected in the leadership's decision making?

The following section will discuss the literature focusing on leadership in early childhood education.

### ***Leadership in ECE***

While underexplored, leadership in early childhood education is a recognised area of research linked to improved learning outcomes for children (Bush, 2012; Thornton, Wansborough, Clarkin-Phillips, Aitken & Tamati, 2009). Leadership in ECE is acknowledged as being complex and having many definitions and conceptions; managerial, educational, pedagogical, distributed, and teacher leadership to name a few (Clarkin-Phillips, 2009; Cooper, 2014; Dalli & Thornton, 2013). Historically the nature of leadership in education is better researched and understood within primary and secondary school settings, however, due to ECE's multiple philosophical, organisational and structural expressions it is difficult to fully compare the notion of leadership against these sectors (Aubrey, Godfrey & Harris, 2012).

When considering leadership in the ECE sector the associated title of owner, manager, head teacher and team leader are commonplace, however, there is a shift towards positioning all teachers in their 'everyday practice' as demonstrating relational leadership, empowering children and developing curriculum (Cooper, 2014). Through this lens teacher leadership can be experienced by those who hold leadership positions as well as those who do not. Cooper (2014) suggests that teacher leadership involves ethical, moral and advocacy commitments which are fundamental within an effective community of practice (Wenger, 1998). While this position acknowledges the general aspect of leadership within a teaching role it is recognised that it is particularly challenging for teachers who are in official

positions of leadership in for-profit ECE settings. The reasons for this, as identified in the literature, are; within the business model of a for-profit ECE centre team leaders are also required to fulfil a managerial and administrative role, which is time consuming and intense (Krieg, Davis & Smith, 2014; Woodrow & Busch, 2008), their ability to ‘teach’ for sustained periods of time is compromised (Reynolds, 2011; Thornton et al., 2009), new graduates and beginning teachers enter into leadership roles without mentoring, compromising teacher registration requirements (Cameron, 2007; Westerbeke, 2011) and time constraints reduce professional learning opportunities (May & Mitchell, 2009; Reynolds, 2011).

The Ministry of Education (2015c), although not directly referring to teachers when defining the term leadership in ECE connects it to ‘educational leadership’ focusing on pedagogy and professional development:

- increasing and sharing our knowledge of the curriculum
- keeping up to date with the latest research in practice
- researching our own practice
- experimenting with new approaches
- sharing our insights with others. (p. 1)

This notion connects with Cooper’s (2014) understanding of leadership occurring in teachers’ everyday practice. However, the definition and role of leaders in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) is ambiguous, as is the definition of a teacher. *Te Whāriki* acknowledges the adults<sup>24</sup> role, which includes teachers, in an ECE setting provides an “integral part of the curriculum” (MoE, 1996, p. 27), and they are required 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

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<sup>24</sup> An adult is defined as, “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, kaiwhina, specialists, and caregivers”. (MoE, 1996, p. 99)

try alternatives, and well supported by management. (MoE, 1996, p. 27)

While the connection between educational leadership and teaching is implied rather than stated there is a clearer differentiation when “Management” (MoE, 1996, p. 27) is discussed. The curriculum positions the responsibilities of those in management as more overtly connected to traditional notions of leadership, with management required to ensure staffing requirements are met, children are safe and adequate training is available to:

enable the adults who work with children to have the knowledge and skills necessary to support the children’s learning and development and to implement the curriculum in everyday practice. (MoE, 1996, p. 27)

In essence, ‘adults’, which include teachers, are responsible for the enacted curriculum, as the MoE’s definition of leadership would support, and ‘management’, as *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) outlines, is responsible for regulatory compliance and professional support, ensuring the enacted curriculum is reflective of the principles and goals of the curriculum document. This would suggest that it is those in ECE management positions who hold the responsibility to ensure that the enacted curriculum is being realised in their setting. In *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) there is no clear indication of what an effective leader would look like, although, with both ‘adults’ and management required to be responsible for the needs of others it could be suggested aspects of leadership are evident in both.

The notion that effective leadership supports high quality teaching is evident in the Ministry of Education’s (2015c) document, *The Māori education strategy Ka Hikitia: Critical factors for success*, in which the interplay of teaching, leadership and governance is recognised as being a critical component in the success of Māori education:

High quality teaching, supported by effective leadership and governance, makes the biggest ‘in education’ difference to student outcomes across all parts of the education sector. (MoE, 2015c, p. 1)

Similar to *Ka Hikitia*, good leaders were also identified as being crucial in Pasifika ECE services “to manage changes that improve learning outcomes for Pacific children” (ERO, July 2015, p. 1). The report found that improvements were realised when relationships were strong, the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy was understood, and leaders had a “sense of stewardship”, ensuring core cultural values and beliefs were strengthened (MoE, 2015, p. 2). Evidence of effective leadership was when roles and responsibilities were clearly understood and there was an awareness of the difference between “governance and management” (ERO, July 2015, p. 9).

Effective leadership in education is documented as being clear about what is important and taking responsibility for decisions and actions (ERO, July 2015; Shapiro & Gross, 2013). Primarily in reference to the primary and secondary school sectors Branson (2007) also believes that leadership that works is about having a shared vision and aligned values, where trust is built between all the community’s participants, which, without care, issues of power can undermine. It is important to consider the influence of power in leadership, with Shields (2012) suggesting that the issues of “power and its negative consequences are frequently hidden, even unintended” in leadership, “and its impact frequently unknown to those who actually benefit from it and perpetuate it” (p. 49).

Many researchers across educational contexts highlight the notion that ultimately good leadership is ethical leadership, and ethical leadership is essential for everyone in the educational community (Branson, 2010; Branson & Gross, 2014; Frick, 2013; Tuana, 2014). Shields (2014) concurs stating that “ethics is at the heart of good leadership” (p.24). Branson and Gross (2014) provide an explanation as to why this is so, asserting that leadership is primarily relational and value laden, therefore, “ethics must be an integral part of contemporary educational leadership” (p. 5). Tuana (2014) concedes that all ‘stakeholders’ will bear the effects of decision making, for better or worse, and ethical leadership involves matters of justice, requiring an element of moral agency, where leaders move beyond simply ‘knowing’ what is the right thing to do, to actually ‘doing’ what is right. The connection, or disconnection, between leaders knowing and doing what is right is underpinned by what is valued, as Branson and Gross (2014) assert:

Every choice an educational leader makes is based on values that are either known or unknown, acknowledged, or unacknowledged, by them. The less known or acknowledged the values that direct a choice, the more likely is it that an unethical decision will be made... (p. 3)

Shapiro and Gross (2013) suggest that responsibility is a term which needs to be heard more of in education as it goes beyond accountability for the budget, or regulation and is connected with caring and sharing and ensuring education will be good not only today but also for tomorrow. This leads to the idea that an element of leadership is the concept of stewardship, which will now be explored.

#### *Stewardship and accountability*

Stewardship is a familiar term within education (ERO, 2015), although it is not usually associated with ECE leadership in Aotearoa New Zealand. The notion of environmental stewardship is more familiar, and is associated with actively conserving the natural environment for the benefit of all, balancing the interests of society today with ensuring a legacy for future generations (Blanchard & Buchanan, 2011). The idea that stewardship is not about ownership, but an ethical responsibility to the collective and future generations, as guardians of taonga such as the environment, is also evident in the Māori concept of Kaitiakitanga (Ritchie, 2010a; Ritchie, 2013b).

The concept and values of stewardship are also applicable to education. The Education Review Office (2015) identifies that stewardship is evident within primary and secondary schools' 'boards of trustees', regarding their role ensuring cohesion and alignment between the needs and aspirations of students and parents, the policies, practices and procedures within the school and the school's values, vision and strategic goals. Stewardship combines leadership and governance, with trust, scrutiny (are we doing what is right?), accountability, and transparency as its basic tenets (ERO, 2015). This understanding of stewardship indicates an element of guardianship – taking care of what is valued within the setting, as well as deemed important nationally, and actively seeking what is best for all. The New Zealand School Trustees Association (2015, p.1) states that “all schools are effectively governed by a board of trustees whose primary focus is every student achieving

their highest possible educational potential”. Whereas, all primary and secondary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand are required to have a parent elected board of trustees, (New Zealand School Trustees Association, 2015), this is not a regulatory obligation for all ECE services. Therefore, the leadership structures do not all have the layer of stewardship as outlined for primary and secondary schools (ERO, 2015).

Branson and Gross (2014) suggest that leadership is difficult and posit that ethical leadership is not something which automatically comes naturally for leaders but is something which requires commitment and a shift in perspective. Ethical leadership is about being socially just (Shields, 2014) with ethical stewardship flowing from this, valuing what is important for the good of all (Branson and Gross, 2014) and guarding its realisation. When issues of power are considered in relation to decision making the notion of stewardship in ECE leadership is associated more with those who ultimately hold the power to ensure the intent of *Te Whāriki* is realised; pertinent to this study the leadership is the centre owners and the managers, both temporary and permanent. In essence, as noted above, leadership in ECE is recognised as being complex, requiring research which is context specific.

The following will examine the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis and view the relevant literature in light of Rogoff’s (2003) notion of participation, giving the concept of belonging context within this study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

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### **Theoretical framework**

#### *Introduction*

This research required a theoretical framework validating the perspectives of individual children and adults and their engagements within the social context of the ECE centre. Therefore, the study is underpinned by the interpretive epistemologies of social constructionism and sociocultural theory, providing a conceptual framework bringing meaning to the shared experiences of the study's participants. This chapter explores each concept in turn and concludes with a critique of Barbara Rogoff's sociocultural historical approach to learning and development and her three foci of analysis in relation to this study. The theoretical literature presented in this chapter frames how I came to understand the relationship between the participants' data and how belonging was being constructed for them in the centre.

#### *Social constructionism*

Social constructionism is premised on the beliefs that individuals make sense of their world as they engage with it (Crotty, 1998), knowledge of the world is developed as an act of interpretation, varying cross-culturally (Hodgetts, Drew, Sonn, Stolte, Nikora & Curtis, 2010), and the construction of meaning and knowledge is not a lone endeavour but occurs in participation with others (Andrews, 2012; Blaikie, 1993; Burr, 2015; Crotty, 1998).

Burr (2015) suggests that in reality there is no one definition of social constructionism, but rather, there are key assumptions which are consistently present within the paradigm. These include, remaining critical of views of the world which rely solely on objective observation (Andrews, 2012; Burr, 2015), being cautious of assumptions and classifications (Burr, 2015), and acknowledging that the categorisations we use and the many ways individuals have of seeing the world are all culturally and historically specific (Burr, 2015; Crotty, 1998). Social

constructionism sees knowledge as an individual's interpretation of reality, rather than their direct "perception of reality" (Burr, 2015, p. 9), suggesting with many ways to interpret a 'reality' there is no such thing as an objective fact. Crotty (1998) asserts that without exception all meaningful reality is socially constructed.

Recognising the influence of culture is essential when applying a social constructionism framework to research. Crotty (1998) offers a perspective suggesting the paradigm's key concept, asserting meaning is made through acts of engagement can be both simplistic and misleading if viewed in isolation of cultural considerations. The idea that we "are all born into a world of meaning", as Crotty (1998, p. 54) indicates, suggests we do not necessarily go around spontaneously 'making meaning' from every one of life's encounters. Rather, we engage with the world through pre-framed filters. Burr (2015) concurs, explaining that the "conceptual frameworks and categories used by the people in our culture" (p. 10) are firmly in place from birth and become subjective filters which we use when encountering and engaging with the world around us. This viewpoint posits that it is our culture which determines how we view our world, and our culture informs how and what to engage with, and conversely, what to ignore. As Crotty (1998) asserts, "we depend on culture to direct our behaviour and organise our experience" (p. 53).

A broad example of experiences being organised due to a cultural expectation would be that in Aotearoa New Zealand a child does not legally have to be enrolled in compulsory education until their sixth birthday, however, the overwhelming majority of children 'start school' on their fifth birthday. Compulsory schooling for children is in itself a social construction, as is the fact that 'five years of age' is an entrenched cultural norm for when children begin this journey in Aotearoa New Zealand. A number of New Zealanders would find it challenging to filter information which re-frames their thinking by offering an opinion challenging this cultural expectation.

## *Sociocultural theory*

Sociocultural theory contains the epistemological tenets of social constructionism as outlined above, and is based on the principle that individuals cannot be understood or studied in isolation, but how they make meaning is only understood within the context of their culture, their interactions, experiences, and the societies they are immersed in (Cole, 2001; Rogoff, 1990; Rogoff, 2003; Smith, 2013a; Tracey & Morrow, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985, 1995). Underpinning *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996), sociocultural theory assists in understanding the complexity of children's meaning making, recognising the collective and collaborative nature of learning and development, and the acquisition of skills and knowledge within the child's multifaceted, and shared, social activities and interactions (Smith, 2011).

Viewing learning and development as more than simply a cognitive experience, sociocultural theory also recognises its physical, emotional, relational and cultural components, imbuing early years' curriculum and educational research with breadth and depth. The term curriculum as defined in *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) broadly reflects this sociocultural understanding and is intended;

to describe the sum total of the experiences, activities, and events, whether direct or indirect, which occur within an environment designed to foster children's learning and development (p. 10).

The holistic understanding of children's learning and development is found within *Te Whāriki*'s four guiding principles; empowerment, holistic development, family and community and relationships, and five strands; well-being, belonging, contribution, communication and exploration, together forming the framework of the ECE curriculum, all viewed as interconnected and influential (MoE, 1996). The following explores this complexity and begins by placing learning and development within a sociocultural context focusing on the two key principles of sociocultural theory; the individual and the social world are interconnected, and, individuals are shaped by their cultural histories, practices and realities.

### ***Learning and development through a sociocultural lens***

Sociocultural theory underpins *Te Whāriki*, including the work of Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) and Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005) (Te One, 2013). The following section will explore the influence of both theorists in relation to children's learning and development.

#### ***Vygotsky***

Sociocultural theory is attributed to the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978) who early in his research career developed an interest in the disconnection between the individual and their environment within the field of psychology. Through extensive collaborative research (Stetsenko, 2004), Vygotsky developed learning and development theories with an aim to orientate the field of psychology towards a more integrated approach recognising the relationship between the individual with their social interactions and cultural environments (Smith, 2013a; Vygotsky, 1997; Wertsch, 1985).

Learning and development, Vygotsky (1978) purports, is a social process involving the growing mastery of physical, psychological and cultural tools (books, speech, rituals), moving the child towards higher mental functioning. At any given point in history, the Vygotskian child engages in social activities utilising the tools of their culture (Wertsch, 1995). It is when participating in activity or social contexts that individuals attach meaning to these tools (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky viewed language as the most important cultural tool of all and saw speech as emancipating – freeing the individual to problem-solve, explore, construct personal meaning, and determine their own place in society (Stetsenko, 2004). Pertinent to this study, Kozulin (2003) suggests it is the conventions of the cultural environment one participates in which provides purpose and meaning to these cultural tools. If the cultural environments a child participates in differ, such as in the home and the ECE setting, what is valued as useful and meaningful cultural tools, such as the language spoken or child-rearing practices, within each community may also be different. This suggests that the level of congruence between the two settings will have some influence on how the child interprets the meaning, purpose, and ultimately the application of the cultural tools within each.

Sociocultural theory promotes the value of children's play in learning and development. Children's activities and social experiences were viewed as important for Vygotsky (2004) who argued, "[t]he richer a person's experience, the richer is the material his [sic] imagination has access to" (pp. 14-15), ultimately facilitating the move to higher order thinking processes (Vygotsky, 1997). The internalisation of the external social world, Vygotsky (1997) contended, occurred gradually as the child engaged with the signs and tools around them. Within this process the values and practices of the child's social communities are also explicitly and implicitly appropriated, reinforced or changed, through the vehicles of imaginative thought and creative play. Vygotsky (2004) viewed creative and imaginative play as a key cognitive building block where meaning is made for children and thought is refined. This form of play is also influenced by culture, and subsequently what counts as valuable play can often be contested between individuals (Wood & Attfield, 2005).

This model positions the child appropriately as having power and influence (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2013; Dalli et al., 2011; White & Mika, 2013), however, the *content* of the social world also has influential power. Significant to this study, within an ECE setting this is evident in the practice and pedagogies of teachers, and the overall culture of the setting, which regulates activities and experiences and determines which relationships and contributions are valued, and conversely which are not (Smith, 2002). This influences the construction of how one belongs in the setting.

Vygotsky's (1997) concept of the *zone of proximal development* [ZPD] encapsulates his understandings and recognises the place of socially located guided learning in the advancement of development and learning. The ZPD is essentially the theoretical locale where learning is optimised; the area within which the individual is able to interact, engage, and think without assistance and where they can develop and progress with assistance from more experienced adults and peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky viewed learning as both 'occurring' within the ZPD as well as 'creating' the child's ZPD. He believed that a child could learn more working with peers and adults who were more capable than if they were working alone. Understanding children's learning was highly significant for Vygotsky

(1978), who theorised the connection between learning opportunities and development, stating,

learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers (p. 90).

Learning was viewed by Vygotsky (1978) as occurring on two levels; firstly, interpersonally, guided or mediated with others within the child's ZPD, and then on an intrapersonal level indicating that competence has been acquired and internalised, thereby placing learning within the child's zone of actual development (Kozulin, 2003; Smith, 2013a). Hence, the role of the teacher was viewed as very important in progressing a child's development and learning as Vygotsky (1978) also saw early sociocultural learning experiences as necessary building blocks for the development of more complex thought processes required later in life. Smith (1998, p. 23) agrees, asserting that the learning and development occurring during the early years of life is "particularly rapid and complex" and "critical" in a person's formation.

A learner's ZPD, and the associated concept of scaffolding (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976), are familiar theories which qualified teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand understand and implement in teaching, planning and assessment practices. From a Te Tiriti perspective, traditional Māori methods of teaching and learning also provide examples of socio-cultural theory in action (Macfarlane, 2004). Similar to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, the tuakana-teina approach, where a more skilled older child assists or teaches a younger child, traditionally a sibling of the same gender (Bevan-Brown, 2009) is a concept familiar to qualified teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand through their pre-service training programmes.

It is important, however, to understand that traditional Māori concepts cannot be viewed solely through a sociocultural lens or in isolation of a Māori epistemology, or worldview, as all concepts are interconnected, intrinsically linked to Māori spirituality and integral to the understanding and transmission of Māori knowledge (Pihama, Smith, Taki & Lee, 2004). For example, the concepts of whanaungatanga; that learning occurs within a family-like environment creating a sense of belonging (Rameka, 2007), and, ako; that teaching and learning is a reciprocal endeavour with

knowledge viewed as belonging to the group, rather than an individual pursuit (Love, 2004; Pere, 1991, 1994, 2003) are also culturally located. These concepts are further illustrations requiring an understanding of a Māori worldview in order to reduce the possibility of superficial application as they have multiple layers of meaning and cannot be contained to short definitions and illustrations.

The construction of childhood and positioning of children, especially infants and toddlers (White & Mika, 2013) will also influence how the concept of the zone of proximal development is applied. Mitchell (2010) suggests that the way society constructs childhood will impact how children are positioned in policy, provided for, and responded to in ECE settings. Across a broad continuum pedagogies and discourses reflect how childhood is constructed. Mitchell (2010) proposes these constructs can be grouped into three categories which are linked to the dominant discourses within policy literature; children can be positioned as having needs to be met making them passive recipients of ECE provision, children can be viewed more as learners who are located within a community of learners, or children can be positioned as citizens of a global community with rights and agency.

Understanding the link between the construction of childhood and the provision of 'childcare' is an important one to make as it allows us to recognise this influence within teacher/child interactions (Moss & Petrie, 2002). Determining a child's ZPD requires valuing the child's *zone of actual development* (Vygotsky, 1978, 1997); therefore, how childhood is constructed by an adult will influence how learning and development is understood by them; how they will view, and what they will value as 'actual development'. This is becoming increasingly evident within infant and toddler research, for example. Dalli, White, Rockell and Dunn's (2011) comprehensive literature review on quality ECE for under two year olds points to a growing body of research highlighting the move away from viewing infants and toddlers as individuals with a limited ability to engage in learning. Rather, infants and toddlers are positioned as capable and competent learners, immersed in a complex array of relationships and experiences (Dalli et al., 2011; Stratigos, 2015).

The view that from infancy children are highly capable learners as proposed by Dalli et al., (2011) aligns with Rangimarie Rose Pere's (1994), who states, "traditional Maori learning rested on the principle that every person is a learner

from the time they are born (if not before) to the time they die” (p. 54). This perspective indicates that from infancy a child is already a knowledgeable and competent learner. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013) offer another construction which supports the notion of competency and agency with the very young, suggesting that when children are positioned as co-constructors of their learning they are viewed as individuals already competent, imbued with power, and with agency to participate and contribute with equal rights. These understandings are counter to those which do not position a child as a competent and capable person in their own right, but ‘an adult in waiting’ (Nutbrown, 1996). Nutbrown (1996) indicates that ‘the needy child’ discourses contribute to an erroneous way of viewing childhood, only serving to narrow curricula, limit pedagogy and restrict participation. However, the discourses which position children as ‘innocents in need of guidance’ are the ones many adults working with young children are accustomed to from their own childhood experiences (Nutbrown, 1996), which suggests without understanding and reflexivity this construction of childhood may be evident in a number of adults’ teaching pedagogies and practices.

It is possible for adults to work instinctively within a child’s ZPD without being qualified, as parents do all the time, but to plan and assess learning effectively, ethically, and with cultural sensitivity in an ECE setting a sound understanding of this theoretical concept is necessary (Dalli et al., 2011; Fler, 2010). The zone of proximal development is important for teachers to understand in theory and apply in practice, but is only one aspect of Vygotsky’s learning and development theories. Fler (2010) argues against compartmentalising Vygotsky’s theories of child development by only having a narrow and limiting focus on, for example, the zone of proximal development as his theories are far more complex. Rogoff (2003) also suggests that a narrow focus on the zone of proximal development can overlook Vygotsky’s “emphasis on cultural processes” (p. 54). However, it is agreed that a principle of Vygotsky’s (1978; 1997) sociocultural theory placed considerable emphasis on how the environment and social interaction is influential regarding children’s thinking; how they think as well as what they think about (Fler, 2010; Kozulin, 2003; Rogoff, 2003).

Vygotsky (1978) argued that learning was embedded in the social context, and that effective learning occurred in meaningful contexts. The relationships within a child's social world were viewed by Vygotsky (1978; 2004) as both powerful and reciprocally influential, suggesting that the environment impacted upon the child's cognitive development, and the 'developing' child then had influence within their environment. This suggests two things; firstly, children have agency, and secondly, context is important as an individual can be both influenced and influential within the context of their lived experiences. Expanding on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory the influence of context and environments are central to Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) early theorising as evidenced in his introduction of the *ecological systems theory* (Smith, 2013a). Bronfenbrenner's contribution to understanding children's learning and development will now be explored.

### ***Bronfenbrenner***

Pioneering the examination of family, social, cultural, economic and political structures as being influential in children's development Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested children were not only affected by everything in their immediate environments, but also those surrounding them and their families. Bronfenbrenner (1979) initially proposed four systems which he viewed as significant in shaping children's development; the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield & Karnik, 2009). A fifth, the chronosystem, was later added to account for the influences of environmental changes on families and individuals over time (Smith, 2013a).

The five concepts are; the *microsystem* – the child's immediate setting, which has the greatest impact on the child, such as the home, or the ECE centre; the *mesosystem* – the connections between microsystems, such as the communication and relationships existing between the family and ECE centre; the *exosystem* – the contexts the child is not immediately involved in but which impacts upon them; for example, parents' conditions of employment, media, government regulations and policies; the *macrosystem* - cultural attitudes and ideologies within the child's given society or the groups the child is affiliated with due to socioeconomic or class status, ethnicity, or religious affiliations; and the additional fifth system, the *chronosystem* theorising the impact of environmental transitions, such as the effects of parental

divorce on children, and the impact of socio-historical circumstances upon the structuring of society, such as the increase of working mothers generating a need for all-day childcare.

Smith (2002) proposes that Bronfenbrenner's influence shifts focus on how we come to understand children's learning and development, indicating that for researchers his theory suggests,

that it makes little sense to study children out of context, and that it is important to attend to the perceived meaning of the context to the people participating in them (p. 77).

Bronfenbrenner's early work has made a significant contribution to understanding the overarching social and environmental systems of influence. Relevant to this study his theory also facilitates an awareness of the factors which support or undermine the capacity of those within and between the children's immediate settings (microsystems) to support their learning and wellbeing (Smith, 2013a). Rangimarie Rose Pere (1994) also proposes that any decisions made within the child's microsystems, family or EC settings, will have a direct impact on the child.

Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield and Karnik (2009), however, challenge the use of Bronfenbrenner's 1979 ecological systems theory as a theoretical framework without acknowledging its place in Bronfenbrenner's continued theorising. Referring to his ongoing commitment to reassessment Bronfenbrenner (1999, p. 4) stated that "it is useful to distinguish two periods: the first ending with the publication of the *Ecology of Human Development* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and the second characterized by a series of papers that call the original model into question". Bronfenbrenner renamed his full theory the *bioecological model* identifying that biological factors, solely considered in the sense that they highlighted potential, required consideration in developing an understanding of children's development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

A key factor for consideration within Bronfenbrenner's *bioecological model* included *proximal processes*, defined as being active, participatory and reciprocal; something that occurs in a child's life on a regular basis over an extended period of time, such as the process of learning to read (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998;

Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield & Karnik, 2009). Bronfenbrenner's *bioecological model* demonstrates he was interested in more than social and environmental context but also the individual's personal characteristics which they bring with them into social interactions, such as age, gender, ethnicity, social and material resources as well as dispositions, such as an ability to persevere.

Bronfenbrenner did not view children as passive participants, but people with influence in bringing change to their environment (Smith, 2013a). For some children, he determined, change in the environment (microsystem) occurs passively, for example, how teachers react to the child's age, gender or skin colour, effectually alters the child's environment (while subtle, reaction is not neutral), and for others this occurs more actively and obviously, for example, a child's physical, emotional or intellectual ability can bring change to their environment, reflective of how each is valued and expressed (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield & Karnik, 2009). In this regard Bronfenbrenner's full theory contained a principal social aspect (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). In respect to Bronfenbrenner's *ecological systems theory*, social and environmental factors greatly influence whether a child's biological potential will be realised or not.

A sociocultural perspective places importance on reciprocal and culturally responsive partnerships within and between the child's social worlds of the home and centre, as is evident in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Smith, 2002). Relevant to this study this consideration can also be applied to children's social worlds *within* the ECE centre, especially for children spending extended periods of time within the one setting.

While children's transitions between settings, including those within settings, are given significance in research (Nueman, 2002) the day-to-day nuances of the social worlds within the one setting can be often overlooked. For example, within a relatively short space of time the presence of infants in ECE settings has become accepted as a social norm, and it is not un-common for infants and toddlers, along with their older siblings, to spend prolonged hours at an ECE centre (Dalli et al., 2011). Siblings most often attend the same centre, yet can be physically separated by social spaces which are governed by regulatory and physical factors, such as the differing adult-to-child ratios between the under-two and two years and over age

groups. This results in separate physical spaces demarcated by age. In larger ECE centres children can be separated into four age groups (for example, infants, toddlers, young children, and pre-school). Siblings can effectively play, eat, rest and explore in totally separate environments within the one locale.

In order for the social world of one child to include their younger or older sibling, responsive and reciprocal partnerships between the adults monitoring the siblings' microsystems (age demarcated spaces) are required. If the sibling relationship is not understood or valued ethically and philosophically, opportunities to spend time socially together throughout the day may be restricted or not available for siblings. Applying Bronfenbrenner's *ecological systems theory* to situations such as these would indicate that extended separation without consideration will have some impact on the children's learning, development, and identities. This social separation would be considered inappropriate for many families (Gonzalez-Mena, 2002; Rau & Ritchie, 2011; ERO, June 2015). An appreciation of the role of responsive and reciprocal partnerships with parents, as well as between teachers, facilitating an authentic understanding of the child, the family's cultural values and practices, and how these relationships are fostered, are all important points for early years teachers to consider (Dalli, et al., 2011; Ghirotto, & Mazzoni, 2013; Gonzalez-Mena, 2002).

A further developmental concept which sociocultural theory has supported is an understanding of the child as belonging to a deeper cultural system. A complex system where generational values, beliefs, customs, experiences and practices provide the child with a living and influential legacy, one which is always with them, informing their observations, interpretations and social interactions. While Bronfenbrenner focused on the breadth of influential connections within a child's social and cultural world, Vygotsky (1978) also connected the cultural child with the historical child (Fleer, Anning, & Cullen, 2009; Smith, 2013a). Neo-Vygotskian theorist, Barbara Rogoff (2003), expanded this notion further suggesting that from a sociocultural historical perspective in order to fully understand the individual child one must also try and discover the historical child. This perspective also recognises that there are alternative ways of being and belonging in the world.

This thesis utilises the perspective of Barbara Rogoff (2003) within the theoretical as well as analytical framework. The following section examines Rogoff's (2003) cultural understanding of development, her theoretical contribution placing emphasis on the role of participation in cultural development, and the application of her understandings to this study.

### ***Rogoff***

Foregrounding the role of current and continued participation in cultural development, rather than focusing exclusively on the internalisation of cognitive processes, Rogoff's (2003) sociocultural historical approach suggests that;

human development is a process in which people transform through their ongoing participation in cultural activities, which in turn contribute to changes in their cultural communities across generations (p. 37).

An example of the transformative role of participation is the development of the English language, which Rogoff (2003) cites to demonstrate the developing nature of cultural participation and practices. The English language has evolved over the generations courtesy of historical conquests, with the acquisition and assimilation of languages arising from contact with other peoples, making it a constantly evolving, living language.

An overarching concept proposed by Rogoff (2003) through her cross-culture studies is that cultural communities, and therefore, how one participates within them, are not static but continually changing. To avoid "generalizing to national groups from observations of a few people in a single community" the term cultural communities is used rather than "cultures" (Rogoff, Mistry, Göncü, Mosier, Chavajay, and Brice Heath, 1993, pp. 2-3) With a view that an ECE setting in itself is a cultural community this notion indicates that an awareness of the cultural processes, interactions and values within the setting is of equal importance as an awareness of the interplay between the cultural groups participating within it. As Rogoff (2003) proposes;

... people develop as participants in cultural communities. Their development can be understood only in the light of the cultural practices and circumstances of their communities (pp. 3-4).

Recognising the diversity of contexts from a socio-cultural viewpoint, “the individual and the social world are mutual and not separable” (Rogoff, 1990, p. viii), Rogoff (2003) proposes the transformative interplay between people and their environment, with each generation contributing to new ideas and practices and to the changing of “cultural possibilities” (p. 67). Children’s learning is complex and the environments, as Rogoff’s suggests, within which they learn are diverse, with every ECE setting having its own sociocultural context (Smith, 2013a). A sociocultural perspective suggests that as children interact with others, cultural, social and intellectual tools are encountered, applied and refined, such as those found within language, numeracy and literacy systems. The application of a sociocultural historical perspective provides legitimacy to *all* of the tools and processes children use as they learn and develop (Smith, 2013a).

While Vygotsky focused primarily on interactions within formal educational settings in a bid to understand and promote a deeper understanding of cognitive development, Rogoff (2003) built on his theory suggesting that similar development occurs outside of these settings, as children engage in “everyday interactions” (p. 283), in a variety of familiar contexts. Rogoff’s (2003) sociocultural historical approach gives meaning and value to culturally diverse child-rearing practices and funds of knowledge which have previously been marginalised within mainstream education (Smith, 2013a). To understand the contributions the child brings to the ECE setting requires reasonable knowledge of their interactions and participation in all contexts the child resides and operates in (Dalli et al., 2011, Rau & Ritchie, 2011). A key aspect of Rogoff’s (2003) theory is personal cultural awareness and an openness to the perspective of others. This awareness facilitates a teacher’s ability to appreciate and value cultural tools and patterns that are different to their own, which is recognised as being important in respectful culturally responsive practice (Gonzales-Mena, 2002; Gonzalez-Mena & Widmeyer Eyer, 2014; Smith, 2013a).

Weaving together sociocultural approaches, Rogoff (2014a) therefore proposes that the goal of learning is not the appropriation of skills and knowledge but the ability to successfully participate within the community (Smith, 2013a). Belonging, through Rogoff's (2003) lens, is intrinsically connected to participation, how one participates, the construction of the environment within which participation occurs, and how one moves towards the culturally constructed goals determining what full participation within the community looks like. Applicable to this study, it is therefore important to discover the goals, or aspirations valued by the child's cultural communities (Rogoff et al., 1993); in this case their family and the ECE centre, determining how they align with each other.

Rogoff's (2003, 2014a) notion of successful participation involves collaboration with others and is premised on the notion that everyone not only has something to offer to the group, but has the responsibility and expectation to contribute to the community to which they belong (Glăveanu, 2011). Rogoff's (2003, 2014b) understanding of cognitive development in relation to participation in cultural communities is explained in three concepts occurring within three interrelated planes; *apprenticeship* (corresponding to institutional/community processes), *guided participation* (interpersonal processes) and *participatory appropriation* (personal processes). In all three concepts Rogoff (1990) emphasises the mutuality of the learning process.

### *Apprenticeship*

Apprenticeship builds on Vygotsky's (1978) notion that novices, or beginners, develop skills when participating with more skilled others. It also asserts that this is a two way process, where children are positioned with agency and are actively involved in their learning. The metaphor of *apprenticeship* (Rogoff, 1990) is seen as a direct assimilation of Vygotsky's ideas (Kozulin, 2003) and is reflective of Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development. However, with a focus on the role of participation the concept of *apprenticeship* goes beyond the expert-novice dyads, focusing instead on the intent of the interpersonal relationships and socially shared activities children participate in. The activities intrinsically connect the child to the community they belong to, such as those occurring in the home or the ECE centre, and *apprenticeship* explains the move towards mature participation

within the said community (Rogoff, 1990). Therefore, *apprenticeship* also looks at the historical nature of an activity in relation to the aims of the community it is embedded within.

Rogoff (1990, 2003) provides the example of the annual Girl Scout cookie sales in the United States to explain the concept of *apprenticeship*. Permeating the activity of selling cookies are the traditions and practices honed by the Girl Scout movement over the years. Within this activity the concept of *apprenticeship* can be seen in the girls taking responsibility for their participation in the sale of the cookies and learning the processes and practices involved for sales and delivery in this culturally embedded practice, thereby moving towards mature participation. The structure of the order form, the tracking of the money received, and the set delivery dates for the ordered cookies are processes determined on an institutional level, by the Girl Scout organisation. This is a further example of the historical component of Rogoff's theory at play. The processes mentioned are embedded in a historical context, at their core they remain the same, but how they are expressed today is a result of being modified and adapted over time. All processes facilitate how the Girl Scouts undertake the cookie sale activity. Understanding what is happening on an institutional/community plane is necessary to understand how the girls are progressing towards full community participation within the Girl Scout movement on personal and interpersonal planes.

Rogoff's concept of *apprenticeship* fits with the aim of this study which is to explore how belonging is being constructed within a for-profit ECE community. While I am not exploring an activity, determining how belonging is constructed also requires an understanding of the purpose and aims of the ECE community on an institutional plane in order to determine how the structure and intent of the organisation facilitates participation within it.

#### *Guided participation*

Rogoff's concept of *guided participation* has its foundation in Vygotsky's (1978) understanding that cognitive development has a collaborative element, within which learning and development occur through interaction with more skilled others in culturally structured activities. Rogoff (2014b) expands on this understanding suggesting that interaction with others does not necessarily have to occur face-to-

face, and “a child who is actively observing and following the decisions made by another person is participating whether or not he or she contributes directly to decisions as they are made” (p. 134). Children’s natural curiosity often provides a catalyst for learning and development; therefore, children are naturally open to new ‘possibilities’ (Rogoff, 2003). The skills, values and knowledge of the community are learnt and extended through active participation in the cultural systems within the community (Rogoff et al., 1993). As noted, this can occur without ‘intentional’ teaching. Rogoff (2003) proposes that “the term ‘guided’ in the concept *guided participation* is thus meant broadly, to include but go beyond interactions that are intended as instructional” (p. 284), including those tacitly structured by cultural and societal systems guiding participation.

The concept of *guided participation* positions the child as a “full participant” (Gauvain, 2001, p. 38) within the social community, with connections constantly being made, for example, through participation in organised routines and practices. This can occur within these and other forms of structured activities which are intended to give children a meaningful role within their community (Smith, 2013a). For example, a parent with their child identifying grocery items in the supermarket using a list they have both contributed to, or a teacher organising a collaborative planting activity purposefully creating an opportunity for the children to participate in growing vegetables intended for consumption within the centre community. Both examples hold focal processes embedded within the concept of *guided participation*; children receive social support through activities which challenge them and simultaneously strengthen their role in the communities they are participating in (Rogoff, 1998; Rogoff, Matusov & White, 1993).

Understanding the concept of *guided participation* also assists teachers in appreciating how values, skills and practices are transmitted, which Rogoff (2003) believes are not limited to those which are deemed “societally desired” (p. 284). Rogoff proposes that the process of *guided participation* remains the same for spontaneous learning as for activities which have been thoughtfully planned, as illustrated above. The construction of learning does not always have to be intentional, or confined to formal learning situations, rather learning is also occurring distally through observation and modelling (Smith, 2013a). This understanding gives greater significance to what is happening outside of the

planned activities which are being experienced and observed by children. A child may regularly observe a teacher sensitively supporting other children as they struggle making sense of a challenging episode, for example, yet their personal inclusion within each interaction is not intentional or even acknowledged by the teacher. A further example is when a child regularly observes a teacher harshly reprimanding children for perceived wrongdoings. Again, the child may never be the actual recipient of the teacher's anger, yet they are participating in every interaction the teacher has with other children through the active role of observer. It can be assumed that new concepts will be understood and internalised by children whether adult or peer mediation is intentional or not. Participating distally in both forms of experiences contributes, for better or worse, to the child's construction of meaning as much as intentional and planned proximally experienced learning activities would. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013) also assert that "the child is in the world as it is today, embodies that world, is acted upon that world – but also acts on it and makes meaning of it" (p. 54).

Therefore, the values and practices embedded within a cultural community will be learned through participation with others, whether that participation is experienced proximally, face-to-face, or distally through observation. Claxton's (2006) notion that learning habits, or dispositions, develop as "children moderate their emotional responses by watching how those around them react" (p. 6) gives support to this theory. The component of time is a further factor to consider in Rogoff's (2003) sociocultural historical theory, as it was in Bronfenbrenner's later theorising (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Both suggest that the process of developmental modification occurs on a regular basis over time, with each new perspective creating new definitions of what is acceptable (Smith, 2013a).

Tacit observation as a valid influence in development and learning is also evident in Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of *legitimate peripheral participation* which acknowledges varying forms of participation within a community of practice - those actively engaged in or tacitly observed. Relevant to this study, applying the perspective of *guided participation* to the ECE setting recognises the context of the learning environment the children are participating in is highly significant to how belonging is constructed, as it *will* leave an imprint, regardless of whether learning is 'intentionally' offered to children or not. What is happening on an *interpersonal*

*plane* beyond the intentionally planned activities is therefore important to consider. Rogoff's concept of *guided participation* indicates that within a cultural community children are not only constructing their skills and practices, but also coming to interpret societal values, beliefs and practices. Applying Rogoff's (1998, 2003) concept of guided participation to an ECE setting suggests that this has pedagogical consequences.

#### *Participatory appropriation*

A companion concept to apprenticeship and guided participation, *participatory appropriation* explains how the process of individual involvement and contribution (physically and intellectually) is involved in new learning. Rogoff (1990) viewed *appropriation* as being more about 'becoming' than it is about adopting new skills. It is where a person, through their own participation transforms their understanding, and in the process better prepares themselves for future related activities (Smith, 2002). Hence, *appropriation* corresponds to the intrapersonal plane.

Rogoff (1990) differentiates between her understanding of *participatory appropriation* and the term appropriation, often associated with internalisation. The latter, Rogoff offers, places knowledge and activity as static entities, something external to the individual which can be appropriated, or internalised, through involvement in an activity. *Participatory appropriation* does not separate the learner from the activity but situates them within it, foregrounding an interconnection between the participating learner and the activity. As Rogoff (1997) asserts, "if a person is participating in an activity, it is inconsistent to consider the person as independent of it; participation inherently means involvement" (p. 267).

The very process of participation precedes and initiates appropriation, which in turn refines perspective, and actively transforms how individuals participate in future events and activities. The perspective of *participatory appropriation* focuses on the *transformation* of participation, such as children gradually taking on greater responsibility, rather than narrowly focusing on the internalisation of new knowledge (Smith, 2013a). Rogoff (2003) attests to the belief that there is more than one way to learn the same thing and ideally by exposing children to diverse ways of learning, while still maintaining other ways of being (culturally located learning), encourages new ways of participation. Children's repertoire to

participate in diverse communities is then extended (Glăveanu, 2011). Therefore, how learning is organised within this study's ECE community is an important point for consideration. How the ECE community is formed – what is valued as legitimate ways of being - will shape how those within it understand how they are expected to participate.

In summary, viewing Rogoff's concepts of *apprenticeship*, *guided participation*, and *participatory appropriation*, the key idea joining all three together is participation in cultural communities. Rogoff's (2003) overarching concept in understanding the role of cultural processes in human development is that "humans develop through changing participation in the sociocultural activities of their communities, which also change" (p. 368). Within this perspective cultural development, participation and belonging are interconnected, dynamic, and context specific (Smith, 2013a; Rogoff, 2003).

Gaining an understanding of the processes involved in the transformation of participation is central to Rogoff's (2003) theory, which also includes the notion that culture is not simply about the activities of 'other people', but requires an understanding of one's own cultural heritage as well as accepting the perspectives of people from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, learning occurs both through explicit intent and tacit, yet active, observation. An additional concept is that there is not a 'one size fits all' or 'best way' approach to understanding cultural practices, but by understanding diverse ways of being connections can be made and variations and similarities can be appreciated (Rogoff, 2003).

### *Three foci of analysis*

How individuals participate within their cultural communities can be analysed through intrapersonal, interpersonal and institutional/community lenses. The aim of Rogoff's (2003) three foci of analysis is understanding the *processes* involved in the *transformation of participation*. The three foci are interconnected and inseparable together comprising the individual and the environment (Fleer, 2009; Smith, 2013a). Rogoff, (2003) contests that as a child engages in activity all three foci are evident (individual, social partners, historical traditions), and should therefore be analysed from all three perspectives in order to fully ascertain the

inherent relationship between each, and subsequently all that is contributing to the child's learning and development.

Rogoff's (1995, 2003) analytical framework has been used by many researchers, with some following her conceptual framework more closely than others (Fleer, 2009). Rogoff's three foci of analysis positions the child's participation in activity (intrapersonal focus) at the centre of her conceptual framework, while concurrently examining their collaborative interactions and relationships (interpersonal focus) and exploring influential community and cultural factors (institutional focus), thereby contextualising children's learning (Robbins, 2007). While each focus can be interpreted in turn they are merely foregrounded in the analysis with the remaining foci retained in the background acknowledging their interconnection and influence (Smith, 2013a). In Rogoff's (1998, 2003) conceptual framework 'activity' and 'event' are used as the unit of analysis, as they reveal the inherent involvement of all foci (Fleer, 2011; Smith, 2013a). Belonging, which is central to this thesis, is a multifaceted concept and cannot be viewed as either an activity or an event, although the construction of belonging could be argued as being inherently evident within both.

### ***Socio-cultural theory and power***

Power relations are recognised as being present in the concept of belonging (Sumsion & Wong, 2011). Corsaro and Molinari (2005) suggest that the often "constraining nature of society and processes of social reproduction ... especially in regard to power relations connected with social-class position, race, ethnicity, and gender" (p.20) are recognised as being neglected in sociocultural approaches, which primarily focus instead on cultural values in relation to cultural practices. When power is considered, in particular within socioeconomic structures, the possibility is increased to see how "variations of values within a given culture constrain some social practices and empower others" (p. 20). Inequality is visible all around us and there are multiple axes of power within research. One of the challenges of socio-cultural research is determining the interplay between the "nature of social structure, power, culture and human agency" (Carspecken, 1996, p. x). Neoliberal ideology, positioning ECE policy and practice towards a business

model of education, is an example of how a shift in values can increase inequality and disempowerment within sections of our society.

The radical economic reforms occurring between 1984 and 1993, taking Aotearoa New Zealand from a state-dominated, protected and regulated system, to the free-market end of the spectrum, where competition and capitalism provided the new economic and social frame of reference (Bassett, 2008). This was evident in the Treasury's (1987) report to Government, with comparisons made between education, and "goods traded in the market place" (p. 33). This ethos of neoliberalism, promoting a market place mind-set which locates the individual free from state intervention, supposedly for the betterment of the economy and the individual, further necessitates the importance of taking into consideration issues of power within educational research. The language of the free market, such as the 'stakeholder' having 'choice' and 'user-pays' has entered the ECE arena since the aforementioned reforms. However, with access limited due to inflexibility, location, cultural or financial barriers, not all citizens have the 'choice' suggested available within this model (Mitchell & Davison, 2010; Robertson, 2007). Those with restricted choice are those with reduced economic and social capital, and, as Thrupp (2007) suggests, it is the poor who are who are the least to see any benefit from neoliberal reforms.

Aotearoa New Zealand's colonial history also requires consideration when viewing *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) as a Tiriti grounded bicultural curriculum, which, through a critical lens, could be considered idealised. Within the context of colonisation power must be viewed as being relational (Hogetts, Drew, Sonn, Stolte, Nikora & Curtis, 2010). Duhn (2006), for example, considers the relationship between the image of *Te Whāriki*'s bicultural child and our settler past, suggesting it is idealised, only serving to water down cultural differences and replicating the colonialised image of the child. Without explicitly referring to our colonial past Fleer (2003, p. 255) adds her own caution to an idealised and superficial view of the bicultural curriculum, asserting that "adopting a bicultural approach without fully understanding the values underpinning particular cultural beliefs" can lead to problems. Te One (2013) also argues that while *Te Whāriki* is unquestionably innovative and progressive we are a long way off seeing it implemented as a truly

bicultural curriculum, as the recent ERO (2012; 2013a) reports reveal, as noted earlier.

Acknowledging that belonging is complex I am broadly applying Rogoff's framework to this research as I believe the three interconnected foci fit well with the study's aim which seeks multiple perspectives while leaving room for various constructs to be revealed. In doing so, variations in values and practices as well as power relations and their impact may be revealed.

The goal of Rogoff's cultural understanding of human development is integrally connected with *belonging* to cultural communities and the processes involved in the transformation of participation within them (Glăveanu, 2011). The following chapter will explain the methodological approach to investigating this study and answering the study's two research questions.

## CHAPTER FIVE

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### **Research Methodology**

Research is not passive or neutral. It is interactive and creative, selective and interpretive, illuminating patches of the world around it, giving meaning and suggesting paths of enquiry (Rock, 2001, p.30).

This chapter will first provide a framework of the research design, situating the focus and overview of the study. The research questions will be outlined and the ontological and epistemological considerations of the researcher will be examined. The rationale for locating this research within a qualitative study and interpretive paradigm will then be explained. I will illustrate how an ethnographic approach is appropriate for this research design and explain the importance of incorporating critical theory as a lens to determine power structures within the social relationships of the research study.

#### ***Introduction***

The purpose of this thesis is to gain an understanding of how stakeholders, namely, children, parents and teachers, identified what supported or constrained their sense of belonging within the centre, revealed through their relationships, values and experiences of participation. Determining the interplay between ‘people, place and things’ and a child’s sense of belonging is also an aim of this thesis. A further interest of this study is to discover how teachers’ beliefs, values, life and educational experiences shaped the lens through which they both construed and engaged with *Te Whāriki*, through the relational strand of ‘Belonging’, and understand to what extent this influenced their teaching pedagogy and practice.

An overview of the research design is now provided with each component unpacked throughout this chapter.

## Focus and overview of the research

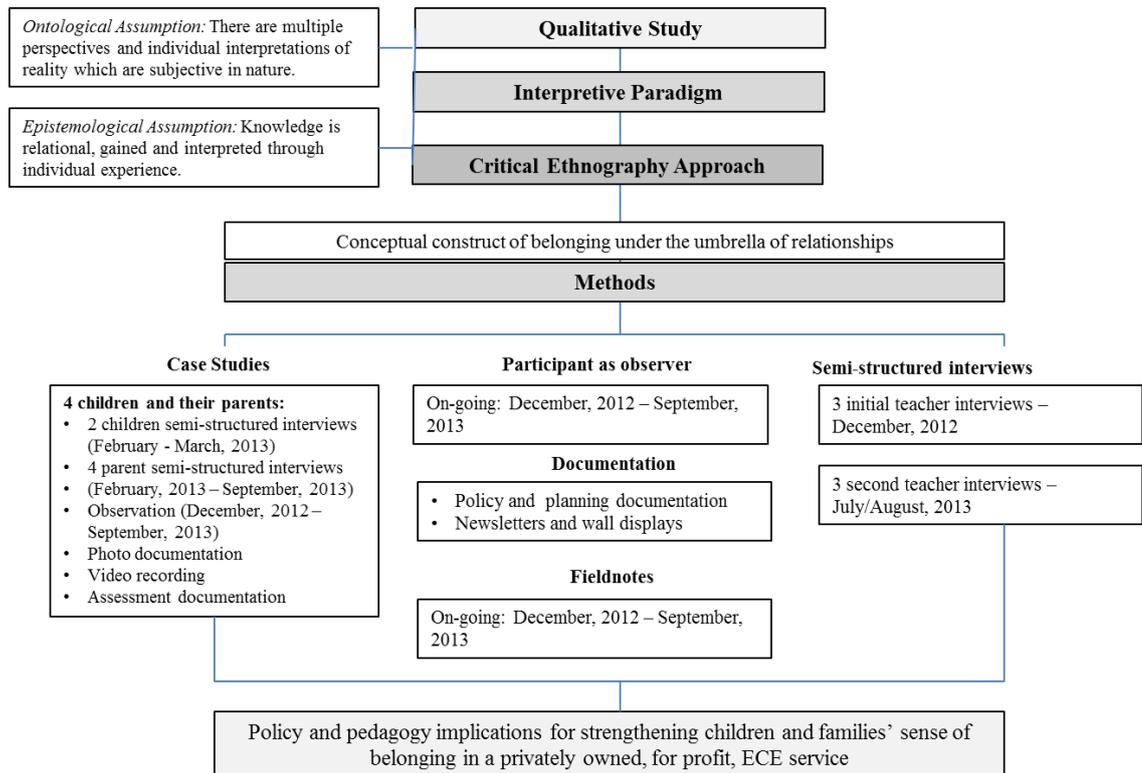


Figure 1: Research design

## Research questions

This study poses the questions:

1. What affordances and challenges to belonging are identified by stakeholders participating in a for-profit, ECE centre?
2. How is the ethical stewardship of Te Whāriki reflected in the leadership's decision making?

## Overview of the research

The ECE curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, acknowledges the multi-cultural heritage and diverse beliefs, values and practices found within our society and ECE settings. Indeed, the curriculum “supports the cultural identity of all children, affirms and

celebrates cultural differences, and aims to help children gain a positive awareness of their own and other cultures” (MoE, 1996, p. 18). The cultural inclusivity identified in *Te Whāriki* could be considered framing what Porter (2006) views as the *intended curriculum*, holding the philosophical beliefs and values underpinning the curriculum document. The research questions are designed to determine how these values are represented in the day-to-day practice of the centre, or what the *enacted curriculum* (Porter, 2006; Nuttall, 2013) looks like, and within the research setting discovering the points of alignment or discord with the intended curriculum.

In order to understand the design of the research questions, and the ensuing research process, it is important to first acknowledge that all features of the study are influenced by the researcher’s view of the world (Newby, 2010). The following section will explain the values and ethical considerations which guided the research design, creating the structures and boundaries which governed the research process.

### ***The research methodology***

The impetus for decision making within a research process is governed by how the researcher conceptualises the natural and social world. Ragin (1994) asserts that “the design of an investigation touches almost all aspects of the research, from the minute details of data collection to the selection of techniques of data analysis” (p.191). The researcher’s ontology (how they view reality) and epistemology (their defined ways of understanding reality and accepted knowledge) influence all aspects of the research design, such as how relationships are framed between the researcher and the participants and the degree of involvement or detachment the researcher adopts during the data generation phase (Scott & Morrison, 2006).

This research study is located within the social world of a privately owned, for-profit, ECE centre, and seeks to discover the lived experiences and perspectives of key stakeholder; teachers, children and parents. As noted earlier in chapter one of this thesis, the perspectives of the centre’s owners and the new manager were not gained. However, the influence and impact of their decision making was captured within the experiences and perspectives of the teachers, children and parents.

Understanding and researching the ‘truth’ about social reality could be conceptualised in two ways; both revealing the researcher’s ontological and epistemological assumptions. If one perceives social reality as external, underpinned by the assumption that knowledge is “hard, objective and tangible” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 6) the researcher would hold an objective, value free epistemology, and align their research within a positivist paradigm and quantitative approach. If one perceives social reality as a collection of individual experiences, viewing knowledge as “personal, subjective and unique” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 6) the researcher would hold a subjective epistemology and would predominantly subscribe to a naturalistic paradigm and qualitative research approach.

The concept of *belonging* is subjective in nature and is central to this study. My personal view is that there are multiple interpretations of ‘truth’ and reality, and individual perceptions or interpretations are subjective and formed by life and cultural experiences and interactions. Therefore, my ontological and epistemological position is also subjective in nature and, accordingly, all aspects of this study are reflective of this. I sought to study the participants’ perceptions and practices, with the belief that these will be complex and there will be multiple understandings of shared experiences. This study relied upon the participants’ subjective interpretation of their relational and situated experiences, which thus influenced my choice of a qualitative methodology.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p. 11) emphasise that within a qualitative research study the “personal biography of the researcher, who speaks from a particular class, gendered, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective” is influential and requires acknowledging. I have lived and taught in low socio-economic areas similar to the context of this study and am familiar with the complexities and unique set of challenges this brings to how life is lived and possibilities are perceived. These experiences have also influenced how I conceptualise belonging. As well as life experiences, my family and cultural values have led me to believe that having a strong sense of belonging, suggesting one is valued and known, is complex. This state of being does not occur in a vacuum; I believe it is the offspring of a complex set of relationships which are bound together with values such as trust and respect, acceptance and care. It is my view that there is an investment component which

characterises and validates the relationship; for example, as a teacher it is the giving of oneself beyond the confines of the job description.

### ***The research paradigm***

Determining the appropriate research design for this study was not a linear process. Unforeseen circumstances meant that my initial research methods, which fell under the auspices of action research and critical theory, would no longer happen. Newby (2010) acknowledges that research is not always straight forward and suggests that it is in fact a “problem-solving activity. Some problems you can anticipate, others do not appear until you start” (p. 21). The design of this research study initially included an action research component and the original focus was on “Pākehā ECE teachers’ bicultural understandings of belonging and how the child and their family’s sense of belonging can be strengthened in pedagogy”. Within two months of entering the field significant changes to the centre’s leadership structure meant that action research would no longer be feasible. This will be discussed further in the methods section of this chapter. However, it was always clear that an interpretive qualitative paradigm was the most suitable for this study, as it is concerned with the subjective accounts of individual and collective human interactions and experiences.

The objective of this research study is to provide an in-depth analysis of the participants’ individual and shared experiences and understandings, within the ECE setting, over a nine month period. Essentially, this research is exploring two aspects of belonging. One concerns the teachers’, children’s and parents’ understandings of what it means to belong to a privately owned, for profit, ECE learning environment. The other explores the interplay between the environment, with all its relational expressions, and the centre’s supporting structures and how these influence the participants’ sense of belonging. As this study is reliant on the subjective views of both the participants and the researcher, in the role of participant observer, and is context-specific, it contains the characteristics of interpretive qualitative research (Creswell, 2012; Stake, 2000; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009).

Qualitative research is explorative in nature, contains unknown variables, and seeks to gain insight or a deeper understanding into a “central phenomenon” (Creswell,

2012, p.16). One of the key distinctions of qualitative research is that it gathers data naturally, which is complex. This involves the purposeful selection of participants in order to gain understanding, providing a voice to individuals who are representative of the setting, including those whose opinion may not always be sought (Creswell, 2012). The setting of the early childhood centre was the natural everyday environment of the participants, which included very young children whose voices historically have not always been included in research (McNaughton, Rolfe & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001). Within an interpretive qualitative paradigm the researcher seeks to “understand, explain and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants”, with the participants defining what their reality actually is (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 15).

As ‘reality’ within a qualitative paradigm is socially constructed and locally situated, qualitative researchers give emphasis to the relationship between themselves and the participants, as well as the contributing factors of the study’s context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). A feature of qualitative research is the researcher’s desire to study people in their natural environments in an attempt to gain an understanding of the meaning participants attribute to their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). However, this is not without its difficulties as “the phenomenon of our interest reflects multiple perspectives” which are not always apparent or considered by the researcher or key members of the setting (Altheide & Johnson, 2013, p. 405). Therefore, isolating the research phenomena within an interpretive qualitative paradigm will always be considered incomplete.

In contrast to research located within a positivist quantitative paradigm, which would view this ‘conflict’ as an intolerable dilemma, uncertainty and quandary is both compatible with, and accepted within an interpretive qualitative paradigm. Having an awareness that any socially constructed qualitative study will always be ‘lacking’ highlights the importance of utilising robust qualitative research methods which ensure, as social researchers, we achieve an “adequate understanding” of the reality within the research setting (Altheide & Johnson, 2013, p. 405).

Qualitative research can be simply defined as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). However, fundamental to a considered qualitative study is *how* the observer, or researcher, decides to locate

themselves within the research setting and *how* they construct the boundaries of the research design. Both will define and determine the nature of the relationships within the situated world of the research study. In relation to this research it was deemed appropriate to build relationships in the role of participant observer (which will be unpacked further in the next chapter), in order to appreciate the cultural practices and relational expressions with some authenticity. In essence, interpretive qualitative research is relational in nature and is reliant upon the participants feeling comfortable enough to share their interpretation of their personal experiences and worldview. The relationships the researcher have with the participants must be strong enough, in that they are respectful and trusting, so that the interpretation that is eventually attributed to the data generated is done so ethically and with reasonable trustworthiness.

Qualitative social research recognises the complexity of human interactions and the holistic nature of meaning making between the knower and the known. The holistic and integrated nature of qualitative research is viewed within literature as both a key feature and strength of the discipline (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In contrast to quantitative methodology a recognised strength of qualitative research is that there is an acknowledgement and emphasis of not only the perspectives of the participants within the study, but the context of the study itself (Punch, 2009). Being immersed in the day to day goings-on of the centre helped locate the participants' perspectives within the context of the study and see the active relationship between the two.

However, as Punch (2009, p. 161) asserts, as researchers “we cannot *give* the full picture unless we *have* the full picture”. This leads into the eventual choice of ethnography as an appropriate methodological approach for this research study. The decision to embark on an ethnographic study, which was new to me, came from a period of reflective and reflexive reading which continued throughout the study, along with critical discussion with other ethnographic researchers, ensuring the protocols framing the approach were adhered to. An ethnographic approach was viewed as an appropriate means to provide the lens and structure necessary to help explicate the ways the participants attributed meaning and understanding to their everyday life, providing a way for the many layers making up the ‘full picture’ to be explored and captured.

### ***The research approach: Ethnography***

This thesis is a study of a relatively small for-profit, ECE centre and is a descriptive account of the cultural characteristics of the members within it. Educational ethnography has its roots in cultural anthropology and sociology. However, educational ethnographers tend to study cultural groups, such as the chosen centre in my study, at a micro-level (Creswell, 2012; Fetterman, 2010; Johnson and Christensen, 2012).

While various subcultures are evident within the composition of the chosen site; leaders, teachers, children and parents, typically ethnographic researchers use the more general term *culture* when referring to the group under study (Johnson and Christensen, 2012). It is acknowledged that all members of the researched group are influenced and affected by multiple cultures, however, for the purpose of this study the group will be viewed from an ethnological standpoint as a culture in its own right. Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) state that an ethnographic case study “analyses a single group, activity, event, or process with detailed attention to the cultural context” (p. 153). The cultural context specific to this ethnography is the ECE centre.

This study contains all aspects of an ethnographic study as defined by Brewer (2000);

[Ethnography is] the study of people in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without being imposed on them externally (p. 6).

The ECE centre can be viewed as a “bounded group” (Anderson-Levitt, 2006, p. 284), in the sense that it is one physically bounded space, however, as mentioned, within this space sit many cultural expressions with some overtly conveyed and others more tacitly so. The exploration of what it means to belong, requires the manifold task of determining what underpins the space’s criteria for belonging, as well as the interplay between the diverse social and cultural individuals and groups

contained within it. I was aware that a caveat of choosing an ethnographic design is, as researcher, remaining mindful of my positioning within the study, which required an ongoing awareness of my cultural values and beliefs, both personal and professional.

Central to ethnographic research is the understanding that reality cannot be predetermined or assumed, but exists within the experiences of the individuals within the group under study (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). Therefore, ethnographic research is phenomenological by nature and seeks to describe the perspectives of the participants and the meaning of their lived experiences (Creswell, 2012; Wierma & Jurs, 2009). This necessitated consciously challenging value judgements in order to understand as reliably as I could the meaning of what I was experiencing; through observation, conversation and active participation in the centre.

Supporting the triangulation of data and adding to the trustworthiness of the study, Johnson and Christensen (2012) offer a description of how this occurs within ethnography:

Ethnographers talk to people, observe their behaviour in their natural day-to-day environments, and examine documents kept by the group members. They also take extensive field notes of what they see on an ongoing basis, and they write memos to themselves, recording their thoughts and interpretations about the developing ethnographic description. (p.393)

A prolonged period of time immersed within the setting, with data generated primarily through observation and interviews, is a feature of ethnography (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010), as is evident within this study. For example, this study took place over a nine month period, from December, 2012, to September, 2013, with interviews and observation comprising the key methods of data generation. During this time I was present in the centre most days, spending between two to six hours a day with the participants. Every ethnographic study will vary regarding the specific amount of time spent within the field. The objective of all ethnographic studies is that the duration of the fieldwork continues until “saturation” point has been reached and the researcher believes there is significantly

no new information, or knowledge, to be found (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 347).

The purpose of ethnographic research is to discover “the patterns of a culture and its unique complexities”, therefore, it is important within the study to describe the setting, the group itself and converse with the interactions between the two (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2010, p. 151). This is a time consuming activity. A related challenge of an ethnographic study is the multiplicity of activities and interactions occurring within the one setting. To address this I chose, on occasion, to be present in the centre solely in an observatory role. Standing back and observing provided an opportunity to become familiar with the activities within the centre and the interplay between the participants, and the setting. Mostly, I participated in the programme alongside the children and teachers. During these times rapport and trust were built.

How the researcher identifies and resolves any research issues encountered within an ethnographic study will either add to, or detract from the credibility of the final report (Altheide & Johnson, 2013). The highly complex and interpretive nature of social research raises the issues of adequacy, especially within an ethnographic study, which requires transparency in every facet of the research process, from data generation and analysis, to interpretation and representation (Altheide & Johnson, 2013).

The interest of this study is the concept of belonging and the social construction of meaning within the culturally transforming framework of a privately owned ECE centre. To belong suggests that one has obtained membership to the community one is participating in, and empowered membership requires *issues* of power to be considered. The following section explains the application of critical ethnography to this study.

### ***Critical ethnography***

An educational environment is continually evolving culturally where values, attitudes and practices are sustained and reproduced through the very nature of participation and interaction (Rogoff, 2003). Viewing *Te Whāriki* through a sociocultural lens, as an empowering framework which recognises that culture is

transmitted and transformed through participation, has the *potential* to challenge values and practices of those who are members of the dominant culture within the ECE setting *potentially* shifting value and power to the individual who is not.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) define ethnographic research as a “comprehensive, holistic narrative description and interpretation that integrates all aspects of group life and illustrates its complexity” (p. 23). As both an ECE teacher and researcher this definition rests well with me. As a curriculum framework *Te Whāriki* is also holistic in nature, seeking to integrate the complexity and diversity of learning and individual learners, and adopts formative, narrative assessment as the primary method for learning identification. The following section will provide an explanation as to why incorporating the methodological approach of critical ethnography was an essential element within this research design.

Underpinning critical ethnography is critical theory, enabling the issues of power within relationships to be identified, providing a means to bring legitimisation to the participants’ voices and determine how, in practice, power relationships are enacted (Carspecken, 1996). Scott and Usher (2011) suggest that critical theory is not simply about knowledge generation, but seeks to “detect and unmask beliefs and practices that limit human freedom, justice and democracy and to engage in action that brings these about” (p. 35). In essence applying a lens of critical theory allows equity and ethical issues to be examined, as an important aspect of critical theory is the awareness of influential power structures within social relationships (Carspecken, 1996; Carspecken, 2001). Both personally, and professionally as a teacher, I have embraced the role of advocate, therefore, I acknowledge that as a researcher I did not begin this study with any illusions of neutrality, for, as Newby (2010) suggests, “critical theorists are not neutral” (p. 40).

Critical theory is thus about linking knowledge about individuals and social worlds with the aim that this will ultimately bring about transformation (Scott & Usher, 2011). It is about research creating conditions conducive for critical dialogue and transformative, empowering (emancipatory) action. Scott and Usher (2011) suggest that critical theory involves the “unmasking of ideologies that maintain the status quo” (p. 35). It involves determining how access to knowledge is constructed, whether restrictions to access are evident, and raises awareness of the

structures in place which determine how groups function and relate. One implication of critical ethnography is that all knowledge gained through a research study which uses this design is subjective and is not perspective-free or neutral (Scott & Usher, 2011). This requires the researcher to maintain an element of reflexivity throughout the research study. Documented reflexivity is an essential component of any ethnography as it suggests the researcher's self-awareness of the assumptions, values and beliefs they bring to the research study, provides transparency of the issues which arise within it, and insight into how the researcher navigates their way through these problems (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Reflexivity was primarily achieved in this study within the fieldnotes, which also acted as a form of journaling, as observations of the setting were not only recorded but also my own thoughts, feelings and insights.

Attaining empowerment involves the task of "understanding the causes of powerless" (Scott & Usher, 2011, p.35) in order to collectively work towards transformative practice. Determining any systemic contributors to powerlessness within this study's context will be also be socially structured and subject to multiple perspectives. Critical ethnography recognises that issues regarding power are never absent and that located in social practice is both *meaning making* and *negotiation over meaning*. The potential to discover the presence of power issues within the relationships of the research setting was foreseen, which required an in-depth and critical methodological approach.

A key characteristic within a critical theory framework is not to suggest that change is required, but "to expose the need for change" (Newby, 2010, p. 40). For example, over half of the children and families within the research setting were Māori. Disparity in educational achievement for Māori and Pasifika is well documented in literature (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Teddy, 2009; Bishop & Glynn, 1999). The lens of critical theory facilitated the exploration of power differentiation within the setting. Critical theory enables the researcher to not only see *if* individuals or groups were being marginalised or privileged, but applying critical theory to the study within an ethnographic framework, supports the researcher's understanding of *why* (Luttrell, 2010).

The philosophical and pedagogical challenges qualified teachers experience working in teams comprising qualified, in-training and un-qualified people was highlighted in my Master's thesis (Westerbeke, 2011). With this awareness I began this study acknowledging that there may possibly be similar tensions evident within the centre, which also comprised teachers with mixed qualifications and experience. Distinctive to the early childhood arm of the education sector in New Zealand, all adults working with children in the education and care sector hold the ambiguous title of 'teacher', regardless of whether a teaching qualification is held, their registration status, or teaching experience. While the distinction is recognised fiscally through funding and individual remuneration, the day-to-day teaching roles have the potential to be blurred, with, for example, all 'teachers' expected to contribute equally to planning and assessment. Throughout this thesis the 'teachers' will be identified regarding their qualification status; qualified, in-training, un-qualified.

Critical ethnography, a conceptual framework situated within qualitative research enabling issues of power and privilege to be explored, was deemed the appropriate methodological approach for this research study. This research has been established as an interpretive qualitative study adopting a critical ethnographic methodology. The following section will discuss the research methods chosen to undertake the inquiry.



## CHAPTER SIX

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### **Research Methods**

#### *Introduction*

This section begins by outlining the context of this study, the composition of the teaching staff and their employment situations. I will then present my research methods, which were chosen to align with an interpretive qualitative paradigm. Accordingly, this study employs ethnographic methods for data generation (Cresswell, 2012; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009); case studies, semi-structured interviews, participant observer, field-notes, video and audio recording and the examination of documentation, which are then discussed.

#### *The research context*

The context for this study is a licensed all-day education and care centre which is privately owned and managed. The operating hours for the centre are 7:30 am to 5:30 pm, Monday to Friday, and the centre is fully operational for 52 weeks of the year. The centre is licensed to cater for 40 children at any one time including up to 15 children aged under-two years. Divided into two age groups the centre is delineated by separate learning areas; children under-two years of age and children over-two years of age. The ethnic composition of the children in the centre at the beginning and the completion of the data collection phase of this study is set out in Table 1. The enrolment information completed by one of the child's parents, or their legal guardian, informed this data, which included identification of the child's ethnicity. The number of children attending the centre decreased during the nine month study by around 45%, although the ethnic composition remained similar throughout.

*Table 1 Composition of children's ethnicity*

<b>Ethnic group as identified on enrolment documentation</b>	<b>Total number of children at beginning of study</b>	<b>Total number of children at completion of study</b>
New Zealand Māori	28	13
New Zealand Pākehā	22	10
Samoan	2	2
Afghanistan	1	2
Chinese	1	1
Cook Island Māori	1	1
Indian	1	1
Niuean		1
<b>Total children</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>31</b>

The ECE centre is located in a lower socio-economic area of a New Zealand city, and is a converted villa on a quarter acre plot of land located in one of the older and established suburbs within the city. The centre is accessed by families of diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The employment demographics of the families within the centre were mixed, with on average over the nine month period 30% of families in paid employment, primarily choosing the centre due to its close proximity to their places of work or home, and on average 70% of families who predominantly resided locally and were dependent on government assistance for their day-to-day living (statistical information received from the centre manager).

During the data generation phase of this study 4 children transitioned to school upon reaching their fifth birthday. One family withdrew their four year old child from the centre in order for him to attend Kōhanga Reo, with the aim of strengthening his te reo Māori, supporting his transition to kura kaupapa Māori upon his fifth birthday. Their youngest child remained at the centre. Two families transitioned out of the centre as they moved away from the area. The remaining eighteen children who left the centre during the time of this study did so due to financial reasons, as their parents were unable to sustain the shortfall between the

government childcare subsidy and the additional centre's fees. All information regarding these families was received from the centre manager.

### *Staffing*

Over the period of the data generation phase there were considerable structural and staffing changes which added a layer of complexity to the study. The most significant staffing change occurred at the leadership level, with the centre manager leaving two months into the study. The centre manager was a fully qualified and registered ECE teacher whose job description required her to spend regular time throughout the week in the capacity of a teacher, primarily covering teacher meal breaks for the teaching staff. This position was vacated late February, 2013, and was not permanently filled again until August, 2013.

Also in late February, 2013, one of the under-two teachers left the employ of the centre, and her position was not filled by a permanent teacher throughout the remainder of the data generation phase. Excluding the centre manager, at the beginning of the study the ECE centre had six permanently employed teachers, of whom two were in-training and four were fully qualified (including the aforementioned under-two teacher). Of the six teaching positions three were employed full-time (5 days per week, at 8 hours per day) and three were employed part-time, essentially sharing two full-time positions (3-4 days per week at 8 hours per day).

One of the full-time qualified teachers was on maternity leave for the first four months of the data generation phase of this study and her position was filled by a series of relieving teachers, consisting of both qualified and un-qualified teachers, until her return in April, 2013. Upon return from maternity leave this teacher's contract had changed from full-time team leader to full-time teacher. A further teaching position, vacated just prior to the start of this study, was filled by qualified and un-qualified relievers throughout the entire nine months data generation phase. Both of these teachers held leadership positions as team leaders of the under-two and over-two areas respectively.

From December, 2012, to September, 2013, two teaching relievers (primarily unqualified) were present at the centre on most days. Of the members of the

permanently employed teaching team, which initially included the centre manager, one teacher acknowledged her Māori heritage, yet identified herself as Pākehā. The remaining teachers identified themselves as Pākehā New Zealanders.

*Table 2 Composition of permanently employed teachers at the beginning and completion of the study*

Permanently employed teachers at the beginning of the study (December, 2012)				Permanently employed teachers at the completion of the study (September, 2013)			
Full time teachers	Number	Part-time teachers	Number	Full time teachers	Number	Part-time teachers	Number
Qualified	2 <i>(including one on maternity leave from December 2012 to April, 2013)</i>	Qualified	2	Qualified	1 <i>(one teacher left August 2013 and was not replaced)</i>	Qualified	2
In-training	1 <i>(left late January, 2013)</i>	In-training	1			In-training	1
Centre supervisor: Qualified	1 <i>(left late January, 2013)</i>			Centre supervisor: Qualified	1 <i>(began August, 2013)</i>		

Just after entering the research site the centre owners restructured the teaching teams removing the two team leader roles. As mentioned above, one of the team leaders had just left the employ of the centre (December, 2012) and the other was on maternity leave (December, 2012, to April, 2013). Late February, 2013, the owners had identified the dwindling under-two roll and made the decision that they would not replace the team leaders in the foreseeable future but trial a distributed leadership model with the possibility of eventually transitioning to a private kindergarten serving only children over the age of two years. The teachers were also informed of potential redundancies; however, up until the time of leaving the research site in September, 2013, neither proposed possibility had eventuated.

### ***Gaining access to the ECE centre***

My initial research proposal involved a for-profit ECE centre exploring an aspect of ‘belonging’ through their annual self-review journey, using the framework of the Ministry of Education’s document, Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua/ Self-review

Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2006). In April, 2012, while in conversation with one of the centre owners, I mentioned my proposed research regarding the exploration of children and their families' sense of belonging. The owner suggested that I conduct the research in one of her centres as, she believed, it would align with an area of current interest.

The centre was familiar with research, as prior to this study it had participated in a small national research project focusing on promoting reciprocal relationships with parents. The majority of the teachers felt that the project was moderately successful. While providing a vehicle to reflect on their practice alongside families they felt it raised more issues than it addressed and in a sense 'left them hanging'. It did, however, highlight the disparity between teacher and parent communication regarding educational aspirations for the children. The majority of teachers within the centre felt as though there was a cultural divide, particularly with the Māori families within the centre, and were seeking ways to bridge this gap so that all families could feel comfortable and be empowered to communicate freely with the teachers, and participate within the programme.

The owner suggested I approach the centre manager, expressing my interest in conducting my proposed research within the centre. The centre manager also felt that my intended research was timely and in keeping with the area of parental/whānau participation and communication which the centre sought to enhance. All permanent teachers were approached and my proposed research study was presented at a full-centre staff meeting. It was agreed unanimously that the research would go ahead and all teachers were enthusiastic about participating. Once gaining informed consent from the staff and families, data generation began in December, 2012. During this time I spent a significant amount of time at the centre building relationships with the teachers and children. However, by March, 2013, restructuring had occurred and the centre was still without a permanent leader. All parties wanted the research study to go ahead but it became apparent that it was no longer possible for the centre to commit to a self-review/action research project so in consultation with my supervisors the design of the research changed to ethnography.

The purpose of this study thus became to explore the experiences, understandings and perspectives of key stakeholders in relation to belonging in a for profit ECE centre. This is an interpretive qualitative study; therefore, the following section outlines the processes which have been employed to undertake this research in accordance with this paradigm.

### ***Case study research***

An attribute of ethnographic research is that the design enables the researcher to explore the setting holistically, through the broader lens of observation and the finer one of case study. Flyvberg, (2011) suggests that if you are choosing to do case studies you are “not so much making a methodological choice as a choice of what is to be studied” (p. 301). A case study involves a comprehensive examination of a “single group, individual, situation or site” and is aligned with ethnographic research, among other types of research (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009, p. 19).

Conversely, Gall, Gall and Borg (2010) suggest that there are characteristics distinct to ethnography which go beyond those found in straightforward educational case studies. Ethnographers focus on a phenomenon which influences a cultural group, whereas “case study researchers usually limit themselves to a single cultural context” (Gall et al., 2010, p. 404). For the purpose of this research the ECE centre as a whole was viewed as a single case, a cultural group in its own right, and the phenomenon under study is the acquisition of a sense of belonging.

It was important that within the one case study (the centre) separate case studies were necessary to support the aims of this study; to understand what it means to belong to this ‘single group’, and to explore culturally responsive pedagogy and practice within the setting. Johnson and Christensen (2012) suggest that studying multiple cases within the one research study can allow the researcher “greater insight” (p. 397) into the phenomenon under investigation. However, Stake (2005) notes that one may miss the particulars of a case, thereby, reducing the researcher’s effectiveness to understand it if one incorporates too many cases and, as a result, has a focus on generalisation.

It was important that multiple viewpoints were contained within the individual case studies (Scott & Morrison, 2006) and that these were a fair reflection of the multiple

perspectives within the setting. As my intention was to gain in-depth insight, rather than that of a more generalised understanding, focusing on four case study children and their parents enabled me to conduct the considered investigation I was seeking. Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) recognise that the examination of “multiple variables” (p. 36) is an important feature of case study research, which adds to the validity of the study. Including multiple perspectives, through the chosen case study children and their parents, in combination with the viewpoints of their teachers, supported this concept. The following details the processes utilised in the selection and recruitment of the study’s participants.

### ***The research participants***

The ECE centre under study was viewed as a cultural group in its own right, as it provided the context within which the collective members of the group resided and related with each other. Wiersma and Jurs (2009) intimate that conceptually, ethnographic research acknowledges that “an organisation can be viewed as consisting of **cultures**” (p. 227). For example, within an educational setting these may include such things as the teaching culture, the students’ culture, the managerial culture, and, to a lesser degree, the parents’ culture (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). To understand what it meant to *belong* to the overarching cultural group there were three cultural “perspectives” sought within this study; the teachers, the children and the children’s parents/whānau (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009, p. 277). An insight into the managerial/leadership culture is provided through the perspective and experiences of the teachers and parents. The process utilised for the recruitment of the teacher, child, and parent participants will now be discussed.

### ***Recruiting participants***

#### ***Teachers***

Once ethical approval from the University of Waikato had been gained (26<sup>th</sup> September, 2012) I began the process of participant recruitment, beginning with the selection of teachers. The only requirement for selection was that the teachers held either full-time or part-time permanent teaching positions with the organisation at the commencement of the study, ensuring that they had the opportunity to build relationships with their teaching colleagues, the children and parents/whānau.

In December, 2012, I attended a centre after-hours full team meeting, with the consent of the centre manager and centre owner. One week prior to the meeting I provided each permanently employed teacher with a letter of introduction (Appendix A) outlining my PhD research study, my role within the study, and theirs, if they chose to participate, as well as a consent form for participation (Appendix B). As mentioned earlier my initial proposal involved studying the teachers' involvement in a full centre action research project, using the framework of Ngā arohaehae whai hua: Self-review guidelines for early childhood education, which is a Ministry of Education recommendation for ECE services (MoE, 2006).

The initial meeting was an opportunity to explain how my PhD research would connect with the centre's proposed self-review (action research) and for the teachers to ask any clarifying questions. The response was very supportive and enthusiastic with all six potential participants, including the centre manager, indicating their willingness to participate in the study by signing the consent forms.

During December, 2012, and January, 2013, I completed the six initial teacher interviews, which included the centre manager. However, as mentioned earlier, by the end of February, 2013, two of the full-time teachers, including the manager in the centre's only remaining leadership role, left the service's employ and the unforeseen staffing changes dictated that the centre's proposed self-review (action research project) would no longer be feasible in the foreseeable future necessitating the adaptation of my research design.

During my initial two months at the centre I observed that the over-two teaching team had embarked on a planning journey focusing on understanding and strengthening whanaungatanga relationships, in order to strengthen the children's sense of belonging. I believed that there was a synergy between what I had observed within the teachers' practice, evident through their planning focus, and my initial research question. During consultation with my supervisors I suggested that an ethnographic research approach would be an appropriate way to move forward in order to explore my first research question.

An ethnographic design would enable me to observe the relationships, interactions and decision making within the real-life setting of the centre. I then approached the centre owners with my revised proposal. The change to my research design meant

that the action research component would be removed which altered my role as researcher within the centre. The proposed ethnographic study would require my immersion in the day-to-day life of the centre, and as a researcher I intended to spend “considerable time with the group” (Creswell, 2012, p. 470) over a period of time which would be considerably longer than initially anticipated. The centre owners were fully supportive of the proposed change.

Once gaining consent from the owners I approached the remaining teachers at a team meeting and shared with them the changes to my study. Together we discussed the possible impact these changes would have in relation to their teaching practice and participation within the study. All remaining teachers consented to continued participation. Four months into the data generation phase of the study I decided that it would no longer be ethical to include the data of one of the participating teachers due to her experiencing an unforeseen and difficult life event. This teacher was qualified and employed part-time, working three full days per week. Therefore, for the purpose of this study the remaining three participating teachers consenting to full participation from December, 2012, to September, 2013, have been included. Of the three participating teachers, two were fully qualified and one had just entered her third year of undergraduate training.

*Table 3: Participating teachers at the beginning of the study’s data generation phase (December, 2012)*

<b>Teacher’s name</b>	<b>Teaching Qualification</b>	<b>Registration Status</b>	<b>Contracted hours of employment</b>	<b>Length of time employed teaching at the centre</b>
<b>Lucy</b>	Bachelor of Teaching ECE	Provisionally registered (full registration gained July, 2013)	Part-time (3 days, 8 hours per day)	18 months

<b>Violet</b>	Diploma of Teaching ECE	Provisionally registered	Full-time (5 days, 8 hours per day)	5 years (1 year fully qualified)
<b>Kate</b>	In-training: Diploma of Teaching ECE (just entered 3 <sup>rd</sup> year of training)	Un-registered	Part-time (4 days, 8 hours per day)	2 years

### *Parents/whānau*

Two weeks prior to beginning the data generation phase, in December 2012, I introduced myself to the parents/whānau through an introductory/information letter, providing an overview of my research study (Appendix K). A general consent form was given to each parent/whānau inviting participation in the research (Appendix E). I made myself available at the beginning and end of each day over the coming week for parents/whānau to meet with me and discuss any questions they may have had about the research project. Informal conversations with parents/whānau during this time and throughout the coming months reassured me of their continued willingness to be part of the study.

### *Case study children/ parents*

Throughout the data generation phase of the study four case study children and their parents/whānau were selected as participants, as shown in Table 4. The primary provision for selection was that the case study children had been at the centre for at least six months and that they represented culturally diverse backgrounds; ideally one child and their family with similar ethnicity to the teachers (Pākehā) and the remaining three children and their families from cultural backgrounds dissimilar to the teachers.

The selection of the four case study children occurred over a six month time-frame. Wiersma and Jurs (2009) suggest that within ethnographic research it is not logistically possible to observe all members of the group under study, therefore, it

is feasible to select participants through “purposeful sampling” (p. 282). Purposeful sampling should not be viewed as a hit-or-miss approach as selection for inclusion is a thoughtful process on behalf of the researcher and “based on prior identified criteria” (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009, p. 343).

*Table 4: Demographics of case study children/parents.*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Child’s Ethnicity</b> <i>(as identified by the parent interviewed)</i>	<b>Parents’ Ethnicity</b> <i>(*Parent/s interviewed)</i>	<b>Child’s age</b> <i>(at the beginning of the study)</i>	<b>Length of time at the centre</b>	<b>Siblings who attend/ ed the centre</b>
<b>Irirangi</b>	Māori	*Mother: Māori Father: Māori	4 years 6 months	4 years 1 month	2
<b>Isaac</b>	Samoaan	*Mother: Samoaan *Father: Samoaan	4 years 3 months	3 years 10 months	N/A
<b>Mia</b>	Cook Island Māori	*Mother: Cook Island Māori Father: Māori	3 years 4 months	2 years	N/A
<b>Grace<sup>25</sup></b>	Chinese	*Mother: Pākehā	20 months	6 months	N/A

Referring to the researcher’s ability to learn from the data, Tobin (2006) believes that an important criteria ensuring ethnography is reflective of the setting is to include a diverse range of perspectives from the participants “who are located in different social spaces by virtue of such factors as race, social class, gender and first language” (p. 25). As just over half of the children within the centre were Māori it was also important that at least one of the case study children and their family participating in this study was of Māori decent.

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<sup>25</sup> Grace was born in China to Chinese parents and adopted as a toddler by her Pākehā mother, who as a single parent is raising Grace in Aotearoa New Zealand.

To gain the case study children's perspectives on belonging required verbal communication, so an additional provision for selection was the children's ability to converse in English with reasonable proficiency. A further criterion for selection was the willingness of the child's parent/s to consent to an in-depth interview for themselves and their child. This supports the view of Wiersma and Jurs (2009) who suggest that within an ethnographic study the notion of comparable data sources is not assumed, rather selection is based on the belief that the sample will provide "information-rich cases" (p. 342).

Wiersma and Jurs (2009, p. 346) indicate that "individuals may be selected for the sample as the research is in progress". This is a variation of purposeful sampling known as the "intermittent selection of subjects" (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009, p. 346). The selection of case study children/parents eventually followed this path as selection was determined by the development of trusting relationships between me, the children, and their parents during my time within the centre. These relationships contributed to both the children and their parents' willingness to participate in the study.

Over the course of the data generation phase there were numerous attempts to arrange interviews with potential case study Pākehā families. Four of the children who identified as Pākehā were excluded from the selection process as their mothers were teachers at the centre. In principle, over the course of seven months, five families who met this particular selection criterion agreed for their children and themselves to be included in a case study. However, in practice this did not eventuate. This was due to a number of reasons, from the general busyness of life getting in the way, to sudden or traumatic changes in home circumstances, or families abruptly leaving the centre because of financial constraints and their inability to pay the expected fees. I was conscious of not pressurising any parents and always did my best to be sensitive to their situation, enabling them to change their mind without any awkwardness.

Therefore, the fourth case study child, Grace, was chosen late in the study. Grace did not fully meet the original criteria for selection in that she was Chinese by birth and too young to converse with full fluency. However, her inclusion added an unexpected dimension to belonging and her adopted mother, a professional Pākehā,

was eager to contribute to the study. It was agreed that while Grace's age placed limitations on the verbal data gathered she was still able to offer a valuable contribution to this study. Her experience of transitioning from the under-two to the over-two area was able to be captured, shedding light on how the teachers from both teaching teams contributed to the construction of Grace's sense of belonging.

According to Roberts-Holmes (2005) involving children in participatory research projects is beneficial on two levels; on a practical level, as a means of improving services in early childhood settings, and, on a "citizenship and social inclusion" level, by increasing empowerment, independence, ownership, and also improving a "sense of community and belonging" (p. 125).

The following section details the methods used for data generation. The primary research method employed to gain the perspectives of all participants was through semi-structured interviews, which I will now discuss.

### ***Semi-structured interviews***

All social research involves gleaning knowledge and understanding through conversation and dialogue (Crang & Cook, 2007). Determining what underpinned the participants' socially constructed and subjective understanding of belonging required such discussion through interviews. Johnson and Christensen (2012) suggest that qualitative interviews "are also called depth interviews because they can be used to obtain in-depth information about a participant's thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations, and feelings about a topic" (p. 202). As the concept of 'belonging' is multifaceted, and the interpretation of what it means to belong an individual experience, the incorporation of semi-structured interviews within this research design facilitated the generation of data which reflected the research questions and revealed insight into each participant's complex and diverse viewpoint.

### ***Characteristics and benefits of using semi-structured interviews***

A range of interviews can be used within qualitative research, including individual and group interviews, each containing their own conventions and used in different situations (Newby, 2010). Individual interviews fall within a continuum from

structured to unstructured, depending on “how much freedom the interviewer has to deviate from the script and ask supplementary questions” (Newby, 2010, p. 339). At one end of the continuum non-structured interviews are conversational and exploratory in nature providing scope for the participant to share their perspective without the constraints of pre-set questions or wording (Best & Kahn, 2006). By comparison, at the other end of the interview type range, structured interviews are tightly designed. The wording of interview questions are determined in advance, delivered and answered in sequence and there is no room for deviation or emergent conversation (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

Semi-structured interviews fall between the two extremes and are the most commonly used in educational and social research. Providing a systematic and sequential approach to interviewing, as found in structured interviews, semi-structured interviews increase comparability, while providing the flexibility and space to probe, explore an issue further, or for emergent topics or interests to arise, a chief component of un-structured interviews (Best & Kahn, 2006). All types of interviews are valid. However, as Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011) suggest, the choice of interview type is dependent on its “fitness for purpose”, and whether the researcher is seeking “more standardized and quantitative” evidence or “non-standardized, personalized” exploratory information.

Determining the appropriate interview type, and consequently its *fitness for purpose*, required focusing on the aim of this research study. This study’s primary aim is reflected in the overarching research question; to seek the perspectives of teachers, children and their parents, and to determine the affordances and challenges regarding belonging in an ECE centre. For the purpose of this study the interviews took the form of one-on-one, semi-structured interviews, incorporating a consistent and comparable framework (questions related to the curriculum) with space for emergent conversation to occur, facilitating participants’ freedom to talk about issues pertinent to them (acknowledging that to belong is subjective and individually interpreted).

Semi-structured interviews are characterised by open-ended questions or themes which are predetermined by the researcher and aligned to the research questions. This is recognised as an advantage of this research method (Newby, 2010), and are

“in keeping with a phenomenological approach” (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009, p. 286). A further characteristic and strength of semi-structured interviews is the flexibility to expand on the prepared questions and introduce others. These may emerge from the conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee, revealing the perspectives of the participants and allowing for a deeper exploration of the context, thereby yielding rich data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Newby, 2010).

While all interviews could be viewed as a “communicative encounter” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 535) semi-structured interviews are characteristically conversational, and as such, a degree of informality is always present. The conversational nature of semi-structured interviews, as noted above, permits the researcher freedom to modify and adapt the flow of the interview in accordance with the direction of the discussion which arises within it (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). This informality is viewed as a further strength as it allows for richer information to be shared by the participants. It is important to note that while conversational in nature semi-structured interviews are purposeful in design and, therefore, do not replicate everyday conversations (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

### ***The limitations of using semi-structured interviews***

As noted, semi-structured interviews have a number of strengths which supported the generation of individual perspectives within the research setting, yielding rich data aligned to the research questions. However, it is also important to understand the limitations of this research method. The subjectivity of participants’ responses and potential for misinterpretation, of both the interviewee’s understanding of the questions being asked, and the interviewer’s interpretation of their responses, is noted as one of the primary disadvantages of this research method (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). As the interview schedule was flexible this limitation was reduced, through the provision of time allowing the participants’ moments to pause, reflect and seek clarification as required. Actively listening to the participants’ responses and comments facilitated the researcher to probe a little deeper, ask for clarity when needed, and offer explanation when required, further reducing the possibility for researcher misinterpretation, ambiguity and minimising bias (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). This was particularly important for one case study

parent for whom English was not his first language. I relied on his partner's translation of the interview questions waiting until they were both happy with their responses and indicated their readiness to continue.

Having structure within the interview format, such as asking the same questions in sequence to each participant, helps to increase reliability (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). This component which is evident in highly structured interviews can be significantly reduced within semi-structured interviews where the wording, emphasis, and order of the questions, as well as the differing contexts the interview is conducted in, can alter the reliability of the data generated (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Silverman (1993) suggests that the adverse effects that these variables have regarding reliability can be reduced if the interviewer ensures that the interviewees have a similar understanding of the questions being asked.

A further limitation of semi-structured interviews is that they are recognised as being "time-consuming" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 205). For the purpose of this research study ten interviews with the adult participants were finally used, each ranging from one and a half to two hours duration. All participants were provided the opportunity to have a break during the interview if they felt they needed it, but none chose to do so. While relatively time consuming, the data generated from the interviews was rich and informative. However, Newby (2010, p. 240) points to the *quantity* of data yielded when using semi-structured interviews as containing a "trade-off" component. While rich, not all of the data will be included in the final analysis, which is dependent upon the researcher's decision as to what is deemed of crucial value to the study and what is not.

Semi-structured interviews do not necessarily work well for very young children (Saywitz & Camparo, 2013), who suggest that while there are "few ethnographic studies of the interview process itself" (p. 377) ethnographic approaches to interviewing young children are "largely unstructured conversations with children engaged in natural activities, supplemented by observation, and full participation in an activity being observed" (p. 375). Rather than the list of predetermined questions characteristic of semi-structured interviews, prompting the child to describe an aspect of their day, for example, or asking for explanations is considered a more appropriate approach (Saywitz & Camparo, 2013). To reduce power

differentials between the researcher and the child, ideally this form of interviewing occurs within a natural conversation, (Christensen, 2010).

### *Application of semi-structured interviews*

The research setting is located in a lower socio-economic area and accessed by people, including very young children, who would fall within a lower socio-economic classification. Therefore, a significant number of the people within this setting, including all of the children within the centre, could be viewed as vulnerable and “powerless” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 175). Powerless people include individuals and groups who can be “easily negatively stereotyped and stigmatized” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 175). Within the research setting these included, but were not limited to; Māori, women, members of minority ethnic and religious groups, sole parents, the unemployed, those who lived in relative poverty, those who experienced mental illness, were transient, had a significant member of their family incarcerated, and children.

The sensitive nature of researching people who may already be disempowered must be addressed throughout all facets of the research design but particularly in face-to-face semi-structured interviews where the power relationship between the researcher, as a middle-classed educated Pākehā, and the participants is inherently unbalanced. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) assert “relationships between researcher and the researched are rarely symmetrical in terms of power; it is often the case that those with more power, information and resources research those with less” (p. 229). The interview schedule is outlined in Table 5 and the question of power will be discussed in relation to the individuals who participated in the semi-structured interviews.

*Table 5: Interview schedule*

December 2012	January 2013	Feb 2013	March 2013	April 2013	May 2013	June 2013	July 2013	August 2013
Lucy Violet Kate (Initial teacher interviews)			Isaac (case study child)  Irirangi (case study child)	Anahera (Irirangi's mother)		Tahlia & Fetuao (Isaac's mother and father)  Layla (Mia's mother)	Lucy Violet Kate (Second Teacher interviews)	Julia (Grace's mother)

### *Teachers*

The three teachers whose data informs this research chose to participate in the two scheduled semi-structured interviews; the initial one taking place in December, 2012, and the second one in July, 2013. At the suggestion of the centre owner all interviews were conducted in the centre in a private room located away from the children and teachers, each taking between one hour and a half to two hours to complete. During the time of the initial interviews the numbers of children present in the centre were low, so the centre owner suggested I arrange the time of the interviews with the centre manager during particularly quiet periods of the day. This worked well and the interview schedule did not have any detrimental impact on the child/teacher ratios. For consistency, the interview questions were predetermined and read sequentially. The questions aligned with the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, seeking the teachers' understandings and interpretations (Appendix F). Clarifying questions were asked by both me, as interviewer, and the teachers being interviewed. Throughout the interview there was space for the teachers to share anything they felt was pertinent to their teaching experiences.

During the time of the second teacher interviews the composition of the teaching team had changed making it impossible to release the teachers during work hours without cover. I did not want to encroach on the participating teachers' free time, or negatively impact on the running of the centre, so in consultation with the centre

owner I paid for a relieving teacher to cover for interview release time during working hours. The interview format and questions mirrored the initial interview but sought to determine any philosophical or pedagogical shifts since that interview, six months prior (Appendix H). All interviews were recorded, transcribed and given to the participants for amendment and consent in accordance with the guidelines of the University of Waikato, Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations 2008.

From the beginning there was an easy rapport with the two qualified teachers throughout their semi-structured interviews. Discussions flowed with ease and they asked numerous questions about my proposed research, indicating a balance of power within the relationship. This was supported by a developing knowledge that we shared similar life experiences and teaching philosophies. The third teacher participant was young and in-training, and I was acutely aware that in my role as researcher the balance of power was potentially placed in my hands.

The group of teachers at the centre was relatively small in size and the interviews included questions which elicited critique of their teaching team, such as identifying any values or beliefs the interviewee held which may be different to those of their teaching colleagues. The issue of power relations *within* the teaching team became evident in the responses of the participating teachers, which required me to simply listen without response, and provide assurances of trust that the information shared within the interview was contained within this study. This was particularly pertinent for the third teacher participant, whose life experiences and background was different to those of her colleagues, and also mine. I was sensitive to this concern and made a concerted effort to place this participant at ease during her interviews.

While this research method privileged me with information and knowledge about the teacher participants, their meaning-making, and the context of the ECE centre which I may not have been otherwise able to get, Newby (2010), suggests that “there is always the possibility that respondents will construct replies that place them in a better light” (p. 342). A number of differing factors between me and the third teacher participant, such as age, qualifications, life experience and religious differences, also contributed to a power imbalance. To try and level the balance of

power and reduce the possibility for the third teacher’s need to present herself ‘in a good light’ I worked on ways to quickly build rapport within the interview. I did this by sharing some personal stories, finding common ground with the participant, and being non-judgemental in an effort to facilitate the feelings of trust and ease.

All three teachers said they enjoyed the experience of the interviews, indicating that it was quite therapeutic being able to talk about their experiences, beliefs and values with someone who as a former teacher understood them, yet also had a level of critical distance as a researcher. According to the teachers the interviews were viewed as a ‘safe place’ to share their thoughts and tell their stories.

#### *Case study parents*

This section begins with a table providing a brief overview of the case study parents’ cultural affiliation, family structure and relationship with the centre.

*Table 6: Parents’ relationship with the centre*

<b>Child (ethnicity)</b>	<b>Parent/s interviewed</b>	<b>Overview of parents’ cultural affiliation, family structure and participation in ECE centres</b>
Irirangi (Māori)	Anahera (mother)	Anahera and Henare identify as Māori and have full-time employment. Their three children have all been enrolled in the centre. At the time of the interview Irirangi and his younger sister, Ahakoa, attended the centre. Grandparents, aunts and uncles are all available for Anahera and Henare and often drop off or pick up Irirangi from the centre. At the time of the interview Irirangi was preparing to leave the centre for kōhanga reo, in order to strengthen his te reo Māori. Irirangi has been at the centre since he was 5 months old. His sister, Ahakoa, aged 14 months, remains at the centre.
Isaac (Samoan)	Tahlia (mother) Fetua (father)	Tahlia is a New Zealand born Samoan and works full-time. Fetua was born in Samoa and came to New Zealand 5 years ago seeking employment opportunities so that he could financially support his parents and siblings still living in Samoa. He is also in full-time employment. They met and married in New Zealand and Isaac is their only child. Their Christian faith plays an important place in their lives with family members serving in the church in leadership roles. As both parents work full-time they require all-day education and care for Isaac. They have great support from their wider family with aunts, uncles and cousins all available to pick Isaac up from the centre if for any reason they cannot. Isaac has attended the centre from the age of 5 months.

Mia (Cook Island Māori)	Layla (mother)	Layla is New Zealand born to Cook island parents and is a full-time working sole parent. Layla and Mia live with Layla's parents. Mia's father is Māori and does his best to see Mia at least every second day, reading her a story before she goes to bed at night. He is actively involved in Mia's life and she spends every second weekend with her father and his family. Layla has strong family connections supporting her and a good relationship with Mia's father. Mia regularly participates in cultural activities associated with her Cook Island heritage. Mia first experience of ECE was in home based care but she was not happy there. Layla has had enrolled Mia in the centre from the age of two.
Grace (Chinese)	Julia (mother)	Julia is Pākehā and a full-time working sole parent, having adopted Grace from China at the age of ten months. Julia chose the centre as it was "just around the corner" from where she lived, and it had a large outside playground, with lots of mature trees, which she "loved". Julia has a supportive network of family and friends, although they do not all live locally. This is Grace's second ECE experience in Aotearoa New Zealand, with the first being in a corporate for-profit ECE centre in another city. Grace has been enrolled at the centre from the age of fourteen months.

In consultation with the teachers and parents four children/families were selected for case study. All four of the case study parents consented to be interviewed and for their children to be observed and interviewed as well (Appendix D and Appendix E). All parents were given the opportunity to choose the location and the time of their interview. Each interview was between an hour and two hours duration. Two of the interviews were conducted at the centre in a private room away from the children and the teachers. This location was chosen by the parents concerned as it fitted in with their time schedule and was viewed by both of them as being more convenient and private, as there were fewer distractions than if the interview were to be conducted in their homes. The remaining two interviews were conducted in the case study parents' homes. One of these took place on the weekend as both parents wanted to be present, and the other took place in the evening, mid-week, once the case study child was in bed.

All of the centre's parents were happy with their children being included in this research study. However, the case study parents meeting the criterion for selection cannot be viewed as being fully representative of the centre's families. For example,

the majority of the centre's families were beneficiaries, which none of the interviewed parents were. Some of the families within the centre experienced varying degrees of disconnection from their wider family, and some experienced extreme stress, relating to relationship concerns, mental health issues, and family crime and violence, which were not the experiences of the interviewed parents.

The interview questions posed to the parents selected sought to gain an insight into their understandings of their child, their cultural affiliations, family values and practices, experiences of the centre and the aspirations they had for their child (Appendix G). The interview questions were read to all of the parents in a similar fashion; sequentially and with consistency.

One of the interviews conducted included both parents of the case study child. It was the only case study Parent Interview where both parents were present. Fetuao's country of birth was Samoa and, for him, English was a developing second language. To ensure Fetuao felt comfortable throughout the interview, time was provided for him to clarify each question with me or his wife, who fluently spoke English and Samoan, and to respond to each question in his own time without any pressure. I was also conscious that our cultural and educational experiences were significantly different and made an extra effort throughout the interview to make Fetuao feel comfortable with my presence. For example, I did so by claiming any common ground I had with him as he shared his story, such as both choosing Christian values to guide our lives.

Confidentiality, which is a key aspect of "duty of care" (Newby, 2010, p. 359) within any interview, was reiterated throughout the interview. Two case study parents wanted me to share some of their suggestions with the teaching team. This arose from a series of interview questions which asked, for example, "do you have any suggestions about anything this centre could do more of, or do differently, to demonstrate your family values/beliefs better?". I informed the parents that in all respect I could not breach their confidentiality in any way, while encouraging them to share their concerns and suggestions with a teacher that they trusted. The very *process* and *structure* of the interview, and the design of the interview questions, had raised salient concerns and issues for these parents which were important to acknowledge.

### *Case study children*

Obtaining the case study children's voices through semi-structured interviews proved to be the most challenging component of this research study. Prior to entering the research site I had envisaged that the child's perspective would be generated through semi-structured interviews supported by digital photographs taken by the child. I was aware this would depend on the level of trust the children had for me, which would subsequently determine their willingness to participate.

Tuckman and Harper (2012) state that a "primary goal in interviewing a child is to establish rapport, that is, a positive relationship between the interviewer and the child" (p. 400). It is important to note that actively building relationships with the children, characterised by a growing level of trust, acceptance and warmth, preceded any selection of the case study children. Selection also occurred in consultation with the teachers and parents, who had knowledge of the children which I did not have.

Unlike the teachers and case study parents, interview questions were not formally prepared and sequentially read to the case study children. Instead, once selecting the child for case study and obtaining their consent the semi-structured interview took the form of chatting with the child, and if it felt appropriate, asking them questions such as identifying who they liked spending time with in the centre, what their favourite thing to do was, identify something they felt proud of, seek their thoughts on the structured mat-time, and ask if they could identify where they went when they felt tired or sad. The child was given a digital camera, taught how to use it, and then asked to think carefully about taking a photo which would accompany their response to the questions that I asked. Roberts-Holmes (2005, p. 130) believes that when children take their own photographs they are provided "with the possibilities of a powerful visual language". The conversation between the case study child and me was transcribed and the photos printed. Two days after the interview I then sat down with the child, showed them their photos and shared with them their responses. This gave the child the opportunity to confirm, clarify, expand on or amend their responses.

The notion of combining photographs taken by the child with their verbal reflections provides an insight into the child's priorities and "adds weight" to their

statements (Clark & Moss, 2001, p. 37). I then prepared two summaries of each participating child's photos and reflections. One copy they took home to share with their family and with their consent, one copy was added to their centre learning portfolio. Tisdall, Davis and Gallagher (2009) suggest that when children participate in research they are provided with an opportunity to represent their views and experiences and, ideally, they are not only "listened to but heard by other groups" (p. 5). Sharing the child's 'voice', through the documented account of their interview/photos with parents/whānau and teachers, provided an opportunity for their voice to be 'heard', not only within the confines of this study but with significant adults in their lives. Integrating visual and verbal research techniques is proposed by Clark and Moss (2001) as a preferred means of gathering children's views. Relating data gathered from a variety of sources, such as observations, children's drawings and photographs, and conversations with children, teachers and parents, is an approach which acknowledges all participants as co-constructors of meaning and is known as the Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2001).

I was able to use this method with two of the case study children. Both Irirangi and Isaac were four years of age and were selected for case study early in the data generation phase, due to their openness and willingness to participate, and their parents' enthusiasm in consenting to their participation in the study, thereby meeting the criteria for selection. The children were asked where they would like to be interviewed and both Irirangi and Isaac indicated that would like to stay close to their friends, moving between the inside and outside areas of the centre throughout their respective interviews.

On numerous occasions I attempted interviewing a further case study child, Mia, who was three years old. Mia simply wasn't interested in the interview format – which I perceived she viewed as a bit of a time wasting exercise. Her response to most of the questions I asked, such as, who she liked spending time with, and what she enjoyed doing most was, "everybody", and "everything". She then used every opportunity to respectfully excuse herself and move onto another activity. I respected this and was impressed with her negotiation and navigational skills. Christensen (2010, p. 151) acknowledges the importance of "*looking and listening*" for when the child is ready and wants to share their story, rather than when the

researcher believes it is an appropriate time to do so. Interviewing the fourth case study child, Grace, was not considered as her verbal communication was limited.

*Evaluation:*

The use of semi-structured interviews was beneficial in gaining the perspectives of the teachers and parents. Sensitivity to cultural, educational and socio-economic differences was considered when conducting the interviews. Rapport with all of the adults was gained relatively quickly which was evident in the quantity and richness of the data generated with over one hundred thousand interview words transcribed from the ten interviews. All adult participants approved their interview transcripts without change.

The interview format did not suit all of the case study children, which I attribute in part to the relationship I had with the children. I have previously used similar methods in my teaching practice as a means of supporting children's story telling. However, upon reflection, as a teacher I *knew* the children; their strengths, interests, personalities and dispositions. This knowledge enabled me to be in-tune with them and modify my teaching approach to meet the child where they were at, facilitating my ability to effectively work within the child's *zone of proximal development* (Vygotsky, 1978).

As a researcher I did not have the privilege of fully knowing the case study children. I believe that my relationship with them was not at the desired level where the synchronization between intended purpose and desired outcomes (in this case, attaining a fair representation of the child's account of their experiences) was supported by the intuitive synergy resulting from a deep and trusting relationship. For example, tuning into the subtle nuances of humour within conversation was difficult without the depth of such a relationship.

An illustration of misinterpreting a child's sense of humour was evident in Isaac's interview. Isaac did not give a lot away when he was being interviewed and I initially found it difficult to discern whether he was stating a fact or whether he was

embellishing a story. Coming to know Isaac more fully<sup>26</sup> over the next few months, I discovered that humour and story-telling were typical features of his interactions with others. It meant that unless you knew Isaac, in particular his sense of humour, it was easy to misinterpret what he was saying. For example, with the digital camera I provided, Isaac was invited to take photos of people, places and things which were significant for him at the centre and in support of his key responses. Isaac identified a number of his peers and two of his teachers as friends when asked who he liked spending time with at the centre. I accepted this as true, and observation of Isaac over the coming months and discussion with his teachers and mother confirmed my interpretation of his account.

During the same interview when asked, “what do you like doing inside?”, Isaac indicated that he enjoyed playing “mums and dads” with his friends, and “Kate”, one of his teachers, who he claimed, regularly played the mum in his game, in which she “drank coffee”. Isaac relayed the story without hesitation and was convincing in his account. He supported his statement with a photo of the dress-up area, indicating that was an area of play he enjoyed engaging in. It was only after talking to his teacher, Lucy, about Isaac’s interest in family play that I discovered his claims were not at all substantiated. Lucy laughed and said that Isaac “never plays mums and dads”, and she had not witnessed him engaged in socio-dramatic play with Kate while she had been teaching at the centre. Kate confirmed this. The general consensus was that Isaac was ‘having me on’ and I had missed Isaac’s subtle and sophisticated humour.

Without the *full* holistic knowledge of who Isaac was I accepted what he said during his interview at surface level and was unable to make the connection with something he said, relatively jokily, with a significant event in his life. This was in relation to Isaac processing the fairly recent death of his grandmother. On this particular occasion, without full knowledge of his family situation, I misinterpreted a comment as a ‘joke’ which actually had much deeper meaning for Isaac than I had attributed to it. Being able to have conversations with the teachers and parents,

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<sup>26</sup> Through interviews and conversations with Isaac’s parents and teachers, but coming to know Isaac primarily occurred through ongoing conversations, interactions and observation.

in my role as participant observer, proved to be vital during this aspect of the data generation phase as they were able to confirm or correct my interpretations. These conversations supported a more accurate understanding of the child's perspective/voice within the semi-structured interviews.

Over the course of time I came to know the children more deeply and they came to trust me. While this helped how I was interpreting what I was seeing and hearing, I feel that I did not fully know the children to the degree I would have if I were their teacher. Principally, as a researcher I was not privileged to the depth of communication and dialogue which occurred between the parents and teachers. As a researcher I did not have the 'investment' component evident in the children/parent relationships that a teacher has. Also, everyone knew the time I spent within the centre was limited and finite. I believe, however, that the developing relationships I did have with Irirangi and Isaac were strong enough to revisit points raised in the two semi-structured interviews. This happened within natural conversations occurring throughout the days and months, and enabled me to contribute more knowledgeably to their discussions during play. These were recorded in the form of field notes which will be discussed further in this chapter.

In summary, three teachers, four parents and two case study children met the criteria for selection and chose to participate in semi-structured interviews. The constraints which frame interviews, such as the limitations of time and relationship, means that there is a possibility that the participants' interview data, especially for children, is not always as 'considered' as one would aim for (Elder & Fingerson, 2002). To add an additional layer of meaning to the participants' perspectives, and to counter this concern, data was generated through the role of participant observer.

### ***Participant Observer***

Within social research two of the frequently used and accepted observational roles for data generation are those of *participant observer*, where the researcher is involved in the day-to-day experiences and activities within the setting, and *nonparticipant observer*, where the researcher positions themselves on the outside of the group and is not engaged in the group's shared experiences (Creswell, 2012). To best understand the participants' lived interpretation of belonging I positioned

myself in the role of participant observer, where I chose to participate alongside them in the day-to-day experiences and activities of the wider group (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2010).

Data generated as participant observer assisted a trustworthy interpretation of the research context and relationships within it. Acknowledging the researcher as a visitor and not a “bona fide group member” (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 209), taking on the role of participant observer aids the collection of key data, such as viewing the intricacies of communication and relationships, which the researcher would not otherwise be privy to. Gaining this information requires actively attaining a level of familiarity, which Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) note, enables the researcher to more clearly come to know the research study’s setting and the participants.

Pertinent to this study, an advantage of participant observer as a method for data generation is that it enables the researcher to gather information and insight into young children, who are often less able to express themselves verbally (Creswell, 2012). Akin to this opinion, Frankham and MacRae (2011) suggest a notable characteristic of observation as a participant is that it supports the notion that time strengthens analysis. Participant observation recognises that interpretation changes and develops over time, as was evident with the case study children’s interviews, with time allowing the revisiting of early interpretations a distinguishing feature of this method (Frankham & MacRae, 2011).

Newby (2010) identifies five characteristics of observational approaches in social research, which are applicable in relation to this study; observational approaches occur in the participants’ *natural*, and *unique*, settings, they are *emergent* and *holistic* in nature, and consider *life and contextual fluctuations* ideally taking place over an extended period of time. Assuming the role of participant observer provides a platform which integrates these characteristics, allowing the researcher to “grasp” the uniqueness of the “experience in context” (Clark, 2011, p. 198).

Implementing the role of participant observer enabled the facilitation of data generation in the natural setting of the centre, addressing my research questions:

1. What affordances and challenges to belonging are identified by stakeholders participating in a privately owned, for-profit, ECE centre?
2. How is the ethical stewardship of Te Whāriki reflected in the leadership's decision making?

Through the role of participant observer I was afforded the opportunity to engage in informal interviews, or conversations, with the teachers and parents within the setting of the centre. According to Tobin (2006) informal interviews occur as the day unfolds usually taking the form of conversation. Within ethnographic research this is an appropriate method as it enables the researcher to seek clarity from the participants regarding what has been observed, ensuring a greater chance that what is being captured is accurate (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). This aspect of observation is particularly important when research includes very young children, as their “parents and other relevant gatekeepers” should be aware of what is being observed and have the opportunity to “add their insights” (Mukherji & Albon, 2010, p. 43). As mentioned earlier these ‘insights’ were particularly important in relation to how I was attributing and interpreting meaning in relation to children’s conversations and social interactions.

The purpose of spending regular time at the centre was to help build trust and strengthen relationships with the participants of this research study, which include the children, teachers and parents. I aimed to spend 4 hours per day, 3 days a week at the centre over the 9 months of the data generation phase of this study, which for the most part occurred. There were some weeks where I attended the centre 5 days during the week. The weeks that this did not happen were the result of both personal and professional commitments which required me being off site, or times when I felt that it was inappropriate for me to be at the centre. Initially the time was spent familiarising myself with the setting, taking into account the time required for participants to become at ease with my presence and behave as naturally as possible. For the most part, as participant observer, I hung out with the children and teachers, involved in the day-to-day activities and conversations characteristic of the role (Creswell, 2012). However, on occasion I found myself stepping into the role of teacher, guiding an activity or filling in for one of the rostered teachers if the need arose (for example, covering non-contact time).

Crang and Cook (2007) acknowledge the importance of providing participants with an on-going opportunity to discuss any concerns they may have, or ask clarifying questions regarding the purpose of the researcher's presence and the research being conducted. For the purpose of this study, assuming the role of participant observer ensured everyone located in the research site had this opportunity.

Data generation as participant observer predominantly involved observations of the day-to-day interactions and conversations occurring within the centre. Observing relationships, along with participating in the centre's activities, assisted in capturing the setting's natural rhythms, routines and occurrences. These observations and conversations were recorded in the form of field notes, which I will now discuss.

### ***Field notes***

Field notes were taken throughout the nine month data generation period as a valuable source of information. According to Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013), observing the interactions of others within educational research generally involves some use of field notes. Field notes can take varying forms, from detailed descriptions and reflections to short notes made to jog the researcher's memory or capture a contextual inference (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2010; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Within this study combinations of short notes and descriptive, reflective, field notes were taken; ensuring an account of what was happening within the setting was recorded as well as ongoing reflections and interpretations of what was being observed.

Qualitative field notes can be written while placed within the context of the research setting and also when situated outside it (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Educational researchers use both techniques, although, it is typical for ethnographers to write notes of what they have observed when they have left the context of the research setting (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2010). I predominantly wrote field notes once returning home from time spent in the centre, as Creswell (2012) notes, "it is difficult to take notes while participating" (p. 214). Writing up the field notes at home generally involved some form of analytical writing, where short notes taken in the field were expanded on and emergent interpretations and connections were being made. The following is an example of this process, where

an observation of a directed mat-time routine was described then analysed at home, while fresh in my mind:

May the 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013

*... Lucy is taking mat time. The children are all engaged and respond well to her asking them to sit quietly. When she puts on a familiar CD about shapes (with an accompanying book) they all sing along and do the actions following Lucy's lead. Two of the little ones who are transitioning from the under-twos are very excited and begin jumping up and down in the front giggling. One of the supporting mat-time teachers (Violet) gently calls them to the back and invites them to dance where there is space and they won't bump into the other children. Some of the four year olds, Isaac, Korey, Lucas, Hallie and Ella, jump up and quickly move to the back as well, and also begin dancing, singing and doing the actions to the shape song. At the end everyone claps and one of the younger children calls out "again, again!". Lucy plays it again, this time with most of the children standing up and moving around. My thoughts: the teachers seem to be able to merge the objectives of mat-time – being able to sit without disturbing others, actively listening to instructions, and whatever teaching/learning goals have been planned, with responding in the moment to the children's sparked interest – in this case dancing. The mat-time could have easily focused on the 'rules' of mat-time and been fully teacher directed. However, today there was space for teachers to respond to the children within the 'routine'. I have observed similar mat-times on a number of occasions over the past 3 months, and have come to a realisation that the flexibility seen today is more likely to be there when Lucy or Violet are the mat-time teachers. Is this linked to their teaching qualifications?*

The process of writing fieldnotes, such as this one, required ongoing reflexivity and awareness of my thoughts and feelings as well as the impact I was making as a guest researcher to the research site and the participants. Within this study I have primarily used the fieldnotes as a reflexive tool to support my evolving understanding of the phenomenon under study – how belonging was being constructed. Where appropriate I have included some of the fieldnotes within the findings chapters of this study, although not many. Their inclusion is to provide my interpretation of the context where needed and support the voices of the participants.

A supporting form of data was through the analysis of documentation within the centre.

### ***Documentation***

Information obtained from documents supported an understanding of the centre's philosophy and values and provided a 'bigger picture' of the centre. Documents "consist of public and private records that qualitative researchers obtain about a site or participants in a study" (Creswell, 2012, p. 223). The decision to use documents was "driven by the research question" (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2010, p. 131) as they gave valuable insight into the values and philosophical underpinnings of the community the participants were *belonging to*. Documentation reviewed included the centre's planning for learning, individual children's learning portfolios, the centre's policies, general job descriptions for teachers and enrolment documentation. The centre documentation was valuable as it outlined the centre's intentions and values, as demonstrated in the enrolment leaflet for parents:

We create links with families/whānau, teachers, children and the wider community, allowing us to personalise learning to meet your aspirations, expectations and cultural needs. (Centre documentation)

Reflective questions, such as 'how is this objective evidenced in practice?' were posed when policies and enrolment documentation was reviewed. At times there was a discrepancy with what was documented and what was experienced. When analysing the planning documentation there was incongruence with what was expected of teachers as outlined in job descriptions, the amount and content of documentation visible within the centre, and the level of complexity and skill I had observed within the lived teaching practice of the qualified teachers. Throughout the nine months of data generation the planning for learning documentation was erratic and lean, sometimes untouched for weeks. Yet the expectation for teachers, as documented in their job descriptions, was that planning was the responsibility of every teacher. Teachers were expected to competently identify children's current individual and group learning goals. Supported by observation of the teachers' practice I noticed that the qualified teachers' understanding of the children's

learning was rich, which was not reflected in their planning or assessment documentation. The incongruence observed between expectation, documentation and practice, was noted, allowing for the reasons *why* this was so to be explored.

### ***Video, photographs and audio recording***

While in the role of participant observer, photographs, video and audio recordings of interactions between the children and teachers occurred. These methods were familiar to the participants in the centre and were often used for assessment purposes. It is recognised that photographs, video and audio recording have the potential to capture the research context, and provide detail which other methods may not afford (Einarsdottir, 2005; Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle, 2010). Potential limitations are that audio visual methods can be viewed as intrusive by participants, and, because of the rich data they provide, they are difficult to analyse (Creswell, 2012; Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle, 2010).

The recordings used for this study focused on capturing the real events and relationships in the centre, as every interaction was viewed as providing insight into the child's sense of belonging. I used photographs as a means of capturing the centre's documentation as data. A digital camera was used by the children for data generation.

During the case-study children's semi-structured interviews digital photographs, taken by the children, were used to support their view. These photographs were printed for the child to revisit, within two days of the interview, and analysed for meaning. Johnson and Christensen (2012, p.518) suggest that "in this approach, the pictures are considered to be the data, and the participant is considered to be the analyst".

Remaining sensitive to the participants who do not want their photo taken, conversations to be recorded, or interactions videoed, is an important ethical consideration (Creswell, 2012). This was particularly important for the children in the centre who often gave non-verbal cues indicating consent or not. I was mindful of the children's right to withdraw any data I intended to attribute to them. By showing the children what I had photographed or audio/visually recorded and asking their permission to use it, helped them to maintain some autonomy over their

data. On a number of occasions a child viewed a photo of them and then told me to delete it, which I did.

Ensuring that methods are appropriate to the study is a key feature of any research. Another important aspect is how quality is maintained throughout all aspects of the study, which will now be discussed.

### ***Maintaining quality in qualitative research***

Qualitative researchers typically embrace an interpretative epistemology and methodology, utilising multiple sources and subjective methods for data generation, such as observation and open-ended interviews (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2010). Conversely, quantitative researchers adopt positivist methodologies which typically rely on objective measures to collect data and authenticate data accuracy, such as reliability and validity. The primary focus of qualitative data is to glean meaning and understanding of multiple perspectives and realities, therefore, the traditionally applied measures of accuracy, such as reliability, are viewed as less applicable to a qualitative study (Creswell, 2012). This section explains how quality was maintained throughout this qualitative study and identifies trustworthiness as the measure used to evaluate the quality of the research process.

### ***Trustworthiness***

Ensuring a high level of trustworthiness is essential in any qualitative study. Guba and Lincoln (1994) believe that the features of trustworthiness and authenticity are better suited to evaluate the quality of qualitative research than those which fit within objective paradigms. Mutch (2013) suggests that in order to establish trustworthiness in a study there is evidence that the researcher has clearly “documented the research decisions, research design, data-gathering and data-analysis techniques and demonstrated an ethical approach” (p. 109). Member checking for accuracy, by involving participants in the review process, is a further way to ensure trustworthiness (Creswell, 2012; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2010). Creswell (2012) suggests that these procedures help determine “whether the description is complete and realistic, if the themes are accurate to include, and if the interpretations are fair and representative” (Creswell, 2012. p. 259). Two member checks were completed by two of the teacher participants; the first occurred after

the second interview was conducted, and the second once the findings chapters were written. These, and the practice of regularly talking with the participants and verifying any hunches I may have had, contributed to trusting how I was interpreting the data.

Adopting a reflexive approach as a researcher is essential in any ethnographic study and adds to the trustworthiness of the study (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2010). Monitoring the research process by being aware of researcher impact to the research site and participants, as well as researcher values and biases, is at the core of remaining reflexive throughout a study, particularly a protracted one such as an ethnography (Creswell, 2012). As Newby (2010) states, “Being neutral is difficult. If we believe in something, we have to manage our own values in the research process” (p. 27). Being aware as a researcher of my values involved applying reflexive practices throughout the research process. For example, at the beginning of the data generation phase of this study, I was aware of my status as ‘emergent researcher’ and that I tended to ‘think’ and ‘see’ as a teacher, rather than a researcher. I was mindful that my experiences as a teacher have influenced how I view ECE teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand. I did not view this as problematic per se; but as an aspect of my role as researcher which required an actively reflexive approach. By consciously asking myself which lens I was using throughout the research process, and foregrounding the aims of my study, I was more able to monitor how I was influencing and ascribing meaning to the participants’ perspectives and experiences. To enhance the accuracy of a qualitative study a variety of methods for data generation are used, and this process is known as triangulation.

### ***Triangulation***

According to Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtler (2010) triangulation is defined as “the process of comparing different sources of data (for example, interviews and observations) or perspectives of different participants” (p. 189). This process is used to compare, confirm and resolve any inconsistencies which are found in the research findings (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2010). Through the semi-structured interviews the experiences and perspectives regarding *belonging to the ECE centre* were attained from different stakeholders; children, parents and teachers. At times there were discrepancies between the adult participants’ viewpoints and

understandings of the children's experiences at the centre. The triangulation of the interview data, supported by observation and document analysis, helped to bring clarity to the findings and credibility to any emergent themes (Creswell, 2012). Gall, Gall and Borg (2010) suggest that triangulation "might produce convergence, or it might clarify the reasons for apparent contradictions ..." (p. 358). It was for both of these reasons that the use of triangulation of data was considered critical to bringing clarity of understanding to this study.

Incorporating different data generation methods enabled me to apply a considered and multi-perspective view to the phenomenon under study; what it meant to belong to a privately owned for-profit ECE centre. For example, the interviews allowed the participants to freely provide their understandings and perspectives, identifying what they valued as individuals, trusting in the confidentiality offered by research interview protocols. Through my role as participant observer I came to appreciate the research participants 'lived experiences', which provided valuable context and understanding to their 'shared experiences'. Viewing the centre's documentation gave an insight into what was valued by the centre, in theory and in practice. As themes began to emerge I used member checking to confirm my interpretations and applied reflexive practices throughout the research process to monitor the influence and impact to the setting as a researcher.

In addition to the issues of "feasibility, clarity, and significance" (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001, p. 22), there are a number of ethical considerations which require attention throughout all phases of the research study.

### ***Ethical considerations for this research***

Ethical approval was sought and approved for this research study by the Faculty of Education's Ethics Committee in accordance with the University of Waikato, Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations 2008. The ethical considerations for this research study will now be addressed, in particular those concerning young children within educational research.

### ***Informed consent***

Informed consent is the foundation of ethical conduct in any research design; it is a democratic practice, acknowledging individual's freedom to choose their own path in life, and respecting their right to decision, without coercion (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Gaining informed consent from the participants required the purpose and aims of this research study to be transparent, including the ethical responsibilities of the researcher and factors, such as time obligations, which would contribute to the participants' decision making (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

All prospective adult participants received an information sheet outlining the aims of the research and what was involved if they chose to participate in the study (Appendices A, C, and K). To support an informed understanding of the process for participation I spoke with teachers individually and at a staff meeting and made myself available to discuss the research with parents. Informed consent obtained from young children under the age of five has its own difficulties, as with very young children it may be difficult for them to "fully understand every aspect of the research" (Mukherji & Albon, 2010, p. 37). Viewing the child as competent, yet being sensitive to limitations due to young children's "language" and "conceptual development" (Mutch, 2013, p. 148) required careful consideration throughout this study. Mukherji and Albon (2010) support this view and acknowledge that it is possible for researchers to simultaneously view the child as "both vulnerable and competent" (p. 37). To gain the case study children's consent I talked with them about what I was doing and answered any questions they may have had. To support this I asked the children's parents to discuss with them the expectations of and reasons for this research study, in terms the children were familiar with, as the parents had a full understanding of their children language and comprehension capabilities.

### ***Protecting participants from harm***

Key concerns for social researchers are the ethical considerations regarding the protection of the participants' human rights (Tuckman & Harper, 2012). Protecting the rights and well-being of all participants is regarded by Wallen and Fraenkel (2001, p. 23) as the "most important ethical consideration of all". This involves

doing no harm, which is an essential consideration for all participants, but is particularly important when conducting research involving young children.

The potential for harm can be minimised, and trustworthiness strengthened, by applying thoughtful sensitivity to the needs of those involved throughout all of the research's processes (Tolich & Davidson, 1999). I respected the right of the children to decline participation in any aspect of the data generation, regardless of whether consent had been gained from their parents. Mia, one of the case study children, said that she was happy being part of my research but declined being interviewed. I respected her decision and always sought her consent before taking photographs or recording any informal conversations throughout the course of the data generation phase. When audio recording or videoing any general conversations or interactions I first asked permission, answered any questions raised by the children, and ceased recording if any child showed any signs (verbally and non-verbally) that they were uncomfortable with what I was doing.

### ***Privacy and confidentiality***

According to Tuckman and Harper (2012) confidentiality must be maintained throughout all aspects of the research process. Once participants consented to their involvement in this study they were given the opportunity to be named or to provide a pseudonym for the purposes of identification. All chose to use their own names. As the research study progressed I felt that there was a possibility that the identities of the ECE centre, the teachers, children and their parents would be evident if actual names were used and that this would be inappropriate.

As the salient feature of this research was the voice of the participants rather than their individual identities, in consultation with the participants a decision was made that it would be ethical to use pseudonyms when referring to data generated from individual interviews and field notes. Protecting the participants' identity had particular significance for the teachers, who revealed facets of their work experiences which potentially challenged the professionalism of their colleagues and employer. Interestingly, while all of the teachers agreed to my proposal to use pseudonyms for all participants they reiterated their desire to stand by their data through the use of their own names. For the purpose of this thesis any risk of identifying participants has been minimised by ensuring that names and personal

details of individuals, the centre, or the location of the study, have not been disclosed either in writing or in conversations about the project. All participants were assured that their identities would be safe guarded.

Transcription was an essential step in the analysis of the data and the transcription of the audio recorded interviews occurred shortly after each interview was conducted. I transcribed each interview verbatim. I returned the transcribed interview to each participant for their consent or modification within two weeks of the interview being conducted, while it was still fresh for them. I also sought timely clarification of any content which I may have missed during the interview or transcription process, although this eventually only proved to be necessary in relation to the initial teacher interviews for the correct spelling of a couple of the children's names.

When interview transcripts were returned to participants for their approval confidentiality was maintained by ensuring the transcripts were contained in a sealed envelope and personally handed to the participants. A return addressed and stamped envelope, labelled 'confidential', was included, so that transcripts and accompanying consent could be returned to the researcher without the need to go through a teacher or the centre manager.

### ***Reciprocity***

Reciprocity was an important feature in this research and is considered ethically appropriate in critical studies (Carspecken, 1996). At the core of critical ethnographic studies are relationships built from shared experiences and the continued awareness of power disparities within relationships and institutions. There were a number of ways in which I was able to demonstrate reciprocity and 'give back' to the participants. In doing so I acknowledged the participants' generosity for allowing me into their space. Providing reciprocity helped to build supportive connections with the teachers, contributing in some way to bring any power disparities into balance. In any critical study being mindful of the position and power of the researcher and how this affects the research process and outcomes is important to consider (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). For example, to lessen the sense that I was in any way the 'expert' within the setting I positioned myself as providing manaakitanga (kindness and care) to the teachers. This took the form of regularly

helping during meal times serving kai to the children, preparing and cleaning the tables and floors before and after kai time, and tidying up the play area when I noticed the teachers were particularly busy.

Throughout the data generation phase I often took in morning tea for the teachers, provided baking for the children's afternoon tea, or new resources, such as books. I was particularly conscious of the teachers' generosity, who had freely given me their time for interviews and warmly allowed me into their teaching space. As a registered teacher, and as a way of offering reciprocity, I gave these teachers back their 'time' by filling in for them, enabling them to have some precious 'non-contact' time for their overwhelming and mounting administrative duties. On three days I was also able to stand in as a relief teacher for a qualified teacher who had significant family issues and emergency medical appointments which required her leaving the centre at short notice. As the government funding received by the centre is directly linked to qualified and registered teaching hours, which I was able to meet, this was viewed by the centre manager and teachers as helping immensely. I was more than happy to help out but was conscious of the ongoing tension between maintaining critical distance as a researcher and getting too involved in the day-to-day experiences of the centre, thereby possibly creating a conflict of roles. However, reflecting on the importance of *mindful* reciprocity in critical ethnographic studies as a means of building relationships and reducing any power imbalance between the researcher and the participants helped to confirm my involvement.

Offering manaaki to the participating families took the form of being sensitive to their work and family schedules and mindful of their generosity in participating in a lengthy interview. For the two parent interviews which took place in their homes I took kai, a gift for the parent/s and a gift, such as a book, for their child. For the two parents who were interviewed at the centre again I ensured that they had refreshments and gave them and their child a gift in appreciation of their generosity. The books that I chose for the children were specific to them and guided by their interests.

## *Data analysis*

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) propose that while there are many ways to analyse qualitative data the decision to choose one approach over another should always abide by the tenet of being fit “for purpose” (p. 537). This involves the researcher having a clear understanding of the purpose of the research study itself, and knowing what they “want the data analysis to do”, which determines the appropriate method of analysis (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 537).

The purpose of this research study is revealed within the research questions;

1. What affordances and challenges to belonging are identified by stakeholders participating in a privately owned, for-profit, ECE centre?
2. How is the ethical stewardship of Te Whāriki reflected in the leadership’s decision making?

To answer both research questions data was generated primarily through semi-structured interviews, which were designed to gain an insight into the perspectives of the children, their parents, and the teachers’ understandings of belonging. In the role of participant as observer data was generated over a nine month period capturing the context of the setting and the relational interplay of the participants within it. The length of time immersed within the setting contributed to answering both questions by seeing patterns forming, strategies employed and ‘norms’ revealed. Newby (2010) suggests that within an ethnographic study the extensive and intensive time spent within the researched setting “produces the insight to make sense of the data” (p. 59), adding to the trustworthiness of the analysis process. Informal analysis of the emerging data primarily gained through observation was on-going throughout the entire process of the data generation phase.

The intended purpose of procuring observational data was to gain a *feel* of what was happening, to experience the life within as a participant, and to sense that what I was observing sat well as a fair interpretation of the events and interactions occurring within the setting. This intended purpose connects with Cohen, Manion and Morrison’s (2011, p. 6) account of the subjective approach to social science research where “the principal concern is with an understanding of the way in which

individuals create, modify and interpret the world in which they find themselves”. This took time and reflexivity and contributed to answering both research questions, but especially the second, which focused on what influenced and impacted upon the children’s sense of belonging.

To understand the views of the children data was generated through semi-structured interviews and observation. Being with the children in their everyday play, and actively building trusting relationships with them, was a key element in obtaining their ‘voice’ and assembling the evidence sought to determine the factors influential to their sense of belonging.

Contextualizing the study is an important component of ethnographic research as it creates awareness of the “relationship between the context and the observed behavior” (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 394). Therefore, the themes were not pre-determined but emerged as the data was reviewed in context.

### ***Thematic data analysis***

Thematic analysis was used for this study and is defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as a way to identify, analyse and report “patterns within data” (p. 79). Making sense of ethnographic data can be achieved through thematic analysis. Creswell (2012) suggests this process involves “distilling how things work and naming the essential features in themes in the cultural setting” (p. 473). Rather than viewing thematic analysis as a methodology, Clarke and Braun (2013, p. 120), “identify it as just an analytic method”, offering greater possibilities for application as it does not have to belong to any particular theory or framework.

Thematic analysis is an inductive approach where themes are not predetermined but arise from the data itself (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). Aligned with an interpretive epistemology, qualitative research methods, such as interviews, observations and document analysis, are typically inductive by nature, where the phenomena under study is “systematically observed” and meaning is discovered (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2010, p. 10). The advantage of this approach is that it fits within the framework of this study which views understanding of the enquiry as context specific. A difficulty associated with applying thematic analysis to an

ethnographic study is that it is challenging to contain the number of themes, and to support each theme with adequate evidence (Creswell, 2012).

The researcher's analytic lens must be acknowledged within the written report, as it is the researcher who ultimately chooses what aspects of the data to examine (Creswell, 2012). Thematic analysis was deemed appropriate for this study as it allowed for patterns to be seen and was a "theoretically flexible method" (Clarke & Braun, 2013, p. 123). To further understand the complexity of relationships and relational factors which influenced belonging, and to focus the themes, I utilised Rogoff's (2003) three foci of analysis; viewing the data through an individual, interpersonal and cultural-institutional lens.

Rogoff (2003) indicates that when applying her three foci of analysis to research "it is usually necessary to foreground some aspects of phenomena and background others simply because no one can study everything at once" (p. 58). This has been the case for this study, and using Rogoff's three lenses values became the chosen unit of analysis. Within this study, understanding belonging required viewing the dynamic relationship between the individual and the social world and in doing so noting "the transformation of participation" (Rogoff, 1994, p. 209), which can also be viewed as an indicator of embedded power within a setting. Reflected in everyday practices (Rogoff, 2003), values became the chosen unit of analysis because, contained within the family, as well as within this study's chosen centre, values are at the core of an individual's and a community's 'being'.

Therefore, Rogoff's conceptual framework helped build an understanding of *what* was being valued in the setting, *who* determined what was valued, and *how* a concept, such as belonging, was being shaped by these values. The flexibility of thematic analysis meant that integrating Rogoff's (2003) conceptual framework of three foci of analysis was not problematic.

To handle the interview data and fieldnotes I purchased the research analysis software tool NVivo™, by QSRInternational.com. The functionality of this tool was initially useful as coding each sentence meant I quickly became intimately familiar with the data. However, I was a little too pedantic identifying the subtleties within the data and became overwhelmed with the number of emerging nodes, or

themes, I was creating. I believe that I did not have the expertise to effectively manage the data from start to finish using NVivo™ as an analysis tool and became caught up in the messiness of it all. Clarke and Braun (2013) emphasise that the reality is that qualitative research is “often messy” (p. 123). While not totally successful, the NVivo™ process did help me to gain insights which I might not otherwise have been able to achieve, by providing a way to gain closeness to the data.

Reducing the myriad of emergent themes into what I regarded as something manageable required being mindful of the research questions, Rogoff’s (2003) three foci of analysis, and my knowledge of the data. This process was completed manually. Applying the three lenses provided a holistic picture of the factors which influenced and impacted upon a sense of belonging at the centre. This holistic picture is consistent with Rogoff’s (2003) sociocultural approach where no one aspect of the data is viewed in isolation. Thinking about the relationships I was seeing between the data, pertaining to the context of the study and the research questions, I then foregrounded a leading theme within each analytical lens; intrapersonal - values, interpersonal – relationships, and cultural-institutional - leadership. Each was interrelated and, as noted above, underpinning each was the notion of values. Placing a spotlight on what the parents espoused as important for them and their children (intrapersonal lens), for example, helped reveal and contextualise the level of continuity and congruence within the setting (on an interpersonal and institutional plane). The key factors emerging from the data which influenced and impacted upon belonging relating to each foci of analysis was then identified and is presented in Table 7.

*Table 7: Factors associated with belonging examined through Rogoff’s (2003) three foci of analysis*

Foci of analysis	Factors associated with ‘belonging’
<p><b>1. Values</b> (Intrapersonal focus of analysis)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents’ values and beliefs, experiences, expectations and aspirations</li> <li>• Teachers’ professional and personal values, beliefs and experiences</li> <li>• Case study children’s identified interests at the centre and at home</li> </ul>

<p><b>2. Relationships</b> (Interpersonal focus of analysis)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case study children’s relationships and communication</li> <li>• Parent/teacher relationships/communication</li> <li>• Teacher/child relationships/communication</li> <li>• Child/child relationships/communication</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Leadership</b> (Institutional focus of analysis)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The leadership structure.</li> <li>• The centre structure</li> <li>• Leadership’s partnerships with the children, parents and teachers.</li> </ul>

Not all of the data was used in the findings chapters. This is common practice in case study research, as Stake (2006) explains:

The case researcher considers many features of the case. Some are selected to be studied. Only a few can be studied thoroughly. Because much of the important activity of the case is recognizably patterned, both coherence and sequence are sought (p. 3).

Deciding what data to include as findings was determined by the coherence and cohesion of the emergent themes, and which best helped to understand the phenomena under study (Stake, 2005). Significant accounts of participant narrative were included as findings to provide context and authentication to the voice of those who belonged to the centre (Carspecken, 1996).

***Limitations***

The intent of this thesis is not to make significant claims which could be generalised but to gain some understanding relative to the context of this study. As Creswell (2012) states, “research is a process of steps used to collect and analyse information to increase our understanding of a topic or issue” (p. 3). In the case of this thesis the issue under study, the topic of belonging, is localised within a single site; in one privately owned, for-profit, ECE centre. Key themes were identified to help understand this issue. Member-checking and reflexive practices assist in a trustworthy interpretation of the analysed themes, minimising one of the limitation

of thematic analysis; the dominance of the researcher's interpretation of the data (Stake, 2005).

### ***Conclusion***

In summary, this is an interpretive qualitative study adopting a critical ethnographic methodology. The design of the research study has been outlined and the methods employed for data generation to answer the research questions have been justified. The study's ethical considerations have been addressed.

The data was systematically obtained, transcribed, approved and analysed, and as the data was engaged in, themes emerged. I was mindful of my own existing knowledge and biases and made every effort to respect the participants' voices. This awareness, and the inclusion of appropriate methodological measures, aimed to minimise "the intrusion of the subjectivity of the researcher into the research" (Luttrell, 2010, p. 185).

The following three chapters outline the key findings from the analysed data. Chapter seven addresses the data viewed through the intrapersonal lens (values). Chapter eight presents the data relating to the interpersonal lens (relationships), and chapter nine highlights the data as seen through the institutional lens (leadership).

## CHAPTER SEVEN

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### **Research Findings**

#### **The Intrapersonal Lens - Values**

##### ***Introduction***

This chapter presents the findings focusing on the values and belief systems of the parents and teachers, both personal and professional, and are viewed through Rogoff's (2003) first foci of analysis; the intrapersonal lens. The chapter is structured in three sections, with each section addressing a key value identified by the case study parents as important for their children and families. The three key values are *family*, *culture* and *social responsibility*.

Within each section the value under focus is filtered through three perspectives; the parents, the teachers and the centre. How the parents represent and construct each value is firstly presented. How the teachers' values and beliefs, both personal and professional, align with the value under focus is then explored; determining how the value is viewed within the teachers' relationships, and evidenced within their teaching practice. Finally, the supports and constraints enabling each value to be manifested in the centre will be examined, with attention given to how this impacts upon the children and their families' sense of belonging.

It is important to reiterate that the data provided by the case study parents are unique to them and are not representative of all the families within the centre. Supporting data, analysed from observations and informal conversations throughout the data generation phase, proposes that the values of *family*, *culture* and *social responsibility* are compatible with those conveyed by the majority of the centre's parents. Extracts from semi-structured interviews, informal conversations and documentation have been used to illustrate the key findings within this chapter.

The case study parents had clear ideas about what was valued within their family and what they believed as being important for their children. The notion of

belonging was a concept that all of the parents were conscious of and underpinned the values they chose to prioritise.

## *Family*

### *Parents*

When asked what values they viewed as being important in their child's life all of the case study parents identified "family". Family was described by the parents as being loving, nurturing and caring, where support was both given and received. It was where generations regularly came together, people were open with each other, meals were shared and everyone looked out for each other. For three of the case study parents' family was the first value identified as being important and something which required investment and respect.

For these same three parents the extended family played a key role in their child's life, with first, second and third cousins being cited as active and valued members of their family groups. Tahlia's comment that Isaac was "really loved, and not only from us" was typical of all the parents.

Family was also about responsibility and reliability. Within their families all parents trusted support would be both received and given. This was particularly significant for Fetuao, Isaac's father, whose family reside in Samoa. Fetuao had left his homeland in search of employment in New Zealand in order to financially support his family back in Samoa. As Fetuao explained;

My parents are in Samoa and they are a poor family. My family in Samoa [are] happy now, I send them some money every month and that's the blessing of God. (Fetuao, parent of Isaac)

For Fetuao, this unwavering commitment to family was a fundamental value he wanted to see instilled in Isaac;

[I want it so that] if you go to [Isaac] for help, he will help you. Even if they (family) are in the Islands; if they ask for help [then Isaac will] give them help ... it is important that I tell him, for

him to learn. For me I try to tell him before I die. (Fetua'o, parent of Isaac)

Family being able to rely on each other was echoed in Anahera's description of what she valued for her children. Anahera noted that she and her husband, Henare, always had strong relationships with their mothers who, as grandmothers, played key and active roles in their children's lives. Their early experiences with their fathers were less ideal. For Anahera, valuing family also meant being able to reflect on difficult past experiences and learning from them:

That is one thing that Henare and myself always talk about - our disconnection with [members of] our immediate family. I have got no dad. Henare's dad was there, but he was kind of doing other things rather than helping his own family. So, we always agreed that no matter what was going on in our lives family would be number one. If I am not there, Henare's there. If Henare's not there, I am there. (Anahera, parent of Irirangi)

Supporting each other and being able to rely on family members to be there when times were difficult was valued by all of the parents, as Anahera's comment highlights:

I just know where I want our family to head. If we can ensure Irirangi that we are with him all the way, through thick and thin. No matter what. You know, if you have broken the car, whānau is still there, family is still there, or someone in our circle is still there. I can see that he has got special teachers that support him here too, and that makes me feel really good. (Anahera, parent of Irirangi)

Similar to Anahera, Julia also knew that her family 'had her back' when times were difficult. Julia's immediate family unit was smaller than the others, consisting of her parents and two siblings. Julia's siblings lived in different parts of New Zealand, yet Julia knew that they supported her, as they did when she chose to adopt her daughter, Grace. Julia's parents played an important role in Grace' life, and

although they lived outside of the city they spent regular time together and supported Julia's choice to be a single parent.

For Julia, family was about showing empathy and acceptance. Being able to have sensitive conversations, without fear that the relationship would change as a result, also characterised Julia's impression of family. During the interview, Julia expressed the insecurity she felt when she had first adopted Grace, and the time it took to develop the bond between mother and daughter which she had thought would happen instantly. Julia's brother and sister-in-law had just become first time parents and had faced a few difficulties with their new baby. Julia talked about discussing her early bonding experiences with her brother, to see whether his early experiences as a birth parent had any similarities to hers as an adopted parent:

[Grace's] bond for me was more of an anxious attachment. It developed into more of a mummy attachment. Mine to her was to a certain extent more of an anxious attachment too. You've got this little girl to take care of. I thought that the next time my brother was back home and it's calmed down [with his baby] I wouldn't mind asking him about it. He's not very judgmental at all; he's very empathetic. So, if I said that I didn't love [Grace] instantly, he wouldn't sit there and be disappointed in me .... (Julia, parent of Grace)

For Anahera, Irirangi's mother, valuing family was about critical reflection and challenging less positive behaviours. Recounting past family experiences, a value Anahera acknowledged that she wanted imparted in her children was for them to think critically about the decisions they made in their lives. Anahera and Henare actively chose to change some of the family practices which were normalised when they were growing up. Anahera reflected on how partying and smoking were 'what they did' as a wider family when she was young, but it was not what she wanted for her children:

I grew up with all of that. I want to get my children out of that way of thinking, because it is not the normalised thing in *our* family. I suppose reinforcing positive family values for us

means exposing them to fun activities, different people and enriching things. (Anahera, parent of Irirangi)

Being able to think critically and make good judgments was also valued by Layla. Layla recognised this as a family value which was being passed on through the generations:

I am grateful [to have this value], I don't know how my mum and dad have done it but we were taught common sense ... and I am really glad that Mia has it, and I think it's just being an open-minded person and being able to learn from your mistakes (Layla, parent of Mia)

For two of the case study parents an aspect of family meant regularly partaking in shared meals with both the immediate and extended family. Similar to the other case study children, Mia was immersed in a close, loving family. Family for Mia included grandparents, aunties, uncles and cousins, who all played an active role in her life. Mia's mother, Layla, emphasised the importance of the wider family having meals together where they could connect with each other and play an active role in one another's lives:

We get each other around the table and just have good family time together. (Layla, parent of Mia)

Coming together for family meals was also raised by Anahera, who believed that even though, as parents, their lives were extremely busy, this was one aspect which she saw as a means of keeping her family united.

Layla, Mia's mother, expanded on how the ongoing experiences and connections with her wider family helped to shape her values, attitudes and worldview. She connected the parenting decisions she was making with Mia with how she was parented, and acknowledged how she valued and trusted the methods her parents applied to her growing up:

I want [Mia] to have experience, and experiences; heaps of them. I don't know if that is what I want because it is what me and my brothers have had, but we had - like our mum and dad

were the same – we had heaps of things going on all the time.... But, with being older now, knowing *that was why* we were doing things, and saying ‘oh, is that is *why* we were doing those things and *why* we were there’. [My parents had us] getting involved in their lives and their jobs, and going to our aunts and uncles and getting involved in their lives and their jobs. That helped [my siblings and I] to have a broad experience of what was out there in life, and what you could do. And, if you wanted it, then you could do it because there wasn’t really very much standing in your way to not make it yours. (Layla, parent of Mia)

All of the case study parents believed it was important that their children knew that family was valued, precious, and not to be taken for granted. All four case study parents identified family as containing values for living and being, such as offering kindness, support and acceptance of others. It was within the parents’ own family experiences that they both learnt about parenting, and were supported in their parenting.

Grandparents played an important role in all of the case study children’s lives. All of the case study parents valued the contributions of their children’s grandparents in the raising of their children. This connection was evident when two of the case study parents, Layla and Julia, chose to take their children’s grandmothers with them to the annual parent/teacher interviews.

### ***Teachers***

The teachers’ views on family were similar to those of the parents. All of the centre’s teachers valued ‘family’ in the lives of the children. In practice, reflecting the values associated with family, such as maintaining a level of openness and connection, was more evident with the qualified teachers, Lucy and Violet, who had solid relationships with the parents and whānau. Both teachers prioritised building strong relationships with parents when reflecting on how to support the children’s sense of belonging.

Crediting their training, Lucy and Violet were able to theorise the importance of strengthening parent and whānau relationships with supporting and strengthening the children's learning and development. Lucy identified her relationships with the children's families as being a key value for her as a teacher in coming to know the child:

I think kids see that relationship you have with their family ... manaakitanga for me is recognising all the things that are really special to each family, or things that children are uniquely good at ... it is recognising [the child's] whole background and what is important for [the child] and their family, rather than just saying 'we love you and care for you'. It is looking at the whole child. (Lucy, I. 1)

The appreciation that building relationships with families was an important aspect of teaching was also held by Kate, an in-training teacher. Kate enjoyed seeing the parents, who were active within the centre, albeit for short times, such as during morning drop-off time:

All of the children here are so loved by their parents, everyone here is so precious to their parents and it is cool to see the mums or the dads that come in and just sit down with their child and play with their child. ... [The parents] do care that they settle their child in properly, and they like it that they can see their child involved in something before they go. (Kate, I.1)

However, Kate did not have the same theoretical understanding which underpinned Lucy's practice and this affected her confidence. During the first interview Kate acknowledged how both her shyness and her perceived feelings of inadequacy, as an in-training teacher, affected her confidence, often stopping her approaching parents and building workable relationships. Kate believed that as an in-training teacher parents probably wouldn't want to speak to her anyway; "I am still a student - I don't think parents quite look at me as they do the other teachers".

Reading her initial interview transcript, where Kate had voiced her lack of confidence relating to the children's families, became a small catalyst for change

and professional growth over the coming six months. During this time Kate did her best to change how she interacted with parents and whānau, within her voiced constraints of being shy and insecure about her qualification status, but for the most part left communication with parents and whānau to her qualified colleagues. Ideally Kate's grappling with this aspect of her teaching would have been supported by a mentor teacher<sup>27</sup>; an experienced and qualified teacher within the centre. Unfortunately, Kate was not afforded this support by the centre's leadership and had to work through any professional growth herself.

Six months after the initial interview there was evidence of a shift for Kate regarding how she viewed her role in building connections with the children's parents and whānau. She had the benefit of being six months further into her training as well as actively reflecting on her practice. Kate still acknowledged a deep-set insecurity connected with not having a mentor to guide her practice, but was now able to identify why it was important for her to consciously build partnerships with the parents:

...there should be that close bond with families, which *we* need to do. It shouldn't be the families' job to try and do it with us – it should be the other way around. So as long as there are those connections then it is that child feeling as though they do have a place, the child feeling as though they do belong here, because they can see the similarities [between home and the centre].

(Kate, I.2)

Relationships with the children and their family included an emotional connection. Violet and Lucy valued loving and caring relationships, which aligned with the parents' construction of family and links to support the values of love and kindness

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<sup>27</sup> In combination with face-to-face classes (block courses) and self-directed study, a field-based ECE Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programme requires the student to complete a minimum of 12 hours per week teaching within a licensed ECE setting for the duration of the programme. The provision of a fully registered associate teacher/mentor teacher supporting the student's professional development within the ECE setting is not a requirement of field based ITE programmes, but is included at the discretion of each ITE service provider and/or ECE service (private communication: Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand).

parents voiced. Violet commented that when relationships were good a child knew that they “were important”, they could “express themselves”, knowing that they were “not going to be judged.” Violet suggested that the measure of a good relationship was when the child knew that they had a place, not only in the community of the centre, but also within her “heart”:

The love, the love that’s put in and comes out – it’s reciprocal.  
If it’s your place (the child’s) you need to be loved and be able  
to love back... (Violet, I. 1)

Lucy also indicated that a tenet of her relationships with the children and their families was that they were grounded in love, trust and care for each other:

I think that the number one thing for me is that you have strong relationships with the child, that there is trust there. It is so important that you have strong relationships with the children’s family as well so that they can come and talk to you about everything. That will always be my core value as a teacher. I think that if you have got a strong relationship with others you share and you learn from each other and you develop that love for others so that you want to support and awahi them, and it works both ways. ...I think everything is about those relationships. (Lucy, I. 1)

For the case study parents, family was about dependability, knowing that they would always be there for you. For Lucy reflecting ‘family’ in the centre included children knowing that a teacher would engage with them in a reliable way, which was consistent with the parents’ idea that families were dependable:

If you see a child is upset then you are going to make sure that they are OK, so that their wairua is OK and they are able to carry on and not get stuck on whatever has happened. Children have to have the confidence that you *will* respond to them. (Lucy, I. 2)

For the teachers, security which came from family dependability also included the component of familiarity. The teachers often connected with parents and whānau

and sought to bring into their practice, aspects of routines, language, events and artefacts which were familiar to the children, similar to what they experienced at home. For example, Lucy focused on a recent regional kapahaka competition which a few of the families at the centre had attended. She found excerpts of the competition posted on YouTube<sup>28</sup>, which Violet commented on:

Mere (one of the parents) went to that and we had lots of conversations about [the event]. Lucy regularly watched it with the children on YouTube. To Mere that meant a lot to her, because that was her place; they were her people that were involved in the kapahaka. (Violet, I. 2)

I was at the centre one morning when Lucy had her laptop computer out for the children and they were watching the above-mentioned kapahaka competition. My fieldnotes record the excitement of the children as they recognised the songs and people on the screen before them:

...I haven't seen Renee so animated before. She pulled me over to the computer as soon as I walked in the door. There were seven children huddled around it. The sounds of the kapahaka performers dominated the space. Renee pointed to the screen and proudly said, "I was there! Look! I was there!" ...Lucy said that Renee in particular lit up when she saw [on the computer] the kapahaka competition, which she had attended over the weekend with her family. Lucy said, "She spends a lot of time with her family involved in kapahaka, which is important to them and it is so familiar to her ... she was delighted seeing the actual competition in the centre". (Fieldnotes, May, 2013)

Violet noted the importance of linking events and practices in the family with the centre:

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<sup>28</sup> a video-sharing website

I know that [the centre] is a different place, but there has to be some similarities between the two. (Violet, I. 1)

The children's grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins were valued by the teachers, as they were for the case study parents. For Lucy and Violet, coming to know the children meant understanding the relationships the children had with all of their family members, not only their parents. Gaining a fuller understanding of each child, and appreciating the prior knowledge the children brought to their learning, required actively connecting with significant family members, as Lucy, referring to another child in the centre, explained:

You don't build any [key family] connections without having [in-depth] conversations [about all of the family members]. It is like Kaiarīhi – when he talks he has got so much knowledge about everything, because he spends so much time with his nanny and his koro. He can explain everything in detail about how to build a fence, because he did it with his koro. (Lucy, I. 2)

For Violet, valuing the child's family included the extended family, which she viewed as important in coming to fully know each child:

For the children in your care, you need to know what they like and what they don't like, know their families and their aunts and uncles and know what they are doing in their home life. (Violet, I. 2)

Sharing a meal together as a family, which was valued by the case study parents, was also evident in the children's conversations at the centre. Lucy noted that for a vast number of children at the centre their experiences outside of the centre revolved around family members, and food, rather than going on trips to the beach, the movies or the zoo. Conversations linking home and centre for these children often revolved around family, as Lucy explained:

It might be about 'Uncle came over and we had a kai together'. Definitely those children are not talking about the beach. ... I'm just thinking of Irirangi at the moment, because he is always

telling us that uncle came over, or he stayed with nanny last night, or nanny is picking him up. There is often a lot of that conversation [happening in the centre] with different people picking them up. Lots of our kids have lots of people picking them up. I think it is the same thing (children like to talk about home experiences) regardless of what it is a child is doing in their life – they are still sharing whatever it is they are doing, or whoever they might be hanging out with, or whoever they have had a feed with. (Lucy, I. 1)

### *Centre*

Operational and procedural structures had an impact on how *family* values, as defined by the case study parents, were represented in the centre. The key areas where this statement was evident include; the expression of family mirrored in the centre relationships, the principles of openness and inclusion reflected in the centre's policies and procedures, and family bonds are strengthened over a meal.

#### *The centre reflects family relationships*

The notion that the centre was an extension of their family was a concept raised by three of the parents. All of the parents were positive about how the centre echoed their definition of family. Anahera believed that the centre was doing well “embracing the teacher/family relationship”. Parents associated words such as loving, caring, nurturing and supportive when referring to the centre ‘family’.

Seeing their values evident within the centre was important for the parents. They wanted to *see* the love that the teachers had for their children and experience links between their home and the centre, as Layla shared:

Just the whole culture of the centre is how I would imagine it would be if I was a ‘stay at home mum’. [For me] this was how it was going to be. It was going to be homely, and cosy, sharing the same values, and the things that they learn which you can see in Mia’s folder are how we do things at home, pretty much. (Layla, parent of Mia)

Anahera also saw her values within the centre, such as showing genuine love for her children, enabling her to make connections with her view of family and how this was reflected in the centre:

To me it is just a whānau centre. It is quite connected. It is not like you just come and drop your kids off. To me there is a connection with everyone. It feels really great.... Bringing my kids here – probably I’ll start crying now – but bringing my kids here, I feel that they manaaki – or look after my kids like I would myself. And ten-fold. Because what they learn here – half the stuff I would never do – like, all the creative stuff for the kids, it is just amazing. (Anahera, parent of Irirangi)

These comments suggest that the emotional connection associated with family, is important to at least these two parents who reflected on their children’s relationships and experiences at the centre. It also reveals the level of trust the parents placed in the teachers to care for their children as they would within their own families.

The parents recognised that the ‘heart’ connection, which Violet referred to, was being nurtured by individual teachers, with some ‘going the extra mile’, showing love which would typically be associated with loving familial relationships. For example, Tahlia noted that when Isaac was a baby he had formed a close loving relationship with one of the qualified teachers while in the under-two area. Although this teacher no longer taught at the centre she would still “randomly text” Tahlia “and ask how Isaac was”. Tahlia acknowledged that it was important for her to “feel good” when she went into the centre and Violet, who she had also known since Isaac’s infancy, supported the impression that Isaac was “loved”. Reflecting on the interactions some of the teachers had with her children Anahera revealed that, in fact, these are the types of relationships she wanted for her children:

There are some teachers that kind of do more than what is expected – and for me that is a good thing. You just want them to love your child like you would, or look after your child like you would. (Anahera, parent of Irirangi)

This sentiment was echoed by Violet, who revealed her belief that being a teacher of very young children contained awareness that relationships also held an emotional connection. For Violet, relationships with the children and their parents contained both depth and closeness, as the following interview excerpt shows:

My biggest thing is for parents to trust that I am going to take care of their child. I think, just *knowing* the fact that I am taking care of their child is going to create an instant relationship with parents in a way. From there it is about the *depth* of the relationship I develop with the children and their parents. I am thinking of Anahera, she calls me her children's 'second mum'. And I am like wow, for a mum to say that I am the 'second mum' to her children is - humbling. (Violet, I. 2)

The young age of the children and the length of time that they spent at the centre – “some of the children are here fifty hours a week” (Kate, I. 2) - contributed to the intimacy of these relationships. All of the parents, and the majority of the teachers, saw the importance of strong connections between the teacher and the children which would not typically be seen in other educational sectors, where the children were older.

Establishing close, caring relationships, as identified by the parents, between the teachers and children was not a centre wide practice. In comparison to Lucy and Violet, there was less evidence in Kate's practice of the loving relationships which the parents valued. Kate admitted struggling with her professional identity and needed to be seen by the parents and children as a 'teacher'. The following is an example of how Kate viewed her relationships with the children, which also reveals how she had constructed her role as their teacher:

I think that the child sees us as, not an equal to them, because you have to be a little bit more educated than them, and they do have to respect us as their teachers.... It would be me trying to be a person that children feel like they can go to. Not being labelled as a grumpy teacher, or a cross teacher, but somebody – I think that a teacher needs to be firm but fair. So being a teacher where the children know their boundaries but still being

comfortable coming to me about things, still comfortable playing around me. I think that would be something that I would want to reflect in my teaching practice. (Kate, I. 2)

On one level Kate had a professional understanding that it was important to build partnerships with parents, yet she consciously framed her teaching practice with what she justified as ‘professional distance’. For Kate it was important that she was viewed as being a “professional teacher” and she acknowledged that she did not want her relationships with the parents to cross the line into a “friendship”, which she saw as being unprofessional:

For a while I was a little bit too friendly and parents were starting to not see me as a teacher. (Kate, I. 2)

Being professional was highly valued by Kate, and a topic she was focusing on in her study (at the time of the second interview). She reflected on how her interpretation of what it meant to be ‘professional’ influenced the distance she had placed in her relationships with the parents:

... even though I have relationships with parents I don’t actually know the parents’ backgrounds. I don’t know any of their personal lives - you have just got to be really careful with how you treat them, with how you form those relationships with them. (Kate, I. 2)

Kate’s understanding of being a professional ECE teacher was not consistent with the parents’ desire that the teachers build close relationships with them and their children. This element of Kate’s practice was also incompatible with that of her qualified colleagues, Lucy and Violet. As an in-training teacher and without regular and reliable mentoring from an experienced, qualified teacher, or clear guidance from anyone in leadership, Kate was prone to misinterpreting terminology such as ‘being a professional teacher’; layering over it her impression of what a teacher ‘should look like’. Without a gatekeeper at the centre challenging values and pedagogies which were significantly different to those expressed by parents, teachers, such as Kate, normalised potentially adverse practices.

Interestingly, Kate also stated that:

I think it is really important that we do have the parents' wishes for their child. That they know that is a priority for us. (Kate, I. 2)

However, Kate was not able to make the connection between her relationships with parents, which were by her own admission purposefully distant, and how this impacted the parents' opportunities and inclination to tell her their "wishes".

The composition of the over-two teaching team made it difficult for the connections with family, as described by Lucy and Violet and required by parents, to occur consistently. For the bulk of the data generation phase Violet was the only full-time teacher employed in the team with the remainder of positions in the over-two room filled by Lucy (three days per week), Kate (three days per week), another qualified part-time teacher (who was going through difficulties at home and often absent – three days per week) and an array of un-qualified relieving teachers. Kate was employed part-time as she spent two days a week studying. Lucy and the other part-time qualified teacher both sought extra hours of employment but their requests were denied by the centre owners.

With only two teachers (Lucy and Violet), actively and regularly connecting with parents and whānau in the over two area, reflecting the value of family was limited. The centre owners deemed it appropriate to structure the teaching team as they did, and it was indicated by the teachers that they believed this decision to be financially driven. For example, it was financially beneficial to employ part-time qualified teachers, ensuring qualified funding hours were achieved, and then fill the remaining un-funded teaching hours with un-qualified relieving teachers. If consistency and meaningful connections with parents and whānau were valued by the centre's leadership, then a full-time, primarily qualified teaching team, would be visible at the centre. The centre's leadership decisions, such as having no gatekeepers who monitored quality and consistency, and having inconsistent staffing, allowed for a disjointed teaching team, compromising family values within the centre, and impacting on the children's sense of belonging.

### *Communication is open and reciprocal*

The centre adopted an ‘open door’ policy where parents and whānau were welcome to spend time in the centre, whenever they wanted to. Their presence was viewed positively by the teachers, which aligned with the parents’ view that family was welcoming. The centre’s documentation also indicated that the centre owners clearly valued family. The enrolment information imparted a desire for the centre to have partnerships with parents, stating;

We aim to make communication as open, regular and informative as possible to enable the needs and aspirations to be shared and take these into account in making decisions on the child’s care and education. (Enrolment documentation)

However, the practice of reciprocal communication with parents did not always reflect the spirit of the policy, nor value ‘family’ as identified by the case study parents. Throughout the data generation period of nine months there was little evidence that those in leadership actively sought the comments or concerns of the parents or whānau, as their documentation suggested they would. This was particularly noteworthy as significant structural and relational changes were decided upon by the leadership team, directly affecting the children, parents and whānau, which they were not informed of.

The process of communicating with parents and whānau was ad hoc. Communication did occur daily between teachers and parents, but this was dependant on the teacher and the time that the parent had free. An annual parent/teacher interview evening, where parents were allotted ten minute slots, was the only official forum where the above was actively sought by those in leadership. Without “regular” or structured avenues for parents to communicate “openly” with the centre and to receive “open” and “informative” communication from the centre, parents’ ability to share their needs and aspirations for their children were restricted.

Analysis of the data shows that beneath the open door policy any parent and whānau involvement in the centre’s programme was limited. Parent voice was reduced to parents speaking with individual teachers, who then either chose to address the parent’s ideas or concerns, or not, depending on their motivation. Relaying communication with parents to the wider team, or at the fortnightly full team

meetings, did not always happen. This meant that not all of the teachers were aware of the parents' "needs and aspirations". Potentially the fortnightly meetings were a place for teachers and leadership to discuss any parental concerns or comments, although there were no clear procedures in place which governed this process.

Without a clear avenue or official forum for parents and whānau to actively be involved in the centre's programme opportunities to contribute, as suggested by the parents, were reduced. This also impacted on the teachers and leaders' ability to hear and prioritise what was important for parents, as Lucy explains:

I think it is important for the parents to have the possibility to be invited in to share their ideas. They have so much to share regarding what is important for their child, and that will only happen if you actively make heaps of connections with the parents. (Lucy, I. 2)

Most of the teachers were aware that there was significantly more that they could be doing to involve the families. Lucy was fully aware that at times she ignored what parents were asking of her, often because she felt she was alone in trying to implement suggestions. For example, Anahera, Irirangi's mother, raised with Lucy and Violet the possibility of having more waiata (singing) in the centre. Either teacher could have raised Anahera's suggestion at a full-team meeting, to have centre wide support and implementation. It was one of a number of parental suggestions which ended with the teachers, as Lucy noted, "I thought about it, but to be honest I haven't done a lot with it". She shared how the centre projected an image of competency and care which was upheld in front of parents, while the reality was more complex and often less proficient:

There is a lot of trust that I find parents have in us. They just think that we do everything really awesomely and they don't really know what is actually involved [in making things happen]. They just think 'oh yeah, they will sort it out' without realising how much goes on, or what really happens. It is not really that clear about what really happens on a day to day basis here. (Lucy, I. 2)

The dichotomy between teachers wanting parents' participation and then essentially ignoring them when they offered suggestions, or knowingly missing opportunities to include them, was not lost on Lucy's understanding of how this impacted upon the children's sense of belonging:

I think that certainly Isaac's sense of belonging could be a lot stronger if I would do more things to get his family more involved. (Lucy, I. 2)

The case study parents also identified active participation as a family value. Lucy believed the reason why parent participation was not really welcomed in the centre was because teachers were uncomfortable with parents witnessing their teaching practice:

I sometimes think too, that if you don't feel really confident in your practice that is why relationships are not built. I think that sometimes the reason why we don't have parents coming in to do activities, when they have offered to do it, is because teachers are not confident with what they are actually doing. So, we don't want parents to come and be involved with us because they will actually see what is going on. Sometimes I think that is the thing behind it all. I don't personally feel that way because I would rather that everything was out in the open but I always notice that the teachers will back off or go quite shy, or change when the parents come in, rather than just be how you are on an everyday basis. (Lucy, I. 2)

Although Kate found building face-to-face relationships with the parents challenging, she did recognise the need to provide an avenue for parents to contribute more. She drew on the idea of a suggestion box which she had seen while on a recent teaching practicum:

I would really love a suggestion box out the front. I think that some parents are scared to come to us – well, not scared to come to us, but afraid of hurting someone's feelings, or don't know how to approach the situation. I think having the pen and paper

and a box out the front would make it a lot easier. I think that at the staff meetings every two weeks we could look at the suggestions and see what we could work on. (Kate, I. 2)

The majority of communication the management had with the parents focused on the children's attendance and the payment of fees. There was no suggestion that families would be involved in any decision making. Interestingly, the pressure for management to have regular 'parent evenings' where there could be open communication with staff came primarily from the teachers. They felt this was important for parents, but also believed that if suggestions were voiced in a public arena those in leadership would be more accountable to ensure democratically agreed recommendations be implemented.

#### *Shared meals*

The parents indicated that sharing a meal as a family was highly valued and strengthened their children's sense of belonging within their immediate and wider families. Shared meals provided regular opportunities for discussion to happen and connections to be strengthened. The centre did organise a shared breakfast to celebrate Matariki, as was the custom of the organisation. This event was well attended and enjoyed by both parents and teachers. In previous years the teachers were expected to cook and serve parents who sat together with their children sharing kai and conversation with each other. This particular year the teachers decided to arrive at 6am and together prepared the food which they kept warm in a number of bain-marie. The centre's cook served the prepared breakfast, freeing the teachers to sit with the families, spending a relaxed time chatting with the children and their parents:

The Matariki breakfast was really amazing for building relationships with the families, especially for those who are so busy in the mornings or at pick up time. I think that we really do need to do more of that. (Lucy, I. 2)

Lots of parents came up to me and told me that they really enjoyed the shared breakfast better than last year. They really, really enjoyed that – it wasn't rushed, everything was done for them and we, as teachers, were able to spend time with the

parents as well. To sit down and actually have breakfast with the parents, rather than have to serve it and do all the work and have them sit alone at the tables - that was good. (Violet, I. 2)

The shared breakfast reflected the importance the case study families placed on coming together over kai as a family. Changing the structure of the shared breakfast provided an opportunity for relationships between parents, children and teachers to be strengthened.

## *Culture*

### *Parents*

Culture was raised by three of the four parents as being important for their family, and a value which they wanted their children to hold on to and be proud of. Layla, Mia's mother, commented on how for her, family and her Cook Island cultural heritage were intertwined:

[Our cultural heritage] is important to us, and we have a huge family – a humongous family. I am always around people and a lot of them are family. My parents are always around people and they are always family. And it is always about helping them and supporting them and there is always some Cook Island event which is coming up that we are all always at. (Layla, parent of Mia)

Cultural awareness was also integral to Anahera's identity as Māori, which she prioritised for her children:

Cultural values and whakapapa are important for my children to understand and have in their lives. If Irirangi knows what is before him, if he gets an understanding of what our people lay before us, then it will help in time to come. I went to kōhanga when I was young and it laid so much out for me. I don't know how to really explain it, but singing the waiata with my teachers, I can clearly remember. Getting up and speaking Māori about certain things that we have done on the weekend. I can still

clearly remember about that. Even the waiata at primary school, I wasn't allowed to be in the bi-lingual unit because I was too - you know how it was quite racist back in the eighties, back in the day. So I was too fair. They didn't believe that I was Māori even though my mum was, you know ... so I was denied that. I suppose for me it is about having everything. Immersing Irirangi and Ahakoa in kaupapa Māori, all things Māori. (Anahera, parent of Irirangi)

For Isaac's parents, Tahlia and Fetuao, their Samoan cultural identity was intertwined with their Christian faith. They saw that in order for Isaac to feel secure with who he was he needed to embrace both his Samoan culture and his Christianity. As members of a local Samoan Presbyterian church Tahlia and Fetuao saw that their faith supported their cultural identity as Samoans, and their identity as Samoans was connected to their faith;

For us, our culture is all at church and Fetuao also speaks to Isaac in Samoan at home. I guess for me being New Zealand born - I don't want him to be ashamed of being Samoan in New Zealand. Because being born in a different country you can lose who you really are. I speak to Isaac more in English but Fetuao speaks to him in Samoan. Knowing who he is and who he has come from, and being strong in himself and obviously having faith when he grows up, is very important. Having faith and knowing God, because that has been right throughout the generations for both of our families. ... Fetuao's mum and dad are really strong in their faith in the Islands. We want Isaac to grow up to be a strong Samoan boy who lives in New Zealand and not being ashamed of being Samoan. (Tahlia, parent of Isaac)

As a Pākehā Julia was easily able to recognise her cultural heritage reflected in the centre:

I definitely do see my culture reflected there, mainly because all the teachers are white and I would guess, from middle-class

backgrounds, like me. I see it every day as soon as I walk in there. Also, I grew up in the country, so there were trees to climb and grass to run around on and you got dirty, and maybe slightly injured, and those sorts of things. I see that aspect of my culture at the centre. (Julia, parent of Grace)

Julia aspired to be culturally inclusive and had a conscious awareness that in New Zealand 'being Pākehā' was an influential position to be in. She recognised, therefore, that although the Pākehā families did not constitute the main cultural demographic at the centre the teachers' cultural affiliation was significantly persuasive:

I know that I am in the dominant cultural group [at the centre] because all of the teachers are Pākehā and the teachers have the dominant influence at the centre. (Julia, parent of Grace)

As a professional, middle-class, Pākehā woman, Julia had the social capital to challenge practices and procedures which did not sit comfortably with her, or request things for her daughter without hesitation. She regularly did both. This, however, was not the experience of a number of families, with social, cultural and language differences limiting their capacity to challenge the status quo.

Not all of the families were able to see their culture represented in the centre as clearly as Julia was. While their Samoan culture was highly valued at home, and at her church, Tahlia found it difficult to see aspects of her son's Samoan identity within the centre, but initially appeared content to accept why this was so:

I would say I see Māori demonstrated in the centre, but not Samoan. To me I understand because we are in New Zealand. Māori is about being a New Zealander. For me to tell them to push Samoan on one child out of how many children they have there, I would find that weird. I don't mind it that they don't push it there because I know that we are strong enough to carry it on out of daycare. (Tahlia, parent of Isaac)

As the interview progressed it became apparent that Tahlia was struggling with the centre's apparent lack of recognition of Isaac's Samoan heritage. Underneath

Tahlia's belief that she did not have a right to request the centre to incorporate aspects of Isaac's Samoan culture into their programme, was a deeper desire for them to do so. The possibility that this could be achievable came from a past experience at the centre when one of Isaac's (qualified) teachers demonstrated cultural responsiveness:

But, when he was in the under-twos Jean was really good and she was willing to go that extra mile and learn certain [Samoan] words for Isaac, which was good. I mean if they could do that now that would be good, but I wouldn't expect them to push it because we are in New Zealand. (Tahlia, parent of Isaac)

As a Cook Islander Layla was less concerned about this aspect of Mia's cultural identity being evident at the centre. This could have been because Layla also recognised Mia's paternal Māori heritage, which was reflected in the centre, and her maternal Cook Island heritage, which was strong at home. When asked whether she saw her own cultural heritage demonstrated in the centre, Layla replied:

Not so much, because there is a lot of Māori incorporated into the centre. But Cook Island isn't far off it, from Māori as well, so the values of it are there. Little things like Rarotonga itself, and the dancing and the food – that's always at home anyway. We talk about it and we show it. (Layla, parent of Mia)

Julia was less able to readily identify elements of her Pākehā culture. She suggested it was encountering and making comparisons with the values and practices of other cultural groups that she was able to see her own:

I guess that is how you notice your own [culture] because you notice aspects of other cultures which [are different to yours].  
(Julia, parent of Grace)

Julia recognised that it was through participation with others that this occurred, and she wanted the centre to explore the cultural diversity she saw in the community. Julia appeared less certain about raising Grace with a strong Chinese identity, although she saw exploring Grace's cultural heritage as being important for her in

the future. Incorporating aspects of Chinese culture into her life was not something Julia currently pursued, in general or in the centre:

I am less concerned with Grace being exposed to Chinese culture – we'll get there, we'll get that. (Julia, parent of Grace)

Throughout the interview Julia focused on ensuring Grace grow in confidence, security and independence, without making links with how these could connect with, or influence her cultural identity:

I want her to be happy and to push herself to be the best person she can be, but to not be too hung up on ... I don't know, being the outstanding superstar achiever. If she wants to be, go for gold, but [I want her to] do it for herself and not for anybody else. (Julia, parent of Grace)

The following excerpt taken from Julia's interview relates to her belief that the facility to distinguish people, due to race, is not inherent within children, but is something which is taught:

...children don't see anything. It is fantastic. There is nothing like having an interracial family to stop seeing race. (Julia, parent of Grace)

The above statement is well intentioned, but could suggest Julia may be confusing discrimination of others, based on race, with a child's right<sup>29</sup> to know their cultural heritage. This could explain why Julia clearly valued acceptance of cultural groups other than her own, yet could not actively see her adopted daughter's right to know her own cultural heritage.

The remaining three parents were clear about their child's cultural identity and nurtured it at home through the inclusion of language and participation in cultural

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<sup>29</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 20.3: Such care could include, inter alia, foster placement, kafalah of Islamic law, adoption or if necessary placement in suitable institutions for the care of children. When considering solutions, due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background (United Nations, 1989).

practices and events. All three case study parents actively and knowingly built their child's cultural identity, believing that as parents they were capable of managing this aspect of their child's life successfully. Anahera provided an example of what this looked like for her family:

So it is yet again about those family connections, those family bonds. Because we are just down the road from the marae which we are affiliated to, we are always making sure that we are taking the kids to it regularly. Not just to go to the marae, but to go and talk about stuff at the marae. Like, why are the harakeke (flax) there in front of the marae? Everything to do with the marae is important. And Irirangi might not think how important it is when we are talking about it, but when he grows up he will remember those things, because that is just how it gets passed through our kids, by just talking, and feeling and remembering all those things that are there for us. (Anahera, parent of Irirangi)

Anahera acknowledged that she didn't always see her Māori culture represented as she would have liked within the centre. She suggested some ways where her children's Māori culture could be respected more in the centre:

Even just [the teachers] trying their best to talk kupu (properly). I know it's hard just trying to get your mouth around the reo, which is OK. Just those sorts of things are important. And the teachers don't mind me correcting them, like "it's actually like this", "Oh, OK". Definitely having whakataukī around would help. Whakataukī say a lot to kids, and they don't say a lot to older people. Some people say, "It's Māori. Translate it<sup>30</sup>", but when you are translating Māori – you know you can't really. Ahakoa's name, I was trying to translate it to the teachers –

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<sup>30</sup> Anahera had experienced one teacher in particular and the centre manager (who both left the centre shortly after the beginning of the data generation phase) regularly mispronouncing Māori place names and commonly heard Māori words. This as well as being 'expected' to be the source of all Māori knowledge, without evidence of these teachers (including the centre manager) making any effort to extend their own, was tiresome and annoying.

because it's a whakataukī, her name, which kōhanga use all the time, but it was really hard ... (Anahera, parent of Irirangi)

All non-Pākehā parents wanted expressions of their culture to be evident within the centre, yet those who were not Māori did not feel it was their right to expect it. This dichotomy was a clear tension for Isaac's mother, Tahlia, who held two opposing views; a belief that she would always be a Samoan living in New Zealand and, therefore, did not have the right to demand anything, and a belief that in order for New Zealand to form multi-cultural citizens with strong identities then the education system needed to do more regarding cultural inclusivity. It was near the end of her interview when Tahlia passionately expressed her desire that Isaac's Samoan culture was more evident in the centre:

I guess I am annoyed that they are not embracing other cultures, although we live in New Zealand. Being a Māori New Zealander is the face of being a New Zealander, but there are a whole heap of other cultures. [Fetua and I] both understand that we are in New Zealand and it would be the same if a New Zealand Māori had to go to a Samoan daycare. I guess if they could just work more around the different cultures that would be good. (Tahlia, parent of Isaac)

If she could see her Samoan culture evident in the centre Tahlia acknowledged that it would have a direct impact on Isaac's "sense of belonging":

It is being able to say 'Oh, yeah. That is who Isaac is! That is who we are!' I think New Zealanders should push that through all of the day-cares', because at the end of the day in New Zealand we would have strong people. If you push that from the beginning you would have strong people to lead New Zealand into the future, no matter who they are. They won't have an identity crisis. It will take a long time, but you can't take someone's cultural identity away from them just because they are from a different country. (Tahlia, parent of Isaac)

Tahlia revealed that her experiences of being a New Zealand born Samoan had challenges. The issues Tahlia identified, influencing her sense of belonging, included her 'home language' and acceptance. As a New Zealand born Samoan Tahlia spoke English as her first language and was not fully fluent in the Samoan language until her early twenties, when she met and married Fetuao. This impacted upon Tahlia's identity; "... being born in a different country, you can lose who you really are." More importantly, she felt in New Zealand she belonged to a society which tacitly positioned her as an outsider, as a Samoan. Tahlia's critique of the centre also indicates that for this parent in particular, the teachers were not fully aware of what she regarded as a priority for her child; securing his identity as a Samoan.

### *Teachers*

Being culturally sensitive and inclusive was valued by teachers and there was evidence that the majority of qualified teachers characterised, to varying degrees, aspects of bicultural awareness. This was appropriate and in keeping with the Treaty of Waitangi, which underpinned the principles of the curriculum, the MoE requirements and the criteria for teacher registration. There was less evidence that the majority of teachers' pedagogies were consistently sensitive to, and appropriate for, the children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds, although this did occur.

Expressions of cultural responsiveness included respecting practices around food, and acknowledging special cultural events, such as Diwali<sup>31</sup>, or Chinese New Year. However, the recognition of significant cultural practices or events for families from cultural groups, other than Māori or Pākehā, was more often initiated by the parents.

Violet and Lucy demonstrated cultural sensitivity in their teaching practice, with Māori children, whose culture they both professed some familiarity with. Lucy identified how she had developed her understanding of the Māori worldview:

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<sup>31</sup> The Hindu festival of light

I would say my understanding developed over time – probably growing up in [a small Māori township] and being part of life there contributed to it, as well as what I learnt at Uni. I think growing up and staying with people, and being part of the community out there has definitely contributed massively to my understanding of the way things work for Māori families. Because it was so clearly different when I moved away. It was like, ‘oh! not everyone does it that way’. All those things, all of those things. I think wanting to learn, being open to learning, that makes a massive difference to how you come to understand different cultural concepts. (Lucy, I. 1)

Cultural sensitivity did not always ensure consistent, responsive, bi-cultural practice. The over-two teachers had embarked on a recent whanaungatanga planning focus. Parents were invited to identify the places in New Zealand, or the world, which they associated with their child’s cultural identity. This process helped to shed light on how much more Lucy believed she could have been doing to strengthen the children’s cultural identities, as her comments about a child in the centre indicated:

Had that project not have happened then I wouldn’t have learnt that Rawiri had about five different tribal areas he is connected to. ... I think [initially] someone said that somebody was from somewhere and I thought, “I don’t know these kids”. And that was how [the planning] came about – we thought we needed to try and find out more about the children. (Lucy, I. 2)

Violet had a similar experience to Lucy where, due to the planning focus, she discovered the correct ethnicity<sup>32</sup> of a child who had been at the centre for over a year. She felt deeply “ashamed” of mistaking this child’s identity, and talked about how the experience changed the way she intended to engage with the children and their families in the future:

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<sup>32</sup> Violet mistook a child from Afghanistan as being from India

I want to make an effort to find out more about who the children are. I think that an important part of knowing the children is knowing their background as well; knowing where they have come from, knowing their family's beliefs as well, and knowing their cultural values. That is something that stood out hugely. I have learnt my lesson from this – well I really hope that I have, because I would hate to have to ask a family about themselves such a long time after they have arrived here. (Violet, I. 2)

These comments indicate a level of reflection and reflexivity which supports appropriate cultural responsive practice. Violet misidentifying the ethnicity of one of the children, also suggests that opportunities for her to build this child's sense of belonging and identity were missed.

Similar to Lucy, Violet connected well with the Māori families in the centre because of her early life experiences and upbringing. Her family had experienced relative poverty throughout her childhood and she had only just begun acknowledging her Māori ancestry on her father's side of the family (which was a recent discovery as he had been adopted at birth), but still chose to identify herself as Pākehā. Violet believed these early experiences helped her to make real connections with the Māori children and their whānau at the centre.

Being aware of children's cultural influences enabled Violet to critique her bi-cultural practice. Violet had strong relationships with the Māori children and their whānau, but she was critical of how the teachers were incorporating te reo and tikanga Māori into the programme as a whole:

[I believe that] we are not doing a great job. Personally I think we use general te reo. We have the Māori alphabet up on the wall, but, do we ever use it? No, it is there just to be seen. We do the whole 'head to head' tikanga. We wash the sheets, towels separately, but we should be using te reo so much more. (Violet, I. 2)

Unlike Lucy and Violet, Kate had great difficulty connecting with the Māori families in the centre. During the nine months of data generation Kate used hardly

any te reo Māori. Her religious beliefs prohibited her from reciting karakia and she rarely incorporated the simplest command or word into her conversations with the children. The only time Kate used te reo Māori with any regularity was when joining in with waiata at mat-time. She attributed her lack of confidence with not having any exposure to Māori language or customs growing up:

I have never experienced it or been around it until now. And I have come to a centre where we are in an area where there are a lot of Māori people. (Kate, I. 1)

Kate professed knowing little about Māori culture, which prior to beginning her teaching qualification she did not view as an issue. Being expected to demonstrate bicultural practice with confidence and understanding was daunting for her:

I didn't think about [supporting Māori culture] before I studied, or even in my first year of study, because I didn't see the importance of it in the beginning. ...it is hard sometimes trying to connect with parents that are Māori. I don't know anything really about their culture. Only what ... I have only done written work, I haven't done my own research. I want to – I just don't know how to. (Kate, I. 1)

The analysis of the data shows that as Pākehā teachers, Violet, Kate and Lucy held different worldviews, which were shaped by their life experiences, beliefs and values. These experiences provided both opportunities and challenges to developing culturally sensitive, responsive, and ethical pedagogies, impacting upon the children's sense of belonging and their identities. The findings also indicate that to varying degrees all of the teachers struggled to address how they positioned people from diverse cultural backgrounds, especially cultures they were less familiar with.

### *Centre*

At the management level culturally sensitive and responsive practice was inconsistent. Anahera acknowledged that the “teachers do try with what they have”, but she wanted to see more of an emphasis on her Māori culture throughout all aspects of the centre. Anahera had already made a suggestion to the centre manager

about bringing a group of people in who would support the teachers with waiata, karakia, or anything that the teachers identified as needing help with. She was aware that there was a group of Māori parents who also wanted more te reo and tikanga Māori evident in the centre and knew that they were beginning to get annoyed that little was happening:

We say ‘come on teachers do this’ you know, and the poor teachers are saying ‘I’m trying to, but I don’t even know myself’. There is a framework of people who do come to centres to help implement things like that, or to sing with the kids. Then the teachers could start picking it up themselves and the group would slowly [ease themselves] out. (Anahera, parent of Irirangi)

Unfortunately, her suggestion was not followed up by the centre manager. Anahera had other suggestions with how the centre could support her children’s Māori identity, although she felt that even though things could be better the teachers were “doing a good job”. Her proposal to the manager included the centre acknowledging the koroneihana, or coronation of the Māori King, and having a photo of the Māori King on the wall for all of the Māori children and families to see. These two suggestions were relatively simple to apply and though discussed amongst the teachers and with the centre manager, no-one took responsibility to ensure that the suggestions were implemented into the programme, and consequently they just didn’t happen. This indicates that for one Māori parent at least their suggestion to support their cultural identity was not valued enough by those in leadership for a response to occur at a centre wide level.

The teachers did not readily make the connection that possibly some of the parents may have held back information or comments because previous suggestions had not been followed up. Lucy felt that she had good relationships with all of the parents, but she had a sense that there were some parents who were less confident in approaching the teachers, and were not as forthcoming with their communication as she would have liked:

You do get the feeling that families are holding things back from you, or they don’t want to say something because they are

embarrassed, or think that it isn't suitable, or that it may not be what they think you want to hear. (Lucy, I. 1)

This comment suggests that the quality of communication with parents may not have been as good with all of the teachers as it appeared to be on the surface, as was the experience of the case study parents. Without the relationships and open and honest communication Lucy experienced with parents being consistent throughout the centre, opportunities for teachers and management to 'hear' the parents and be reliably culturally responsive were reduced.

Anahera identified how it was difficult for families to raise concerns when the centre was not as culturally sensitive or responsive as it could have been:

You know if it's wrong, I am not going to put up with it. But the problem is I don't have any avenue [at the centre] to support me saying stuff like that. (Anahera, parent of Irirangi)

Similar to Anahera, Lucy and Violet both felt that there was so much more that they could be doing as a whole centre regarding the implementation of Māori cultural practices. Lucy was the only teacher who sang waiata throughout the day, outside of mat-time. Lucy regularly took her guitar and sang with the children as they explored and played both inside and outside. Violet acknowledged that it shouldn't just be Lucy, but they should all be doing more:

It is no good when Lucy is bringing her guitar in and singing waiata when she is here – 'cause she is only here every so often. We all need to be on the same page and have it all as a goal. I think then we would have more Māori whānau come through the centre - they can see it because it is on the walls but can they sense the intangibles? I think that they feel that their culture is respected, but my belief is that we are not doing enough to really embrace it. I feel that Māori whānau get the sense we respect them because of what they see on the walls and because of the 'kia ora', 'morena' they hear. I feel it's acknowledged but I think we need to be learning more, finding more te reo words to embrace and to use. That is such a big thing. For Māori their

culture is such a huge thing to them. That is who they are, it is their everything - their whole wairua – that’s my belief anyway.

(Violet, I. 1)

Parents clearly indicated they wanted more te reo and more waiata incorporated into the day-to-day life of the centre but those in leadership did not hold the same values, as in practice there was no commitment, or direction ‘from the top’, to work with parents to support them, nor was there any financial investment to support teachers improve their expertise through any professional development. These leadership decisions impacted upon the belonging of the children and their families.

Supporting cultural values, beliefs and practices in the lives of children and their families who affiliated with cultures outside of New Zealand was not readily apparent at the leadership level. The centre’s documentation states that the centre would actively make connections with the parents/whānau and wider community to meet parents’ aspirations, expectations and cultural needs. However, the analysed data shows that during the nine months of data generation cultural matters were not prioritised by those in leadership; the centre manager or the owners. There was no evidence to suggest those in leadership actively sought ways to meet the cultural needs of the children or their families. Without the provision of avenues for families to share their cultural concerns or suggestions, the ability to respond to them responsibly and sensitively was compromised, which undermined belonging.

### ***Social responsibility***

#### ***Parents***

All of the parents expressed that they aspired for their children to be successful in life, which they defined as being confident in their identity, as well as embracing life and academic opportunities. Underpinning the case study parents’ aspirations was the notion that above all else they wanted their children to be socially responsible people. The parents sought for their children to be respectful members of society, where they expressed gratitude, kindness, inclusivity and respect for others.

Being a “good person” was key for all of the parents, which Julia’s comment typifies:

I want Grace to treat others as you want to be treated ... It sounds cliché, but [I want her to be] a good person – caring for other people and treating them with respect. I want her to try to be as non-judgemental as possible ... to treat all people with respect and not to be judgemental. (Julia, parent of Grace)

For all of the parents, being socially responsible included respecting cultural diversity. The parents were all mindful that their children were members of a society which was culturally diverse, and all four of the parents articulated that they wanted their children to be inclusive, embracing and celebrating cultures which were different to their own.

To support cultural inclusivity in the centre Isaac’s mother, Tahlia, suggested that there could be regular “culture days”, where different cultures were explored and celebrated. This point was raised by all of the case study parents. The following are two examples from parents (Julia and Anahera), identifying their belief that cultural awareness and inclusivity was about respecting others and growing responsibly as an individual:

I love that [Grace] is being exposed to more Māori culture [at the centre], but there are a whole lot of cultures there that I think are going to become more important as we grow older ... particularly in the community that we are in ... even if there aren’t any children that are necessarily of that culture in the centre. I don’t know how they would do it, but I look around where I live and there is a massive Somalian community, there is a growing Muslim community – I was wondering if there was any way ... maybe celebrating a festival or something that was part of it – of that culture. I want to normalise as much as possible that there are many different people, there is a lot of diversity, so to embrace it and be interested in it ... and show that due respect. (Julia, parent of Grace)

For Irirangi to be awesome while he is at school he needs to know more than what is just Māori. [Young people] get to a stage where - the youth that I work with anyway<sup>33</sup> - where it's foreign to them. Especially the Māori young people, [I believe] they don't want to learn about other people and other cultures if they don't have to. I definitely think all cultures here need to be celebrated. (Anahera, parent of Irirangi)

Being mindful of how people help you in big and small ways, and recognising other peoples' contributions in your life, were themes evident in all of the parents' data. These included, thanking someone for preparing a meal for you, acknowledging an act of kindness, or acknowledging others' support in the attainment of a life achievement. Taking responsibility, acknowledging and respecting others, were values evident when Anahera expressed the aspirations she had for Irirangi:

So for my kids, Irirangi [as a Māori male] especially, I want him to be anything he wants to be. But he has got to work hard for it and acknowledge the people around him who will get him there, because you can't just get through life, or get a degree, by yourself. You need family, you need support; you need to know who is there to support you because it is so hard by yourself. (Anahera, parent of Irirangi)

Layla also wanted Mia to set herself high goals for life, which included a future University degree, something Layla did not have. Layla was not concerned about Mia's education as she recognised her daughter as a "quick learner", believed that Mia was encouraged in the centre, and felt confident that she would find success in the education system. For Layla, social competency was prioritised over academic aptitude, with "having manners" and "being respectful" highly valued attributes:

Having manners is important to me. You don't have kids with manners anymore. I was really harsh on Mia when she was a toddler – just talking about manners. And it has paid off because

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<sup>33</sup> Anahera works with Māori youth, particularly in the area of promoting sexual health

now she has got really good manners. I just kind of had to not care about the looks people were giving me over ‘pleases’ and ‘thank-yous’ – but I knew why, and it shows now, so I think ‘oh, that’s alright then’ ... There are things that I won’t bend on, because I know in the future that it will pay off. (Layla, parent of Mia)

Fetua'o also expressed his desire for Isaac to live mindfully, which included having respect for God, family and others, concepts which, for him, could not be separated:

[It is important to have] respect for other people, even your environment. Your family, your parents and your kids. That is the truth that is spoken. The [Samoan] culture is really nice, especially the love for God. We need to learn from the bible. That is what I want to get through to Isaac. Love God, your faith and [show respect] for other people. ... love other people, not only yourself. ... My English is not good, and I want to tell you everything. (Fetua'o, parent of Isaac)

Anahera had high aspirations for Irirangi, and believed he had the attributes and support to achieve whatever he set his mind on. A core value for Anahera, which she wanted instilled in her children, was to always be mindful of others’ well-being. She acknowledged that in order for this trait to be fruitful it had to be balanced:

One thing others have told me ... do for others and forget about myself – which is a great mind-set to have, but you can kind of forget about yourself. So, [Irirangi] has to embrace it all, but [to also] remember what makes him feel good and happy in order to get there. (Anahera, parent of Irirangi)

Anahera also explained how the centre could support the values which were important to her in preparing her children as responsible members of society:

Be diverse ... [Help the children] know that the world is not straight up and down. There are so many aspects to it. I think creating the positive path by exposing the kids to different things; to different cultural things, different doing things - that

a centre does every day - and then over time growing those little seeds that the children have been exposed to. (Anahera, parent of Irirangi)

Being socially responsible was also about respecting family diversity. This point was raised by two of the parents; Julia and Layla, who were both sole parents. For Julia, her concern was more with how the teachers embraced diverse family units. Julia perceived that not all of the teachers were accepting of her choice to adopt Grace from China and then quickly return to full-time employment. Through observation, the data did show that there was some substance to Julia's concerns, with one of the under-two teachers, more than once, questioning why Julia, as a single professional woman, would want to adopt a child, and regularly commenting that Julia "left the parenting of Grace to the teachers".

Layla also wanted the centre to look at respecting different family compositions. She commented that Mia had started noticing that her family dynamics were different from other children in the centre, who had their father and mother living together. Layla wanted her daughter to respect diverse expressions of family, believing that in doing so she would accept herself.

Social responsibility was conceptualised as being an accountable and positive contributor to society, and all of the parents believed that the centre could support this value.

### ***Teachers***

Respecting others and respecting diversity was evident amongst the teachers. Respecting parents' choices for their children was important for Violet, who was aware that at times this meant a clash of cultural practices. To illustrate this, Violet referred to her time teaching in the under-two area, transitioning an 18 months old child into the centre whose family had recently arrived in New Zealand as a refugee from Afghanistan:

They (the family) seem to be less interested in their children being independent - they like their children to be dependent on their parents, who hand feed their food, hold their drink up to

their mouth. Because that is their culture and that is what the parents want to do, we will do the same. (Violet, I. 2)

Violet acknowledged that this was not necessarily a value which she would hold if she was a parent, but respected it as important for this particular family:

The parents are always right, and that is their way of parenting the child. In my past years I have spoon fed an older child because that is what mum wanted. We can encourage him – I mean Ramin has only just started – but once he gets used to us and his peers we can talk to his mum and ask ‘would you mind if we gave him a spoon?’, even if he didn’t use the spoon. It would definitely be asking his mum for permission to do that – we wouldn’t just be doing that because we felt it was the right thing to do. We still have to respect the parents’ opinions. (Violet, I. 2)

Violet’s example is in alliance with the parents’ values who wanted their children to be sensitive to diverse cultural practices, facilitating a sense of belonging for all. Opportunities to demonstrate cultural responsiveness were more available with the younger children, possibly supported by the necessary exchange of communication between the teachers and parents of the infants and toddlers. This in itself did not guarantee the sensitive, responsive interactions as Violet’s account showed.

Once Violet left the centre Kate moved to the under-two teaching team. During this time I noticed Kate aligning her teaching practice with Harriet’s, a qualified teacher who had recently returned from maternity leave. Harriet’s interactions with the children were identified by Violet and Lucy as often being insensitive and at times dismissive of the parents’ requests for their children. My ethnographic fieldnotes confirmed this, identifying a number of occasions where the under-two and over-two year old children were ignored, left to cry, spoken to harshly by Harriet, or their family members were spoken about inappropriately in front of them. It was difficult to always reconcile Harriet’s and at times Kate’s pedagogical choices with the theory identifying quality interactions with infants and toddlers, which include strong partnerships with parents and warm and sensitive interactions with the children (Dalli, White, Rockel and Duhn, 2011). It is important to note that in lieu

of any formal mentoring provided by the centre's leadership, as an in-training teacher still grappling with the complexities of teaching, Kate sought her own, choosing to model her practice on Harriet's.

Lucy's practice was more aligned with Violet's and she articulated a similar philosophy in her second interview, where she appreciated there were perspectives which were different to her own, yet also respected the right of the parents to ask for what they believed was best for their children:

Sometimes what I really want for [the parents'] children may be different from what they want. But it doesn't matter; I just respect what they want for their kids. (Lucy, I. 2)

In the day-to-day lived experiences of the centre respecting different cultural values, expressions and practices was not always embraced by all teachers. At the time of the first interview Kate was in the over-two room and still coming to know me, when she shared how some teaching relievers had not always understood the importance of respecting parents' cultural requests for their children, such as providing Halal food, or giving a Hindu child only warm water to drink, which some perceived as "weird". She drew on her own experience of "being different" in regard to her religious beliefs, to explain to me the importance of respecting differing cultural practices;

It is kind of easier for me to realise that it must be hard for [the child] and it must be hard for the parents to get people to accept or to understand that [practice]. So it is just taking those things into consideration. Like [the children] with the Halal meat; I say, well who cares? What's the problem? It must be hard for the parents to actually get us to accept it is very important for them. It is not just food for them, it is very important that we follow those things. (Kate, I. 1)

Through observation I came to see that there was some incongruity between Kate's considered understanding of accepting cultural values and practices different to her own, as evidenced above, and the consistent application of this understanding into her teaching practice. Without sensitive and competent mentoring numerous

opportunities were missed for Kate to reflect further, deepen her understanding, and modify her teaching practice.

Being socially responsible was also about modelling respectful relationships for the children. Consistent with the parents' values, Lucy believed teachers' relationships with the children should be caring, loving and inclusive, where a child could contribute without reserve and where they could "be themselves". For Lucy, "growing in confidence" as a unique individual was important:

I think the more that I teach the more I really feel that is the only thing that is important. It is that you do feel OK to contribute whatever you want, whatever you bring to the table, that's what we want to have here. Not try and mould you into something that you are not, or put some things onto you that you are not into doing. (Lucy, I. 1)

In practice Lucy modelled how to both invite and listen to another person's perspective. She intentionally created situations where children could determine the play, which often required negotiation. She also regularly set up a space, as occurred at the four year old time, where the children could freely talk about their interests or concerns. This was a pedagogical decision which Lucy clearly understood the goal of;

I think it develops respect for each other, you know. Respect for differences and for people and their ways. ... They are building connections with other people as well, they are finding the similarities – that is one part of building strong friendships I suppose. They are finding things in common and finding connections with people. Although, I think the main thing is respect; that you have respect for differences – for people who aren't the same as you – you are saying that somebody else's situation is OK. Therefore, when Hallie shares her story then for Mia her situation is OK for her. Hallie has a different family living situation from most of the children and it was the same thing for Mia. Hallie was living with her grandmother and her aunty and sometimes her other aunties, and sometimes her

cousins. Hallie talking about that – that then is helping to normalise things for Mia, who lives with her mum and grandparents. And, of course, all of the other four years olds are listening and adjusting their theories about family as well.

(Lucy, I. 2)

### *Centre*

The centre had a high representation of families who struggled financially, as well as socially, although this was not always taken into consideration by the centre owners. Two illustrations are presented which demonstrate how the centre's leadership considered the centre's families' financial welfare and showed social responsibility, in policy and practice. The first scenario presented shows how the centre manager and teachers, when planning for a costly excursion, were mindful of the families and how any financial barrier could potentially exclude them from participation. The second example presents the disconnection between the demographics of the centre's families and the fee structures.

### *The zoo trip*

A month prior to the data generation phase of this study I was aware that the centre had organised an excursion to a neighbouring city's zoo for the children and their whānau. In consultation with the centre manager, it was decided by the teachers that no child or family members who wanted to go would be excluded from the trip. The projected cost of the excursion exceeded the money the centre owners had budgeted for such activities, so, rather than ask parents to fund the shortfall, the teachers and the centre manager raised the considerable funds themselves, outside of their working hours. It was acknowledged by the teachers that some of the children had never been to a zoo, nor travelled outside of the suburb they lived in, and they saw the zoo trip as a wonderful experience for them. Underneath the teachers' and the centre manager's altruistic decision to raise the substantial shortfall themselves were values of equity, empathy, kindness and inclusivity, all demonstrating social responsibility.

### *The fee structure*

In contrast to the above example, being mindful to the needs of the diverse social and cultural families who accessed the centre was not always apparent in the centre. The majority of the families who accessed the centre relied on government benefits and subsidies to survive. Every child in New Zealand aged three years and four years is entitled to access *20 Hours ECE*, a government scheme aimed at boosting ECE participation, by reducing barriers for parents, such as cost. The centre under study chose to charge a fee over the government funded ECE hours for their children over the age of three. This was within the rights of the centre to do so, as long as they could justify additional fees. This fee was relatively small, but proved to be excessive for a number of families participating in the centre. In direct connection to this additional charge, eighteen children left the centre, abruptly, over the nine month period of data generation<sup>34</sup>. The centre's *Terms of trade* documentation stated that any late payment of fees "over three weeks" would:

...result in your child's enrolment being cancelled immediately and their space at the centre reallocated. (Centre documentation)

When families failed to pay the extra charge, which frequently happened, they were told they had to withdraw their children from the centre, immediately. The *terms of trade* documentation also indicated that any account balance arrears would be given to a "debt collection" agency.

This raises the concern that the intention of the Government's 20 Hours ECE, for increased participation of children 3 to 4 years, was not actualised in this centre. The needs of the families in this particular location were not being met, and the additional fee charged to parents, reduced participation. This finding was confirmed in September, 2013, during the centre's three yearly ERO<sup>35</sup> review. The teachers claimed that the ERO reviewer challenged the owners regarding how they were meeting the needs of their community and questioned the ethics of charging families who were known recipients of government support, over and above the

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<sup>34</sup> Information provided by the centre manager

<sup>35</sup> Education Review Office

government subsidies. The additional cost for participation questions the centre owners' social responsibility to the families in their community and calls into question how belonging is supported within fee structures for these children.

### ***Conclusion***

The construction of relationships between the teachers and parents influenced the level to which parent and whānau values were evident in the practices of the centre. When relationships showed characteristics of being loving, nurturing and caring they reflected the values which the parents associated with family. When the teachers experienced 'heart' connections with the children feelings of trust and safety were strengthened for the children and their parents, indicating that close familial bonds are part of being a professional ECE teacher. Genuine connectedness was central in teachers understanding what parents prioritised for their children.

When meaningful connections with teachers occurred, children and their parents developed a sense of belonging. The findings indicate that 'making meaningful connections' was a value which teachers held and applied to their practice as individuals, rather than as a collective whole. These teachers had a professional goal of providing education and care for young children firmly embedded in meaningful, reciprocal relationships with children, parents and whānau.

As the teachers represented the face of the centre the parents were generally under the misconception that 'making meaningful connections' was a *cultural value* within the centre, which they believed was both embedded in the practices of the centre and, therefore, to be expected. When parents offered suggestions and voiced their concerns with teachers they were disappointed and confused when these 'fell on deaf ears', expecting the sensitive response from teachers they were familiar with. However, two teachers carried the weight of 'making meaningful connections' with parents and whānau and were constrained by structures out of their control, such as the employment of un-qualified relief teachers who did not have the professional knowledge or the mandate to connect meaningfully with parents. The centre's open-door policy was superficial as there were no

opportunities for parents to participate, contribute to, or challenge the content of the programme.

Aspects of the cultural groups of the participating families were not evident within the centre. The qualified teachers incorporated elements of te reo and tikanga Māori into the programme more than other their in-training colleague and the non-qualified teaching relievers. Culturally relative life experiences and education contributed to the teachers' ability to be culturally inclusive, and the lack of these features hindered others. Multi-cultural depictions were underrepresented within the centre and teachers often did not consider how their pedagogical decisions impacted the identity of children from diverse cultural groups.

In conclusion, this chapter has highlighted the values which were held by the case study parents, the extent to which the teachers have reflected these values in their relationships and practices, and exposed the clash of cultural values at the leadership level, who determined which values were prioritised. The values of family, cultural identity and social responsibility, which parents identified as important for their children were reflected in the centre, but they were not *completely* cultural practices embedded throughout the life of the centre. The high use of unqualified relievers, whose faces changed from day-to-day, and the adoption of a model which prioritised part-time teachers over full-time teachers, limited the establishment of meaningful relationships. The fee-structure, imposed by the owners and challenged by the ERO review, valued profit over social responsibility with a significant number of families from the community excluded due to their inability to pay the expected charges.

The following chapter will focus on the relationships in the centre, in particular those of the four case study children, employing Rogoff's (2003) second foci of analysis, the inter-personal lens.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

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### **Research Findings**

#### **The Interpersonal Lens - Relationships**

##### *Introduction*

This chapter discusses the key findings focusing on the children's relationships within the centre, viewed through Rogoff's (2003) second foci of analysis, the interpersonal lens. The chapter presents the case studies of four children, aged from two to four and a half years. Each case study presents a brief overview of the child identifying their age, ethnicity and family structure. The key emerging themes contributing to, or detracting from, each child's sense of belonging within the centre are then examined. Rogoff's (2003) concept of *guided participation* was applied to analyse the children's participation and construction of meaning, occurring within the ECE centre and at home. Therefore, particular attention is paid to identifying how the case study children have both received and contributed to meaning making within their relationships and how this has impacted upon their sense of belonging.

##### *Case study children*

###### *Isaac*

Isaac is identified as a New Zealand born Samoan and was aged four and a half at the time of the interview. He has been enrolled at the centre full-time since he was 7 months. Isaac is an only child and lives with his parents, who are both in their mid-twenties. Isaac's father was born in Samoa and his family all reside there, whereas his mother was born in New Zealand to New Zealand born Samoan parents. In regular contact with his maternal family Isaac's grandmother lived with his parents prior to her death four months before this interview taking place. Isaac saw his maternal aunts and cousins regularly throughout the week and together they

were members of the same Samoan Presbyterian church. Isaac is described by his parents and teachers as being friendly, intelligent, curious, and humorous. He is also recognised as having good social skills, which his mother attributes to his ECE experiences providing opportunities for socialisation with other children from a young age:

He has got another cousin at church who doesn't go to daycare - I think he is starting because of the twenty free hours, but his social skills at church were really bad, because he obviously wasn't hanging out with kids of his own age. His nana would babysit him, and I don't have anything against that, but, [compared to Isaac] you can really see the difference. (Tahlia, parent of Isaac)

A key theme which emerged for Isaac, relating to his sense of belonging at the centre, was the influence of communication between his parents and teachers in understanding and supporting him. The following provides two different examples of communication between home and centre; the first focuses on a significant life event in Isaac's life; the death of his grandmother. Through ongoing communication between the centre and his parents Isaac is supported through this difficult time as he makes sense of his grandmother's death. The second example demonstrates how Isaac's positioning is affected when the shared communication evident in the first example is not there. This illustration focuses on how Isaac's literacy competencies are valued and viewed through the eyes of his mother and his teacher, Lucy.

#### *Making meaning; comprehending death*

Building a partnership of understanding between children, parents/caregivers and teachers supports a child's well-being and strengthens their sense of belonging. At the time of the first round of teacher interviews, in December 2012, all of Isaac's teachers expressed pedagogical sensitivity to the children's emotional well-being, as Lucy's comment typifies:

I think it really important for teachers to know children really well and to understand what it is that is going to make them sad,

what is going to make them upset and when to step in and help them sort it out. (Lucy, I.1)

However, as Isaac spent ten hours per day at the centre I was hoping he could identify what *he did* during times where he wasn't feeling so happy. When interviewed in March, 2013, and unaware of his grandmother's death, the question I posed to Isaac was, "what about when you are feeling sad, what do you do?" In hindsight, this question did not indicate to Isaac that I was specifically referring to his time at the centre, allowing him to answer it generally:

When I have a dream I'm sad and I cry. ...When I have a monster dream....with vampires ... and scary nanas ... and scary papas ... scary mamas. (Isaac, I. March, 2013)

Asking him what he did when he had a dream like that Isaac replied that he slept in his bedroom with his aunty and then he didn't have the dream.

I had misinterpreted Isaac's initial comment about "scary nanas" as him embellishing his story. It was through conversation with Violet a few days later that I discovered his much loved grandmother had passed away in his bedroom four months earlier. Violet was a little surprised that Isaac was still referring to the nightmares which followed the death of his grandmother, as she hadn't heard him reference them, but explained why, at the time, the event was so traumatic for him:

It was a bad time for him; his nightmares wouldn't go away. His nana passed away not just in his bedroom, but in his bed. Imagine that! (Fieldnotes. March, 2013)

Five days later, when I was interviewing Irirangi, another case study child, Isaac once again brought up his grandmother's death. Irirangi had chosen to stay with his friends while being interviewed and had just told me that his favourite time of the day at the centre was home time, because it meant he could be with his dad who he loved very much. When Irirangi mentioned he wanted to stay with his daddy all of the time Isaac who was close by jumped in, saying, "I want to stay with my mum and my dad and my aunty!". Isaac went on to say "'cause my nana's died". Isaac and Irirangi each offered their perspectives on their fledgling understandings of death; one gleaned from experience and the other possibly from media:

Irirangi: What did you do to her? What did you do to her, Isaac? Did you kill her?!

Isaac: Nah, I didn't!! 'cause my aunty want to wake my nana up and she ...

Irirangi: Did you kill her with a gun?!

Isaac: No, no, no .... 'cause the doctors come and then I was crying. And then I put everything in there (the grave). I put some leaves and some flowers. [But] not buckets.

A further occasion where meaning was bridged between friends, in relation to death, occurred in July when Isaac was outside with two other children, four months after our interview. I asked Isaac's friend, Korey, whether his younger sister was at the centre that day. He replied that she was, "but not my other sister. She died ... because she got too sick". He went on to say that "she died herself, because she got too sick ...". Death was a topical issue at the centre as there were a lot of families affected by death or severe illness at that particular time, which generated a lot of discussion at mat-times and in conversation throughout the day between the children and with the children and the teachers (Lucy, 2). Once Korey had mentioned his baby sister's death Isaac quickly jumped in with his experience of his grandmother's death:

Isaac: And after my nana ... did you know when my nana died? My nana died on purpose and then I was scared because I thought she was going to turn into a monster and after that my aunty was crying. And then after that I was watching cartoons and my aunty was at my house and [she] used to live there and my aunty lives in ... now ... 'cause my nana lived at Jesus.

Researcher: She lives with Jesus. That's true. So she's happy?

Isaac: Yep. She's playing games. (Video, July, 2013. 3:52)

This incident revealed there was an evident shift with how Isaac conveyed information surrounding his nana's death. He was now more forthcoming with his contributions and was visibly less fearful when talking about her death. Isaac was

able to create some separation from his nana's death, which was evident through his incorporation of past tense words such as "I was", and, "I thought". This shift was supported in part by the teachers and Isaac's parents coming together purposely to help Isaac through this difficult and confusing time. Lucy noted the importance of listening to Isaac's family, understanding their beliefs and then developing strategies which were consistent with the family's values:

[It is about] trying to figure out, or getting all the information about how they actually do things in their family, or what their beliefs are around things like dying and that. To support Isaac you had to figure out what stories [his parents] were telling him about what happened, and then you knew that you could work with that and get some strategies in place when he started talking about it here. (Lucy, I. 2)

Violet raised one strategy which they had applied both at the centre and at home with some success. Violet had approached Isaac's mother asking her what her beliefs about an afterlife were, tentatively asking if she believed in angels. Isaac's mother said that she did, so together they decided to talk to Isaac about angels protecting him while he slept, in a bid to lessen his nightmares. This suggests that for these two teachers a cultural and social value practiced in the centre, supporting relationships, was actively listening and responding to parents' worldviews and belief systems. Lucy and Violet consciously connected the practice of listening and responding with cultural sensitivity to Isaac's sense of belonging in the centre. Meaning was bridged for the children through the provision of opportunities where they could share their experiences. It was also supported when language and belief systems were consistent with those experienced at home, such as referencing angels, Jesus, and Heaven, as in Isaac's situation.

Lucy introduced how teacher continuity linked with the children and their family's sense of belonging during her second interview. She talked about the significance of robust relationships which, for Lucy, could only really develop over time. Using Isaac's experience as an example, Lucy suggested that it is only when you engage with the child and their family during the shifts and changes which occur in their lives that you can come to know them. Lucy suggests that it is within these

relationships that you can sensitively support the child and their family, which strengthens their sense of belonging:

... the families start becoming clearer over time, it's like any friendship that you build. [This] is why it is so important to [hold] on to teachers for as long as you can because you do have those strong relationships with the parents. ... It is like Isaac's nana died a while back ... if you are a new teacher you are not going to know that. Or you don't know the process that he went through to get to where he is now, unless someone is going to explain it to you. And it is not really the same as having gone through that with that child. (Lucy, I. 2)

Sustained and reciprocal communication between Isaac's parents and teachers supported Isaac over time as he processed his grandmother's death. The transparent and trusting nature of communication evident in the aforementioned example also supported a united response by his parents and teachers to Isaac's lived experience.

#### *Miscommunication and misinterpretation*

Without the open dialogue between home and centre evidenced above, opportunities for understanding and support had the potential to be significantly reduced, as the following example demonstrates.

Tahlia, Isaac's mother, was extremely anxious about how Isaac was being prepared for future success at school. Learning the alphabet and basic numeracy was very important for Isaac's parents, as Tahlia explained during her interview:

I think that when they turn four that they should have a separate class, because to be honest, I would prefer Isaac to go into primary school knowing his ABC's. [At home] he did his ABC's and then he started mumbling, but I want him to identify each letter; to know that an 'A' is that and then there is a little 'a'. But I guess because they are in daycare they still have the whole fun and experience kind of thing, but they could change it when they get to four, I reckon. (Tahila, parent of Isaac)

Tahlia revealed that it was the fear of her son being behind his peers at primary school potentially leading to him being bullied which lay beneath her desire for Isaac to obtain literacy and numeracy proficiency at the age of four:

I am worried that when he starts primary he won't know how to write his name, because things change when you get to primary school, kids get mean and you have to stand on your own two feet. You don't have the teacher giving you that attention that you get at daycare. So if they could split the over two's and start teaching the four year olds their ABC's and 1, 2, 3's, even 1+ 1, because they are the basics. (Tahlia, parent of Isaac)

I was aware that the over-two teachers had begun an extension group for the four year olds as part of a 'transition to school' focus. I was a little surprised that Tahlia was unaware of this fact so I asked Isaac, who was present at the interview, for confirmation that he was attending the group, which he provided. While Tahlia was pleased this was happening it was also clear that, for her, this was an important issue and one that brought with it concern:

That's good, because I don't want Isaac going to primary school - he has only got five months left - and be weak. I don't want him to come home and say 'they're picking on me', I don't want him to say 'mum these kids know the ABC's and I don't'. That shouldn't happen because he has been in daycare from seven months. Especially identifying it (the alphabet), because it is easy learning it off by heart. I reckon that they can do that. Because kids, they are so protected by their teachers in daycare. Every time you move from one to another it gets harder; from daycare to primary, from primary to high school, and from high school to Uni. It is only going to get harder and harder. (Tahlia, parent of Isaac)

It became clear that Tahlia was not always aware about the content of her son's day while at the centre. Raising the issue of her son's literacy and numeracy knowledge in the interview highlighted a deeper concern regarding daily communication between herself and the teachers. While Tahlia said of the teachers that, "they have

done awesome with Isaac. I have so many family members who say that he is bright”, she voiced her concern about not knowing the details of Isaac’s day at the centre. Knowing about Isaac’s day was particularly important for Tahlia due to the length of time her son spent at the centre. Tahlia noted how she couldn’t rely on Isaac for information as he was inevitably tired when he came home:

... he does all the learning and stuff and experiences at daycare. And when he comes home this is his space and he wants to relax. It is something that he picked up off his nana, my mum. They would watch TV together and share channels and me and Fetuao would want to watch TV together and they would go, Nah. So he will come home and put his stuff away and watch TV. That’s pretty much Isaac. (Taylia, parent of Isaac)

Tahlia referred to the time that Isaac was in the under-two room and how the use of the communication book which relayed information about his day was appreciated by her. She thought that this could be something which the over-two teachers could adopt:

Even if it was every second day then I would know what he has done. Because when I drop him off in the morning, that teacher that I drop him off to may not be the teacher that I would see in the afternoon. If I say ‘how was he?’ they would say ‘oh, you know’. I don’t know. I think having that feedback [from the teachers] then you can see what your child is struggling with. If they have to keep writing ‘Isaac struggled with his ABC’s again’ then I would know that it would be something that we could be working on at home. Of course they have got, I don’t know how many other kids in there, but, yeah, I know it is hard, but ... that it is your job. (Tahila, parent of Isaac)

Unbeknown to Tahlia, Lucy was also pondering Isaac’s understanding of the alphabet, as my fieldnotes taken prior to interviewing his parents show:

Lucy has been reflecting on Isaac and said *I have noticed that he can recognise his name but can’t distinguish individual*

*letters. Others know that Manaia's name begins with 'M' and Korey's name begins with 'K', but Isaac never gets it. He is such a brilliant artist and an amazing thinker; he always makes connections. He has the best control of a pen and fine motor skills of anyone here. He is athletic and has amazing social skills. He's got everything. He has the best memory of anyone I know, so there is no real reason why he doesn't get it. I have really been thinking about it and I think it is because he is an artist. I think he sees patterns and shapes when he draws and for him letters just aren't like pictures. He can write his name if it is written for him and he copies it, but if I tell him individual letters he can't do it.* Lucy had obviously spent a lot of time puzzling her way through why Isaac couldn't remember the letters of the alphabet and was in the midst of trying to find a solution. For me, this is another example of how well she knows the children and how committed she is to seeing that they reach their potential. (Fieldnotes, May, 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013)

I asked Lucy if she had spoken about this with Isaac's mum and she said that she hadn't – "I should I guess, sometimes I get caught up in the day and forget to pass this on" (fieldnotes, May, 21<sup>st</sup>).

For Isaac these findings show that without the concerns, observations and perspectives of his parents and teachers being communicated with each other an opportunity to understand him more completely as a learner was missed. Tahlia, Isaac's mother, had attached high stakes to the learning of the alphabet; however, Lucy appeared unaware of this. Tahlia equated Isaac's competency with future school success and any lack of competency with potential bullying. Conversely, while Lucy also placed weight on Isaac's recognition of the alphabet and his written name, she viewed his struggles through a holistic lens and within the context of a child she knew as being highly capable and competent. If Lucy had communicated her professional understandings and reflective thoughts about Isaac with his parents there was significant potential for Tahlia's fears to be allayed.

### *Irirangi*

Irirangi is a four year old Māori child who has been enrolled full time at the centre from the age of 5 months. His older sister, now aged 8, had attended the centre during her pre-school years, from the age of three and a half to five, and his younger sister, aged 18 months has attended the centre from the age of 5 months. At the time of the interview Irirangi was on the cusp of moving to a kōhanga reo in a bid to strengthen his te reo Māori in readiness for attendance at a Kura Kaupapa Māori school when he turned five. Irirangi was a thoughtful, kind, consistently happy child who had solid relationships with his teachers and peers alike.

In relation to belonging three key themes emerged for Irirangi; first, creative expression through music and dance connected the home and centre communities, secondly, connecting with others builds collective belonging, and thirdly, the caring and supportive nature of the relationships Irirangi had with his teachers contributed to his secure sense of belonging at the centre.

### *Creativity across place*

Described by his teachers and mother as being loving and caring, Irirangi also loved to express himself creatively through song and dance. Irirangi's mother, Anahera, explained the moment which she attributed to the beginning of Irirangi's long interest in music, in particular anything connected with Michael Jackson:

He loves to sing and dance. Right from when he was one – music videos. Michael Jackson was his first music video. I remember it clearly. We put it on when we were on holiday. He had just turned one, because his birthday is in December. It was New Year at the Mount, we would put Michael Jackson on and he was glued to the DVD player, and we were there for two weeks. It just kind of settled him. He seemed to focus on a lot of stuff and he would keep watching and watching. He watched so much that he started mimicking and started following the moves.  
(Anahera, parent of Irirangi)

Anahera also described how over the years Irirangi's connection with music and dance was supported by his admiration for older whānau members who belonged to kapa haka groups:

...it must be in his heart, in his thoughts – ‘when I dance it is like being Michael Jackson’. He looks up to his cousins who are in big dance groups, who have travelled everywhere. He likes to copy them – ‘I want to dance like them’. He tells me what he wants to dance, why he wants to dance, and he does little productions with them (his cousins). He is an amazing kid. At first I thought ‘oh, he is going to be shy in front of people, but no, he naturally loves to be in that central place. I thought he was going to be shy, but when it comes to performing he is right out there. (Anahera, parent of Irirangi)

Irirangi's love for Michael Jackson music and dance moves was evident in the centre which everyone, particularly in the over-two area, associated with him. Observation and conversations with his teachers established Irirangi danced daily without reserve both inside the classroom and out in the playground, with or without music. Irirangi's uninhibited dancing was highly valued in the over-two area and the joy he exuded when he danced was contagious. Small groups of children would often join him if he was dancing inside. Those who were inclined to sit on the periphery of the action visibly enjoyed watching him. Irirangi regularly brought music into his relationships with his peers and teachers, as Violet's reflection indicates:

... Michael Jackson with Irirangi, [we] sing Billie Jean. That's our little thing. (Violet, I 1)

During the interview Irirangi shared stories about his friends, of which there were many, his most recent birthday party at ‘Chipmunks<sup>36</sup>’, and how he loved to dance to Michael Jackson music. Isaac, who was ‘hovering’ during the interview, confirmed that “Irirangi was the best dancer” at the centre and Irirangi

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<sup>36</sup> A children's party venue

magnanimously acknowledged that Isaac was also good at dancing. They then decided that they wanted to demonstrate their dancing skills and agreed to a photo to document the moment:



*Figure 2: Irirangi dancing*

Anahera confirmed the extent of Irirangi’s passion for music, dance and performance, which went from home to the centre, and then back to home at the end of the day:

As soon as he comes home he likes to get his Michael Jackson gear, or get some type of clothing. He likes to get his Michael Jackson music on or turn the TV to the music channel. (Anahera, parent of Irirangi)

### *Connecting with others*

Irirangi valued people and enjoyed the company and friendship of many within the centre. This aspect of Irirangi was evident during the semi-structured interview. In support of the interview questions, such as ‘what do you love to do the most, who do you like to spend time with, where do you spend most of you time?’ I asked Irirangi if he would like to take photos of all the things and people that he liked the most. It was interesting to see that the photos that he took were all of people (teachers and children) and not of ‘things’ or any of the activities which were happening at the time, such as water play. I also asked Irirangi if there was anything that he did that made him feel good about himself, or proud of himself, and he replied “Yes, I love people”. After speaking with his teachers they were not surprised at all. ‘People are important to Irirangi’ was the general consensus. One of his teachers noted that they were not surprised Irirangi only took photos of people,

stating “I totally can see that, because for his family people are important. It’s all about relationships” (Irirangi, I, March, 2013).

Irirangi readily and actively made sensitive and inclusive connections with people, which supported their sense of belonging. For example, my experience with Irirangi was typical of the relationships he formed with his peers and their parents. Irirangi regularly greeted me, enquired how I was, invited me into his play, and introduced me to his friends. Irirangi was consistent in his openness and inclusion of others, affording the same generosity of acceptance which I experienced to new children and parents of his peers.

These values of kindness, care and inclusivity were also recognised by Irirangi’s teachers. Violet mentioned a strategy she used to help support a new child’s sense of belonging within the centre. She believed that if a child could form friendships with their peers it would enable them to feel “safe enough in [their] environment” so that they would quickly “be able to be themselves”, thereby supporting their sense of belonging. Violet mentioned Irirangi, who she viewed as having the necessary inclusive attributes, as one of the children she would purposefully choose to scaffold relationships with new children:

[I] set up those situations. Because there would be other children who probably wouldn’t have the same ... care because they are a bit more rough and tumble or something, so until [the child] has got some strong, steady relationships with – not the ‘nice’ children – but the children that you know he is going to be cared for [by] and included with in their games. Then [the child] can choose whether [they] want to go and associate with [the children] who are rough and tumble ... (Violet, I. 1)

Irirangi was sensitive and respectful to others. For example, on one such occasion Irirangi gently corrected my te reo Māori. I had said the incomplete and casual, “ka kite”, meaning see you, as I was leaving the centre and Irirangi, with a smile, gently and respectfully corrected me, “we say ka kite āpōpō”, or, I’ll see you tomorrow (fieldnotes). The respect and love which underpinned Irirangi’s relationships with the children, teachers and parents within the centre aligned with his parents’ aspirations for him:

[It is] important ... for him growing up with appreciation for people. (Anahera, parent of Irirangi)

*Supportive relationships with teachers*

The relationships Irirangi had within the centre were described by all of his teachers as sound, and acknowledged as contributing to his sense of security and sense of belonging. Anahera was sensitive to Irirangi's sense of wellbeing and belonging as her oldest child had to move primary schools due to experiencing relentless bullying:

If someone is getting him down he will not want to come here, and he has never ever not wanted to come to school. It is always in my thoughts about how he feels here, or how he is being treated or nurtured here. (Anahera, parent of Irirangi)

Irirangi's relationships with the majority of his teachers were characterised by love, care and support. The following illustrations reveal the loving nature of the relationships which underpinned Irirangi's sense of place at the centre. Lucy and Violet explain their approach to building relationships with the children and their families and why this is important:

When there is an atmosphere of love, when people care about what is happening in your life then you are more likely to fit within a group. (Lucy. I. 1)

Lucy went on to explain her meaning of 'care' for each child and their family:

[It] is recognising all the things that are really special to each family or things that children are uniquely good at. For example, Irirangi is really into Michael Jackson and his parents always talk about his dancing at home, and he always talks about his dancing. Lately he has been singing Po karekare ana, and if he brings something new, I would always mention it to his mum, and that, for me, is more about manaakitanga than caring would be, because it is recognising his whole background and what is important for him [and his] family, rather than just saying 'we

love you and care for you'. So it is looking at [and supporting] the whole child. (Lucy, I. 1)

Violet reflected on the importance of having familial-like relationships, which she viewed as particularly important for the children, like Irirangi, who spent a large number of hours in the centre:

All the children and families are like my big whānau. And I would treat them like my whānau. Of course you are not going to get along with everyone to the same extent, but just caring for their well-being and ... you know ... I look after their child how many hours a day? You need to be close and you need to have a strong relationship ... (Violet, I.1)

Violet had known Irirangi's family for over five years and through her role as a teacher in the centre had been involved in the lives of all of their three children, knowing two from infancy. The link with Irirangi's family was strong and reflected the whānau connection Violet aimed to achieve in her relationships, as the following indicates:

I am looking at Anahera and Nikau for instance (Irirangi's parents) and every time I see Nikau – which isn't very often, he'll come and give me a hug and a kiss. Some people would see that and like 'huh?', but for me that's his way of showing, like 'oh, I haven't seen you in ages, Vi ... how ya been?', hug, kiss. You know that's just [being part of their whānau]. (Violet, I.1)

During our interview Irirangi stated that his favourite time of the day was "going home", because "I like playing with my daddy" (Irirangi, I). He was happy at the centre, but he loved being with his father. Anahera, Irirangi's mother confirmed that Irirangi had a close bond with his father, who was an influential role model in her son's life. Anahera also noted that Irirangi got home-sick if he was away from his parents for too long:

He is a home boy. He will go to someone's house and he will miss us. If I ring up and talk to him – "How are you Irirangi?" –

“I am good mum, but I want to come home”. “Why?” –  
“Because I love you and I miss you” (Anahera, parent of Irirangi)

Irirangi regularly spent over forty hours at the centre every week. Anahera regarded the centre as a second home for her children, which was evident in Irirangi’s contentment and engagement when he was there. This suggests Irirangi had a strong sense of security and place at the centre as he did not experience the same home-sickness which he did when away from his parents outside of the centre.

On Irirangi’s last day at the centre a Michael Jackson party was held with Michael Jackson music playing all day and the children and teachers dressing up in Michael Jackson costumes. Over the coming weeks once Irirangi had left, there was a palpable sense of loss and his friends would often ask for the Michael Jackson CD to be put on so that they could dance along to it. Months after Irirangi had gone he was still being associated with Michael Jackson’s music with “I miss Irirangi” regularly being heard.

### *Mia*

Mia was three and a half years of age, whose cultural affiliation was identified by her mother as Cook Island/ Māori. An only child, Mia lived with her mother and maternal grandparents. She saw her father regularly and had strong ties with both sides of her family. At the centre Mia was often mistaken by visitors and relieving teachers for a child who was nearing her fifth birthday. For example, without knowing Mia’s age a student teacher at the centre believed Mia to be older than her years, initially choosing her as a case study child for a ‘transition to school’ assignment. Being physically tall contributed to this common assumption being made, but more often it was due to believing that Mia’s sophisticated interpersonal skills and advanced and extensive vocabulary belonged to someone older than a child of three. Mia’s mother was aware of this and acknowledged Mia’s ability to hold her own with children older than herself:

She is really intelligent and, I think, it feeds her willingness to learn. ... She keeps up incredibly well. My brother has got school age kids and she does incredibly well to keep up with them (Layla, parent of Mia)

Mia's advanced ability and quest for learning was acknowledged by her teachers who had decided to include Mia and one other three year old in the four year old extension group, run by Lucy and another teacher:

The best thing that Lucy was talking to me about was the four year old time, which my three year old goes to ... But it is little things like that - because they see just as much as I do that there are a few of them that just want more. But they don't know what it is that they want more of, and it is exactly what this is – it's the reading, the writing, telling their stories in different ways with pictures or actually wanting to write out their stories. It is expression; expression and experimenting different ways to express yourself. (Layla, parent of Mia)

Mia had an air of settled maturity and was often the child others turned to for assistance; for example, with a challenging puzzle they couldn't complete, as observed on numerous occasions. Layla, Mia's mother noted that the patience and kindness evident in Mia's relationships at the centre extended beyond her peers and the centre environment:

She is a really caring child. Not just to other children, but to strangers and adults. It's as if she is wondering 'I'm OK, but is everybody else OK in this situation'. And if there is anybody who isn't doing their best in a situation she will try her best to help them out. (Layla, parent of Mia)

All of her teachers agreed that Mia was also a person who knew her own mind and was not easily swayed if she had set her mind on something of importance to her. Layla spoke of being in tune with the intensity of Mia's interests, and the futility of pursuing a topic with her unless it was a current focus or of interest to Mia:

... if nothing else is more important to her than [what she is focusing on], then there is not really a point in talking with her about [another issue] ... because she is too busy enforcing another value within her learning. (Layla, parent of Mia)

Mia's teachers and her mother all agreed that there was a level of complexity to Mia's thinking that belied her age. This was mostly apparent as Mia made meaning of her world. In support of Mia's sense of belonging one key theme emerged; her formulation of meaning as she came to understand her gender and family identity was strengthened through purposeful support by her teachers and family.

### *Developing working theories*

Having teachers notice and purposefully support the exploration of her various working theories contributed to Mia's sense of belonging. During the data generation phase two key working theories were identified which Mia was grappling with over time. The first manifested primarily in the centre and related to gender roles, specifically understanding what it meant to be a girl. The second initially revealed itself at home and concerned Mia understanding the structure of family and what it 'should' look like. The following section addresses each working theory in turn and identifies the purposeful and united response of parents/whānau and teachers which contributed to Mia's meaning-making.

### *Gender roles*

The majority of Mia's teachers noted that Mia had begun avoiding activities which her teachers believed did not align with the image she had of what 'a girl' should be like, and which she appeared to want portrayed to others. Lucy had become aware of this through noticing Mia modifying her behaviour in front of others, including herself. Lucy explained how some of Mia's actions were quickly becoming typical for her, such as purposefully creating an image of herself for photos. As an example, Lucy talked about one occasion when Mia and Manaia were outside walking across a wooden plank to a large wooden box and then enthusiastically jumping off. As soon as Mia noticed that Lucy had the camera she started "acting like a girl (sic), walked across the plank like a ballerina and gracefully jumped off the box" (fieldnotes, May, 2013). Once the camera was put away Lucy noted that Mia:

... ripped into it with as much energy as Manaia. For me, that is becoming so typical of Mia. She is amazing for her age. She is polite, friendly, intelligent, caring and helpful. But she has learnt how to act differently in different situations – how to

present herself. It is a bit of a clash for her. She obviously wants to be represented as a girly girl; even if she is also willing to take risks so she can keep up with Manaia. (Field-notes, May, 2013).

It was this outward incongruence which first brought to Lucy's attention the thought that Mia was struggling with her understanding of gender roles. At the centre Mia participated in all aspects of the curriculum. Mia was perceived as a self-assured, active learner and participant, at times choosing to be hands-on in shared activities inside and out, and at other times choosing a quiet activity on her own. This was also the child at home which Mia's mother, Layla, described:

She loves hands-on kinds of activities. And then she switches and she will quietly read in the corner or she will get into boisterous play outside. She is a great all-rounder, which is good because it is not hard to find stuff to entertain her with, because she is open minded to everything. If you don't show her anything she will make fun out of anything that she needs to, which is good. Then you see that she enjoys it and you just think 'oh, we will supply her with more of that then'. (Layla, parent of Mia)

However it became clear to her teachers that Mia was investing a reasonable amount of energy into managing her image as a "girly girl" while in the centre. Avoiding activities she had previously engaged in, such as rough and tumble play outside, Mia also began to align herself with stereotypical girl things, such as claiming to like all things pink and demonstrating to her peers how she could pirouette, which she had not done before. Lucy noted that it was only because she believed Mia's new found status as a 'girly girl' was not sitting comfortably with her, that she responded by finding ways to support Mia's quest to make sense of her gender identity.

Lucy discussed with Layla her observation of Mia's gender role dilemma, where she appeared to struggle with 'this is who I am' versus 'this is who I think I should be'. Lucy noted that Layla wanted Mia to continue being adventurous and taking risks, and supported the teachers to continue encouraging her to do so. For Layla

it was important that Mia had a range of experiences which would contribute to her education and provide her with the “make or break attitude in a person to make it really far” in life, which she valued. She wanted Mia to be resilient, as she had to be when facing difficulties in her own life. Lucy reflected on, and implemented strategies to help Mia broaden her understanding of gender:

I was thinking [about] Mia and how she is interpreting gender roles; what it means to be a girl. I want to find stories where woman play rugby and men look after the children; those sorts of things. (Field-notes, May, 2013)

### *Family structure*

It was clear that Mia was highly intelligent and fully aware of her surroundings. She was actively making connections and finding her place in the world, as the above example suggests. Mia also selected to keep some aspects of her life private from those in the centre, such as her questioning why her family was structured the way it was, with her father living in a separate house to her mother and grandparents. During her teacher/parent interview Layla and her mother shared with Lucy Mia’s search for answers and sought the support of the teaching team:

Because Mia is now coming into the age where – like her father and I have been split up since she was three months, and so it is what she has lived with and what she has dealt with, and she hasn’t seen too many examples of her friends living with both their mum and their dad. So it’s her and I with my parents. So that to her is what is normal, because it has been like that for so long now. But she is now starting to come to the age, where her dad comes over every second night to help put her to bed and to read her stories and spend some good time with her - which has been consistent for years now. But she has started to begin to wonder why it is that he leaves and goes back to his house. So that is what we were talking about at the interview – if they could talk about how the ‘normal’ family isn’t just mum and dad and the kid. There are so many different ones. ... There are heaps of grandparents incorporated into the families in the

centre. To be able to talk about how people have different families and it is OK. Because it was something that – when she brought it up, it was one of the [questions] where I just couldn't [find the answer] – I didn't know. I was like 'that's just where dad lives, or, because dad lives at dad's house'. And I could see for her that wasn't a good enough answer, but I think it is just something that slowly it is going to have to be talked about and reinforced and one day she will get it. (Layla, parent of Mia)

Layla had an open relationship with the teachers and felt comfortable speaking to them about anything, as the following comment indicates:

I know for a fact that we are on the same page and if they want to say anything then they can and I will as well, and it will be in a way that we all mean well for each other (Layla, parent of Mia)

Mia's quest for understanding, which Layla raised at the parent/teacher interviews, was the first time the teachers knew of this particular concern. At home Mia queried why her parents lived in different houses, noticing that families were structured in different ways at the centre. However, Mia had not given any indication to her teachers that she was grappling with this issue, as Lucy reflected:

I haven't had any conversations with Mia about [her family structure] – she hasn't raised that with me at all, so there was nothing I knew about her situation. (Lucy, I. 2)

Lucy responded to Layla's request for support, while still respecting Mia's privacy. To support Mia, Lucy utilised the four year old extension time and purposefully structured opportunities and activities for Mia and her peers to explore what 'family' looked like together:

... the thing for [Mia] originally was 'why doesn't dad live with us?', that was the idea. So she has developed this idea somewhere that a family is a mum and a dad and a child. Who knows where it came from? It could be 'I just want dad to live with us', it could be that you know. ... But I think by

everybody ... talking about their own situations, and a number of our kids have got lots of houses that they live at – grandparents and uncles and aunties and all sorts –I think that makes her situation OK when she talks about hers. (Lucy, I.2)

Lucy had included Mia, and another three year old, in the four year old extension time because she recognised that for these two, the older children were their intellectual, if not age peers. Lucy set up the enquiry within this small group forum purposefully to support Mia’s search for understanding. Also seeing the benefit of focusing on ‘difference’ for the entire four year old group, Lucy believed it provided an opportunity for “conversations and discussions” about what she saw as an important life reality:

I also think that you learn about differences [being here] as well [as acknowledging what is the same at home]; that it is different in different places. I think that is just as valid as things being the same as they are at home. (Lucy, I.2)

Lucy provided additional information through books and video, which opened up the conversations and discussions which she believed to be the essence of children making sense of their world, and finding their place in the world:

That strengthens that sense of ‘who I am’, my identity is stronger and I suppose it cements your place in the world (Lucy, I.2)

Lucy revealed how she saw her role as a teacher within this small group setting:

I am finding more and more that my job here is just to listen and to acknowledge what they are saying. Make them feel OK about ‘this is how it is for me’ – yeah. (Lucy, I.2)

Mia sat through books being read about difference, listened to her cohort’s conversations about their family diversity and watched YouTube videos about different family groups, but did not disclose anything about her situation to anyone at all. Mia chose not to contribute to the discussions during the four year old time which were rich, varied and welcoming of new perspectives. Lucy respected Mia’s

confidential disclosure to her mother to the extent that she chose not to initiate a one-on-one chat with her:

We talked about it when we did our four year old group. I didn't sit down with her and have a conversation with her – but I still think that it opened it up for more discussion if she wants to [do this]. (Lucy, I.2)

The topic, framed loosely around 'difference' carried on for a month. In August, two months after Layla raised the issue with Lucy I stumbled upon Mia sitting in the midst of the flax bushes with two of her peers. The children had created a natural tent by flattening the area in the middle of a group of flax plants, utilising the flax fronds as walls. Realising that Mia was having a conversation about family I asked if I could record what she was saying. She agreed, but politely reminded me of my place by saying "We just want to be comfortable". This was significant as it was the first time Mia had allowed me to record a spontaneous conversation. So as not to be too intrusive I kept the recording short and stayed at a reasonable distance from the children. One of Mia's companions shared that they lived in three houses, their mum's, their aunt's and their grandparents'. Another offered their contribution to the conversation which also included a variety of family homes which they associated with belonging to. Mia then shared with her companions that she lived in two houses, her mum's and her dad's. The conversation continued but I tactfully withdrew.



*Figure 2: Mia in the flax hut*

I mentioned to Lucy what I had witnessed and she was genuinely delighted, saying that as far as she knew that was the first time Mia had publicly disclosed her living situation. This finding indicates that, for this child, the intentional structuring of opportunities for participation, such as the guidance offered by Lucy (a skilled and reflective qualified teacher) in the four year old extension time, is influential in the meaning making process. This finding also suggests that explicit participation, such as sharing personal stories, asking questions or making comment, is not the sole measure of attainment and understanding. Tacit participation, as expressed through observation, or intent listening, is equally valid.

### *Grace*

Grace had recently turned two years of age, and was transitioning into the over-two area, when selected for case study in May, 2013. Of Chinese decent Grace was being raised in New Zealand by her adopted Pākehā mother. Grace was enrolled full-time at the centre and was often one of the first children to arrive and the last child to be collected at the end of the day. The key theme which arose from the data in relation to Grace's sense of belonging was the effect of teacher perception on her well-being and belonging at the centre. The following provides illustrations of the effects of teacher perception, initially while Grace was in the under-two area and then as she transitioned to the over-two area. They demonstrate the link between how Grace was viewed by her teachers, both negative and positive, with their response to her. How Grace was perceived by her teachers influenced the relationships they had with her, which was evident in their pedagogical response to her.

### *A negative view*

When I first began the data generation phase, in December, 2012, Grace was a member of the under-two area. I wrote my impressions of Grace down in my field-notes:

[In December, 2012] I often found [Grace] upset in the under-two room – “She doesn't like new faces”, I was told. My impression was that Grace was timid and liked to ensure her primary teachers were in sight of her. She very rarely ventured outside and did not like strangers, which included myself as well

as relievers. I also got the impression that she was not one of the ‘favoured’ children. Jenny and Charlotte were the under-two teachers until they left. I felt as though Grace was viewed as a ‘crier’ and a ‘whinger’. I never saw her being held by any of her teachers. Now that both Jenny and Charlotte have left, Grace seems more relaxed. The children move more freely between spaces and there is some communication between the under and over two teachers which I had not seen before. (Field-notes, February, 2013)

My first impression of Grace was that she was a very unhappy child as she appeared to spend a significant portion of her time alone and crying. This claim was substantiated through conversations with Lucy and Violet who believed Grace was often left alone by her under-two teachers, and, they claimed, was perceived by her teachers as being “annoying”. This view did not sit well with Lucy and Violet who both challenged the centre management to “draw lines in the sand” of what was appropriate behaviour for teachers and what was not.

Kate, also revealing how she prioritised relationships, brought Grace’ unhappiness up during her second interview:

...Grace – she used to cry twenty four seven and nobody knew why. I think that she wasn’t happy here. She didn’t have any bonds with teachers, because unfortunately, working on making bonds with the children was probably the last thing on our minds. (Kate, I.2)

Grace’s mother, Julia, was not informed of her daughter’s unhappiness and was under the illusion that she was mostly happy in the under-two area. At the time of her interview in August, 2013, Grace had fully transitioned to the over-two area and was settled. During the interview Julia referred to Grace’s time in the under-two area mentioning that she did struggle with being called at work to collect her daughter during the day, because Grace was “upset”. However, Julia did not consider that the teachers were calling out of genuine concern for Grace, believing instead that on such occasions they were simply not doing their job properly:

I got called to come and get her because she was upset and crying off and on, so I would say ‘is she sick – has she got a temperature?’. ... ‘No’ ... ‘Has she eaten?’ .... “Yes”. Well that would annoy me. To be called home from work to pick her up because she was having a bad day and they didn’t want to deal with it. (Julia, parent of Grace)

This was the only reference Julia made to Grace’s experiences in the under-twos. When describing her daughter at home, Julia said she was “cheeky [with a] very strong sense of humour”. Her mother also noted that:

at home ... she is very cuddly. When I say cuddly, it’s probably a nice word for clingy. She doesn’t like to be in a room on her own. (Julia, parent of Grace)

This comment raises the question as to what effect being left alone to cry for extended periods of time during the day, without comfort from her caregivers (the teachers), had on Grace’s long term sense of security and her identity. The data does not make any clear connections between the two, but it does reveal that Julia did not know the full extent of Grace’s unhappiness while she was in the under-two room so had no reason to make any connection with her daughter’s early centre experiences of being left to cry, and her clinginess.

#### *A pedagogical shift*

By March/April Grace had mostly made the transition to the over-twos. It was common for the teachers, particularly Lucy and Violet, to spend time supporting the children with how to ‘be’ in the over-two area. This meant encouraging them to explore their new environment which was more stimulating and offered greater freedom and choice than what was available in the under-two area. It also meant encouraging transitioning children to respect others by applying social skills, such as waiting for a turn or putting resources away. Interestingly, most of Grace’s ‘behavioural issues’ as identified by the under-two teachers, such as ‘whining’, ‘ignoring teachers’ or ‘constantly crying’, stopped once in the over-two room. Lucy challenged the perception of these teachers who believed the child and the parents were at the core of behavioural issues:

As some of the children are with us for five days a week, ten hours a day, then I believe they are at the mercy of the *teachers*, and a product of their *environment*. Therefore, it is our duty as teachers to provide them with a safe, consistent, loving, caring, quality learning environment. (Fieldnotes, April, 2013)

Grace thrived in the over-two area. During her August interview, four months after transitioning, Julia portrayed an image of a child at home who was well-rounded, loved to explore and had a definite playful personality:

She is quite happy to help; she will help with anything I ask for. ... She's funny. She likes to read; loves to read. ... She is very social. She likes being outside. She is very funny – she has got quite an entertainer's sense of humour. ... It cracks her up if she can make people laugh. She will do that more than laughing herself, although she does laugh a lot. She does thrive on seeing people's reactions. (Julia, parent of Grace)

I first noticed a change in Grace during one of her transition visits to the over-tuos late February, 2013. It was a gloriously hot summer's day and the majority of the children were outside playing amongst the trees, in the sandpit, on the swings or with the water play which was now a daily feature of the curriculum. I greeted Lucy, who was an outside teacher, and approached her for a chat. She was located beside the climbing frame, which was a collection of movable boxes, metal ladders and wooden planks. On this particular day the components were laid out so that two large wooden boxes were connected by a metal ladder, forming a bridge. From one of the boxes a wooden plank connected with a smaller box. For the older children this did not appear to prove much of a challenge, although they extended their play by performing 'tricks' such as flips off the rungs of the ladder, jumping from the top etc. For the younger children support was always there in the form of a teacher or an older peer.

I then recognised who was making her way across the top of the 1.2 metre high ladder bridge. It was Grace. Her concentration and determination was immediately apparent. So was her confidence. I felt nervous for her and instinctively moved closer. "It's OK, she won't fall", Lucy said, indicating with her hand to move back.

“Grace knows what she is doing. Watch her” (field-notes, February, 2013). I stood beside Lucy and watched. I realised that Lucy had total faith in Grace. I also noticed that for the first time I saw a happy Grace. She was a different child in the over-two space. It took her a while to get across the ladder; she seemed to move, stop, think, and then move again. She was determined, skilful, thoughtful and competent.

I heard from Lucy that Grace was spending more time with the older children outside where they saw her levels of confidence growing immensely; confidence with exploring her environment and with interacting with previously unknown peers and teachers. It was a stark contrast to the child I had seen before. Lucy said that “Grace is a lot happier” (Violet passed by and agreed) and that she was connecting well with the over-two teachers. Throughout our conversation Lucy would stop and say “Grace, I like the way you are taking your time and thinking about what you are doing”, or, “Hey! Look at you!”. Over time I realised that Lucy’s belief in Grace was not isolated to her. The children in general were risk-takers, just as Grace had proven herself to be today, as Lucy not only allowed them, but expected them to be so.

It was difficult to see this confident child portrayed in the centre while she was in the under-twos. However, very quickly and with purposeful support Grace adapted to her new surroundings. The incident with the climbing frame reveals a clear level of trust between Grace and Lucy, which was actively and sensitively built. Grace was being immersed in the values of the over-two area, which included taking risks and stretching boundaries. The caring and trusting pedagogical response Grace experienced from the majority of her teachers in the over-two area was evident in Violet’s statement:

What I need to do to give children a sense of belonging is to give them the love and the time, and the space that they need to blossom. (Violet, I.1)

At a later date I noticed that Grace was spontaneously tidying up after lunch-time and so I began recording her with my camera. It was a typical day in that it was busy with one teacher inside, one outside and one in the sleep room with the younger children. I noticed that the way Grace participated in the over-two area

had changed significantly from when she was in the under-tuos. Grace was involved; she was happy engaging with her new environment, even though it was ‘chaotic’ compared to the under-two room. She freely moved from tidying the tables and pushing in the chairs to playing with a few puzzles. During this time Grace called out to Violet for help, which she received, had puzzles taken away from her by another child, yet did not get upset. Violet did not enjoy being filmed and became rather quiet when I recorded anything so it was difficult to hear how she responded to Grace’s request for assistance. However, I was curious as to what she said to Grace and she replied that they were helping Grace restore her confidence in herself. She had simply whispered “you do it”.

By September Grace was the entertainer her mother described her to be. She was becoming more confident with her words, as Julia acknowledged during our August interview:

She has been speaking a lot in the last two weeks, like really speaking a lot more. Even the last two days – I was amazed – there were words coming out of her mouth that I just haven’t heard her say. (Julia, parent of Grace)

Grace was included in others’ play and had built some friendships with her peers as my fieldnotes indicate:

I called into the centre and the children were having afternoon tea. Grace was sitting beside Tahi who had not long woken from his afternoon sleep. One of the (qualified) teachers [Suzi] was fixing his hair, tying it up into his usual ponytail. Grace watched Suzi intently, and then Suzi found another hair tie and gathered a small bunch of Grace’ hair into a tiny topknot. It looked really sweet. Grace was very happy about this and dragged her chair closer to Tahi’s. She said “look, Tahi, same”. Tahi acknowledged Grace with a lift of the eyebrow. Suzi said “Grace loves Tahi, don’t you Grace”. It was lovely seeing Grace so happy and quite sweet seeing her fondness for Tahi. (Fieldnotes, September, 2013)

Julia also acknowledged Grace's pleasure at being in the over-two area:

She's down in the main room now and she is very happy there.

(Julia, parent of Grace)

Grace enjoyed reading at the centre and could often be found sitting on the sofa beside the bookshelf engrossed in a book, alone or with a companion. While I had observed Grace less closely while she was in the under-two room, in the over-two room she reflected the child described by her mother at home. Being supported by her over-two teachers, who predominantly viewed her through a credit based lens, clearly buoyed her confidence and sense of belonging in this new space. The freedom to choose, the physical space to explore and the relational support she received in the over-two room aligned with what she knew at home.

### ***Summary***

The relationships within the centre had a significant influence on how the case study children constructed meaning and contributed to their sense of belonging. The concept of guided participation offers a means to view interpersonal exchanges and activities unearthing the connection between both. As such, the findings have highlighted the relational factors which both strengthened and challenged belonging.

Belonging was strengthened when respectful, responsive and reciprocal communication between parents and teachers was present. When teachers actively listened and purposefully responded to the child and their parents, consistency between the practices and values in the home and the centre were maintained. This supported the child's sense of belonging as well as provided structures which supported their evolving meaning-making.

The teachers identified the purposeful construction of the learning environment, through the provision of resources and time to support children's working theories and belonging. Supportive relationships and respectful communication between teachers and parents facilitated the awareness of others' perspectives which strengthened a comprehensive understanding of the child. Without parent and teacher understandings and perspectives being communicated with each other occasions where the child was misunderstood and/or misinterpreted were increased.

How the children were perceived influenced the pedagogical response of the teachers which also impacted upon the child's sense of belonging and well-being.

In conclusion, this chapter has explored the children's relationships within the centre through guided participation with others. The factors which contributed to children's meaning-making and understanding have been illustrated. The findings have highlighted the influence of the teachers in contributing to the child's and their family's sense of belonging.

The following chapter presents the findings relating to leadership, with the supports and constraints to belonging examined through managerial decision making.

## CHAPTER NINE

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### **Research Findings**

#### **The Institutional Lens - Leadership**

In this chapter I will focus on leadership, which is located within, and viewed through Rogoff's (2003) third foci of analysis; the institutional, cultural lens. This chapter is organised into two sections. The first section provides a brief overview of the leadership structure within the centre during the nine months of data generation. In this section the challenges posed by the chosen leadership models are highlighted. The second section addresses the influence of leadership on quality teaching practice. It examines the impact of the centre's leadership structure on the experiences and perceptions of the teachers within their everyday practice. Attention is given to three aspects of leadership; firstly, how leaders set the parameters for teachers' roles and responsibilities, secondly, how leaders negotiate differing philosophies and pedagogies, and finally, how leaders have a duty of care not only to the children within the centre, but also to the parents/whānau and teachers. This section concludes with a vignette by a parent which provides context and perspective to the stories of the teachers.

#### ***Introduction: An overview***

Just after entering the research site in December, 2012, the positions of centre manager was reconfigured and the team leader positions for the over-two and under-two teaching teams were dissolved. In December, 2012, the centre owners announced to the teachers that they were restructuring the centre and that there would no longer be team leaders or a centre manager.

The decision to restructure the centre, and principally the leadership team, coincided with the under-two team leader going on maternity leave in November, 2012, and the over-two team leader leaving the employ of the centre in December, 2012. Both vacated team leader positions were filled by a series of qualified and un-qualified relievers. The centre owners decided that these leadership roles would

be incorporated into a new position, entitled the centre supervisor. The new position would combine managerial leadership, almost solely aligned to the manager's role, with pedagogical leadership, which was previously the main responsibility of the team leaders. The overall leadership of the centre was to be placed in the hands of the 'head office', or the organisation's larger leadership team, comprising the owners, an off-site administrator and the manager of their larger ECE service, located north of the city. The change meant that the new centre supervisor had to refer to the larger leadership team for a number of day-to-day operational decisions, whereas the previous manager had greater autonomy. For example, the *centre manager* was privy to the financial position of the centre and had the autonomy to authorise resource buying or building maintenance, as the budget allowed. The *centre supervisor* did not have the same level of authority and most expenditure decisions were now to be made by the head office team, principally the owners.

The umbrella of a 'restructure' legally enabled the owners to dissolve all leadership positions, regardless of whether the positions were in effect already vacated, in the case of the team leaders, or currently filled, as was the case of the centre manager. The teachers and manager were effectively powerless to challenge the restructure. The new role of centre supervisor was made open for applications from within the centre and was ultimately filled by the previous centre manager, who felt she was given little choice and little voice in the matter. The salary for the new position was less than she received as centre manager in correlation to the reduction of her role and responsibilities.

It was clear to everyone that the new leadership position of centre supervisor was also reduced in status to that of the manager. Previously, the manager was part of the organisation's senior leadership team, comprising herself, the owners and one other manager. In the role of centre supervisor she was no longer invited to the head office leadership meetings and was not privy to any decision making discussions. There was little doubt that she was no longer part of the 'inner circle', and she definitely did not have the power of authorisation assumed by her previous leadership role. While the status and ultimate authority of the leadership role was reduced, the duties as centre supervisor were significantly increased.

The duties of the new centre supervisor included a significant portion of the administrative tasks which were previously attached to the role of manager. The role also included duties which were previously the responsibility of the team leaders. For example, the centre supervisor was expected to oversee both the under-two and over-two teaching teams; their planning and assessment responsibilities, non-contact time, rosters, leave requests, resource requests, and regulation requirements, as well as relieving the teachers during their break times<sup>37</sup>. These were all new duties attached to the leadership role and took up a disproportionate amount of the centre supervisor's time, often up to four hours per day. The new centre supervisor voiced with the owners her belief that within the decision there was very little consideration for the legitimate needs of the centre, or how the owners' decisions would affect the children, parents and teachers.

The reasons provided by the centre owners for the changes to the leadership model were touted as creating cohesiveness between the centres, centralising some of the administrative tasks and encouraging distributed leadership<sup>38</sup> within the centre. However, along with the centre supervisor, the teachers also collectively believed that the reasons for change were for financial purposes, to reduce the running costs of the centre in order to increase profitability.

With the roles of team leaders now dissolved, the teaching teams voiced their concerns about being left without any direct pedagogic leadership. This was particularly important to all of the teacher participants who at the start of this research study were either in-training or provisionally registered, indicating their need for support. In particular the teachers were concerned about the areas of planning and assessment, which the team leaders had previously managed. Principally in the over-two team there was a general acknowledgement that while

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<sup>37</sup> To ensure that the regulated teacher/child ratios were adhered to during meal breaks, and teachers were able to have non-contact time for administration duties, the centre had previously employed an extra teacher. Historically, this position was at times filled by either a permanent teacher or a reliever. Having the centre manager complete these duties meant that another teacher was no longer needed to be employed.

<sup>38</sup> The premise of distributed leadership is that power is shared amongst all professionals within an educational setting and that it is "through collaboration and collectivity that expertise is developed" (Clarkin-Phillips, 2009, p. 22; MoE, 2014)

they ‘contributed’ to planning, none of the teachers were confident with ‘how to’ plan (fieldnotes, March, 2013). The teachers acknowledged that they had not received adequate professional development or mentoring regarding planning and assessment.

A further concern in relation to the duties of the centre supervisor was how well she would oversee the day-to-day management of the teaching and learning areas. For example, the previous team leaders arranged relievers based on their knowledge of the teachers and children within their areas. They were able to scaffold philosophical and pedagogical differences and resolve issues within the teams, and they brought continuity to the day in teams which primarily comprised of part-time teachers. The time and relationships required which enabled team leaders to be effective was not fully afforded to the centre supervisor. The centre supervisor also shared her apprehension about the feasibility of overseeing two teaching teams, as well as relieving the teachers’ breaks and non-contact time, and completing the administration requirements of the centre (fieldnotes, December, 2012). It soon became clear that it was not realistic to expect one person to effectively manage all tasks, with at least three hours alone spent covering teachers’ breaks. There was awareness by the teachers and the centre supervisor that a full appreciation of what was involved in the new role had not been taken into consideration by the centre owners.

Prior to the leadership change the owners informed the teachers that there would be a trial period of three months where the effectiveness of the new leadership model would be closely monitored and then revisited. They were assured that their opinions would be valued and any future concerns would be considered in the upcoming review. The owners reiterated that if the new model was ineffective the team leader positions would be reinstated. In reality, the promised monitoring of the changes did not occur and the team leader positions were not reinstated. While there was no official forum for the teachers to discuss their concerns, privately they did voice them with the owners. When problems were raised during the transition period the owners consistently questioned the competency of the centre supervisor, or the teachers themselves, rather than accepting any responsibility for decisions they made which may have contributed to the problems occurring.

The centre supervisor left the position late February, 2013, and her role was temporarily filled by the manager of the organisation's larger centre. The temporary manager, who was not a qualified ECE teacher, ran the fortnightly staff meetings, arranged staffing rosters, approved resourcing requests and responded to any concerns or queries from teachers and parents. She left the day-to-day running of the centre solely in the hands of the teachers. For example, the teachers were expected to manage planning, assessment, the preparation and content of the learning environment, and the nature of the interactions with the children and parents.

Managing two ECE services meant that the temporary manager was only able to be at the centre for a reduced number of hours, leaving the teachers without any physical presence of a leader for a significant portion of the day, and at times, days on end. From February, 2012, to May, 2012, the centre did not employ an extra teacher to cover meal breaks or non-contact time. Consequently, the regulated teacher/child ratios were often over what they should have been, particularly in the over-two team, and none of the centre's teachers received non-contact time during this time. This meant that planning and assessment requirements were not effectively met during this time. It became apparent that actively managing both centres was too difficult for the temporary manager and from May to July, 2013, the owners created a position of 'acting centre supervisor', placing a young, qualified teacher from the larger centre into the role. This person primarily covered the administrative duties of the role. The vacated position of centre supervisor was not permanently filled until the end of July, 2013. The term centre supervisor did not stick with the teachers and parents who all referred to the person filling the role of leadership within the centre, no matter who they were, as the 'centre manager'.

### ***The influence of leadership on quality teaching practice***

The challenges created by the centre's leadership model and the influence of leadership on the teaching practice, were highlighted in this study. Analysis of the data identified three key themes which linked the role of leadership with quality teaching and learning; namely leaders define and monitor roles and responsibilities, leaders bring philosophies and pedagogies together, and leaders have a duty of care.

To illustrate the key findings data from semi-structured interviews, observation, field notes, photographs and documentation, such as newsletters, were used.

### *Leaders define and monitor roles and responsibilities*

The individual teaching roles were contractually defined within the teachers' job descriptions. However, the findings indicated that without active and relational leadership teaching roles were neither clearly delineated nor equitably measured. This was evident in the temporary manager's decision to dispense some of the team leader duties amongst the teachers. For example, teachers were delegated to share the leadership power through collaborative planning for learning, apportion amongst themselves responsibility for administrative and legislative requirements, such as health and safety checks, and were authorised to drive the curriculum within their settings. The previous team leaders oversaw these areas and were accountable for their completion. The distribution of these duties was delegated to the teachers by the temporary manager, who stated that the teachers were capable of 'sorting it out' for themselves (fieldnotes).

Ostensibly it appeared as though a distributed leadership model was being attempted. Now, it was the teams rather than individual team leaders who were accountable for the completion of these tasks. However, there was no consideration for the varying degrees of professional education, expertise, experience or motivation held within the teaching teams. For example, Kate was an in-training teacher who worked three days per week. She did not have the expertise, education, experience or the confidence to contribute to the same level as her colleagues, who were all qualified teachers. Two further part-time teachers also worked three days per week; however, one was experiencing personal difficulties during this time and both were in the provisional registration phase of their teaching careers. The data indicates that these factors were not accounted for.

In reality the duties of the team leaders were not absorbed democratically, through consultation, or fairly distributed within the teams, but ultimately fell on the shoulders of a few qualified teachers. These extra duties were expected to be absorbed by the teachers without the allowance of non-contact time or team meeting time for collegial discussion; both of which were available to the former team leaders. The commitment and the frustration of these teachers were evident,

particularly in the area of planning for learning. While all participants acknowledged planning was not as effective as it could have been, it was previously driven by the team leader, along with time allocated for collaborative discussion during fortnightly team meetings. Planning was now expected to be completed by the teachers during teaching hours without any advice or guidance from the leadership team. Lucy reflected on the time when the leadership model changed, expressing some of the consequences she experienced as a result of the increased responsibility:

There wasn't any time afforded to planning or meetings or anything. We didn't have any non-contact time for ages. When we started planning for whanaungatanga relationships back in December – there were massive changes going on and there wasn't time for discussion around [planning] – although initially there was. ... I don't know if back then we would have really been able to talk about anything in depth at all. We had to get on with it as best we could, even though it was frustrating and we had no support from above. If the question came up about planning and a parent asked 'why are you doing this?', then I would say, 'it is really important for all these reasons' and that 'children feel good about where they come from and who they are', and ask them 'are you guys feeling comfortable about contributing?'. I wouldn't say those words exactly but I would try to make the spirit or essence of that come through in my conversations with parents. I wanted parents to feel they could still trust us with all of the changes going on, even if we felt lost. But thinking about the planning - if everyone was on board and we had proper time, we could have done so much more. (Lucy, I.2)

It was evident that tensions arose across both teaching teams from the clear disparity between expectation and provision. The expectation to complete all of the added responsibilities without the provision of adequate time, resources, or full support, was acknowledged by all of the teachers as unfair and an ongoing stress contributor. Tensions between teachers arose as a result of this disparity. For example, the

consequence of having no provision of time set aside for planning clearly had repercussions; unifying the team's commitment to planning was adversely effected, as well as the involvement required to implement the administrative side of planning, while 'teaching', was limited. Violet critiqued the 'strengthening whanaungatanga relationships' planning focus during her second interview:

Not everyone was on the same page, and that was a big reason why it didn't really work. For me, the drive was there, but it was hard being – you know ... two people can't do a team's work. It could have been amazing – Lucy and I wanted cultural boards on all of the walls and I got through about a good eight of them. I put up a map of Aotearoa with the whānau's link to their whakapapa underneath. That was time consuming. It took a lot of time as I had to put those displays up while I was on the floor – we didn't have any non-contact time allocated to it. (Violet, I.2)

Similarly to Violet, Lucy commented on the sense of responsibility she felt as a registered teacher to complete all of the legislative and planning requirements now expected of her on top of her usual responsibilities. She also indicated a realisation that her dedication could easily be exploited by those in leadership:

It always falls on the same people. [The owners] know we can't just sit back – we have to try and make it work, even if everything is stacked against us. (Lucy, I.2)

There was no evidence of the leadership team assessing the effectiveness of the modified teaching roles and expectations, or fully recognising the pressure the removal of the team leaders placed on the teachers. The lack of monitoring and acknowledgment that the teachers were struggling resulted in the extra duties being absorbed and completed in an ad-hoc fashion by teachers; particularly in the over two team.

Without the gatekeeping which leadership traditionally provided, it was evident that it was no longer clear which teaching standards were deemed acceptable. The roles and responsibilities of each teacher were no longer clearly defined, and, as

mentioned above, they were not being monitored by anyone in a leadership position. No one in leadership was saying ‘this is what quality looks like, and this is what we expect’.

The additional tasks were not evenly distributed within the team, and the level of teacher accountability was significantly diminished. For example, when Kate was invited to reflect on the success of the over-two teaching team’s whanaungatanga planning she revealed her decision to disengage with it:

Personally I don’t think it went too well – only because I don’t think we focused on it properly, because we were going through other things at the time. I think that it just got to the point where we needed change, so it just kind of stopped. And myself, I didn’t really get into it at all. (Kate, I.2)

There was no official consequence of Kate’s choice not to contribute in any way to planning from December, 2012, to May, 2013, even though planning was a contractual requirement for all teachers. Although, her colleagues did say that Kate’s decision to extricate herself from planning annoyed them considerably (field notes).

As previously mentioned, teachers were expected to complete the duties outlined in their job descriptions and absorb all of those previously associated with the role of team leader, without any allocation of extra time for administrative duties, team meetings or training. Combined with the lack of authority to affect change, or address the increasing concerns within the teams, significant tension was evident when inequalities became apparent, as Lucy commented:

I think a lot of our issues have to do with the leadership. The supporting structures are just not there. For an example, you need somebody driving planning and team meetings, because if you don’t have that then the opportunities for every perspective to be heard isn’t there. It is just like that with the children. When they come up into the four year old structured time here, you need to be able to make sure that everybody gets their opportunity to say whatever they are wanting to say. They need

to know that they have been heard, that they are being listened to, and that they will be responded to. But someone has to drive it. I think that, as teachers, there also needs to be some accountability as well, because we are responsible to children and their lives and their wellbeing. And then I think that you can hear everybody else's perspectives, but if you are not the driver and you are not in a position of leadership then you can't actually make anything happen. Because I can't go into the room and say 'well, what have you been doing, Kate?', because it is not my place. Who then says it? Who says, 'that is not right', or 'it's your responsibility as a teacher to do this'? (Lucy, I.2)

Kate identified the lack of non-contact time and focused team meetings as reasons for opting out of her responsibility to contribute to the over-two team's planning. However, these were the same barriers which three of her qualified teaching colleagues also identified, yet they chose to accept the responsibility of planning for learning and did what they could. Without the presence of a team leader monitoring and supporting the participation of each team member, Kate was not held accountable for her actions.

The data indicates that there was also no accountability exacted from the temporary manager, primarily because there was no monitoring or regulation processes in place. Through conversations with the teachers, and observation over the months, I became aware that the temporary manager did not actively involve herself in the planning, coordination, or evaluation of the curriculum, entrusting these aspects of the programme to the teaching teams.

The well-being and confidence of the teachers was not being monitored during this time. It was within the safety of an interview that Kate, as an in-training teacher, expressed her lack of confidence engaging with Māori language, principles and values, which underpinned her disengagement with the whanaungatanga planning focus. When describing her bi-cultural practice, Kate mentioned, "I still don't have great confidence, but it is definitely better than what I did have. Coming from none to some, it's better than none to nothing". Kate did not have the confidence to share this insight within her teaching team as she felt embarrassed acknowledging that

her knowledge and relationships with the Māori families were not what they could have been. She also acknowledged that as an in-training teacher she felt lost without a mentor, and disadvantaged, commenting;

I have never had a mentor here. I wasn't allowed one. They didn't think it was necessary. So it has been a little bit hard, which is why I think I am unmotivated in my study, because really I have no one to turn to. (Kate, I.2)

This indicates that Kate was also a casualty of the leadership structure. There was evidence of incongruence between Kate's status as an in-training teacher and the expectation that she complete her duties as though she was an experienced, qualified teacher. Kate's status as an in-training teacher was not being actively and equitably acknowledged or monitored. The data indicates that as a field-based in-training teacher, without the support and guidance provided by an associate teacher or a team leader, Kate's growth towards competence and confidence was not appropriately supported, and this was difficult for her. As Kate observed when reflecting on the early months of the leadership restructure, "...I was kind of stressed here, and I didn't have anybody that I could go to".

### ***Leaders bring philosophies and pedagogies together***

The mediation and consolidation of teachers' differing philosophies and pedagogies occurs at the leadership level. The change to the leadership structure impacted significantly on the teachers. On the surface there was a veneer of everyone working together, but through observation and the interviews there was evidence of tensions and significant philosophical and pedagogical differences between the teachers.

Without clear, involved leadership, the teaching teams became fragmented, which was evidenced in the teachers' relationships and practice. For example, processes were missing which supported the identification of practices requiring support, as in Kate's example, or which could be upheld as exemplary. The qualified teacher participants indicated theoretical differences and incompatibility between themselves, and also with those who were un-qualified, and in-training. This in itself was not unusual as the teachers were, for the most part, accepting of difference.

However, without team leaders evaluating, mediating and negotiating the relationships within their teams, factions began to form.

The philosophical differences evident between teachers began to adversely impact upon their practice. In lieu of team leaders mediating the influence of these differences, connections were forged between teachers based on pedagogical similarities. These were underpinned by aligned personal and professional values. These informal networks were identified as both constructive and destructive by various participants. For example, Violet described how she viewed Lucy as a critical friend and how she identified an aspect of Lucy's practice which she admired, and which benefited her:

Lucy is always good at reflecting on her practice. I always go to talk to her. ... Lucy always has got something thoughtful to say – if I don't know then I will go and seek out Lucy because I want to hear her perspective on it. Whether I take it or leave it is ultimately up to me. I just know that she is grounded as a teacher and I know that her practice is thoughtful. (Violet, I.1)

Kate also talked about how she aligned her practice with Harriet, an experienced teacher who also demonstrated a core value of children knowing "their boundaries". At the time of Kate's second interview Harriet had returned from maternity leave:

I think her coming back – to me she is just such an amazing teacher and I don't think she realises it. She is such a role model for me. She has got that whole positive reinforcement but still letting children know their boundaries, and she sets their boundaries. I think that is the kind of teacher I would like to be, and she has been teaching for ten years so I know it is not going to happen over-night. But I think in the future – I look up to her and think that is what I would want to be in a few years' time. (Kate, I.2)

The alliance between Kate and Harriet was not viewed as positively by Lucy who saw pronounced philosophical and pedagogical differences between herself and her colleagues. For example, Lucy foregrounded "loving and caring" for the children

as being highly important to her. These values were reflected in her interactions with the children which were almost exclusively warm. Whereas Kate foregrounded the importance of children having “respect and trust” as well as “knowing their boundaries”, which often manifested in Kate’s interactions with the children as being quite strict at times. Kate indicated during her interviews that she wanted to have warmer interactions with the children but she didn’t really know how to go about it. Lucy identified how Kate’s teaching philosophy, which she gleaned from Kate’s pedagogical approach, was vastly different from her own, expressing how this affected her:

I would use Kate as an example of being different to me. That is because often when we are working together, often children will come out crying about a situation, children that I very rarely see cry. To me when I look at them I feel as though they have been stripped of their mana. They have lost control and there is nobody protecting them or looking after them. I see that when they are crying that is what is happening. Sometimes I feel that in her view the way that the situation is she will just see it like, ‘I asked them to do it and they didn’t, so they need to go outside’. Sometimes you need to talk a little bit more because they just don’t get it, or they are only two, or they have just woken up from their sleep, or nanny dropped them off this morning instead of mum, or they didn’t eat any lunch, or they don’t have a spare change of clothes, or they can’t find the Spiderman leg. There is something that’s going on and I feel like she misses those things, or she doesn’t see them, or she doesn’t care. I often think that the children are quite frightened because she is quite harsh in the way that she speaks sometimes. The way she doesn’t give warnings or doesn’t ... I can’t even explain really (sounds resigned). I know in her that she loves the children, I know that she does, but I know that she believes that the [strict] way that she is doing it, is the right way. (Lucy, I.1)

Kate did not see any obvious differences between herself and her teaching colleagues, apart from her personal religious views. When asked whether she saw philosophical differences between herself and her colleagues, Kate said,

I guess that [my religion] is about the only thing. I think we are all pretty good here now. We spend a lot of time talking about what we are going to do with our routines. Or there may be a specific child where we need to talk about behavioural management, or about helping them in any way. We all talk about it together so that we are all on the same page. Even though I don't really know what their personal philosophies might be; they might be completely different. We just all make it work for the children – making it better for them. So, I guess we are all pretty much on the same page there. I haven't really noticed or thought about whether there is anything that is different. I have actually never really thought about it before. I guess it's just something that we never have talked about. (Kate, I.1)

Violet reflected on the values and beliefs she identified as underpinning the teaching practice within the over-two teaching team, which at the time of the interview comprised herself, two qualified part-time teachers and one in-training part-time teacher. Violet talked about how she viewed the differing pedagogical approaches evident within the teaching team. She noted how the different approaches impacted on the children, as well as herself, as a teacher working within, what she viewed as a discordant team:

There are three different types of teachers in the room. [Firstly,] Lucy and I are both [prioritising] relationships; caring for the children - loving the children. Our focus is on that at the moment. Because of everything going on I think that is the most important thing, and that's what we need to do, to get ourselves through the day. Not all this ... like, here I am trying to love these children and here someone else is telling them off in a way that

– if I had seen my child get told off like that, I wouldn't like it.  
(Violet, I.1)

When asked whether she could identify the focus of each teacher within the over-two team Violet said:

The focuses are different; [Lucy and I are] loving the children and being consistent; [another teacher is] having boundaries all the time and not letting children cross those boundaries, and then we have someone [the other permanently employed, part-time, qualified teacher] for who there is no consistency at all – she's totally opted out. (Violet, I.1)

Violet's frustration with the inconsistencies within the team was clearly evident. Ultimately Violet's concerns were with how this impacted on the children's sense of well-being and belonging:

Lucy and I both see the wider picture and see what we should be doing. Everyone should be on the same page. They 'know' about what is on the page, but choose not to get involved with the children. There isn't that consistent love, the consistent boundaries, the consistent expectations ... every child should be able to go up to every teacher and feel some kind of safe place with them, or some kind of love or happy experience. Like, if they go and sit next to a teacher and they drop a puzzle piece, then one teacher might say "oh, that has gone under the table, we have to get that" (uses a gentle tone to demonstrate), and another might say "You've got to pick that puzzle piece up right now!" (uses an aggressive tone). So, what would that do to the child's sense of belonging? That's only a little thing, but that could bring trauma to the child, getting yelled at for something that isn't actually a big deal and is going to happen anyway, [the puzzle piece would be picked up]. (Violet, I.1)

Lucy also reflected on pedagogical approaches which were different to her own. When talking about the relationships that the teachers have with the children, Lucy said:

...what I have really learnt is that we all do things a little bit differently with the children. Our relationships are all a little bit different with them. Like Violet, for example, would approach things in a different way than I would. We all have different relationships with the children and I think that Kate, Violet, or I, could all be saying the same words to a child, but it is the tone that is used and the relationship you have with them which is going to determine how [safe the children] are going to feel about the situation. (Lucy, I.1)

All teachers said that there were opportunities to raise pedagogical differences at full team meetings. However, they also indicated that there was a level of difference between what was talked about openly at these meetings and what was shared between alliances outside of the formal meetings. Without anyone in leadership addressing the attitudes and behaviours which the majority of the participants considered “unprofessional” and “divisive”, such as engaging in workplace gossip, or isolating certain teachers, discontent began to fester. All participants identified a growing loss of morale and lessening of trust between teachers. Lucy shared her perspective on this, while referring to two colleagues she was struggling with:

Neither of them want to be here, which makes it really hard because the energy level that they put in is low; care factor of about minus one hundred. You are constantly feeling as though you are pulling the weight of those people because their heart is really not in it. They moan about the place constantly. It is one of those bad, bad buzzes. I find if I am in the space with either of them for too long I need to get out or move to a different place so that I am not in the same vicinity, because it is so negative.... I just come wanting to enjoy my day with the children. My mission every day is to try and avoid any dramas and to try and have fun with the kids. All of those things, if adults can't sort it

out, certainly impacts on the kids. How do you go about sorting those things out? I don't know. It just seems like a can of worms. It comes from the top, for sure. Our relationships with [each other] should be the same as with the children; they have to be respectful, trusting, transparent, honest and professional. It's the same. (Lucy, I. 2)

Lucy and Violet expressed frustration and a sense of powerlessness with the lack of any resolution concerning the clear philosophical and pedagogical differences between the teachers, whenever these concerns were raised at the team meetings. Lucy and Violet both professed that most of the informal discussions they overheard during the day were predominantly unprofessional, both viewing them as an unhelpful means of communication. Without the authority to implement change Violet identified how a team leader, who had the power to set standards and facilitate resolution, may have helped remedy these disparities:

We have talked about it [differences in teaching practice] in the past, but it gets us nowhere. What we need is to have someone lead by example. ... I am the only full time person [in the over-two team] and there is only so much that I can do by myself. What I think is needed is a team leader who is strong. I do what I can do, but it means [without any authority] I can't make someone else do it, unfortunately. Having a strong leader in the room - that would make a difference - [I know] that whatever I say or do won't make a difference or change them in any way. So what I do is block out anything negative as it's not going to help the situation if I rock the ship a bit. So all I do is try to support the children and try to shut out all the other negative stuff. If it was something I could help with and try and address and try and change then I would definitely do it. But all of that 'this person said this', and, 'this person said that', well that doesn't help. (Violet, I. 1)

Lucy echoed similar sentiments to Violet during her first interview in December, 2012, which highlighted the management of philosophical and pedagogical

disparities evident throughout the initial leadership changes; the removal of team leaders. Expressing her understanding of *why* her teaching colleagues were resorting to what she perceived as “unprofessional conversations”, Lucy also revealed how unhelpful they were, and how she attributed these behaviours to the leadership structure:

I did raise in a meeting that we all say things because we don't know how to approach a situation, or we don't know how to approach that person, or we don't want to hurt [that person's] feelings. ... But we might go and tell [the concern] to another colleague because it is so frustrating. When you are working in an environment where things are going out of control and previously they had been going really smoothly, you see all this chaos start to appear. It's not good and you just want to pull it back. It feels out of control. ... All the stories get through the centre about who said what about what and it stems right from the top and it flows right through. (Lucy, I. 1)

While Violet shared a similar philosophy to Lucy she lacked the confidence to openly present an idea or concern with the group which opposed that of the majority. Lucy worked with an ethos of transparency and voiced any issue either one-to-one, or at full centre meetings where the temporary manager was also present. This approach was not always received well by her colleagues and was often not supported by the temporary manager who often swept issues ‘under the carpet’. Unlike Lucy, Violet found it difficult to openly challenge her colleagues practice and was worried about the future without a team leader. Lucy often became Violet's voice in meetings, constantly challenging what they perceived to be “bad practice”, such as the way children were being spoken to, or left to cry. Without a team leader, and as the only full-time qualified teacher in the over-two team, Violet felt the burden of responsibility to maintain professional standards;

I am worried for myself and I am worried for the children.  
Seriously! I am a strong teacher, but I am not that strong.  
(Violet, I. 1)

At the time of her second interview, Violet had recently moved from being the only full-time teacher in the busy over-two team to one of two qualified and full-time teachers in the quieter under-two teaching team. It was apparent that from this relatively stress-free position she was able to reflect on her colleagues' philosophical and pedagogical differences with a greater degree of distance, claiming "they don't worry me", as she explained:

I think that it is good to understand everyone's weaknesses and strengths so that you can balance it out. I am not good academically but I know that Kate is. So, if I needed help I will go to her. I know that Lucy is really good at putting things into perspective, so ... you know; you go to those different teachers. ... you have to look at your classroom and look at the support within the room and ask whether they are going to be alright with supporting you, and ask yourself, are they going to contribute to whatever you were planning to do. Are they capable? Are they willing to do this? Do they want to do this, or are they just doing it because they have to... (Violet, I. 2)

During her first interview Lucy recognised how her approach to addressing any disparities arising was different to that of her colleagues. Aware that she was often viewed as being confrontational, Lucy wanted to emphasise that while she wasn't "afforded the same respect" as her colleagues, she believed she was being fair in her professional relationships;

I just realised, now, that I make a massive effort to say what I need to say to people to their faces. But at the same time I will say heaps of neat things that they have done during the day as well. (Lucy, I. 1)

The data showed that without clear leadership there was dissonance with how professional standards and appropriate pedagogy were defined, interpreted and accepted by the teachers. Lucy's attempts to address what she perceived to be significant pedagogical concerns "affecting the children" were often dismissed by her colleagues, and outside of the meetings she was often referred to, often disdainfully, as the one who "always has something to say". Lucy regularly

reflected on how upsetting it was that as professional teachers they were all expected to meet a basic set of standards (registered teachers' criteria and the code of ethics) yet these were never enforced by those in leadership. She believed that poor practice was often being overlooked by the temporary manager and the centre owners, and therefore tacitly condoned. During the second interview Lucy connected the inconsistencies she saw in practice to what she perceived as ineffectual leadership;

It is because the leadership has been so rubbish that over time the teachers have developed really bad habits. So it has become normal the way that teachers are being in their daily practice. It has the possibility of changing, I know that as well, but it just seems like it is harder now because there has been this time of bad practice becoming ingrained. But I am open to the possibility that it could all change with new leadership, and that is coming through next week. So I am looking forward to seeing that. We had been disempowered from the top down and we haven't been empowered to share ideas, or empowered to work as a team and do all these things that we know are important for children. (Lucy, I. 2)

### *Leaders have a duty of care*

All of the teachers made some form of connection between a 'care component' within leaders, their personal wellbeing, and how this impacted on their teaching practice, and sense of belonging. The teachers described 'leaders showing care' as; being listened to, respecting their qualifications and experience, thinking about how decisions would impact on them, being aware when everything became overwhelming, and being consulted.

The majority of teachers believed that their emotional needs were not always considered by those in leadership when decisions were made which directly impacted on them. From December, 2012, to September, 2013, there were significant changes made by the owners where teachers were not consulted. For example, an area of tension arose in April, 2013, when the owners decided to restructure how the centre was to be cleaned. The bulk of the daily cleaning was

previously completed by a cleaning contractor and occurred outside the centre's operating hours of 7:30 am to 5:30 pm. The owners severed the cleaning contract with the outside providers and added the cleaning duties to the centre cook's daily job responsibilities. The new cleaning regime occurred during operating hours and was presented to the teachers, and the cook, as a *fait accompli*. Neither the cook nor the teachers were consulted regarding the decision to complete the cleaning within the centre's operating hours. This decision mostly impacted on the over-two teachers and children as the over-two's space had to be packed away (resources put away, chairs on tables) at 4:30pm in order for the area to be thoroughly cleaned for the day. This significantly reduced the space available for play and impacted on the children who were collected by their parents/whānau between 4:30 pm and 5:30 pm.

All of the over-two teachers expressed their frustration with the centre owners and believed that this decision did not take into consideration the impact on the teachers, the cook, or the children, and they believed, once again, it was financially driven. Field notes during this period indicated that all of the teachers worked hard to make this procedural change work, regardless of their voiced reservations. The decision also impacted on the over-two's morning and afternoon tea routines, as the cook needed to reorganise her kitchen duties to accommodate her new cleaning duties. The majority of the teachers expressed their concerns and discontent with the centre owners for their lack of consideration and consultation, with all believing they were not being listened to. For example, Lucy shared her thoughts about how the teachers were told to stop the rolling morning and afternoon teas, which were an established and effective practice in the over-twos area, because the cleaning was now to take place during session hours;

You can't just come in and make changes without even thinking about the children and the teachers. We know our children. We know what works. Rolling kai works for the children. Some just aren't hungry. They have the power to choose to eat or to choose to carry on with their play. Making decisions without consultation is disempowering. (Lucy, I. 2)

All of the teachers referred to the stress which they experienced during this time. For some the above mentioned pressures had an accumulative effect and became overwhelming. Placed in a position where they believed their opinions were not being heard by those with the power to affect change, and having to justify to the parents and whānau decisions which were not theirs, the teachers' sense of well-being and belonging began to erode. Lucy regularly began to question whether she should stay in teaching;

It can get so stressful that I sometimes think I could even just do a basic job somewhere for \$15.00 an hour. But then I think, what will happen to the children if all the decent teachers leave? One of the reasons I got into teaching was because I believe every child deserves a good upbringing, which also includes good early childhood experiences. If all the good teachers left teaching what would they be left with? It's about them. (Lucy, I. 2)

Lucy, Kate and Violet all mentioned that they had lost confidence in themselves as teachers during the nine months of this research study. The issue of power imbalance was raised by the majority of teachers in reference to those in leadership. Violet revealed her concerns as she contemplated the thought of who might be employed as a permanent centre manager;

It's all about power relationships – power over. We have just got rid of one person who had power over everyone and we were all disempowered ... We could end up with another person who takes our power away. (Violet, I. 2)

By July, at the time of the second interview, by her own volition, Violet had moved to the under-two team, which consisted of herself and Harriet, who had returned from maternity leave. Violet essentially provided the centre owners with an ultimatum; either she was moved out of the over-two team or she left their employ. Averaging around five children per day, the reduced pressure the under-two area afforded was in sharp contrast to that of the busier over-two area. With Violet's move to the under-two team, the over-two teaching team now consisted of three

part-time teachers (two qualified and one in-training) and a cast of primarily unqualified relievers.

At the time of the interview Violet described herself as being happy in the under-two team and viewed it as a “time of healing”, where her confidence as a teacher had a chance to be “restored”. Contemplating the possibility that her request to move to the under-two team had not been listened to she said, “I seriously don’t know what would have happened to me if I was still there”. Violet mentioned that she was genuinely concerned for her mental and physical health, which had been showing signs of deterioration. The leadership decision to move Violet was the correct one for her, but left the over-two team in a precarious position. Violet expressed how she felt “guilty” for “leaving Lucy to keep it all together on her own”. Without a full-time teacher, and no one day during the week where the three part-time teachers were together, the reduced cohesion between the team was highly apparent and the pressures of their day-to-day expectations and the inconsistencies within their interactions continued to build.

Violet’s sense of restoration was short-lived. Violet’s dissatisfaction with the centre owners continued while she was in the under-two team. The discovery of black mould in the teachers’ staff room and the children’s sleep room became the catalyst for Violet leaving the employ of the centre. Violet shared the moment which became her tipping point, and which for her also revealed, what she believed was the owners’ blatant and continued lack of care:

We told [the owners] that we had found black mould in the sleep room and all through the staff room. It was disgusting! They knew about the mould for ages but chose to do nothing about it. We told them over and over again about it. I felt sick, and I was so angry with them for ignoring us. We said that we wouldn’t put the babies into the sleep room, but [the new centre manager] said we had to. The day I had to put Ahakoa into her cot knowing there was black mould above her head was the day I decided to leave. She was born with a lung deficiency. I put her to bed and then sat on the floor beside her and cried. [The owners] knew about the mould, and they knew about Ahakoa

being born with a lung problem. They chose not to do anything until we couldn't stand back anymore. That day Harriet and I told Charles that if he did not fix it we would start telling the parents. That was on a Friday. When we came back to work on Monday Charles had painted the ceiling and the wall. He painted over the mould; he didn't remove it, he painted over it. What does that tell you about them? The moment we mention telling the parents the truth they react. They don't react when we plead our case for the children, but they do when they think their practices will be exposed to the parents. Not because they care about the parents, but because the parents have the ability to create a stir and bad publicity would negatively affect their business. That was it - I couldn't take it anymore and I handed in my notice to leave. I was so broken ... (Fieldnotes, September, 2013)

The 'culture of care' between the teachers also became eroded over the nine month data generation phase and by the end it was often absent. The over-two and under-two teams became quite autonomous in their operations, and did not appear to 'look out for each other', as they once had. For example, in the beginning of the data generation phase the teachers acknowledged differences yet readily supported each other by sharing teachers if one area was busy and the other less so. By the end of the data generation phase this no longer happened. By August, 2013, the over-two area often experienced periods where they were 'over ratio', with two teachers to over twenty children, while, for example, the under-two area had two teachers to three children. With the under-two teachers not willing to support their colleagues Lucy regularly asked the new centre manager to step in and address the teacher/child ratio disparity between the teams, either by employing an extra teacher or asking the under-two teachers to think 'centre wide'. The new centre manager offered no resolution to this issue. The data indicates that the level of care and concern by those in leadership for the over-two teachers in particular was not sufficient, and similar acts of negligence perpetuated the strain between teaching teams.

The majority of teachers were confident communicating with the centre owners, contacting them whenever they felt they needed to. Some of these concerns were personal and some were operational. For example, issues ranged from a teacher negotiating their hours of work to concerns that a MoE regulation had been breached. These conversations occurred mainly over the phone as the owners were rarely seen at the centre, and by the later stage of the data generation phase the owners were only present for short bursts in preparation for an upcoming Education Review Office (ERO) visit. As Lucy said, “we don’t see them anymore. They don’t really care about us – they are more interested in [their other centre]”.

The view that those in leadership did not extend their duty of care to the parents was also widely held by the teachers. For example, the owners did not consult the parents and whānau when the centre manager and one of the teachers left the employ of the centre without notice at the end of February, 2012. All participants (parents and teachers) noted this period as a particularly challenging time. The owners chose to inform the parents and whānau through the general monthly newsletter, a couple of weeks after the centre manager and teacher had left. Some of the parents felt uncomfortable with the way the changes were being communicated and expressed their concerns about the future of the centre with the teachers. The teachers informed the owners that the parents were beginning to lose confidence in them and suggested that an information evening be organised where the owners could outline their planned way forward, and answer any questions the parents may have had. This did not happen. The teachers did not have the knowledge or the authority to speak on the owners behalf, yet were constantly questioned by the parents regarding the changes. All of the teachers expressed that they felt a sense of responsibility to both the parents and the owners. During this time of transition the visible presence of anyone in leadership was minimal, and as the ‘face’ of the centre all of the teachers believed they were placed in an unfair position by the owners.

Julia (Grace’s mother) was one parent who sought to go directly to the management for answers. As a case study parent Julia was interviewed, during which time she talked in depth about her experience regarding the change in leadership. Julia’s experience/view paralleled those of the teachers; there was no consultation or prior warning that change was going to happen, there was no official forum to discuss

how the changes would affect the children or the running of the centre, and there was insufficient interaction between the management and the parents. This is Julia's story;

... I was very disappointed how, from my perspective, how it seemed to be handled, and how the parents weren't given any information. We weren't given anything – there was no proactive response from the management to the people who were paying for that service. And so, I raised [my concerns], and I think that lady who runs the operations management or something [temporary manager], she said something along the lines of 'we feel that if the parents have a concern then they will ring us and discuss it'. I thought 'that's another copout. That's putting it on the parents again'. I am someone who likes to be proactive with people. I don't need to know the ins and outs of any performance management that they are doing – that's not my business. But when it comes to the people caring for my child and there has been no notice – they are leaving with no notice ... There has been no discussion with me about the concerns with the care of the children. ... I thought the whole thing reeked of poor management, and I've never met the owners. I tell a lie, I had met Charles, I think. I have met him – I forced myself on him basically. I find that odd too. I mean at the Christmas function wouldn't you make an effort to go and say hello to the people. Or when you are in the centre, unlocking the building and letting people in, which they were doing when [the centre manager] left, they didn't say hello, or say 'oh, you are Grace's mother' or anything like that. So, I guess that the management doesn't match my values of 'treat people with respect'. That's how I felt – disrespected. And I thought well, if they disrespect me, do they really care .... Because everyone raved about Heather and Charles and how they really cared about the children... but I thought that's not obvious to me ... at all! To me, it was that they really care about getting their

money! The teachers care about the children – I don't doubt that at all. I really don't see that the management do ... at all! I just found that it didn't match what I would do - as someone who is a people manager. Admittedly I don't manage a daycare environment, but I would just expect, well, you are my customer, there are significant changes going on to the service I am providing you, so I should be giving you a proactive explanation, as to, a, what the situation is, b, what has caused it, and c, what my resolution is. But I really felt as though I had to fight to get the c part of that equation. Like, where is the resolution? A lot of time it may be simply about having other people's values being acknowledged. But at least if you are discussing it with them you have an understanding of where they are coming from. I finally rang - well it only took me a couple of days because I was getting annoyed with them. When I did speak to [the temporary manager] and voiced my concerns - I made sure that I had gotten rid of my emotions and broke it down to the key things which were concerning me and I wanted to get a resolution on ... I spouted a couple of phrases, one of them was 'continuity of care' and the other one was 'consistency of information', because I had been given different stories. I had rung and discussed these things with [the temporary manager], they had a team meeting that night and the next day two teachers interacted with me and restated both those phrases back to me. I felt, a, that was a bit funny, and then, b, I thought that at team meeting it was said '*Julia has rung and was concerned about blah, blah, so you will tell her this*'. That was how it came across. I didn't stipulate that my conversation was confidential, but it was kind of implied. When I am asking management for a management response and I had just been saying to you that I am concerned with the messages that I am being given are messages from the teachers, and not directly from them (the management). My concerns have to do with the management function of the centre, and a day later the exact

same situation is effectively occurring. Yeah, they are using the language I have raised, but you are still getting the teacher to deliver this message. You haven't listened to anything I have said. That is the one, and always will be my biggest sticking point with the centre – the management. But the environment in the centre itself I am quite happy with. So I sort of think '*suck it up Julia. Grace is very happy there and she is getting a great education, and there is a fantastic outdoor area*'.

While Julia had the confidence to approach the temporary manager and owners regarding her discontent with how the transition from one leadership model to another was managed, her concerns were echoed by a number of parents. Unlike Julia, the majority of parents choosing to share their concerns did so only with the teachers, who for them were 'the voice of the centre'. The data also indicated that parents typically did not communicate in any great depth with the management team (consisting of the centre owners and the manager) believing they were primarily concerned with how many days their children would be enrolled for and if there were any fees owing.

### ***Summary***

The form and function of the leadership model had a significant influence on the quality of teaching practice within the centre, which impacted upon the children and the teachers' sense of belonging. Regardless of individual teacher job descriptions and employment contracts, the owners reshaped the roles and responsibilities of teachers, individually and collectively. This impacted significantly on teacher identity, and how belonging was constructed for the children, their parents and the teachers.

The impetus for these leadership decisions was not grounded in an aspiration to enhance the children's learning and development but was universally viewed by teachers and parents as being solely profit driven. This was evident in the decision to; dispense with team leaders, increase teacher responsibilities (without the provision of mentoring or support), minimise parent interaction/communication, reduce staffing, minimise or ignore teachers' concerns regarding breaches in

regulations and health and safety. These were all decisions which distanced parents and demoralised teachers, hindering their ability to teach, or operate, effectively.

Expecting the responsibilities of the dissolved team leader positions to be absorbed by the teachers was unrealistic. The teachers identified a number of tensions which contributed to this conclusion, such as the lack of adequate time, training, and support. The deficiency of engagement between the teachers and the owners/managers played a key role in the lack of opportunity to critique the success or failure of any changes. Without any system for monitoring in place inequalities and inequities within the teaching teams were overlooked.

There were meagre opportunities for teachers and parents to voice their concerns, or for teachers to unpack differing teaching approaches within a professional forum. As such, schisms appeared between teachers as they aligned themselves with those who held similar values and beliefs. Without team leaders or the manager assuming a mediatory role the ability to explore differences and debate values was ineffectual. Effective leaders can identify where tensions lie and understand the processes, practices, beliefs and values which both contribute to and resolve these tensions. The context's leadership decisions also impacted upon the parents' confidence and trust with how the centre was being managed. Communication between the owners, or centre manager (the owner's representative) and the parents, largely focused on their children's attendance or fees and was not viewed as being informative or seeking consultation on any matter. The majority of parents were not comfortable discussing concerns with the owners, who were often not available.

In conclusion, this chapter has explored the relationship between leadership decisions and the enacted practice of the teachers. The findings have highlighted the factors of the centre's leadership structure which provided barriers and challenges to the teachers practice within this context and to how belonging was constructed for this group. These factors have shown to have impacted significantly upon the teachers' well-being. The findings also illustrate how leadership directly provides supports or challenges to the parents. Without effective communication and clear leadership, parents' concerns were at times minimised, more often dismissed. The primary focus and deepest concerns of the parents and teachers

were for the children; however, these were subverted by internal dissention, inadequate procedures and processes and lack of support.

The following chapter will discuss the findings and address the research questions in relation to relevant literature.



## CHAPTER TEN

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### **Discussion of Research Findings**

#### ***Introduction***

This chapter draws on the research findings from the previous three chapters. In relation to the relevant literature, the discussion utilises the evidence of the identified stakeholders; children, parents and teachers, in order to answer the research questions:

1. What affordances and challenges to belonging are identified by stakeholders participating in a privately owned, for-profit, ECE centre?
2. How is the ethical stewardship of Te Whāriki reflected in the leadership's decision making?

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section presents a *belonging framework*, conceptualised to make sense of the connections, aligned and contradicting, between the stakeholders' three viewpoints influencing belonging; values, relationships and leadership. Synthesising the three findings chapters within the unique context of the ECE centre, the three part *belonging framework* is explained. The findings are then examined within each section of the model; firstly, observed belonging, then lived belonging and finally, framed belonging.

#### ***Belonging framework***

Within this critical ethnographic study the perspectives of key stakeholders (children, parents and teachers) were gained to determine their identified supports and barriers to belonging, in a for-profit ECE centre. The findings highlight the context of the centre as being influential in how belonging was constructed and experienced for all of the participants. The findings also demonstrate that to belong is multifaceted, with influencing factors often not visible to all stakeholders, which is a key argument of this thesis. My argument is that without understanding the full context of a for-profit ECE service, it is difficult to

understand what contributes to participation. To present a full picture (Punch, 2009) of belonging to the centre required bringing the complex interplay between the participants' perspectives together, in light of the centre's unique context, highlighting how and why viewpoints were converging and contrasting with each other. This is understood within the following model which synthesises the findings.

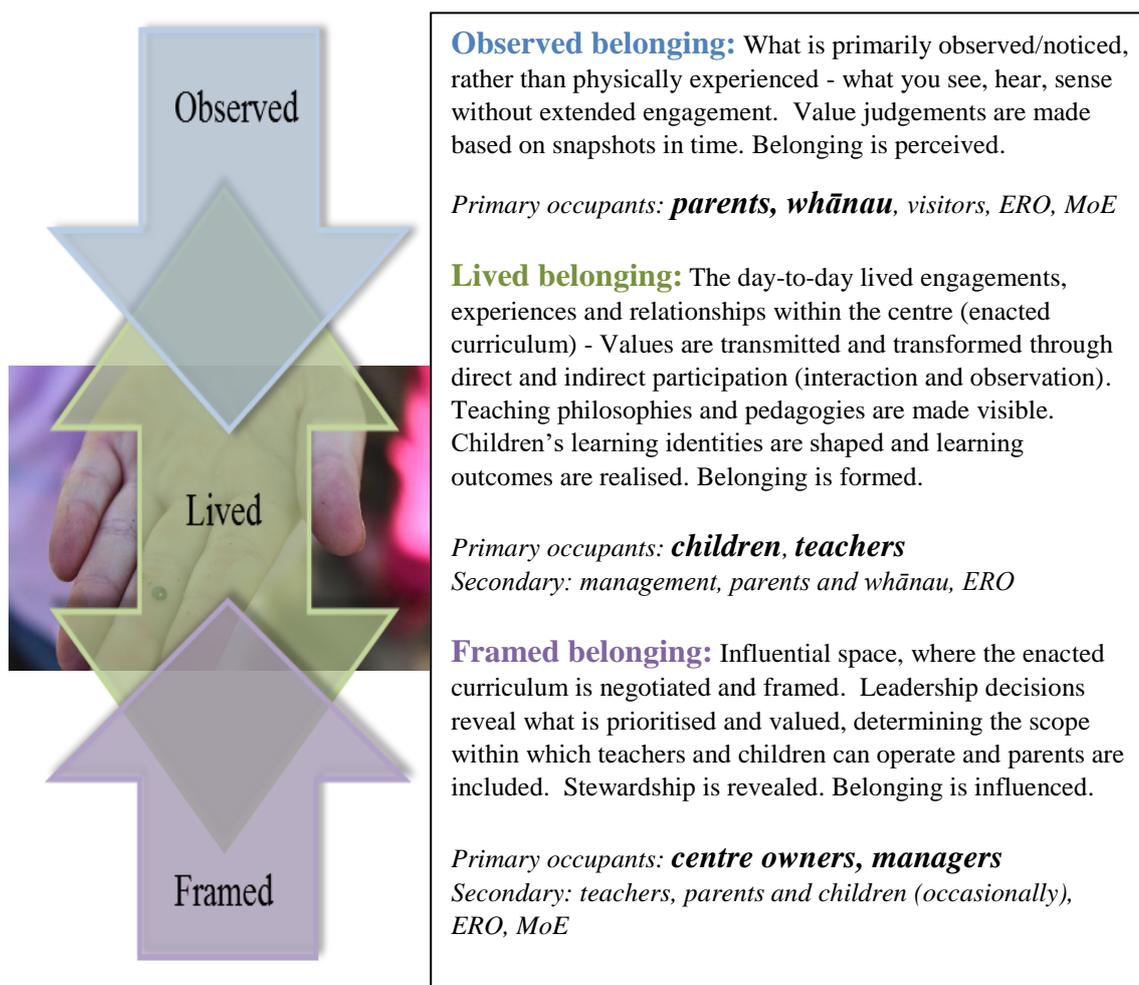


Figure 4: Belonging framework (Westerbeke, 2016)

I developed the *belonging framework* to highlight how power, knowledge, and influence were distributed within the centre, and the effects these components had regarding how belonging was eventually constructed and experienced. Rogoff (2003) recognises that viewing participation, individually and collectively, is a more accurate way of understanding the transmission and transformation of culture within any given community. She also acknowledges that an individual can participate within a cultural environment without being afforded membership (Rogoff, 2003).

The *belonging framework* supports this, viewing each space within the framework as relational, yet containing its own participation criteria. It explains how belonging is influenced by ‘access’; the level of access an individual has to knowledge and power within the centre influences their ability to participate, illuminating the status of their membership, and subsequently impacting upon their perception and experience of belonging. This is comparable to the distribution of power and sharing of cultural knowledge required to effectively support Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological transitions. The structural and operational context of the centre was an influential source shaping the construction of belonging. This was seen within the top-heavy structure of the leadership model and the construction of teaching teams, comprising full-time and part-time qualified teachers, an in-training teacher, and a range of qualified and un-qualified relievers.

The three findings chapters filtered the data through Rogoff’s (2003) three foci of analysis, utilising an intrapersonal, interpersonal and institutional lens. In doing so, the wider context of the centre was explored from multiple standpoints, revealing the affordances and challenges contributing to belonging for this study’s identified stakeholders; children, parents and teachers.

Informed by the findings, the *belonging framework* proposes that belonging can be viewed from three distinct perspectives; as being *observed*, *lived*, and *framed*. While all of the framework’s perspectives contain their own verity within the context of the centre, and there is overlap between the spaces, the extent to which the stakeholder’s sense of belonging is experienced varies within each. For example, the study evidenced that the day-to-day lived experiences of the children are not fully known by parents and the construction of the centre’s lived belonging is primarily *observed* for this cohort. The child is placed at the heart of the framework where belonging is *lived* and it is here that meaning for this group is primarily created. The extent of parent access and participation in the setting is influenced by the teachers’ and leadership’s philosophical and pedagogical approaches, evident within their decision-making. The framework suggests that within this space the child’s sense of belonging is constructed through participation with people - mainly teachers and peers - places and things. It is within the context of *lived belonging* the centre’s expression of curriculum is

shaped. The third perspective is how belonging is *framed*, with operational decisions both supporting and constraining access for the centre's key stakeholders; children, parents and teachers. The parameters for the teachers' ability to 'teach' are set in this space and the values guiding the setting are revealed.

The following will expand upon the *belonging framework* with findings illustrating each space.

### ***Observed belonging***

Parents' physical presence at the centre was predominantly limited to times when their children were dropped off and collected, at the beginning and end of the day, which meant they were not always privy to the day-to-day goings on at the centre. The findings indicate that the parents were not fully aware of all that influenced their children's day at the centre, or the operational and pedagogical issues faced by the teachers on a daily basis. Unaware of the concerns raised by the teachers, such as the impact of having minimal non-contact time to fulfil assessment expectations, or the challenges of being without day-to-day leadership, parents mostly had a positive impression of the centre. This is not a surprising finding and typically it would be considered unprofessional for teachers to have negative or unsettling conversations with parents regarding their employers or the organisation they worked for.

The findings reveal that at times teachers presented a professional 'face' to the parents, which was not always consistent with how they spoke and related throughout the day, away from parental observation. Therefore, parents' perception of their own and their child's sense of belonging was principally informed by three key aspects, or themes; the strength of their relationships with the teachers, their observation of the setting and its alignment with their values, and their communication with the adults within the centre.

### ***Responsive and reciprocal relationships***

Parents' awareness of their child's desire to be at the centre was a basic, yet key indicator that their child was happy and feeling settled. All of the parents were in-tune with their children's core well-being, with a litmus test for happiness identified

by one parent as their child always being content to be left by them in the mornings. This is consistent with the literature which suggests parents' aspirations for their children include their child's emotional wellbeing (Mitchell, Meagher-Lundberg, Caulcutt, Taylor, Archard, Kara & Paki, 2014).

A key element supporting this was parents' belief that their children, and they, had strong connections with the teachers. How connected the parents were with the teachers affected how knowledgeable they were of their child's experiences and relationships at the centre. An unforeseen finding was that parents of young children, over the age of two years, wanted the relationship between their child and the teachers to hold an element of intimacy – showing love; mirroring the closeness of family relationships, and those one would expect with younger children. The literature indicates that this level of emotional and physical intimacy is an important pedagogical expectation for teachers of infants and toddlers (Dalli et al., 2011; ERO, May 2015), although the subject matter is less evident in literature referring to teacher interactions with older children in ECE. This expectation did not diminish the parents' view of the teachers as being professional in any way. Teachers displaying a 'pedagogy of care', evidenced in loving and nurturing relationships, were viewed by parents as strengthening their children's sense of belonging at the centre. This was considered an affordance. Ritchie and Rau (2006) argue that the commitment to their children evidenced within the intimate nature of relationships, which was wanted by the study's parents, should not be surprising to teachers, but normalised as it would be within Tiriti based pedagogies.

As parents explained, the closer the relationships between the teachers and the children reflected those within their families, the more secure they felt in trusting their children's teachers and having security about their child's happiness. This need for a sense of intimacy within the teacher/child relationship is understandable given the length of time the children spent at the centre and their young ages. Having an ethic of care is also not a new concept in early childhood education, with much of the literature arguing the importance of continuity between home and centre, and closeness within the teacher/child relationships (Dalli et al., 2011; ERO, 2013b; Gonzalez-Mena, 2002; Mitchell, Wylie & Carr, 2008; MoE, 2015b; Ritchie & Rau, 2006, 2008).

Reciprocal relationships with teachers are identified as an affordance to strengthening a sense of belonging (Dalli et al., 2011; MoE, 2015b, 2015c). From a sociocultural perspective collaborative relationships strengthens cohesive learning between home and ECE settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rogoff, 2003; Smith, 2013a). Parents acknowledged that it was their 'power-shared' relationships with teachers that inspired their trust that everything was alright at the centre, with the parents establishing their children's well-being and sense of belonging by a belief that they would be 'informed' if this was not the case. The parents expressed that they felt comfortable raising sensitive issues with the teachers, although this was not the case for Tahlia who did not share her true feelings about the lack of Samoan artefacts or language within the centre.

During the early stages of data generation the team leaders of the over-two and under-two rooms were removed from teaching teams. The parents in this study did not give any indication, which I was aware of, that the team leaders were missed by them. This could have been in part due to the relational and collaborative pedagogies demonstrated by Lucy and Violet, overriding the parents' need to have a centralised 'go to' figure. These two teachers were considered knowledgeable, reliable and trustworthy by parents, and actively built warm collaborative responsive relationships with parents/whānau. These relational qualities were viewed by the parents as an affordance in strengthening belonging, as they are in literature (Dahlberg et al., 2013; Dalli et al., 2011; Gonzalez-Mena, 2002; Mitchell et al., 2014; Rogoff, 2003).

The parents expressed their concerns with teachers, to varying degrees, regarding the upheaval of losing the centre manager, as well as another teacher without explanation, and the data showed that there was apprehension regarding the continuity of care for their children. However, the substantial tensions identified by the teachers during this time were effectively not known by the parents. While parents were concerned how the staffing changes would affect their children, which were voiced in the interviews, they were reassured by the presence and words of key teachers, who, in the absence of any direction from the owners, became the official voice of the centre.

The parents were not aware of the pedagogical impact an inconsistent teaching team was having on the teachers' well-being and sense of belonging, thus affecting their children's. The majority of parents perceived that everything was being managed well. Cooper (2014) suggests that teachers in everyday practice display leadership by stepping up "to respond to unplanned events, [and] address important issues" (p. 89). The teachers' responses were values based and derived from a core commitment to the families, however, they were intended to pacify and distance the parents from the uncomfortable reality the teachers were aware of. The teachers were placed in an unenviable position where they had to 'temper the truth' through the act of omission. This raises questions regarding what constitutes ethical reciprocity within parent/teacher relationships. The findings show that parent perception is not always an accurate indication of how belonging is constructed, and voiced accounts of security, such as trust in teachers, requires being viewed in context.

#### *Aligning values*

Parental observation of the setting; the teachers, the children, and the environment, occurred primarily at drop-off and pick-up times. It was here that parents gained an impression of the centre and observed the teacher/child relationships in action. During this time, and through conversations, the parents gained some knowledge of how aspects of their culture were represented within the centre. For some, they were not represented at all (Tahlia – Samoan), some more so (Layla – Cook Island Māori, Anahera - Māori), and for others, fully (Julia – Pākehā). All non-Pākehā parents believed that they were able to support their children's cultural identity at home. The interview and observational data showed that parents were essentially content with how their culture was represented in the centre, but there was awareness that there was room for improvement. Connections were made between children seeing their cultural language, practices and values in the centre and the strengthening of their cultural identity. Tahlia felt a deep set resentment that her Samoan culture wasn't really valued in the centre, believing her son, Isaac, would be stronger in his identity as a Samoan, and a citizen of Aotearoa New Zealand, if he had ECE experience of it. The sociocultural literature supports this, suggesting that to develop an accurate understanding of the child as a learner an understanding of the child at home is important, and for learning outcomes and possibilities to be

optimised, the child needs to experience familiarity between settings (Gonzalez-Mena, 2002; Rogoff, 1995; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). The child's cultural identity will be influenced through participation in everyday activities, within cultural communities, with values and practices transmitted and transformed (Rogoff, 2003). Without any cultural continuity between the child's home and the ECE centre (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), the literature suggests there is likely to be a clash of values and practices (Rogoff, 2003). When viewed through the concept of *guided participation* (Rogoff, 1995, 2003, 2014b) the centre's values evident in the lived relationships (practices, procedures and conveyed through word, image and action) will transform those of the child's, for better or worse. The implications of this have significance for the parents who were content with not seeing any reference to their culture within the centre.

Māori parents, in particular, identified that their cultural values were not as evident as they would like, and a number voiced their concerns regarding this. There were many examples of the Māori parents offering teachers and the centre manager suggestions regarding how their aspiration for their children to be strong in their cultural identity could be realised in the centre. Anahera voiced that she, and other Māori parents, wanted te reo and tikanga Māori to be more evident in the centre's enacted curriculum. There was a consistent call for teachers to include more tikanga into the programme, and waiata (song), to support te reo Māori. Parents volunteered their time, as well as suggested practical ways this could happen, as noted by Anahera in her interview. The involvement of parents in their child's early education is considered by Ghirrotto and Mazzoni (2013) as an essential support and for these parents this appeared to be denied them.

Anahera wanted the children to see a photo of the Māori King Tuheitia, and whakataukī (proverbs) around the centre, even if the teachers did not understand the significance of them. Dahlberg and Moss (2006) assert that responsive listening involves listening to parents without judgement, with a willingness to be open to others and to learn. Rogoff (2003) also acknowledges that healthy cultural communities will comprise divergent viewpoints, and a spirit of collaboration and openness. Without recognition of the cultural importance of these parents' suggestions, and without any expectation of teacher/centre accountability, these offers and suggestions by parents were chiefly ignored. When this finding is viewed

“within the historical context of colonisation”, as Rau and Ritchie (2011, p. 32) suggest, then I suggest, it is no longer an ‘oversight’, but a breach of rights. The reasons parents’ suggestions were not valued were complex and systemic. This finding reveals the systemic challenges faced by Māori to have te reo (language) and tikanga (correct ways of being Māori) valued and implemented within “planning, teaching interactions, programme evaluation, and centre review” (Rau & Ritchie, 2011, p. 32).

Standing back and viewing the centre using a wider lens, it would be difficult to see the changes the parents were seeking actually occurring, given the context of the setting, the market driven values at the forefront of the centre, and the unequal distribution of power throughout. The parents were not aware of the structural, philosophical and pedagogical issues sitting behind what they saw, heard and sensed. The literature addressing communities of practice indicates that firstly, in order for a CoP to be effective, there must be a shared vision and commitment, and then stakeholders not only need to have opportunity to contribute to the learning community, but power to implement change (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). This is also consistent with Rogoff’s (2003) understanding of participation in cultural communities, but she includes the notion that participation and contribution is an expectation. The findings indicate that while the parents identified feeling a sense of belonging to the centre community, the centre did not reflect the components of an effective community of practice as reasonably non-permeable boundaries hindering full-participation and belonging were evident (Sumsion & Wong, 2011; Youkhana, 2015; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

The expressed cultural values were highly important for the parents who raised them, and in this regard the centre’s values, as evident in the enacted curriculum, did not align with the parents’ and the intended curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996), which states, “New Zealand is the home of Māori language and culture: curriculum in early childhood settings should promote te reo and ngā tikanga Māori, making them visible and affirming their value for children from all cultural backgrounds” (p.42). Rau and Ritchie (2011) also suggest that research confirms Māori parents “want their children to develop a facility in the language that is their birthright as Māori and would like this to be supported within mainstream educational settings” (p. 799). The accurate use of te reo Māori is deemed by some

to be an intensely ethical issue, such as Kāretu (1992), who posits that the incorrect usage of te reo Māori should be condemned in Aotearoa New Zealand, believing that Māori language should receive the importance it deserves. In her interview Anahera revealed a similar point of view. She voiced her annoyance that the centre manager was unable to correctly pronounce her daughter's name, and commonly used Māori place names, and felt that, like Kāretu (1992), this was unacceptable. Research such as Rau and Ritchie's (2011) and Kāretu's (1992) point to the possible changing positioning of te reo and tikanga Māori in ECE settings, requiring higher prioritising than is currently occurring. For the most part parents were only aware of how te reo Māori was being spoken in the centre by observing mat-time interactions, where it was more likely to be heard, through greetings, instruction, and waiata. The extent which te reo and tikanga Māori were part of the teachers' pedagogies and embedded within the teaching programme was effectively invisible to parents.

The parents indicated that other important values, such as valuing extended family, participating in shared meals, and wanting their children to develop as respectful, inclusive individuals, with an understanding and appreciation of cultures other than their own. Again, there was evidence that most of these values were present in the centre, with the shared Matariki breakfast and the appreciation of grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins within the centre. However, these values were tied to individual teachers and were not connected to a universal cultural practice.

How values aligned between parents and teachers influenced how they communicated with the teaching team, with parents purposefully seeking teachers who held similar values to them. Parents trusted their professionalism and had confidence that their child was genuinely 'known' by these teachers, as an individual and as a learner. This was particularly evident when the parent/teacher interview schedule was posted by the sign-in book at the front entrance of the centre. Lucy was sought by all of the over-two parents as their teacher of choice for a one-on-one interview. At the time of the interviews one other part-time qualified teacher, who did not participate in this study due to personal issues, and Kate, the in-training teacher, were available for parent/teacher interviews in the over-two room, but were not selected by the parents. It is my opinion that this should have set off alarm bells for the centre's owners and the centre manager, but it didn't, as parents clearly did

not have faith in the abilities of Kate and the other teacher. Teachers who are knowledgeable and skilful, have familiarity with the children's strengths and interests, and are able to articulate these meaningfully to parents, are all viewed as important indicators of a high quality ECE service (ERO, 2007). This finding may suggest that these particular quality indicators were not valued to the same degree by the owners and manger.

### *Communication*

The children who spent long hours at the early childhood centre were tired at the end of the day, and to gain a clearer picture of life at the centre their parents were reliant on what was being communicated with them via the teachers. The parents trusted the communication they had with teachers regarding their child's general well-being, whether their child was struggling with anything, or how they were progressing. While the parents predominantly expressed satisfaction with what was being communicated through the teachers, for one parent, Tahlia, the lack of communication was identified as a frustration and the findings indicated that it contributed to how her son was positioned by her as a competent learner.

All of the case study parents had been with the centre for a long time, with one choosing the centre for all three of her children. Interestingly, they all expressed the limitations regarding the avenues available to make any comment or suggestion for change. This was identified as a systemic challenge to belonging. There was limited capacity to communicate any concerns they may have had and there were few formal opportunities for parents to do so. The New Zealand Educational Institute (2014) identifies inadequate communication and poor responsiveness to the communities which for-profit centres serve, as indicators quality practice and procedures are being undermined.

To varying degrees all of the parents wanted to be involved in the centre programme. For the case study parents, physical involvement was limited due to work commitments; however, all were able to identify strategies which would support their values being realised in the centre. The findings indicated that the challenges to this were the deficiency of official avenues for parents to communicate suggestions, and, if suggestions were made, there was a lack of accountability to ensure any procedures were carried out. Without accountability there was nothing

in place to ensure parents' ideas were handled professionally. This affected the parents' and their children's sense of belonging.

The parents all had clear views about what was valued for them as family and what they deemed important for their children. However, their aspirations for their children were not always known by the teachers. During her interview Violet mentioned that it was only through the whanaungatanga planning project that she discovered the ethnic identity of one of the children – a child she had 'known' for months. She had incorrectly assumed this child's cultural background, indicating that informative communication between the home and centre was not consistent for all families. This particular parent was not aware of the mistake. This parent's observation of her child's belonging differed from her child's lived experience, where for months either no connection was made to her child's cultural heritage or her culture was wrongfully represented.

The parents voiced their concern about staffing changes within the centre yet were unaware of the depth of concern voiced by the teachers regarding changes to the leadership structure and pedagogical differences. Information passed on by the teachers regarding the centre was often modified so as not to unsettle the parents. The reasons for staff leaving and the health and safety breaches were not communicated with parents. A number of decisions were contained at the managerial/leadership level and did not filter down to the parents. This finding raises a salient point regarding the degree of influence communication had on the parents' perception of their own, and their children's belonging. Parents trusted what they observed and 'experienced'. Without transparency within the communication between the centre and families, the parents' ability to make informed decisions regarding their children's well-being was significantly reduced. The following section discusses the findings illustrating *lived belonging*, which also include the experiences of the parents.

### ***Lived belonging***

The interview and observational data found that the case study parents' lived experiences of the centre were mostly positive, with all four case study parents professing high levels of trust and satisfaction with the teaching staff. The trust experienced by these parents was facilitated, as noted above, by their close

relationships with key teachers, who actively built connections with them, sustaining their sense of belonging within the centre. There was evidence that Violet and Lucy both considered it important to have close familial-like relationships with the children, revealed in their interactions and teaching practice. This was viewed as an affordance, effectively building not only the children and their families' sense of belonging, but also the teachers. The importance of having an emotional connection with children is consistent within infant and toddler literature which suggests this is an important indicator of quality practice (Dalli et. al., 2011; ERO, June 2015).

The findings indicate the day-to-day lived experiences of the children and teachers show there was disparity between the parents and teachers perception of how belonging was framed within the centre. At times the teachers' views differed from the parents, primarily because teachers were privileged to more information. The teachers' perceptions of belonging were principally informed by three themes; how relationships were embodied in their teaching practice, how quality practice aligned with qualifications, and the imposed constraints to their teaching practice. The perspective of the children will be woven throughout this section.

#### *Responsive and reciprocal relationships*

Relationships between children, adults, and, adults and children, are all influential in infants, toddlers and young children's learning and development (Dalli et al., 2011; MoE, 1996; Rogoff, 2003). The amount of time the case study children spent at the centre was significant, with all case study children attending between forty five and fifty hours per week. This is an important consideration, as the centre is an influential environment for these children, with lived and observed relational experiences shaping the way the children participated, and their identities (Dalli et al., 2011; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Rogoff, 2003; Stratigos, Bradley & Sumsion, 2014). The findings show that the children valued their relationships with their peers and key teachers, which strengthened their sense of wellbeing and belonging in the centre. However, amongst the teachers (qualified, in-training and un-qualified) the nature of the relationships with the children varied and the quality of interactions were inconsistent. Understanding the relationships available to the

children requires understanding the sociocultural contexts they are located within (Wertsch, 1995).

The two qualified teachers, Lucy and Violet, prioritised relationships, connecting their relational pedagogies to their qualifications, as well as their personal values, their cultural backgrounds, attitudes towards others, and life experiences. Through observation it was clear that the children were loved and valued by these teachers and relationships were mutually responsive. The data gathered from the interviews and observation over the nine month period indicated that both teachers were highly reflective and reflexive, both were professed advocates for children and both wanted the best for the children working, for the most part, collaboratively with their families. Both teachers positioned the children as powerful, with agency, and had high personal and educational expectations for them. Literature supports the link between sensitive and collaborative pedagogical approaches, high teacher expectations and successful educational outcomes for Māori children (Bevan-Brown, 2009; Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh & Teddy, 2009; Bishop & Glynn, 1999; MoE, 2015b).

Parents had confidence in the care and expertise these teachers provided their children; Anahera viewed the centre a second home for her children. Lucy and Violet were also able to articulate the purpose of their teaching strategies - they could theorise their practice (Carr & Mitchell, 2010). Strategies both teachers used which supported a sense of belonging included, prioritising caring relationships, intentionally scaffolding children's learning and transitions, planning for exploration, utilising theory - such as extending children's emerging working theories, and, chatting, discussing, joking with the children. These are all considered affordances to building a positive sense of belonging, meaning they contributed to children 'feeling good' about being there (Sumsion & Wong, 2011). The children enjoyed their relationships with these teachers, with two of the case study children articulating how they valued their 'friendship' with Lucy and Violet. Lucy and Violet consistently valued and cared for the children, purposefully aiming to strengthen their identities as individuals and learners, as well as providing them with some emotional safety and security during the time of leadership upheaval. The data showed that the responsivity and reciprocity within Lucy and Violet's relationships with the children evidenced an equal distribution of power.

The nature of these relationships facilitated effective meaning-making for the children. The findings indicate that Isaac and Mia were both skilfully guided through significant learning moments, as they grappled with making sense of the challenges life presented them. To support both children in their meaning-making the teachers (Lucy and Violet) worked closely and collaboratively with the parents. Dahlberg et al. (2013) suggest that it is incidents such as these, where meaning-making is valued and supported, which should be considered as more accurate indicators of quality practice.

The findings indicate that not all of the teachers (qualified, in-training and unqualified) within the centre prioritised relationships or demonstrated the same level of quality interactions which were evident in Lucy and Violet's practice. This is noteworthy as the over-two teaching team changed regularly, resulting in inconsistency of interactions with the children, focus and expectations, all impacting on quality learning outcomes (Mitchell, Wylie & Carr, 2008). Lucy was employed part-time and during the data generation phase, Violet moved to the under-two team and then left the employ of the centre. Kate also moved between the over-two and the under-two teaching teams. Kate's understanding of teaching was grounded in an outdated model where she believed the teacher is to be seen as the one holding the knowledge and power. As a result her relational pedagogy was not aligned with the research which suggests it is critical young children experience warm and sensitive relationships (Dalli & Kibble, 2010; Dalli et al. 2011; Stratigos, Bradley & Sumsion, 2014) or that teachers should build collaborative relationships with parents (Rau & Ritchie, 2011).

Without clear and consistent mentoring, which is recognised as important for beginning teachers (Cameron, 2007), Kate struggled aligning her practice to the goals and vision of *Te Whāriki*. It was apparent that without the benefit of a full teaching qualification Kate did not have the same level of skill and understanding required to have effective, reflective practice. An aspiration all parents wanted for their children was that they be 'good people', respectful members of society. The parents defined this as being kind to others, having gratitude, being respectful of others, being mindful of others' well-being and realising there were others in the world with them who were different – and valuing this difference. The practice of some of the teachers would not be considered kind, and was not aligned with these

parents' aspirations. Rogoff's (2003) concept of *guided participation* suggests that what was valued within the centre is potentially transmitted to the children both directly and indirectly.

Bicultural practice was inconsistent in the centre. Lucy and Violet drew on Māori concepts, such as *aroha* (love), *manaakitanga* (care and kindness), *whakawhanaungatanga* (developing family-like relationships), *tuakana teina* (older child teaching younger child), and *ako* (teacher/learner, reciprocity) within their teaching practice. The findings indicate that they listened to a Māori parent's request to extend their use of *te reo Māori*, seeking the expertise of *tangata whenua* as *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) encourages, and at times they ignored it. They consistently and actively build relationships with the Māori parents and included extended family in their partnerships. However, throughout the wider centre Māori culture and values were inconsistently reflected in pedagogy, planning and practice. Through the *whanaungatanga* planning, within the structural constraints of having no pedagogical leadership or time afforded to planning, Lucy and Violet sought to extend their understanding, and to respectfully come to know and value the cultural heritages of the children and their families' within the centre. However, some teachers chose to disengage with this planning, dissipating the value of it. There was ample evidence to indicate that *te reo* and *tikanga Māori* were viewed by some as 'add-ons' to the curriculum, rather than permeating all aspects of the centre. Ten years on from Ritchie and Rau's (2006) study, this research has shown that inconsistent practice indicates there is still "a veneer of biculturalism" in ECE (p. 22).

The question of how Māori cultural practices and values are being upheld in mainstream education settings, such as this study's chosen ECE centre, surfaced in the findings. For various reasons, as noted above, some teachers within this study chose to disengage themselves from a number of cultural practices, such as *karakia* (prayer), but also the regular use of *te reo Māori* (language), *waiata* (song), and the collaborative involvement of Māori parents and *whānau* (family). Ritchie (2010b) suggests that *karakia* "meaningfully enacted, invoke the *mauri* [life essence] and *wairua* [spirit], the interconnectedness of people with their ancestors and their

specific environmental context, engendering a sense of spiritual safety, identity, belonging and well-being for the people concerned” (p. 40). Teachers choosing to regularly separate themselves from Māori practices significantly limited their ability to reflect these important Māori concepts within their day-to-day teaching practice. The findings show that te reo Māori in the day-to-day lived experiences of the centre, for example, was inconsistent, reliant almost exclusively on Lucy and Violet valuing its regular use. When these key teachers were not physically present in the centre nor was the use of te reo. Therefore, the children within the centre were not immersed in an environment where te reo was part of the settings cultural fibre. This perpetuates the concern that Māori children are not receiving the education they deserve in mainstream education (Glynn, 1998), thereby raising the question whether this could be viewed as breaching the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Waitangi Tribunal, 2012). To add to the debate, rather than attempt to offer any answers, I question if an ECE setting in Aotearoa New Zealand can be called culturally responsive and responsible when the practices and pedagogies of the leaders and teachers within it are incongruent with those which honour the Tiriti-based partnerships at the heart of *Te Whāriki*. Who is responsible for upholding Te Tiriti principles in mainstream education? And, within the discussion whose ‘rights’ are being privileged?

#### *Qualifications, pedagogies and quality practice*

The teachers’ philosophical underpinnings and theoretical understanding determined how the children’s day looked, how they were valued and positioned, how they were responded to by adults, and how they were supported. Relievers were present every day, and the majority of them were unqualified. Within the setting qualified relievers were only employed at the end of a funding period to ensure the 80% threshold was met, assuring maximum funding.

For the teachers, tensions often inhabited the socially mediated *lived belonging* space, where educational, pedagogical and philosophical values and experiences converged. The philosophical and pedagogical disparity is recognised between unqualified and qualified ‘teachers’ (Carr & Mitchell, 2010; Hedges, 2013). The influence of these realities was reflected in the children’s relational experiences and agency – relievers, and some employed teachers, placed limitations on the children

which Lucy and Violet did not. Qualified teachers need to be supported within a cohesive and ethical, structural and operational framework unified in a vision aimed at high quality interactions and outcomes (Branson, 2007; Branson, 2010; Branson & Gross, 2014).

Actively listening to family members regarding children's interests, and significant moments of physical, cognitive and emotional growth, was identified as an affordance to belonging. This was evident within the intentional support provided by the teachers regarding Mia's working theories, Isaac processing the death of his grandmother, and Irirangi's passion for anything Michael Jackson. When these experiences have their impetus in the home, without respectful and responsive communication with parents, teachers may miss opportunities to support children's key learning, which literature supports (Rogoff, 2003; Dalli et al., 2011).

The findings demonstrate that physical and emotional tiredness as well as time constraints reduced the teachers' effectiveness in responding to parents, although, taking these aspects into consideration Lucy and Violet demonstrated strong relationships and ethical awareness, which was less evident within Kate's practice. While Kate articulated that she 'knew' it was important to develop partnerships with parents in order to understand what was important for them and their children, in practice she struggled to do this, imposing what she viewed as legitimate 'professional distance' between herself and the parents. The connection to her qualification status is less clear. The findings do show that on the days when the ratio of qualified teachers (with ethical practice) to unqualified was high, Kate's reduced experience and expertise as an in-training teacher could be absorbed. Kate regularly taught with only one qualified teacher, and at times she was the only permanent 'teacher' with a number of unqualified relievers. Therefore, there were significant amounts of time where the children were exposed to practice and pedagogy which was not consistent with indicators of quality. Without any focused mentoring or guidance Kate struggled moving forward from this position. She was also unfairly placed in a position of responsibility as an in-training teacher. More significantly, this finding highlights the concern regarding who is taking responsibility for stewardship of the values and intentions of *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996), when those charged with its implementation are in-training or unqualified.

### *Constraints*

Structural and operational constraints proved an imposition for the teachers, with all identifying that their ability to teach effectively was compromised as a result. Insufficient time for assessment, planning and team meetings impacted on children's learning outcomes. The data showed that Lucy was skilled in supporting complex learning, recognising and responding to children's working theories, which are important outcomes of *Te Whāriki* (Hedges & Jones, 2012). However, without the structures to support this occurring consistently within the setting (not all teachers with theoretical knowledge, no mentoring, minimal professional development, insufficient time to reflect, plan and evaluate learning) identifying and assessing learning opportunities and outcomes was significantly reduced. This not only challenges belonging but is considered by some to be unethical (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005).

The teachers' comments in this study about the owners' perceived lack of care or concern for them, the children and families, aligned with my own observation. The findings showed a number of decisions made by the owners placed constraints on the teachers practice, such as, not including teachers in decision making processes, knowing that the decision to remove team leader positions was significantly impacting negatively upon the teachers, not responding to voiced concerns by the teachers, expecting teachers to fulfil administration duties without any provision of time or support in the form of mentoring.

At the beginning of this study's data generation phase the manager left the centre along with one other teacher. At this time the team leader roles had just been removed. As noted above, the parents mainly viewed the centre as managing this process well, although individual parents voiced concern with the owners that they were worried about the effects of the changes on their children's well-being. Teachers worked hard at reassuring parents and maintaining children's sense of belonging through the challenges faced by the leadership changes. The two qualified teachers, Lucy and Violet, expressed a sense of responsibility to ensure the children and parents felt secure, while trying to manage the expectations they felt as professional teachers, demonstrating qualities of leadership (Cooper, 2014).

The findings show that the qualified teachers were less likely to separate themselves from the sense of responsibility they felt as teachers. The data also shows that not all qualified teachers acted ethically or with the concern. There were two qualified teachers, other than Lucy and Violet, employed part-time at the centre that did not show the same level of responsibility; one was experiencing personal challenges, and found everything overwhelming, and the other demonstrated unprofessional practice, which was challenged by Lucy and Violet but ignored by the owners and the temporary manager. During this time all teachers were placed in situations by the owners, and the temporary manager who was not a qualified ECE teacher, which were unrealistic and unfair. This all impacted upon the teachers and children's experiences of lived belonging. Mitchell (2012), referring to two national surveys, states that staff in privately owned for-profit services are more likely to "describe their workload as excessive and were less likely to regard themselves as part of the decision making team in relation to teaching and learning and policy" (Mitchell, 2012, p. 106). The New Zealand Educational Institute (2014) identifies "poor employment practices" such as "the use of large numbers of relievers and unqualified staff" (p. 5) as a risk factor impacting the provision of quality ECE in for-profit ECE centres.

The confidence of all teachers was affected throughout the nine months of data generation and the findings show that they demonstrated signs of exhaustion – losing interest, motivation, feeling overwhelmed, disrespected and powerless. Branson (2010) asserts that teachers and children experience the effects of stress when educational decisions are not made ethically. The impact of these decisions, constrained the realisation of quality practice and ethical relationships. The impact of these constraints was less communication and care between the adults, and teachers' beginning to feel isolated within their 'teams'. A significant finding is that Rogoff's (2003) concept of *guided participation* was evidently at work during this period. While the children appeared to be surprisingly resilient and 'happy' to the casual outsider (and regularly at times myself), those that knew the children well (Lucy and Violet) noted they had adopted ways to navigate their way through their day, mirroring those of the teachers, such as gravitating towards teachers they liked, or felt safe with, ignoring 'relievers' and teachers they felt unsafe with. I also noticed children echoing the interactions of some teachers by, for example,

speaking firmly to the baby dolls and each other. Vygotsky (2004) suggests that “a child’s play is not simply a reproduction of what he has experienced, but a creative reworking of the impressions he has acquired” (p. 11).

The challenges identified by the teachers impacted upon belonging within the lived day-to-day experiences of the centre. These experiences were not always visible to parents or visitors, or I would suggest, to ERO. However, they all shaped curriculum experiences for the children. The data indicates that the construction of belonging is complex, as Sumsion and Wong (2011) suggest; containing systemic, operational and structural contributors. The ‘wearing down’ of teachers resulted in two key teachers leaving the centre as a direct result of the owners’ decision making, and their gradual decline of their sense of belonging. How their leaving affected the children belonging was beyond the parameters of this study, however, the findings show that a short time after Violet leaving her loss was felt in the under-two area. Violet had a pedagogy of care (Rockel, 2009) prioritised relationships, which included warm and sensitive interactions with the infants and toddlers, as well as actively listening and responding appropriately to the parents of the children. To the best of her, reduced ability, Violet created an atmosphere in the under-two area of joy, warmth, conversation and calm, all important expressions of curriculum for infants and toddlers (Dalli & Urban, 2010). These relationships and interactions were significantly reduced once Violet left the centre. Dalli et al. (2011) suggest that it is of vital importance for the wellbeing and safety of infants and toddlers that they receive the care and connections which were typical of Violet’s pedagogy and practice.

Lucy petitioned the owners and the new centre manager not to place Kate in the under-two team with a qualified teacher who had aspects of undesirable pedagogy, suggesting the combination of teachers would not be beneficial to the well-being of the children. For example, throughout the nine months of data generation, I did not once witness this qualified teacher open the outside play area for the under-two children to freely explore. In the absence of a mentor who could help Kate reflect on the curriculum, relevant theory, and the code of ethics to refine her practice, Kate modelled her teaching on this teacher’s, as it aligned with her idea of ‘professionalism’. The parents were unaware of Lucy’s concerns, which were ignored by the owners and the new centre manager. Lucy was also made to believe

she was being unprofessional in voicing apprehensions about her colleagues. This finding connects with the idea that there was a lack of stewardship of ethical practice within the centre – who, with any authority to make a difference, was ensuring the rights of the children were being prioritised? (Shapiro & Gross, 2013).

The following section of the *belonging framework* presents the findings which created the parameters within which *lived, and observed belonging* within the centre, as illustrated by the above examples, was *framed*.

### ***Framed belonging***

Within the space of *lived belonging* the curriculum is enacted, which, as the *observed belonging* space reveals, is mostly hidden from family and community within the operational structures and culture of inclusion it resides in. This predominantly hidden space is where belonging is *framed*.

Belonging and participation cannot be viewed as being value-neutral, as a sociocultural perspective would also maintain (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). The findings support this, with the voiced values of the participants converging, often aligning, and at times opposing each other, as the above two sections have revealed. The perspective of the owners was not obtained for this study, yet the findings do reveal that while the values of those in leadership are undeclared they determine the parameters within which belonging and participation are contained. To the observer notions of power were not always visibly manifest within the centre, however, the *belonging framework* suggests that it is the leadership who shape the spaces for participation, through the sanctions they impose with their inclusive and exclusive decision-making. It is also apparent from the findings of the parents and teachers that the owners were fully aware of their ongoing concerns. Therefore, I propose that the leadership decisions (primarily those of the owners) throughout the nine month period of data generation occurred mindfully, and suggest that a significant number of the factors identified as challenging belonging were avoidable.

The owners determined who was included and consulted in leadership decisions, such as the restructuring of the teaching teams, and consciously chose to exclude parents and disregard teachers' suggestions from these processes. The policy and

enrolment documentation indicated the owners valued working in partnership with parents to support each child's learning and development, yet there was minimal evidence of this happening within the top heavy model the owners chose to lead from. Respecting Te Tiriti o Waitangi commitments, *Te Whāriki* (MoE, 1996) calls for adults (leaders and teachers) to “actively seek Māori contributions to decision making, and ensure Māori children develop a strong sense of self-worth” (p. 40). Empowered collaboration and contribution is essential in developing a strong sense of belonging (MoE, 1996), in particular for Māori children and their whānau (Rau & Ritchie, 2011), and while acknowledged as presenting its own challenges (McNae, 2011), collaboration was not even possible, as key stakeholders (parents, children and teachers) were not included in the owners/leaders decision making processes. Therefore, while the aforementioned key stakeholders bore the effects of any leadership decisions, it was the owners/leaders who structured the framework supporting and/or challenging belonging. The owners' decision to change the leadership structure at the centre heralded a time of difficult transition for the teachers, children and their families. When considering Bronfenbrenner's (1979) view that even when an environment does not contain the child they are still influenced by what is happening within it, this is significant.

Branson (2007) emphasises the need for educational leaders to nurture and skilfully manage any change process, ensuring all involved can maintain their sense of meaningfulness and personal purpose within their continued participation. The findings indicate this did not happen and that managing belonging for the children, their families, and the teachers, was not a priority for the owners. During this extended period of change there was a disconnection between how belonging was *observed, lived* and *framed*.

I argue, with others, that supporting a sense of belonging are teachers who are qualified, who have sound and current theoretical knowledge and understand the complexity and intentions of *Te Whāriki* (Carr & Mitchell, 2010; Hedges, 2013). However, I also suggest that ownership of a for-profit ECE centre operating without social and ethical sanctions within a market driven business model constrains teachers from feeling valued as teachers, and restricts their ability to engage fully with complexity of the curriculum, or the needs of the children. This

is consistent with the work of Mitchell (2012) who contends, “[p]rofits for owners and shareholders are in direct competition with investing fully in the service” (p. 105).

The owners and the temporary manager were aware of the difficulties being faced by the teachers, yet chose to dismiss them. They were aware of teachers who did not have warm and sensitive interactions with children, the health and safety concerns, the mounting stress teachers were experiencing, and of their struggle to meet the assessment and planning requirements. Not acting on these concerns is considered unethical practice in educational leadership (Duhn, 2010; Branson & Gross, 2014; McNae, 2014; Tuana, 2014).

No one in leadership was addressing inappropriate pedagogies, yet they were brought to their attention by the key teachers. The owners were aware how these were impacting upon the children’s well-being and belonging, yet chose not to investigate further or put in place anything which would ensure consistent quality practice. As an in-training teacher who was gaining her teaching qualification through long-distance study, Kate did not receive any official form of mentoring, which she identified as needing to teach effectively, while fulfilling the required practice-based component of her qualification. This meant that Kate’s teaching practice remained unquestioned and her worldview unchallenged, she did not receive support in theorising her practice, nor provocation to explore more appropriate approaches and attitudes. Therefore she had difficulty determining what best practice was, or what was ‘regarded’ as best teaching practice within the context of the setting. Vygotsky (1978) viewed the zone of proximal development applicable to adult learning as well as children’s, as is Rogoff’s (2003) concept of *guided participation*. Kate’s interactions and teaching pedagogies may have reflected the intentions of *Te Whāriki* if these aspects of sociocultural theory were culturally embedded within a centre wide mentoring model. This finding gives emphasis to the lack of stewardship of ethical practice within this for-profit ECE centre and calls for private ECE ownership and leadership to include a sense of responsibility to the children, parents and teachers, and a philosophical and fiscal commitment to quality education and care.

The data indicates that there was little or no concern with who was being advantaged or disadvantaged through the owners' decisions. Parents were at times viewed as a commodity; the inability to pay the fees additional to the government funding meant children were removed from the centre. These families were further disadvantaged by the decision to charge a fee over the 20 ECE hours. The effects of interrupted ECE for the children involved was not considered by the centre's owners. Viewing this as unethical is consistent with Shield's (2014) argument that having knowledge about the issues facing marginalised groups within society and then choosing not to respond in a supportive way is unethical. The day-to-day lived experiences of inequity and societal marginalisation these families experience is perpetuated by profit driven decision-making such as this. Within the owners' decision making processes empathy was clearly absent. Branson (2010) believes that empathy is a key value in ethical leadership. Leaders showing empathy and accepting a duty of care for their children, families and teachers has been acknowledged as a key factor in building a strong sense of belonging within Pasifika ECE services (ERO, July 2015).

In spite of the support offered through government subsidies, parents' financial capital was a barrier to sustaining access to this centre. This is in conflict with the government's focus to increase ECE participation, and reduce barriers to participation, which is the intention of 20 Hours ECE. During the nine months of data generation there was no evidence of consideration taken by those in leadership – the owners, the temporary manager, and the new manager - for these families, regarding their continued participation or ability to access other forms of ECE in their locality. In my role as participant observer I can attest to the vulnerability of the families who had to withdraw from the centre due to their inability to pay the fees expected of them. The owners were not meeting the ECE needs of the community it served and for these parents and their children the ECE centre they were belonging 'in' was governed by values driven by monetary gain.

A lack of empathy and care extended to the teachers and a detrimental message conveyed to them by the owners was that they were undervalued, they had little voice, and they were powerless. The data indicates that the owners did not respectfully show a pedagogy of responsive listening, necessary for ethical

meaning-making, either physically or symbolically to parents or teachers (Dahlberg et al., 2013, Ritchie, 2010b).

Neither the children, the parents, nor the teachers had any control over the changes which occurred. This lay solely in the domain of the owners and to a lesser extent the temporary manager. All of the teachers were fully aware of the impact of the decisions being made by the owners – they lived it. However, the findings show that it was difficult for them to redress injustices as it was clear they did not have the power to do so. For Lucy and Violet the actions of the owners were in direct contrast to the tenets of the code of ethics which they were professionally obliged to honour, and which they actively sought to apply in their teaching practice. The *Code of Ethics for Certificated Teachers* (Education Council, 2016b) states that “the professional interactions of teachers are governed by four fundamental principles:

- **Autonomy** to treat people with rights that are to be honoured and defended
- **Justice** to share power and prevent the abuse of power
- **Responsible care** to do good and minimise harm to others
- **Truth** to be honest with others and self. (p. 1)

Ethical stewardship embodies the principles of the code of ethics and a commitment to learners, parents and whānau, society and the profession of teaching (Branson & Gross, 2014). Shields (2014) suggests that principles are at the basis of ethical leadership. Promoting best practice in early childhood education through the centre’s publicity documentation, and disempowering their teachers in practice could be considered neither best practice nor principled. In this instance the owners did not show the ethical stewardship of the *Code of Ethics for Certificated Teachers*.

The toll on teachers as a result of the owners’ decision making and habitually ‘ignoring’ parents and teachers concerns was significant, with Violet physically and emotionally broken, leaving the place she once considered her second home. Shortly after the data generation phase of this study was completed, Lucy, also worn down and disillusioned, left the centre, and teaching. Participation in a for-profit ECE centre is not equally influential when decision-making spaces are closed without consultation or collaboration and power is contained amongst the few in

leadership (Branson, 2007; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Mitchell, 2012; Rau & Ritchie, 2011; Rogoff, 2003). The lack of transparency and sense of responsibility currently fostered within this particular for-profit model does nothing more than fan the flame of unethical practice, inequality and injustice.

### *Summary*

To build a valid picture of how belonging is constructed takes time and requires a view from multiple perspectives. When first spending time at the centre, at the beginning of the data generation phase, my impression was that the centre was great – it was like a caring home (MoE, 1996). It was only through viewing the centre from multiple perspectives, experiencing the lived belonging of the community's participants and witnessing the previously unseen dividers built through the decision making of the owners that I realised 'first impressions aren't always everything'.

The findings have shown that there were many good things happening, with strong, trusting relationships between parents, teachers and children facilitating rich learning experiences and meaning-making for the children. Unfortunately, these relationships and experiences were not consistent throughout the centre which had a negative impact on the children's sense of belonging. Contributing to the pedagogical inconsistency there was no real evidence of anyone in leadership (the owners and the centre manager) implementing any form of stewardship; there was no clear indication of assumed responsibility, the best interests of the children, parents and teachers were not considered and the explicit values evident in decision making were market driven rather than curriculum focused.

The following chapter concludes this thesis.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

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### **Conclusion**

Concluding the research this final chapter is presented in five sections. Firstly, the research questions are briefly addressed together with a summary of the research findings. The potential value of this study is then presented and the limitations are disclosed. The implications of this research for stakeholders in for-profit ECE services, those in positions of ownership and leadership, as well as policy makers are outlined. This chapter concludes with possible areas for future research and a final reflection.

#### ***Summarising the findings***

The original intention of this study was for teachers to focus on belonging within the self-review process, which due to unforeseen circumstances was unable to happen. However, thanks to the generosity of those within the research site this study was able to capture a for-profit centre during a time of uncertainty as it transitioned through leadership restructure. In doing so, I believe this study provides valuable insights into a for-profit ECE model, and captures the challenges which can occur when decisions and structures are not fully aligned to the intentions of *Te Whāriki*. My argument is that it is critically important that we understand the context of for-profit ECE centres, so that we can appreciate ‘what’ we are encouraging children and their families to participate in.

The findings were viewed through the lens of my proposed *belonging framework*, designed to synthesis the data filtered through Rogoff’s three foci of analysis, employed to capture a wider picture of belonging in the for-profit centre. This picture has also drawn attention to the construction of the teachers’ belonging. The critical paradigm applied to this ethnography (Carspecken, 1996) suggests that it is important to avoid privileging one group over another in research, for example, focusing solely on children’s experiences, or parents’ contributions. In doing so it

is possible to ignore other equally relevant groups, such as teachers, who are also impacted by context specific factors, for example, the leaders' decision-making processes. Utilising an ethnographic methodology, intensively over a nine month period, this study observed the setting and examined the perceptions and experiences of 11 stakeholders; including children, parents, and teachers, exploring how belonging was understood and constructed for this cohort in a bid to answer the research questions:

1. What affordances and challenges to belonging are identified by stakeholders participating in a for-profit, ECE centre?
2. How is the ethical stewardship of Te Whāriki reflected in the leadership's decision making?

Analysis of the data led to the understanding that belonging should be viewed from different perspectives. The findings indicate that at the heart of belonging is a collective responsibility for each member of the learning community to favour relationships which are respectful, supportive and reciprocal, which are identified in literature as contributing to a strong sense of belonging (Dalli, et al., 2011; ERO, March 2016; Rogoff, 2003). The affordances identified as strengthening belonging were both philosophical and pedagogical. The challenges to belonging were philosophical and pedagogical in nature but also included structural and operational components. Individual teachers' reflected values which resonated with parents and whānau, such as whakawhanaungatanga, building respectful and responsive relationships, and showing aroha (love) and manaakitanga (kindness and care). However, without a culture supporting belonging for all, and ensuring the values and aims of *Te Whāriki* were understood and reflected within all aspects of the centre, inconsistencies were rife. A summary of the identified affordances to belonging have been grouped into three themes; relationships, empowerment, and pedagogy. The identified challenges to belonging primarily come under the umbrella of 'structural and operational' but includes within this overarching heading, relationships, empowerment and pedagogy themes. For both the affordances and challenges to belonging the themes are overlapping and interconnected:

### *Affordances:*

- **Relationships:** Parents trust the teachers and have warm relationships with them. There is synergy between the parents' and key teachers' aspirations for the children. The children are known by the teachers who understand their strengths and interests. The children feel comfortable and safe with the teachers, and experience coherency between home and the centre, as well as within the centre – they know who their teachers are. The teachers work collaboratively with the parents and together support children's emergent working theories. The teachers are sensitive to the children's cultural identities and actively seek to be respectful and responsive.
- **Empowerment:** Children are loved and viewed as valued participants within the cultural community. Children have agency – they have the power to direct their own learning, choose their level of participation without judgement and voice their opinions. Meaning-making is co-constructed with the children. Parents are included in their children's learning.
- **Pedagogy:** Relationships are prioritised. Teachers have a sound theoretical knowledge and an understanding of ethical practice, which is evident in their teaching practice. There is evidence that *Te Whāriki* is understood and implemented as intended. Teachers' interactions with the children are warm and supportive. Families are welcomed and their values are reflected in the centre. Pedagogies and practice reflect Te Tiriti partnerships, such as collaborating with parents, valuing and reflecting te reo (language) and tikanga (correct ways) Māori. The teachers actively seek to understand and celebrate cultural diversity (evident in aspects of the whanaungatanga planning).

### *Challenges:*

- **Operational and structural:** Parents and whānau are not included in decision making processes by owners and manager. The fee structures exclude consideration for vulnerable families, disrupting ECE participation for children. The top heavy leadership model prioritised profit making agendas over curriculum goals. Unqualified teaching relievers, means there is inconsistent teaching, relationships, interactions, rules and expectations.

Teachers are undervalued and their valid concerns are not listened to. Teachers are placed under unrealistic pressure to fulfil the expectations placed on them by the owners and manager. There are no structures in place to identify poor teaching practice and pedagogies, and if brought to the attention of the owners/manager they are dismissed, rather than addressed. In-training and beginning teachers are not supported, with no provision for mentoring or targeted professional development. Assessment and planning is not valued enough to ensure adequate time is assigned for it. Teachers and parents are not included in decision making processes which directly affects the children's experiences of belonging. The leadership model and teaching pedagogies and practices do not consistently reflect Tiriti partnerships. The children's physical and emotional wellbeing is not prioritised in leadership decision making.

Understanding belonging is complex (Sumsion & Wong, 2011) and requires leaders, who in essence have the potential to hold the balance of power, to fully understand and if necessary challenge the constructions of their values, attitudes and practices and reflect on how they influence the key stakeholders in their community. A salient issue arising from this study, and answering this study's sub-question, is the lack of stewardship in this for-profit ECE centre. The findings suggest that there was no cohesive leadership ensuring stewardship of the parents' aspirations for their children, quality practice and pedagogy, or adherence to the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, underpinning *Te Whāriki*. All of these aspects are subject to review by ERO, as is the expectation for all licensed ECE services receiving government funding, but funding is not linked to stewardship of *Te Whāriki* intentions, Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnerships, or parents' aspirations, for example. This study has identified that the for-profit market approach, as favoured by the centre involved in this study, is not only potentially detrimental to children and families, but also teachers. All groups of peoples participating in a for-profit ECE centre need to be considered and all contributing aspects to belonging require further exploration and critique. Those in leadership need to be committed to the children in their care.

This study has identified that having a for-profit market approach to early childhood education and care, in this instance, has negative implications on the belonging of

children and their families. Without an effective and current knowledge base to draw on, adults working with children in ECE services draw on intuition and personal philosophies, which are not always aligned with curriculum intentions, Te Tiriti principles, and professional ethics and values.

This research project aims to create an awareness of ECE leaders and teachers' power and influence through words, values and actions on the shaping, transmission and transformation of culture and consequently belonging. The challenge is for the ECE sector to ensure ECE is democratic, ethical and accountable. The fall of enrolments would be concerning for all ECE operators, be they for-profit or non-profit services. However, this study was located in an area identified as being lower socio-economic and predominantly accessed by families existing on government benefits. It has highlighted the need for greater governance regarding how for-profit ECE centres serve their communities, how government funding is spent in these centres and how the intentions of the curriculum are upheld.

#### *Potential value of this study*

The focus of this study is particularly relevant as the drive for increased participation in early childhood education increases the participation in for-profit ECE services (Mitchell, 2012). This research topic has significance to early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand as it is an endeavour to engage in debate about belonging in a for-profit ECE service.

The findings of this study, while interesting, are not intended to be generalised. The case study data collection method was necessarily limited and consequently the sample is not representative of all parents and children participating in for-profit ECE services. Nor are the findings fully representative of the children, parents and teachers within this particular centre. However, I was immersed in the setting for over a nine month period, therefore, this study gained unique insights beyond the observed 'first impressions of belonging' which have potential value to ECE teachers, owners, researchers and policy makers in Aotearoa New Zealand.

My research has proposed a framework which explores beyond the façade of belonging, highlighting that parents and teachers have little agency when owners of for-profit centres prioritise agendas which are not in alignment with curriculum

goals. It has revealed some of the politics of belonging (Stratigos, Bradley & Sumsion, 2014; Sumsion & Wong, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2006) which have built boundaries for full participation (Rogoff, 2003). Some of the issues raised in this thesis are consistent with those raised by other researchers, such as the importance of teachers having current theoretical knowledge (Carr & Mitchell, 2010), children having consistent, warm and sensitive relationships with teachers (Dalli et al., 2011; ERO, March 2016; Rogoff, 2003; Stratigos, 2015; White & Mika, 2013), and parents working collaboratively with teachers and leaders (Ritchie & Rau, 2008). I too have identified the need for collaboration with Māori parents ensuring Tiriti partnerships are reflected, and Māori children's rights to te reo and tikanga Māori are consistently realised in pedagogies and practices (ERO, June 2013; Rau & Ritchie, 2011). This study has also contributed to the body of research which calls for 100% qualified teachers (Carr & Mitchell, 2010; Hedges, 2013), appropriate recognition of beginning teachers through the provision of mentoring and professional development (Cameron, 2007; Feiman-Nemser, 2001), and stewardship of curriculum goals, raising the status of ECE in line with other educational sectors.

I also challenge the for-profit ethos, suggesting, along with others (Dahlberg et al., 2013; Moss, 2012) that at its core it is incongruent with the values of democratic and ethical early childhood education. Not including parents and families in decision making processes or responding to the needs of the community contributes to the literature which indicate challenges experienced in for-profit ECE services in fostering a sense of belonging (Harris, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2016). This study has revealed that the cost of participation in a for-profit ECE centre could possibly, for some, be too high; unethical leadership led to the loss of two teachers who displayed quality pedagogies and practice. The belonging framework could, therefore, be equally applied to gain an understanding of the complexity of teachers' belonging to an ECE setting as it could to children and their parents.

While this research project did not include the voice of the centre owners or the centre managers (temporary and new), the impact of the decisions made at that level upon the teachers, parents and children is apparent throughout. This research project therefore seeks to engage owners of for-profit ECE centres, ECE teachers, and policy makers in dialogue and critique regarding what constitutes quality

pedagogy and practice, and, who is *responsible* for ensuring the intentions of *Te Whāriki* are realised, which I believe, is a legitimate response to the obligations and principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi which underpin the ECE curriculum.

### ***Limitations of the research design***

All research needs to be considered in the light of its limitations, which this section now discusses.

This study was confined to one relatively small for-profit ECE centre; therefore, it is not intended to be a reflection of all for-profit ECE services. Those accepting to be participants in this study were guided by circumstance, hence, a clear limitation of this study was firstly, its small number of participants, and secondly, the representation of families included for case study. The parents who chose to participate and generously set aside time for an in-depth interview, were all employed, and, therefore, were not a true reflection of the majority of the service's families who were not in paid employment.

A further limitation of this study was the uneven amount of data generated from each of the case study children. As the children were 'picked up' at various stages of the study they were not always in my radar, meaning key information about how the children's belonging was constructed was probably missed. Ideally, in hindsight, more case study children would have been selected and included earlier in the data generation phase, however, this was not for a lack of trying. One case study child (Grace), due to her age, had limited verbal communication, and one other (Mia) consented to the inclusion of only selected amounts of recorded data. To increase the validity of how I, as researcher, was able to interpret the child's verbal and non-verbal communication in their everyday setting, such as in these examples, a wider pool of possible case study children could have been selected earlier in the study.

A significant implication for further research is the notion of leadership and stewardship, which also highlighted a limitation of this research. When this study began the main focus was on "Pākehā ECE teachers' bicultural understandings of belonging and how the child and their family's sense of belonging can be strengthened in pedagogy", using an action research methodology. This did not

eventuate and I essentially ‘went with the flow’ as data was generated within the constructs of an ethnographic design. Ethically I believe I did the best I could as a novice researcher given the circumstances I was faced with, however, if I had included a focus on leadership at the beginning of the study then more data could have been systematically generated. However, a limitation of this study is that no one in leadership was included in the data generation. Nonetheless, the shift in direction meant that the nuances of the centre’s cultural values within the procedures and practices were able to be explored.

This study has ultimately relied on my interpretation of the data; primarily generated through observation and interviews. Throughout the process I have made a conscious effort to honour the context of the setting by remaining as true to the voices of all the stakeholders as I possibly could, and to build all relationships on a foundation of respect and trust. Measures such as remaining reflexive, repeated member checking, and triangulation of data has helped to mitigate any bias, however, bias can never be fully eliminated within a qualitative study (Newby, 2010). Throughout the nine months at the centre I identified Lucy and Violet’s pedagogies and teaching philosophies as respectfully aligning with *Te Whāriki*, essentially indicating they were for all intents responsible partners of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. However, I was interpreting this data as a Pākehā myself, and a dominant member of Aotearoa New Zealand society, which had its own limitations.

### ***Implications of the research***

The findings of this study have highlighted a number of areas which have implications for children, parents, teachers, leaders, and policy makers, which will now be discussed.

#### *Children*

The findings have indicated that children from low socio-economic backgrounds are at risk of participating in ECE centres which do not reflect indicators of quality teaching and learning. Therefore, their potential learning opportunities and possibilities were at times compromised, as the following explains. The study indicated that children were subjected to inconsistent education and care, exacerbated by the owners’ decision to employ unqualified relievers, who had

inadequate curriculum and theoretical knowledge, and a reduced commitment to building relationships with the children. Permanently employed qualified teachers would significantly lessen this possibility. While the children chosen for case study were over the age of two years, the data showed that the children under the age of two experienced care inconsistent with current literature which indicates the critical need for infants and toddlers to receive dependable warm relationships (Dalli & Kibble, 2010; Dalli et al., 2011).

Two of the over two teachers, Lucy and Violet, consistently advocated for these children, bringing to the centre manager and the owners' attention that, in their opinion, the practice and pedagogy of some of the teachers was detrimental to the children's wellbeing. Their views were repeatedly ignored. There is a need for owners and leaders to be held to greater account (Branson, 2010), as the long term effects of infants and toddlers being left to cry, spoken to harshly, and ignored for significant periods of the day are damaging (Dalli et al., 2011). Referring to Rogoff's (2003) concept of *guided participation*, children learn how to engage and interact through face-to-face as well as distal relationships. Therefore, exposure to interactions which are negative and/or culturally inappropriate, whether immediately experienced or distally observed, have implications regarding how children develop their emotional and relational frame of reference. The condition of these relationships is influential on the child's sense of belonging and their wellbeing. Examining the composition of relationships within this early childhood context determined that when teachers reflected high quality interpersonal interactions, such as listening and responding with intent, children's agency and meaning making was realised, and their trust in others was built. When these qualities were not present children experienced emotional disconnection and displacement.

### *Parents*

Infants, toddlers, and young children are not in a position to choose or make strategic decisions about their early childhood education, yet they are the recipients of many systemic failures. Parental opportunities to choose quality ECE for their children can be reduced due to socio-economic, ethnic, and agency factors (Mitchell, et al., 2016). The findings indicate that the parents were not fully aware

of the concerns raised by the teachers, such as the lack of structural supports necessary for them to ‘teach’ effectively, the pedagogical and philosophical clashes the children were exposed to, inadequate time to support, plan for and assess children’s learning. Therefore, the parents were not able to make ‘informed’ decisions regarding their children’s education and well-being.

Communication with parents needs to be transparent and respectful (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dali, et al., 2011; Mitchell, et al., 2016; Rogoff, 2003). When decisions are made which directly affect the children (changes in leadership structure), parents must be included in the decision making process, or informed regarding how the centre will manage significant transitions, such as key people in the lives of the children leaving. When there are limited or no avenues for parents to express concerns, the aspirations they have for their children, or the family/cultural values they want reflected in the centre, this important aspect is left to chance. This is unethical, and for Māori families, unacceptable under the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

### *Teachers*

The un-qualified relieving teachers and to a lesser degree, the in-training teacher, did not have a sound understanding of sociocultural theoretical knowledge. This impacted significantly on how they contributed to planning and assessment, and how they interpreted their qualified colleagues’ pedagogical choices. The term ‘teacher’ in ECE is too ambiguous and potentially undermines those who hold a relevant qualification and teacher registration. The for-profit ECE centre this research was conducted in comprised unqualified relieving teachers and permanently employed in-training and fully qualified ‘teachers’. This legitimised combination of the term ‘teachers’ blurred professional lines, with any authority a qualified teacher had to improve the educational provision within the setting often misunderstood within the ‘teaching team’.

Without sound theoretical knowledge, contributions to planning and assessment fell primarily on the shoulders of the qualified teachers. In reality the status of the qualified teachers within the setting was variable. On one hand the qualified teachers were considered highly valuable to the owners, ensuring maximum funding was achieved, and parents were appeased (evidenced in the schedule for

parent/teacher interviews). On the other hand, the owners did not include the qualified teachers in any decision making or demonstrate that they valued their theoretical and curriculum expertise and pedagogical leadership within the setting. The qualified teachers were not positioned by the owners any differently than the adults ‘teaching’ without relevant qualifications. Therefore, their value as a qualified teacher was linked to funding rather than curriculum ideals.

A further issue raised by this study, relating to a teaching team with mixed qualifications, is that the ‘teachers’ do not share the same understanding of, and ethical commitment to, effective teaching practices. All ‘teachers’ were expected to contribute to planning and assessment and were expected to collaborate together, with ostensibly equal opportunity to voice their opinions. Cooper (2014) points to literature which suggests that if all voices have the opportunity to be heard, differences can be discussed and negotiated, and consensus can be reached. I argue that this is not fully possible within a teaching team with mixed qualifications without ‘negotiated meaning’ compromising the tenets underpinning the curriculum, reducing effective learning outcomes for children.

Targeted professional development is identified in literature as a “critical lever” (MoE, 2015c, p. 28) for raising teaching practice and learning outcomes for children. Professional development linked specifically to the needs of the setting is required for all adults working with children in for-profit ECE centres; qualified teachers, and others. The study revealed that professional development opportunities were chosen by the centre owners focusing on marketable topics, such as ways to fast-track literacy proficiency, rather than meeting the identified needs of the children, or aligning with strengthening an understanding of intentions of *Te Whāriki*. In order for a consistent and sufficient level of understanding and for professional development to be effective it needs to be meaningful to the teachers.

While union membership is voluntary the findings indicate that there is a need for a professional advocacy group for teachers. It is currently too difficult for teachers to navigate their way through ethically difficult situations in for-profit ECE services, as ultimately any dispute resolution is achieved between themselves and the owners. The *belonging framework* indicates that in some cases resolution is not possible as there can be a power imbalance, with the owners, or leaders, overriding

teachers' concerns and setting the parameters for how the teachers are able to operate. As advocates for children, teachers need an avenue where they can safely, and with confidence, get support to work through ethical concerns when those in leadership are not prepared to address them. Teachers in for-profit settings also require greater advocacy themselves.

### *Leaders*

There is a need for ethical leadership in ECE (Bush, 2012), and ownership of for-profit ECE centres should be viewed by both the government and service owners as not just 'providers of ECE service' but an ethical endeavour. This study has shown that a number of the owners' decisions can be considered unethical, such as ignoring teachers' requests and concerns, deliberately leaving parents out of any decision making processes, removing team leaders, and putting profit before people. Without anyone specifically focusing on accountability or stewardship of the values, aspirations and goals embedded within *Te Whāriki* unethical practice went unchallenged by anyone with authority to make a difference. The involvement of parents needs to be normalised by ECE centre owners/leaders, as they are the guardians of their children's educational aspirations (Dalli & Thornton, 2013; MoE, 2015a, 2015b). When parental involvement and relational agency are not cultural practices within a for-profit ECE centre the implications are significant regarding how an effective, collaborative and power-shared community of practice can be built. Without collaboration with parents and whānau there is no alignment between the intentions of *Te Whāriki*, the aspirations of the children and their families, and the centre's organisational and structural strategies.

The owners of for-profit ECE centres have a duty of care to ensure teachers are not placed in overwhelmingly stressful situations, such as experienced by this study's participants. The implication is that the sector will lose valued, experienced and qualified teachers (Cameron, 2007; Sumsion, 2002; Sumsion, 2006). A further implication is that the physical and emotional wellbeing of these teachers will be significantly compromised. The study showed that leaders also need to ensure their teachers receive appropriate mentoring, so that the vision and values of *Te Whāriki* are supported, and in-training teachers are appropriately positioned as apprentices, receiving the necessary support and guidance, and expectation their status calls for.

## *Policy*

The Government needs to explore the implications of its national focus to increase participation in ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand. The focus needs to shift to what these children are belonging ‘in’.

Early childhood and education services which locate themselves in low socio-economic areas should demonstrate that their fee structures will appropriately serve the families within their community, ensuring consistent and continued participation for all. Government funding for these centres should ensure funding reaches the children it is intended for and there should be a requirement that ECE centres in low socio-economic area are staffed by 100% qualified and registered teachers, which will support in high quality services (Carr & Mitchell, 2010; May & Mitchell, 2009). As a democratic society it is a matter of social responsibility and justice and of ethical and equitable importance that children from families who have reduced economic status, social power and choice, receive consistent high quality education and care. A child should not be viewed as a statistic – the fact that they are counted as participating in ECE should not be viewed as an end in itself. What they are participating in is of equal importance and should not be left to chance.

*Te Whāriki* defines adults working with children as “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” (MoE, 1996, p. 99). I argue that this is misleading, and the title ‘teacher’ should not be used to “represent all adults in educative roles” (Hedges, 2013, p. 280). The title of teacher should be reserved for adults who have undertaken an appropriate qualification in ECE teaching, received quality guidance and supervision through the process of teacher registration, adhere to the code of ethics (Education Council, 2016b), and demonstrate responsibility for the learning environment and learning outcomes within it.

### *Areas for future research*

The findings of this study have highlighted areas for future research, which are now briefly outlined.

- This research study has highlighted an ethical need for further research regarding for-profit ECE centres. With the majority of children participating in early childhood education reflecting a market approach there is a need for research which explores how these services are constructed and how public funding is spent.
- Further research is required into how leaders and teachers can be respectful partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi in pedagogy and practice. *Te Whāriki* honours this partnership and reflects it “in text and structure” (MoE, 1996, p. 9). However, there is a significant gap between the intended and enacted curriculum, and nationally it is not being understood and applied well as a bicultural document (ERO, 2013a).
- The relationship between ethical leadership and stewardship in for-profit ECE centres is a further area which would benefit from focused, context specific, research.

### *In summary*

My research has recognised that belonging is more than membership. The current call by the Ministry of Education is for increased participation in ECE for all children in Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly those from groups such as Māori, Pasifika and children from low socio-economic families. With the majority of Māori children participating in for-profit ECE settings, taught by teachers of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, this requires ECE leaders and teachers to have a responsibility to understand what it means to be tangata tiriti – people of the treaty. Children live within the context of the relationships available to them and it is our responsibility to ensure their ECE relationships with “people, places and things” (MoE, 1996, p. 14) are ethically and culturally safe and secure. With children spending long hours in for-profit ECE services the way they make sense of the

world, and how they identify their place within it, is being influenced by what is being immediately experienced and distally observed within this sociocultural context. This cannot be left to chance. This study has also shown that teachers' belonging experiences must be taken into consideration as they are a key component in how the children's belonging experiences are framed.

This research project has endeavoured to examine some of the whāriki's individual threads of belonging within a for-profit ECE centre with the hope that it would generate a response of renewed responsibility and commitment, ensuring high quality experiences for all of Aotearoa New Zealand's infants, toddlers and young children, especially for those whose voices are less audible. In order for this to happen there has to be an embedded culture of belonging, a prioritising of all components contributing to strengthening wellbeing, identity, and belonging for all stakeholders. Therefore, I argue that the call for increased participation in ECE should sit alongside an exploration of what it means to belong in the ECE services the majority of children will be called to participate in. Sumsion (2006) suggests that for-profit ECE services, especially those upholding a corporate model, would benefit from having their services assessed within an ethical audit framework. I fully agree; "the system must fit the [child] rather than the [child] fitting the system". (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 29).



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## Appendices

### *Appendix A: Information Sheet for Teachers*

This letter is to ask you if you would be interested in participating in a research project I am undertaking for my Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) thesis. My thesis supervisors are; Associate Professor Beverley Bell, her contact details are; email beebell@waikato.ac.nz, ph: 838 4466 ext. 4101, and Associate Professor Linda Mitchell, her contact details are; email lindamit@waikato.ac.nz, ph: 838 4466, ext. 7734.

**What is this study about?** This research aims to explore Pākehā ECE teachers' bicultural understandings of belonging and how the child and their family's sense of belonging can be strengthened in pedagogy. Barbara Rogoff (2003) suggests that culture is constantly changing through participation and I am interested in what happens to the child's sense of belonging, and that of their family, when they participate in early childhood education. My research project aims to examine what happens when ECE teachers start looking closely at the child and their family's sense of belonging and begin to explore ways to strengthen it.

**What is involved?** The research will take place over a period of 3 months. It will involve:

- 1) **Action research;** which will be conducted in the Centre at part of your annual self-review expectations. It will look at ways teachers can strengthen the child and their family's sense of belonging and involve teachers' participation and critical reflection on their practice.
- 2) **Workshops:** There will be three workshops throughout the research study. They will occur at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the research. During the workshops relevant theory and literature will be looked at and teachers will have the opportunity to look at their practice and understandings against it. The initial workshop will also outline the action research process and explain how my PhD research sits alongside of it. It is envisaged that the workshops will occur during your fortnightly team meetings.
- 3) **Interviews:** Teachers who choose to participate in my PhD research will be invited to participate in 2 interviews. The interviews will take up to one hour to complete and will be organised at a time and place which is suitable to the participants. The interviews will be audio-recorded. The participant has the right to request that the audio-recorder be turned off at any time. The participant has the right to decline any question in the interview. The recorded interview will be transcribed and returned to the participant to read, check and approve the content.
- 4) **Video recordings:** During the initial stages of the research I will video-record interactions between teacher/participants and case study participants (4 children/whānau will be selected). Four mornings will be allocated for video recording – one per case study child/whānau. One interaction (up to 5 minutes in duration) will be selected for each teacher/participant to view and co-construct meaning; exploring how they are/could strengthen the child and their whānau's sense of belonging in the

ECE setting. The co-construction will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The teacher/participant has the right to ask for the audio-recorder to be turned off at any time. The transcript will be returned to the teacher/participant for reading and approving. Teacher/participants can choose for this data to be used solely for the purposes of my PhD research or share it with the wider teaching team for wider co-construction, where the data will be also used for the Centre's action research.

**5) What will happen to teachers' information?** The information received will form the data for my PhD thesis. Some quotations may be used within the thesis. Be assured that every effort will be made to ensure no-one will be able to identify any teacher in any of this material. A pseudonym (another name) will be used when referring to any data contributed by any teacher. At the end of the study the audio-recordings, video-recordings and written documentation will be securely kept in a box at my home, for a period of at least five years and then be destroyed. An electronic copy of the thesis will become widely available, as Doctoral theses are required to be lodged in the Australasian Digital Thesis (ADT) database. Information resulting from this research may be used in presentations and publications. Video recordings or photos will **not** be placed on the Internet (World Wide Web) and may only be used for teaching purposes and/or in any academic presentations or publications which may result from this research and only with the consent of the teacher/participant, and the consent of every person whose image and voice is captured in the video recording.

**6) What can teachers expect from the researcher?** If teachers decide to participate in this project, the researcher will respect their right to:

- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- decline to discuss any particular issue brought up in the interview;
- withdraw from the study up until they have read and approved their transcripts;
- provide information on the understanding that their name will not be used;
- ask for the audio-tape to be turned off at any time during the interview;
- have a hard copy of the transcript, which they can amend or change; and
- ensure anonymity will be maintained in any reports or publications.

Regards,

Lynley Westerbeke

## *Appendix B: Consent form for Teachers*

I have read the information Sheet and I understand what I am agreeing to as a participant.

- I consent that data contributed by me, pertaining to the action research and workshops, can be used for this PhD research study.
- I consent to participating in one-to-one interviews.
- I understand that I have the right to decline any particular question in the interview.

I consent to the interview discussions being audio recorded and transcribed and I understand that I have the ability to amend or change anything in the transcript.

I understand that my confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and that any information I share will only be used for the purpose of the named research study and any presentations or publications that may result from this research.

I consent to having aspects of my teaching practice, which focuses primarily on the child and their whānau's sense of belonging, to be video-recorded and co-constructed for meaning. My co-construction will be audio recorded and transcribed. I understand that I have the ability to amend or change anything in the transcript of the videotape critique.

I consent to video recordings which have been used for the purpose of the named research study, which identify me, to be used for teaching purposes and/or in any academic presentations or publications that may result from this research.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from my participation in the research up until I have approved and returned my transcripts. If I choose to withdraw from the research study before these points I will contact the researcher.

Signed:

\_\_\_\_\_

Name (please print):

\_\_\_\_\_

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

My preferred pseudonym (another name) is: \_\_\_\_\_



*Appendix C: Introductory/information letter to case study  
parents/whānau*

Tena koe \_\_\_\_\_

This letter is to ask you if you would be interested in participating in a research project I am undertaking for my Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) thesis. My thesis supervisors are; Associate Professor Beverley Bell, her contact details are; email [beebell@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:beebell@waikato.ac.nz), ph: 838 4466 ext. 4101, and Associate Professor Linda Mitchell, her contact details are; email [lindamit@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:lindamit@waikato.ac.nz), ph: 838 4466, ext. 7734.

My research will take place over a period of 3 months and will be exploring ECE teachers' understanding of 'belonging' and how the child and family's sense of belonging can be strengthened in teaching practice. My research project aims to examine what happens when ECE teachers start looking closely at the child and their family's sense of belonging and begin to explore ways to strengthen it. I am inviting your child and family to take part in a case study.

This would involve looking closely at your child's portfolio, which contains accounts of your child's learning and experiences while at the centre; videoing moments throughout one half day when your child is interacting with their teachers, or when you are interacting with your child's teachers (specifically focusing on belonging); and having an interview with me about your child and your family, at the beginning of the research project. If you consent to an interview you would have the right to decline to answer any of the interview questions. If you consent to be interviewed you are also welcome to bring with you family/whānau members as support.

The interview will be audio taped and transcribed and I will send you a copy of the transcript to read and change or amend as you wish. For the purpose of my PhD research study, your confidentiality will be maintained and any information you share will only be used for this research or any future presentations or publications which may result from this research. With your consent the key points from the interview will be fed into the Centre's action research providing the teachers with information which will support their review on their teaching practice and programme planning. I would like to conduct the interview between November and December 2012 at a time that is convenient to you. The interview will take approximately one hour to complete. Video recordings and photos will **not** be placed on the Internet (World Wide Web) and may only be used for teaching purposes and/or in any presentations or publications which may result from this research. Video recordings will only be used with the consent of the participants, and the consent of every person whose image and voice is captured in the video recording.

The project will adhere to the University's ethical guidelines for research, which ensure confidentiality and voluntary participation. If you agree to participate I will ask you to sign a consent form which outlines the conditions of participation and my responsibilities as well.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this, I appreciate your time is valuable. Please feel free to contact me at home (.....) or by email (.....).

Regards,

Lynley Westerbeke

***Appendix D: Consent form for case studies – parent/whānau interviews***

I have read the information Sheet and I understand what I am agreeing to as a participant.

I understand that my confidentiality will be maintained and that any information I share will only be used for the purpose of the named research study and any presentations or publications that may result from this research.

I understand that I have the right to decline any particular question in the interview.

I understand that I have the right to bring family/whānau members with me to the interview as support.

I consent to the interview discussions being audio recorded and transcribed and I understand that I have the ability to amend or change anything in the transcript.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from my participation in the research up until I have approved and returned my transcripts. If I choose to withdraw from the research study before these points I will contact the researcher.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

My preferred pseudonym (another name) is: \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher contact details:**

Lynley Westerbeke

**Research Supervisors contact details:**

Associate Professor Beverley Bell  
Ph: (07) 838 4466 (ext. 4101)  
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Associate Professor Linda Mitchell  
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Professional Studies in Education  
Faculty of Education  
University of Waikato  
Private Bag 3015  
HAMILTON 3240

***Appendix E: Consent form - All children at the centre, including the case study children***

**Permission from parents/legal guardians to use interviews, observations, video and audio-tapes, photos and children’s work.**

Over the coming 3 months I will be investigating how the child and family’s sense of belonging can be strengthened in teaching practice. The research I will be conducting in the Centre is for my Doctor of Philosophy degree (PhD).

During the course of the research project, I may collect observations, photographs, examples of work, audio and video recordings which show children participating, and interacting, in the day-to-day programme during their time at ..... Video recordings and photos will **not** be placed on the Internet (World Wide Web) and may only be used for the purpose of teaching or presentations and/or publications which may result for this research study. I would like your permission to use items collected about your child in the research project.

**Child’s full name:**

\_\_\_\_\_

(First name) (Last name)

**I give permission for:**

<b>PLEASE CIRCLE Yes or No</b>	<b>To be collected and analysed for this project</b>	<b>To be used in academic presentations and publications</b>
Observations of my child	Yes/No	Yes/No
Interviews of my child	Yes/No	Yes/No
Documentation of my child	Yes/No	Yes/No
Photos of my child	Yes/No	Yes/No
Audio recordings of my child	Yes/No	Yes/No
Video recordings of my child	Yes/No	Yes/No

Tick this box if you would prefer to give permission for each and every individual item chosen

→

The confidentiality of your child and family will be maintained for the purpose of the named research and any presentations or publications that may result from this research.

Please suggest a pseudonym (another name) for your child: \_\_\_\_\_

**I understand that at any time I can say no to the further collections of observations or work for the project**

PARENT/CAREGIVER'S FULL NAME:

\_\_\_\_\_

(Please print)

\_\_\_\_\_

(First name)

\_\_\_\_\_

(Last name)

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher contact details:**

Lynley Westerbeke

**Research Supervisors contact details:**

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## ***Appendix F: Guidelines for Teachers' Interviews (baseline)***

### **Current Understandings of belonging**

#### **Knowing:**

- What words/values come to mind when you think of belonging?
- What is your current understanding of belonging?
  - How did you come to this understanding?
- Can you recall any examples of times when you have consciously thought about a child's sense of belonging?
  - If so, can you describe them?

#### **Being (pedagogy):**

Te Whāriki states that children and their families feel a sense of belonging when “they experience an environment where “they know they have a place” (MoE, p.15).

- What does this statement mean to you?
  - What would it look like in your teaching practice?  
Are there things that you currently do so that children and their whanau “know they have a place” in this learning environment?
- How do you perceive belonging in a child?
  - What does that look like in your teaching practice/relationships?
- What is your current understanding about the role of the teacher concerning the child's sense of belonging?
  - Why do you feel this way?
- What things do you think can strengthen belonging?
  - Can you recall any examples when you have consciously done this?
  - If so, can you describe it?
  - What do you think were the implications of this decision/action for the child/learning community?

#### **Relationships:**

Te Whāriki states that children and their families feel a sense of belonging when “they experience an environment where connecting links with the family and the wider world are affirmed and extended” (MoE, p. 15).

- What does this statement mean to you?
  - Do you have opportunities to make those connecting links with the child's family, and/or their wider world?
  - If so, can you describe them?
- How would you describe your relationships with the children within the centre?

- What are the most important aspects about your relationships with the children?
- How would you describe your relationships with the children's parents/whānau?
  - What are the most important aspects about your relationships with the children's parents/whānau?
  - What opportunities do you have in your day to talk with parents/whānau?
  - How would you describe your interactions with parents/whānau?
- How do/don't you see parents/whānau perceiving and communicating their child's sense of belonging?
  - Does this influence the way you view, or interact with, the child/parents/whānau?
  - If yes, in what ways?
- Do you ever see that your own values and beliefs are different to your teaching colleagues?
  - Could you give some examples?
  - Do you have opportunities to discuss these differences?
  - How does this affect your interactions/teaching practice/decision making?
- Do you ever see that your own values/beliefs are different to the parents/whānau in the centre?
  - Could you give some examples?
  - How does this affect the way you interact/communicate with the parents/whānau or their child?

Learning Story:

The teacher/participants will be invited to select one piece of documentation (last 6 months) from the child's portfolio for co-construction and analysis. They will be asked to select one which they feel best reflects the identification of the child's sense of belonging and bring it to the teacher/researcher interview.

Guiding questions:

- Why do you feel this learning story best identifies the child's sense of belonging?
- Do you think there is anything you could do which would strengthen this child's sense of belonging further?

## ***Appendix G: Guidelines for case study parent/whānau interviews***

- Tell me about your child...
- What is your child like at home?  
*Parents/whānau will be given the opportunity to view their child's portfolio (last six months)*
- When you look at your child's portfolio, is this the child that you see at home?
  - If yes, what has been captured that reminds you of your child at home?
  - If not, what is different?
  - What characteristics of your child would you like to see in their portfolio/learning stories?
- What do you see as important in your child's life?
- What experiences does your child enjoy at home?
- What are important values or beliefs which are held within your family?
  - Do you see these demonstrated within the centre?
  - If yes, could you give some examples?
  - Do you have any suggestions about anything this centre could do more of or do differently to demonstrate your family values/beliefs better?
- Do you see aspects of your cultural heritage within the centre?
  - If yes, could you give some examples?
  - How does this make you feel?
  - If not, what difference do you think it would make if they were evident?
  - Do you have any suggestions about anything this centre could do more of or do differently to acknowledge your cultural heritage better?
- What do you want for your child's education?
  - How do you think an ECE centre might best support these aspirations?
  - Do you have any suggestions about anything this centre could do more of or do differently to support your aspirations better?
- Have you ever thought about your child and your family's sense of belonging here in the Centre?
- If you have thought about your child and your family's sense of belonging here in the Centre, what does this mean to you?

- Do you have any suggestions about anything this Centre could do more of or do differently to support or strengthen your child or your family's sense of belonging?

## *Appendix H: Guidelines for Teachers' Interviews (2nd)*

### Current Understandings of belonging

Knowing:

- What is your current understanding of belonging?
  - Has your opinion changed since the beginning of the action research?
  - If so, why do you think that is?
  - What was the most significant thing you read saw or heard which made the difference?
- Can you recall any examples of times when you have consciously thought about a child and/or their whānau's sense of belonging?
  - If so, can you describe them?
  - Has your opinion changed since the beginning of the action research?
  - If so, why do you think that is?

### Being (pedagogy):

Te Whāriki states that children and their families feel a sense of belonging when “they experience an environment where connecting links with the family and the wider world are affirmed and extended” (MoE, p. 15).

- What does this statement now mean to you?
  - What opportunities do you have to make those connecting links with the child's family, and/or their wider world?
  - If so, can you describe them?
  - Has your understanding changed since the beginning of the action research?
  - If so, why do you think that is?
- How do you now perceive belonging in a child?
  - What does that look like in your teaching practice?
  - What does this look like in your teaching relationships?
  - Has your opinion changed since the beginning of the action research?
  - If so, why do you think that is?
- What is your current understanding about the role of the teacher concerning the child and/or their whānau's sense of belonging?
  - Why do you feel this way?
  - Has your opinion changed since the beginning of the action research?
  - If so, why do you think that is?
- What things do you think can strengthen belonging?
  - Can you recall any recent examples when you have consciously done this?
  - If so, can you describe it/them?
  - What do you think were the implications of this decision/action for the child/learning community?
  - Has your opinion changed since the beginning of the action research?
  - If so, why do you think that is?

### Relationships:

- How would you describe your current relationships with the children within the centre?
  - What are the most important aspects about your relationships with the children?
  - Has your opinion changed since the beginning of the action research?
  - If so, why do you think that is?
- How would you describe your current relationships with the children's parents/whānau?
  - What are the most important aspects about your relationships with the children's parents/families?
  - Has your opinion changed since the beginning of the action research?
  - If so, why do you think that is?

- How would you describe your interactions with parents/whānau?
  - Has your opinion changed since the beginning of the action research?
  - If so, why do you think that is?
- How do/don't you see parents perceiving and communicating their child's sense of belonging?
  - Does this influence the way you view, or interact with, the child/parents/whānau?
  - If yes, in what ways?
  - Has your opinion changed since the beginning of the action research?
  - If so, why do you think that is?
- The action research has given you opportunities to discuss your own values and beliefs with your teaching colleagues?
  - How has this affected your interactions/teaching practice/decision making?
  - Could you give some examples?
- The action research has given you opportunities to see that your own values/beliefs may be different to the parents/whānau in the centre?
  - Has this affected way you interact/communicate with the parents/whānau or their child?
  - Could you give some examples?

Learning Story:

The teacher/participants will be invited to select one recent piece of documentation from the child's portfolio for co-construction and analysis. They will be asked to select one which best reflects the identification of the child and/or their whānau's sense of belonging and bring it to the teacher/researcher interview.

Guiding questions:

- Why do you feel this learning story best identifies the child and/or their whānau's sense of belonging?
- Do you think there is anything you could do which would strengthen this child and/or their whānau's sense of belonging further?
- What, if anything, has changed for you since the beginning of this action research regarding the strengthening of a child and/or their whānau's sense of belonging?

**Appendix I: Statistical data - teachers**

(to be completed at the beginning of the interview)

**About you**

Please indicate which ethnic group/s you identify with?

\_\_\_\_\_

What teaching qualifications do you have? *(please specify all):*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been teaching?

\_\_\_\_\_

Are you in training for an ECE teaching qualification? *(please circle one)* Yes/No

If so, for what qualification?

\_\_\_\_\_

When can you expect to complete your qualification?

\_\_\_\_\_

Are you a fully registered teacher? *(please circle one)* Yes/No

Are you a provisionally registered teacher? *(please circle one)* Yes/No

If yes, when can you expect to be fully registered?

\_\_\_\_\_

What teaching position do you currently hold?

\_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been teaching at .....?

\_\_\_\_\_

*Appendix J: Statistical data – case study parents*

(to be completed at the beginning of the interview)

Please indicate which ethnic group/s you identify with?

---

What ethnic group does your child identify with?

---

How many children do you have that **have previously** attended this ECE Centre?

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How many children do you have that **currently** attend this ECE Centre?

---

What are the ages of your children who are **currently** attending this ECE Centre?

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*Appendix K: Introduction letter to parents/families at*

.....

Tena koe,

My name is Lynley Westerbeke and I am a Doctoral student at Waikato University. I will be conducting research within the Centre over the coming 3 months for my PhD. I have gained permission from ....., the owner of ....., and ....., the Centre Manager, for the Centre to be involved in my research study.

My research is looking at Pākehā ECE teachers' bicultural understandings of 'belonging' and how the child and their family's sense of belonging can be strengthened in teaching practice.

There will a parent/whānau information evening sometime during the next month. During the evening I will share with everyone my research and the research which will be happening in the Centre. There will be an opportunity to share with the teachers and myself your thoughts about the research and answer some questions, if you would like to. The day and time of the parent/whānau evening will be arranged with ..... and everyone will be notified 2 weeks before it happens.

During the research I will be involved in gathering information which will help me to answer my research questions. This will involve observations of the children, videoing 4 case study children/families, as they interact with teachers and audio-recording conversations between teachers and children. I have attached a permission form to fill out so that you can let me know whether you want your child involved in any part of my research. It is O.K. if you choose not to have your child involved in my research. I respect your decision and will ensure that this will not happen.

I will be available to talk to parents/families over the coming week if you have any questions. Please return the completed consent form to the Centre Manager, .....

I look forward you meeting you all and being involved in the Centre over the coming 3 months.

Yours sincerely

Lynley Westerbeke