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**HETERONORMATIVITY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION: SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SOME PUZZLING
QUERIES**

A thesis
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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigated the discursive production of heteronormativity in the historical and present day contexts of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. A Foucauldian genealogical investigation of early childhood policy and documents revealed how heteronormative discourses shaped understandings in early childhood education in the twentieth century. Then a study of practices as accounted for and produced in focus group interviews showed how heteronormative discourses were confirmed and resisted in the present day.

The thesis argues that the locus of heteronormativity in early childhood education centres on constructions of the family, of genders and of sexualities. It sought to investigate whether heteronormative discourses were shaping practices in early childhood education, and if so how. Following the writing of a genealogy of heteronormativity in early childhood education, the fieldwork of the study entailed three rounds of focus group interviews with queer teacher, queer ally and teacher educator participants. Discussions in the interviews were provoked by dilemmas of heterosexism, homophobia and heteronormativity in early childhood settings. Participants were asked to talk about what they thought was occurring in the dilemmas and they were also asked to share examples of practices from their own professional lives where same-sex sexualities had been troubled or affirmed.

The texts produced from the focus group interviews were read the same way as the historical and policy and documents. Foucault's discourse analysis combined with questions from Davies' (1994) study of teaching practices, and queer theory provided a theoretical framework through which I was able to explore relations between constructions of genders, families, and sexualities; concepts of insiders and outsiders; and notions of power. A queer turn in the project enlarged the focus of the study to investigate how heteronormative discourse might have been shaping the research interviews too. A discourse of silence along with a discourse of risk was interpreted as contributing to heteronormativity in this work. A strategy designed to assist teachers to interrupt heteronormativity was explored. It

allowed teachers to bring together ideas and concepts that would constitute families and parents in ways inclusive of and broader to the (hetero)norm.

In the study, teachers, children and parents were shown to draw on (hetero)normalising discourses in their interactions with each other in early childhood education. Such activity limited opportunities for valid alternative options to heterosexuality to be known. This meant that heterosexuality was repeatedly constituted as dominant and normative, thus supporting heteronormativity. Constructions of genders, families and sexualities in the study were regularly shaped by traditional and essentialising discourses that positioned heterosexual sexuality as normal and non-heterosexual sexualities as not. These in combination with other discourses, such as a discourse of developmentalism, provided few opportunities for non-heterosexual sexualities to be recognised, valued and included in early childhood education. The extent to which socially just and inclusive policy aims in early childhood education might therefore be met in practice, could be seriously questioned.

However, examples of practices that worked to expand opportunities for the recognition of diverse families and sexualities in early childhood education were also documented. These provided evidence that some teachers, parents and children in some circumstances can and do access and use discourses of social justice, family and sexual diversity, inclusion and human rights. Sustained access to these was not documented, in fact, discourses of social justice, family and sexual diversity, and inclusion were often immediately countered by limiting and (hetero)normalising responses. The thesis concludes with suggestions as to how such processes might be explored and challenged so that more teachers, more children, more families can enjoy recognition and welcome in early childhood education settings designed to include.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to those we have yet to recognise.

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

This project explores the effects of heteronormative discourses in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Heteronormativity brings together meanings, metaphors, representations, images and so on that produce heterosexuality and the heterosexual as dominant and normative, while at the same time producing *pathological* or *deviant others*, for example, queers and homosexuals. Where heteronormativity exists, heterosexuality is institutionalised and viewed as the standard for legitimate close interpersonal relations (Ingraham, 1994). I wondered if heteronormativity shaped practices in New Zealand early childhood centres and set out to research this idea. Of interest to me was what heteronormativity might mean for the inclusion of diverse families in early childhood education. Further, what it might mean for the creation of climates for teaching and learning where all children might experience environments where they are supported to:

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

Since its formal introduction in 1996, the curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996b), from which the above aspiration for children is drawn, has become an organising construct central to the policy, theory and practice contexts of early childhood education and care in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Te Whāriki* was not mandatory when it was introduced. However, its implementation was later assured by the implementation of a framework for evaluating and chartering early childhood services (Ministry of Education, 1996a) that mapped directly onto the curriculum's principles, strands and goals. At the time of writing (December, 2007) the New Zealand Government is engaged in a review process that will see the curriculum more directly included in a revamped regulatory framework for early childhood education. This mandating of the curriculum provides clear intent towards the provision of early childhood education services that are socially just.

To me this says teachers have clear license to work at implementing practices in early childhood education that are designed to include.

Incitements to research heteronormative discourse

Why research heteronormative discourse and early childhood education? I have gathered impetus from several places. First my personal and professional histories have guided me towards this project. As a child in the 1970s and 1980s I lived around several of the large institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand providing care to those classified as psychiatrically ill, in which my parents worked, and later I too was employed. I found myself never quite fitting into my surrounds, either inside or outside of the hospital gates. In this context, I learned a great deal about humanity, medicine, hope, loss, normality and discrimination. Never able to successfully broker inclusion and understanding between worlds, they collided every time I arrived or left the confines of whichever institution my family were affiliated with. I became aware of and sensitive to exclusion, confinement and injustice; these are things I have engaged with since. So, when as a teacher, I think about those messages in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996b) and in other early childhood education policies and documents (for example, Ministry of Education, 1996a, 1998, 2002, 2006) that stipulate all children and their families are included in education and care settings, I wonder how, and if in fact they are. And in the context of this project I wonder in particular about children in families like the one my partner and I have created, where same-sex parents feature, and whether our families are supported to become full members of our early childhood communities. Achieving justice in this regard provides significant impetus for the work.

My adult family life as a non-heterosexual woman, partnered and with children provides a second incentive for this project. The experiences my family and I have shared as the children have grown have often connected my professional frustrations about dominant discourses and normative practices firmly with the personal. Reminded of how unfair I felt the disabling institutions of my childhood to be, I have found myself and my family over the last decade and a half living somehow similarly: othered to a dominant norm. We live in part outside of the

norms of heterosexuality, or as I name it, the (hetero)norm; or we are incorrectly assumed to be part of it. From this place I have watched with disquiet, along with my partner, as our children's life experiences as members of a lesbian-led household have been more often than not rendered systematically invisible by the practices and norms of their early childhood, primary and secondary education settings. They have been regularly *closeted* through the assumptions of heteronormative discourse, particularly those related to family structure and parenting. The notion of *the closet* or of *being closeted*, or of *closeting*, denotes a performance initiated by silence (Sedgwick, 1990) which leads to a withholding of information about one's non heterosexual sexuality. It can also indicate resistance towards acknowledging as legitimate, forms of sexuality different to heterosexuality. An assumption of heterosexuality, or allowing oneself to *pass* would be considered examples of the closet in action. I recall a discussion with Miss 8-years-old on return from school one day. I cite this as exemplary of the exclusions and closets that she and her brother have faced:

For homework we have to get our mothers' and fathers' different ideas about what would be good for the new school uniform! [she exclaimed]. I'm not ringing Australia to talk to Dad and I don't think Harry¹ should phone Hastings either, they'll just have to get an answer from our mothers and mothers!

That such an innocuous request should cause comment is worthy of pause. Interpreting Riley's disquiet as a remark on the exclusions she faced at school, I began to think about what other ways she and her life experiences were closeted. How many similar incidents had been let go before Riley shared her frustration at this one at home? What was she learning in school about our family, and about its position outside of the (hetero)norm?

¹ In respect to my family's privacy I have used pseudonyms in the thesis when the text refers specifically to them.

The assumption that the children in Riley's class could ask their mother and father parents about possibilities for the uniform served to silence the experiences of children in that class whose families were not made up of mothers, fathers and children. The rendering of families as nuclear (see p.10), by asking children to get their '... mothers' and fathers' different ideas...' opened the closet and marked families like ours as different, in a negative way. Similar experiences to Riley's have been reported in the research literature. In a study of lesbian-parented-families in Australia where researchers sought to understand the strategies used by families to negotiate relationships with schools, in-depth interview data with parents and children illustrated that experiences like the one Riley experienced in her classroom, where the (hetero)norm made same-sex families invisible, were not uncommon for children of lesbian-parented families (Lindsay et al., 2006). Many children in lesbian-parented families are involved in a complex process of information management about their family. Some children in Lindsay et al's study had learned to keep their family experiences out of the classroom, especially at the middle stages of primary school and the lower to middle stages of secondary. In this example I cite here, Riley wasn't keeping her family out of school, her teacher was. My principal concern here is with the potential impacts of such practices on children. I think it unfair that they should have their lives marked so by the assumptions of the (hetero)norm.

I have used such ideas at times to confront heteronormative discourse in education settings, be it my own, my colleagues' or my children's. And I have had plenty of cause to wonder about matters of inclusion and exclusion, normal and abnormal, just and unjust, as they relate to education, children's experiences and teachers' practices. I reason that connecting ideas of sexuality and social justice in light of that *Te Whāriki* aspiration (Ministry of Education, 1996b) provides particular challenges. In this thesis I wonder how we might respond to these.

There is a third provocation for studying heteronormative discourses in early childhood education. It comes from the broader political and social context of late 20th and early 21st century Aotearoa New Zealand. I began reading in anticipation of this project late in 2001 just prior to the introduction of a programme of legislative reform designed to address what many in New Zealand considered

were outdated laws around family, matrimonial property, marriage and parenting. Homosexual acts (between men) had been legal since 1986 when the *Homosexual Law Reform Bill* sought the dismantling of criminality associated with sodomy ("Homosexual Law Reform Act (NZ)", 1986). Since 1993, it has also been illegal in New Zealand for individuals to be discriminated against on the basis of their sexual orientation ("Human Rights Act (NZ)", 1993). These existing measures, hard fought, provided a strong background for the introduction to parliament of two significant proposals in 2003 and 2004. They related to parenting and the legal recognition of same-sex couples' relationships.

The *Care of Children Bill* introduced to Government in 2003 by Labour MP Lianne Dalziel heightened public awareness of issues around same-sex parenting just at the time the proposal for this research project was being prepared. The Bill was designed to replace New Zealand's *Guardianship Act* ("Guardianship Act (NZ)", 1968). It would modernise the legislation around guardianship issues to ensure a stronger focus on children's rights and provide recognition of diverse family formations. It was advocated for on this basis and was met with resistance by others who constructed arguments around the cornerstones of heteronormativity: traditional nuclear families (that is, families that adhere to a patriarchal family form: father as head of the household, his wife and children), essentialist understandings of gender, and the naturalness of opposite-sex relationships (Alsop, Fitzsimons, & Lennon, 2002; Cooper, 2002; Jackson, 2003; Robinson, 2002; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2002a; Sumara & Davis, 1999; Theilheimer & Cahill, 2001). The institutional reform was eventually won however, and the legislation passed ("Care of Children Act (NZ)", 2004) recognising among other things the roles that non-biological parents (same-sex and opposite-sex adults involved in the day-to-day care of children) played in the lives of young children. Of significance to this project, the new act introduced parenting orders, a mechanism through which non-biological parents could be granted guardianship rights and responsibilities with respect to the children in their families. This meant that now, the same-sex partner of a biological parent could be offered the same rights and responsibilities as traditional parents (mothers and fathers who are biologically or legally related to children). This

move would have consequences for how teachers in education settings constructed understandings of families and of parents in their work with young children in education and care.

As well as the legislation concerning parenting and the care of children, the *Civil Union Bill*, offering relationship recognition in the nature of marriage to same-sex and opposite-sex couples, was brought to parliament in 2004. After heated debate and national actions for and against the bill, it too successfully passed into legislation later that year ("Civil Union Act (NZ)", 2004). I took support for this thesis from the existence both in New Zealand and internationally of a reformist legislative agenda that was catching up with changes in the ways people live, and in the process asserting a sort of ordinariness about non-heterosexual sexualities and diverse family formations.

This project was therefore framed in part as a response to the changing political landscape. It asked teachers to think about the minutiae of possible implications for them (as teachers) that these reforms might bring about. The national debates provided a background climate that publicised the issues and biases that heteronormativity, homophobia and heterosexism levelled at some individuals and groups in contemporary New Zealand society. Not only would teachers be asked by me to consider their own responses and practices as teachers in relation to issues of non-heterosexual sexuality, such forms of sexuality were being problematised and normalised on a much larger scale in the political debates of the day.

From these personal, professional and societal contexts I drew significant impetus for a study into heteronormative discourse and early childhood education. What practices did heteronormativity support? Who was affirmed when heteronormative discourses were spoken and who was marginalised? To explore such questions I continue in this chapter to outline the theoretical concepts used in this study and to define further the problems that heteronormative discourses pose to contemporary early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The theoretical concepts central to this study

Foucault explored discourse (1969, 1978) and the ways in which discourses shape understandings, knowledge and practices within human and social science disciplines and associated professional and clinical practices. When I started teaching in early childhood education, I made connections between Foucault's writing, what I had learned as a teacher education student, and what I was learning in my new job. Suspecting that particular education and developmental psychology discourses were shaping and supporting understandings, knowledge and practices in childcare, I wondered about what subjects they were producing and what objects were being formed. These ideas remain relevant to this thesis, for in it I explore how discourses of sexuality, gender and the family shape understandings, knowledge and practices in early childhood education; whether heteronormative discourses feature; and if so, what might this mean for teachers' capacities to respond affirmatively to the present day legislative and curriculum contexts of early childhood teaching.

As my argument will analyse heteronormativity in the sense of heteronormative discourse, a brief introduction to the concepts of heteronormativity is necessary. At times I refer to heteronormative discourse, at others heteronormative discourses, this is because heteronormativity relies on the convergence or *interdiscursivity* (Lewis & Kettler, 2004) of related discourses of gender, sexualities and family form. In the following section I write to show how.

Heteronormativity explained

Ingraham (1994) describes heteronormativity as "the view that institutionalized heterosexuality constitutes the standard for legitimate and prescriptive sociosexual arrangements" (p.204). Where heteronormativity exists, heterosexuality is preserved as: taken for granted; as natural; and as unquestionable. In this context, an absence of valid alternatives to heterosexuality can prevail. Such a climate helps to maintain the (hetero)norm. The concept heteronormativity is central to queer theory where the disruption of heterosexuality (its position as dominant and the normalcy associated with the concept) is viewed as the key project of queer scholars and queer research (Cameron & Kulick, 2003; Jackson, 2003; Sumara &

Davis, 1999; Warner, 1991). The term queer brings with it several meanings. It represents: an identity category to name those who claim non-heterosexual sexualities (Alexander, 1999; Halberstam, 1996; Phelan, 1997; Pinar, 1998; Slagle, 1995); an approach to research that questions normativity (Britzman, 1995, 1998; Morris, 1998; Spargo, 1999; Taylor & Richardson, 2005; Valocchi, 2005); and an analytic strategy that helps to determine relations between sexuality, gender, power and notions of normal and deviant (Cooper, 2002; Dilley, 1999; Valocchi, 2005). Common to all these meanings is the questioning of heterosexuality as dominant and normative; or, in other words, the questioning of the (hetero)norm. A concept or idea is identified as normative by virtue of it being a dominant or institutionalised standard. In the case of heteronormativity, it is heterosexuality that is dominant and institutionalised.

The term heteronormativity draws to attention practices and ideas that derive from and contribute to taken-for-granted understandings related to one's gender, sexuality and close interpersonal relationships. As a concept, heteronormativity can be seen to encompass three related categories: sexuality, gender, and family form. With respect to sexuality, heteronormative discourse asserts heterosexual sexuality as the normal form of sexuality. The positioning of heterosexuality as normal and therefore dominant means it is easy for heterosexuality to be presumed for all. The "heterosexual presumption" (Epstein & Johnson, 1994, p.198) helps heterosexuality to be produced as normal and natural, whilst valid alternatives to heterosexuality are obscured, or seen as "perverse, remarkable or dangerous". This privileging of heterosexuality and subsequent marginalizing of other forms of sexuality establishes a binary of normal heterosexuality versus abnormal (or pathological) non-heterosexuality that for many queer scholars needs disrupting if the dominance of heteronormative discourse is to be confronted (Jackson, 2003; Sumara & Davis, 1999; Warner, 1991). Binaries position words in opposition to each other in order to help to produce meaning (Davies, 1994). They are asymmetrical and show how the concepts to which they refer are entirely reliant on yet different to each other (MacNaughton, 2005). Heterosexual for instance derives part of its meaning from the term homosexual. We cannot fully comprehend what heterosexual sexuality means if forms of sexuality other to

heterosexuality remain undefined because it is these other forms of sexuality that delineate what heterosexuality is not. The first term in the binary represents a standard against which the second or sub-ordinate term is measured or understood (Burr, 1995). And the second term is conceptualised as problematic because it represents a deviation from the norm (MacNaughton, 2005).

A second aspect of heteronormativity relates to gender (Boldt, 1997; Cover, 2005; Ingraham, 1994; Nielson, 2000). It is difficult to separate gender and sexuality as distinct elements of one's personhood, particularly in light of the tradition of viewing gender and sexuality as "continuous and collapsible categories" (Sedgwick, 1994). Remlinger (1997) writes, "... our notions of what it means to be 'woman' or 'man' are related to how we play out these meanings sexually. In other words, expectations and roles for 'woman' and 'man' are dependent on a community's beliefs, attitudes, and values about sexuality" (p.2). This is particularly so where gender is understood through essentialist theories. For example, biological essentialist ideas conceptualise men and women as each having biologically determined (or natural) features that explain psychological and behavioural differences. In contrast, social essentialists prioritise socialisation, accepting that women as a group and men as a group, each share characteristics as a consequence of taking on the same social role or being subject to the same social order (Alsop, Fitzsimons, & Lennon, 2002). Both approaches assume the binary division of men and women into two sexes and they position the pairing of men and women as normal and natural. This is what supports heteronormativity. Further, essentialist ideas establish broad norms for behaviour that distinguish and define expectations for what constitutes normal masculinity and femininity. To be properly feminine is, in part, to expect to be both attractive to and attracted by men, and vice versa. These understandings lead to the notion that masculinity and femininity are "inextricably linked to the institution of heterosexuality" (Cameron & Kulick, 2003, p. 48). Such ideas provide impetus for heteronormative discourse because if men and women, boys and girls do not perform their gender in accord with the norms of the male-female gender binary their sexuality may be questioned. The binary that positions masculine men and

feminine women as ascendant to gender deviant (or feminine) men and masculine women can therefore be understood as intrinsic to heteronormative discourse.

Finally, heteronormativity can be viewed in relation to conceptualisations of the family (Kitzinger, 2005; Theilheimer & Cahill, 2001) because family discourses in the Western world tend to privilege a particular family form: those consisting of heterosexual parents who are, or who are assumed to be, children's biological or legal mothers and fathers. To clarify the use of the term family and in particular my use of the term nuclear family, Koopman-Boyden and Scott (1984) provide a useful discussion. Writing of the family and government policy in New Zealand, Koopman-Boyden and Scott describe how family researchers of the 1940s and 1950s tended to define the family as:

a social group characterised by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults (Murdock, 1949 cited in, Koopman-Boyden & Scott, 1984, p.21).

This definition of the family provided the basis for much 20th century social policy in Aotearoa New Zealand. It includes “assumptions of families being centred on a married couple, two parents and a full-time mothering role” (Koopman-Boyden & Scott, 1984, p.21). Defining family for their research in the 1980s, Koopman-Boyden & Scott write of family as “a grouping in which one or more adults are responsible, through a blood relationship or by law, for the economic support and nurture of one or more dependents...” (p.21). The dependents are later identified as children. In both cases, the families generally described here are what I refer to in this thesis as nuclear. Important to note though, is that Koopman-Boyden & Scott's second definition of family includes families where one adult takes primary responsibility for parenting. While I agree that single parent families are families, I do not name this form of family as nuclear.

The nuclear family, in my use of the term, takes one of two forms. Either it will be conceptualised as the traditional nuclear family, that is patriarchal, with a

father, his wife and children, encompassing patriarchal ideas about gender relations, work and interpersonal relations, or it will be understood as father and mother and children, where the parents have equal or near equal input into and responsibility for childrearing and other family tasks. The central features of families important to a definition of them as nuclear relate to the expected or assumed heterosexual sexuality of the parents and the actual or assumed biological and or legally constituted parent. In this thesis I will refer to these families as either traditional nuclear families or nuclear families. This family occupies a position as the ascendant partner in a third binary related to heteronormativity: nuclear families versus non-nuclear families. The idea of nuclear families is predicated on understandings of sexuality that privilege heterosexual sexuality and in the case of the traditional nuclear family, ideas of gender informed by essentialism.

I argue that heteronormativity relies upon the convergence of these three pairs of binary opposites: normal heterosexuality versus abnormal non-heterosexual sexuality, masculine men and feminine women versus gender deviant men and women, and nuclear versus non-nuclear families, and that in early childhood education all three of these binaries feature and shape understandings of what gets taken-for-granted or positioned as normal. One of the most tangible consequences of heteronormative discourse is the silencing of knowledge, concepts and understandings of forms of sexuality different to heterosexuality. For if heterosexuality is what constitutes the norm, diverse forms of sexuality can remain unremarked, except to underscore how heterosexuality can go wrong. Where this occurs, those whose lives are lived outside of the norms of heterosexuality can have their experiences diminished and silenced. An analysis of discourse can show this occurring and illuminate the practices that include and exclude.

Foucault's notion of discourse

Discourses are explained by Foucault (1969) as groups of statements belonging to a single system or formation. These systems bring together “sets of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way

together produce a particular version of events” (Burr, 1995, p. 48). They are normative. That is, “they carry with them norms for behaviour, standards of what counts as desirable and undesirable, proper and improper” (Alsop, Fitzsimons, & Lennon, 2002, p. 82). These norms, meanings, metaphors, concepts and so forth change across time, culture and field of expertise, meaning that many interpretations of events or phenomena become possible. Sexuality for example can be explained via biological, cultural, psychiatric and medical discourses each one prioritising and drawing upon differing sets of concepts and understandings. In this process, discourses both constitute and reflect objects and subjects as part of the social order. Heteronormative discourse may be understood, as meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that produce heterosexuality, and the heterosexual, as dominant and normative. And, conversely, it produces others, for example, queers and homosexuals, as pathological or deviant. This representation of the world is what Sumara and Davis (1999) would call straight. Living with heteronormative discourse means “learning to ‘see’ straight, to ‘read’ straight, to ‘think’ straight” (p.202).

Discourse, subjects and subject positions.

One may speak of discourses as “identified by the particular way in which they represent or construct the person (and, of course, all other objects)” (Burr, 1995, p. 142). Foucault (1969) writes of “clinical discourse, economic discourse, the discourse of natural history, psychiatric discourse” (p.121). Each of these discourses constructs different subjects: the patient, the consumer, the clansman, the lunatic, and each subject constituted within discourse is offered different opportunities:

Who is speaking?... [Foucault wrote.] Who, among the totality of speaking individuals, is accorded the right to use this sort of language? Who is qualified to do so? Who derives from it his special quality, his prestige, and from whom, in return, does he receive if not the assurance, at least the presumption that what he says is true?... (Foucault, 1969, p. 55)

Foucault’s question of ‘who’ draws attention to the subject constituted when a person occupies a subject position available in discourse. The question of ‘who’

one might be being constituted as is key because depending on ‘who’ you are understood to ‘be’, you will receive and take different opportunities. The discourse defines what a person occupying a position can legitimately say, know and do from that position. Similarly, they define what is sayable, knowable and doable in regard to other people who occupy positions constituted within the same discourse. Within heteronormative discourse for example, the biologically or legally related mother or father of the child occupies the subject position of parent even though there may be other parents (such as the same-sex partner of a biological parent) in children’s lives. Subject positions are described by Burr (1995) as “slots” (p.141) within discourses that provide us with ways of representing ourselves and others. Discourses have a limited number of subject positions to be occupied and each has consequences for how one is perceived. If the term parent is normally understood to mean the biologically or legally related mother or father of a child, others who also parent become constituted differently; they may be named differently, for example, as a co-parent, and they may be treated differently. *Other* parents might have limits placed on them, being unable for instance to consent for their child to participate in a school excursion or being kept out of the loop of information exchange between parents and teachers with regards to children’s learning (for example, access to school reports). Such practices assert the normativity associated with the positions of biological or legal parent within heteronormative discourse. They effectively underscore the normal of the (hetero)norm.

Understanding discourse in this way, it is possible to see how some people can be authorised to make claims, to construct and receive knowledge and to assert what gets taken as true (the teacher, the doctor, the psychiatrist, the parent) while others are denied such capacity (the student, the patient, the lunatic, the co-parent). This process is illustrated by Foucault (1978) when he describes the construction of a discourse of sexuality in nineteenth century Europe. He argues that the study of sexuality and its deviations within the institutions of medicine and psychiatry produced a “new specification of individuals” (pp. 42-43) whose sexuality deviated from the normal form of (hetero)sexuality as promulgated through biological, scientific and religious discourses of the time. Doctors and

psychiatrists had a new subject upon whom their attention might focus. The homosexual, upon the medical, psychiatric and psychological characterisation of homosexuality, became “a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology with an indiscrete anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology” (p. 43). This subject constituted in different discourses became subjected to examination, observation, testing, corrective strategies, punishments and treatment, the application of which came via the authorisation of knowledgeable experts operating within specific fields of expertise. The position and the subject homosexual were established within discourse and treated accordingly. Foucault’s idea provides a means of understanding the processes by which subjects are constructed within discourse. It also allows us to understand the subject in a dual way: “in relation to what and how something is said and in relation to a community that makes particular practices available and others unavailable” (Britzman, 2003, p. 39). The idea of discourse becomes important therefore for understanding issues in a field like education, and in particular for attempts towards practising inclusively.

As a key concept in discourse analysis and in this study of heteronormative discourse, the ideas of the subject and subject position require further elaboration. The term subject is “used in relation to (but not entirely analogously with) the ‘individual’ (Middleton, 2003, p.41). It is also used as a “linguistic category, a place-holder, a structure in a formation” (Butler, in Middleton, 2003, p.41) that individuals can come to occupy through discourse. Weedon (1987) writes that discourses “constitute the ‘nature’ of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern” (p. 108). When we occupy the subject positions made available in discourse, we draw from them capacities to make sense of our selves, our bodies, our emotions and our experiences. It is through the repeated constitution of one’s self from a range of positions within relevant discourses that we are able to form a sense of personhood or subjectivity. Understanding the self as continually constituted within multiple discourses (which don’t always align easily with each other) brings to light the “shifting, fragmented, multi-faceted and contradictory nature of our experiences” (Davies, 1994, p. 43) and paying attention to the ways subject positions constitute subjects

within discourses helps us to comprehend why it is that individuals and groups can be known in different ways in different domains. These ideas are useful for the present study where the constitution of subjects through heteronormative discourse positions them in particular ways in the context of early childhood education. How are you positioned in early childhood education if you are a non-heterosexual parent or teacher? What effects do practices that mobilise heteronormative discourse have for silencing or opening up possibilities for you and your family to be known?

As well as being positioned within discourses, subjects too are active in positioning themselves. There are at least two reasons for this. First, discourses bring about effects, you can be subjected to practices or you can authorise certain things as a result of the position you occupy within discourse. In educational discourses for example, children can be observed and tested by teachers, or in medical and psychiatric discourses homosexuals can be examined, scrutinised and diagnosed by doctors and psychiatrists. Second, discourses offer us ways to be that are recognisable to others. From our positions, we must conduct ourselves and talk in ways that reflect the rights and obligations of the positions occupied. We can recognise each other and ourselves by positioning ourselves in the correct manner for if we don't, things can get complicated. For example, when my same-sex partner and I attend school interviews for our children and we don't front up with any information for the teacher by way of introduction beyond 'we're the parents', trouble can brew. Our experience has been that the teacher will be operating with a family discourse that leads him or her to expect to talk to the parents (meaning the biological or legal mother and/or father). Adding to the complexity is the fact that my name in its shortened form (Alex, which is how I'm usually known) is gender ambiguous, so if we haven't met the teacher before, she or he is usually expecting to meet a man and a woman. So, when we claim the position of parents but obviously don't fit the criteria of mother and father it presents a problem that for most of our children's teachers, has had to have been worked through before we can have any useful discussions about our children's learning. Some teachers are direct, 'Which one is the real mother?' we may be asked, or if we haven't been asked it, our children have been the next day.

Whereas others have sought clarification in more indirect ways, ‘Oh, doesn’t Harry look like you!’ or, ‘I can guess which one is Riley’s mum’. Also, there have been times when, even though we’ve introduced ourselves as the parents, we’ve been asked directly “who are you?” which is a question in our minds that is really asking, who are you in relation to this child?; what right do you have to be asking me about my teaching and this child?; and, do I have permission from the *real* mother to be having this discussion with you about *her* child? It is a fairly complex matter.

When we do occupy positions in a manner that helps us become recognisable to others though, things proceed much more smoothly. My partner and I have learned, over time, to perfect the behaviours, talk and expertise that accurately reflect each other’s positions as the mother (the biological mother) and the other mother (depending on which child we are concerned with at the time). Having found that the name ‘the other mother’, which we have used on occasion, being not so readily accepted outside the family, we tend to claim each other as partner or not at all, where our children’s teachers are concerned. If I return to our family’s parent teacher interview experiences I can explain. We approach the teacher and as we sit I may say something in the order of “Hello, I’m Riley’s mother, this is my partner”, upon which the teacher may or may not hesitate as she or he reciprocates with a greeting and we proceed. Most of the interview would be directed to me as the ‘mother’ and my partner would sit back and listen attentively from her place as the ‘not-the-mother’. The nuclear family discourse would remain relatively settled, as I would be ‘doing parent’ in a manner that the teacher was accustomed to and my partner, by not claiming the position of mother too, would remain present, interested, yet unproblematic. In this situation, by outing ourselves and by me naming my partner and positioning her as ‘not-the-mother’ we offer the teacher recognisable positions for us within a not-so-ordinary-but-tolerable-variation-of-family, family discourse.

We are in a sense recognisable even before we are recognised because a different family discourse has been drawn on when I introduce us in this manner to the teacher. Not only is this ‘not-so-ordinary-but-tolerable-variation-of-family’ family discourse giving the teacher a sense of how we might fit together (we as in

the family but more importantly, we as parents and teachers having a discussion about children's learning), legitimate subject positions for my partner, the teacher, and me are available too. I am free to take a lead in questioning (as the real mother parent), my partner can listen attentively and support appropriately (as a mother's partner / quasi stepfather should) and the teacher can fulfil his or her obligation to report on our children's learning. It seems a compromising game. In it we all seem to lose a great deal of opportunity to collaborate in the interests of the children and possibly, much more.

If dominant discourses help to make people recognisable through the positions they occupy, and if they offer them different opportunities, then they also help to create the conditions in which they may be included or excluded. The ideas of the subject, positioning and subjectivity enable explorations of how discourse is relevant to the construction of selfhood as well as to the sense we make of others. This understanding of how we make meaning introduces the possibility that, should new discourses be brought to social settings, change in the social order, in one's understandings of oneself, and our understandings of others, may become possible.

Discourse and the construction of sexuality.

Another understanding of discourse that is useful to an exploration of heteronormative discourse and early childhood education concerns the way in which discourse is involved in the production of knowledge, and the manner in which this knowledge becomes applied to the body. Knowledge is produced in disciplines for example, medicine, education, the law and psychiatry. Disciplines constitute objects: the things that disciplines concern themselves with. Foucault outlined this process when he wrote of how sexuality emerged as an object of medical and psychiatric discourses in the 19th century in Europe (Foucault, 1969, 1978). His research serves to show how when discourses function, they “systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1969, p. 54).

Contrary to thinking of sexuality primarily as a dimension of the natural world order, Foucault argued that sexuality was a constructed category of experience, something that emerged through a proliferation of 19th century European

discourses of sexuality. Technological advancement and the development of the social sciences led to the ascendancy of disciplines, each uncovering new truths about the body and establishing norms for the body's management and preservation. Bodies were inserted into the machinery of these new disciplines becoming both "analysable... [and] manipulable" (Foucault, 1977a, p. 136). They were becoming as Foucault called it, disciplined or docile. Such bodies he wrote, "may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (p. 136).

Sexuality had become of strategic importance because it lay at the interface between the discipline of the body and the control of the population. Sovereign power in the 18th century had been giving way to bureaucratic democracy and governments found it necessary to manage their ever-increasing populations in efficient ways. Science and technology were providing the means by which healthy and productive populations could be grown and the population, with its "specific phenomena and its peculiar variables: birth and death rates, life expectancy, fertility..." (Foucault, 1978, p. 25) was, as an economic and political problem, centred on sex:

...it was necessary to analyze birth rates, the age of marriage, the legitimate and illegitimate births...for the first time...a society had affirmed...that its future and its fortune were tied...to the manner in which each individual made use of his sex.... Between the state and the individual, sex became an issue, and a public issue no less; a whole web of discourses, special knowledges, analysis, and injunctions settled upon it (Foucault, 1978, pp. 25-26).

In examining how sexuality was produced and what its functions in society were, Foucault argued that the "medicalization of the sexually peculiar" (1978, p. 44) resulted in intensified understandings of human sexuality and drew clear boundaries around what was to become understood as sexually proper and perverse. Two of the facts established about sex and sexuality have a particular bearing on this study of heteronormative discourse. First, children were constructed as being prone to and in danger from sexual activity (specifically masturbation), and second, potential deviations from normal heterosexual

sexuality, to which anyone might become subject, were numerous and perverted. Foucault's research showed how in modern times heterosexuality had been established as normative and had become a standard against which all other forms of sexuality might be compared.

Strategies employed in the production of sex/sexuality.

The production of sexuality in the modern world was assisted by "four great strategic unities which...formed specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centering on sex" (Foucault, 1978, p.103). The "hysterization of women's bodies...; a pedagogization of children's sex...; [the] ...socialization of procreative behaviour...; [and] ...a psychiatrization of perverse pleasure (pp. 104-105). These strategies led to the emergence of four figures around which the production of sexuality was centred: the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult. I find that the last three of these figures hold particular relevance to this study of heteronormative discourse and early childhood education. In relation to them divisions between child and adult sexuality were constructed and the lines between normal and abnormal sex and sexuality were drawn.

The strategy Foucault called "a pedagogization of children's sex" (1978, p. 104) held that practically all children were likely to indulge in sexual activity and that such activity posed to them both physical and moral risks. Children were "defined as 'preliminary' sexual beings, on this side of sex, yet within it, astride a dangerous dividing line" (p. 104). It was up to the adults in children's lives to take control of this sexual potential and to produce children's sexuality in a manageable, safe and controlled sort of way. Foucault argued that this pedagogization strategy was deployed most obviously in the war against onanism (masturbation) which, he wrote, lasted in the West for nearly two centuries. Can evidence of this production of children's sexuality be seen in the context of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand? What forms of sexuality are allowed and censured in early childhood? Such questions can contribute to an understanding of heteronormative discourse in early childhood education. I will return to these in chapter two.

The second of Foucault's (1978) strategies that I find relevant to this work, concerned the "socialization of procreative behaviour" (p.104). Economic, social and fiscal pressures encouraged individuals to enter into monogamous and heterosexual relationships. Such relationships provided the context within which, what had become known as the only sort of legitimate sex, conjugal sex, could take place. Other forms of sex were being documented, defined and slowly constructed as pathological through the study of sex and sexuality in psychiatry and medicine. The Malthusian Couple became the figure around which legitimate and responsible sex and sexuality developed. The figure connects with the ideas of an 18th century British economist with a theory about population growth Thomas Malthus. Malthus had believed that without moral constraint, populations would increase beyond a level that could be sustained and that this would lead to war, famine and epidemic (Pearsall, 2002). He advocated a method of population control that relied on preventive checks of the sort he considered morally acceptable: abstinence and late marriage (Bullock, Trombley, & Lawrie, 1999). Foucault's (1978) figure (the Malthusian Couple) picked up on these ideas and linked them to the middle class family. This family, according to Foucault, became the most significant site for the deployment of sexuality in the eighteenth century. It was heterosexual, it was nuclear, and its dominant position was secured by its institutionalisation within marriage. This family deployed sex through the bodies of women and children; within it limitations on reproduction were imposed; and it signified the place where proper and responsible sex occurred – within heterosexual marriage. It helped demarcate the boundaries between ideas of the sexually proper and perverse and it contributed to the constitution of the (hetero)norm. Exploring how this family is positioned in early childhood education is an aim of this thesis. Further, investigating what potential effects this (hetero)norm might bring to children, families and teachers, especially those who live outside of it, is a second principal concern.

The third of Foucault's strategies for the deployment of sexuality in the modern era that holds particular relevance for this study, is the strategy he referred to as "a psychiatrization of perverse pleasure" (1978, p. 105). Within this strategy, sexuality was construed along both biological and psychological lines enabling

the clinical analysis of all the possible anomalies that might afflict one's sex or sexuality. The figure of the "perverse adult" (p. 105) emerged as the locus around which all knowledge concerning abnormal or pathological sex and sexuality might be formed. Has, and if so, how has this figure remained relevant to ideas of sexuality in the context of early childhood education today? And what effects do ideas of perverted sexuality bring to the construction of knowledge and understandings around sexualities within early childhood? I respond to these questions as I write about heteronormative discourse in chapter two.

In addition to these strategies, Foucault (1978) named the confession as an important mechanism in the production of sexualities, writing that it "was and still remains, the general standard governing the production of the true discourse on sex" (p.63). The idea of the confession sits counterpoint to the notion of the closet that I introduced earlier in the chapter. I find the ideas closely related. Whereas the closet denotes a performance of silence concerning the truth of one's sexuality or the closeting of divergent sexualities conceptually, the confession is concerned with revelation of the same, of enabling its presence and arguably, of leading to its absolution. One of several technologies identified by Foucault as involved in the production of the self, the confession provided a means by which an individual could authenticate him or herself "by the discourse of truth... [he or she]... was able or obliged to pronounce" (p.58). The confession opened a web of relations in which the subject could be defined and perfected. It provided a way of "attempting to live the truth, tell the truth and be changed by the truth" (Danaher, Shirato, & Webb, 2000, p. 129).

Foucault described the confession as a "ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject... [was] ...also the subject of the statement" (1978, p.61). It always involves a partner, one who represented the, "...authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile" (pp.61-62). A relational ritual, no longer confined to the church, the confession valorises personal disclosure in science, the professions and interpersonal relations in general, for example, between child and adult, patient and doctor, normal and deviant. For the teller, the act "exonerates, redeems and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and

promises him salvation” (p.62). It is an act imbued with power, which is overtly and covertly given/demanded, taken/received.

Discourse and the exercise of power.

A further point about Foucault’s conceptualisations of discourse useful for this study relates to the role of discourses in relation to the exercise of power. This is because discourses are normative. They devalue some concepts and ideas whilst valorising others. It is the norm, Foucault (1999) writes, that:

lays claim to power. The norm is not simply and not even a principle of intelligibility; it is an element on the basis of which a certain exercise of power is founded and legitimised.... The norm brings with it a principle of both qualification and correction... it is always linked to a positive technique of intervention and transformation, to a sort of normative project (p. 50).

Norms are adhered to by individuals through the way power is exercised on and in their bodies. As 17th century technologies developed and the social and human sciences gained ascendancy and formed the disciplines and professional practices (medicine, psychiatry, the law, education), norms were institutionalised and bodies became subject to them in complex and lasting ways:

The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A ‘political anatomy’, which was also a ‘mechanics of power’, was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile’ bodies (Foucault, 1977a, p. 138).

Foucault (1978) argued that power came to be exercised within as well as upon bodies. It was manifest externally. For example, prescription and law stipulated what could and should be done to achieve the body as normal; yet power was also exercised from within through processes imbued in discourse, supported by technologies of the self, e.g., confession, and firmed by the desire to perfect

oneself in accordance with expectations about how one should properly *be*. Power therefore came to form the conditions by which the movement and regulation of people's every day behaviour might occur. Viewing it not as a force for limiting lives, but rather as one of assisting the establishment of conditions by which they would be lived, Foucault conceptualised power as unstable, diffuse and productive. Accordingly it:

...must not be sought in the primary existence of a central point... it is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power... always local and unstable (Foucault, 1978, p. 93).

Foucault called such power, "biopower" (Foucault, 1978, p. 143) and he related its insertion into bodies as part of the mechanism by which bodies became normalised. Not only did he contend that power-knowledge discourses produced knowledge, constituted subjects, institutionalised relationships and established the development of norms within disciplines, he wrote that they also assisted the movement of power between individuals thereby enabling people to have a hold over others and over themselves. But, it is not like one set of discourses can hold sway over others in perpetuity. We should not imagine a world constrained by accepted and excluded discourses. Painting a much more complex picture, Foucault writes, a "multiplicity of discursive elements... comes into play.... It is this distribution that we must reconstruct, according to who is speaking, his position of power, the institutional context in which he happens to be situated..." (p.100). In trying to comprehend issues of power, dominance and the norm, room must be made for understandings of how discourses can be both "an instrument and an effect of power... a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy..." (p.101). This will enable the possibility of thwarting dominant and discriminatory discourses. I intend exploring this in relation to the (hetero)norm to see how these ideas might help us understand the ways in which teachers' practices might assist and hinder movement towards that aspiration in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996b) which promotes inclusion, belonging and a sense of wellbeing. If heteronormative discourse is being spoken in early childhood education, what hope exists to bring

forth and assert a new norm? Is there a possibility for working towards the aspiration then?

Te Whāriki and social justice: pedagogical and political context.

At the beginning of the chapter I described this study as framed in part as a response to the changing political and social landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand with regard to family formation and diverse sexualities. Further, the inclusion of families where same-sex parents parent featured was identified as important. My interpretation of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996b) as a statement of social justice is informing this study too. This is because I read the curriculum and other early childhood policy documents (for example, Ministry of Education, 1996a, 1998, 2002, 2006) through my experiences as teacher, teacher educator and parent. I interpret these as harbouring concern for social justice and wonder if and if so how, the just aims of such policy might be met for all.

The form of social justice I see as relevant to my questions of heteronormativity and early childhood education is described by Gale (2000) as *recognitive social justice*. Rather than focussing on the redistribution of resources or on equal opportunity as primary methods of achieving justice, recognition of differences in a positive light (Fraser, 1997) and the removal of institutional barriers to participation are to the fore in this view (Gale, 2000; Rizvi, 1998; Slee, 2001). It is an approach to social justice that views all members of a community as both contributing to and maintaining conditions in which justice might prevail. Recognition is a key concept.

Fraser (1997) argues that the struggle for recognition became a site of political conflict as patterns of social representation, interpretation and communication resulted in domination, non-recognition and disrespect towards many people in the late 20th century. Characterising injustice with respect to non-heterosexual sexualities as “quintessentially a matter of recognition” (p.18), Fraser views recognition as a primary response contributing towards social justice in this domain. For her, “overcoming homophobia and heterosexism requires changing the cultural valuations (as well as their legal and practical expressions) that privilege heterosexuality, deny equal respect to gays and lesbians, and refuse to

recognize homosexuality as a legitimate way of being sexual (pp.18-19). For me, such recognition and valuing of diverse sexualities would involve resisting the closet. Such cultural shifts may open up possibilities for valid alternative options to heterosexuality to emerge.

In a recognitive social justice view all members of a community are implicated in processes seeking justice. Further, rather than seek to replace or de-emphasise some knowledge, concepts, understandings with others, for example, to de-value heterosexuality in an attempt to recognise and value *other* forms of sexuality too, the aim is to broaden understandings and develop respect for different forms of knowledge, practices and people through their identification and inclusion. The approach looks to heighten awareness of differences in order to affirm difference as an important and necessary element of human relations. Gale (2000) writes of recognitive social justice as a view of justice that acts as a constant and perpetual desire for social justice. It acknowledges that change occurs through processes of people working together. From this view, social justice might be seen as something always on the horizon.

What messages from *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996b) are key to thinking about heteronormativity? The curriculum statement is structured around a key aspiration, four principles, five strands and a series of goals for children's learning. The curriculum acts not as a syllabus for practice but as a guide for thinking. It uses the key aspiration, for children to "grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society" (p.9) as its original thought. The document's principles, strands and goals illustrate how progress towards this aim can be achieved and provocative questions are posed to teachers through the document's texts, for example, "What aspects of the environment help children feel that this is a place where they belong?" (p.58), and, "In what ways and how well is the curriculum genuinely connected to the children's families and cultures?" (p.66). The strands and goals of the curriculum are derived from four principles. Together the strands and principles are represented as interweaving, to form a woven mat or whāriki. The idea of the whāriki acts as a metaphor for the common ground upon which

members of early childhood communities can build or weave the philosophies and practices of their own distinctive early childhood service. In a study of discourses, the metaphor works well. An alternate interpretation of the whāriki could see it as the articulation of a “discursive field” (Weedon, 1987, p.35) from which particular types of subjects, positions and objects are constituted, and through which power moves and shapes what gets taken-for-granted and asserted as true.

Of the four curriculum principles two are key to my questions of heteronormativity and early childhood education: the principle of whānau tangata - family and community and the principle of relationships - ngā hononga (Ministry of Education, 1996b, pp. 13-14). The principle of whānau tangata holds that the wider worlds of family and community have an integral part to play in the early childhood curriculum. It raises questions about how we know that all family members who are important in the lives of children are included. It asks us to think about what do we do to ensure that everyone who could participate in curriculum with us is supported to do so should they choose. Finally, the principle of relationships sets out the idea that children learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places and things. If children whose life experiences as members of non-heterosexual households have these home worlds and relationships rendered invisible or deviant by heteronormative discourses then how is this principle going to be realised in practice?

Looking more specifically at the curriculum document, there are goals that may be less readily attained where heteronormativity prevails. For instance in the first curriculum strand, mana atua – well-being, there are goals for children to experience environments where “their health is promoted, their emotional well-being is nurtured [and where] they are kept safe from harm” (Ministry of Education, 1996b, p. 46). The strand of mana whenua – belonging, stipulates that children and their families “feel a sense of belonging” (p.54), the contribution – mana tangata strand describes children developing “confidence that their family background is viewed positively within the early childhood education setting” (p.66). Based on the understandings of heteronormativity discussed thus far,

heteronormative discourses seem to erect barriers for teachers' attempts to work towards the curriculum's inclusionary aims.

I argue that the curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996b) offers licence for teachers to work against heteronormative discourse, yet the curriculum has been questioned as to the extent to which it might provide impetus for such work. Surtees (2003) engaged in a content analysis of *Te Whāriki* that sought to investigate how sexuality was reflected in the document and what this might mean for children's learning about and development of sexuality. Initially her analysis challenges *Te Whāriki* and suggests that heteronormativity may be central to its construction because of the way sexuality is rendered absent in its texts. Drawing on the work of Tobin (1997) this invisibility of sexuality is linked to *the* theoretical bases of early childhood practice, where understandings of children's development that regularly privilege cognition over other developmental domains enable the questioning of sexuality as relevant to young children's lives. This view makes it possible to wonder about the extent to which some curriculum aspirations might be met. Surtees writes:

...consider the principle of 'Empowerment'. In reading about 'Empowerment', as it is described in *Te Whāriki*, I see the intent is to 'enable' children to develop their 'identity', 'personal dignity', 'self-worth' and 'confidence' (to list but a few of the relevant qualities described in the document). Placing this particular conception of empowerment under scrutiny, I query the potential for all children to experience empowerment and to be enabled without access to information about the full spectrum of sexual orientation (2003, p. 136).

As well as reading the curriculum for its exclusions Surtees (2003) also reads for its inclusions. And by taking a "queer theory perspective" (p. 144) and re-reading the curriculum, possibilities for working against heteronormativity, or for "queering the Whāriki" (p. 148) begin to emerge:

I see that while the principles and strands used to weave the metaphor are not overtly queer this invisibility does not necessarily equate with either

the presence of heteronormativity or the absence of queerness... perhaps queer possibilities (and indeed a multitude of other meanings) can be read into the text. The whāriki may provide a space for alternative threads to be woven (Surtees, 2003, p. 150).

I agree, and although I might name these threads, discourses, I think that the opportunities for others to materialise are plentiful. My optimist self is working on the premise that if the principles and prime aspiration of the curriculum provide the conceptual backdrop for practices in early childhood centres, then practices that oppress, silence and marginalise people and knowledge of non-heterosexual sexualities will falter in the face of social justice and inclusive pedagogies.

The argument this thesis sets out to address

How does heteronormative discourse shape policy and practice in Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood education? And what effects does this have for children, families and teachers whose lives are lived beyond the (hetero)norm? These are central questions in this thesis. My argument begins by exploring how discourses that establish heterosexuality as the dominant and normative form of sexuality have informed policy and practice for early childhood education settings in New Zealand. Language and practices that advance the nuclear family form over other forms of family, when combined with discourses of sexualities and genders that privilege heterosexuality work to exclude and position as not normal, families led by lesbian women and gay men. This not only results in the situation where children of such families are left without recognition of their unique family form, it can also lead to the exclusion of some parents from full participation in their children's early education. I argue that this is not only unfair, contrary to education policy, and against the inclusionary principles of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996b) but it is also counter to the spirit of New Zealand's human rights legislation which upholds peoples' rights to be free from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Overview of the thesis

This first chapter of the thesis has allowed me to outline the impetus for, and theoretical concepts useful to this study. Drawing from my positions as lesbian, parent, teacher and research student, I have gathered momentum from my personal and professional histories to think about practices in early childhood education and how these might include and exclude. The purpose of my attention is to consider how the experiences, realities and worldviews of children and families whose lives are lived beyond the (hetero)norm might be included, valued and recognised in early childhood education.

I have shown how the work of Michel Foucault is instrumental. Concepts such as discourse, subject positions, power-relations, normalisation and the production of knowledge within institutions provide the means by which forms of early childhood education, produced through practices derived from discourse, might be explored. Further, understandings of the subject and subject positions, along with queer theory, offer opportunities for understanding early childhood worlds differently and for working towards practices that might interrupt the status quo. This theoretical framework of Foucault's concepts and queer theory, is what I take into this study as I explore questions of heteronormativity and what heteronormative discourses might mean for the attainment of early childhood practices in accord with inclusive policy and progressive legislative reforms.

Chapter two introduces Foucault's idea of genealogy (1977b) to trace the production of early childhood education in 20th century policy, in relation to the (hetero)norm. Exploring how the nuclear family form came to occupy a privileged place in Aotearoa New Zealand society, and showing how the provision of early childhood education services were designed to support the needs of this family, the chapter illustrates how texts (policy documents) have spoken family in early childhood education, as if all were nuclear. Further, the chapter allows for an exploration of how prominent early childhood gender and sexuality discourses contributed to the regulation of heterosexuality as dominant and normative in the context of early childhood education. This leads me to the point where the study departs from an historical text based reading of heteronormativity to a project

where I ask, *is, and if so how is, heteronormative discourse shaping practices in early childhood education today?*

Genealogy is also a method, and in chapter three I describe how I took genealogy into the qualitative phase of the research. In the chapter I explore the challenges that were posed as I moved the sites of my study between its historical and present day locations. I raise questions that persisted as I worked ethnographically to connect practices which were talked about in the local sites of my study with broader socially, historically and culturally produced discourses. I outline the practical and procedural elements of the research and discuss several dilemmas and conflicts that arose when I was planning and conducting three rounds of focus group interviews with queer allies, queer teachers and teacher educators.

The fourth chapter focuses on participants' accounts of practices that troubled genders, sexualities and family form. Identifying discourses that shaped practices in a manner that upheld heterosexuality as normal is a feature of the chapter, however practices that accessed discourses of social justice and inclusion are also explored. The ways in which different discourses intersected, confronted and confirmed each other is highlighted. The chapter attends to the principal research question of this thesis, *is, and if so how is, heteronormative discourse shaping practices in early childhood education today?* It shows how people's activity in local settings can synchronize with the activity of others' and how local activity can derive from and contribute to discourses in the socio-political and policy contexts.

Chapter five reports on a turn in the research that saw me enlarge my object of study to think about whether heteronormativity might have been shaping discussions in the research interviews. I wondered if our shifting attentions, identified by threads of thinking that distracted us from the concepts that we had originally set out to discuss, was a way of coordinating ourselves with a generalised discourse of silence towards sexualities in early childhood education. If we were busy attending to these other things, then the topics we had come together to explore could be left relatively undisturbed.

Discussions of heteronormativity in the contexts of early childhood education were at times, quite difficult to sustain. Two storylines, connecting with a discourse of risk about concepts and knowledge different to the (hetero)norm in early childhood education were involved. I write about these in chapter 6 to show how the metaphors of the can of worms and of boundary keeping kept reminding participants (and me) of the problems of seeking to disrupt heteronormativity.

Exploring events at the conclusion of the second round of focus group interviews, and returning to some of the concepts central to framing the study, namely queer theory and Foucault's rule of the tactical polyvalence of discourses (1978, p. 100), I go on in chapter 7 to show how I pursued a strategy in the third round focus group discussions that sought to have participants imagine practices beyond the (hetero)norm. Two examples of discussions from small group work where participants tried to bring together ideas that produced versions of the concepts of family and of parent, inclusive of and broader to those constituted in heteronormative discourses features in the chapter.

The final chapter makes connections between the historical, present day and theoretical dimensions of the study to bring together the understandings of heteronormativity in the context of New Zealand early childhood education that I have formed. I reflect on the ways in which discourses from the historical and present day socio-political and policy spheres connect with localised practices, I remark on how research of this nature may assist teachers to understand the processes by which early childhood practices are produced and which they themselves are implicated. Finally I make suggestions about the contribution this thesis may make to teacher education knowledge, and to possibilities for understanding how teachers' practices can confirm and resist the status quo.

CHAPTER TWO - THE HISTORICAL CONSTRUCTION OF HETERONORMATIVE DISCOURSE IN NEW ZEALAND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

In this chapter I follow two related trajectories and use Foucault's (1977b) idea of genealogy to explore the construction of heteronormative discourse in Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood education. The main question guiding me in this is, how have discourses of gender, sexuality and the family assisted the production of heterosexuality as the dominant and normative form of sexuality in relation to early childhood education? To explore the discursive field, I focus primarily on the idea of the family, in particular, how nuclear family discourses in early childhood policy have assisted the related ideas of normal heterosexuality and abnormal non-heterosexual sexuality to sit largely unchallenged in early childhood. I then explore discourses of gender and sexuality and show how they function similarly and contribute to the articulation of heteronormative discourse. I shall argue that dominant developmental discourses have asserted heterosexual sexuality development as a normal form of development for the typically developing young child. By proceeding in this manner, I will be able to show how ideas concerning 'normal' nuclear families, heterosexual sexuality and traditional understandings of gender have repeatedly positioned heterosexuality as normal. This brings me to the ways heteronormative discourse comes to be articulated, and how it speaks heterosexuality, as the normal and dominant form of sexuality, in early childhood education.

Foucault described genealogy as:

a form of history that can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects etc, without having to make reference to a subject which is transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness through the course of history (Foucault, 1977b, p. 117).

The method asks us to analyse discourses in order to “re-think or un-think the categories and procedures through which we know and account for experience and identity” (Dehli, 2003, pp. 136-137). By separating us from the “contingency that has made us what we are” (Tamboukou, 1999, p. 203) we can use genealogy to figure how subject positions become available to occupy, how knowledge assists the production of disciplined bodies and how norms become established discursively and subsequently perpetuate power relations like those involved in the production of heterosexuality as dominant and normative.

The nuclear family and heteronormative discourse

When we imagine the nuclear family we make assumptions about people’s sexuality, gender relations and familial relationships that may or may not be correct. It is the assumption that these understandings are universal that paves the way for heteronormative discourse to be spoken. In chapter 1, I described the notion of family that informed New Zealand social policy for much of the 20th century. It was an understanding of family formed around several assumptions: adults in nuclear families would be opposite sex and heterosexual; the union of these adults would result in the birth of one or more children; the resulting children would have mother and father parents; and that those who were known as parents, would be, or would be assumed to be, biologically or legally related to their family’s children. Of course, in some families all of these factors will be true, but in others, they will not. In families where lesbian women and gay men parent the latter is likely.

The way the construction of the family has come to be central to heteronormative discourse in early childhood education is related to the place the nuclear family has occupied in New Zealand’s broader social and political context through the twentieth century. How has the nuclear family been positioned through discourse in New Zealand? And what has this meant for education policy in the early years? To explore these questions I return to Foucault’s (1978) figure of the Malthusian Couple because his reasoning around this figure shows the value to modern societies of the nuclear family form. The Malthusian couple is important to heteronormative discourse in two ways. First, it is this couple and their family

that Foucault (1978) argues is instrumental in the production of sexuality; and second, it is this couple and their family in the middle classes that represents a significant productive unit of a modern capitalistic society.

As I noted in the previous chapter, Foucault (1978) argued that one of four great strategies engaged in the deployment of sexuality in the nineteenth century centred around the responsible procreative behaviour of citizens. Modern societies required a population of productive citizens who would contribute to both economic and social development. However, the population provided a problem of supply and demand with which governments had to grapple. Too many citizens and insufficient resources would lead to poverty, ill health and productivity loss whereas too few citizens would lead a population to diminish. The fertility of couples became one way for the control of the population to be effected. Reproduction was to become a delicate issue (Smyth, 2000) . In this process, women's productivity could be usefully centred on childrearing and the home, which in turn would free their husbands for the demands of work life in the wider community. Bringing together ideas about gender and sexuality, with which the population of the time generally agreed, the nuclear family was positioned as the family form upon which the modern society's economic and social futures was dependant. This chapter asks: how did this occur in New Zealand?

The nuclear family in New Zealand society

One way to explore how the nuclear family became positioned as the dominant family form in New Zealand's recent history is to investigate how family discourses have shaped social and educational policy and practice. Two examples are illustrative before exploring this idea in relation to early childhood education: the civilising of wayward children in the late 19th century, and the provision of housing schemes mid twentieth century. Foucault's (1978) notion of the Malthusian Couple, which I wrote about in chapter one, picked up on the idea that a significant determinant of success for a modern capitalistic society was the productivity and reproduction of its citizens. However, this productivity, tied closely to the nuclear family form, could not be assured for all. Education became

a key area in which adults might use nuclear family discourse to impart capitalist values and practices on the young.

Two child populations thought in need of civilising became subjected to nuclear family discourse in New Zealand. In the late 19th century, destitute or impoverished children from reform and industrial schools were regularly placed in local middle class homes where they served as domestic servants or labourers. The practice was “lauded as... [an opportunity] ...for inmates to learn skills and have modelled for them middle-class family structures and values...” (Morris Matthews & Matthews, 1998, p. 66). It was hoped that, having realised the benefits of a middle class nuclear family life, these children would live in accord with nuclear family discourses themselves and become reformed citizens. Conforming would mean that as productive and responsible members of society, they would have a legitimate and non-burdensome place in the social order. This would mean a twofold success for production and reproduction: the children would become adults able to contribute to the societies in which they lived, and the nuclear family norm would be upheld.

Māori children who attended missionary led village schools in the 19th century were subject to nuclear family discourse too. In this case, teachers were expected to influence children and their families towards the adoption of Pākehā values and middle class family practices so that a “Christian Pākehā lifestyle...[including] ...the promotion of monogamous marriage [and] the notion of a nuclear family” (Morris Matthews & Matthews, 1998, p.67) would prevail. This process was to continue later in the century when secular schools (Native Schools) were developed in Māori communities as part of what Simon & Tuhiwai Smith call, “the civilising agenda of the nineteenth century state” (2001, p. 3). In these schools the Education Department stipulated that teachers were to:

...exercise a beneficial influence on the natives, old and young; to show by their own conduct that it is possible to live a useful and blameless life, and in smaller matters, by their dress, in their houses, and by their manners and habits at home and abroad, to set the Maoris (sic) an example that they

may advantageously imitate (Hislop, 1880, cited in Simon & Tuhiwai Smith, 2001, pp. 335-336).

The modelling of the Pākehā nuclear family formed part of a plan related to the administration and ultimate integration of Native Schools into the State school system. The broader intention was to:

bring an untutored but intelligent and high spirited people into line with... civilisation... by placing... European school buildings and European families as teachers... as exemplars of a new and more desirable mode of life (Bird, 1928, cited in Morris Matthews & Matthews, 1998, p. 68).

The strategy diminished traditional Māori family values and practices in favour of European forms. Thus it is possible to see how through both the reform and missionary school systems, Māori children were actively encouraged to take up middle-class values and practices, of which the traditional nuclear family form, with husband as head of the household and gendered expectations about work, husband-wife relations, childrearing and domesticity, formed a significant part.

Not only was the ideal of the traditional nuclear family actively promoted in some quarters of the nineteenth century education system, it was also promoted through twentieth century social policy, especially in relation to housing in the middle part of the century. For example, the impact of the 1920s and 1930s worldwide economic depression was felt in New Zealand. One of the consequences of it was a decline in births as many couples, in Foucault's (1978) terms, *responsibly* delayed marriage and childrearing in response to the economic situation. A great deal of illegal abortion also occurred, the extent of which was outlined in a *Committee of Inquiry into the Various Aspects of the Problem of Abortion in New Zealand* (1937, cited in Smyth, 2000). Consequently population growth had steadily declined until it was "barely at replacement level" (Koopman-Boyden & Scott, 1984, p. 124) in the 1930s. Yet at the same time, New Zealand found itself dealing with a major housing shortage as city housing conditions deteriorated and families shifted to the cities in search of work. The 1935 Labour Government pledged to turn the situation around. A cornerstone of their plans was the

provision of housing for families who became charged with providing for the nation's foundation (Estorick, 1943).

Walter Nash, minister in charge of the State Advances Corporation and later prime minister, took a keen interest in housing matters. His view was that “the ultimate test by which the policy of any government must be judged... [was] ...the extent to which it... [brought] ...about the conditions under which family life, centred on the individual home, ... [could be] ...strengthened and enriched” (Estorick, 1943, p. 27). The Government embarked on a programme of state house building. In the planning and construction of the houses nuclear family discourse dominated. “Labour... sought to create conditions that would encourage ‘home life’, or more specifically, nuclear home life. Only then would New Zealand’s future be preserved” (Schrader, 2000, p. 131). The homes, explained by Schrader, separated out private and public living, and established the lounge room as the social centre of the home. The kitchen, which formerly occupied this position, was reinforced as the domain of the housewife. In it, sufficient space was made available so that young children could be easily supervised at play by mothers otherwise occupied in domestic tasks. In the lounge, the new hub:

...was the fireplace, around which large comfortable chairs could be placed, as shown in a government publicity photo of the time. A blazing fire casts light across the hearth where a child sits in her mother’s lap, seemingly lost in the story being read to her. In the foreground a father, leaning forward in his easy chair, engages in conversation with an older child, who looks up to him with due admiration. It is an image of complete familial happiness (Schrader, 2000, p. 134).

Nuclear family discourses connected to others concerning the division of household labour, childcare, gender, and the world of the home as separate from the world of work. They also connected with thinking in the mid century about the provision of appropriate sorts of early childhood education that would not only support the development of more nuclear families, but would also assist children

to grow happily and in good health under the watchful gaze of their smiling and sensitive mothers (Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989) .

The nuclear family and early childhood policy

By the time the first government report into early childhood education was written in 1947 (The Consultative Committee on Pre-School Educational Services, 1947, known as *The Bailey Report*), New Zealand had felt the full impact of a worldwide economic depression and was into its recovery from the second world war. A state system of kindergartens was proposed. The writers of *The Bailey Report* argued that a system of state kindergartens would have an important role in promoting children's health, in strengthening families, and in gaining improvements to mothers' childrearing skills. But more than this was thought possible should a kindergarten service become established. For a government wanting to grow the country and strengthen and stabilise families after the upheavals of the depression and the war, the kindergarten represented a pathway that could lead directly towards an expansion of the population. *The Bailey Report* noted that by kindling sufficient interest in children and childhood, kindergartens:

...would stimulate not only the desire in parents to know more about the processes by which children grow up, but would, too, permeate the attitudes of the whole community towards the family, to give child-rearing pride of place, and to help shape the desire to have more children (The Consultative Committee on Pre-School Educational Services, 1947, p. 8).

The nuclear family discourse was being successfully advanced. The service would form part of the network of supports for the development of the New Zealand population. In the process the nuclear family form was positioned as a desirable and necessary element of social and economic development.

When the 1947 report describes the New Zealand home as a place where “the New Zealand mother... [needed] ...to manage her house and family single-handed” (The Consultative Committee on Pre-School Educational Services, 1947, p. 6) it speaks nuclear family discourse in two ways. First the patriarchal nuclear

family in which mothers assume primary responsibility for childrearing and housekeeping is evoked, and second, scope for other sorts of families where perhaps the New Zealand mother didn't take up this mantle, are not being promoted as a form of family that might benefit from the advent of a national kindergarten service. Further, when the report positions nuclear families as normal by commenting "...young children spending the whole of every day from Monday to Friday in a nursery school are deprived of the vital experiences that only the normal home can provide" (p.11) the discourse underscores the normalcy and dominance associated with the nuclear family form.

Identifying something as normal is a strategy described by Foucault (1978, 1999) that creates the conditions under which something else can be understood as abnormal. By evoking an image of the nuclear family home as the normal family home, the *Bailey Report*, constituted all other forms of family as not this. Other families, for example, non-nuclear ones or ones headed by same-sex couples become constituted therefore as deviant. Representing normal, the New Zealand nuclear family home was constructed as the domain of the mother whose responsibility was primarily geared towards caring for her children and keeping house. This nuclear family discourse successfully connected with other gender and sexuality discourses related to women, parenting and domesticity. By the middle of the twentieth century motherhood had taken on a sort of career status (May, 1988) and mothers as a key figure in the constitution of the nuclear family had an important job to do. The kindergarten, "by its operating on half of each day,... [would give] ...full weight to the place of the home as the all-important element in the nurture of the child" (The Consultative Committee on Pre-School Educational Services, 1947, p. 11) the Committee wrote. As such, it would provide certain support for the maintenance of the nuclear family ideal.

The second major government report into early childhood education also framed the provision of services to families around the nuclear family form only by now thinking about early childhood education had adapted sufficiently so that the needs of some sorts of other families could be addressed too (The Committee of Inquiry into Pre-school Education, 1971, known as *The Hill Report*):

Neither free kindergartens nor federated playcentres in their present forms are suited to meet the needs of children of working mothers [the *Hill Report* committee wrote]. If a solo parent wishes to earn money for her family, if a wife wishes to supplement the family income, or if a mother with a particular training or skill wishes to use it in the community she must, in general, look beyond the major pre-school movements (The Committee of Inquiry into Pre-school Education, 1971, p. 29).

New Zealand had experienced a baby boom in the Pākehā population after the end of the second-world war (Pool, Dharmalingam, & Sceats, 2007) and a new political and personal consciousness around women and families had eventuated after contradictory discourses about work-life, motherhood and domesticity had come to prominence in the 1950s (May, 1988). Women had begun to move quietly into part-time work during the 1950s and dual roles of parenting and paid work were becoming more acceptable (May, 2001). The rise of feminism, human rights and anti-war movements in the 1960s provided background for significant social change. By the 1970s the number of out of wedlock births had increased significantly and the government had moved to make available a discretionary domestic purposes benefit that would give support to single (never married) mothers or to women with dependent children who had lost the support of their husbands (Koopman-Boyden & Scott, 1984). The call for childcare services that would support working mothers was being heard and the needs of some non-nuclear (single-parent) families as well as nuclear ones were being reflected in thinking about early childhood education.

Despite widening the way the family was constituted in *The Hill Report* (The Committee of Inquiry into Pre-school Education, 1971), the committee's writers still largely wrote about families in the body of the report as if all were nuclear (in the traditional form), and they articulated principal responsibility for childcare as the domain of mothers. A central characteristic of nuclear family discourses, locating responsibility for childcare with mothers, linked with other discourses from the mid twentieth century that placed mother as instrumental to domestic life and parenting too. Traces of the influential theory of maternal deprivation (Bowlby, 1951, 1953) from the 1950s for instance (May, 2001), sat easily in the

context of the 1971 report. This psychological discourse held mothers responsible for the healthy normal intra-psychological development of children by claiming that the effects of even partial maternal deprivation would bring about “anxiety, excessive need for love, powerful feelings of revenge, and arising from these last, guilt and depression” (Bowlby, 1953, p. 14). The ideas were supported and elaborated by other influential psychological research from the 1950s as Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) explain:

It is 1958... the president of the American Psychological Association, Professor Harry Harlow, has conducted a set of experiments on infant rhesus monkeys, which will be the most quoted research to demonstrate the biological basis for maternal bonding for many years to come... (p. 47).

Harlow’s studies suggested that mothering, the components of which included providing children with close contact and comfort, was a key determinant in social attachment. This work, in combination with Bowlby’s (1951, 1953) provided scientific evidence of the absolute necessity of *mothering* of a particularly sensitive kind. It was not the need for physical contact that became disputable; rather, the idea of the absolute necessity of close mother-infant contact was to be used against working mothers by the advancement of an understanding that children left in the care of others may have their development impaired. The impacts of these mid century scientific studies allowed popular beliefs about mothers and mothering to form, and these found their way into places like Aotearoa New Zealand policy, and its developing field of early childhood education.

In *The Hill Report* (The Committee of Inquiry into Pre-school Education, 1971) phrases such as “the mother especially plays an important role in the young child’s development” (p. 42) and “...belief holds that before the age of 5 is too early in the child’s life for the mother’s place to be taken over by a teacher” (p. 43) draw on these ideas and locate our ideas of parenting in the first instance with a mother who is able to fulfil her responsibilities to her children from the nuclear family home provided for her by her husband. Further, by framing parents as

female, “parents who enrol their child... can be expected to be involved in a number of ways: in pre-entry clubs, in parent clubs, as mother helpers...” (p. 42), or, “...there are solo parents, working mothers and mothers with particular commitments who are quite unable to take part in the parent activities associated with pre-school...” (p. 43), the report reasserts norms associated with the nuclear family form that fall in accord with these discourses of the family, gender and women’s domesticity.

A 1980 State Services Commission report (State Services Commission, 1980) into early childhood education continued in a similar vein. The working group who developed the report had a remit outlined as to devise “an effective administration for policies relating to early childhood education and care” (p. 1). The benefactors of such policies were seen to be primarily the nation’s children and their mothers, a continuation of the traditional nuclear family discourse. In at least one instance however, the report calls upon gender equity discourse and argues for “flexible patterns of work for both men and women in paid employment, opportunities for part-time work, and leave from paid employment for the care of children” (p. 11). Times were changing, but even though the traditional or patriarchal nuclear family was challenged here, the nuclear family itself was not. While it may have been more plausible by the 1980s for men and women to equally engage in parenting of the sort that was previously only expected of mothers, the gender equity discourse did not diminish the dominance of the nuclear family form. It may even have helped to articulate it more clearly. This is because implicit in the gender equity discourse of parenting is the assumption that children have two heterosexual parents both of whom are equally capable of rearing their children. The report continues from its articulation of the gender equity discourse to speak nuclear family again, “we note...[the writers of the report commented] ...that Mia Kellmer Pringle has said, although care truly shared by both parents may one day become the norm, this day is unlikely to dawn within the next 10 to 15 years” (p. 11).

The articulation of nuclear family discourse and framing of responsibility for childcare as primarily the domain of mothers (and sometimes of fathers) continued in Government thinking about early childhood education in the late

1980s even though arguments for increasing women's capacity to enter in economic and social life outside of the home were also being made (Early childhood education and care working group, 1988 known as *The Meade Report*):

Past governments' funding has been based on the benefits that early childhood care and education offers for children... [the working group wrote]. The state has shown little interest in the value of early childhood services for mothers.... What is needed now is for sufficient funds to be made available to early childhood care and education for... [women's participation in economic and social life] ...to become possible (Early childhood education and care working group, 1988, pp. vi-vii).

By the 1980s many New Zealand women both worked and parented, balancing domestic and professional lives with and without the support of partners, extended families and early childhood services. The continuing discourses of women's domesticity articulated alongside others of economic and social liberation reflected the reality of many women's lives and the early childhood report mirrored this. *The Meade Report* (Early childhood education and care working group, 1988) successfully articulates nuclear family discourses by continuing to mark childcare as primarily centred around mothers and it elaborates this by speaking nuclear family in intriguing ways.

In a section of the report, "The importance and value of early childhood care and education" (Early childhood education and care working group, 1988, p. 11) the writers explore several "myths about early childhood care and education" (p. 11). Working to dispel these, the report draws attention to discourses of gender, parenting and psychology that dominated thinking about the appropriate care and education of young children in New Zealand from earlier in the twentieth century. Further it introduces new discourses about the same phenomena, some of which sit in accord with and others that counteract earlier thinking. An example of this arises in relation to the way the family is constructed in this section of the report. The report writers outline a "myth" (p. 11) that it is bad for children to be separated from their mothers. This idea connects with psychological discourses, supported by Bowlby's (1951, 1953) theory of maternal deprivation and Harlow's

mothering research. Bowlby had visited New Zealand in 1973 and the ills of maternal deprivation were widely known here (May, 2003). The ideas sat easily alongside nuclear family discourses that located parenting, in the first instance, as the domain of mothers. The report uses the discourse of the extended family to confront the psychological and nuclear family discourses though by arguing through developmental discourse that “more than one bond is better than a single bond” (Early childhood education and care working group, 1988, p. 11) and illustrating that in [traditional?] Māori and Pacific Island cultures the norm of the mother caring for children on her own would in fact be abnormal. The hold of the psychological and nuclear family discourses become somewhat diminished in the face of developmentalism and the discourse of family diversity. They are not however lost. The very next argument put forth to dispel the myth of it being bad for children to be separated from their mothers, upholds another assumption of the nuclear family: that in [all?] families children will have mother and father parents. “Historically and cross-culturally,... [the report reads] ...young children have been reared in an extended family or small social group, by a variety of adult mother- and father-substitutes” (p. 11). It is the mother and father idea that evokes the nuclear family. Further, the assumption that children need both mothers and fathers or substitutes thereof, is key in keeping this form of family central in our thinking about what constitutes normal.

The Government policy for early childhood education developed after *The Meade Report* (Early childhood education and care working group, 1988), is known as *Before Five* (Lange, 1988). In *Before Five* the term parents/whānau is used to describe the adults in children’s families with whom officials and teachers in early childhood services would interact. The term parents/whānau also appeared in *The Meade Report* although there it was slightly varied: “parents and/or whānau” (p.13). Did this phraseology allow for a broader understanding of family and parents to form? In some ways yes, but not necessarily in relation to who was constituted as parent in children’s lives. The term whānau has many traditional and contemporary meanings (Metge, 1995) but in the context of *Before Five* and in later early childhood policy and documents (for example, Ministry of Education, 1990, 1996a, 1996b, 1998, 2002) the term whānau in the phrase

parents/whānau became understood in English, to mean family, either the parent-child family or extended family. But what did this mean for its co-articulated term parent? In the absence of a definition otherwise, and an alternative discourse to the nuclear family, no real change came about in our uses of the term. It continued unchallenged to represent children's biological and / or legal mothers and fathers. An effect of this is that some children's other parents can be silenced. And those parents, otherwise marked, can be marginalised by not being recognised.

Is this an issue that continues in the present day? In relation to schooling in Aotearoa New Zealand, a departure from education policy's adherence to the nuclear family form took place in the context of broader education reforms of the late 1980s. Then, the new education act ("Education Act (NZ)", 1989) defined a person living in a child's household aged over 20 years, and with day-to-day caregiving responsibilities for that child, as a parent (s.92) . This meant that for schools, the understanding of parent was clarified and broadened sufficiently enough in policy to allow for relevant adults, including a same-sex partner of a child's biological or legal parent to be recognised as a parent for the purposes of a school's day-to-day operations. This meant, in policy at least, information between children's home and school settings, and between the people involved in the day-to-day care and education of children could be shared. The same affordance was not to be forthcoming in early childhood education. And in fact a piece of legislation, implemented in 1993, and designed to bring about protections related to individual's privacy ("Privacy Act (NZ)", 1993) raised questions in early childhood education about who teachers might now be able to legally communicate with.

The Privacy Act ("Privacy Act (NZ)", 1993) applies to almost every individual, business and organisation in New Zealand. It sets out 12 principles of one's privacy guiding how personal information is to be collected, used, stored and disclosed. When the Act was introduced it was clear that teachers would be able to discuss matters concerning children in their care with those children's parents. The question though remained, who were they? The definition of parent was not made clear in either set of 1990s regulations ("Education (Early childhood

centres) Regulations (NZ)", 1990, 1998). The only clue as to who was constituted as a parent in the early childhood legislation, other than those who were or who were assumed to be biologically related to children as mother or father, were those who were legally constituted as parents through processes related to guardianship and custody ("Education (Early childhood centres) Regulations (NZ)", 1998, s.38, s.42; 1990, s.35, s.40). The traditional notions of parent remained and in light of the privacy laws, conservative teachers and wary administrators could use the legislative framework as reason to deny same-sex parents, who were not legally related to their children, access to information that might otherwise be shared by teachers with their children's biological mothers or fathers.

The introduction of the privacy laws established a second question for teachers about information gathering and sharing. What was to be considered private information? Information about home addresses, phone numbers, medical histories and emergency contact people; this could be easily understood as private and therefore subject to the safeguards of the privacy act whether or not the term parent was clarified. But what about other types of information, information about children's learning for instance, was this private information too? Early childhood legislation and policy ("Education (early childhood centres) Regulations (NZ)", 1990, 1998; Ministry of Education, 1990, 1996a, 1996b, 1998) required the gathering and reporting of information about children's learning by their teachers. Teachers were directed to share this information with "parents/guardians and, where appropriate, whānau" (Ministry of Education, 1996a, s.8) or as expressed in the regulations, "parents, guardians and whānau" ("Education (Early childhood centres) Regulations (NZ)", 1998). In the absence of a clear definition of the term parent, who was it that teachers were being directed to communicate with? Guardian draws its meaning from legal discourses and "where appropriate, whānau", this is another question all together. From the perspective of nuclear family discourse not yet displaced, parents remained the people who were biologically or legally related to the children in their families. What about other adults involved in the day-to-day care of young children, were they to be included too? From the perspective of heteronormative discourse it

seems unlikely. It is only very recently that any suggestion of moving beyond this situation has been seen.

In 2006 and 2007 the Government engaged in consultation on the adoption of a new regulatory framework governing early childhood education. In the context of other legislative change in relation to families, children and relationships recognition ("Care of Children Act (NZ)", 2004; , "Civil Union Act (NZ)", 2004) it seems as if the State is imagining children's families in early childhood education somewhat beyond the constraints of the (hetero)norm. In the Ministry of Education's consultation document, *Draft Criteria for the Licensing or Certification of ECE Services* (Ministry of Education, 2006) definitions of terms are offered. Following the already existing Education Act ("Education Act (NZ)", 1989) definition, it seems that the legislation in early childhood education might be about to catch up with the reality of some families' lives:

‘Parent’ means the person (or people) primarily involved in the day-to-day care of children and taking on a commonly understood parenting role. Depending on the individual circumstances of a child's day-to-day care arrangements, it could include biological or adoptive parents, step-parents, legal guardians, or the extended whānau as appropriate – grandparents, aunties or uncles etc. (Ministry of Education, 2006, p.73).

The definition falls noticeably short by not naming same-sex parents as parents, yet room for them (under the auspices of ‘etcetera’) will exist if this definition is adopted. This phrase could indicate tentative steps at unsettling the dominance of the nuclear family assumption. It has been spoken in a period where family legislation in New Zealand is moving to include more than predominantly nuclear family norms. The proposed new regulatory framework marks the possibility for different discourses of family and parents to emerge in early childhood education and it opens up the scope for more diverse practices and inclusive approaches for working with families in the field.

The nuclear family form has been asserted as the normal and dominant form of family in Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood education during the 20th

century. The formation of the nuclear family as the ascendant partner in a binary of normal nuclear families versus abnormal non-nuclear families supports the positioning of heterosexuality as normal and dominant. This is because the nuclear family form is predicated on understandings of sexualities and genders that privilege heterosexuality as normal. I have argued that heteronormative discourse entails the convergence of three pairs of binary opposites, one of which is the nuclear families versus non-nuclear families binary. And I have shown how the nuclear family has held a privileged place in early childhood policy in Aotearoa New Zealand. What evidence is there of the other two binaries: normal heterosexuality versus abnormal non-heterosexuality and masculine men and feminine women versus gender deviant men and women in relation to early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand? How have gender and sexualities discourses assisted the production of heterosexuality as dominant and normative too?

Gender, sexuality and the articulation of heteronormative discourse

In chapter one I wrote about the difficulties associated with attempts to separate out ideas of gender and sexuality because significant overlap between these dimensions of one's subjectivity exists in both the ways we think about gender and sexuality and the ways we perform our gender and sexuality. Where essentialist understandings of gender dominate this is particularly so because such understandings assume the binary division of men and women into two sexes and the pairing of men and women as normal and natural. This is what supports heteronormativity. A fixed and stable gender is implicit to understanding heterosexual sexuality development. How have these ideas featured in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand?

To explore how gender and sexualities have been framed in early childhood education I turn to what Foucault (1969) named the "library... [or] ...documentary field" (p. 57) associated with early childhood education. This field is one of four "institutional sites" (p. 56) from which professionals make their discourse and from which discourse derives its source and point of application. The library or documentary field includes the "books and treatises

traditionally recognised as valid... the observations and case-histories published and transmitted... the mass of statistical information that can be supplied” (p.57). This site provides important assistance to teachers with regard to the formation of truths and understandings about children, childhood, gender and sexuality; it is equally as important in assisting teachers to form the tools and instruments through which children, childhood, gender and sexuality can be known.

At the time the major New Zealand early childhood movements were becoming established there was also significant work being undertaken in the social sciences to understand aspects of children, childhood and human development. Foucault (1978) wrote about a post 17th century rise of science and in the role of sciences in producing truths about populations. Foucault connected this to a form of governmentality and to a principle of “normalization” (1999, p. 50). He argued that “fields of knowledge” (1978, p. 142) derived from the sciences, came to be used to exert a relative control over life, “in the space for movement thus conquered, and broadening and organizing of that space, methods of power and knowledge assumed responsibility for life processes and undertook to control and modify them” (p. 142). The norm was established. It laid claim to power. It brought with it “a principle of both qualification and correction... [its function] ...not to exclude and reject... [rather, to be linked to] ...a positive technique of intervention and transformation, to a sort of normative project” (Foucault, 1999, p. 50). Of importance to early childhood education was the knowledge and the norms produced about children, their childhoods and their development that came from the associated domains of developmental psychology, education and medicine and from the related movements of child study and mental measurement (Walkerdine, 1984). In relation to the articulation of heteronormative discourse, *facts* about gender and sexuality development derived from psychology and medicine counted. When connected with advice about how gender and sexuality would become manifest in the *normally* developing young child, truths of children’s gender and sexuality development were established. I maintain that knowledge about how so called normal development of children progresses along these lines of gender and sexuality assists the production of heterosexuality as normal and natural. And it is the way in which teachers work to produce children

whose development falls in accord with these norms that assists heterosexuality to be reproduced over and over as the dominant form of sexuality in New Zealand early childhood education. So how was sexuality configured? Whose expertise mattered? And what ideas came to represent an authoritative account for how sexuality was understood in 20th century New Zealand?

Establishing the heterosexual norm.

Official attitudes to non-heterosexual sexuality in colonial New Zealand society emulated those in Europe and beyond. Non-heterosexual sexuality had been framed as both criminal and pathological since the 17th century when sex for purposes other than procreation within marriage had been outlawed and homosexuality was named and identified as a deviant form of sexuality (Foucault, 1978). Heterosexual sexuality's superiority had been quietly secured in the 1800's when scientific sexuality built from the Christian traditions. The norm of heterosexual monogamy was to mean that "the legitimate couple, with its regular sexuality, had a right to more discretion" (p.38) while heterosexual sexuality's variants were publicised, classified and defined. "What came under scrutiny was the sexuality of children, mad men and women, and criminals; the sensuality of those who did not like the opposite sex..." (p.38). Various forms of same-sex sexual activity between men had been criminalised in New Zealand in 1858. Early medical and scientific texts contributing to the medicalization of sex (Foucault, 1978) and that described proper and perverse sexualities were likely available in New Zealand's public domain from the 19th century (Laurie, 2005), and non-heterosexual sexuality where the church was concerned was morally suspect. In relation to the State, homosexuality was more a matter of criminality rather than mental illness (Brickell, 2005) but the dual framing of non-heterosexual sexualities as both criminal and pathologic remained.

In the context of the early 20th century scientific study of children, norms for various domains of children's development, including gender and sexuality were established. Freud had researched sexuality and his findings were published in a series of essays which contributed to the development of a theory of sex (Freud, 1925c). In his essay on the sexual aberrations (Freud, 1925b), Freud established a

line between what was to be considered normal heterosexual sexuality and abnormal non-heterosexual sexuality. A second essay in the same volume, this time concerning infantile sexuality, enabled Freud to account for variations to normal heterosexual sexuality development in children and adolescents. In this process, the ‘normal citizen’ was largely constituted as heterosexual (Richardson, 2004) and the standards against which all children’s normal heterosexual sexuality development might later be compared came to be known. The *new science* of childhood sexuality contrasted from the existing dominant ideas about sex and children which drew on notions of childhood ignorance and innocence (Silin, 1995 in, Canella, 1998), and positioned children as needing protection from sex and sexuality (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Foucault, 1978; Renold, 2000; Tait, 2001). The childhood innocence discourse:

... had its beginnings firmly within the rationalities associated with the bourgeois family, in that this understanding of childhood was based on the belief that children were intrinsically pure and innocent, and by shielding them from the corruption of society for as long as possible (a corruption most normally characterised by the lifestyles of the working classes), they could be equipped with the necessary moral faculties to cope by themselves later on (Tait, 2001, p.44).

Sexual activity in young children was thought unnatural and an imposition of “physical and moral, individual and collective dangers” (Foucault, 1978, p.104). Children were “deemed to be naturally without a sexuality... [yet] ...the belief existed that... [they] ...could potentially be sexualised” (Tait, 2001, p.44). This belief forced parents, teachers and other professionals to step in and produce children’s sexuality in accord with stringent expectations and cultural standards. The publication of Freud’s research helped to assert the orthodoxy of the sexual child (Tait, 2001) and to define what the norms of development concerning that child were to be.

At the same time ideas about gender and gender differences between boys and girls, men and women were informed by biological interpretations that positioned men and women as complementary and essentially different to each other. Such

understandings conformed to the view that gender is “naturally ascribed, natural and immutable” (Cooper, 2002, p.46). Subsequent to this, truths about the regulation of intimacy between genders and also relations between children and parents (Du Plessis, 2004) formed. To be considered normal “one must enact one’s physical sex, gender and sexuality in particular ways. One must be a masculine male who desires (or is expected to grow up to desire) females or a feminine female who desires (or is expected to grow up to desire) males” (Boldt, 1997, p.189). These views fell in accord with Freud’s ideas of sexuality development. Together they formed persuasive understandings about proper heterosexual sexuality and gender development. I argue that these notions of gender and sexuality remain prominent in early childhood education today. And the speaking of heteronormative discourse is facilitated by their presence.

Freud’s theory of psychosexual development became one of several regulatory discourses about children’s sexuality. He argued that three important erogenous zones become the centre of children’s sexual interests in their early years and that the early childhood child progressed through the oral, anal and oedipal stages until the age of around 6 years where the oedipal complex became resolved (Skolnick, 1986). This is how I learned about childhood sexuality as a student of early childhood teacher education in the late 1980s. The perspective remains powerful in teachers’ learning and in professional publications of the present day (Hendrick, 2001; Honig, 2000; Tobin, 1997). Freud’s Oedipus complex is posited as a normal emotional crisis brought on when children’s natural sexual impulses towards their opposite sex parents lead to the development of guilt (on the part of children) and jealousy (on the part of their same sex parents). The complex is said to occur in two important life stages: early childhood and adolescence. If successfully resolved, the development of conscience and of adult heterosexual identity will occur. Freud considered therefore that forms of non-heterosexual sexuality were examples of arrested development. In this idea, the binary of normal heterosexuality / abnormal (or pathologic) non-heterosexual sexuality is produced. These notions of healthy and normal heterosexual sexuality expressed in Freud’s work help shape our sense of what we should, can and must do with children’s bodies: construct them heterosexually. Along with this thinking we

form ideas of abnormal or pathological forms of sexuality too. Combining notions of normal psychological development with heterosexual sexuality development and marking non-heterosexual sexuality as abnormal in the process, Freud's theories facilitate a host of understandings about sexualities proper and perverse.

In the broader context of early 20th century New Zealand society, criminality, immorality, risk, disease and abnormality were already readily associated with non-heterosexual sexuality when Freud's theories were developed. Stories of sensational same-sex sexual activity for instance featured regularly in the New Zealand media, "...many of which served as cautionary tales and warnings of the consequences of being exposed as homosexual. As well as reports of men convicted of committing homosexual acts, there were other sensational cases... a number of cases connecting homosexuality with murder..." (Laurie, 2005, p. 12). Through Freud and others though, science had come to mark non-heterosexual sexuality as deviant. And this fact of human development held great sway. The science of normal heterosexual sexuality articulated through developmental discourse provided pedagogical possibilities for those who would come later to early childhood education and who would themselves be charged with producing a particular sort of child for the benefit of New Zealand's social and economic futures: a typically developing one.

Producing the heterosexual child.

Walkerdine (1984) writes, "pedagogic practices... are totally saturated with the notion of a normalized sequence of child development, so that those practices help produce children as the object of their gaze" (p. 155). By engaging in a discourse analysis of documents from classrooms, nursery schools and teacher education settings, Walkerdine explores the notion of "child-centred pedagogy" (p.154) and the ways developmental psychology and education discourses construct the objects with which they are concerned, in this case the developing child.

Walkerdine's research focuses attention on how developmental discourses make the subject position of the developing child available, and it demonstrates how apparatuses of pedagogy assist the production of this child. Child assessments are

shown to rely on teacher knowledge developed through forms of teacher education imbricated with developmental discourses. The organization of teaching spaces is shown to rely on the same. The point Walkerdine makes is that “the apparatuses of the pedagogy are no mere application but a site of production in their own right” (p.162). Developmental checklists, observation schedules, teachers practices are instrumental in the production of *normal* sorts of children as defined by medicine, the sciences and developmental psychology. In terms of normal sorts of sexuality, teachers are informed by regulatory discourses from scientists like Freud and Isaacs (below) and in this, are led towards an assumption that constructs children as heterosexual and in the process constructs heterosexuality as a desired norm. Thus teachers’ attention, in terms of sexuality rests on the heterosexual presumption, and this detracts from any sense of there being valid alternatives to heterosexuality.

Freud’s ideas were built on by the work of child psychologists. Isaacs was one whose thinking was influential in New Zealand. Her “ability to translate complex psychological theories into meaningful rationales and suggestions for teachers and parents ...made her writing popular” (May, 1997, p. 168) and after a visit to New Zealand in 1937, Isaacs’ approaches to early childhood and to child development grew in influence. She had ideas about sexuality development that differed from Freud in some ways, but that followed him in others. Importantly the idea that normal sexuality development followed a heterosexual trajectory was left intact. Isaacs framed early childhood sexual activity as a problem that needed to be managed sensitively. If a boy child were found fondling his genitals for instance, Isaacs’ advice was to ignore the behaviour because if attention were drawn to it, he may develop intense feelings of distress and shame; and ...”the child [she wrote] *always* (italics in original) feels ashamed and distressed about it” (1929, p.112).

Isaacs’ explanation for children’s interest in their bodies was accounted for as “expression of the intense inner conflict of the child’s feelings towards his parents” (1929, p.111) and an outward expression of his struggle to “overcome his desire for absolute passion for his mother...a common thing in the ordinary course of development” (pp. 111-112). The discourse follows Freud and asserts

heterosexual sexuality development as normal (his desire... for his mother) but it also connects with Foucault's (1978) notion that the idea of sex or sexuality when related to children needed to be treated with great care. On the basis of its articulation from science and its consistency with other prominent medical, psychological and social discourses of sexuality, heterosexuality was marked again as a truth of all children, for teachers and others to work to produce. An example from recent early childhood education literature is illustrative.

Advising teachers on how best to support parents to understand their children's developing sexuality, Honig (2000) draws on Freudian ideas to write in the journal *Young Child*, widely read in New Zealand:

Caregivers as well as parents need to know about the Oedipal period and the sometimes surprising expectations that preschoolers have as they grow through this period toward emotional resolution of their desire to rival the same-sex parent. Soon enough, children who indeed do love the parent of the same sex learn to want to grow up to be like the parent of the same sex rather than a 'competitor' (2000, p.73).

The heterosexual sexuality development of children is assumed in this developmental discourse because the Oedipus complex, which preschoolers grow through, is a part of normal psychological development of preschoolers. By educating teachers to teach parents about the issues that will arise when children progress through the crisis, Honig's advice orients teachers' and parents' constructions of children towards heterosexuality because of the same-sex rivalry that occurs. Further, the comment about same-sex parent rivalry assumes the presence of an opposite sex parent in children's families; with this comment the nuclear family norm is established. As an example of how binaries of normal heterosexual sexuality, gender and family come together Honig's comment speaks both heteronormative and developmental discourses.

Early in the 20th century New Zealanders had been supported to think about children and childhood in terms of developmental norms and the rise of child study and child psychology further cemented the tradition. The establishment by

Truby King of the *Society for the Protection of Children and Women* (the Plunket Society) and the practices and understandings about proper childrearing and child health that came from Plunket had been taken up readily by New Zealand Pākehā parents in the country's attempts to curb infant mortality and to increase children's health outcomes in their early years. According to Olssen (1981), by 1930, 65% of all non-Māori infants were under the care of Plunket and by 1947 the figure had risen to 85%. Regimen, routine and the checking off of milestones became instrumental markers of appropriate childrearing in New Zealand. This meant that by the time the developmental approach to early childhood education gained prominence, the construction of children, as the sum of fragmented developmental domains, was a somewhat familiar proposition. And although the emphasis on regimen with regards to proper care and development diminished with the rise of psychological theories later in the 20th century, the routine and developmental emphases did not. Parents came to expect children to progress along normally evolving developmental pathways. In terms of sexuality, Freud and Issacs had defined what that looked like, and in education, teachers influenced by the science of childhood sexuality, came to expect heterosexuality as a normal and inevitable outcome. In the process came a silencing of valid alternative options to heterosexuality and a closeting of diverse sexualities that worked to preserve the (hetero)norm.

Gender and sexualities matters later in the 20th century.

By the 1960s and 1970s different ideas about genders and sexualities were coming to the fore. On the back of feminist action, the new gender discourse was one of equality of the sexes and international rights movements had begun to agitate for change in response to various social, cultural and economic oppressions, sexuality included. Gender equality was a growing concern in New Zealand education and in early childhood sex role stereotyping was explored (Halliday & McNaughton, 1982; McMillan, 1978; Meade & Staden, 1985; Smith, 1985). Dominant thinking about gender development followed ideas about the social basis for learning (Bandura, 1965, 1973). It was thought that girls and boys learned about how to perform their gender from observing significant same sex and opposite sex role models, and by having appropriate sorts of gendered behaviour reinforced in the

context of the broader community (Davies, 1989a). It was an understanding that held fast to the essentially male and essentially female understandings of gender even though gender was considered somewhat malleable in light of learning. Davies argues that the sex roles view constructs gender as a “superficial social dressing laid over the ‘real’ biological difference” (1989a, p. 5). As such it did little to shift understandings of gender development away from the biological and essentialist views. Both of which have been shown to exist in early childhood education (MacNaughton, 2000).

The newer theories of gender development blended with traditional ones and the texts where New Zealand students of early childhood education like me learned about gender development (Skolnick, 1986; Smith, 1986; Smith & Swain, 1988; Somerset, 1976) advanced them equally. It wasn't until the late 1980s that newer understandings of gender started coming to the fore. Davies' (1989a) study of preschool children and gender introduced early childhood teachers and others to the idea that gender is a public rather than private construct through which children learn to become masculine and feminine as they try out and perfect gender performances of the sort that would allow them to be recognisable as boy or girl in the social, cultural and historical locations of their lives. Other feminist and post structuralist researchers and writers continued in this vein to give relatively local (both the volumes I refer to here are from Australian authors) examples of children's capacity to construct themselves as gendered beings in social communities (MacNaughton, 2000; Yelland, 1998). The newer theories gave rise to discourses of gender diversity that rallied against the essentialising and biological explanations of gender development from earlier in the century. Persistent however was an assumption identified by Sedgwick (1994) about gender and sexuality that viewed them both as continuous and collapsible categories of one's personhood. The newer theories and evidence around gender had allowed for different understanding of gender development to begin to form, but for sexualities, little had changed in spite of significant developments outside of education.

Liberating views of sexuality?

The death of Charles Aberhardt in Christchurch in 1964, in a crime where 6 youths (subsequently found not guilty of manslaughter) went to Hagley Park to reportedly “bash up a queer” (Wright, Duff, Edyvane, & Emms, 2005, p. 84) became an important catalyst for the formation of various gay rights groups in New Zealand. In 1972 the first New Zealand Gay Liberation conference was held. The New Zealand Homosexual Law Reform Society (NZHLRS) began working for law reform towards the decriminalisation of homosexual acts. The group used a discourse concerning the biological basis for homosexuality to elicit “sympathy for the plight of the homosexual, but ... [to indicate at the same time] ... that support for reform did not imply moral approval of homosexual behaviour” (Pritchard, 2005, p. 83). The biological discourse centres on deficiencies in brain development as the root cause of homosexuality (Greenberg & Bailey, 1993; Spanier, 1995). As a discourse it draws on the dual influences of science and nature, and inherent to these, the inevitabilities of biological determinism. The biological discourse pathologises non-heterosexual sexuality by reasoning that the cause of homosexuality is a decreased hypothalamus size and subsequent insufficiency of brain hormones in the developing foetus. The use of the biological argument by the NZHLRS perpetuated the idea that “homosexuals were victims of a condition that was no fault of their own, and that criminal sanctions only served to push underground already troubled people” (Pritchard, 2005, p.83). This appeal to the liberal senses occurred at a time when there was enough of a climate for potential change brewing in the New Zealand population. National MP Venn Young introduced a private members bill to parliament proposing the decriminalisation of homosexual acts. It was, however, a bill before its time, and once introduced to the house, was quickly defeated.

By the late 1970s an umbrella organization for various gay rights and activism groups, the National Gay Rights Coalition (NGRC), formed and began a programme of systematic and organised activism towards law reform and gay recognition. Drawing on human rights discourses that celebrated difference and argued for an acceptance of homosexuality and a valuing of social diversity, this group came to an end in the mid 1980s, but by then government MP Fran Wilde

had proposed a bill that would decriminalise gay sex. The impetus for change grew. Task forces were formed in major cities, the campaign for reform had begun and public interest was sparked. The 1984-85 campaign was fiercely contested on religious, moral and traditionalist fronts. But this time the reformists won out and homosexuality in New Zealand was decriminalised with the passing of the *Homosexual Law Reform Bill* ("Homosexual Law Reform Act (NZ)", 1986). Following from this, it became illegal in New Zealand to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation when human rights legislation was passed in parliament in 1993 ("Human Rights Act (NZ)", 1993).

Such acceptance of non-heterosexual sexualities was not however to come to early childhood education. The contrary was in fact to occur as discourses of risk and danger (Jones, 2003, 2004) were to interweave with significant events in the 1990s that served to assert the notions of abnormality and deviance associated with non-heterosexual sexuality markedly. In November 1991 a group of childcare teachers, four women and one man from Christchurch's Civic Crèche were charged with committing sexual indecencies against children attending the centre. The charges against the women were dropped after depositions, but the man Peter Ellis, faced the court on 25 charges in 1993. At the conclusion of the trial he was found guilty on 16 charges and sentenced to 10 years in prison. On sentencing the Judge told Ellis, a bi-sexual man who was now a convicted paedophile, that "he was a pervert; that he had no doubt the jury was correct in its verdict and that Ellis could have assisted the child victims of these crimes, and himself, if he had faced up to the truth about himself and sought help at an early stage" (Brett, 1993, p.55). Jones (2003) explains that, "the case reverberated through the New Zealand early childhood communities. The response was... to move immediately to make all centres 'safe' for children" (p.236). Not only did Ellis' conviction provide support for the "stereotype of gay men as sex-obsessed child molesters" (Silin, 1997, p. 219), it raised the spectre that other men who taught in early childhood might also be homosexual and that if they were, they were most certainly, potential paedophiles. Connections between the ideas of homosexuality, paedophilia and male teachers in early childhood education are explored by King (2004) when he discusses the discursive practices, or language

routines, that create and recreate homosexuality and unjustly impact on men who want to teach young children. “When a man... respond[s] to the call... [to teach], and that man happens to be gay, others are prepared to think him perverted, pedophilic, and certainly wrong-headed in his intent to teach youngsters” (p.122) King writes. Drawing attention to gender and sexuality discourses around teaching, King explores common perceptions such as, teachers are asexual, or teaching is women’s work, to show how “these largely inaccurate mappings between homosexuality, teaching, and gendered behaviour have had disastrous effects on teachers” (p.123). Gender and sexuality discourses combine to render the place of men as teachers of young children especially risky. This idea prevalent in the immediate post-Civic era of New Zealand (Farquhar, 1997, 1999) and arguably it still may be (Farquhar, Cablk, Buckingham, Butler, & Ballantyne, 2006). The discourse of risk was to ensure that men along with their female counterparts in early childhood centres would work hard so as to ensure the spectre of accusation was kept far at bay (Jones, 2003).

Heterosexuality became asserted again as the normal form of sexuality as prominent organisations produced guidelines and policy documents designed to assist teachers’ and children’s safety from child sexual abuse or allegations thereof (Combined Early Childhood Union of Aotearoa, 1993; Ministry of Education, 1993; Wood, 1993). The same messages were recycled in various ways; normal heterosexual sexuality development would follow a particular pathway. For children who were “normal, unmolested, well adjusted and well brought up” (Combined Early Childhood Union of Aotearoa, 1993, p.33) teachers and parents could expect children to display sexualised behaviours of certain sorts, to ask some kinds of questions, or to engage in specific activities at particular ages and stages. The ideas were premised on developmental discourse and replicated the messages about childhood sexuality in the child development texts (Hendrick, 1992; Skolnick, 1986) and other professional publications. They assisted teachers in maintaining heterosexuality as an expected and desired outcome of normal child development. A discourse of professionalism shaped the response and the guidelines and policy directives were designed to help to re-establish the safety of early childhood centres and early childhood teachers in the post-Civic era. These

steps proved effective means of re-connecting with the imperative to preserve children's safety from the dangers of adult sexuality.

At the same time new problems in education centred on gender were coming to light, and in these traces of the traditional gender essentialist theories shone through. Now though problems of gender inequity in education were centred on boys rather than girls as the government agency, the Education Review Office (ERO), drew attention to the problem(s) of boys' underachievement in the New Zealand education system (Education Review Office, 1999). Since then this gender *problem* has grown. It has been defined variously: as a problem of the feminised education system; as a problem of gender differentiated learning styles; as a problem of emasculated masculinity; as a problem of homophobia. And it has applied to men who teach as well as to children who participate in education settings. In early childhood and secondary education (Farquhar, 1997, 1999; Farquhar, Cablk, Buckingham, Butler, & Ballantyne, 2006; Lashlie, 2004) in particular, understandings of gender are being framed in ways that speak essentialism once more.

One example of this is evidenced in a report on aspects of New Zealand early childhood education that received a great deal of media coverage at the end of 2006. The report levelled a charge of institutional sexism at the government in relation to early childhood education (Farquhar, Cablk, Buckingham, Butler, & Ballantyne, 2006). It drew frequently on essentialist discourses to justify a set of problems that can result when men are not represented in the early childhood workforce. One key problem identified in the report is the issue of children spending limited time with men, "during their formative years children... [are in] childcare environments...that are almost exclusively female...time with adult males and their contact with positive male role models...is thus reduced" (Farquhar, Cablk, Buckingham, Butler, & Ballantyne, 2006, p. iii), the report said. Ignoring the fact that traditionally, childrearing was the domain of women, the report goes on to say, "...today women have more career choices and this makes it harder to attract talented women... by not opening up early childhood teaching more... for men, children are at a greater risk of substandard care and education" (p. iv). The perception of it being necessary to increase children's time with men

so as to correct a modern day imbalance that puts children at risk represents a key idea in gender essentialism: the balancing of male and female energies. When this idea is articulated in the context of a discursive formation that asserts the normalcy of heterosexual sexuality development, as the documentary field of early childhood education does, it is possible to see how dominant gender and sexualities discourses can converge to assert the (hetero)norm.

Chapter conclusion

I began this chapter with a statement about heteronormative discourse forming around the binaries of normal heterosexuality versus abnormal non heterosexual sexuality, masculine men and feminine women versus gender deviant men and women and nuclear versus non nuclear families. I argue that all three of these binaries feature in early childhood education and support the articulation of heteronormative discourse. I have shown how nuclear families were positioned in social and educational policy as the normal form of family in New Zealand's 20th century. Further, I wrote about the way heterosexual sexuality development, reliant on particular understandings of gender, was constructed as the normal form of sexuality development for the typically developing young child. Heterosexuality constructed as an object of medical, psychological, developmental and an educational discourse is produced as a standard representing a desired and normal aspect of human development.

In early childhood education, the centering of heterosexuality through prevalent discourses of gender development, of the family, and of children's sexuality, establishes heterosexuality as normative and dominant. A consequence of this is that those whose lives are lived outside of these norms risk being excluded by the every day practices of early childhood education. Not only is this unfair, it is also against the spirit of the law and contrary to guidelines for early childhood education (Ministry of Education, 1996b) that ask teachers to help create learning communities to which many might say they are able to belong.

So the question of *if, and if so how, heteronormative discourse is shaping practices in early childhood education today* is what I continue on in this study to explore. Further, what effects does heteronormative discourse bring about? How

is heteronormativity kept firm? Should it be? And what can be said of inclusive practices where non-heterosexual sexualities are concerned? These are the kinds of questions that the remaining chapters of this thesis seek to address.

CHAPTER THREE – METHODS

To study *if, and if so how, heteronormative discourse is shaping practices in early childhood education today*, the question of how best to work within a genealogical framework and also to engage ethnographic methods was raised. It is one thing to research and write in relation to historical data, but to turn to the present and wonder about practices and people who are included and excluded on the basis of their positions in discourse, a different approach is warranted. The study would blend seemingly incompatible philosophical and epistemological standpoints. The question of *if, and if so how, heteronormative discourse is shaping practices in early childhood education today*, was located in the real world. It shifted the site of the project from an historical documents based reading of heteronormativity to a present day reading of lived experiences as told by real people. This shift raised questions. First, I was planning to work with people not words on a page, but as Middleton (2003) explains, Foucault's "genealogies were archival and did not extend to living persons. His forms and modalities of subjectivity are not analogous with the embodied person" (p.41), rather he focussed on the positions made available in discourse and on showing how the techniques of professions helped to produce them. Second, Foucault's genealogies had been written out of analyses of historical texts that allowed him to explore the "networks of writing that diagnosed, classified, and recorded" (Foucault, 1977, cited in Middleton, 2003, p. 42) whereas I was working in the present day with embodied teacher-subjects. Could genealogy *fit* here too? How might I proceed when my data were located in these different sites and my theoretical resources raised questions of most procedural elements of the work? The basic problems seemed to stem from a distinction between understanding the world as "found versus constructed" (Simon and Dippo, 1986 cited in, Lather, 2001, p. 675) because this had consequences for how I construed who I would choose to work with, how I interpreted the procedures I might employ, and for what readings I might make of what would be said.

The question of combining genealogy with ethnography

I was to combine Foucauldian genealogy and ethnographic focus group research in this second phase of my study. This created a question of logic around the world I was going to study. In genealogy, part of the aim is to show the world constructed: to illuminate how discourses produce practices, to show how subject positions are maintained, to locate the ways in which knowledge is produced, and subsequent to this, how the professions apply it to bodies. Through this approach it was relatively easy for me to accept the view that the world is brought into being through meanings people make in language because language, words, texts, are shown in the writing that researchers produce, for their constitutive effects. Ethnography on the other hand is characterised by Britzman (2000) as an approach that presupposes worlds existing somewhere to be discovered and people to be discovered in them. This rendering of the world (or worlds even) as existing external to us, free from discourse and able to be found and understood through careful observation and documentation sits at odds with the former view. How could I ‘discover’ when my philosophical and theoretical positions made it clear that I would ‘produce’?

The question of fit between genealogy and ethnography is discussed by Tamboukou and Ball (2003) as both problem and possibility. While the approaches might be characterised as starting from different places, the ground up – from interactions to social processes as in ethnography, or the top down – from culturally produced discourses that shape every day lives as in genealogy (Miller & Fox, 2004), they both seek similar outcomes. These are to produce accounts of how what we do in local settings is connected to social practices in broader society. Taking Foucault’s discourse analysis into the ethnographic part of the study was one way to work towards producing an account of how people’s activities in localised settings are organised into what Smith (2002) calls “the relations that rule them” (p. 21). By bringing the genealogical to bear on accounts of teachers’ practices in the present day, these could be placed in the context of an historical reading of social, political, cultural processes that are located in time

and place, thus reinforcing the notion that interpretations formed in the course of ethnographic work are not some immutable set of facts discovered and forever established, but constructions made possible by and in relation to the time, place and people involved in the production. Tamboukou and Ball (2003) argue that “being genealogically driven can mould the ethnographer’s sociological imagination in new forms and further incite her towards historicizing her findings and continually interrogating the factuality of their existence” (p. 18). I found it could keep several questions in play: how were my meanings being framed? How was the text I was producing concealing and revealing particular ideas and not others? In what ways were the positions I occupied in the research making some things possible and others not?

My response to the genealogy – ethnography questions, in particular the key one in my mind which was about finding a world *out there* to study, was to not really go *out there* at all, or rather, to go *out there* in a purposefully productive way. I made decisions to locate my research at the level of text by producing the objects of my analysis, transcripts, from accounts of early childhood worlds articulated in focus group interviews. It was a reality thrice removed. Working in this manner would not only provide continuity across the kinds of data I read in both the historical and present day sites of my study, it would also acknowledge that the data were produced not discovered, and it would privilege language in my analyses. I considered that this would be more likely to assist me towards discourse analysis of the sort that I had set out to undertake: one that might “produce an awareness of the complexity, historical contingency, and fragility of the practices we invent to discover the truth about ourselves” (Lather, 1992, p. 88).

Producing data: The focus group method

I planned focus groups for the ethnographic part of the study. Focus groups are a type of interview where participants are brought together to respond to questions or ideas of particular interest (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Frey & Fontana, 1991; Ryan & Lobman, 2007). I wanted to bring several different focus groups together and to conduct several rounds of interviews, culminating in a

combined meeting where all groups would convene. I constructed three groups, the queer allies, the queer teachers and the teacher educators. I met with each group twice, in two rounds of interviews, and then collectively in a final focus group meeting. My decisions around the participant groups, their constitution, naming and the process of three rounds of interviews are discussed later in the chapter (see pp.70-72).

As a method, focus groups are mostly associated with market research, public opinion polling and consumer affairs research: however they are increasingly being utilised within social science disciplines (Wilkinson, 2004). Jones' (2003, 2004) studies of New Zealand teachers' and education managers' responses to social anxieties about touching children and surveillance in education settings used the focus group approach to produce data which could be examined with reference to issues of power and safety in teaching within New Zealand schools and early childhood centres. Kamberelis & Dimitriadis (2005) have traced the use of focus groups in emancipatory pedagogy and feminist research. The method offered possibilities for this part of my project on the grounds of: practicality, logic and quality research design.

The focus group rationale: considerations and research design

The location of the talk in focus group research was advantageous. Usually, when a focus group is convened, the researcher will provoke discussions and the group will then take up the conversation. The talk exists largely between members of the group rather than having research participants conversing primarily with the researcher (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). I was interested in this approach practically. Teachers in early childhood education work in group settings (Nuttall, 2004), and conversations between teachers about all manner of subjects related to practice or not takes place regularly in such contexts. I expected then, that the collective nature of the group would be a somewhat familiar context for participants' discussions about practices, and that because of this, participants might be more forthcoming about contributing to the discussions that would take place.

The focus group method and the multiple rounds of focus group meetings I had proposed had a positive impact on the ability to produce trustworthy data and authentic interpretations (Merriam, 2002). The question of trustworthiness or “dependability” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 35) concerns a study’s usefulness and authenticity. That is to say, if one were to judge a study trustworthy, he or she would likely want to make use of the knowledge generated by it (Merriam, 2002). One reason why I considered the focus group method productive of trustworthiness was that the numbers of participants able to be involved in the group interviews (across the timeframe I had available for the study) would be increased than in comparison to if I had relied on another interview method for data production. If more people, speaking from a range of positions, spoke similarly about issues of heteronormativity then data might be considered *more accurate than not* because a consistent message, if it were being articulated from different positions would be considered more dependable than a single utterance or isolated experience of some idea or concept. This I understood, was a criterion upon which the worth of a qualitative study might be judged (Coll, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Merriam, 2002). Conversely, if participants didn’t speak similarly to matters of heteronormativity in the focus groups, then the work would have taken different directions, and these shifts, documented carefully so as to provide an “audit trail” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981 in, Merriam, 2002, p. 27) of the study, would “indicate increasing maturity of the inquiry” (Coll, 2002, p. 5) which is also understood to be sign of dependability and therefore an element of sound research design. But the focus groups were also practical for their capacity to bring together sub groups of teachers to speak to the project: (heterosexual) teachers, (non-heterosexual) teachers, and teacher educators. I thought that being able to speak to practices from each of these positions might offer complex insights into the practices I was planning to explore.

I was also interested in the location of the talk in the focus group interview for logical reasons. The data produced in focus group research comes from the interactions of the participants more so than an interaction between the researcher and an interviewee. This was important because of the potential power relations between me and the participants (see pp.76-79 & 99-103), but also because it

allowed me to pay attention to the group's processes (Hyde, Howlett, Brady, & Drennan, 2005) and the ways in which meaning is "jointly created, contested and reworked with the processes of the group" (Warr, 2005, p. 203). I was interested in the group processes of the focus group because the data from such interview settings can be considered more naturalistic, within the context of a constructed interview setting, that is, closer to every day conversation (Wilkinson, 2004) and it provides for the chance to see how information is constructed between people. As already mentioned, early childhood teachers, unlike most others who work in school and tertiary settings, work in collective settings. Focus groups also involve a number of people speaking to topics of interest and they can be particularly illustrative of the wide range of discourses that might be brought together to constitute understandings. Further, the conversation is public and open to a wider range of communicative processes than might be evident in a traditional interview, for example, joking, boasting, teasing, persuading and challenging (Hyde, Howlett, Brady, & Drennan, 2005; Wilkinson, 2004). Would thinking about these processes lead me to understandings about discourses and heteronormativity that I might not have reached if I had chosen another method of data gathering for my project?

A second reason I was interested in the group processes was because my reading of Davies' *Poststructuralist Theory and Classroom Practice* (1994) cued me into thinking about group interactions. In that volume, Davies engages in post structural analyses of classroom practices by interpreting video recordings of a teacher and his students at work. Questions about group interactions and content of conversations come together in Davies' reading of the video. Several of these are about group relations, for example, what kind of context are the participants creating for each other? How are they positioning each other? How is experience made relevant? Whose interests are being served by the discourses that are mobilised? I could see that these types of questions could be asked of the transcripts of focus group meetings that I might produce in my project. They might help me explore the ways in which teacher-subjects acted in concert with each other and with institutionally located discourses to produce certain knowledge and concepts as legitimate and others as less so. The collective nature

of early childhood teachers' work was distinctive and the method sought to utilise this in the study.

The participant groups

As I was interested in exploring *if, and if so how, heteronormative discourse is shaping practices in early childhood education*, I needed to talk with the people whose professional practices were tied up in early childhood education. For me this meant I would seek to work with teachers and teacher educators. Teacher educators, because they are responsible for facilitating the transition of individuals from outside early childhood education into early childhood education, would form one group. A particular type of early childhood teacher, teacher educators visit a vast array of early childhood centres. I thought therefore that they might be able to recognise and respond to the practices we had come to discuss, because the likelihood that they had come across such practices in the course of their work would be increased. Also, I considered that teacher educators would be able to speak with some authority about early childhood education because they are recognised as experts of a kind: people with skills and knowledge to transmit as well as people with the ability to produce knowledge about the field of early childhood education. I wanted therefore to include their views as important sources of data for my study into heteronormative discourses and early childhood education.

As well as teacher educators, I would involve teachers because it is through the every day practices of teachers that heteronormative discourses might shape practices and in which heterosexuality may be repeatedly reproduced as dominant. But I sought specific kinds of teachers for the project: those who were open to the possibility that heterosexism, homophobia and heteronormativity existed in early childhood education and those who recognised the exclusions that heterosexism, homophobia and heteronormativity could bring about. I therefore brought together a group of non-heterosexual teachers and another who saw themselves as allies to them. I named these groups, the *queer teachers* and the *queer allies*.

I used the word queer on purpose. It is immediately provocative of identity politics and of homophobia and it drew attention to heteronormativity by claiming

a position in opposition to heterosexuality. Historically used as a hate word in every day speech, queer was, and still is from the view of some, a derogatory term for labelling homosexuals. However its contemporary use within political activism and academic theory is seen as a “conscious reclaiming and re-signification of the term to put it to use in a positive and productive way” (Alsop, Fitzsimons, & Lennon, 2002, p. 95). Queer, as an identity term refuses more familiar categories, such as lesbian or gay, and Halberstam (1996) advocates the term as one that can help destabilise the “assumed identity in identity politics” (p.259) and therefore work against the creation of binaries associated with sexual identity. It can hinder the ability to *other* because the notion of *queer* is also related to a more generalised tendency to resist normalising practices or to act queerly or at odds with something (Britzman, 1995, 1998; Morris, 1998; Spargo, 1999; Valocchi, 2005). This was another of my main reasons for adopting the term. I could use it to position people similarly and therefore work against tendencies towards binary patterning. Queer as a term can function “as a noun, an adjective, a verb, but in each case it is defined against the normal or normalising (Spargo, 1999, p. 6). I found that it offered me license to interrupt thinking that led to the (hetero)normative status quo. By naming both non-teacher educator participant groups in the project queer (the queer teachers and the queer allies), I hoped to signal the common ground from where all teachers could act against the (hetero)norm in favour of social justice. Second to this though, I wanted to keep in play the discomfort that homophobia, heterosexism and heteronormativity can produce so as to reduce any possibility that we might adjust to the topic sufficiently in our discussions that we began to fail to recognise the potentially damaging effects that heteronormative discourses can have on those whose lives are situated outside the (hetero)norm.

Bringing together teachers to speak from the positions of teacher educator, queer ally and queer teacher was purposeful also, because I understood that discourses made positions available and authorised some subjects whilst marginalising others. Where heteronormative discourse is concerned, those who identify with non-heterosexual sexualities, the queers, are pathologised whereas those whose sexuality is identified as heterosexual, the allies, are viewed as normal. I wanted

to trouble these constructions and I considered that in order to come to understand the varied impacts of heteronormative discourse; to explore the complex ways it becomes manifest in early childhood practice; to appreciate how it excludes and includes; how it intersects with other discourses to stay anchored in early childhood education, I needed to hear heteronormativity spoken about from various positions which weren't fixed and stable. If we (I include myself here, because I was not divorced from any of the positions I chose to include and name in the project – teacher educator, teacher, queer) all spoke heteronormative discourse in some manner, we could also all be implicated in resisting it. On this basis I invited teachers and teacher educators to participate in the project by selecting and joining one of these three groups.

Participant invitations

To begin formally recruiting participants to the project once ethical consent to proceed was granted, I made phone contact with several individuals who had known what I was proposing to study and who had indicated an eagerness to participate. To these individuals I mailed a *Focus group member participant information sheet* explaining the study along with consent forms for participation (see appendix one). To recruit participants for the study beyond these few individuals, I had decided to employ a mix of snowball sampling (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000) and advertisements through local early childhood networks. Snowballing would be useful for accessing a potentially difficult to reach population: non-heterosexual teachers; and the wider advertising would hopefully capture the interest of others who might be drawn to the study. I also asked those who had already indicated eagerness to participate if they could recommend participants and I placed an advertisement in a professional publication called *Early Childhood Support News*, and its associated e-network, an email contact list of early childhood individuals, centres and organizations in the Canterbury region administered by a local tertiary institution.

Over a period of 10 weeks, I was in contact with 14 potential participants for this study. I would talk by phone with them and follow up this initial contact with mailed information sheets and consent forms. Once consent forms had been

received back, I wrote to participants again, confirming their involvement in the study and sending them further documentation as starting points for their first focus group meeting (see appendix two). There was no selection process through which potential participants were excluded from the project. When I had recruited at least 4 members to each of the participant groups, it seemed time to begin.

The participants

I asked each of the 14 participants to write a profile in which they described themselves and their professional experience in early childhood education. This was to give me a sense of how participants viewed their engagement in the study and for me to gain some insight into their work lives. I didn't know all of the participants prior to the research. They had self-selected into one of the three participant groups and at my request most had chosen a pseudonym. Where they had not, I assigned one to help preserve confidentiality for the production of this thesis.

The queer allies.

In establishing this group I had written in the study's information sheets that it would bring together "teachers who do not identify as lesbian or gay and who... [were] ...comfortable in adopting teaching practices that affirm sexual diversity" (*Focus group member participant information sheet*). The group comprised four members, three of whom worked together in one early childhood centre (Pat, Rona and Stacey). I knew two of the teachers prior to the project (Pat and Pietra) but I met Rona and Stacey for the first time in the context of this work.

Pat described herself as happily married, as owning sheep, and as having taught in early childhood education for approximately 16 years, since leaving school. Pat was the head teacher / manager of an early childhood centre that she took great pride in. She saw that the topic of the research was important for early childhood education because the lack of information in this area let people "just bury their heads in the sand" because "they don't know how best to handle the topic for children and families" (*Participant profiles: Pat*).

Pietra thought that homophobia was visible in New Zealand and since coming here 8 years ago, she had experienced New Zealanders as “prudish and not openly affectionate” (*Participant profiles: Pietra*). Pietra felt these attitudes filtered down to children. She worked in an early childhood centre with children from birth to two years of age. She was married and had a 16 month-old child of her own.

Rona worked part time in the same early childhood centre as Pat and was studying towards her early childhood diploma as she worked. Mother to two daughters, Rona was interested in the project because “it is a topic some people are uncomfortable with” (*Participant profiles: Rona*) and she saw her job being partly about allowing children to “develop in an unbiased setting... so that they...[could] ...develop with open minds” (*Participant profiles: Rona*).

Stacey was the fourth participant in the allies group. A colleague of Rona and Pat’s, Stacey was 21 years old and had been working in her current centre for 1.5 years. Stacey provided no further detail about herself or her professional experiences in the profile.

The queer teachers.

I described this group in the *Focus group member participant information sheet* as one that would bring together “lesbian women and gay men who work in early childhood centres”. The group comprised five members, all women, three of whom I’d previously known (Marian, Rebecca and Andy). Andy and Ariel worked in the same early childhood centre. Marian and Rebecca were partners; they knew Kim prior to the research. The project was the first time Marian, Rebecca and Kim had met Andy and Ariel.

Ariel trained in early childhood education overseas and had worked in early childhood education on three continents. At the time of the project she worked in an infant and toddler setting. Having been with her partner for the previous four years, Ariel wrote in her personal profile that she felt her same-sex sexuality had no “bearing whatsoever on... [her] ...work with children” (*Participant profiles: Ariel*).

Andy, who worked in the same organization as Ariel, had been teaching for 6.5 years. At the time of the project she held a position as supervisor in her centre. Andy said she was told by her boss that she “should take part” (*Participant profiles: Andy*), and after an initial mixed reaction, she decided that she wanted “to offer... [her] ...perspective as a teacher who happens to be gay, to this research” (*Participant profiles: Andy*).

Kim, another participant in the project, chose to not write a participant profile, and her participation in the project was limited to joining in the first round of focus group meetings and receiving all mailed documentation that was sent in the course of the study.

Marian was 40 at the time of the project and had been teaching for 19 years. She was the supervisor of a large centre and she stated that over her teaching career she had dealt “with many situations... [and had made] ...many choices because of... [her] ...sexuality” (*Participant profiles: Marian*). She hoped that research into queer education would make a difference to teachers and children.

Rebecca had been teaching and working in related services for the past 20 years, since she was 17. Personally and professionally interested in anti-bias education, Rebecca viewed early childhood education as the “perfect place to model/instill these attitudes, or at least create openness” (*Participant profiles: Rebecca*).

The teacher educators.

I didn't define the teacher educators group in the *Focus group member participant information sheet* beyond its name. The group comprised five participants from two tertiary institutions providing initial teacher education programmes in early childhood education. Mina, Penny and Dan worked together in one institution while Rose and Shirley worked in another. I knew the entire group of teacher educator participants prior to their engagement in the research and they knew each other too.

Mina had worked in teacher education for 5 years after an 8.5-year period of teaching in infant and toddler education. She hoped “to learn and share issues that

arise in relation to the area [of the research] and... [her] ...own work” (*Participant profile: Mina*).

Rose was 40 at the time of the project. She had taught in early childhood centres for 9 years and in teacher education for 9 years. Rose described her interest in the topic as reflecting her “own emerging interests / research as a queer scholar and colleague” (*Participant profiles: Rose*).

Shirley described herself as a 50-year-old Pākehā woman and mother of 4 who had lived rurally as a child and was part of a large extended family. Shirley had been associated with early childhood education since she trained as a Karitane Nurse after leaving school. She had also taught in, established and managed early childhood education centres.

Neither Dan or Penny provided participant profiles.

Positions in the focus groups

The focus group method offered me a position in the research interviews as facilitator or moderator. I viewed such a position as productive of a more democratic interview process than traditional interview methods thus providing further justification for the use of the method in my study. Researcher and participant relationships have been long troubled by feminist researchers who point to the politics of power that loiter between those who research and those who are researched in the social sciences (Fine, 1994). Based upon the idea that social positions shape and limit what we might understand, what Lather (1992) calls, “feminist standpoint theories of knowledge” (p.92), I had formed questions in my mind about the extent to which positions might colour what was possible in the research but I couldn’t yet comprehend what this might mean for the range of positions that might be made possible in the focus group discussions. I had made choices to declare the positions of queer teachers, queer allies and teacher educators and had considered some of the implications of this, yet many more possibilities existed and I left these unremarked. With respect to my positions though, I wondered, how would participants read me? As researcher and/or

teacher educator and/or lesbian and/or parent and/or something else? And how would this impact on what was said and heard in the project?

Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2002) explain that it is through positionings (of the researcher and the researched) that research interviews take place and from which meanings are drawn. Assuming that participants would likely afford me some authority by reading me at least in part, as researcher and the person who had brought the groups together for the purpose of *my* research, and worrying that this might limit conversation, I wanted to move myself aside in the interview processes so that the participants' contributions might come to prominence. Focus groups are considered more egalitarian than other interview methods (Warr, 2005), their "horizontality" (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 898) is useful in locating power during the interview between participants rather than between the researcher and participants. I was hoping that participants would tell stories of how they'd experienced discursive practices at work in early childhood education. Focus groups, by offering the position of facilitator or moderator, offered me a clear method towards this end.

The possibility that the participants and I might occupy different positions and speak variously to the issues of the research from time to time was drawn into focus at the beginnings of all the group meetings in round one of the interviews, but more so in the first of the teacher educator interviews when I responded to a question from one of the participants, Penny, about 'who' I wanted the teacher educators to speak as in the interview:

2: Alex: So this is the first tape of the teacher educator focus group... so the question Penny is, do I want you to speak as a teacher educator or as any of the other multiple hats that you might wear? All of them actually...in one sense I've got you as a group of teacher educators because I have an assumption that teacher education has a big role to play in opening up the potential for teachers to talk about sexualities matters. That's why I see you as a... unique group with a unique perspective to bring to this research because I think that we, when we talk to student teachers and when we talk to teachers out there in centres, [it] can legitimise in a way the ability for us to speak about this aspect of diversity. And so that's why um I've called together a teacher educator group because I think we matter in relation to that. So, ...the episodes or dilemmas that I sent you were written from a teacher educator focus. Now

there are parallel ones that I've talked in the other groups with, that are from a teacher focus. And so in one sense I was thinking uniquely as teacher educators, but if we move into other realms...that's o.k. because we've all been teachers as well, some of us quite recently...

Penny: and students, is another that comes to mind

Alex: and students, yeah,

Shirley: and teachers of adults, and teachers of children and, ...

Mina: and parents of children in centres

Penny: mmm, that's right

Mina: (laughs)

Penny: and supervisors, yeah that's slightly different again sometimes...

(FG: TE, 1.0, L.2-13)¹.

It seemed as though the most obvious of possibilities of who we might *be* at various times in the interviews were being laid out. And I at least, engaged in some deliberate moves to try and diminish my position as researcher and horizontalise my relationship with the group. Penny's initial question addressed me as researcher, and my response to her and the other participants was to them as teacher educators. I claimed this position too for myself and heard Penny's 'student' comment as it spoke to me as research student. Beyond this, the possibilities kept coming: teacher, parent and supervisor. I was reminded in this

¹ The referencing technique I use to cite moments from transcripts of focus group (FG) interviews is as follows. There are three parts to the reference. First the participant group is identified as one of either QA: queer allies; QT: queer teachers; or TE: teacher educators. Then the specific transcript from where the comment is drawn is cited. The first number, if it is a '1' denotes a round one interview, '2' a round two interview, '3' an excerpt from the combined focus group. Each side of each audio tape was transcribed into a new electronic file so in an interview lasting up to 90 minutes, there will be three transcripts associated with the interview, '0' (transcript 1, first 30 minutes), '1' (second transcript, 30-60 minutes) or '2' (third transcript, 60-90 minutes). The third aspect of the reference indicates the line numbers from the original transcripts. So the reference above, (FG:TE, 1.0, L.2-13) should be read: Teacher educator focus group, round one, first transcript, lines 2-13.

moment that the participants and I would engage in active positionings as we discussed heteronormativity and the shaping of practices in early childhood education whether we were aware of them or not. Our ears would be variously attuned and interpretations and utterances would be influenced by the positions we occupied as we talked. This wasn't a problem, what was important for me to remember though was that we *would* inhabit positions, that our positions would *change*, and that they would exist in *systems of relations* that would open up opportunities and provide challenges to and for our participation in the research. There was no privileged or distanced place from which I might experience and report on the focus group work, there were only positions made available through the discourses we would articulate. The context would have much to do with shaping what might be said, who might be able to say it, and how what was spoken might ultimately be received.

The research settings

There were two aspects to the question of where to host focus group meetings that I took into account when planning this study. First, I wanted to use space to further level relationships between the participants and me and second, I wanted the places the interviews were held in to assist our talk about heteronormative discourses rather than detract from it. Foucault's argument (1978) about power being unstable and discursively produced in the context of local interactions meant that I was attentive to not only how our speech and body movements might relate to discursive constructions for their meaning, but that the places where focus groups took place might impact on what could be said and understood too. According to Kamberelis & Dimitriadis (2005), most focus group work within second-wave feminist qualitative inquiry came to recognize the constitutive power of space and place.

I planned to host the focus groups for the queer allies in an early childhood centre and for the teacher educators, a teacher education classroom. I brought the queer teachers to my study in the university (see next paragraph). Madriz (2000, cited in Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005) raises the question of how research settings can contribute to a process of "otherization" (p.895) whereby perceived differences

between researcher and researched can lead to imbalances in power distribution and constrain communication in the research endeavour. Even though I appreciated that power would shift in the research relationships, I had been concerned about a perceived imbalance of power in my favour, in particular with the queer allies and teacher educator groups. This was not only because of my positions as research student, teacher educator and university person, but because a key difference, our heterosexual and non-heterosexual sexualities, was being highlighted through the work that brought us together. I was trying to question the dominant position of heterosexuality from many angles and this might have been particularly affronting to those in the study who identified as heterosexual. The research settings could assist in working against the potential of asymmetrical power relations and the process of othering in the focus group interviews, this is why the location question had been important to consider.

I treated the queer teachers differently. Here my concern was not for any power imbalance issues that might arise between the participants and me, rather it was for the safety of participants in relation to their own colleagues and their status as *out* or not at work that was important. My study space at the university was large enough to host the meetings. Further, it provided a place where no explanations would be demanded as to the nature or purpose of our gathering. Even though it was my university person space, it was also the space of a lesbian parent, teacher and colleague. This would provide some balance to the potential power relations that might come into play. I set the furniture so the discussion would bring the participants' together rather than focus on me. I also worked to level the relationships in other ways: through open-ended questions, facilitating, and staying quiet when the participants' discussions began to flow.

The focus group interview where all participant groups came together was hosted in a tertiary teaching classroom at my (university person, teacher educator) institution. I wanted to lead the interview more and to test out ways to locate teachers' talk beyond the (hetero)norm. In this instance the research setting provided assistance by helping create spaces from which I could speak from my positions as academic and teacher, in addition to those of research student, lesbian

and parent. Similarly, the participants could step into and out of positions as queers, teachers and students et cetera themselves (see chapter 7).

Preparing for and conducting the focus group research

To prepare for the first meetings I sent participants a letter confirming details and included a document that I hoped would provoke discussions for the first round of focus groups (the full document is included in appendix two, *Starting Points: Focus group one*). The document included a set of five queer dilemmas, short stories of practices where same-sex relations and/or gender and/or family structure were troubled in some way. The dilemmas that I sent to the queer teachers and the queer allies were written from the perspective of a teacher in an early childhood centre, parallel tales for the teacher educator group were written from the perspective of student teachers. The dilemmas were fictional but based on incidents I had experienced as a teacher or which had been reported to me as a teacher educator or which I had read from other teacher educators and researchers investigating matters of non-heterosexual sexualities and early childhood education (Cahill & Theilheimer, 1999; Casper, Cuffaro, Schultz, Silin, & Wickens, 1996; Erchick & Kos, 2003; Robinson, 2002). With the dilemmas I included questions that I hoped the participants would reflect on prior to coming to the meeting. An example of one dilemma and the questions is shown below:

Story Two: Rita lives in a lesbian household. Your attention is called to her and Ben playing in the whānau area when you hear an escalating interchange. You approach and Ben is saying "but she can't be the daddy 'cos she's a girl an' you can't have two girls being mummy and daddy!" You notice Rita setting up the table and chairs for 'dinner'. There's a girl doll sitting at the table and she's attempting to place another girl doll in a second seat.

What do we think is going on here? What attitudes and assumptions are at work? Whose needs are competing and what messages might the players in this situation be receiving? What are all the ways we might respond to this event and in our responses, what attitudes and assumptions might be operating? How might we characterise our responses? Perpetuating heteronormativity - opposing it? Somewhere other or in between? How might our responses impact on those involved?

(Starting Points: Focus group one).

I intended using these dilemmas and the *Starting Points: Focus group one* document to bridge participants into the first round's focus group meetings. They would give us something to jointly focus on and help settle the discussion. I also thought that if participants had read the material, any lingering worries about what might be planned for the focus group meetings that might have existed in their minds would be lessened. This strategy of sending materials to participants prior to the meetings was repeated for the second and third round of focus groups. I met with the groups in the first and second round of interviews in the order of: queer allies, queer teachers and teacher educators. For the last focus group interview all participants came together in a combined meeting.

Beginning and maintaining discussions.

Once I had arrived at the venue for the focus group meetings in rounds one and two I would set out the audio-recording equipment and arrange the furniture so the participants would be sitting facing each other with me as part of the group but slightly removed from it. For meetings in the first round of the focus groups I had a copy of the queer dilemmas printed on A3 sized sheets and presented on a small stand so we could refer to these if the discussion warranted. Once everyone was settled I would check that they were ready to begin and then turn on the tape recorder. I would speak to identify the meeting (first or second focus group) and to name the participant group. Each time I changed a tape, I would follow the same procedure.

For the round one interviews I planned to begin the discussions by extending an invitation to participants to reflect on anything that had occurred to them as they had read the *Starting Points: Focus group one* document. Where the talk diminished I would use the queer dilemmas to provoke more discussion or I would ask for participants to share their own tales of practice where heterosexism, homophobia and heteronormativity had emerged. In the second round of focus groups, I used the *Starting Points: Focus group two* document (see appendix three) for the same purpose. I drew the focus groups to a close when I sensed the discussion had come to an end. Each meeting in the first and in the second round of interviews lasted approximately one and one half hours.

Transcribing interviews

I decided to complete transcribing of the audiotapes myself. My main reason for this was that I knew that language and humour in queer communities could be ambiguous. As an insider to both queer and early childhood worlds I thought I might be less inclined to correct any perceived omissions in the talk, and that I might be in a position to better understand vague or odd utterances. Further, by completing the transcribing myself, I would know the data more intimately and this would hopefully result in more credible and comprehensive interpretations.

I used qualitative software for the transcribing of audiotapes and for assistance with discourse analysis: *nVivo 1.1* ("QSR NUD*IST Vivo", 1999) . I resolved to begin transcribing as soon as practical after meetings. With the exception of two transcripts, I completed the transcription of each focus group's tapes within a week of the meeting. Eventually I bound the transcripts into two large documents to use as working copies of the data. I completed most data analysis using *nVivo*, however these two large documents became my primary source for reading and referring back to data once I began the write up of the research.

The texts produced.

To complete discourse analysis I had produced transcripts of focus group meetings where teachers had come together to discuss issues of heterosexism, homophobia and heteronormativity in early childhood education. I planned to read them to see *if, and if so how, heteronormative discourse is shaping practices in early childhood education* by looking for the constructions of genders, sexualities and family form made available in and by the participants talk. The transcripts were very large, over 360 pages of text were produced, a number quite unwieldy for me to handle in both paper and electronic form. To manage, I wrote chronologies of the focus group transcripts. By this I mean I read the transcripts and wrote short hand versions of each, by topic, conversational turn and discussion thread. This meant that each transcript was reduced to a 2-3-page summary of the focus group interview (an example of this work is contained in appendix five). Using the chronologies, I could locate specific passages in the discussions more easily and access text in the hard copy of the transcripts quickly.

It proved an effective means of holding in my mind the range of topics canvassed across the interviews.

In addition to the transcripts and chronologies, other texts were produced. I kept a project folder in which I recorded immediate thoughts after focus group meetings and in which I collated random notes, questions, and lines of thinking, and in which questions I had sent my supervisors (and responses) were filed. I recorded the development of ideas in this folder and used it like an index to the project. It prompted my thinking and recorded important decisions made in the course of the research. Forming part of the study's "audit trail" (Merriam, 2002) this text held records of many of the decisions and connections I made in the study. It detailed the development of analytic categories and it captured important thoughts about data collection and issues that arose. On the basis of this folder's contents I have been able to describe important facets of the work, in this chapter, that support the study's trustworthiness.

I created research journals for participants too. I hoped participants would use them to record any thoughts, questions, dilemmas that were raised for them in the course of the project. I requested that I be allowed to copy these, thinking they might assist my thinking about if and how heteronormativity might be being produced and maintained in early childhood education. As it turned out, there was far more data produced from the focus group transcripts than I anticipated. The participants' research journals remained unread for the contributions they might have afforded my understandings of heteronormativity and early childhood education.

Approaching analysis

As I explained in chapter one, heteronormative discourse was the focus of this study. I wanted to find out *if and if so how, heteronormative discourse is shaping practices in early childhood education* and I wanted to think about this in light of inclusive policy and progressive legislative reform ("Care of Children Act (NZ)", 2004; , "Civil Union Act (NZ)", 2004; , "Human Rights Act (NZ)", 1993; Ministry of Education, 1996b, 2006). In my discussion of heteronormative discourses in chapter one, I oriented my thinking towards these aims by using queer theory to

keep the focus on sexualities to the foreground. Broadly thinking my approach *queer*, I both read and questioned queerly in my analyses. Further, I used questions adapted from Davies' (1994) study of classroom practices to help produce meaning from the focus group transcripts (see p.90). This framework for approaching data and for questioning my analysis assisted me to resist tendencies to leave normalising practices unremarked; it helped me to trouble heterosexuality's dominant position, and it facilitated readings that looked for connections between "sexuality, power, gender and conceptions of normal and deviant, insider and outsider" (Dilley, 1999, p. 148). I added family to the mix, as this was consistent with my reading of heteronormativity as outlined in chapter two.

Reading transcripts.

My approach to data analysis involved a close reading of the transcripts produced from the focus group meetings. I initially read the transcripts in four related ways: to find representations of the world in accord with heteronormativity; to identify repeated ideas and commonality across the groups' data; for connections between ideas of gender, sexuality, family form, normal and abnormal; and to mark instances where the heterosexual/homosexual binary seemed apparent. Later I was to re-read the transcripts using a set of questions modelled on Davies' (1994) study so that I could think about the way discourses were being drawn upon as we produced discussions of heteronormativity in the focus groups themselves (see p.90).

A first step in recognising discourses is to identify how they are producing aspects of the world. For me this process began when I started transcribing audiotapes from the first round of focus group interviews. I didn't engage in any coding of the data at the point of transcribing, but I did develop initial impressions of the meetings' flows and tones et cetera. For the meetings I had provoked discussions about sexuality, gender and family form by sharing dilemmas where same-sex relations, gender or family structure were in some way problematic. I had also asked participants to talk about their experiences from teaching where sexualities had been troubled. In writing and reading the transcripts of these first discussions I originally worked towards two main purposes: to document instances of

heteronormative discourses shaping practices in the stories that participants shared; and to document any instances where anti-heteronormative or queer practices were explained. Later, as the object of my inquiry became enlarged, I was to re-read the transcripts again so as to locate discourses being drawing upon as we constructed our discussions around heteronormativity in the actual focus groups meetings.

In my reading, once transcripts were produced, and relying on a sense of familiarity and repetition as indicators of possible discourses, I first noted places in the transcripts that seemed to contain ideas that represented the world in accord with heteronormativity. I coded the relevant text using *nVivo* (“QSR NUD*IST Vivo”, 1999) by highlighting it and naming it with a descriptive term that reflected the content of the passage. For example, talk of nuclear families, or gender essentialist ideas, or the normalcy of heterosexual sexuality development was coded. Then, if I heard the same reasoning about an issue or if an idea was repeated either within or across groups, I noted the location of this in the transcript and coded it. When I had finished each transcript I reviewed the marked passages, grouping similar ideas and naming them as themes. Reviewing this list for repetition and overlap I amalgamated some themes before returning to the locations in transcripts where the relevant text was situated and recoding it. Each time I identified a new theme, I retrospectively read previously analysed transcripts to look for evidence of it across the entire data set. Using a different feature of *nVivo* I was then able to extract the text passages of each theme to a *node* which I saved electronically and printed in hard copy.

An example of the data produced using these processes is shown below. Various participants talked about family structure. I was cued into this idea when Mina, a participant in the first teacher educators’ focus group interview talked about how her family structure, a single parent family, was challenged by her students’ tendencies to interpret the notion of *family* in accord with the nuclear family structure. Mina said:

62: Mina: ...and it’s quite interesting saying (pause) um, a heterosexual, ‘cos not only is it heterosexual, it’s also about being in a nuclear family, and so for me its quite different, so I’m constantly challenging my students

being a single parent, in that sort of sense, so I can relate to then the next step of yeah, sexuality as well, so it's all of those, it's not just moving from one to another you've got that other layer on top of there as well.

(FG: TE, 1.0, L.62)

This *family form* theme was then brought into my reading of the transcripts and the following kinds of passages were coded to it:

12: Stacey: rather than just always having the mum sitting at the table, the dad at the head of the table and the baby in the highchair and the (pause) 2.4 children and the dog as well

(FG: QA, 2.0, L.12)

171: Stacey: and we changed the 'about me' sheet, you know how we [(pause)] had that discussion and it ... [used to be like mummies name]...

Pat: [it used to be people important to me] my mummy, my daddy and,

Alex: yep?

Stephanie: but it just changed to um... people important to me are, and then with just lines.

(FG: QA, 2.0, L.171-178)

229: Andy: [that bought up a whole new question on things], other than gay families doesn't it? I mean what if there's... an open adoption thing going on?

(FG: QT, 2.0, L.229-232)

257: Andy: and I think it should be because the reality is, the percentage of two parent, as in straight parent families, is such a thing of the past that regardless of whether you're talking about gay families, diversity's huge and it I think it should be asked more [readily] than what it is, and talked about, not just (inaudible) the gay thing

(FG: QT, 2.1, L.257)

The excerpts showed several representations of family and they gave some insight into how teachers worked with those representations. They documented a range of family structures: traditional nuclear family, families where open adoption takes place, single parent families; they gave examples of teachers' attempts at broadening concepts of family: the 'about me sheet... used to be... my mummy, my daddy...', Mina's challenge to her student teachers; and they affirmed the

dominance of the nuclear family by showing how teachers have sought alternatives to it and questioned its status: ‘rather than just always having...’ and ‘the percentage of two parent as in straight parent families is such a thing of the past...’. This approach allowed me to explore heteronormative discourse by enabling, as Davies (1994) suggests, for an examination of “teaching-as-usual and its constitutive effects” (p.82). I was able to construct understandings, from the accounts of practice shared in the interviews about who was being discursively produced and able to speak, what was it that she or he might have been able to say, and what opportunities were then available or obscured. If Stacey for instance, usually saw representations of family in her work as dad at the head of the table, mum at the table and the baby in the high chair, not forgetting the dog; and if Mina wasn’t constantly challenging her students about single parent families being family; and if ‘about me’ sheets weren’t changed to reflect families other than those who are made up by mummy and daddy and me, whose family form would be being repeatedly constituted through these discursive practices?

Beyond this, the data arranged in this way allowed me to think concretely about the possible effects of heteronormative discourse on children, families and teachers: I could interpret from these comments that Stacey worked to find or create representations of family that reflected diversity, Mina constantly defended forms of family constituted as other, Pat altered documents so as to not exclude, and unless they would have teachers like these, parents and children in queer families would have their forms of family rendered invisible by the repeated positioning nuclear family as dominant and normative.

I also read the transcripts queerly, that is, for connections between gender, family, sexuality and ideas of normal. I read lastly for evidence of the heterosexual / homosexual binary. As outlined in chapter one, the binary draws attention to the ways heterosexuality and other forms of sexuality are intimately entwined.

“Heterosexuality has meaning only in relation to homosexuality; the coherence of the former idea is predicated on the exclusion, repression, and repudiation of the latter” (Pinar, 1998, p. 9). The heterosexual/homosexual binary fixes concepts of sexuality into a structure of dominant and subordinate relations. Heterosexuality becomes defined through the careful extraction, definition and documentation of

other forms of sexuality deemed abnormal or deviant. A key queer strategy is to try and disrupt this formation by asking: why/how is it that heterosexuality is dominant? And, why/how does heterosexuality get produced and reproduced as a norm to which all should aspire? In this way the tables are turned and the repetitive production of heterosexuality, or the (hetero)norm, becomes the object of questioning and exploration. From this perspective queer can be articulated "...as a flexible strategy of positioning to resist heteronormative practices" (Halperin, n.d, cited in Cooper, 2002, p. 48), offering scope for inquiry into unquestioned aspects of practice, with it I could read for instances where teachers talked about practices that imposed heterosexuality on children and adults in early childhood education.

Enlarging the analysis: the project's queer turn.

Reading the transcripts for evidence of discourses helped to move the analysis of the focus group transcripts beyond the usual approach of taking focus group talk as a means of access to something that lies behind the words spoken. It gave the talk what Wilkinson (2004) describes as a different epistemological status and it opened up the possibility of seeing the discussion as social context in its own right. I became interested in this idea as I transcribed the audiotapes from round one of the interviews because as I worked, I began to hear the discussions in part, for the ways they seemed to be preventing talk about heteronormativity, heterosexism and homophobia. I was intrigued and this led me to want to understand if heteronormative discourse might have been shaping discussions in the local context of the focus group interviews too. I therefore used my adapted version of Davies' (1994) questions to more fully understand what might have been occurring in the focus group meetings and to think about heteronormative discourse in a different way.

In Davies' study, she worked to locate moments in practice where a teacher, if she or he were working from a poststructural position, might choose to practice differently. Of her data, Davies asked:

What kind of context are the participants creating for one another? How are they positioning each other in that context? What positions or subject

positions are available? How are those positions created and maintained? Where does the authority lie? Where is a text being used? What is the relation between the teacher and textual authority? How is experience made relevant? What binary or dualistic thinking is evident in their discursive practices? Are gender relations visible in the text of this classroom? What forms of masculinity and femininity are being made available here? What storylines are being made relevant? What discourses are being mobilised in the content of the teachers talk, in the teacher's choice of pedagogical and interactive practices? Whose interests are being served by each of these discourses? (1994, p.45)

Many of these questions were, in my mind, directly relevant to a study of heteronormative discourses because they sought to explore the realities that were being produced through the discursive practices engaged when people were at work together. Even though I hadn't located my study in an early childhood centre, I did bring teachers of various kinds together to talk about practices that troubled sexualities, gender and family form. Changing some of Davies' (1994) questions to more acutely emphasise my interest in sexualities, I would be able to apply them to my own study's transcripts so as to think about the versions of early childhood education being produced in the focus group interviews. My reworked version of them allowed me to ask: What kind of contexts are the participants creating for one another? How are the participants positioning each other in the focus groups? What subject positions are becoming available? How are they created and maintained? Where does the authority lie? How is experience being made relevant to the discussions? What binary or dualistic thinking is evident? Are gender relations visible? Are relations of sexuality visible? What forms of sexuality are being made available? What storylines are being made relevant? What discourses related to heteronormativity are being mobilised in what teachers say? Whose interests are being served by the articulation of these discourses? How are they being received?

My teacher-educator self, used to working with groups of teachers, and teacher education students, interested in their thinking processes and the ways they constructed understandings of early childhood education and teaching, led me to

this work. Through this kind of analysis I could think about what happened when groups of teachers came together to consider the concept of heteronormativity. It could make visible the kinds of positions that become available and show how these were opened up and shut down through discourses associated with sexualities matters in early childhood education. I thought that such an analysis might help me discern what kinds of other discourses might be made relevant to sexualities matters in this domain. An excerpt of text from the beginning of the very first queer allies focus group meeting is illustrative of the understandings that this kind of analysis produced:

8. Alex: ... (pause) well, you had a question

Pietra: well why is the terminology [queer]? I don't like it...

Pat: [yeah]

Pietra: ...with the connotations comes to it, ... I prefer gay...

Alex: yeah

Pietra: ...so I was wondering if you were playing on the word with queers and querying...

(FG: QA, 1.0, L 8-13).

Earlier in chapter three I outlined my use of the term queer and the reasons why I chose to use it in the project (see pp. 70-71). I sensed the term queer as it was used in relation to the participant groups, in part, as a relatively innocuous but useful provocateur that would remind us of the discomforts associated with the issues of heterosexism, homophobia and heteronormativity. I also thought it helpful for reminding teachers positioned in relation to the heterosexual/homosexual binary, that they could all take a similar position in relation to acting against the (hetero)norm. By naming the non-teacher educator participant groups similarly, I was hoping to mark out some common ground. However, within the first minutes of the meeting, the sense of the term queer as provocative was dominant as Pietra took up the chance to respond to what she saw as the negative connotations brought on by the use of the term. Her outright refusal of my label in favour of her preferred term 'gay' and Pat's 'yeah' immediately following seemed to support this turn. Retracting her challenge

somewhat, Pietra immediately went on to raise the possibility of framing my choice of the word queer in terms of a play on language.

Who was Pietra being throughout this exchange and who was she addressing me as? What advantages and consequences did her questions bring to the group process? Was she positioning herself as antagonist, interrogator, a comedian, an intrigued inquirer? And me as provocateur, academic, and lesbian? All of these? Some? None? I could hear all these subject positions open up as I read the exchange and I suggest that through it, Pietra was able to achieve several things. She showed that the term queer was contentious; she showed that she understood that it might be a little amusing to be using such a variably understood word in the context of our work; she was able to assert her point of view and in the process gather support from other group members for her ideas and stand in opposition to what I was proposing. Throughout the exchange, Stacey and Rona listened and watched. I wondered how they perceived the controversy that Pietra was raising and with which Pat seemed to agree. How might it impact on their participation within the discussions to come?

The context was charged and it seemed from the outset of that meeting that we were here to do business. As the exchange continued, I praised Pietra's question and responded by offering up many possible justifications for why I had chosen to use the term. I consider that an effect of this beginning was to define my distance from the group – as researcher and or academic. But uncomfortable with this I worked to diminish the authority that might be assumed or offered to those positions by commenting wryly on the 'academicness' of using the word queer. I settled the point with a response to Pietra's question that ensured both her and my interests were acknowledged: it seemed a moment of 'lets agree to not agree'. By doing this I was resisting Pietra's refusal of my language and at the same time hoping to validate it too. My aim was to help establish a climate in which group members would know that they were able to ask provocative questions, and in which they could see that I wasn't there to convince them to know the world my way (lesbian, university person, teacher educator). Whether the desired effect was achieved or not I can't say, but the potential was there as an unintended and possibly positive outcome of Pietra's charged beginning:

14. Alex: ... ahh, very perceptive

Pat: good point

Alex: yeah, well in one sense I am, you know, queries – questions, queer – odd (pause)... and I, um, and I think that um, we think about not, doing things non, in a non normative way,

Pietra: [hmm and that's what]

Alex: [that go against the grain]...

Pietra: hmm

Alex: ...there are some political reasons also

Pietra: yeah

Alex: some very kinda airy-fairy academic reasons about why I've used that term as well but um, yeah (pause)

Pietra: but I will use gay 'cause I don't like queer

Alex: you are [absolutely, um absolute,], we are here to talk how we want to talk

Pietra: [laughter]... yeah, 'cos I also thought its not the shock effect but you know the whole way of (pause) um that word, people say queer they think gay

Alex: yeah ... well that's fine, I mean we can talk about um lesbian women and gay men, and I might talk about, sometimes I might slip up...

Pietra: mmm, o.k.

Alex: yeah, 'cos I'm used to using that term a lot now².

(FG: QA, 1.0, L.14-35)

² Features of the transcript shown in this text include [square brackets] for words or responses uttered simultaneous to (over the top of) someone else's speech; (pause) where a longer break in speech occurred, possibly indicating thinking time; and ellipses ... where a point being made by the speaker spans several lines of transcript. The continuity may have been broken by another speaker's interruption or group response such as [laughter].

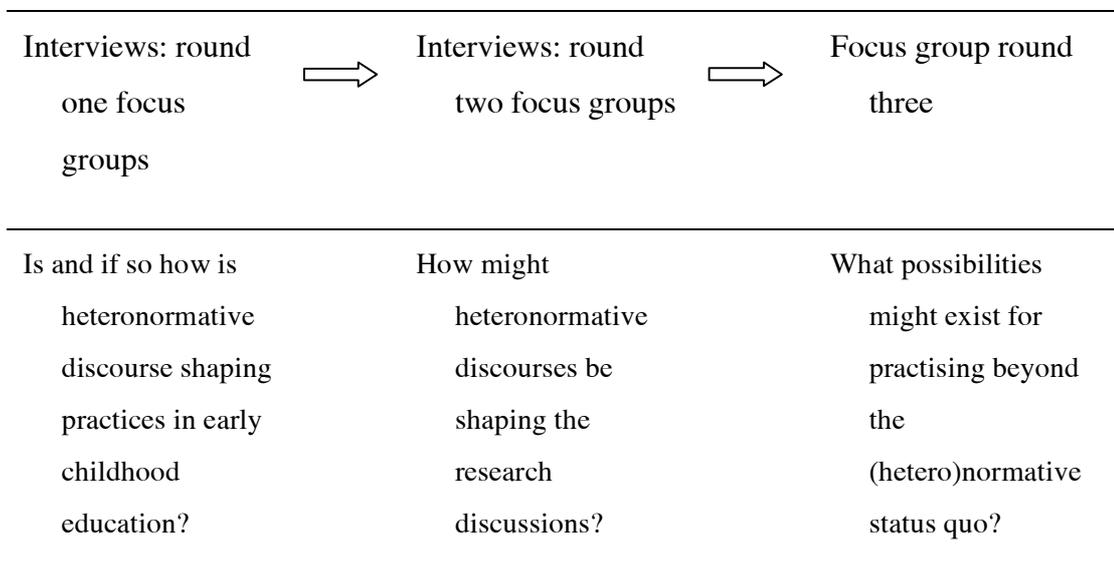
By using Davies' (1994) adapted questions to think about the group processes, I could appreciate the ways people might change their talk so as to act in concert with others or coordinate with dominant discourses. The end of this exchange shows my language being modified to some extent, or at least in the moment, I raised the possibility that I might change the way I spoke in the group. My comment, '...I might slip up...' suggests that I might have needed to have made my talking *straight* if it were that I would be able to enter into legitimate discussions within the group that wouldn't alienate or silence participants through *my contentious words*. This, from one position, self-monitoring, from another, policing, should I have carried it through would have been in my mind a victory against my queer theoretical orientations, in Pietra's it would most likely to have been a victory for inclusive practice.

Round two and three focus groups: the formative research design

In round one of the interviews I provoked discussions in meetings by sending the participants queer dilemmas to read and questions to think about. These were based on my own early childhood teacher and teacher educator experiences as well as professional reading in the area of sexualities and early childhood education. Focus group meetings in rounds two and three though were designed and structured on the basis of what happened in the preceding round of interviews and my interpretations of the data generated in those. The research process was formative in that what occurred in the later stages of the project was informed by my understandings of the discursive formations evidenced in the focus group transcripts. This process led to an increasingly complex object of analysis as the project took what I have formerly named a *queer turn* in the space between the first and second round of focus group interviews (see p.89). As I explained earlier, when I transcribed the audiotapes from round one of the focus group interviews, I was intrigued by an interpretation of the discussions that I was forming which suggested that the discussions were in some ways preventing talk of homophobia, heterosexism and heteronormativity to feature. We seemed to spend a great deal of time in the focus group interviews talking about other semi-related topics. Therefore, rather than simply continue with my original intent of exploring *if, and if so how, heteronormative discourse is shaping practices in early*

childhood education as articulated in stories reported in the focus groups, I came to expand on this focus and to contemplate the possibility that heteronormative discourses might have been shaping the research discussions more directly too. I began explorations of how discourses supporting heteronormativity might have been at work in the focus group settings. This in turn afforded me the opportunity in the third focus group round, to test out strategies for locating practice beyond the (hetero)norm. The project’s increasingly complex and expanding focus and formative nature is illustrated in figure one.

Figure one: The project’s expanding focus and formative design.



Framing the second round focus group interviews.

After an analysis of the transcripts from focus group one I had identified nine instances where participants talked of sexualities, gender and/or family being troubled in teaching practices. I also identified several instances where anti-heteronormative or queer practices were talked about and I had noted ‘threads of thinking’ which seemed to illustrate resistances to troubling the (hetero)norm (see chapter five). This expanded focus was to lead to an inversion of my attention. I shifted from principally thinking about the stories told, to thinking about the practices engaged as we, as members of the focus groups, talked about these sexualities matters, or not. These shifts seem to make the project more *queer* (see pages 70-71 & 88-89) as I began working somewhat at odds with my original

intent but at the same time entirely in line with the broader project of exploring heteronormative discourses and the shaping of practices in early childhood education.

I produced a document for participants that reported on my readings of the first round of interviews transcripts, and which summarised key ideas I wanted to discuss further. I termed these ideas, 'threads of thinking'. They represented six major themes produced from the data that suggested reluctance towards disrupting heteronormativity in the contexts of our research discussions. I also documented the suggestions offered by participants for responding to the kind of dilemmas that we discussed in the first round of focus groups. As an exercise in testing my interpretations, the *Starting Points: Focus group two* document offered opportunities for participants to respond to the ideas I was building and to confirm or contest these. An important feature of the research design, these *member checks* (Coll, 2002; Merriam, 2002) offered credibility to the study's findings. The process enabled me to ascertain from participants whether the interpretations I was making *rang-true* (Merriam, 2002) to them. If the discussions in the second round of focus groups indicated that the participants' experiences of the research interviews were captured in my interpretations, then the meaning I was making could be judged dependable. Responses to the *Starting Points: Focus group two* document included comments like:

4. Alex: ...here are some things I want to check out with you, what do you think?

Stacey: hmm, when I was reading through that... one of the ones that stood out I think was the thread two, it was about the resources... and I didn't necessarily think it's resources to use, but it's resources just to depict, you know how a few years ago they you know has (inaudible) include... a lot of... Māori faces and Asian faces in your books and stuff... I think you need it more in the books...

(FG: QA, 2.0, L. 4-8)

14. Pietra: ...I can't even remember the threads you're talking about

Alex: well there was one, there was this kind of whole um

Pietra: silence

Alex: yeah, the thing about the silencing sexualities issues

Pietra: yeah

Alex: ... I wondered about whether there was resistance to that, or whether early childhood teachers are resistant to that...

Pietra: (laughs)

Alex: ...in all three focus groups we talked about ... another type of silence, and it was about a silence in resources to use or to portray diversity or family diversity in early childhood settings...

Pietra: ...I read in that thing, and I thought well it just sounds like if we get the resources then we can talk about it, but we all know that we can get resources about all sorts of stuff and then they just get put on the shelf and we don't use them, so I thought that was a bit of a cop out.

(FG: QA, 2b.0, L.14-24)

16. Alex: ...so um in the first part of the document that I fed back to you, there were six threads that I wanted to check out with you...

Shirley: ...it's the same topic... heteronormativity, I was in Australia a couple of weekends ago and they had the lesbian family on *Playschool*... and the news was just full of it and nobody was comfy at all about it... they haven't even moved to the point where you can ah, depict a lesbian family on *Playschool* and think it's normal because to them it's just not normal... it's aberrational...

[A lengthy discussion about the *Playschool* episode followed so that those in the group who hadn't heard of the issue were apprised of events. A discussion of the issue can be found in Taylor and Richardson (2005)]

Rose: they tried to pass off those two mothers as you know, mothers from [other shaped families]...

Shirley: [well they tried to fix it up]

Rose: you know, that thread of the, what is it? It was the first one, is it [really a queer issue?] um, I thought of that... because it's so easy to back-track, to think oh well this feels a bit uncomfortable and you know, skirting around the issue of whether it is a queer issue.

(FG: TE, 2.0, L.16-101)

I took Stacey and Pietra's comments about the thread of thinking I named '*If we had some resources we'd be able to teach queerly*' as agreement that I had captured an important idea from the focus group interviews. It seemed unlikely

that Stacey would have elaborated on her notion of needing more books to depict same-sex families if the thread about resources had been unfamiliar to her. Further, Pietra's comment about not using resources and the notion of a 'cop out' would have made little sense if she hadn't recognised the thread from the previous discussions. In the teacher educator focus group meeting, the discussion around the *Playschool* episode seemed to confirm my thread of '*Is this really a queer issue?*' too. Rose had drawn a parallel between it and the attempts by the broadcaster in the days following the television programme to reframe the lesbian mothers as mothers of a different kind. Shirley's comments seemed to indicate the same. If it were so that 'they' had tried to 'fix it up' and frame the family as not lesbian, then the programme could have been read as one that was not promoting a queer issue. It seems unlikely that these connections would have been made if my interpretations of significant ideas from the previous round's focus groups hadn't rung true.

I also wanted to discuss the practices mentioned by participants that I had identified as anti-heteronormative or queer so as to test their credibility. Would these be considered beneficial to or practical for interrupting the (hetero)normative status quo? The document *Starting Points: Focus group two* provided a bridge into the second round of focus group meetings. It is included in appendix four.

One of the queer ally participants was unable to make the second focus group meeting so requested an individual interview. Consenting, I conducted a semi-structured interview with Pietra using the *Starting Points: Focus group two document* as the prompt. The interview was held in my study. It was audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed in the same way as all other focus group transcripts. The interview lasted approximately one hour.

The round three focus group.

For the combined focus group interview I had set up a teaching classroom at my institution so that the participants could come together in a single large group for discussions but also be able to separate out into small groups of three or four participants from time to time. I had set up four *stations* (four tables placed

together to make one large surface with chairs around the outside) for the small group discussions. At each there was an audio tape-recorder and tapes. I allocated participants to small groups making sure that each small group had a mix of participants from each of the queer allies, queer teacher and teacher educator groups. Large group facilitated discussions were led by me and small group discussions were led by participants. I audio-recorded large group discussions and participants' audio-recorded discussions in their small group. The activities planned for this meeting were produced out of my reading of focus group two transcripts. They are outlined in appendix four.

Three main purposes for this focus group interview existed. First I could further test my interpretations by sharing statements and ideas with participants and asking for comment. From this perspective, the focus group provided a further opportunity to test the dependability of the meanings I was forming in the research. I was also able to make this meeting a setting where the historically and politically situated discourses identified in the study could be discussed for the ways these placed constraints on or facilitated teachers' work in early childhood education. As a principal concern of both ethnographic research and Foucauldian genealogy, the participants would have a chance to see how their lives as teachers were concerted with discourses circulating in the macro-context. Finally, the interview provided opportunities to attend to the matters of social justice that had provided much impetus for the study in the first place. I could test out a pedagogical intervention for trying to locate teachers talk beyond the (hetero)norm.

Conflicts, questions and dilemmas

Ethical considerations in research centred on gender and sexuality remain paramount in social research (Kirkman, 2001). This is because one can never predict how the subject of sexualities and same-sex sexualities will be actually received. Further, as I discussed in chapters one and two, the idea of bringing an inquiry of sexualities together with early childhood education seems doubly troubling because sexuality is often de-prioritised or viewed as irrelevant where young children are concerned (Robinson, 2005; Tobin, 1997), and in Aotearoa

New Zealand echoes of a childcare sexual abuse scandal in the nineteen-nineties still reverberate sensitively in some quarters of early childhood education. Despite this I proceeded. The participants' safety was a primary concern. How to proceed to minimise any potential harm?

The first dilemma I faced was about naming the participant groups. I felt it important to name them because through this process I was identifying positions from which I hoped participants would speak to the research. Yet such choice making on my part seemed somehow limiting, even though I also understood that to name the groups I might also be offering participants a context in which they might define themselves differently and confront issues of practice they might not otherwise have taken license to address. I suspected the term queer in relation to the non-teacher educator participant groups might alarm, but I also had other reasons for its use, such as to name teachers positioned in relation to the heterosexual/homosexual binary, similarly and to keep the discomforts of homophobia tangible. The benefits of these I considered outweighed any possible harm.

I also wondered, would there be safety issues for some or all of the group members by virtue of their participation in one or other group? And could these be foreseen and ameliorated sufficiently so as to ensure the minimising of potential risks? I had chosen my method carefully, staged the research settings and had informed participants of the three groups inviting them to self-select into one. These steps would help to minimise issues of power imbalances that might have impacted the work because the participants had agency in the choice of group, they knew the *other* groups existed, and the focus groups themselves created "multiple lines of communication that... [helped] ...to create safe places for dialogue in the company of others" (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 898). Even so, I recognised that the work might still be risky because of the nature of the topics we had come together to discuss: exclusion, normativity, sexualities, and social justice, were sensitive and potentially challenging.

I had also shared with participants my plan to bring all of them together for one of the interviews. A major consideration here was that the combined focus group

would be potentially difficult for the queer teachers, especially if their status as non-heterosexual was unknown to others outside of the queer teacher group. I came to take the queer teachers' consent to participate in the knowledge that they would be 'outed' to other participants in the project as a sign that any perceived risk was minimal, otherwise they would likely have not agreed to join in the project. One of the participants in the queer teacher group however didn't attend focus groups in the second and third rounds of meetings. When she phoned to tell me that she couldn't make the second focus group interview she asked that she be kept informed of the project by receiving any materials I might send out. I understood that she couldn't make the interview because of other work commitments but I still wondered about her sense of safety. This made me even more cautious about the safety of all the participants in rounds two and three of the study and I maintained a heightened sensitivity to potential exclusions that may have arisen in the work. The only time I was aware that there might have been an issue with the participants' sense of safety, or more specifically the fact that some of the topics were provocative in a troubling way for some participants, was in regard to the second queer teachers interview.

Marian started the interview by saying that she'd had a "strong reaction when... [she] read the stuff about resources...[because]... one of the things was, ... it's not about the resources, it's about the attitude. It's about... people's ignorance, not knowing... 'cos the thing is, childcare centres are full of resources and... you search out the resources you want... and if they're not there, you do something about it..." (FG: QT, 2.0, L.13-15). I think Marian had read the 'thread of thinking' about resources in the *Starting Points: Focus group two* document as one that showcased exclusionary practices: attitudes of not wanting to engage with the possibilities of valid alternative forms of sexuality to heterosexuality. I asked about this later in the interview. Marian shared her frustration more clearly:

142: Marian: ...some of what I read from that stuff I just started feeling a bit angry about

Alex: hmmm (pause) about the injustice of it?

Marian: yeah and... about people's ignorance really

Alex: yeah, ok,

Marian: and their, and it's... so simple how to respond to things, because it's just, it's just our lives... some people don't realise that it's simple...

(FG: QT, 2.0, L.142-152)

It seemed that Marian's position as lesbian supported her reading of the 'thread of thinking' as limiting. Stepping aside from her teacher-subject self, she remarked, 'it's just our lives'. Exasperated it seems, Marian's frustration at being marginalised by the dominance and ignorance made possible by heteronormative discourses was made known.

I also thought about the harm that might come to me as a researcher exploring heteronormative discourse and early childhood education. Research centering on discrimination and minority populations can be risky, not only to the participants, but to the researchers too (Grace & Benson, 2000; Kirkman, 2001; Sears, 1992). Writing about research on and with same-sex populations, Kreiger (1982, cited in Sears, 1992, p.149) comments:

As an insider, the lesbian has an important sensitivity to offer, yet she is also more vulnerable than the non lesbian researcher, both to pressure from the heterosexual world – that her studies conform to previous works and describe the lesbian reality in terms of its relationship with the outside – and to pressure from the inside, from the lesbian community itself – that her studies mirror not only the reality of that community but its self-protective ideology.

Would my position as queer researcher impact positively or negatively on the participants and their contributions? What influence on how the research was received, might my position as lesbian have? My focus group method helped to address these worries and because of the sampling strategy employed in the project, I knew many of the participants already and was out with them. Those I didn't know had come to the project through others who knew me. I assumed that all the participants understood that I was lesbian although I never checked this out. My queer positioning offered me a way to listen and to read the conversations because, like Marian, by living as an outsider to the (hetero)norm I am sensitive to

its exclusions. It may also have obscured understandings from time to time though. This was one of the reasons I took my interpretations of the focus group meetings from round one back to participants for further discussion.

As a final check towards safeguarding participants in the project, I suggested that they might have someone outside the project that could act as a critical friend should the matters we discussed provoke discomfort. My experience as teacher educator had taught me that sometimes people's responses to discussions of sexualities matters could be wide ranging and troubling. Robinson and Ferfolja (2002a , 2002b) have documented student teacher resistances to dealing with issues of heterosexism and homophobia in teacher education, and my own teaching in the past has sometimes come at some expense, mainly to me, but also to student teachers who have been provoked by the topic. I hoped though in the context of this work that because participants had consented to involvement and that there was arguably less compulsion to contribute than might be the case with teacher education students, that the participants would be less inclined towards negative responses. To ameliorate any issues, should they arise, I suggested that participants might discuss, with colleagues, the types of dilemmas we'd talked about in the project. I viewed the participant journals (which I asked to copy, not to keep) as instrument of this process.

Finally, even though confidentiality couldn't be achieved in the project, anonymity could. Researchers have responsibility to ensure that discussions are comfortable and non judgemental and that the privacy and confidentiality of participants is protected (Warr, 2005). At my request participants had chosen a pseudonym for themselves and where they hadn't I allocated one. Later when I wrote the thesis I allocated another set of pseudonyms to all participants so as to protect their anonymity further in this rendering of the work.

Chapter conclusion

In this chapter I have described the practical and procedural elements of this second stage of a study into heteronormative discourses and early childhood education. I discussed the problems and possibilities of combining ethnography and genealogy favouring Tamboukou and Ball's (2003) "fruitful encounters" (p.1)

description of such endeavour. I described what focus groups could offer as a data producing method useful for Foucauldian discourse analysis and discussed the constitution of groups in my study. The formative nature of the research process was outlined, as was my approach to analysis that sought to understand the realities construed through teachers talk about sexualities, families, and genders in early childhood education. In chapter four I begin documenting what I learned about heteronormative discourse and early childhood education in the course of this study as I explored the question of *if, and if so how, heteronormative discourse is shaping practices in early childhood education in the present day.*

CHAPTER FOUR – HETERONORMATIVE DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE

In this chapter I draw on data from focus group discussions to explore heteronormative discourse and early childhood education. Earlier in this thesis I illustrated how heteronormativity has shaped historical policy and documents in Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood education. But my study also seeks to explore if and if so how heteronormativity is present in every day practices. I questioned the extent to which aims of the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996b) might be met if practices were shaped through heteronormative discourses and I wanted to find ways that early childhood teachers could work towards the construction of early childhood communities to which diverse children, families and teachers might belong. Chapter 3 described how by reading transcripts of focus group interviews I could explore the question of heteronormative discourse and think about how heteronormativity, if it were shown to be shaping practices, affected children, families and teachers. Through this process I could also consider how practices in early childhood education might lead to the maintenance or disruption of the (hetero)normative status quo.

To explore heteronormativity in this chapter I discuss accounts of practices in centres where gender or sexuality or family form were made problematic in some way and where heteronormative discourse was articulated in reports of ‘doing’ early childhood education. The accounts I discuss involve the articulation of discourses that privilege heterosexuality directly or indirectly. They resist ideas and actions that enable the untroubled expression of valid alternative options to the (hetero)norm in the early childhood centre setting. This chapter seeks to respond to the principal research question of this study.

Is, and if so how is, heteronormative discourse shaping practices in early childhood education in the present day?

As I outlined in chapter 1, when heteronormative discourse is spoken

heterosexuality is positioned as the dominant and normative form of sexuality and other forms of sexuality are rendered abnormal or deviant. This can lead to problems for those whose sexuality is or is perceived to be non-heterosexual. They may face discrimination. This is not only against the spirit of the law in Aotearoa New Zealand, it is also unfair and in the context of early childhood education, contrary to the inclusive policies that are supposed to underpin practice.

Heteronormativity encompasses the related concepts of gender, sexualities and family form. With respect to sexuality, heteronormative discourse asserts the normalcy of heterosexuality and subsequent to this, the abnormality of non-heterosexual sexualities. In terms of gender, traditional forms of patriarchal masculinity and femininity that rely on the notions of gender constancy and heterosexuality are privileged over forms of gender that confront these. And where family is concerned, heteronormative discourse supports the dominant positioning of the nuclear family, constituted by heterosexual parents who are, or who are assumed to be children's biological or legal mothers and fathers.

In the focus groups I provoked discussions amongst teachers by asking them to respond to a set of five dilemmas where same-sex relations, and or gender, and or family structure was in some way problematic. I asked participants what they thought was going on in the dilemmas and what they thought the possible implications of the practices could be. This provocation led to teachers telling stories from their own experiences of sexualities, genders and family form being troubled. It is these stories that provide insights into the question of *if, and if so how, heteronormative discourse is shaping practices in early childhood education in the present day?*

Troubling gender: the problems of boys who cross-dress

As a concept, heterosexuality relies on understandings of gender which privilege essentialist type theories expecting men and women to express their gender in coherent and stable ways that compliment each other. Understandings of masculinity and femininity formed through binary thinking, implicate not only

gender but sexuality too because the ways we make sense of our gender is in part related to how we play out our meanings of man and woman sexually (Remlinger, 1997). To be understood as properly masculine or feminine is, in part, to expect to be both attractive to and attracted by those of the opposite gender. To complicate this, “the stereotype of homosexuality as a mismatch between a person’s biological sex and his or her self-perception – gay men want to be and act like women, lesbians would be men – reinforces... [a] ...belief in traditional gender roles” (Silin, 1997, pp. 219-220) by tapping into the traditional notion that “anyone, male or female, who desires a man must by definition be feminine; and that anyone, male or female, who desires a woman must by the same token be masculine” (Sedgwick, 1994, p. 157). This means that when boys’ and girls’ gender performances disrupt norms for how boys and girls are *supposed* to dress or behave, their conduct can be met with low tolerance from others. This seems especially the case for boy children.

The term cross-dress describes activity in which norms for gender categories are blurred by individuals who dress in a non-gender conforming manner. Boys may wear dresses for instance or girls may refuse the same in favour of so-called masculine clothing choices. I have used the term in the title of this section of the chapter purposefully. *Cross-dress* can be somewhat problematic in that it can be read as a term that reinscribes binary thinking associated with genders, one of the three pairs of binary opposites that I am supposedly working to disrupt. To entertain the possibility of being able to cross-dress we must hold in our minds the notion that there exists a boundary to cross, which delineates the difference between proper and improper masculine and feminine dress codes. Nevertheless, writing queerly, to cross-dress is to engage in an apparently purposefully transgressive gender performance that blurs the notions of what it means to be masculine or feminine. I use the term not to reify the binary, but like other researchers who position their work queerly (Blaise, 2005; Dilley, 1999; Valocchi, 2005), to note it, and to call it into question.

Several accounts from teachers in my study are illustrative of the troubles that can ensue if boys perform their gender in ways that confront ideas of traditional

masculinity. I discuss three. They are all instances of cross-dressing. In each, heteronormative discourses, amongst others, shape understandings of these children and their behaviour. A close reading of the accounts can demonstrate relationships between individuals, social structures and institutions to show how activity in every day settings like early childhood centres may be coordinated with dominant discourses that privilege heterosexuality.

Andy's soon-to-be-school-aged-boy.

Andy talked of the imposition of gender norms on a soon-to-be-school-aged boy by his mother:

99: Andy: well at my last centre, there was a boy who just about five and he loved fancy dress, he loved [dress-ups] he... when he picked his own birthday presents out it was Barbie slippers and tiaras and... he just loved it. He had two older sisters, and he so wanted to be a part of... their play [(pause)]...and, he looked stunning and he carried it off. It was great. And just before his fifth birthday we had a conversation with his mum, we were asking, "how do you think he's going to go at school? Do you think he's, you know, "emotionally ready?" All the rest of it (pause). And, he so was ready for school, and she said, "oh you know it's great, (pause), oh well he's going to have a great fifth birthday party but, it's just not going to be the same after that". And I said, well you know, "what are you talking about?" And she said, "well, once he turns five he can't wear dresses any more". I said, "why's that?" And she said "he's been so lucky here because everyone is aware, that this is a learning curve, that this is just part of him exploring, and figuring out who he is in life" and she said, "it's not acceptable at primary schools to be like that"...

Rebecca: no

Andy: ...and I was, just thought my, she's so right... and she said, "my, he can't wear a dress to school instead of his school shorts... he'd get beaten up in the playground or, he'd get called names and I'm not having my son go through that... so, if he's lucky he'll be able to play like that at home so long as he hasn't got friends there". And I thought that was so sad that, from one day you can be completely who you are and the next day, you've got to fit into a little box of what, [everyone else expects you to be].

Kim:[he'll probably sneak his dresses in the, into his schoolbag]

(general laughter)

(FG: QT, 1.1, L 99-111)

The account is interesting not only for how it illustrates the placing of limitations on people when essentialist discourses shape understandings of what is acceptable

and normal in terms of gender, but also for how it shows other discourses contributing to an understanding of some gender performances as problematic. In reading this data I recognise gender essentialism and heteronormative discourse in the comment from this boy's parent about it not being acceptable in primary school to be like 'that'. The 'that' is not that it is unacceptable for a child at school to be understood as an 'explorer' or someone 'figuring' him or herself out, the 'that' refers to a boy who dresses in feminine clothing. It is almost impossible to think that a boy child might legitimately confront such gender norms in the primary school setting. Not only is this boy's mother attuned to this fact of schooling, his teacher it seems, is aware of it too. Children have also been shown to understand the impossibility of such ideas.

In a study of children's access to and taking up of gender discourses in a North American kindergarten classroom, Blaise (2005; Blaise Ochsner, 2000) showed how 5 and 6 year old children socially constructed themselves as gendered beings and in the process coordinated their own gender performances with traditional and dominant notions of what it meant to be a proper boy or girl, that is, to enact one's gender in accord with dominant and traditional discourses of "hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity" (Blaise, 2005, p. 86). Children used the public classroom space of 'show and tell' to reinforce gender norms like the idea that it is not normal for boys to be interested in feminine items such as make-up, and some children also drew on understandings of the "power and politics of masculinity, especially when they show[ed] how... [boys who associated] ...themselves with the feminine color pink... [were engaging in] ...risky business" (p.97). Blaise explains:

When we were sorting Lego action figures, I match a boy face on a pink body. When Alan noticed what I had done he looked on in disbelief as he yelled, "Ahhhh!" Raoul also loudly said, "No.", while grabbing the action figure out of my hand. With a puzzled expression, I asked why this couldn't work and was told by Alan, "If he walked down the street **for real** [emphasis in original], all the people would laugh". Even when I asked Raoul and Alan what they would do if all of their shirts were dirty

and the only clean shirt to wear was pink, they told me that they would just wait until the others were cleaned. For these boys, they would “never ever” [emphasis in original] walk around in a pink, girly colored shirt, “no matter what!” (Blaise, 2005, p.97)

Whilst Alan and Raoul do not overtly connect dubious gender performances with questionable sexualities, the two are inevitably intertwined. The insistence by these boys that they would ‘never ever’ desire or be like girls as signified through the act of wearing pink serves to position them as boys of the masculine sort, those whose gender and subsequent to this sexuality, confirms and conforms to the institution of heterosexuality. Refusing to trouble their gender the boys also refuse to trouble their sexuality, and in fact, the achievement of masculine gender norms by these boys signifies that in their classroom they can be known as “fashion boys” (Blaise, 2005, p.96). ‘Fashion boys’ are, in the mind of Alan at least, ably paired with the girls in the class known as “fashion girls” (p.96). Having learned rules around gender that those who hold to essentialist theories from the 20th century would have them learn, the children in this classroom are also attuned to those ideas around (hetero)sexuality which derive from 18th-20th century scientific, medical and psychological study. The children seem consistent with and as articulate as Rene, Andy, and Andy’s soon-to-be-school-aged-boy’s mother, with respect to the social and scientific norms that delineate the boundaries of proper gender and sexuality performances at school.

Rene and Andy, both speaking from the position of teacher, lend authority to the fact that a non-traditional gender performance by a boy is unacceptable. Rene agrees with the reported parent’s comment of the unacceptability of his being ‘like that’, and Andy thought that the parent was ‘so right’. Was this a reason why Andy offered no resistance to the mother’s ideas? The mother’s notion that her son’s expressions of boy, inconsistent with heterosexuality and traditional masculinity, put him at great risk from both physical and verbal violence leads her to suggest what could be interpreted as intent to ‘closet’ his behaviour: ‘if he’s lucky he’ll be able to play like that at home so long as he hasn’t got friends there’, she explains. Closetedness, as I explained in chapter 1, is a concept described by

Sedgwick (1990) which denotes a performance of silence. It is a deliberate withholding of information that if articulated would otherwise mark one as non-heterosexual. In public, the soon-to-be-school-aged-boy's behaviour is to be curbed; he is expected to obscure his desire to wear feminine clothing so as to preserve his safety and prevent any suggestion that his gender and sexuality might deviate from traditional norms. The idea of hiding the cross-dressing behaviour also emerges in Kim's comment when she says that he'd 'probably sneak his dresses...into his schoolbag'. Such subversive behaviour would limit the possibility that the boy might be thought *not normal* and potentially *gay*. Epstein and Johnson (1998) discuss ramifications for boys in schools if they are perceived to be "sissy" or "girlish" (p.204), writing that they are "liable to be punished through teasing and bullying in a variety of ways. It is demanded of them that they become more like 'real boys' (and later 'real men')... the policing of masculinities... assumes the inevitability of heterosexual relations" (pp. 204-205).

Renold's (2000) ethnographic study of gender in the primary school setting in the UK illuminates this process by showing how boys, albeit tenuously, invested in the construction and maintenance of their masculine and heterosexual identities by "coming out as heterosexual" (p.319) through engagement in 'fancying', 'asking girls out' and 'being boyfriends' narratives. Even though these *outings* were fraught and sometimes contradictory; they often involved teasing, becoming vulnerable, and the taking up of homophobic and misogynist discourses; the boys persisted in their attempts to assert and make coherent their masculinities and heterosexual identities. A key manner by which this was achieved, was by accessing and directing homophobia towards boys who "got too close to other boys" (p.322) and those who failed to successfully access "hegemonic masculine discourses/practices" (p.322). This, social fact of schooling, that there are *proper* ways to do boy which inevitably involves a *proper* performance of (hetero)sexuality too allows the closeting of Andy's soon-to-be-school-aged-boy's cross-dressing to be demanded so that in public at least, he will perform his gender, and sexuality *normally*. The act successfully brings together *discursive threads concerning gender, sexuality, risk, and safety* to preserve heteronormativity.

So, this soon-to-be-school-aged boy is construed as potential victim, but also as someone with agency when other discourses can be seen to shape the discussion between Andy and the parent in the account that Andy gave. A new interpretation is made possible when Andy frames his behaviour in terms of the *unreal*: he is a *player*, a person who likes to *dress up*, and a *pretender* who can *carry it off*. It seems that an idea of *fantasy* is being drawn on. It intersects with *discourses of developmentalism* allow for the cross dresser and leaves his gender and sexuality development unencumbered. Perhaps he is in part actually being signified as a *normal* boy after all. In developmental terms, it is not until the ages of between four and seven years that more sophisticated understandings of gender, primarily gender constancy are expected to emerge (Smith, 1998). Therefore the possibility that this boy (and any other boy too) might get his gender wrong from time to time seems acceptable because at almost-school-age, he has not yet reached the upper end of the age/stage where gender constancy is expected.

The *discourse of developmentalism* also seems to contribute to the mother's use of ages and stages thinking. She intends using her son's impending birthday as the catalyst for curbing his transgressions: 'once he turns five he can't wear dresses any more' she says, as if the soon-to-be-five-year-olds birthday demands a change of rules around how he might necessarily dress and conduct his gender in public. The mother talks about her son's behaviour as 'a learning curve... just part of him exploring... figuring out who he his...' thereby helping to signify him as a proper masculine heterosexual boy, in control of his learning and who is therefore achieving himself within the bounds of *normal development*. Not only might he be now understood entirely in accord with expectations of how *proper boys develop*, she too is understood as a mother whose watchful gaze (Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989) will ensure the preservation of her son's safety and who reserves time for his *real* gender and sexuality development to emerge with age.

Rose's student teachers' brave parents.

Rose, in the first of the teacher educator focus group interviews, gave another account of a boy's gender performance being troubled. Student teachers in her teacher education classroom were talking about a child and family in their early

childhood centre. Rose explained:

18: Rose: ...I actually can't remember now what we were talking about, we weren't talking about sexualities but they said that there was one boy child, 4 years old, always dresses in pink dresses and comes in his pink dresses from home with his handbags and his high shoes always, from home. And the two students were saying to the other students "we think the parents are brave to allow this", and I think that whole notion of bravery is really sucky, misplaced. And then they also said... that some teachers accept it and they're two of the teachers that claim they accept it. And they talked about you know, that being [in study¹] had opened their eyes to other ways of being in the world, and that was part of it. So that was good. But they all love it, they all love it when the boy has a kilt on because then all of the teachers can safely say, "what a wonderful kilt. Boys and men wear kilts in Scotland"...

Dan: mmm - agreeing

Rose: And so for me, I addressed it a little bit in class, but not in great depth because I had another agenda I suppose. For me, they were positioning this kilt wearing child and his interest in female clothing, so called female clothing, in relation to culture. Their fears weren't about, you know, their fears were about, assumed sexuality... and they really loved this kilt, (laughs), that he has, because it allows them a safe way to handle... it.

(FG: TE, 1.1, L.18-33)

Here the heteronormative discourse existed in the marking of the boy's parents as brave for letting their son wear dresses and high heel shoes to the centre, Rose objects. She thinks it is 'really sucky, misplaced'. Her view draws attention to a contradiction posed by the teachers. Rather than affirming the parent's decision to support their child's choices, the bravery notion confirms that there are rules around gender that the parents are breaking. As transgressors, they open themselves and their son to risk by allowing and supporting him to dress in non boy-gender conforming manner. Further, and as Rose points out, the non-traditional-boy-gender-performance seems transformed if it is viewed as an expression of cultural (as in ethnic) diversity. This idea of *cultural diversity* features in current early childhood policy (Ministry of Education, 1996a, 1996b). Teachers, attuned to the cultural contexts of children's lives, are considered to be

¹ Text changed to preserve the anonymity of the institution named.

able to work effectively with children and families if they relate in culturally relevant and meaningful ways. Associated with a *discourse of diversity*, being attuned to cultural differences allows for norms around dress codes and genders to shift sufficiently to accommodate the possibility of a skirt (kilt)-wearing-four-year-old boy. The risks to the boy, and to the teachers who now find ‘a safe way to handle it’ (the non conforming gender performances) are immediately removed.

The idea of the *brave parent* and the idea of being attuned to *cultural difference* compete with each other and allow for different meanings of the boy’s behaviour to be formed. However, both sets of understandings work to preserve gender essentialism and heterosexuality because through them, the notion that there is a real boy gender to preserve, which is essentially male and heterosexual, remains firm. Real Scots men wear kilts; the parents are brave because they are letting their son cross the boundary of what it means to *do* boy properly. The heteronormative discourse remains undisturbed.

Dan and Shirley’s furious fathers.

A few moments after Rose’s account, Dan and Shirley elaborated on this idea of boys’ gender troubles by adding their experiences to the discussion:

51: Dan: I also remembered one particular discussion where a student had noticed, I’m not too sure of the details of it, but basically a young boy was coming to the centre and putting on women’s clothing in the dress up area and a father had found out and was quite furious about it and was sort of saying “don’t you let him do that sort of thing”. And then we sort of talked about you know what, where would you, what would you be doing? What could you say? And things like that. And so that was quite interesting. But also, I’ve heard this, there’s a child coming to centre in women’s clothing and they dress, yeah, so I’ve heard the same thing, they dress him in a kilt, yeah.

Shirley: ...I’ve been in several situations like that and the hard part, oh, it’s difficult enough managing the parents, ‘cos they’re the ones with the problem often. It’s, it’s then... getting your team to delve... deeper into how they think about it. We had a little boy who used to, didn’t dress up in the dress up clothes, he’d go to the change, where you know, where the clean knickers are, and get out the little girls pair with the big bit of lace on it. The most obvious pair of little girls knickers he could get. And we didn’t mind until... the father minded. And then we had to mind. And then we all had different opinions... about how we minded and how we were going to respond to it. And it took half a staff meeting... and of

course we never really clearly resolved. It was just some people, ah, some peoples' ... opinions, possibly mine, overrode every body else's (laughs). And it was one of those behaviours... that worked its way out for him in the end. But he knew his father didn't like it and he, so he ended up with this idea in his head about what was o.k or not o.k about it. So it happens a lot, yeah.

(FG: TE, 1.1, L.51-66)

The fury expressed by the father in Dan's story suggests that he is troubled by far more serious concerns than these transgressive gender performances might warrant. And a similarly provoked father from a time in Shirley's career when she worked in an early childhood centre 'minded' that his son would seek out and wear the 'most obvious pair of little girls knickers he could get' to the extent that this caused Shirley and her colleagues to 'mind' the behaviour too and to go on and try and find ways to respond.

The individuals may be interpreted in various ways. The boys are competent: they make choices about what to wear and they can discern the right conditions in which their decisions might be able to be carried through (they dress like this at the centre not at home) yet they may also be read as troubling because the status of their gender and possibly sexuality development is questionable. Might their *feminine* dress choices suggest potential homosexuality? The fathers may be understood as both champions of traditional masculinity and troublemakers whose homophobia contributes to their reactions. And the teachers, as too permissive, 'don't you let him do that sort of thing', and as somewhat successful professionals, '...we had to mind. And then we all had different opinions... it took half a staff meeting... we never clearly resolved...'. We don't know what the outcome for the boy in Dan's account was in the end; he didn't go on to explain whether or not his non-traditional-masculine gender performance was able to continue in the context of his early childhood centre involvement. Yet Shirley's boy's situation was eventually deemed to be resolved, although not through anyone's direct action, but by the inevitabilities of normal patterns of growth and development "...It was one of those behaviours... that worked its way out for him in the end" (FG: TE, 1.1, L.64-66). Shirley told us this as if the boy's achievement of gender constancy was always going to precede him. The

developmental discourse is clear.

Boldt (1997) writes “the regulation of gender and that of sexuality go hand in hand” (p.189). In these examples the chance that boys might be showing signs of non-heterosexual sexualities, signalled by their inclinations to get their genders *wrong*, leads to direct interventions on the part of teachers and parents to curb the problematic behaviour of cross-dressing. It seems as if the stereotype explained by Silin (1997) and Ryan and Martin (2000), which holds that homosexuality is a mismatch between one’s biological sex and self-perception might be influencing meanings here. The boys’ behaviour is not only being construed as a move away from power and possibility (Boldt, 1997). It is throwing their sexuality into question and moving them towards risk and danger. The boys in Blaise’s (2005) and Renold’s (2000) studies know this, as do the parents and teachers in my study’s accounts. Such ideas provide sufficient impetus it seems for the boys in my study to be hampered in their attempts to ‘do’ their gender in ways that make sense and are pleasurable to / for them. Their parent and teacher reactions as reported by Andy, Shirley and Dan show that proper sorts of masculinities are sought and preserved in early childhood education. Such activity inevitably renders unlikely the possibility of reading non-heterosexual sexual identities as viable and therefore able to be received with welcome in early childhood education settings.

Troubling sexualities: issues of recognition and resistance

With respect to sexuality, heteronormative discourse positions heterosexual sexuality as the *normal* form of sexuality: normal in the sense of a statistical norm, but also in the sense of it being *healthy*, an inevitable outcome of naturally progressing heterosexual sexuality development. The privileging of heterosexuality and subsequent marginalizing of other forms of sexuality establishes a binary of normal heterosexuality versus abnormal non-heterosexual sexuality. This is the second of three binaries central to heteronormative discourse that I question in this study.

As discussed in chapter two, the idea that heterosexual sexuality is the normal

form of sexuality quietly firmed in the eighteenth century through the ways in which the professions and science built from early Christian conceptualisations of homosexuality. The determination of truths around deviant forms of sexuality through what Foucault (1978) calls “scientia sexualis” (p.58) provided authority for the idea. In this context “the legitimate couple, with its regular sexuality, had a right to more discretion” (Foucault, 1978, p.38) and the sexuality of children, of those thought insane, and of those whose sexuality was oriented towards others of the same sex came under scrutiny by scientifically legitimated authorities. The specification of a new type of individual, the homosexual, constructed in scientific, legal, medical and psychological discourses firmed the grounds for ‘others’ to be known and for their sexualities to become associated with abnormality, deviance and disease. Constituting the standard for legitimate and prescriptive social and sexual arrangements, heterosexuality became institutionalised. It was/is regularly taken-for-granted. The normalcy associated with it, and its consequent superiority, allows for the marginalisation and pathologisation of people and concepts associated with sexualities different to the (hetero)norm.

In the study several accounts of non-heterosexual sexualities being troubled were reported. I chose to explore two of these with the question of how discursive practices were promulgating heteronormativity. The first concerned a participant in the queer teachers’ focus group, Andy, and a situation at work where she was assumed to be heterosexual. Dan reported the second account. In his position as teacher educator, Dan had faced resistances from teacher education students to the legitimacy of families with same-sex parents in them. He had explored these with his students and had sought to challenge the ideas informing their positions.

Kate’s heterosexual presumption.

In the exchange that Andy reported, a new colleague Kate joined in a conversation that Andy was having with her boss. The conversation was about Andy’s new relationship, she explained:

200: Andy: ... and my boss and I were having a chat, because I've just started a relationship not long ago with someone. And Donna² was saying, "so hows it all going?", chat, chat, chat. And Kate overheard and turned around, leaned across the table and said, "oh, oh my god Andy, have you got yourself a boyfriend?!". And I thought, oh shit, here we go... well, that's a really good thing to say. And I just leant across the table and said "actually no I haven't, it's a girlfriend", (laughs)... And she, her face just dropped. And I thought, oh maybe I was just a bit forward there, but (laughs) I thought, oh no stuff it.

Marion: yeah

Andy: And she just looked at me. And then her face lit up. And she said, "oh I'm so excited, that's great". And I thought sorry? ...Her face was just, to start with, was so different to her reaction.... She came back to me later and she said that she was just... startled, she "wouldn't have, wouldn't have picked me" (laughs)... I'm serious, oh please, god, I can't pick half the people, god! (laughter). Anyway, yeah, but she came back and she thanked me she said "I'm so, you know, grateful that you were honest and that you told me and um, good on you". And I thought, wow, that's you, I mean everyone's been like that. But, I just got a slightly different feeling from her to start with and then it was, but then it was all good, but, it was just bizarre, it was such a... bizarre time.

(FG: QT, 1.0, L.200-217)

Andy's account draws attention to the ways heterosexuality, if it is taken-for-granted, can be assumed for all. Where heteronormative discourse exists, heterosexuality dominates; the idea that other legitimate forms of sexuality might be possible, diminishes in the face of this positioning of heterosexuality and the "heterosexual presumption" (Epstein & Johnson, 1994, p. 198) marginalises those who identify their sexuality as not heterosexual. Kate's presumption that Andy's new partner was male was one such moment where these ideas materialised in the early childhood setting. It reveals how heteronormative discourse shaped Kate's interpretations of what she was hearing Andy say. As would be expected where heterosexuality was dominant, the possibility that Andy's new partner might have been a woman hadn't occurred to Kate, and she was 'startled' but 'grateful' nonetheless for Andy's honesty. She was, in fact, *in praise of her*, a response

² The names Donna and Kate are both pseudonyms I gave to individuals identified by Andy in the interview.

slightly reminiscent of Rose's student teachers' brave parents from earlier in the chapter.

Kate's 'good on you' suggests she perceived that it took some courage for Andy to not pass and to tell her that her partner was a woman. Andy's words too hint at some risk to be overcome, '...I thought... here we go...' Like other non-heterosexual teachers who are faced with daily decisions about whether or not to come out at work, Andy's apparent trepidation is not a feeling she shares alone. Khayatt's (1997) discussion around whether or not, and if so how, one might tell of their non-heterosexual sexuality as a teacher refers to the risks of coming out when she describes lesbian university teachers talking about whether or not they should put their *bodies on the line* in order to confront the predominantly heterosexual academy in their university settings. The notion of bodies on the line is analogous to going to war; the possibilities of bodily harm seem palpable, it is difficult to imagine activity much less risky than this.

Ferfolja's (1998) interview study of lesbian secondary school teachers in New South Wales shows how harm can materialise when deviant sexualities are suspected or known in teachers' professional lives. Homophobic harassment meant that some lesbian teachers in Ferfolja's study lived through significant periods of stress. The discriminations they faced impacted on how they chose to teach and diminished their faith in the capacity of their employers to recognise and respond effectively to homophobia. The demoralising and harmful attitudes that permeated the schools in which they worked led Ferfolja to conclude that these lesbian teachers faced "environments which pose a constant daily threat to their physical and mental well-being" (Ferfolja, 1998, p.412). It seems these teachers were placing their bodies on the line whether they had chosen to or not. In light of such understandings, Andy's hesitation in my study seems a reasonable expression of the fact that there are risks in coming out at work when you are a lesbian teacher. For men, it seems similar notions are in play.

King's (2004) and Silin's (1997) discourse analyses both explore the construction of the gay male teacher though this time in early childhood and elementary education. They both point to the gay male's construction as an impossible and

undesirable subject: perverted and potentially paedophile. There seems plenty of cause for teachers to pause before deciding to out themselves in the contexts of their professional work. Andy's hesitation seems an expression of this. And although she appears somewhat regretful of her frankness in confronting the heterosexual presumption made by Kate, '...maybe I was just a bit forward there'; in company of other queer teachers in this study, she seems able to appreciate her response too, saying that she thought, at the moment of confession, 'oh no stuff it'.

Writing about the 'coming out imperative' as one "underpinned by a broader movement within gay and lesbian politics that tends to unproblematically valorise the act of coming out" (Rasmussen, 2004, p.149), Rasmussen argues for a more complex analysis of how coming out is constructed "via moral, political and pedagogical considerations related to the production of sexual identities" (pg.149). In this vein, Foucault (1978) might say that Andy was forced in this moment to tell this truth of herself to Kate and that this discursive ritual was providing Andy with the means to authenticate herself "by the discourse of truth... [she]... was able or obliged to pronounce" (Foucault, 1978, p. 58). The compulsion to tell, or the imperative for queer teachers to come out to their colleagues and students is what Rasmussen (2004) would seek to explore. As an important mechanism in the production of sexualities, Foucault (1978) argues that the confession "was and still remains, the general standard governing the production of the true discourse on sex" (p.63).

(Re)marking the deviance associated with Andy's queerness, this relational strategy of personal disclosure means that more is going on for Andy and Kate than simply the celebratory recognition of Andy's non-heterosexual sexual identity. Andy's telling of her non-heterosexual sexuality was *rewarded* by Kate, albeit not in the moment when Kate's 'face just dropped' but rather, later, when Kate came back to Andy, to thank her and to tell her she was 'grateful for her honesty'. The telling seemed to provide a *means of liberation* for Andy; she'd thrust open the closet door in the act of leaning over the table and challenging Kate's assumption of heterosexuality, and while this marked Andy clearly as not

(hetero)normal it also enabled this truth to be sanctioned by a new colleague who had found herself ‘startlingly’ in a context where a discourse of *sexual diversities* - that positioned non-heterosexual sexualities differently to usual, as normal, legitimate, and ordinary - were in play.

Thinking for a moment after Andy challenges the heteronormative discourse, Kate seems to position herself differently by sharing her excitement at the possibilities of Andy’s new relationship. Kate too, it seems, is now taking opposition to the heteronormativity that has shaped the interaction thus far, and Andy is now the one surprised as she struggles to reconcile Kate’s bodily expressions, assumptions and words. The *welcoming of sexual diversity* apparent in Kate’s response seems a localised expression of the social and policy changes marked by the late twentieth century legislation reforms I discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis. Kate seems to recognise Andy’s relationship as a legitimate alternative option to the heterosexual norm. In her celebrations she successfully captures and temporarily advances the spirit of those reforms. The shift quickly passes though with Kate’s comment to Andy about being able to ‘pick’ her as lesbian. Drawing on upon ideas of *feminine women and masculine men*, Kate seems to suggest that Andy, because she is a lesbian, should be a more masculine looking woman than a heterosexual woman might be. In this, Kate evokes *gender essentialism* and therefore counters concept of diversity she drew on momentarily before. The construct of *feminine women and masculine men* is reflected upon by Allen (1995) who writes about an exercise in her gender studies class where she asked students to note differences in three pairs of celebrities that she had recorded as dichotomous in terms of race, gender and sexual orientation. Allen asked the students to write adjectives and qualities that would describe tennis player Martina Navratilova and talk show host Oprah Winfrey, she explains:

...they generated a long list. I asked them to do the same with Martina, but the list was shorter. I asked them to think of why they had so few ways of describing Martina... they started raising their hands and generating all sorts of responses. One student said Martina was so bulky and unfeminine, but Oprah had been a beauty queen, and another student

said that since Martina was a lesbian, perhaps we just couldn't think of her as feminine, and then many other students started saying things about lesbians being unfeminine... (1995, p.138-139)

Allen used the experience as an opportunity to confront the assumptions embedded in the notion of *feminine women and masculine men* by outing herself to the students in the class and asking them if she seemed unfeminine to them. Like Kate, the students in Allen's class were reportedly somewhat stunned, but many too voiced, "it doesn't matter to me opinions, as if to reassure... [that] ...they weren't judgemental" (1995, p.139). This stereotype of homosexuality as a mismatch between a person's biological sex and his or her self-perception (Ryan & Martin, 2000; Silin, 1997) draws on the traditional notion explained by Sedgwick (1994) that anyone who desires a man must be feminine and anyone who desires a woman must be masculine. Clearly something in Andy's and in Allen's demeanours and bodily appearances confronted this idea, because for Kate and the students in Allen's class, it wasn't at all obvious that these women were not heterosexual until they publicly and deliberately decided to come out. The *feminine women and masculine men* construct is an homogenising one that affirms the binary of heterosexual/non heterosexual by drawing upon gender essentialism to suggest that Andy, Allen and other lesbians like them would share traits and characteristics that would set them obviously and visibly apart from the norm. In my study, even though Andy's lasting impression of the interaction with Kate is that it was 'bizarre', she frames it positively in the end, and from Kate's reported actions, it seems that she would most likely see it this way too.

What was remarked immediately after Andy's account of this interaction to the queer teachers focus group members was the sorts of dilemmas that lesbian teachers face when they decide to disrupt heteronormative discourses through the act of coming out at work. Rebecca commented:

220: Rebecca: She'll probably think before, she'll probably be a bit more open gendered about her... questioning from now on,

Andy: ...someone else I work with has said that... since knowing me, being out and stuff... she's become aware... not assuming that everyone's straight which is quite good. I kind of feel like, that that's all I would... like to, or, I would like to think that I could at least do that, by being gay,

is just getting people... more aware of, just

Kim: don't presume

Andy: ... not presuming because it's really hard if someone says to you have you got a boyfriend? For me, I automatically think well no I haven't, do I just say no?...

Kim: yeah

Andy: I'm still being honest... or do I actually (pause), some people, you just want to put it in their face because they just annoy you... stress them out, but... others, it's you know, are they ready to have you say, oh, it's just so crazy.

Kim: or am I ready to deal with their reaction?

(FG: QT, 1.0, L.220-242)

The commentary provides a glimpse into the kinds of self-conscious management of emotions, questions and actions by those lesbians who, like Andy, decide to challenge heteronormative discourses in their workplaces. "Moments of coming out involve facing up to and overcoming homophobia in an acute form" (Epstein & Johnson, 1994, p.200), in this account Andy took the risk and put herself out there to confront the dominant discourse of heteronormativity that was brought into play with Kate's assumption. My reading of the extract, informed by my own lesbian positioning, is shaped by my own memory of decisions about whether or not to come out in my work as teacher and teacher educator. Detailed analyses are made available by my positioning. Casper and Schultz (1999) write about this in their interview study of same-sex families and school settings. Finding a "sophisticated level of micro analysis of what are usually considered every day parent-to-parent interactions" (p.65), Casper and Schultz discuss what happens in the process of non-heterosexual persons make meaning of social interactions with *straight* peers. Parents in their study reflected about how *out* they were in classrooms. Simple encounters like how to introduce oneself and one's family to others, or responding to birthday party invitations were challenges to work through in attempts to help straight parents become acclimated to same-sex family structures. It seems that my readings of the levels of investments made by Andy in response to her description of Kate's heterosexual presumption emulate this kind of detailed analysis of Kate and Andy's interaction. I recognise that Kate might have experienced some embarrassment at the assumption of heterosexuality

made, and if Kate was telling the story, much more might be understood about her experiences. But my concerns and sensitivities are with Andy in this instance, a fellow lesbian teacher in whom I can recognise many responses, similar to those I myself might have made in the past: surprise in the assumption of heterosexuality given that she was 'out' at work; trepidation at what might come should she challenge the heterosexual presumption; sarcasm possibly towards it; regret at her refusal to let the heteronormative discourse go uninterrupted; resolve in her decision to speak against heteronormativity; confusion at Kate's response; relief after Kate's later return to the topic; and perplexity on reflection at the contradictions and confrontations brought about by the complex process of confronting the dominant discourse. Unable to find a privileged place from where I could distance myself from what Andy, Kim and Rebecca were saying, my reading of the extent of the emotional and cognitive investment in the coming out process that Andy had explained made her actions seem remarkable.

Dan's student teacher resistances.

Dan's account of sexualities being troubled in his work as a teacher educator deals much more overtly with resistance to non-heterosexual sexualities. In this case, student teachers share opposition to the inclusion of same-sex families in early childhood centres:

63: Dan: I took a group of students through looking at diverse families... I thought... that my views of gay families as being acceptable and okay was... something that would be... normal with the students.... What I got to my shock and horror, was some people that were out rightly against um, they thought that it was bad for children, that it was bad for society generally. And so, instead of taking them to that place of, okay, let's look at how we can make gay families more inclusive... in our early childhood centres, it was like, taking them right back to looking at the issue of... that it's okay, for gay families to exist...

(FG: TE, 1.0, L.63)

Dan, connecting with discourses of diversity from the socio-political sphere, approaches his teacher education class from a position of tolerance towards same-sex sexualities, which he expected them to share. Unfortunately though some do not and Dan finds himself shocked and horrified at the homophobia circulating in

the class. Such expressions of homophobia and intolerance towards the idea of same-sex families have been recorded in other studies where student teachers' attitudes towards non-heterosexual forms of sexuality have been examined (Maney & Cain, 1997; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2002b). Maney and Cain (1997), who surveyed elementary school student teachers taking a health class as part of their university study, found that students who held strong religious attitudes also held significantly more negative attitudes to lesbian parents, and male student teachers were significantly less likely to be comfortable with gay or lesbian parents and their children than female students were. Robinson and Ferfolja's (2002b) study on the other hand focussed on discourses circulating amongst student teacher populations in university classrooms to show how those learning to teach can draw on discourses of relevance, compulsory heterosexuality and pathology to render lesbian and gay issues in teacher education curricula problematic. Like students in these studies, Dan's teacher education students bring up questions of morality. The rightness or wrongness of same-sex sexualities is what Dan elects to focus on as he attempts to diminish the homophobia and find other discourses that allow for inclusion to be drawn into the discussion.

One factor in Dan's account that I find most troubling is that the student teachers he was talking about in the context of the focus group interview were also practising teachers, in the process of gaining formal qualifications, who were therefore already working with children and families in early childhood centres. Again, I find my position of lesbian (this time parent), to be relevant to the meanings I created from Dan's account. How were these teachers responding to queer families and their children already in their daily work in early childhood education? Drawing on my teacher educator sensibilities, I recognised the task Dan had faced as he explained how he went on to work with the students in the account he gave:

63: Dan: ... And I felt quite rattled... about their, some of the things that they were saying. But I was very fortunate to have gone to the... library and found a... video-tape that was... produced by Christian people... a talk about... a son... and family who'd gone through... this young adolescent coming out.... They'd tried to take him to... Christian counselling, and I think it was three or four years, and so they talked

about that. And this is one of the issues that was raised in the class, that... you know, a gay person could be counselled out of this kind of behaviour.... And so one of my students had actually said that all they need is counselling... a good counsellor would sort of solve the problem....

(FG: TE, 1.0, L.65)

It was as if Dan had anticipated the morality question and the possibility that *religion* might become cited in his class as a means to condemn same-sex sexualities. He had equipped himself with teaching resources so that he might address any potential issues in a somewhat non-confrontational way. The influence of Christian traditions in Western culture “remains a major regulative discourse in familial and sexual matters” (Epstein & Johnson, 1994, p.212). Dan, it seems, is aware of this, although he says that he was ‘very fortunate’ to have obtained a video-tape produced by Christians, showing a family who’d realised after counselling that their son’s homosexuality couldn’t be counselled out of him. I think Dan’s actions were most likely more purposeful than he gave himself credit for. His awareness on some level that some students’ beliefs would be coordinated with *religious and moral beliefs* condemning same-sex sexuality, had made it possible for Dan to ready himself to respond should it be necessary.

The video served to refuse the discourse of *homosexuality as a lifestyle choice* and therefore temporary anomaly to true heterosexuality by replacing it with the notion that for some, like the son in this video’s Christian family, that *homosexuality is a permanent state*, a biological anomaly unable to be corrected by the individual’s choices. Reminiscent of the approach taken by early campaigners in the homosexual law reform processes of New Zealand that I described in chapter two of the thesis, Dan it seems, attempted an appeal to the liberal senses of his teacher education students. He sought to elicit sympathy for the plight of the homosexual and his family and indicate at the same time that sexuality couldn’t be counselled out of someone, and that this awareness did not imply a moral acceptance of queerness. Prepared with the resource, Dan seems able to remove the moral grounds upon which his teacher education students might reject families in early childhood education where same-sex parents parented. He doesn’t provide for the concept that same-sex sexualities are a

legitimate alternative option to heterosexuality, but he does encourage a student re-evaluation of the grounds upon which same-sex families might be resisted in the early childhood setting. By using the tape to confront the issues that were raised, Dan was able to position himself as ‘not-the-teacher-educator-trying-to-convince-his-students-to-change-their-minds’ but the ‘teacher-educator-doing-teacher-education-properly’ by making it possible for different discourses positioning non-heterosexual sexualities as less of a problem to emerge. It seems to have been a somewhat useful way for Dan to have approached the matter in his teacher education classroom.

His account of the discussion with his students continued:

And then looking at... the issues of the gay parade and saying things like “oh I just don’t like it”, and we realised that, possibly um, gay people were sort of flaunting their sexuality in that gay parade... And that it was more about the whole, flaunting of the sexuality and not so much about gay families.... And so we looked at various scenarios of gay families, and we got some books for young children that show... gay men and the young girl living with, um a in, sort of a nuclear family.... Living with her mother and then going the weekends to her gay father, and so waking up in the morning and he was with his gay partner. And so, showing them this book... suddenly became more... instead of concentrating on the whole sexual aspect of it, the fact that two men or two women could live together. And actually seeing, it became kind of more acceptable for those that had really been quite against it. So I did see some shifts. Although the woman who was really against it still... had this idea that she would say that “it’s o.k, I’m quite accepting of gay families, but it’s not what I agree with and, but I would still accept this in the centre”.

(FG: TE, 1.0, L.67)

There are several ways that comments in Dan’s account point to heteronormative discourses and the positioning of non-heterosexual sexualities as deviant, pathologic and abnormal. There is the naming of homosexuality as a problem as expressed in the comment that Dan and his students were to examine ‘issues of the gay parade’; the interpretation of the parade as a ‘flaunting’ of non-heterosexual sexualities; the subsequent connection of this flaunting idea with the notion of same-sex families (...’it was more about the whole, flaunting of the sexuality and not so much about gay families’...); and the somewhat unsuccessful attempts at (hetero)normalising the family form of a story book character who lived ‘in, sort

of a nuclear family'. Together these ideas conflate to speak the (hetero)norm in that they mark non-heterosexual sexualities as *problematic* ('...the issues of the gay parade...'), as overtly *confrontational* ('...gay people were sort of flaunting...'), and as attempting to unsuccessfully achieve the *proper* family form ('...sort of a nuclear family...').

It does seem in the end as if the discussions Dan provoked were able to successfully shift the emphasis from sexuality sufficiently so that same-sex families could be viewed as 'kind of more acceptable' by those who had resisted them at the start of Dan's class. Was it the foregrounding of *nuclear family discourses* i.e., that the child in the picture book lived in 'sort of a nuclear family', a dubious family perhaps, but a family none the less, that held more sway in the early childhood context? Did the *nuclear family discourse* allow for some, albeit reluctant, diminishing of heteronormativity to transpire? Possibly. Perhaps in a context like New Zealand early childhood education where there is growing recognition that children's learning in the early childhood setting is connected to the experiences they bring with them and take out of that place, that it is impossible for teachers to imagine teaching successfully without deliberate connections to children's families being made. Foregrounding *family* over *sexuality* might provide sufficient veneer upon which some teachers, opposed to non-heterosexual sexualities, could see their way towards maintaining a professional relationship in order that they could *do* teacher in the manner required. It might work for a time, but as Hulsebosch and Koerner (1997) ask, how can you be *for* children and *against* their families? How long would the veneer last and what quality of relationship would possibly transpire?

When non-heterosexual sexualities are troubled it is not necessary for homophobia or heterosexism to be overtly present if heteronormativity is to be active. Heteronormativity can operate through overt discrimination, as in the case of Dan's teacher education students who questioned on moral grounds the right for same-sex families to exist, but it can also operate effectively through silence and absence as in the case of Kate's presumption of Andy's heterosexuality. Heteronormative discourse works to posit the world as totally and unambiguously

heterosexual: the continual rendering of non-heterosexual sexualities as abnormal, deviant and pathologic helps achieve this through the construction of a binary where normal heterosexuality is valued and abnormal non-heterosexual sexualities are not. Evidence of these processes can be seen in the stories of practice that Dan and Andy tell.

Andy, refusing to allow her new relationship with a woman to be hidden with her colleague, challenged the heterosexual assumption head on: the resulting inversion of the heterosexual/homosexual binary lead to a temporary normalisation of non-heterosexual sexualities in a work context where a *diversity discourse* recognising *sexual diversity* seemed to prevail. Kate, temporarily coordinated with a broader social attitude towards valuing and welcoming same-sex partnerships shifted positions quickly in her interaction with Andy although the shift seemed only temporarily achieved as the notion of *feminine women and masculine men* further complicated the discussion that Andy was to later characterise as ‘bizarre’.

Dan’s teacher education work did not seek to invert the normal heterosexual / abnormal non-heterosexual sexualities binary in the same kind of way although it did ask serious questions of the ideas and assumptions that contributed to its formation. Dan’s activity seemed to be reminiscent of the strategies used by early homosexual law reform campaigners as he appealed to the liberal senses of his student teachers to find ways towards inclusion and tolerance of same-sex families. It seems as if the *nuclear family discourse* gained some ascendancy in Dan’s teacher education classroom and that this provided a means by which some student teachers could reconcile their resistances on moral / religious grounds to same-sex families and imagine working with them just like they would work with families who didn’t have same-sex parents in them. The extent to which this resolution might assist teachers to practice inclusively is a lasting question. The last (student) teacher’s response, ‘...it’s not what I agree with... I would still accept this in the centre’, preserves the idea that non-heterosexual sexualities really were a problem. It also introduces the possibility that people who are non-heterosexual might be tolerated only if their sexuality is hidden, denied or

unremarked.

Ryan and Martin (2000) show how non-heterosexual parents can be encouraged by teachers to obscure their non-heterosexual sexualities at school. Parents in their study have had affection described as ‘flaunting’ and children’s safety and interests are heralded as reason why non-heterosexual sexualities should be kept closeted. One parent commented, “the teacher said that while she had no problem with us she was sure there were parents in the school who could make trouble and it would be better for our child if we kept it quiet” (p.5) and another said, “we were told that we were welcome in the school, but we should be ‘discreet’ and not hold hands at school events because my son might get teased” (p.5). Dan’s teacher education student, holding fast to a desire to deny the legitimacy of same-sex families might not go to the extent of the teachers reported in Ryan’s and Martin’s studies (2000) but the effect is the same: a silencing of non-heterosexual sexualities and therefore preservation of the heteronormative status quo.

Troubling families: constructions of and challenges to the nuclear family form

I have argued in chapter 2 that the third of three binaries central to heteronormative discourse concerns constructions of the family and that in the Western world, the nuclear family form has come to occupy a privileged place. Families are most often assumed to comprise heterosexual parents who are, or who are assumed to be, children’s biological or legal mothers and fathers. Notions of heterosexuality and gender essentialism (particularly in relation to ideas of the traditional patriarchal nuclear family) are central to the nuclear family form and biological and legal discourses also feature strongly (Kitzinger, 2005; Theilheimer & Cahill, 2001).

In this study there were several examples of the nuclear family being positioned as the *normal* family form: normal as in the family form assumed or constructed when the notion of family is raised, and normal as in proper. Participants gave accounts of children’s constructions of family that privileged the nuclear family, and they also told of teachers’ practices, that while in some ways made it possible for other forms of family to be recognised, served largely to reinscribe the

dominance of the nuclear family form. The nuclear versus non-nuclear family binary acts to preserve heterosexuality as the dominant and normative form of sexuality and in doing so contributes to heteronormative discourse.

Settling Essa and her family

Marian's account of the family form being troubling concerned the transition of a lesbian family into the centre where Marian worked. Acting from her positions as lesbian teacher and parent, Marian stepped in when the settling process for Essa, the child in this story, wasn't proceeding in a straight forward manner. Marian explained:

68: Marian: ...The last centre I worked at, when I first started there, it was working with children under two. There was a child who came from a lesbian family. Both her mums came into the centre and, the child wasn't very settled. And there was primary caregiving. And I said, "oh, I think I'll take over the primary caregiving of Essa because, I'll be able to really relate to the family". And it just, snap like that, the child settled really quickly after I'd started and the parents both said, like it was, it was great and really affirming of them... And I don't think the teachers had been blatantly homophobic or necessarily uncomfortable with the situation, they just, didn't know. You know, they didn't know, well how did, you know, how does that work? Or those kind of questions... which I could easily answer. And they had somebody to kick things around with as well, 'cos I could just tell them about my family situation. So I think that made a difference to those teachers and also to that family.

Alex: so Marian, are you saying that, maybe the teachers had, like your reference to like, well, how does that work? ...Like how does the family work? And...

Marian: yeah, yeah, 'cos you know how if you don't know...yeah

Alex: you know, who's the mum and who's the mum, that sort of thing?

(FG: QT, 1.0, L.68-73)

How was this lesbian family constructed? And what about Marian and the other teachers? It seems as if the lesbian family were *foreign* to the teachers the centre, except for Marian who, as a lesbian parent herself, knew how things worked. It is a homogenising view, as if all lesbians parent similarly and form and run their families in a particular way. Marian seems also to enter into the positioning of the *same-sex family as foreigners* with her comment about being able to 'really relate to the family'. The other teachers, without question, accept this and Marian is

achieved as *expert*. The intervention worked, and it seems as if the inference that it worked because Marian was a lesbian too, could easily be drawn. Such practice may do little to disrupt heteronormativity because it effectively allowed the teachers who were not lesbian to keep their image of the lesbian-family-as-foreign, firm. They could use Marian as their interpreter, but in doing so, need not change their own practices. The teachers could remain *tourists* to the intricacies of same-sex family lives and do little to challenge themselves so as to engage differently with this family and others like them. We don't actually know what happened to successfully facilitate the transition of Essa and her family into the centre and we don't know whether the other teachers came to change their practices as a consequence of Marian's work and the family's introduction, but what we can see is that Marian became an intermediary figure and her position as a lesbian teacher and her relationship with the family seems to have been significant.

It is a powerful position that Marian has come to occupy. The parents found her involvement 'really affirming of them' and the teachers found themselves with 'somebody to kick things around with'. Essa, we assume, had come to develop trust in her new teacher and Marian, it could be said, had achieved herself as the professional she was expected to be. The strategy of pairing non-heterosexual teachers with families parented by same-sex parents is not an uncommon one and Lindsay et.al's (2000) study of lesbian-parented families and their children's schools named this practice as one that created a supportive environment for inclusion.

The heteronormative discourse, which would position this lesbian family as otherworldly to normal families, seems to have called Marian to action. She recognises her colleagues as naïve, and as a knower to the intricacies of how a same-sex family might operate, Marian takes responsibility for supporting Essa and her mothers' introduction to the centre. It seems to have worked to everyone's gain: Marian's position as a lesbian teacher is affirmed, the recognition of this lesbian family has led to their inclusion, Essa is settled, and the teachers in the centre can begin to figure out how this different type of family might possibly

work. But what of the heteronormativity that led to the positioning of this family and their settling in as troubling in the first place? The questions to be asked might include: Have Marian's colleagues had to test themselves on what it might take to transition a lesbian-led family into their centre successfully? Has Marian been asked to play a part in dismantling the difference associated with families that fall on the *other* side of the normal family binary divide? And what of Essa's parents? Have they found opportunities to be recognised by all the teachers in their centre or are they held firm with their daughter's lesbian teacher in place as a conduit to the *other* side?

Research, such as Casper and Schultz's (1999) ethnographic study of gay parents and schools, shows that where same-sex families find their family structure unremarked in their children's education settings, it is more difficult for them to settle into their school community. We can take from this that Marian's activity might not have hampered Essa and her mums' inclusion and I don't want to detract from the positivity associated with the story that Marian recounts. But thinking about heteronormativity in the manner I have chosen allows for different interpretations of events like Essa's transition into the centre. The questions I raise are a result of the *queer* readings I am trying to provoke.

Pat's disappearing lesbians.

Pat, a teacher in the queer allies focus group interview, also had an account of a lesbian-led family starting at her centre. She explained:

340: Pat: ...we had a lesbian couple come in..., and as soon as they walked in the door... they said "you realise we're lesbians". And I said "oh, cool, (laughs), excellent".... And they said, "um, do you have any issues with that?" And I said, "I don't think so, I shouldn't do"...

(FG: QA, 1.1, L.340-342)

In this example, the heteronormative discourse is evoked when the parents asked Pat if she had a problem with their same-sex sexuality. "Managing information about parents' sexual orientation is an ongoing and fraught 'coming out' [emphasis in original] process in which family members must decide to 'display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let in or not to let in; to lie or not to lie;

and in each case, to whom, how, when and where” (Goffman, 1973 cited in, Lindsay et al., 2006, p. 1064). It seems as if the lesbian-led family in Pat’s account had deliberated over their coming out before arriving at the centre and their question, ‘do you have any issues?’ immediately summons the idea that a family headed by adults with non-heterosexual sexualities sits on the problematic side of the heterosexual / homosexual binary divide. These parents, by introducing their same-sex family form and non-heterosexual sexualities so forthrightly might well have been appealing to the centre (to Pat) for honesty and respect, yet in doing so, they may also have framed their future relationship with the centre, or at least with Pat, in a particular way: mindful to the fact that they and their child might face challenges or discrimination on account of their family form.

Were they positioning themselves as subject to risk and in the process marking themselves as different whilst simultaneously checking for hostility in the centre and its teachers? Or were they hoping that their forthright approach would lead them to inclusion, as some parents in Lindsay et.al’s (2006) study of lesbian-parented families negotiating Victorian school settings expressed? Pat continued:

344: Pat: I showed them around and they were just absolutely thrilled with the place... and they just said “oh well, initially we’re just going to book casually and then we’re going to book our daughter in for four or five mornings a week” and they came twice and never came again. And I know they only live four houses down and I keep on thinking what...I mean like, (laughs)... This is two years later.... I really want to know.... What actually occurred? ...Did they see things that they just thought, hey no, this just not o.k.? Because to go from... really keen and eager to... never contact again.... I responded like that because I wouldn’t expect anybody to come and say, “well you realise I’m a heterosexual... so is that a problem?”...

Pietra: ... do you think they might have done it to see your reaction? Because some do that too, (inaudible) hetero, whatever, whatever, whatever (pause), like that, into animals or... whatever. You know they do it with shock effects sometimes...

Pat: I was going to say, I don’t know (clears throat)

Pietra: ... honestly, they do [(laughs)]

Pat: [yeah]...but well, it was whether it was because there’d been so much judgement? And, because they had a young child? And so, this could have been a really anxious time for them coming into a preschool... so, as

soon as we get in, we're going to... see whether this is going to be a safe place for us to come?

(FG: QA, 1.1, L.344-375)

This event has left Pat wondering about her and others' practices for years. She seems to suspect that the family experienced some form of exclusion or discrimination during the early stages of their relationship with the centre, 'did they see things?' Was the centre interpreted as unsafe? These possibilities are in direct conflict with Pat's desire to be inclusionary and have remained unresolved. Pat had thought that the greeting extended to this family was one of openness and welcome, but something went awry, and the only thing Pat can imagine is that some form of intelligible (to her) homophobia was involved.

Casper and Schultz (1999) comment that parents will differ in their levels of comfort in deciding the extent to which they might come out at school or not. Choosing to remain closeted at school involves the construction of what Epstein and Johnson describe as a "deviant double life" (1994, p.200). In the case of same-sex families with very young children this construction implicates not only the parents, but the child as well. While some same-sex parents appreciate teachers' proactive stance towards the inclusion of their families in school settings (Casper & Schulz, 1999) others experience their first encounters with education settings, like those in early childhood education, as "the hardest, but... also one that had great meaning for them in their development as parents" (p.64). For Pat, it seemed as if these parents were appreciative of her inclusionary stance, but something else has impeded their inclusion in the centre and Pat cannot seem to look beyond the possibility of heterosexism, homophobia or discrimination as the reason why.

I think that heteronormativity is contributing to Pat's responses. My reading of what is going on here, connects directly back to the lesbian family's introduction of themselves. I suggest that the question posed to Pat about whether she had any issues with the parent's sexualities, led the relationship between the parents and Pat to form in a manner that left Pat unable to see beyond the possible discriminations of the (hetero)norm. Pat is perplexed at the family's introduction,

‘I wouldn’t expect anybody to come and say, well you realise I’m a heterosexual... so is that a problem?’, she exclaimed. Yet she is also aware that this family might well expect or anticipate trouble and she wanted to know if their introduction to her had been because ‘...there’d been so much judgement? And, because they had a young child?...’ In Pat’s account of what happened she is unable to entertain alternative possibilities for why the family disappeared. Maybe the family realised they couldn’t afford the centre, maybe they’d made a decision to make non-centre based care arrangements, maybe their circumstances had changed in other ways. Unable to see beyond the possibility of discrimination, Pat’s thinking focuses solely on issues of safety, judgement and anxiety provoked by her awareness of the possibilities of heteronormative discourse, homophobia and heterosexism.

Pietra’s response to the lesbian family outing themselves by questioning Pat’s sensitivity to their same-sex sexuality seems to offer other insights into heteronormative discourse too. I am reminded, in Pietra’s comment that ‘*they*...(my emphasis) might have done it to see... [Pat’s] ...reaction’, of Dan’s discussion with his teacher education students about the gays flaunting their sexuality in the gay parade. Further, by associating ‘*them*’ with bestiality, ‘into animals or... whatever’, Pietra’s comments add further complexity. I find Foucault’s (1978) figure of the perverse adult relevant. Established in *psychiatric discourse*, the figure of the pervert enabled clinical analyses of the ways one’s sexuality could be afflicted. The subsequent production of deviant sexualities brought with it the unremarked and firming understanding of heterosexuality and heterosexuals as normal. Those deviants recognised by Dan and Pietra: the uncontrollable, extroverted, flamboyant gays at the parade, and the confrontational, sexually perverse mothers, looking to shock the teachers at their new early childhood centre, were always available in the context of heteronormative discourse. These subjects’ public displays of deviant sexuality seem as Robinson (2002) suggests to be taken as “representative of all non-heterosexual relationships, which are linked to sexual deviancy” (p.420). The patterning in Pietra and Dan’s language that identifies the lesbian mothers as ‘they’ and the gays at the parade as ‘their’ marks a distance between the normal

heterosexual population who would presumably not confront and not shock like this. The ways Pietra and Dan talked about these families underscored the perceived differences between them as examples of deviants and normal others who occupy the dominant side of a significant binary divide.

Baby bear's queer parents.

A different account of family form being troubled was given by Marian, who, as a participant in the queer teachers' focus group spoke about another teacher's report to her of a situation that had occurred with children at story time:

43: Marian: ...Oh a teacher came and told me a story the other day. We've got, the magnet board, Goldilocks and the three bears. And, when another teacher... another lesbian teacher at the centre had made the story... she'd made it with two mamma bears... well there's... actually about 10 bears and you can chop and choose and change. But a teacher came to me the other day and said she was reading it outside. And she was choosing the two mamma bears, and one kid said, "How can there be two mamma bears?" And this boy piped up and said, "Well it might be the papa bear dressed up in women's clothing"...

(general laughter)

Marian: ...which was great... the teacher just said, "yeah well that could be too"...

(FG: QT, 1.0, L.43-47)

At first my interest in Marian's story was centred on thinking about how the lesbian teacher at the centre had made a teaching and learning resource that meant many kinds of family form could be represented in re-tellings of the Goldilocks fairy tale. I considered this an example of exactly the kind of teaching practice that would help to unsettle the dominance of the (hetero)norm: not only would the resource signal that families can come in many forms, it also allowed for the possibility of same-sex sexuality to be represented in the context of every day curriculum. It could be used as a vehicle for presenting valid alternative options to heterosexuality and for interrupting traditionally dominant discourses. Other teachers have practiced with teaching resources towards such ends. However the success of such strategies in helping children to disrupt dominant discourses is questionable.

Davies (1989b) explains one study where children who were read a feminist fairy tale, portraying a prince and princess taking up and performing their genders in non-traditional ways, were unable to see the princess as a hero and her prince as needing rescue even though the story portrayed these very things. Davies writes that for the children, “the *idea* [emphasis in original] of dualistic oppositional maleness and femaleness which is embedded in the usual stories that they hear... intervenes, precluding a feminist hearing of the text. The story is heard as if it were a variation of a known story line... Elizabeth...[the princess in the story]... thus becomes a ‘normal’ [emphasis in original]... princess who just got things a bit wrong” (p.231). There may have been similar things happening here in this account of practice in my study. The questioner who asked how there could be two mama bears was possibly open to the same-sex storyline, yet the child who offered up the cross-dressing Papa bear suggestion seemed able to reconcile Baby Bear’s family as a variation on the “real” one (the traditional nuclear family) whereby Papa bear in this instance had just got his gender slightly awry. The teacher seems to agree and in doing so, she can be interpreted as accessing the discourses of *diversity* that I described in chapter 2. As I came back to read Marian’s account again, I started to think again about what I had initially understood of the Baby Bear’s queer parents tale.

My initial interpretations accounted for the story like this: The teacher seems to be one who is able and willing to give recognition in her teaching and learning programme to the possibility of a same-sex family. She was ‘doing teacher’ in a progressive and extra-ordinary manner by accessing and mobilising *discourses of diversity* in the early childhood programme. The child who asked, ‘how can there be two mamma bears?’ was possibly confused by the unfamiliar storyline: not only was this Goldilocks’ story not woven around a mamma, a papa and a baby bear, as the “real” one was, this baby bear’s family also had parents of the same gender, the oversupply of mothers might have been slightly alarming. In this case, the questioner might have been engaging in a learning interaction of the ‘child-centred’ sort (Walkerdine, 1984), by looking to his or her teacher for clarification of these matters, while the interjector who offered up the Papa bear suggestion contributed to a working theory around the story which the teacher went on to

confirm.

As for the boy who interjected, he knows that sometimes men dress up in women's clothing. He accesses a *discourse of diversity* in an attempt to explain the over-supply-of-mamma-bears situation, and his teacher, validating his idea, seemed to enter into this discourse too. It seemed a reasonable interpretation yet I remained unsettled. Several of the questions I modified from Davies (1994) gender study helped me think the situation through: I could perceive the subject positions of teacher, child, learner, and homophobe in my early readings of the account. How were these maintained? The teacher's response to the interjector's suggestion that this was a cross-dressing papa bear could be seen in the context of child-centredness and *developmental discourses* whereby the teacher, affirming the child's suggestions firmed her own subject position in relation to the child in an appropriate sort of child centred way. Walkerdine (1984) writes of child-centeredness as a paradigm for teaching that privileges exploration, freedom, and child initiated ideas. Wanting to validate the child's perspective on the bear's family, the teacher acknowledged his/her idea as a legitimate one. Concomitant with this she diminished the possibility that this could have been a same-sex family in the story. Relations of sexuality were visible in that the teacher introduced the possibility of same-sex sexualities but the original questioner reminded everyone that same-sex parents were troubling. Two relevant storylines related to diversity were present in Marian's account: one of gender diversity and one of sexual diversity. As the former came to prominence, the latter seemed to fade away.

When I examined the excerpt in this way, I began to wonder about the conviction of the teacher towards recognising same-sex family forms in the programme she provided. Most likely, if the mamma bears hadn't been questioned, this event would have been understood as an example of socially just practice with the same-sex family form remaining unproblematic to any of the parties in the account. However, it was questioned. And the teacher's failure to persist with the same-sex parents' storyline might have exposed a limited, or a temporary-until-questioned-commitment to including and reflecting family and sexual diversity in

the early childhood programme. The teacher didn't say, "yeah it could be, but in my story there are two mamma bears in this family", instead she, and Marian, who characterised the affirmation of the interjectors idea as 'great', let the same-sex sexualities of baby bear's parents go in favour of a potentially less troubling storyline of gender diversity. Thus the silencing of non-heterosexual sexualities was achieved.

The same-sex wedding reception

Andy, another of the queer teacher participants told of a child who rejected the same-sex play theme of his peers in a family-play scene. In this example, a male peer meets the same-sex marriage script played by two girls with resistance.

Andy recalled:

19: Andy: I had an experience... and it's the only thing that I've ever had... oh well, that I've actually been aware of happening... two girls were playing and there was a boy as well and they were wanting to do, dress ups and have a wedding.... The boy thought that he was getting married but it was going to be just the two girls and he got quite upset, and threw a bit of a hissy-fit about the fact that the two girls were going to be getting married together and told them that they couldn't. And I sort of, it was one of those; I was ready to jump in, sort of, you know, "no you can't say that". But... one of the girls actually solved the whole thing. And she turned around and... went on to say, "my mummy said it doesn't matter whether it's two boys or two girls as long as you love each other and", just this amazing speech and I just... it was ...amazing because she was... only just four years old. And the boy just absolutely took everything on board... you could tell that he was gutted that he was, still wasn't get... (pause)

Alex: get married

Andy: ... yeah but he ended up sort of being part of the reception and sort of, off he went. But he wasn't impressed, but the girl was just so, staunch and sure.

(FG: QT, 1.0, L.19-27)

The boy's reaction to the impending marriage can be understood from the point of view of his taking up of traditional notions of gender and *nuclear family discourse*. He could recognise a position for himself in the family play if it were that he would be married to one of the girls, but the *diversity discourse* which was introduced by his peers and backed up with the authority of his friend's mothers

reported statement of fact about the legitimacy of same-sex relationships, presented him with a question of fit: how would he be situated if he weren't to be the husband? The reported response of the boy to the role that he received, a member of the reception, indicated that an unsatisfactory discourse was in play. Perhaps he expected and wanted a dominant position? He left, and the opportunity for him to develop a wider appreciation of social diversity was diminished in his act of refusal.

In reading this transcript, I, like Andy, acknowledge the girls and their capacity to persevere with and access the *diversity discourse* that allowed for their same-sex family play. I also wonder about what was lost to this boy. Separated from the actual event I am unable to access his thinking or to talk to him and his peers about what his teacher reported of his play, but what I can take from Andy's account is that this boy's involvement in the curriculum was curbed. Unable to introduce a counter discourse, like the person in the Baby Bear story earlier, this child can't settle with the subject position on offer to him, he seems displaced. Unable to change the state of things, he withdraws. Had this boy been successful in inserting himself into the play in a manner more in keeping with *gender essentialism* or *nuclear family discourses*, he might have stayed on. His inability to shift the play in order to accommodate his needs shows that it is not only those who identify with non-heterosexual sexualities that can be hampered by heteronormativity.

A response to a queer dilemma

The final example of when family form was troubled in my study that I have elected to explore related to a discussion with Pat and other participants in a queer allies focus group meeting about a written account of a dilemma I had introduced to the project. The dilemma centred on whether or not a teacher could or should share information about a child's learning with a child's parent if that parent were the same-sex partner of a biological or legally appointed parent but they themselves had no clear legal or biological connection to the child. The dilemma 'got at' whom teachers constituted *parent* as for the purposes of their work. It

read:

At a staff meeting your colleague Jenny brings up a situation for discussion. It seems as though she had a fraught interaction with one of the children's parents, Jed, because she refused to let him look through Abby's assessment file. Jed is Abby's dad's boyfriend and Abby lives between households, one week with her mum, and the next with her dad. Jenny's opinion is that Abby's file should only be shared with Jed if Abby's dad is present.

(Starting points: focus group one)

Pat responded to the dilemma:

8: Pat: this was the only one...that I... actually felt I had any form of dilemma... I could see black and white... this is the one where I could actually see where Jenny (the teacher in the dilemma) was going... because I will not give out [information] to anybody apart from the guardians or the parents.... I would have done it in the sense of saying to her (*sic*), 'hey look this information we collect, on our enrolment form... we say its for the parents, so, I just need to get some approval. How about I ring [dad]...

Rona: [mum, dad]

Pat: and let her (*sic*) know... and then... I'm really happy to share this with you...

(FG: QA, 1.1, L.8-19)

Pietra seemed intrigued, "what about... if it's the grandma?" (FG: QA, 1.1, L.22):

23: Pat: I would not share that.

Rona: no

Stacey: no

Pietra: really?

Pat: yep,...

Pietra: I would, I would

Pat: ... I believe in that celebration, in letting everybody have a look, but... well you have to be so careful... we had a number of parents who came to us and said, 'look, we are really concerned about this information, we've had bad experiences...' so I guess that gave me I suppose my own agenda of... this is precious information, I'm going to share it... [in the correct procedures]...

(FG: QA, 1.1, L.23-31)

The discussion showed how legal and biological concepts assist teachers to frame parents and families in accord with heteronormativity. Further it illustrated how these ideas can provide justification for treating some sorts of parents differently. It seems as if Pat's past experiences, where parents have worried about whether information about their children and families might be being shared publicly and without their consent, has led to her developing a sensitivity towards who might legitimately be able to access information about children's learning. The 'correct procedures' to which Pat refers are derived from the centre's enrolment procedure, which in part tries to give effect to the Privacy Act legislation ("Privacy Act (NZ)", 1993). The Act, as I explained in chapter two, sets out 12 principles of privacy guiding how personal information should be collected, used, stored and disclosed. In this light, the teachers' sensitivities are understandable because that law is supposedly working for an individual's benefit. Those without proper cause are prevented from accessing information about others. Yet I could see that in their haste to protect children's privacy and uphold the law, the teachers' might also be working against families and using the law to exclude some parents from full participation in their children's education.

Stacey continued the discussion:

43: Stacey: ...like you said, that profile book is at that stage collected for the parents, and the parents only, and it's the parents'... wishes as to who they choose to share that information with... and it's not... up to us ...

Pat: it's not our right to take that [off the parents] and who they want to share with... our enrolment form states that we... undertake children's learning journey books... and this is to be shared with the parents

(FG: QA, 1.1, L.43-60)

The discussions continued and talk about the legal barriers that sometimes impacted on parents' abilities to visit children in early childhood centres (custody and access orders for instance) ensued. Then Rona suggested that if a biological parent came to the centre and said that their same-sex partner could sight their child's learning-story book, then this would be o.k. A learning-story book is a kind of document built up over time in an early childhood programme which contains formal assessments of children's learning in the early childhood

programme. The assessments, often learning stories (Carr, 2001), are narrative assessments of children's learning. They are regularly accompanied by photographs depicting the events described in the narrative assessments and they contain teachers' analyses of learning and their plans for the child's future learning. Pietra followed up on Rona's point:

86: Pietra: ...if Jed was... there with Abby's dad, you'd be alright?

Pat: ... if he was with Abby's dad, I'd be fine... so, say Abby's dad's name was Joe... I would say, 'hey Joe look,... you're quite happy with Jed being able to access this information any time?', he'd go 'oh?', he'd go 'oh yeah yeah, not a problem', I'd write that on her enrolment form and the I would share that always.

(FG: QA, 1.1, L.86-94)

Pat, it seems, has a resolution to the dilemma. She would seek authority from Joe to allow Jed to read his daughter's learning-story book. With this permission Pat would be meeting the requirements of the procedures established in the enrolment process. Pat's interpretation of the law allows her to devise a practice that will allow her to legitimate Abby's "other" dad by seeking permission for him to access information about his daughter from the "real biological" parent, Joe. Such practice would premise Jed's full participation in the centre community on the authority of his partner. When I asked the teachers, "what is a parent"? (FG: QA, 1.1, L.97), Rona replied, "the legal guardians" (FG: QA, 1.1, L.100) and Pat followed on by saying, "...in a way, you have to go to that, that law. The legal I think, well I know here we do... (FG: QA, 1.1, L.110). The finality and authority of the response was resounding.

I suggest that the troubling of the nuclear family form in each of these examples may have left the third binary implicated in the production of heteronormative discourse, nuclear / non-nuclear families, to remain largely intact. When the nuclear family is repeatedly constructed as the normal sort of family, comprised of biological or legal parents and their children, families with forms different to this can be marginalised, silenced or treated differently. I think some evidence of this has been seen in these examples. Essa's family was afforded special care in their transition to the centre, it seems to have worked and the image of them as a

foreign kind of family (to teachers other than Marian), lingers; Pat's family disappeared and Pat can't get past the worry that homophobia might have driven them away; the assertion that Baby Bear's parents might possibly be lesbian was lost by the re-framing of Papa Bear as a male who just got his gender slightly wrong; the opportunity to understand that sometimes same-sex couples can 'wed' and create family was lost in the boy's act of leaving, and Jed's conditional participation in his daughters early childhood centre community marked him as a different kind of parent, one who could potentially be denied the full rights and responsibilities of "real" dads. Heteronormative discourse serves to problematise the same-sex family form. In each of the instances discussed in this chapter, this form of family, although not always intended, seems to have been troubling or troubled. In Aotearoa New Zealand, official policy in early childhood education expects that children should be able to appreciate that their families are viewed positively in early childhood education and that early childhood centres are organizations where children and families feel welcome and included (Ministry of Education, 1996b). If the idea of same-sex families continues to be marked in the ways described in this chapter, then I suggest such aims will be difficult to attain and sustain.

Chapter conclusion

From the accounts of practices in early childhood education that I have discussed in chapter 4, I have been able to identify a range of ways in which non-heterosexual sexualities are problematised and in which heterosexuality is preserved as a dominant norm. Through the analysis of these accounts of early childhood practices produced in focus group discussions with queer teachers, queer allies and teacher educators, I have been able to show how particular constructions of *child development, of gender and of cultural diversity, of parenting, family and the law, of religion, and of risk and bravery* combine to repeatedly constitute heterosexuality as normal and non-heterosexual sexualities as not. Evidence of parents, teachers and children concerting localised activity with discourses producing broader social structures and institutions, for example, refusals of some kinds of gender performances; assumptions of colleagues'

heterosexuality; the marking of same-sex sexualities as objectionable; and resistances to same-sex play scripts has been presented. This work shows us how people's lives and work may be hooked into relations of which most of us remain unaware (Smith, 2002).

Likewise, large institutional changes like those seen in New Zealand's homosexual law reform processes and family / parenting law changes I discussed in chapters one and two have also been reflected in some of the practices I have explored. *Discourses of diversity*, like those mobilised in the girls wedding play, Andy's worksite, and Baby Bear's family have been shown in my study for how they have accommodated, albeit temporarily, knowledge and concepts of sexuality different to the (hetero)norm in the early childhood context. Maintaining access to such discourses of justice seems a challenge yet to be overcome.

So how might heteronormative discourse be displaced sufficiently so that these *other* families, *other* forms of knowledge, and *other* concepts might find a legitimate and lasting space in early childhood education? As my study progressed, this became an increasingly important question. However, before I could test any ideas I had to understand more fully another dimension of the research interviews that had captured my attention after round one. I had noticed that while we had managed to successfully talk for some of the time in the focus group interviews about heteronormativity impacted on children, families and teachers, we had also spent a great deal of time not talking about it too. Somehow the discussions of heteronormativity seemed regularly displaced or silenced in favour of other storylines and topics. What was this about? And how did it keep us from attending early childhood education and the (hetero)norm?

CHAPTER FIVE – SILENCING DISCUSSIONS OF THE (HETERO)NORM

The accounts of practices I have written about to show how heteronormative discourses might be shaping practices in early childhood education in the present day, were all shared in the study's first round of focus group interviews.

Sometimes, in the contexts of the interviews, the accounts were left undiscussed, but at different times, participants elaborated on themes and picked up points for further discussion and clarification. As well as these accounts, the dilemmas I had developed for the beginning of the focus group work sparked plenty of discussion and debate. I encouraged the participants' reflections by asking open questions or, if the conversation between participants flourished, by staying quiet. Later when I came to write and read the transcripts of the interviews I found a rhythm to the talk that sparked my ear. A sort of movement between attending to and not attending to heteronormative discourses in early childhood education seemed present. In one moment the discussion would be squarely focussed on issues non-heterosexual sexualities and early childhood education and then our attention would be diverted elsewhere and our capacity to stay with the original ideas lost in the shifts.

In the face of this, moods of resignation would develop as our reflections led to a sense that this was all too hard to change. It was an interpretation I couldn't ignore. This reading of the focus group discussions made me aware of a new standpoint from which I could further my study of heteronormative discourse and early childhood education: the local setting of the research interviews that the participants and I were involved in. Explained by Smith (1990), the standpoint provides a site from which we can explore the ways in which we actually exist and make meaning about the world from where we actually are. It provides not for a "reiteration of what we already (tacitly) know, but an exploration of what passes beyond that knowledge and is deeply implicated in how it is" (Smith, 1990, p.24). My attention turned towards what was happening in the groups more directly, and I started to listen to the audiotapes and read transcripts from the perspective of

what was being said by us, to each other with respect to possibly confirming heteronormative discourses rather than disrupting them.

In this chapter I focus on how in research interviews about heteronormative discourses and early childhood education, participants and I managed to successfully talk about *other* things for large portions of the time. It wasn't that we refrained entirely from talking about how discourses of heteronormativity shaped practices, plenty of evidence of such discussions is represented in chapter 4, but when it came to deepening the discussion or figuring out how to confront heteronormativity, it did seem that our shifting attention provided many more resistances to change than justifications for it. If we could successfully talk about other things, related by association to heteronormativity and early childhood education, then we seemed to be displacing the topic that I had brought us together to contemplate. Was this resistance? If so, what was this resistance about? Burr (1995) explains that for Foucault, resistance and power are a pair that go hand in hand, "prevailing discourses are always under implicit threat from alternatives which can dislodge them from their position as 'truth' [emphasis in original]" (p.70). Were my readings of the interviews in this vein actually an indication of the fragility of the heteronormativity we had come together to discuss?

A generalised *silence* towards talking about heteronormative discourses in the contexts of early childhood education fuelled by our shifting attention became my focus for round two of the study. Now, not only was I interested in heteronormative discourse as it was articulated 'out there', meaning through participants' accounts of practices from early childhood centres, I was also intrigued by the ways it was potentially circulating through the discussions we were (not) having 'in here', in the contexts of our focus group interviews. I began to wonder if our deviating conversations in the research settings might help me understand how teachers might refrain from talking about issues of heteronormativity in early childhood settings. And whether, if by listening to how we confronted and confirmed heteronormative discourses in the focus groups, whether I might understand more about how this could happen in early childhood centres too.

This *silence*, represented by our deviating discussions seemed closely related to other dominant discourses concerning children, sexuality and early childhood education that I had previously identified. For instance, if the *scientific and psychological discourses of sexuality* (see pp.17-19) that emerged in the 20th century held sway then the idea of eventually emerging sexuality might render the notion of sexuality in relation to young children as irrelevant and therefore unnecessary a concept to speak of (Robinson, 2005; Tobin, 1997). If a *discourse of childhood innocence* was prevalent (Tait, 2001), then the understanding that children were naïve to the adult concept of sexuality (or at risk from it) would also mean that raising the topic in the context of young children's lives would be thought unnecessary. *Developmental discourse* would suggest sexuality a developmentally inappropriate notion to raise in relation to young children (Tobin, 1997). The notion of risk surrounding sexuality and young children, identified by Foucault when he wrote of sexual activity in young children being thought unnatural and an imposition of "physical and moral, individual and collective dangers" (1978, p.104) and heightened at the end of the 20th century in the context of early childhood sexual abuse scandals here and internationally, would mean sexuality as an idea might best be thought a subject left unremarked. From this perspective, not speaking of sexuality can be read as an effective means of preserving the (hetero)norm. Without the impetus to legitimately talk about sexualities and to question the ways in which dominant discourses of sexuality play out, the dominant and normative positioning of heterosexuality remains.

Was my change in focus a reasonable turn of events? What possibilities did it allow for? Smith's (1990, 2002) writing about standpoint knowledge and the position of the researcher in relation to what is being studied offered some ideas. As I explained in chapter 3, my positions in the research process offered me insights into the problems of practice I was studying than otherwise might have been possible. As a lesbian studying heteronormativity it could be said that I possess what Smith (1990) calls, a bifurcation of consciousness, whereby my experiences of the world, accessed from both the perspective of those marginalised by heteronormative discourses and the world privileged by them afforded me a heightened awareness of and sensitivity to heteronormativity in its

many forms. This consciousness is explained by Brooks (2007) as one that contributes to the availability of a “privileged position from which to generate knowledge about the world” (p.66). The feminist standpoint perspective suggests that those in oppressed positions are more capable of producing a more “accurate, comprehensive and objective interpretation of social reality” (p.66) than those who speak from positions that dominate. Taking the thought into my work, my position as a woman and lesbian, offered me arguably more capacity to develop a “clearer and more trustworthy understanding of the world[s being produced in the course of this study]” (Jaggar, in Brooks, 2007, p.67) because my location as a partially subordinated subject allowed me to see and understand the world in ways different from and challenging to the (hetero)norm.

Deviating from heteronormativity and early childhood education

Recall that in my first close reading of the focus group transcripts I produced a list of images and ideas that enabled a representation of the world that sat in accord with heteronormativity. If I had heard the same or similar reasoning, or if an idea or discussion were repeated in the various focus group meetings, I would mark those places in the transcripts, return to them later and code the pieces of text to a node using the software, *nVivo* (“QSR NUD*IST Vivo”, 1999). While many of the nodes I created seemed focussed on heteronormativity and early childhood education directly, others did not. They focussed on phenomena, quite related, but not exactly honed on heteronormative discourses and early childhood education. I was perplexed. Were we, by talking about these other things, actively *silencing* matters of (non-heterosexual) sexualities and early childhood education? Maybe we were ‘talking’ about heteronormativity and early childhood education by not actually talking about it at all.

The idea of not talking about sexualities matters in the contexts of early childhood education is taken up by Tobin (1997) whose research on the missing discourse of pleasure and desire in early childhood education points to the notion that sexuality is able to be repressed by a:

societywide denial of the sexuality going on around us every day in childcare settings and other contexts. It is a screening out, a

disinformation campaign, a process of actively not speaking, hearing, or thinking about children's sexuality and our own (Tobin, 1997, p.10)

Charting several ways in which sexuality is missing from early childhood education, Tobin (1997) argues that the idea of sexuality is lost from the curricula of teacher preparation. He suggests that it has disappeared as a result of the encumbrances of notions of sexuality and desire perpetuated by childcare sexual abuse scandals of the late twentieth century; and that it has become missing, as in disembodied, when "leaky and uncontrollable" (p.19) sexuality and bodily processes yield to the civilising processes of educational settings. Elaborating on the silence concept, Robinson (2005) continues in a similar vein. For Robinson, as it has become for me too, it is through the intersection of discourses of childhood, sexuality and other "psychological discourses of child development that sexuality is constructed as both irrelevant to children's lives and a 'taboo' [emphasis in original] subject in their education" (p.21). If sexuality is missing from early childhood education in the ways Tobin and Robinson suggest, then discussions about sexualities matters, of the sort I had tried to provoke might be understandably difficult to maintain.

I resolved to talk about this idea of shifting attention in the focus group interviews with participants and to ask about what they thought was gained by focussing on the things that had captured our attention rather than simply staying with the discussions I had attempted to provoke. I produced a document for the second round of focus group interviews that brought the ideas together and asked participants what they thought (see appendix three).

Threads of thinking: pathways into focus groups - round two

Six 'threads of thinking' that I had interpreted from the first round of focus group interviews framed the first part of the document. I read all but one of these as providing the means for silencing the particular discussions I had set out to provoke (heteronormativity and early childhood education) and therefore of preserving the (hetero)norm. In the following sections of this chapter I describe each of these threads. I give examples from transcripts to show how they were identified and named, and I identify the discursive threads that they represent. In

this work I will show how our shifting attention allowed for discussions of heteronormativity and early childhood education to be somewhat displaced.

'Is this really a queer issue'?

The first thread concerned the question of whether or not the dilemmas I had introduced for the start of the focus group discussions were actually related to issues of non-heterosexual sexualities. I called the thread 'is this really a queer issue?' It seemed implicated in an attempt to deny the idea that homophobia might have been shaping key players' responses to each other in the dilemmas I had introduced to the focus group meetings. The thread first became noticeable when discussions about dilemmas shifted from the question of heteronormativity to other topics, for example, issues of supervision or a reluctance to address sexuality in general in early childhood education. My thinking was that if we were attending to these issues, then discussions about heteronormativity were going to be difficult to sustain.

This shift occurred for the first time close to the start of the first queer allies focus group meeting. Pietra had said of the dilemma where a teacher commented to another about finding two boys looking at each other's genitals, that it was not a problem of homophobia that was being seen in this dilemma, but rather a problem of "adults perception of children... [as]... actually sexual" (FG: QA, 1.0, L.77) that was at issue. Pietra seemed to be drawing on the discourse of *childhood innocence* to explain the teacher's response because for her the problem was situated with the teacher, who presumably would be accessing discourses about childhood and sexuality that meant sexuality was understood as a concept irrelevant or troubling where young children were concerned. Pat wasn't so sure. For Pat, an emphasis on *professionalism* made another reading of the dilemma more central, "I practically went to, well why is there no supervision behind the shed? Why is... that area available...?" (FG: QA, 1.0, L.88-90) she said. From there a more general discussion emerged about how the teacher in the dilemma responded:

109: Stacey: ... I think that in a preschool setting they do need to keep their pants up and that's just the... story... they should just keep their pants up.

Pat: ...regardless, it should be that at preschool you need to keep your clothes on.

Rona: yeah

Pat: [full stop, you shouldn't be...] ...[I would just be]... keep your pants up... if you said, "alright you need to...pull your pants up and then go...somewhere else"...

Pietra: 'cos if you don't acknowledge it, just said put your pants up... then that's it. If you start making a big deal out of it well, then what is wrong with that? ...Whereas if you just ignore the behaviour..., just don't make a fuss out of it...

Pat: ...if you just say, "you need to keep your pants up" and ... move then along... then I think that's different...

(FG: QA, 1.0, L.109-156)

The talk between the queer allies seemed to indicate that the teacher should have ignored the children's interest in exploring their bodies and that she should simply have encouraged them to remain clothed and moved them away from the play.

This move, to a discussion around keeping clothed and moving children on, silenced potential discussions of heterosexism, heteronormativity or homophobia in relation to the dilemma. Further, by suggesting that the teacher shouldn't acknowledge the boys' looking behaviour and thereby making a big deal out of it, Pietra seems to be suggesting that an active denial of the children's interest in their bodies might be warranted. Such a practice would help the teacher, who Pietra had earlier suggested was uncomfortable with children's sexuality, to resolve the situation. It seems as if the tendency towards silence that Tobin (1997) and Robinson (2005) identify, is relevant here. The active denial of children's interest helps to preserve childhood innocence, staying clothed would seem to preserve children's safety, moving children on would keep the teacher from having to enter into the dangerous territory of acknowledging children's interests in their own and each others bodies.

Other participants raised this notion that teachers might be uncomfortable with the topic of sexuality in different interviews. I read the discomfort as being associated with the ideas of *risk* introduced in chapter two, whereby children are thought in both moral and physical danger of premature sexuality. Teachers, by connecting

with *developmental discourse* and ideas of *professionalism* are encouraged to avoid the topic too. In the teacher educator focus group interview Mina commented about inclusive teaching saying that inclusion was about “race, gender sexuality and everything, but when it comes to the sex, sexuality issue, often that’s the one that they sort of get a wee bit stuck on...: (FG: TE, 1.0, L.42). I thought, if teachers are this uncertain about the inclusion of sexuality in its ‘normal’ forms, then the potential for including knowledge and topics of sexuality different to heterosexuality might be that much more difficult to attain.

‘There’s only really a problem as children get older or go off to school’.

A second ‘thread of thinking’ that seemed to divert our attention from directly attending to the (hetero)norm and early childhood education centred on the concept that homophobia or heteronormativity became more of a problem as children age and enter formal schooling. With this thread, ‘there’s only really a problem as children get older or go off to school’, concepts around *risk*, *child development*, and of *private and public domains*, seemed to support the idea that children’s diverse gender performances were more acceptable and less risky in early childhood education than in other education settings. Kim said:

175: Kim: I think that... it’s almost as though... the acceptance of it in early childhood is more like, well they don’t necessarily know that girls are supposed to wear dresses and boys don’t, so that’s kind of o.k, ‘cos they’re just playing... because it’s all experimentation and they don’t...

Ariel: yeah

Kim: ...know. But once they’re, I guess it... would seem more horrifying to somebody who didn’t want to accept that that might be permanent if they could see them at an age where they actually know that girls generally wear the dresses... and its not acceptable for boys to wear dresses... what would that say about their child?... ‘Cos they’ve got that kind of... excuse for when they’re under five, when they’re not really aware that there... are those social rules, so to make a choice when you do know, I don’t know... you do wonder well, how will they feel about then when they’re ten? Will that actually still be o.k?

(FG: QT, 1.1, L.175-183)

Marian had also talked about the complications of peers and families at school, and the diminished availability of adults in the school setting as potentially problematic:

129: Marian: ...If a boy came to school in a dress... a teacher might be really affirming of that, but the other families and the...

Kim: [yeah, but you don't have the same]

Marian: ...[other kids] (pause), there's a whole lot of peer stuff that goes on...

Kim: and then they spend more time the day where you know, that never happens in early childhood, you're always there to kind of...

Marian: step in

Kim: to mediate...

(FG: QT, 1.1, L.129-136)

Risk seems central to both Marian's and Kim's comments: they both seem to suggest that if boys do their gender in non traditional ways at school then this is a more risky prospect than such behaviour in early childhood education. Kim draws upon the notion of *fantasy* embedded in a *discourse of developmentalism* to account for the behaviour using a kind of approach to the issue that I described in chapter 4 when Andy's soon-to-be-school-aged-boy was under discussion. Her response seems to offer some relief to the possibility that non traditional gender performances (and subsequent to this, questionable sexuality) might be permanent, yet it also brings with it a subtle message about gender and sexuality that Casper, Cuffaro, Schultz, Silin and Wickens (1996) comment on:

Although most teachers used the idea of normal behaviour with the best intentions to reassure parents, we found it could convey a hidden and less than positive image about homosexuality. If it is normal for a six-year-old boy to dress in clothing of the other gender then he is okay, he is not gay. But, if he continues with this behaviour in later years, then when is he no longer okay? When is it no longer normal? Do we imply in our language that being gay is abnormal? Do we also confuse questions of dressing in clothing of the other gender with questions of sexual orientation? (p. 78).

The *developmental discourse* is less readily available in the context of primary schooling where, as Marian put it, “a different type of learning... a much more structured... more formal” (FG: QT, 1.1, L.162) approach replaces the play oriented early childhood curriculum. The ‘horrifying’ prospect that a boy’s atypical gender performance (and subsequent to this, his sexuality) might continue seems a more likely prospect when fewer plausible explanations for it are available in middle childhood. As I explained in chapter 2, *developmental discourse* would have us accept that by middle childhood children will have acquired gender constancy (Smith, 1998), the likelihood that there is something therefore troubling about a child whose non-traditional gender performances continue into his or her primary school years is a potential sign of normal development going awry.

Marian’s comments connect with the thread of *risk* to give attention to the fact that peers and families in the more public and unsupervised space of the primary school setting may pose a threat to the safety of boy children whose gender performances might come under their scrutiny. This interpretation of the dilemma allows for the prospect that an early childhood setting might be seen as less risky a space for children when their gender performances contravene culturally accepted norms. Or for the early childhood setting to be viewed as one where the likelihood of heteronormativity prevailing might pale in comparison to other education settings. To me this seemed another useful diversion enabling heteronormativity in early childhood education to be less scrutinised by drawing our attention to the possibility of more pressing problems in the primary school setting.

‘It’s the individual’s problem, the centre isn’t really like that’.

Another thread of discussion that seemed to shift attention from heteronormative discourses and early childhood education centred on whether heteronormativity was viewed as a problem located at the individual or the institutional level. A move towards *isolating individuals* seemed to support some participants’ readings of dilemmas as expressions of individuals’ biases. In this process, the opportunity to explore heteronormativity as an institutional problem in early childhood education was lost. Three of the five dilemmas were read in this way. Of the

teacher who responded in a homophobic way to the boys who were looking at each other's genitals, Pat said:

82: Pat: ...where she goes back to the team meeting and she says "oh and particularly two boys" which made me think that there was certainly, she had her own agenda...

Piper: yeah

Pat... it should have just been I found two children... behind the shed having a play...

(FG: QA, 1.0, L.82-86)

Similarly, in response to the dilemma where the centre licensee refused to have the centre's details printed in a lesbian and gay community organization resource, Stacey remarked:

227: Stacey: I definitely think that licensee has got some pre-conceived ideas about what the pink pages... are for, you know... she's thinking it's you know, ...queer in a negative way...

(FG: QA, 1.1, L.227-230)

And Pietra, whose views I asked for, commented on the same dilemma:

251: Pietra: well I thought I was pretty damn bad (laughs)... what did I say?... same as above (inaudible), so homophobic, that whole thing... so that's definitely... own values and phobias... coming through there.

(FG: QA, 1.1, L.251-258)

There seemed little else to discuss in the face of such certainty and the possibility that heteronormativity might also exist as an institutional problem in early childhood education was left unexplored. A similar response was made to the dilemma where a father had reacted angrily to his son's play when he, with others and a teacher, had been 'shopping' and was dressed in high-heels, a hat and carrying a handbag. Marian said:

194: Marian:... I mean ultimately why...the parent's responded like that, is like a homophobic response to something, and it would be great to... just to say, "well I think you're coming from a really homophobic place, blah, blah, blah, blah" you know... so that kind of thing.

(FG: QT, 1.1, L.194-198)

Again, the capacity to explore what might have contributed to the heteronormativity beyond the individual's homophobia was lost in this reading of the dilemma as an individual's problem. I listened to this kind of response as one that could minimise the issues. I thought if we could account for heteronormativity as a problem of homophobia perpetuated by individuals then we could frame heteronormativity in early childhood education as a potentially less troubling, even though the varied ways in which heteronormative discourses shaped practices were also being discussed. The tendency towards locating the 'problem' at the level of individuals seemed another way to resist the possibility of examining heteronormative discourses in early childhood education in detail.

'We don't want to upset anybody/staying silent is keeping safe'.

A further thread of thinking I formed from the interviews concerned teachers' desires to keep from upsetting families, employers and communities by the introduction of knowledge and concepts concerning non-heterosexual sexualities. I called the thread, 'we don't want to upset anybody / the equilibrium, or, staying silent is keeping safe'. It too seemed supported largely by the concept of *risk* although the idea of *qualification* also seemed implicated in its construction. Participants for instance talked about not knowing how to speak about or respond to matters of diverse sexualities in early childhood education. When I asked participants in the queer allies focus group what they might say to a child who refused another's same-sex play script, Rona responded:

437: Rona: I don't really know, because I don't think its, I don't know whether it's our role to explain the world to him...

(FG: QA, 1.0, L.437)

Whose world, I thought? For Rona, saying nothing on the basis of not being sure what she could or should say was possibly a safer prospect than assisting the child in the dilemma to understand families in a more complex manner than he already possessed. The idea that teachers were unqualified or ill prepared to respond to the notion of non-heterosexual sexualities seemed also connected to repeated discussions around a perceived lack of teaching and learning resources for early childhood centres that include diverse sexualities. I discuss this further on in the chapter. Other participants spoke about 'keeping the peace' by noting how same-

sex families or lesbian or gay teachers might be only tolerated if this meant that no significant changes were necessary:

66: Rose: ...you can have a centre that looks very middle...class, Pākehā and heterosexual, [a] lesbian family who are quite comfortable being out can come and knock on the door and say “hi, we’re dykes, there’s our kid”, you know... and... the staff can be quite welcoming of that family, but unless they’re actively doing, celebrating that family’s particular... uniqueness, then really the message is, ‘come in to our white, middle-class...

Alex: and don’t disrupt us

Rose: ...Pākehā centre which looks heterosexual and we accept you, but you know we can’t, we’re accepting... you on the basis that you fit in with the environment that looks like this.

Shirley: yeah, don’t make waves

(FG: TE, 1.2, L.64-74)

Finally, the queer teachers talked at length about how fear of a backlash against them, or their employer or centre might occur if they were open about their non-heterosexual sexualities at work:

219: Kim: ...I don’t know about you guys but I have this feeling actually, and... I’m just thinking about it as we’re talking about these things but, I feel less inclined to be able to say that than another teacher who’s straight and that... puts the onus on straight...

Marian: yeah

Kim: ...teachers to be able to say, actually yeah,

Ariel: yeah

Kim: ...he might turn out to be gay or he might not, lets wait and see... I’d feel worried if someone knew that I was a lesbian and was saying something like that to be honest...

(FG: QT, 1.1, L.219-223)

Marian commented that she thought it not that unimaginable that:

280: Marian: ...if you did say, you know like a pro kind of, or an anti-homophobic, you know, if you did say what you thought, I can imagine somebody writing... a letter saying... to the committee or to management, ‘I’m concerned that this teacher’s promoting gay attitudes in the centre’, I can just, I mean it’s not that unbelievable for that to happen.

(FG: QT, 1.1, L.280-282)

Andy continued:

289: Andy: that's been my only fear at all... that fact that I happen to be a lesbian could impact on everyone around me, and I... don't care for myself what... gets said to me... I don't take things like that on board, but I'd hate to think that my boss would have to deal with issues like 'I'm taking my child out of the centre because of her'... when I know I'm a bloody good teacher, I just happen to be something that you don't agree with...

(FG: QT, 1.1, L.287-289)

The inclination for these teachers to make non-heterosexual sexualities visible in early childhood education seems diminished in the face of such questions and fears. The sorts of consequences that Andy alludes to have been shown to materialise in others' research, as an account given in Caspar and Schultz (1999) study shows:

When a 4-year-old girl asked Barbara, her teacher, if girls could marry girls and boys could marry boys, Barbara said that they could, and that they raised families like mommies and daddies. When this idea found its way to the child's home, her angry mother immediately contacted the school's director and said that had she known her child would be told such a thing, she never would have enrolled her in the program. When the director supported Barbara, a scandal ensued. A number of families removed their children from the center, and several staff members quit their jobs (Casper & Schultz, 1999, p.148).

Being unsure of your ground, not making waves and preventing your centre and colleagues the hassle of having to confront negative community responses to the fact that valid alternatives to non-heterosexual sexualities exist, all seem reasonable grounds upon which teachers might not attend to same-sex sexualities in the contexts of early childhood education. Risk and qualification seemed important concepts in our discussions. Where they prevailed, this meant that teachers could take the position that keeping quiet about heterosexism, homophobia and heteronormativity in early childhood education was an important means of staying safe.

'If we had some resources we'd be able to teach queerly'.

The final thread that I read as diverting our attention away from talking about heteronormative discourses in early childhood education centred on a lack of resources for teaching and learning programmes that would help teachers teach in ways that affirmed valid alternatives to heterosexual sexuality. I called the thread, 'if we had some resources we'd be able to teach queerly'; it seemed associated once more with the idea of *qualification*.

Rebecca, a participant in the queer teachers focus group was one person who explained the issues:

75: Rebecca: ... I had to do this talk for these teachers... we wrote a story for Emma¹ when she was born just talking to her about... how she came to be in our family and all that, and I read it out to the people at the talk and they were like, "oh we really need books like this in our centres", you know, "get that published, that would be really useful". And I think that people, teachers just have some sort of questions that they, they don't necessarily know the answer... I think that there's a need for those kind of resources...

(FG: QT, 1.0, L.75)

Drawing on the idea that teachers are perhaps naïve to same-sex families and non-heterosexual sexualities, Ariel also explained the lack of resources issue drawing comparisons between understanding heteronormativity and understandings of cultural diversity:

105: Ariel: teachers and parents want resources to know how to deal with it more.... It's like something that you don't know about, like another culture, you know. Like I know nothing about an Indian culture... you know and how they have, ah, why they wear the clothes they wear or they have certain um, festivals and celebrations. And so, sometimes if you have a book that can show you that then ... you just feel a little bit more comfortable talking about it to... the children...

(FG: QT, 1.0, L. 105-107)

¹ Name changed to preserve the anonymity of the person named in the transcript.

Andy elaborated and also introduced the idea that a lack of information or inaccurate information might cause offence if teachers' weren't sure of what to say and how to speak about valid alternatives to the (hetero)norm:

113: Andy: ...well maybe it could be something like that, and just how to approach it because um, to me everything seems so politically correct these days that...you're too scared to bring things up without insulting someone when your actual intention is a good thing anyway. So it could be something as simple as that, that they just need that starting point as to how to, where to jump from there... and also for a backup in case a parent was to turn around and say "I can't believe you brought this up with my child" you know, then you've got something to, I mean apart from all of your policies, you've got something else that you can turn around and say well actually you know this is a great resource and we're using it...

(FG: QT, 1.0, L.113-118)

For Pat, a teacher in the queer allies group, the prospect of using the actual documents I provided in the course of the research project as a teaching and learning resource for teachers was enticing. She planned to take the dilemmas I had developed for our initial discussions and to use these to prompt reflection and discussion in her early childhood centre because she viewed the documents as providing the 'right' means by which to enter into discussions:

67: Pat: well that was a fantastic starting point and that is going to be something that I'm... going to take back to our team meeting...

Alex: yes, by all means,

Pat: ...because I just felt that the ... oh am I allowed to? (laughs), sorry, I should have asked...

(general laughter)

Alex: yeah, no, absolutely

Pat:... I think that's really important because I mean... as you were saying, there's not enough information and there, if you want to do it right but you're not quite sure, it would be lovely to have some prompts.

(FG: QA, 1.2, L. 67-78)

The idea that some sort of (proper) external impetus would be necessary if teachers were to respond to heteronormativity in early childhood education made me wonder about whether participants felt that teachers were perhaps *unqualified*

to speak to matters of heteronormativity. However the idea of needing an external prompt, a book, or a set of dilemmas before one could enter into discussions would also allow for teachers to not respond or to take the initiative in this regard. If one's capacity to act was seen as conditional on the availability of resources or on the development of expertise, then teachers could shift responsibility for responding to heteronormativity to elsewhere, the Ministry of Education for instance, or to teacher education programmes. In this sense, the resource issue seemed to provide for another means of perpetuating the (hetero)normative status quo.

'This is just like'.

Another take on the *qualification* idea which suggested something other than teachers being unqualified to respond to matters of heteronormativity in the contexts of early childhood education seemed to exist in the interviews too. In the context of discussions by participants who repeatedly asserted that heteronormativity was *just like* other forms of discrimination: racism and ableism for instance, participants appeared to be suggesting that teachers might actually be able to respond to issues of discrimination where non-heterosexual sexualities were concerned. I took the 'this is just like' thread as a claim to *qualification*. It seemed to connect with discourses of *social justice* and *equity* that permeate *Te Whāriki* and other recent early childhood policy (Ministry of Education, 1996a, 1996b, 2002, 2006). Dan explained the similarities in relation to matters of bi-culturalism in the first of the teacher educator focus groups. His ideas are typical to those shared by others in different meetings:

147: Dan: I see some real... similarities between, like for a Māori, in terms of a Māori person and they walk in and around in society and there's nothing... usually out there [reflecting their worldview].... I think if a person is saying "look I really disagree with Māori", or "I agree, disagree with ...gay families" then ... that won't help in making gay families visible. Like there'll be no literature, or posters on the wall... in the same way that with Te Reo Māori, people say "oh, what do we need to learn that language for, it's stupid"

(FG: TE, 1.0, L.147-149)

Pat drew parallels between discriminations on the basis of your sexuality and those faced by people whose body size was different to the norm:

473: Pat: ...on a different angle, it's like people's sizes, um we have one staff... here who is wickedly wickedly tiny and I am bigger, and we were out one day... and the next day she came in and she was really upset... and I said to her, "what's that over?" and she said, "oh I was out... and everybody was calling me Allie"... oh, Allie McBeal, and look, I had never thought, because being bigger... I had never thought... it's the same sort of thing... it's just like if you're out of this little, nice little fitting in pocket here... why should you be any [inaudible]... form of discrimination.

(FG: QA, 1.1, L.473-480)

For Stacey, the parallel was in treating same-sex families just like other families who didn't fit the nuclear family mould:

235: Stacey: ...it's saying we're queer friendly, so I mean it's just saying it's the same as we are solo parent friendly,

Pat: or having a bi-lingual programme

(FG: QA, 1.1, L.235-236)

The *qualification* idea seemed to be working in two contrary ways: to claim expertise in relation to diversity and difference, and to deny the capacity of teachers to include in curriculum, valid alternative options to heterosexuality and the (hetero)norm.

Drawing the threads together

The threads of thinking, 'is this a queer issue?', 'there's only really a problem...', 'it's the individual's problem', 'we don't want to upset anybody...', 'if we had some resources...' reflected substantial discussions in the focus groups, related to but not quite honed on heteronormativity and early childhood education. They seemed to detract from the possibility of examining the extent of, or complexity of, or issues associated with heteronormative discourses in relation to early childhood education by shifting attention elsewhere or by containing the discussions. They all resulted in an act of silence: heteronormativity, heterosexism and homophobia were denied; heteronormativity could be seen as less of a problem in early childhood education; homophobia could be ring-fenced

and attributed to individuals; striving to keep the peace could allow teachers to avoid responding to heteronormative discourses and responsibility for action in response to heteronormativity could be shifted to elsewhere. By interpreting the dilemmas in ways that *individualised* the problem, that built on notions of *developmentalism, of qualification/professionalism, of risk and of private and public domains*, we seemed able to silence the discussions I had set out to provoke. This meant that for parts of the research interviews in round one of the project, discussions of sexuality in general, and non-heterosexual sexualities in particular were missing because they were displaced. In light of Tobin's (1997) argument and Robinson's (2005) research introduced earlier in the chapter, it seems perhaps not unsurprising that the discussions I had set out to have were difficult for participants and me to sustain, yet I was bound to persist and so I took these threads back to participants in the study and asked them about what sense they made.

Making sense of the threads

As I said earlier in the chapter, the generalised tendency towards silence became a key focus for me as I prepared for and conducted focus groups in round two of the study. I had wondered if talking about those other topics was a means by which participants could avoid talking about heteronormativity and early childhood education. When I introduced this concept to the queer teachers, they resisted comment. The teacher educators talked about how the 'is this or is this not a queer issue' theme represented silence. The queer allies spoke pointedly about silence too and in doing so showed once more how the coming together of dominant discourses about children, sexuality and early childhood education could preserve the idea of heterosexuality as dominant. I had asked if the silencing of sexualities was kind of a typical response in early childhood education. Pat responded:

41: Pat: (laughs) yeah I do

Stacey: yeah...

Pat: I think its something that as a society we aren't particularly comfortable with... I think a lot of adults like to think that anything to do with sexuality only occurs after [16 years of age]...

Rona: [as an adult]

Pat: ...and under then it's... they're innocent... and they should remain innocent.... When you talk to someone... parents... about sexual play or sexual curiosity... I try to find other words because as soon as you say sexual they just...

Rona: it just freaks them out

Pat: ...they freak out... they're feeling like something's going wrong and then you know.... We've given them, we have the resources that have the little thing that talks about norms and what children may do at certain ages... and you provide them with that... and when you... first discuss it with them they are really like, they're not hearing you... all they're hearing is sexual, sexual, sexual, and then they take these two pieces of paper away and... come back and go 'oh wow, it was quite reassuring to know that this and this and this occurs'...

(FG: QA, 2.1, L.41-62)

Like Robinson (2005) these teachers were making the point that where sexualities were concerned, a kind of silence framed practices and that this silence was connected to a sensitivity towards sexuality and childhood. Such thinking has been evident in early childhood education since the psychological theories of child development and sexuality development from the 20th century became widely known and accepted (Freud, 1925a; Isaacs, 1929). These ideas gained even more prominence in light of child sexual abuse scandals in early childhood education in New Zealand and internationally in the late 20th century. Similar responses by teachers to talk of sexualities in early childhood education has been documented in other New Zealand research (Surtees, 2005). Teachers in Surtees' (2005) qualitative study which explored the discursive production of children's sexuality in New Zealand early childhood education for instance, talked in such a manner so as to minimise or silence sexuality. Surtees writes that teachers' talk "around sexuality... [was] ...guided by a metaphorical and unwritten code... permeated by heteronormative assumptions... [which served to maintain] ...narrow views of children and childhood" (p. 22). In this focus group interview, Pat sought to speak 'other words' to parents rather than 'freak them out' by bringing the notion of sexuality and children together. By unspeaking sexuality in this way, Pat allows the notion of *childhood innocence*, and therefore heteronormativity, to prevail. Further, by allowing 'two pieces of paper' to outline the 'norms and what children

may do at certain ages' *developmental discourses* are able to promote the implicit understanding that sexuality will eventually emerge and that when does it will occur along pre-determined patterns of ages and stages that inevitably result in heterosexuality.

Chapter conclusion

In this chapter I have written about how discussions in focus group interviews that were designed to promote talk about heteronormative discourses and early childhood education regularly shifted direction into other topics that were related to but not quite honed on heteronormativity. I read these shifting attentions as a kind of resistance to attending to the issues of heteronormativity and early childhood education that I was trying to explore. By silencing the ideas of childhood, early childhood and sexuality I was trying to discuss, this response seemed a useful means of preserving the (hetero)norm; if participants and I were concentrating on these other things, then attending to heteronormativity, the extent of the issue and its effects on children, families and teachers in early childhood education, was always going to be a difficult agenda to sustain.

The *tendency towards silence* was accessed by participants' questioning of whether the dilemmas I had introduced actually related to issues of heterosexism, homophobia and heteronormativity. Positioning heteronormativity in early childhood education as less risky than heteronormativity in primary schools was another way this occurred. By accessing ideas that *individualised* responses and ring-fenced homophobia, heteronormativity was maintained as a problem of individuals, institutional heteronormativity, as it might possibly relate to early childhood education, could be left largely unexamined. Notions of *risk*, *qualification and professionalism* highlighted different issues related to but not quite honed on heteronormativity and early childhood education. These 'threads of thinking' allowed for the diminishing of talk about the (hetero)norm. Yet at the same time they also underscored and preserved it by leaving the concepts of heteronormativity as they related to practices in early childhood education, somewhat undisturbed.

It was the case that other parts of the same discussions had also elicited some talk about how heteronormativity in early childhood education did constrain people, did privilege heterosexuality, and did prevent the inclusion of people, knowledge and concepts different to the (hetero)norm. From my position, it seemed though as if the tendency to not talk about heteronormativity in early childhood education occupied so much more of the interviews than not, and I was intrigued by what this might possibly mean. Therefore I took these ideas back to participants for the second round of focus group interviews. From this I could try to understand more about how teachers in early childhood education could talk and not talk about the (hetero)norm. As Pat, Rona and Stacey's comments at the end of this chapter illustrated, it seemed that concepts relating to development, innocence and risk were key. The second round of focus group interviews underscored these ideas and in chapter six I discuss two storylines from the focus group work that highlighted how. A relationship between *concepts of silence and of risk* seemed to be forming and providing persuasive means by which one might keep the closet door shut and avoid disruptions to the (hetero)norm.

CHAPTER SIX – THE RISKS OF ATTENDING TO THE (HETERO)NORM

In chapter four, I explored teachers' accounts of practices from early childhood centres and teacher education classrooms to show how constructions of the family, sexuality and genders in early childhood education regularly draw upon discourses that problematise non-heterosexual sexualities and preserve heterosexuality as a dominant norm. There was also some evidence of how teacher, child and parent activity in early childhood education was able to coordinate with *discourses of diversity* and were therefore able provide some resistance to the (hetero)norm. Following, I discussed shifting attention in the research interviews as a kind of resistance to the agenda of attending to heteronormativity and early childhood education. I wondered if by talking about other things, we were *actively practising silence* in our work and acting therefore indirectly to preserve the status quo. I took these ideas back to participants in round two of the focus group interviews. There, discussion seemed shaped by a concept of *risk* that reminded participants (and me) of the challenges that might come if teachers were to confront heteronormativity in early childhood education.

Metaphoric Discussions in the Focus Groups

Two storylines begun in the first round of focus groups but also picked up in round two are discussed in this chapter to illuminate the discursive practices crossing the focus group discussions. One was about the opening of a 'can of worms'. The second was about 'boundary crossing'.

Opening cans of worms.

As I explained in chapter 5, during round one of the focus group interviews I asked Rona, a participant in the queer allies interview how she thought she might respond if she were a teacher close to Ben (a child in one of the scenarios I introduced) at the point when he refused Rita's same-sex family scene in the dramatic play area. She responded:

437: Rona: I don't really know because I don't think its (pause), I don't know whether it's our role to explain the world to him (pause). You sort of want to be, I mean it would be quite simple by saying yes some houses have...two mummies... but is that overstepping the boundaries? Because what do his... parents want?... I would feel I might want to mention it to his parents... because that might open up a whole new can of worms... in their family...

(FG: QA, 1.0, L.437-442)

Also in round 1, after I put a general question to participants in the teacher educators' focus group, about their thinking around sexualities matters and queer issues, Shirley used the 'can of worms' metaphor too:

18: Shirley: I think it's one of those... things that... once... your consciousness is raised about it, it's everywhere.... From my experiences in centres... when you're dealing with children... it's mostly pretty easy there, and then you deal with their parents at it opens another whole can of worms...

(FG: TE, 1.0, L.18)

Later in the same interview, Shirley drew a parallel between the 'can of worms' opened where sexualities were drawn to attention, and the one opened when a child might have been injured through another's biting:

312: Shirley: ...if everyone was open minded and had a sense of fairness, well then there wouldn't be such an issue... if we discuss sexuality with a parent, it's a bit like talking about biting, that's the other thing I can think of that just opens (laughs) such a can of worms... and nobody can think sensibly about it you know...

(FG: TE, 1.1, L.312)

Finally, the can of worms metaphor was used in the second round of focus group meetings, after a question to the queer allies focus group about why non-heterosexual sexualities are not represented in early childhood environments, Stacey said:

118: Stacey: ...I wonder if it's more... we've never really done that so ...why should we open up that can of worms and start, you know... but you know all it needs... is... a couple of people to make the change and it might be a can of worms but it will just benefit everyone involved

Alex: well it might be a can of worms (laughs)

(general laughter)

Stacey: it will be a can of worms (laughs)... it will also be of help... if it is used... appropriately and properly

(FG: QA, 2.0, L.118-125)

What did this can of worms represent? And what did its insertion into the various focus group discussions possibly achieve and relate to? I think the ‘can’ was able to signify two important and potentially negative messages, both of which served to remind us of the risks associated with disrupting heteronormativity and introducing valid alternative options to heterosexuality. First, the ‘can’ may be seen to denote a warning against challenging heteronormativity. Representing a sort of squeamishness, abhorrence, or disgust towards the spectre of non-heterosexual sexualities, the ‘can’ reminds us of the 20th century *scientific and psychological discourses of sexuality* that pathologised non-heterosexual sexualities and positioned heterosexuality as normal and its variants as not. Second, the ‘can’ might remind teachers that they are in danger of untoward responses from parents should they practice in a manner that was inclusive of and open to diverse sexualities. In this case, the ‘can’ is associated with a concept of *risk* that puts teachers, centres and relationships in jeopardy. Warning against the spectre of change, the ‘can’ reminds teachers that to introduce sexualities in general and non-heterosexual sexualities in particular into early childhood education is to confront those dominant and historical discourses of *childhood innocence* and of *developmentalism*, and to position heterosexual sexuality as just one form of sexuality amongst many others. To disrupt this order is possibly too risky a prospect to entertain. I suggest that both these possibilities existed in the articulation of the ‘can’, and that the ‘can of worms’ metaphor, drew from these historical discourses to keep challenges to heteronormativity at bay.

Boundary crossing.

The second storyline that provided constant reminders of the fact that our discussions were risky concerns the notion of boundary crossing. Opening up possibilities for children to learn about sexualities in forms other than heterosexual sexuality could be taken, as the teachers in this study identified, as overstepping the limits of the early childhood teachers’ professional boundaries.

This idea is reflected in other research too.

In a qualitative survey and interview study involving 49 early childhood educators in New South Wales, Robinson (2002) investigated “perceptions, policies and practices operating around issues of diversity and difference in early childhood education” (p.417). Examining prevalent discourses associated with lesbian and gay issues, Robinson found sexuality to be constructed as a largely “private matter that should remain within the privacy of the family, or within adults’ private lives (p.422). Citing Britzman, Robinson discusses the separation of heterosexual and non-heterosexual sexual identities and the idea of sexualities as a private matter, naming these divisions a myth, perpetuating the “notion that heterosexuality has nothing to do with homosexuality and that sexual identity is a ‘private’ affair, which has little to do with public lives” (p.422). She claims that “early childhood education is very much part of...[a]... normalisation process of the construction of heterosexual public / homosexual private hierarchy” (p.422). These notions of boundary crossing and of private and public knowledge were evident in transcripts of this study. I use the following examples to illustrate how.

Recall the discussion I was having with Rona about Ben. Rona had said that it would be quite simple to respond to Ben in a manner that facilitated his understanding of the fact that families sometimes do comprise two mums and children, but she asks at the same time if such a move would be “overstepping the boundaries” (FG: QA, 1.0, L.437-440).

Similarly, in the second round of interviews, Pietra suggested that if a teacher stood up to a homophobic father’s response to deny his son’s play script if it involved dressing in women’s clothing, that this wouldn’t be a boundary crossed. “...That would be your prime opportunity, and I think that’s not going over boundaries”, she said (FG: QA, 2(b) 0, L.108). However, not all teachers were accessing the same discourses as Pietra and questions of boundaries became conflated with notions of public and private lives to complicate the matter even further. Rona, in the queer allies group interview also wondered about the homophobic dad:

152: Rona: because once again I think most of the time you get people

who come in here, or men who come in and say, ‘my boy’s wearing a dress!’, how do you as a teacher deal with that issue without overstepping the boundaries? If it was in my personal life I wouldn’t have a problem, I would just say ‘get over it, move on’... but as a professional, how do you deal with that? Is it easier to just say [he’s just]...

Stacey: [it’s play]

Rona: it’s part of his play, its quite normal for boys to wear dresses at preschool...

(FG: QA, 2.0, L.152-154)

Rona, Stacey and Pietra seemed sure that there were lines to cross. And Pietra had drawn upon her understandings of *professionalism* to help her build a sense of when these wouldn’t be overstepped. Rona and Stacey however had not, and their sense seemed caught up in a construct that positioned them as naïve to the expertise they would need in order to come to such understandings. Later in the queer allies group meeting, Pat explained how she would normally manage the issue of sexualities with parents. This was the occasion discussed in chapter 5, when Pat explained how the topic of sexuality “freaks... [parents] out” (FG: QA, 2.1, L.58). After Pat’s comments, which illustrated safe ways of acknowledging forms of sexuality in keeping with the heterosexual norm, Rona suggested that a consequence of her relative inexperience to the position of early childhood teacher, made her wonder about the “right way to deal with it... [and]... whether ...[she] ...was crossing too many boundaries” (FG: QA, 2.0, L.64). Stacey murmured agreement. Pat, Stacey and Rona worked in the same early childhood centre together where Pat held a position of head teacher. The notion of *professionalism* came clear when Rona went on to clarify:

67: Rona: I think that would be the biggest thing for me, because... if it happened at home and with my children I don’t have a problem talking about sexual things... but just in this environment I would be quite wary about what I said, and I would probably have to see someone before I, I don’t think I’d attempt to deal with it, and I would deal with what I could right then and there and then see someone else.

(FG: QA, 2.0, L.67)

Rona seemed to use the idea to achieve herself as the junior and inexperienced early childhood teacher, but at the same time, she used it to delineate standards of

practice that set down limits for what she, as an early childhood teacher might legitimately be able to say and do. The construct of *professionalism* allowed Rona to express herself as an expert in the home, a mother, whose own children would be able to be educated by her about 'sexual things'. But in the centre there is a boundary around such practice and it seems as if Rona is grappling with whether or not she might be able to cross it.

The mere fact that the boundaries were understood to exist helps keep heteronormative discourse firm and I wondered if this might have been an unintended and negative consequence of the emphasis on *professionalism* found in early childhood education over the last twenty or so years. By keeping teachers vigilant about what topics it may and may not be acceptable to raise within the early childhood centre, the boundaries to assist with the silencing of sexualities or its production in accord with scientific and psychological norms that position heterosexuality as dominant and normative, are formed. It was fine for Pat to educate parents about norms for sexuality development through documents premised on the assumption of eventually emerging heterosexuality, but for Rona and Stacey to consider it possible to confront a homophobic father? This seemed a step too far.

By this time in my study I had elicited talk about heteronormative discourses and gathered evidence of how heteronormativity could shape practices as reported in accounts of early childhood centre events in focus group interviews. As well as this, I had also documented how participants seemed to invest a great deal of time and energy in maintaining heteronormativity and I had identified discursive threads implicated in this. If teachers drew on discourses that reified the heterosexual assumption (for example scientific and developmental discourses of gender and sexuality) or if 'threads of thinking' and metaphoric conversations reminded teachers of the risks involved in disrupting the (hetero)norm, then possibilities for change seemed even more diminished. Finally, an event at the end of the second round focus group interviews cast even more doubt in my mind about whether or not attending to heteronormativity in early childhood education might be an achievable aim.

A contrary end to the second round focus group interviews

It was getting late in the focus group meeting with the teacher educator participants and I was conscious that our attention for much of the meeting had seemed diverted from the *Starting points: focus group two document* I had written for the meeting. An incident in the Australian media (reported here) in which the ABC's television programme *Playschool* had included a same-sex family in the 'through the windows' segment of the show had captured participants' interest. It was a diversion difficult to return from.

Near the end of the meeting Dan and Mina asked to recount stories they'd not yet had time to share. I had already turned off the audiotape so I turned it on again and the participants settled down to listen once more. "Can I tell of an experience I had?" asked Dan (FG: TE, 2.2, L.23) as he began to give his account:

30: Dan: ... Well I had lunch with a friend Jed who's in my men's group... it was [a] particularly good lunch... and then we walked outside... he was going one way and we always hug you know... so we had this enormous hug... it was on Home Street... it was very busy... and we had people going everywhere... and I sort of turned to go... and there were all these people about... and they were sort of looking at me and I realised that what we'd done... was, actually quite out there... and I thought gee is this what it's like for a gay person to hold... hands or to kiss you know... in public... and stuff like that.... [There's this kind of fear you know].

(FG: TE, 2.2, L.30)

Mina continued:

Mina: [yeah, I've got an entry in here as well]... I was driving down the road and there was obviously a... (same-sex) couple... in front of me, they were holding hands and looking you know... it was out in the country and they were going for a country walk... they dropped hands, and they were like still, and I was like 'oh', it just broke my heart to think that... they couldn't have... carried on, but it was interesting how... their whole assumption is someone else might not be accepting, we don't know who's driving that car, they might have gone vroom and (laughs) you know... and why should they feel they have to keep themselves safe?

(FG: TE, 2.2, L.49)

In chapter three where I wrote about conflicts, questions and dilemmas in the research, I commented that I had been concerned for the safety and security of

participants in this study to be preserved. I was also aware that from time to time, my own sense of wellbeing might be tested. Dan and Mina's accounts were to prove a moment in the research where I found myself challenged and discouraged. As their stories unfolded I could appreciate that what Mina and Dan were saying seemed to tell of how they were each developing sensitivities towards the ways heteronormativity and homophobia can marginalise those whose sexuality is positioned other to the heterosexual norm. It was somewhat encouraging that Dan had noticed the furtive glances of passers by and had wondered about a 'kind of fear' that 'gays' might face, and that Mina had found herself saddened that the couple she had passed by on the side of the road weren't able to carry on holding hands, presumably for fear of possible repercussions ('we don't know who's driving that car, they might have gone vroom and (laughs) you know'). Yet, I was also perplexed as Smith's (1990) bifurcation of consciousness made another reading possible. The positioning of the same-sex couple in Mina's account as untrusting seemed to suggest that the lesbian couple were being judgemental of the driver of the car that was approaching them. The presumption that they might be at risk from the approaching car positioned the lesbians as problematic. I wondered, did Dan and Mina really not possess a lasting appreciation of the risks that may be posed to people whose sexuality deviates from the (hetero)norm? Was it really news to Mina and Dan that fear, discrimination and safety issues could mark aspects of queers' lives in the ways they had noticed and others?

I began to think that perhaps I had only been imagining that we (the participants and me) had been having serious discussions about the discriminatory effects of (hetero)normalising discourses over course of the project. Had my desire to enter into and successfully conduct a research project like this obscured my sense? It was a discouraging moment. I found it especially so, in light of the fact that the focus group interview was taking place just after Auckland man Phillip Edwards was found not guilty of the murder of queer Aucklander David McNee, having successfully argued a defence of provocation. There had been intense media coverage of the case and debate around the defence strategy in the days preceding the focus group meeting (May of 2004). I found myself wondering, how could it be that connections weren't being made? Might some of the participants, who I

thought (and still do) had genuinely engaged in the project, really not ‘get it’?

Using the theories to move past this stumbling point

In the days after the focus group I stood back from my response and re-evaluated. As I explained in chapter 3, a central concept in this work was my attempt to work in ways that I thought queer. In part this had meant that I had regularly looked for ways to invert any binary thinking (especially where the binary of heterosexual/non-heterosexual was concerned), to work at odds with any tendencies towards normalised practice, and to document connections between genders, sexualities, family forms and the concepts of insiders and outsiders, normal and deviant and power. An effect of this approach had already seen my gaze become somewhat inverted between the time I had conducted interviews in round one of the study and those in round two. I had become not only interested in thinking about heteronormativity as it had been articulated in accounts of practices by participants, but I was interested in contemplating how we might have been confirming and confronting the (hetero)norm ourselves too. My readings of *silence* and of *risk* that had come from attending to the shifting attentions and metaphors of the interviews made it seem that heteronormativity was perhaps too difficult to challenge, Dan and Mina’s accounts helped convince me even further of this fact. Yet after a few days of leaving well enough alone, and of listening to my teacher-educator self insist that things could change, hope came from reading again about Foucault’s (1978) rule of the “tactical polyvalence of discourses” (p.100).

In chapter one I discussed Foucault’s (1978) notion of discourse and outlined how power-knowledge discourses produced knowledge, constituted subjects, institutionalised relationships and established the development of norms within disciplines. But Foucault also wrote that discourses could be:

both an instrument and effect of power... a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also

undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it (p.101).

What was the more pressing risk? Maintaining silences and avoiding temporary disruptions to one's senses of professional safety or running the risk of continuing to grow intolerance, homophobia and heteronormativity in early childhood centres and communities? I reviewed the 'threads of thinking' to see what, if anything, might be useful for my thinking. In my reading I found an opportunity that provided a starting point for an opposing strategy geared towards change.

Inversions: using discourse to resist the (hetero)norm

A significant discursive thread in the discussions from focus groups in rounds one and two had been associated with the idea of *qualification*. As I showed in chapter five, participants sometimes seemed to claim that they were unqualified to resist (hetero)norm, but the participants also talked about qualification in another way, saying that thinking about non-heterosexual sexualities and the heterosexual/homosexual binary was *just like* thinking about other forms of difference. The *qualification* idea was to become my point of resistance, my starting point for an opposing strategy to the *silence* and *risk* tendencies that had characterised much of the focus group work in the study. The idea of *qualification* was to become key in my planning and would inform much of the activity around which the third round focus group was to establish.

Chapter conclusion

Chapter six has showed how *risk* was made relevant to discussions of heteronormativity in early childhood as participants in focus group discussions drew on metaphors of 'cans of worms' and 'boundary crossing' in their talk. Connecting to conceptualisations of non-heterosexual sexualities as dangerous, deviant and wrong, the metaphors reminded participants why heteronormativity in early childhood education might best be left undisturbed. If this view were to be successfully advanced then the idea of *risk* would successfully connect with that of *silence* to push notions of non-heterosexual sexualities back into the closet. Seeking to move beyond this point, I used Foucault's (1978) idea about discourses

being both able to advance and thwart power as a way to move ahead. This is what I go on to discuss in chapter seven of this thesis.

CHAPTER SEVEN – FINDING PRACTICES BEYOND THE (HETERO)NORM

In this study I have been exploring *if, and if so how, heteronormative discourse is shaping practices in early childhood education*. Where heteronormativity exists, meanings, metaphors, representations and images produce heterosexuality as dominant and normative; heterosexuality is institutionalised and presumed as a standard for all. At the same time, understandings, concepts and knowledge of valid alternative options to heterosexuality are displaced or silenced by the workings of the (hetero)norm. Through heteronormative discourses, heterosexuals are produced as normal while those whose sexuality is different, are produced as deviant or pathological. I wondered if, and if so how, this happened in relation to early childhood education and what this might mean for the attainment of social justice and inclusion, aims I interpret as central to the policy and practice of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In chapter two of this thesis, I investigated the historical production of heteronormativity in New Zealand early childhood education. Then in chapter four dominant constructions of the family, genders and sexualities, as elicited in focus group discussions of practices from early childhood centres, were shown for the ways in which they privileged heterosexuality. Chapter five focussed on how discussions of heteronormativity in early childhood education seemed somewhat displaced by other conversations, related to but not quite honed on the topic I had set out to explore. Reading this as a kind of resistance towards examining and disrupting the (hetero)norm, I went on in chapter six to show how two metaphors drawn on in several of the focus group interviews seemed to remind participants of reasons why not to interrupt the status quo. Even though we had discussed many ways in which heteronormative discourses marginalised and silenced some concepts and people in early childhood education and we seemed to agree that this was unfair, contrary to policy (Ministry of Education, 1996a, 1996b, 2002, 2006), and against the spirit of New Zealand law ("Care of Children Act (NZ)", 2004; , "Civil Union Act (NZ)", 2004; , "Education Act (NZ)", 1989; , "Human Rights

Act (NZ)", 1993), it seemed also as though we had reminded ourselves that heteronormativity was perhaps too difficult a discourse to shift.

Not wanting to end the field-work of this project in this vein, I resolved to use the third focus group interview for several purposes. First, it was an opportunity for further member checks (Coll, 2002; Merriam, 2002) to test out the dependability and trustworthiness of the ideas I had formed in the context of the project.

Second, the focus group would bring all participants together and provide me with an opportunity for making visible the historically and politically situated discourses around sexuality and early childhood education that had been present in our work. Finally, the focus group would make it possible to test out a means of shifting talk to somewhere beyond the (hetero)norm. This would take the study in a new direction. Having worked up till this point to identify and historicise discourses in early childhood education that positioned heterosexuality as a dominant norm, I wanted to find an effective means by which teachers could discover for themselves alternate discourses that would provide for the inclusion of valid alternative options to heterosexuality. Not only would this seek justice in a way that implicated all participants in finding solutions to exclusionary discourses, it would contribute to meeting the aims and outcomes of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996b) that I identified in chapter 1 as providing impetus for challenging the (hetero)norm.

In this chapter I discuss one significant element of the round three focus group work: having participants replace heteronormative constructs of genders, families and sexualities with different discursive formations that would include families, knowledge and concepts different to the (hetero)norm. Wanting to find possibilities for practices that would give recognition to same-sex families and that would reflect valid alternative options to heterosexuality, I asked participants to consciously disrupt the rendering of families, genders and sexualities as (hetero)normal and to find means by which these phenomena might be understood diversely.

Recognising and interrupting discourses privileging heterosexuality

I planned a series of activities and discussions for the focus group meeting. Beginning with the notion of discourse, I shared Burr's (1995) account of how discourses produce a particular version of events. I explained that sexuality for instance, could be explained via biological, cultural, psychiatric and medical discourses, each prioritising and drawing upon slightly different sets of understandings. I commented about discourses emerging in time and place and on how they constructed people, concepts and knowledge in particular ways. To illustrate these points I had devised two sets of resources that I called 'discourse wheels'. One set represented discourses that had been identified in the study's historical and focus group work that provided for several constructions of non-heterosexual sexualities and early childhood education. The second set, less detailed than the first gave representations of genders, families, sexualities (as commonly associated with childhood). Both sets of discourse wheels constructed heterosexuality, indirectly or directly, as dominant and normative. In other words, they produced understandings in accord with the (hetero)norm. The sexualities wheel is illustrated below.

Figure 2. Sexualities discourse wheel



The text of the wheel read: Several dominant discourses circulating in the background to queer sexualities: heterosexuality, your lifestyle or political choices, some kind of biological deficit <?>. The *discourse of heteronormativity*, which privileged heterosexuality, was represented by the word ‘heterosexuality’ in the wheel. The notion of ‘lifestyles’ and ‘choices’ was derived from the historical *religious discourses* of homosexuality that positioned non-heterosexual sexualities unnatural and subsequent to this wrong, and which conflate with *gender essentialist and traditional nuclear family discourses* that that rely on understandings of the complementarity of men and women for their coherence. Such discourses had been evident in several of the focus group interviews, for instance in the second teacher educators focus group discussion when Mina talked about having had “several conversations with several different people... talking about... lesbian, and... them coming to the point of thinking that it was about choice... you know they’re only lesbians because they’ve chosen to be...” (FG: TE, 2.0, L.09-111). Finally the last discourse, the *biological discourse* was represented in the wheel by the words, ‘some kind of biological deficit’. This discourse had contributed to the shaping of discussions in focus groups where ideas of normal sexuality and gender development in young children prevailed. The biological discourse had also been a feature of the early campaigns for homosexual law reform in New Zealand in the late 20th century. I left a question mark <?> in the discourse wheel after this in recognition that many other discourses might contribute similarly to the construction of heterosexual and non-heterosexual sexualities in the societal and local contexts of our work. The representation of the discourses in this manner helped me illustrate the point that many different discourses, coming from varied places at different times in history, can be drawn upon so as to represent the world in accord with the (hetero)norm.

Interrogating the meanings I had been forming in the course of the project, participants sometimes questioned the ideas I had shared. This was one of the purposes of the group, to test whether the concepts I was introducing *rang-true* (Merriam, 2002). After I had introduced the notion of the discourse wheels, Ariel for instance asked, “is this phenomena that you’ve gathered just from our talks of

from other sources as well?” (FG3:LG_Dis.1, L.3¹) and Mina queried whether the idea of ‘choice’ making as included in the ‘queer sexualities’ discourse wheel was representative of talk that had happened in earlier focus groups discussions involving her, “It didn’t resonate with what we’d been talking about and I just wanted to check”, she said (FG3, LG, Dis.1, L.14). While not at that moment ringing-true to Mina, Rebecca commented that the notion had been raised in the queer teacher discussions. The fact that Mina had herself introduced it in the context of the teacher educators group had clearly escaped her memory.

My approach was both different and similar to others’ whose work with teachers and students of elementary and early childhood education around issues of homophobia, heterosexism and heteronormativity I had read at that time (Ferfolja & Robinson, 2004; Hulsebosch & Koerner, 1997; Koerner & Hulsebosch, 1996; Marinoble, 1997; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2002b). Marinoble’s (1997) professional development workshop approach to reducing the oppressive effects of homophobia in elementary education settings focused on consciousness raising activities and the formulation of strategies whereby teachers were encouraged to think about how they might include the kinds of knowledge and concepts they learned of in the professional development workshop, into their own classroom settings. I wanted to raise awareness of the concept of discourse and to have participants in my study understand how discourses privilege some understandings over others. In this sense there was a substantial consciousness-raising element in my approach.

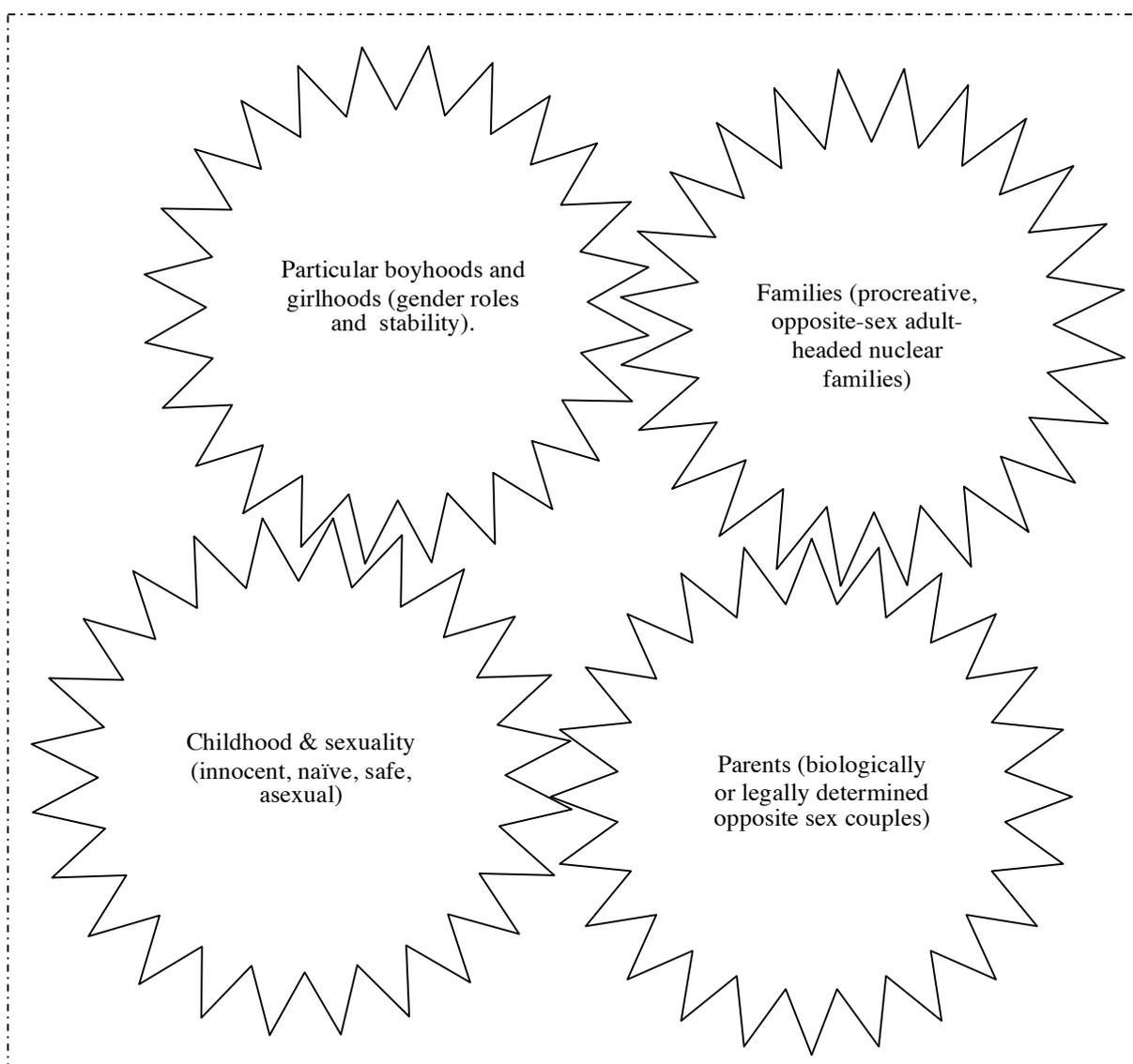
¹ The referencing technique to focus group discussions is changed in this chapter to reflect the nature of the third round interview where all groups were combined. The parts of the reference are read as follows: FG3 denotes the combined focus group meeting, LG, denotes large group discussions, Gr ‘x’, indicates one of four small groups made up of members from each of the queer allies, queer teachers and teacher educators participants, Dis ‘x’ indicates which discussion as per my plan for the interview was taking place, and L. ‘x’, gives the line numbers of the transcript from where text is drawn.

Hulsebosch & Koerner's (1996, 1997) methods emphasised family diversity and used reflective discussions of critical incidents where gay and lesbian family members of children were *outed* in schools to highlight problems of homophobia and heterosexism. Their work sought to bring to light underlying principles for teachers that would provide guidance when "difficult discussions of provocative topics" (Hulsebosch & Koerner, 1997, p.269) arose. Seeking discourses that would access notions of diversity, including family diversity, was an element of what I intended to do. Yet establishing underlying principles to guide practices when facing issues of homophobia, heterosexism or heteronormativity was not an express aim of the activity I had designed, except to say that the principle of identifying and deconstructing dominant discourses was key.

Finally, Robinson & Ferfolja's (2002b) teaching in student teacher classrooms which took the approach of examining social inequalities by having students develop personal understandings of their own constructed subjectivity, concepts of agency and the discursively produced knowledge/power nexus connected with what I had planned. Their work sought to help students understand how multiple interpretations of the world were made possible by discourses, and how one's own positioning in discourses enabled individuals to perpetuate particular meanings and worldviews, as did mine. Yet I was also interested in drawing to attention the ways that many different discourses intersected and constituted heterosexuality as a dominant norm, and consequently, to think about how this might impact on people whose sexuality was different to heterosexuality in the context of early childhood education. Further, I wanted to find a way to access alternate discourses that had already been present, albeit fleetingly, in our previous focus group discussions, and for participants in my study to form for themselves understandings of why and how these other discourses might be desirable and important for them to take up.

The second set of discourse wheels that I devised were presented in a figure on an overhead transparency machine. It is represented in figure 3.

Figure 3. Discourse wheels involving genders, sexualities and families



This time, instead of a single wheel focused on one concept, I brought together the three main dimensions around which heteronormative discourse in early childhood education coheres: genders, sexualities and family form. While there were four parts to the figure, family was represented twice, once in the ‘families’ aspect of the figure and again via the section on ‘parents’. Each of dimensions in this figure was positioned as though they intersected so I could draw attention to the ways different discourses in a *discursive field* (Weedon, 1987) could conflate to speak heteronormativity. By providing examples of text from previous interviews in which these constructions were evident, I was able to show how the discussions we had engaged in had connected with ideas about sexualities,

families and genders from broader society, or as Smith (2002) would say, were coordinated with ruling relations.

Further, by also talking about the fact that these were not the only kinds of discourses available to construct these phenomena (genders, sexualities and families) by, and by pointing out how shifts in the broader social and political landscape had already accommodated for valid alternative constructions, I could ask participants to find ways that might coordinate their local practices with these other ruling relations in a manner that sought to displace the (hetero)norm.

I shared evidence from focus group discussions that showed glimpses of how these alternative discourses were already being accessed from time to time. Andy's worksite for instance was one where her new lesbian relationship became celebrated. The children in Marian's centre were introduced, albeit fleetingly, to the possibility that Baby Bear might be the child of lesbian bear parents. And children held fast to their same-sex play script in the story that Andy told of a boy's struggle to settle with his positioning in an unfamiliar wedding scene. I reminded participants of the recent legislative changes that were catching up with changes in the ways people lived their lives ("Care of Children Act (NZ)", 2004; , "Civil Union Act (NZ)", 2004), and I referred to the curriculum document for early childhood education, quoting passages that suggested it necessary to disrupt the (hetero)norm. Then I asked participants to work together and to draw broadly from the discursive field in a way that would make other understandings of genders, sexualities and family form in early childhood education possible. And I gave them the task of writing new discourse wheels that might represent these alternative constructions. Who do you mean when you say parent? I asked. What does family mean? Who is a family member? It was this work in the focus group that seemed to provide opportunities for significant conceptual shifts in relation to how early childhood teachers might build inclusive practices that would represent diverse families and alternatives to heterosexuality in a positive light. As participants made connections between the ideas introduced, the discourses they connected with, and the possibilities for who would be represented and how, they seemed actively involved in practices that sought to include. Two groups' work was particularly illustrative.

Imagining parents beyond legal and biological discourses.

I asked a group comprised of Shirley, Marian, Pietra and Dan to work with the parent discourse wheel and to think of how parents might be constituted if they were to be known differently from those constructed in legal or biological discourse. Marian started the conversation:

416: Marian: biologically or legally determined opposite sex couples, parents,

Shirley: people,

Marian: adults,

Pietra: not necessarily, what constitutes an adult?

Shirley: legally...

Dan: legally a parent is

Pietra: some parents are teenagers,

Shirley: ...twelve

Pietra: fourteen, so are they adults? Legally they are not are they?

Shirley: no

Dan: well I dispute this whole idea of adult, child, you know, like where do you actually draw the lines...

Marian: we could talk about... we don't need to talk about... we can talk about relationship

Shirley: yeah...

(FG3: Gr2_Dis2, L.416-440)

The discussion showed how difficult it was to extract the notion of parent from concepts of biology and the law. The question of age came to the fore, implicating biological maturity and adulthood in the construction of who parents might be, but this was challenged, and the law provided another option for making sense of the notion of parent. Marian introduced a different idea and a discussion about relationships came to the fore:

457: Shirley: I like relationship

Marian: yeah I do too...

Dan: relationship, I don't understand... what does that mean?

Marian: well there has to be some relationship between the parent and the child... so the parent has some sort of relationship with the child, unless you're talking about a child whose biological parents don't have anything to do with them... but there's still a relationship in that...

Pietra: ...relationship could be an adopted child into a family, into a couple where maybe they later split up... maybe they get a new other partner which could then be a relationship with that person, new person

Marian: yeah, there's lots of relationships...

(FG3: Gr2_Dis2, L.457-475)

However the possibilities that the term 'relationships' offered, for who might be considered or recognised as a parent, remained a problem. The group seemed sure that an alternative discourse wheel centring on relationships might be possible, but there were still some problems to overcome. Shirley reminded the group of some of the ideas in my discourse wheel:

482: Shirley: this parent one is... biologically or legally determined opposite sex couples...

Marian: well a couple, to that definition... if you're not married then legally you're not a parent

Shirley: that's right

Marian: mmm

Shirley: or couple, an opposite sex couple are parents as opposed to same sex couples being parents,

Pietra: ...are they not parents?

Marian: they're parents, but one of them wouldn't be a legal parent...

(FG3: Gr2_Dis2, L.482-490)

As I joined the group, Pietra who had been charged with writing the words for a new discourse wheel asked the group what she should write:

497: Marian: relationships

Shirley: couples

Marian: so,

Shirley: are they couples?

Marian: I'm just

Shirley: oh I see, looking at that,

Dan: yeah

Alex: not necessarily... that coupling idea comes back to that heteronormative idea... I mean it might be. Parents might be couples. But they might not be either. There could be four adults who are co-parenting

Shirley: and they could be intergenerational as well...

(FG3: Gr2_Dis2, L.497-515)

With the introduction of the notion of 'couples' a *nuclear family discourse* was being drawn upon to help understand the notion of parent. Trying to move the discussion beyond the traditional discourses was proving difficult. Dan introduced a new idea and the conversation changed direction again:

571: Dan: yeah and that's the whole thing of... who do we actually invite to this place here? Who do we say is the most important person? Rather than say, look this person...

Marian: yeah, I think this is a 'but'... there's legal issues...

Shirley: ...but that actually now is in doubt

Alex: I, I think so too

Marian: yeah

Dan: hmmm

Alex: that's...

Shirley: so where does it fit in the story?

Alex:... so how can we make it, yeah, so what can we do so that the people who are significant in children's lives can have a full participation in our...

Marian: ah yeah, programmes

Alex: programmes, yeah,

Marian: of all the significant people in this child's life

Shirley: yeah

Alex: I just had a thought, and I might have Dan, I think it's come from what you were saying Dan, but, you know we, we try to define this, but what would happen if we didn't? If we just had to

Shirley: accept all the options

Alex: accept all the options

(FG3: Gr2_Dis2, L.571-589)

Thinking about 'the people who are significant in children's lives' seemed to shift the discussion away from a reliance on biology and the law for making sense of who children's parents might be constituted as. Continuing the discussion, Dan asked:

592: Dan: can you explain that further?

Alex: if we try and figure out who um the, you know the, why is it that it's us that has to try and figure out who those significant people are in children's lives? Why can't we practice in ways that those groups of people define it for themselves?...

Shirley: ...there's something about us not narrowing our thinking down to at some point saying like, this relationship's o.k., and that one, and that one, and that one, but, actually probably not that one for some reason, but so, if you just say relationships, then why couldn't any of them be o.k.?

(FG3: Gr2_Dis2, L.592-594)

Sharing responsibility for defining or coming to understand who was important in the lives of children seemed to shift the discussion away from the limitations of *biological, legal and nuclear family discourses* with regards to constituting parents. We seemed to be entering to a new discourse that opened up different positions for teachers to work from so that as Shirley indicated, they would not have to enter into the business of validating some kinds of relationships over others. I moved away from the group and the participants kept working to identify concepts that would enable a broader range of parents, known. 'Involvement' was a concept that they drew on, 'willing' was a word that was added to the alternative discourse wheel too. Figure 4 represents the concepts the group settled with in order to open up possibilities for who parents might be constituted as in their work.

Figure 4. An alternative discourse wheel for 'parents'



The text of the wheel read, Parents: relationships; significant; involved; and willing. If teachers held to these images for constituting those to be considered a parent in the lives of young children, then opportunities might come for parents in families beyond the (hetero)norm be recognised. If the question in teachers minds, upon meeting a new family centred around who the significant adults in children's lives were, rather than who was the parent, then teachers might achieve practices beyond the status quo.

Imagining families beyond the nuclear family norm.

A second example of the discourse wheel work that seemed to access concepts which would disrupt heteronormative discourses came from the discussions of a group comprised of Rose, Stacey, Pat and Ariel, who began their conversation by contemplating the notion of family. Rose began:

20: Rose: I can't explain what I'm thinking... I'll just try. I almost feel as though I can't contribute to this route we're taking, because I think we already do this talk in early childhood, we already say 'diverse families is where it's at...'

Stacey: mmm

Rose: ...and so I think our wheel's going to look like the posters you walk into centres and see...

Pat: mmm

Rose: ... and so... I think we need something else to do social justice around family, but I've got no idea what...

(FG3: Gr4_Dis2, L.20-25)

Rose's response came after the words 'diverse' and 'relationships' were suggested as possible starters on a new discourse wheel, different to my (hetero)normal one which read, 'procreative, opposite-sex, adult headed, nuclear families'. Pat clarified:

34: Pat: ... these are the words, when you read anything about relationships, or support, or anything like that, they're all your key-words that you always see, and we say we celebrate diversity, and relationships... are the foundation, so, if we're already saying and doing that, and yet this is the normative for us, then it's got to be more to create this doesn't it? ...Like it's tokenism...in a way, so how do we make it genuine?

(FG3, Gr4_Dis2, L.34-43)

By pointing out that some early childhood policy is already built on *discourses of equity, diversity and social justice* and recognising that other discourses which shut down possibilities for understanding family beyond the traditional *biological, legal and nuclear family discourses* were also being drawn upon, Pat questions how to give voice to the alternative discourses in a way that moves beyond tokenism. How might one really work towards *Te Whāriki's* goal of having children develop "confidence that their family background is viewed positively within the early childhood education setting"? (Ministry of Education, 1996b, p.66). Or, in what ways might teachers enhance children's learning and development by "modelling non-discriminatory behaviour and promoting this with children"? (Ministry of Education, 1996a, s.1(e)). The group seemed dissatisfied and they looked for another way to proceed:

78: Rose: lets brainstorm some other words we could put there instead

Ariel: what do we want in the centre of our wheel?

(FG3: Gr4_Dis2, L.78-79)

This group also settled with the word 'relationships' and began brainstorming associations to that. Later when I joined the group, Rose explained their work, "...and see, what I think happens even when we try to not be hooked into just the

nuclear family 'cos we know we've got to recognise diversity in our families, it's so very much the back-drop that it's really hard to get outside of that thinking" (FG3, Gr4_Dis2, L.103). Pat continued:

107: Pat: or because like families, the word as you said, is so used in early childhood, and we're just sort of saying you know, all the... words you always hear associated with it... diversity and relationships and understanding and things like that. ... Yet we were actually saying that's still not creating socially just practices... so how can we move away from that and actually look at what really genuinely is going to...

Alex: ...what genuinely matters? ... Which is where the term relationships comes in?

Rose: yeah, see... that's why those, you know, why I offered those ones, because for me what matters is... people's relationships and people's attachments and bonds... to one another. And if a diverse group of people walked into a centre that I was teaching in, I would be interested in, not in the fact that they were a legal family necessarily, well if we took family away as our organizing concept, I would be interested to know about what their relationships were

Ariel: mmm

(FG3: Gr4_Dis2, L.107-117)

The discussion had brought the participants into talking about the quality of relationships between people in a given community. They had stepped beyond an attempt to understand family in ways that might marginalise people who didn't fit a particular version of family and moved into a new domain: a discussion about how teachers might come to understand the myriad of potential relationships that were relevant to children's lives:

Rose: if we have relationships in the middle on our wheel, you see for me... there would be something on the wheel about, a question really, who is important to you? Thinking about... here's the child and these are sort of questions applying to the child, who is important to you? I mean if we have that concept of family we tend to assume that mum and dad will be the one's who are important...

Pat: mmm

Stacey: mmm

Rose: and so instead that might free up us to be more open to hearing that, 'well it's auntie,

Ariel: mmm

Rose: or 'it's grandpa', or its mum'

Ariel: yeah

(FG3: Gr4_Dis2, L.168-174)

The idea of replacing 'family' with 'relationships' in the centre of the alternative discourse wheel was finding favour in the discussion. New possibilities for approaching children and families and for accessing different practices were being suggested. Pat and Rose could see a new strategy become available, one that could access a *diversity discourse* and seek to include those different to the (hetero)norm:

186: Pat: well who's important to you, I mean that, well that automatically encompasses the diversity...because you are saying,

Rose: Who's important to you? How can we support this...

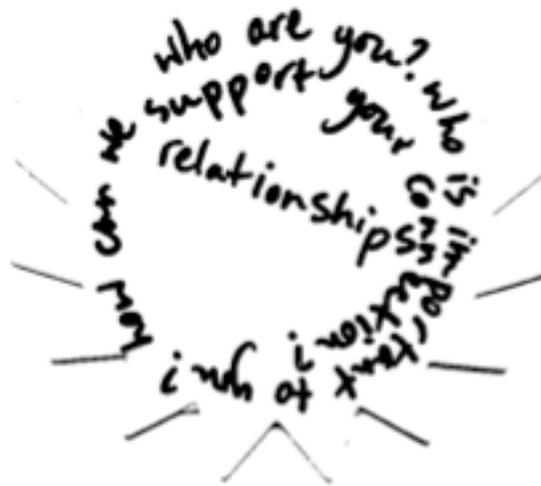
Ariel: mmm

Rose: ...connection? How can we support, how can we foster the connection you have together?

(FG3: Gr4_Dis2, L.186-191)

The discussion had moved beyond what kind of families might be constituted through our practices into a contemplation of who the people in a community might potentially be. Further, the questions of how teachers might build strong relationships in that community, had come to the fore. Thinking about how to open up one's working definition of 'family' had confronted the traditionally dominant *biological and legal discourses*. The group's alternative discourse wheel about family is represented in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Group four's alternative 'family' discourse wheel



The text of the wheel read: Relationships – Who are you? Who is important to you? How can we support your connections? Again, a new discourse seemed to be creating different positions for teachers to work from. Not requiring teachers to identify mothers and fathers and siblings and grandparents of children, by taking this approach, teachers could question openly and receive information from families about significant people in children's lives in a way that made sense to the family. Taking these ideas and connecting them with her own parenting experiences Rose spoke about how she thought this kind of change might have impacted on her and her family's early childhood centre experiences:

224: Rose: ...if the kind of message I'd take on, kind of subconsciously, was that I'm really recognised as someone who is vitally important to Anna² and vice versa, and that team's teachers wanted to support and nurture our relationship then the outcome for me would have been... like, I love you Pat, you're a great teacher! ... And it would have made me feel good as Anna's, one of Anna's parents and it would make Anna feel good because she could see I was being affirmed ...

(FG3: Gr4_Dis2, L.224-228)

² The name is changed from Rose's text, to preserve anonymity.

These conversations about family provided rich and unifying discussions in which possibilities for expanding conceptualisations beyond the nuclear family form were supported. Discussions related to the gender and sexualities dimensions of the discourse wheels were less united as many of the usual discursive practices associated with discussions of genders and sexualities in early childhood education found their way into the talk. Some progress towards constructing alternative discourse wheels was made but the deep investments that participants had in the discourses of heteronormativity that shaped the discussions were left largely unexamined and difficult to shift.

Chapter conclusion

The question of how to draw broadly from the discursive field in order to allow for constructions of families, genders and sexualities in a manner inclusive of but broader than the (hetero)norm was at the forefront of the work in the focus group of the study's third round. In this chapter I have shown how the possibility of broadening understandings of *family* in early childhood education were affected by work with 'discourse wheels'. By seeking to mobilise discourses of *social justice, diversity and equity* that already existed in the contexts of participants' professional lives, some teachers imagined different kinds of practices that would support them to meet diverse families with welcome in early childhood centres. Through prioritising the concept of relationships when thinking about children and their families, *biological and legal discourses* that constitute 'parents' as mothers and fathers who are related by blood or law to the children in their families, could be expanded on. This meant that 'other' sorts of parents could be recognised as parents in their children's lives. By looking at the family from the child's perspective, it raised the possibility that same-sex parents of children who attend early childhood centres might be recognised by teachers and included as such.

CHAPTER EIGHT – CONCLUSIONS: EXPLORATIONS OF HETERONORMATIVITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CONTEXTS

When I started this project, I set out to question the extent to which practices in early childhood education might be being shaped by heteronormativity. I thought that should I be able to document how heteronormative discourses were implicated in the production of early childhood education then this might bring to light the varied means by which concepts, knowledge and understandings of valid alternatives to heterosexuality, including same-sex families, might be obscured and marginalised through discursive practices. Further, if heterosexuality were seen to be repeatedly constituted as dominant and normative, I could question the extent to which aspirations for social justice and inclusion as advanced in early childhood curriculum and policy (Ministry of Education, 1996a, 1996b, 2006) and reflected in broader 20th and 21st century legislative reform ("Care of Children Act (NZ)", 2004; "Civil Union Act (NZ)", 2004; "Human Rights Act (NZ)", 1993), might possibly be able to be achieved.

To realise these aims I asked the question of *is, and if so how is, heteronormative discourse shaping practices in early childhood education?* I explored heteronormativity through an examination of how discourses of gender, sexuality and family form converged in early childhood education historically and in the present day. I engaged in a close reading of relevant policy documents and texts from the 20th and early 21st century and I did the same with transcripts from focus group interviews where queer allies, queer teachers and teacher educators in early childhood education discussed dilemmas where questions of heterosexism, homophobia and heteronormativity were raised. This chapter provides some synthesis of the different facets of my study. It draws the historical, the theoretical and the empirical together to provide insights into heteronormativity and New Zealand early childhood education.

The problem that heteronormativity creates in early childhood concerns the way in which heteronormative discourses posit the world and everyone in it as either

needing to be, or as being, totally and unambiguously *straight*. What does this mean for children's understandings of themselves and their families if they live as members of households where same-sex parents parent? What does it mean for the way teachers work with and include (or not) children's same-sex families? How would teachers whose sexuality was not heterosexual fit, in such a climate? And what challenges would this pose to the attainment of goals in the early childhood curriculum that welcome diversity, difference and social justice? These kinds of questions, asked from my positions of lesbian, parent, teacher, research student, living in a socio-political climate where recent progressive legislative reform has sought at the macro level to remove discrimination towards those with non-heterosexual sexualities provided impetus for this study.

My decision to explore heteronormativity through both genealogy and ethnography enabled understandings of how locally situated present day practices are coordinated with historically constituted discourses from the socio-political sphere to allow us to produce truths about ourselves and others. The truth I have been exploring relates to sexuality: How is it that heterosexuality is taken-for-granted and produced as a truth for all?

Foucault's discourse analysis in combination with queer theory and questions modified from Davies' (1994) study of teaching practices provided the framework for this research. The approach provided tools for exploring not the wilful means by which people might be excluded, discriminated against or marginalised by 'truths' such as heterosexuality, but the way in which seemingly ordinary events and practices in early childhood centres can and do, privilege and promote some truths over others. The construction of heterosexuality as normal and its repetitive positioning as dominant in both the historical and present day sites of this work was achieved by the conflation of discourses of gender, sexualities and family form that relied on the notion of heterosexuality for their coherence. The study also points to the myriad of ways that discourses of heteronormativity converge and are advanced in various contexts across the domain of early childhood education.

What does this thesis tell us about heteronormativity and early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand?

Both drawing from and contributing to the broader socio-political context, heteronormative constructions of families, genders and sexualities informed the development of policy and practice for and in early childhood education during New Zealand's 20th century. Nuclear family discourses which assume the presence in children's lives of two heterosexual adults, biologically or legally related to them, shaped the development of early childhood policy (Early childhood education and care working group, 1988; State Services Commission, 1980; The Committee of Inquiry into Pre-school Education, 1971; The Consultative Committee on Pre-School Educational Services, 1947) so that the notion of family either came to be understood in the first instance, as nuclear family, or it upheld the nuclear family as the normal sort of family with which teachers in early childhood services would interact. Connected with this, nuclear family discourses constitute parents as mothers and fathers, opposite sex couples who have created children together and who must therefore be biologically or legally related to the children in their care. This coming together of parenting and family discourses supports and maintains a binary of normal nuclear family versus abnormal non-nuclear family form. The binary is a significant means by which the idea of heterosexuality as normal is held firm.

Further, building on earlier religious discourses, scientific and biological discourses of sexuality from the 19th century that had already established heterosexual sexuality as a norm: that is, as dominant, as healthy, and as proper, Freud's (1925c) theory of children's psychosexual development came to prominence in the early 1900's, and confirmed heterosexual sexuality as an inevitable outcome of normal children's developmental pathways. The continuing construction of heterosexuality as normal was thus achieved in a binary of normal heterosexual sexualities versus abnormal non-heterosexual sexualities. In the broader context of the scientific study of children and of childhood within developmental psychology, a fact of human development was achieved: normal, healthy children whose development proceeded properly would inevitably end up heterosexual adults. Teachers in early childhood education were reminded of this

by theorists like Isaacs (1929) whose writing also told them that the best ways to handle children's interests in their bodies was to ignore it (thereby bringing notions of *risk and sexuality* together in relation to children), and teachers whose expertise included training in child development and in accounting for children's progress towards developmental norms, became implicated in the production of heterosexuality in early childhood education.

Understandings of gender and of gender development, which are closely related to those of sexuality (Remlinger, 1997), were largely built in the early part of the 20th century, from essentialist theories which assumed the binary division of men and women into two sexes and which positioned the heterosexual pairing of women and men as normal and natural. Later, as social learning theory (Bandura, 1965, 1973) came to prominence, new ideas about how children learned gender proved influential, yet these still relied on the concept of coherent and stable heterosexuality and of understandings of the primacy of the male-female dualism for their coherence (Davies, 1989). Evident in texts of teacher education programmes where student teachers like me learned about how to teach in early childhood education, understandings of gender development as promulgated through biological or essentialist discourses were implicated in maintaining heterosexuality as a dominant norm.

Analysing the ways gender, family and sexualities discourses converge and support heteronormativity shows how by both speaking directly and indirectly about sexualities (i.e., through constructions of sexuality or gender or family form), that the statement of heteronormative discourse, heterosexuality is normal, can be promulgated. A dense network of power relations passes 'normal heterosexuality' through apparatuses and institutions distributing the statement so that it is not exactly anywhere but present everywhere at one and the same time. The ethnographic work in this study shows this in process and enabled what Smith (2002) described as an understanding of how people's activities in localised settings can be coordinated with these ruling relations. By adding genealogy to the mix was possible to map out change and to see discursive threads emerge, strengthen and dissipate relative to time, place and socio-political context thus emphasising that change is always possible.

The study showed how present day practices continue to problematise non-heterosexual sexualities through the ways genders, sexualities and families are constructed in early childhood education. When participants in focus group interviews responded to my dilemmas of teaching practices where non-heterosexual sexualities were troubled, they gave accounts of how they'd noticed constructions of families, genders and sexualities being troubled too. Several stories in which the construction of the nuclear family as normal, and subsequently, where the normalcy of heterosexuality was asserted, were shared. Marian's transition of a lesbian family into an early childhood centre seemed to allow her colleagues to leave their sense of this family as special, or not normal, undisrupted; Pat's lesbian family who came out (of the closet) to her upon their introduction to the centre marked themselves at risk because of their questionable sexualities and same-sex family form; baby bear's lesbian mothers were represented as heterosexual parents (even though baby bear's dad performed his gender dubiously); and Andy's four-year-old-boy left his playmates' play, unable to sustain a place for himself in their version of same-sex family and marriage, possibly because for him, their version of family had no place for him as husband or dad and was just plainly wrong.

The imposition of heterosexuality through traditional *gender theories*, notions of *risk* and *developmentalism* were evidenced in this study too. For example, gender trouble of the sort that positioned cross-dressing boys as abnormal and suggested that their proper sexuality was in jeopardy, marked several accounts. Andy's soon-to-be-school-aged-boy was to be prevented from wearing feminine clothing by his mother who would only let him out of the closet (Sedgwick, 1990) for periods at home when no-body else was around. His teachers provided no resistance to her plans and could be interpreted therefore as participating indirectly in the policing of his behaviour and contributing to the silencing of his expressions of boy inconsistent with heterosexual sexuality and traditional masculinity. Rose's student teachers thought that parents were brave because they let their son come to the centre in dresses. The bravery notion, connecting with the concept of *risk* could be successfully diminished if teachers accessed *diversity discourses* to explain the skirt-wearing-boy's-actions as expressions of cultural

tradition and family heritage. Contrarily, the *diversity discourse*, that in this instance referred to traditional Scots men and their son's, "what a wonderful kilt. Boys and men wear kilts in Scotland"... (FG: TE, 1.1. L.20), could also be seen to connect with *gender essentialism* which contributes to heteronormativity too. Finally, Dan and Shirley gave accounts that illustrated how boys' imperfect performances of gender constancy could lead to fury on the part of parents (directed towards teachers) and largely unreconciled professional debate amongst teachers. Like accounts of teachers, children and parents responses to boys' diverse gender performances in other studies (Blaise, 2005; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Renold, 2000), this project showed how commonly accessed discourses of gender and sexuality assisted the development of practices which reified heterosexuality as dominant and positioned it as a desirable norm.

However, as well as discourses that positioned heterosexuality as dominant and normative, those that positioned heterosexual sexuality as one form of sexuality among others were also available. Evident in the socio-political sphere in the late 20th century, a shift in the discursive field achieved in part through changes in law, facilitated *discourses of equity and human rights* in education ("Education Act (NZ)", 1989), and in early childhood education new curriculum policy (Ministry of Education, 1996b) and Government objectives (Ministry of Education, 1996a) saw *discourses of social justice and diversity* also come to the fore. A multiplicity of discursive elements were coming into play (Foucault, 1978) and heterosexuality was being positioned differently as other strategies mobilised and the validity of alternatives to the (hetero)norm were claimed. In my study fleeting instances of practices that connected to these other ideas and represented non-heterosexual sexualities positively were recorded.

It was difficult for Marian's colleague to persist with a same-sex family script in the Baby Bear's story, but the girls in Andy's account were able to shape a rebuttal to their peer's resistance, "my mummy said it doesn't matter whether its two boys or two girls as long as you love each other and..." (FG: QT, 1.0, L.23) and continued to play. This allowed for the kind of programme that genuinely connected to children's families and cultures (Ministry of Education, 1996b) and in which the conditions for social justice of the kind that values difference (Gale,

2000) and provides recognition (Fraser, 1997) would prevail. Further, in the third round focus group where participants constructed anti-heteronormative discourse wheels, new possibilities for understanding the concepts of family and parent, inclusive of but broader than the (hetero)norm were raised.

As the fieldwork of my study progressed I became unsettled by what I perceived as a subtle resistance towards attending to the issues of sexualities I had brought the participants together to discuss. Already aware of that concepts of *silence* and of *risk* (Jones, 2004; Robinson, 2005; Tobin, 1997) as well as notions of sexuality's *irrelevance* (to children) and *childhood innocence* (Canella, 1998; Robinson & Ferjolja, 2002; Tait, 2001) could help form understandings of sexuality as troubling, I was sensitive to the ways participants seemed to talk around and about sexualities matters (Surtees, 2005) and consequently to how such shifting attentions seemed to provide the means by which the dominance of heterosexuality might be able to be left undisturbed. My bifurcation of consciousness (Smith, 2002) led me to question the extent to which discussions in focus groups might have been helping inadvertently to preserve the (hetero)norm.

The active unspeaking (Tobin, 1997) of children's sexuality, of homophobia, heterosexism and heteronormativity seemed regularly achieved in this study's focus group work. Participants would draw upon different discursive threads: *developmentalism*, *cross-culturalism*, *risk*, *silence*, *professionalism* and *qualification* to explain practices that preserved the (hetero)norm. 'Threads of thinking' that shifted our attention beyond issues of heterosexism, homophobia and heteronormativity provided continuities across the focus group discussions that I hadn't anticipated. Metaphors like 'boundary crossing' and 'cans of worms' drew on the concept of *risk* to warn of the dangers associated with confronting heteronormativity. I suspected that we were coordinating ourselves with a broader tendency towards the *silencing* of sexualities as they played out in relation to childhood and early childhood education. Sedgwick's (1990) closet became a powerful image. Was there a desire to closet the topics we had come together to attend to? How best to keep the closet door open, became my next focus as I prepared for the final round of discussions in the study.

Foucault's (1978) rule of the tactical polyvalence of discourses offered a means by which I could challenge the possibility that we might have been being coordinating ourselves with this broader move towards *silence*. Wanting to share with participants my understandings of the locally and globally situated discourses that had featured in our discussions, and how these could enable and constrain teachers' professional lives, I wanted to find a way for participants to discover how and why they might draw more broadly from the discursive field in order to achieve practices that included valid alternative options to heterosexuality. *Discourses of social justice, of equity, of diversity, and of human rights*, were already available in the socio-political and policy contexts for early childhood education. Some evidence of practices that were built on these had been produced in my study. The idea of *qualification* (doubly remarked by participants' claims that they were both unqualified and qualified to deal with matters of non-heterosexual sexualities in early childhood education) became my point of intervention, the starting point for my opposing strategy, and my entry point into fieldwork seeking practices beyond the (hetero)norm.

Drawing upon the discursive thread of *professionalism*, I took a position in the third round focus group interview that constituted participants as able and willing to engage in work that might disrupt the repeated constitution of heterosexuality as dominant and normative in early childhood education. The discourse wheels provoked some discussions that accessed *discourses of diversity, equity and social justice*. In discussions around notions of 'family' and of 'parent', participants accessed different words and concepts that could lead to constructions of families and of parents in early childhood education broader than those found in the (hetero)norm. Should they have taken those ideas back to early childhood centres and tried to build practices from them, the recognition and inclusion of diverse families, concepts and knowledge may have been facilitated. If I had taken my study of heteronormativity into early childhood centres, it would have provided an opportunity to see what impacts such change might bring about. This would have added to centre based understandings of heteronormativity by expanding on the ways other studies have ventured to comprehend it: in the geography of early childhood play spaces (Taylor & Richardson, 2005), the conversations and play

scripts of children (Blaise, 2005; Blaise Ochsner, 2000; Davies, 1989a, 1989b) and in the documents and artefacts that teachers create to help them do their work (Gunn, 2003). Even though my study did not venture into centres, the work participants undertook in the third round focus group proved insightful into my question of how teachers' practices might become coordinated with different discourses already existing in the socio-political and policy fields.

Evidence of anti-heteronormative practice existed in my study. I have commented previously on the same-sex play script of children in Andy's early childhood centre. Another example was given by Marian whose description of baby bear's parents as lesbian was made possible because a (lesbian) teacher produced a resource that provided a myriad of ways for family to be construed. This act, making it possible for families other than nuclear ones to be represented in the early childhood programme shows that some teachers can and do access *discourses of social justice and equity* to help them do their work. Had the child in Marian's story left baby bear's parents unremarked, that event would likely have been interpreted by me as a coordination of activity in the local setting with discourses of social justice from the socio-political sphere. *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996b), other early childhood policy (Ministry of Education, 2006) and education law in general ("Education Act (NZ)", 1989) provides scope for alternative *discourses of diversity* and of *social justice* to shape practices in early childhood education. Licence to work against heteronormative discourse clearly exists. Teachers are capable of action as some of the accounts in my study show. They could be encouraged to find more ways of accessing these discourses in their work. The concerting of early childhood practices with these broader *discourses of social justice and equity* provide a means by which teachers may imagine themselves agents of change. Drawing on these discourses more often would assist them to 'do' early childhood education in ways that include.

The genealogy/ethnography approach to studying heteronormativity in early childhood education has illuminated the ways in which intersecting discourses of genders, families and sexualities in both historical and present day educational and socio-political spheres are productive of heteronormativity. Rather than seeking answers to how early childhood teachers might promote heteronormativity on

purpose, the emphasis that this approach has enabled, has been on how early childhood practices can be complicit in the production of heteronormativity through the mundane routines and every day assumptions of early childhood education. If the discourses that help shape practice can be named, and our involvement with these understood, we can shift a problem like heteronormativity to the external, work from many positions and attempt strategic interventions (like the discourse wheel work) to shift the balance of the (hetero)norm. Work like this can show that when change in the socio-political and policy contexts occur, localised practices can shift too. This is what provides future hope for recognising and building future practices that might include families, concepts and knowledge broader than those constituted in heteronormative discourse.

Strengths, limitations and possibilities for future work

By studying heteronormativity in the historical and present day contexts of early childhood education I have been able to question some taken-for-granted assumptions that have helped form, and continue to form, understandings of sexualities, families and genders in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. All teachers in compulsory education settings in New Zealand are charged with creating partnership with families for the benefit of learners, and with creating safe, just environments in which all children can learn ("Education Act (NZ)", 1989). Situating this work in early childhood education has expanded understandings of how heteronormative discourses operate in New Zealand education.

The extent to which *nuclear family discourses* have been shown to contribute to heteronormativity in early childhood education is a feature of this study.

Constructions of the genders and of sexuality seem to be more of a locus for heteronormativity in compulsory education sectors (Blaise, 2005; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Renold, 2000). The emphasis on family in early childhood education could lead to new questions of heteronormativity being explored in other education sectors too. Questioning whom teachers mean when they say parent, and how different forms of family are constituted in the every day

practices of schools are important means by which we can form understandings of how teaching practices and education settings can include and exclude.

The project has drawn attention to the ways many intersecting and historically derived discourses converge to form and keep heteronormative discourse firm in early childhood education. The ways in which discourses intersect, confirm and contest the (hetero)norm is complex and far reaching, in these processes the exclusion and marginalisation of same-sex families can occur. I have foregrounded how discourses of gender, sexualities and the family form can provide continuity across local and trans-local settings and therefore how they are implicated in universalising practices in early childhood education. This work shows how practices derived from discourse can be seen to exist as local and temporally situated activities derived from and connected to dominant discourses in society.

Teachers', children's and families' activities, as reported in the contexts of these focus group interviews, exposed relations between local and extra-local activity to show how the possibilities and opportunities afforded some and denied to others, always precedes them. The subjects produced and positions occupied in discourse changed regularly in discussions where genders, sexualities and the family form were troubled. The study allowed us to glimpse children, teachers and parents involved in activity where they achieved themselves variously, took and lost opportunities with each other, and affirmed and contested the (hetero)norm.

What can teacher education learn from this project?

As well as a parent, lesbian, researcher, student and teacher, I occupy a position as teacher educator. My interest in this work has been supported by my personal and professional histories and a sense of responsibility about what I can and possibly should be doing in my own teacher education work to assist the development of early childhood practices that are fair. I see two clear implications from this study for the work of teacher educators and for the curricula of teacher education programmes.

The constancy of a number of intersecting discourses concerning families, sexualities and genders acts as a hindrance towards change. Further, the ways in which seemingly unrelated concepts and knowledge, for example, ideas of developmentalism or interpretations of the law, assist the production of heterosexuality as dominant and normative, is an important feature to note. Engaging in the kinds of teacher education work that Britzman (2001) characterises as “unleashing popular things” (p.64), will begin to address the deep investments that teachers and teacher education students have in discourses of heteronormativity. Following methods like those described by Robinson and Ferfolja (2002b) where student teachers are asked to develop understandings of how multiple interpretations of the world are made possible in discourse, of how these make available subject positions, and of how these offer subjects different opportunities, seems one possibility for drawing attention to the (hetero)norm. Distinguishing the varied means by which the statement ‘heterosexual sexuality is normal’ is upheld will be one important step in recognising and deconstructing heteronormativity in early childhood education.

Second, I have learned that change seems possible when new discourses are purposely made relevant to teachers’ discussions of sexualities, genders and families. Helping teachers distinguish broader discourses from the discursive field with which they desire to coordinate, discourses from texts like *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996b) which speak belonging, diversity and inclusion, may provide support for those who are trying to form practices that work to include. How can a child whose family life is rendered invisible by heteronormative discourse feel like they belong in the early childhood centre? Would her or his emotional wellbeing be preserved if some of his or her parents were unrecognised? These are the kinds of questions that will provoke learning opportunities so that teachers can see what is at stake by not challenging the status quo. The risks of disrupting heteronormative discourse are certainly real, participants in this study attest to that. However the risks that might remain if more children, families and teachers continue to hold to heteronormative discourses must be considered too. Are we really prepared to continue to practice in ways that limit opportunities for learning and exclude?

Concluding comments and remarks

In this work I have come to understand that if teachers can look at the ways and degrees to which heterosexuality is imposed on children, families and each other, then they might understand more fully how their seemingly uncomplicated every day practices connect to historically and politically situated ideas that can include and exclude. Further if this kind of looking at the professional practice of teaching was made possible through regular encounters with theorists like Foucault and concepts such as discourse then teachers might understand the contributions they / we make to maintaining and challenging constructions like the heterosexual norm. Performing heterosexuality does not have to remain an irrevocable truth of the bodies we shape and expect to meet in early childhood education settings. Finding ways to recognise and include valid alternative options to heterosexuality is but one way to proceed towards social justice and practices that include.

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APPENDIX ONE - INFORMATION SHEETS AND CONSENT FORMS FOR THE STUDY

<University of Waikato Crest and Letterhead>

Focus Group Member Participant Information Sheet

Project Title: Early childhood pedagogy: Social justice and some puzzling queries/queries.

Researcher: Alex Gunn, School of Education, University of Waikato

=====
Kia ora, Greetings.

This information sheet contains details of my doctoral research project with the University of Waikato where I am studying to meet the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. I am working under the supervision of Associate Professor Margaret Carr and Professor Sue Middleton of Waikato University.

My research is concerned with early childhood teaching, or more specifically, how it is that early childhood teachers' work can help us meet our profession's aspirations of social justice for children. Specifically, I am interested in issues in teaching that are concerned with sexuality, heterosexism and heteronormativity. I use the term 'queer' to refer to these things, so will talk in the project about 'queer' issues, teaching 'queerly' or 'queer dilemmas'.

I wish to invite teachers to participate in three focus group discussions. This participant information sheet contains details about the focus group participants' involvement in the project.

I plan to work with three groups, a group of *queer teachers* (for instance, lesbian women and gay men who work in early childhood centres), a group of *queer allies* (teachers who do not identify as lesbian or gay and who are comfortable in adopting teaching practices that affirm sexual diversity), and a group of *teacher educators*. We will meet three times.

In the first focus group meeting I am asking participants to deliberate over some queer dilemmas. Additionally, participants will more than likely have experienced their own dilemmas related to queer issues and I will invite participants to discuss and reflect on these with their colleagues in the focus group meetings. I wish to record (audio tape) the focus group's discussion and later I will transcribe this data and use it to think about non-normative or queer teaching strategies that help teachers to counter normative discourses in early childhood teaching. I aim to illuminate what early childhood teachers' work might look like if they were to adopt teaching strategies for social justice.

Further to this, participants in the focus groups will be given a research journal in which they can record ongoing ideas and issues related to the project. These will, at the end of the project, be copied and returned to participants as a record of their own reflective journal from this project.

In the second meeting, participants will be invited to respond to the synthesis and initial analysis of material from the first focus groups. Using your research journal, you will be able to reflect with colleagues about emerging issues and ideas that have come about as a

result of focussing your attention on these diversity issues. The third meeting is a time for all three focus groups to come together to talk about barriers and supports for teachers if they wished to adopt queer pedagogies in early childhood education. The third meeting would be our last and in it I would collect your research diary. These would later be copied and returned to you.

Given the nature of the discussions in the focus groups and the possibility that participants past actions may be called into question, you may wish to identify someone who could act in confidence as a support person or critical friend outside of the project.

No findings that could identify any individual participant in the focus groups will be published. Since data must be stored indefinitely you will be asked to give yourself a pseudonym which will be used on all data. If you agree to participate you have the right to withdraw yourself or your data from the project up until the final draft findings stage or before June 2005 (whichever comes first). Further, as a participant, you will retain rights of access to any data collected from you during this project.

All information provided in the course of this project will be used in my doctoral research and in subsequent publications. I would welcome your input into one of the focus groups. If you have any questions prior to giving consent for participation, please feel free to make contact. You can reach me at work by phone: 03) 364 +++++ extn. +++++, or at work by fax: 03) 364 +++++ or at work by email: alex.gunn@canterbury.ac.nz

Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to your input into this project.

Alex Gunn

School of Education,
University of Canterbury
Private Bag 4800
Christchurch, NZ

Ph. 03 364 +++++ extn.++++
Fax. 03 364 +++++
Email. alex.gunn@+++++.

The consent form for the project is on the next page. Please fill this in and return it in the envelope provided.

Please fill in and return this form.

Early childhood pedagogy: Social justice and some puzzling queries/queries.

Participant consent form

The nature of this research project has been conveyed to me, including the purpose of the research and conditions of confidentiality. I understand what will be required of me if I agree to participate.

I understand that information I provide through my involvement in this project will be used in Alex's doctoral research and also in subsequent publications.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may choose to withdraw myself or my data from the project without giving a reason up until the final draft findings of the thesis or June 2005 (whichever comes first).

I agree to participate in the three focus group interviews and to use the research journal. I agree to have my ideas recorded anonymously on audio-tape. I would like to adopt the following pseudonym in the project: _____(please write a suitable name here).

The focus group in which I am agreeing to participate in is the: (please indicate which group you would contribute to by circling one of these group categories.)

Queer teachers

Queer allies

Teacher educators

If I have any questions or concerns about this research project I will speak to Alex Gunn or either of her academic supervisors at the University of Waikato, Associate Professor Margaret Carr or Professor Sue Middleton (phone: 07 838++++).

Name

(Please print your name here)

Contact Address:

(please write an address to which project correspondence can be sent.)

Phone No:

(day / night)

Signature:

(please sign your name)

Date

(please note the date here)

This form can be returned to: Alex Gunn, School of Education, University of Canterbury, Private Bag +++, CHRISTCHURCH

Participant Consent Acknowledgement

[v.1]

Early childhood pedagogy: Social justice and some puzzling queries/queeries.

Contact: Alex Gunn, School of Education, University of Canterbury, Private Bag +++,
CHRISTCHURCH

alex.gunn@++++++.++,

ph. 03 364++++,extn.++++, fax. 03 364 +++++

Dear XXXXX

Greetings and many thanks for returning the participant consent form for this project. Your interest and the interest of others in the project is heartening. I am looking forward to getting underway.

XXX, I am waiting for a few days before making phone contact with individuals to confirm their participation in the project. This note is to let you know that I received your consent for participation. Thank you.

You may have seen some information in the ECS newsletter last week and I have made contact with a few centres and individuals about participating. I am waiting for a few more people to return forms. I will confirm involvement with participants near to the end of the week and talk then with people about the first meeting date.

Until then, many regards.

Alex Gunn

Participant Consent Acknowledgement [v.2]

Early childhood pedagogy: Social justice and some puzzling queries/queeries.

Contact: Alex Gunn, School of Education, University of Canterbury, Private Bag +++,
CHRISTCHURCH

alex.gunn@+++++++.++.++,

ph. 03 364++++ extn.++++, fax. 03 364 +++++

Dear XXXXX

Greetings and many thanks for returning the participant consent form for this project. Your interest and the interest of others in the project is heartening. I am looking forward to getting underway.

XXXXX, I am pleased to let you know that your participation in the project is confirmed and this note is to let you know that I received your consent for participation. Thank you.

You may have seen some information in the recent ECS newsletter and I have made contact with a few centres and individuals about participating. I have had some preliminary thoughts about the first meeting date as you know, I will confirm if the XX of April is to go ahead in the next few days.

Until then, many regards.

Alex Gunn

APPENDIX TWO - STARTING POINTS, FOCUS GROUP ONE

Starting points: focus group one.

Early childhood pedagogy: Social justice and some puzzling queries/queeries.

Contact: Alex Gunn, alex.gunn@+++++++.++,

ph. 03 364++++ extn.++++, fax. 03 364 +++++

Tēna koe XXX,

Greetings and welcome to the project. I am happy to confirm your involvement as a queer teacher and am looking forward to our first meeting on XXXX at XXXpm. As confirmed, we will meet XXXX. The location is XXXX

XXX, the purpose of this letter is to provide you with some resources we'll use in the project and to key you into the business of the first focus group. I have included here a participant profile that I'd like to collect from you at our first meeting. Additionally you'll have received with this letter, a participant journal. I'll write a little about this further on, suffice to say though, you can begin writing in this any time from now. Finally, the queer dilemmas I'm using to begin our discussions are included here too.

The participant profile: I will appreciate it if you can read through and respond to the profile sheet, bringing this to our first meeting.

The participant journal: You will recall from the participant information sheets that I am providing a journal for participants so they can record thoughts, ideas, and emerging issues that have come about from participating in the research. I have pasted some of my ideas about how specific incidents might be recorded in this journal, but other than this it is blank. I'd like you to decide how you'll use this resource, you'll get to keep it at the end of the field work so I'm hoping you'll make use of it in a way that will support your work towards teaching for social justice beyond this project.

The queer dilemmas: XXXX, you will recall from the participant information sheet that in the first focus group I am asking teachers to both deliberate over some queer dilemmas and to share any we have ourselves confronted in our work. By way of generating discussion, I have included here the stories that I will bring to the group. I am hoping participants will read through and think about these a little so we are familiar with them when we meet for the first time.

Well, this is surely enough to start us off. I am looking forward to working alongside you in this project.

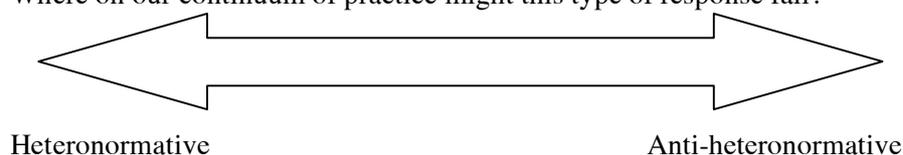
How are we going to use these stories to think about anti-heteronormative teaching strategies in early childhood education?

In the participant information sheet I wrote about heterosexism and heteronormativity. In order for us to get involved in this work its important for me to explain my use of these terms. Teachers will be familiar with terms like sexism, racism, classism. These are terms that we use to describe oppressive actions, beliefs and attitudes in relation to gender, ethnicity and social status. Heterosexism follows this tradition and is a term used to describe oppressive actions, beliefs and attitudes in relation to one's sexual orientation. Heterosexism assumes that heterosexuality is the only 'normal' and 'acceptable' sexual orientation. It is closely related to sexism in that gender roles are maintained in part by homophobia (fear of lesbian women or gay men). Through heterosexism, we can maintain the ideal of separate and permanent gender roles / identities increasing the likelihood of maintaining hierarchical relationships between men and women. In the project we will at times use the terms heterosexism, heterosexist, and heteronormative to describe attitudes, beliefs and practices in the episodes we talk about.

When we talk about heteronormativity or heteronormative assumptions we will be referring to way our thinking, responses and actions encourage people to behave in consort with heterosexuality. The 'normal' in hetero-normal is heterosexual and we will be thinking about how our actions support heteronormativity or provide alternatives to it.

To help with this, I have conceived a continuum of practice, where we might align the possible responses to our queer dilemmas with attitudes, beliefs and practices close to heterosexuality or homosexuality - or somewhere in between. It looks like this:

Where on our continuum of practice might this type of response fall?



Story One: Byron and Chester, two 4.5 year olds are seen sneaking in behind the garden shed outside in the playground. Sally, their teacher approaches to see what the boys are doing there. She sees them with their trousers down looking into each other's pants. Sally responds by saying, "stop doing that, boys shouldn't be looking at each other's willies! Now pull your trousers up and come out here to play". As the boys come out from behind the shed she sends one inside and the other to the sandpit. As Sally retells the story at a later staff meeting she comments, "it's bad enough that the children want to look at each others privates, let alone boys looking at other boys!"

What do we think is going on here? What attitudes and assumptions are at work? Whose needs are competing and what messages might the players in this situation be receiving? What are all the ways we might respond to this event and in our responses, what attitudes and assumptions might be operating? How might we characterise our responses? Perpetuating heteronormativity - opposing it? Somewhere other or in between? How might our responses impact on those involved?

Story Two: Rita lives in a lesbian household. Your attention is called to her and Ben playing in the whānau area when you hear an escalating interchange. You approach and Ben is saying "but she can't be the daddy 'cos she's a girl an' you can't have two girls being mummy and daddy!" You notice Rita setting up the table and chairs for 'dinner'. There's a girl doll sitting at the table and she's attempting to place another girl doll in a second seat.

What do we think is going on here? What attitudes and assumptions are at work? Whose needs are competing and what messages might the players in this situation be receiving? What are all the ways we might respond to this event and in our responses, what attitudes and assumptions might be operating? How might we characterise our responses? Perpetuating heteronormativity - opposing it? Somewhere other or in between? How might our responses impact on those involved?

Story Three: At a staff meeting your colleague Jenny brings up a situation for discussion. It seems as though she had a fraught interaction with one of the children's parents, Jed, because she refused to let him look through Abby's assessment file. Jed is Abby's dad's boyfriend and Abby lives between households, one week with her mum, and the next with her dad. Jenny's opinion is that Abby's file should only be shared with Jed if Abby's dad is present.

What do we think is going on here? What attitudes and assumptions are at work? Whose needs are competing and what messages might the players in this situation be receiving? What are all the ways we might respond to this event and in our responses, what attitudes and assumptions might be operating? How might we characterise our responses? Perpetuating heteronormativity - opposing it? Somewhere other or in between? How might our responses impact on those involved?

Story Four: You're outside with Tom, Jesse and Lucia playing 'going shopping'. The children are all dressed up, handbags, high heels, hats and have just given you (the bus conductor) their tickets to go to town. Tom's dad walks outside and on seeing his boy playing says, "get that off you're not a poof! Tom hurriedly gets off the bus and takes off the dress ups with his dad looking on. As they turn to go inside, Tom's dad says to you that his son isn't allowed to do that again.

What do we think is going on here? What attitudes and assumptions are at work? Whose needs are competing and what messages might the players in this situation be receiving? What are all the ways we might respond to this event and in our responses, what attitudes and assumptions might be operating? How might we characterise our responses? Perpetuating heteronormativity - opposing it? Somewhere other or in between? How might our responses impact on those involved?

Story Five: You've been approached by the publishers of the local pink pages (a queer community resource book that contains information about local queer friendly business and organisations). You take the request to the licensee to see if it would be fine for the centres details to be published in this year's edition. The licensee is less than happy saying, "this centres name will not be associated with that sort of thing".

What do we think is going on here? What attitudes and assumptions are at work? Whose needs are competing and what messages might the players in this situation be receiving? What are all the ways we might respond to this event and in our responses, what attitudes and assumptions might be operating? How might we characterise our responses? Perpetuating heteronormativity - opposing it? Somewhere other or in between? How might our responses impact on those involved?

Well, I hope these have sparked some interest. I'm sure we'll have heaps of ideas about what we think is going on here and in the first focus group we will be able to share these.

You might like to begin using your journal, write some reflections about these stories and bring these along to talk about, perhaps these will remind you of others stories you can bring to share. I hope so.

Many regards XXXX, I'll look forward to seeing you when we meet in April.

Cheers

Alex.

Participant Profile

Early childhood pedagogy: Social justice and some puzzling queries/queeries.

Contact: Alex Gunn

alex.gunn@++++++.++, ph. 03 364++++ extn.++++, fax. 03 364++++

Please take some time prior to our first focus group meeting to share some details about yourself and your history in early childhood education. You might like to simply provide some facts, or you could write a paragraph or two about yourself. I will collect profiles at the first focus group and use these in the research to write about the teachers who participated in the work. At the very least, please give an indication about:

Your age;

How long you've been teaching in early childhood education;

Are you trained, in-training, yet to decide? What was / is / might your training be like?;

Where have you worked in early childhood? What type of setting do you work in now and how would you classify your job?

If you have time it would be useful for you to write briefly about what brought you to this project. What interests you about the topic, what hopes do you have for engaging in this work?

A large empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the participant to write their profile information in response to the questions above.

Parallel dilemmas for use in the teacher educator focus group.

Story One: Byron and Chester, two 4.5 year olds are seen sneaking in behind the garden shed outside in the playground. Sally, (their teacher, your student) approaches to see what the boys are doing there. She sees them with their trousers down looking into each other's pants. Sally responds by saying, "stop doing that, boys shouldn't be looking at each other's willies! Now pull your trousers up and come out here to play". As the boys come out from behind the shed she sends one inside and the other to the sandpit. As Sally retells the story later in your class, she comments, "it's bad enough that the children want to look at each others privates, let alone boys looking at other boys!"

What do we think is going on here? What attitudes and assumptions are at work? What messages might the players in this situation be receiving? What was happening here that we might want to address and how might we respond? What attitudes and assumptions might be operating through our responses? How might we characterise them? Perpetuating heteronormativity - opposing it? Somewhere other or in between?

Story Two: You are observing your student in the centre as the following takes place: Rita (4 yrs.) lives in a lesbian household. Your student's attention is called to her and Ben (4 yrs.) playing in the whānau area because of an escalating interchange. As your student approaches Ben is saying "but she can't be the daddy 'cos she's a girl an' you can't have two girls being mummy and daddy!" You notice Rita setting up the table and chairs for 'dinner'. There's a girl doll sitting at the table and she's attempting to place another girl doll in a second seat. Ben takes the second doll away and replaces it with a boy doll. Your student watches on.

What do we think is going on here? What attitudes and assumptions are at work? What messages might the players in this situation be receiving? What was happening here that we might want to address and how might we respond? What attitudes and assumptions might be operating through our responses? How might we characterise them? Perpetuating heteronormativity - opposing it? Somewhere other or in between?

Story Three: Your student shares an incident in class that he's unsure of. It seems that at staff meeting your student was at, another teacher in the centre, Jenny, brought up a situation. She'd had a fraught interaction with one of the children's parents, Jed, because she refused to let him look through Abby's (a child at the centre) assessment file. Jed is Abby's dad's boyfriend and Abby lives between households, one week with her mum, and the next with her dad. Jenny's opinion was that Abby's file should only be shared with Jed if Abby's dad is present.

What do we think is going on here? What attitudes and assumptions are at work? What messages might the players in this situation be receiving? What was happening here that we might want to address and how might we respond? What attitudes and assumptions might be operating through our responses? How might we characterise them? Perpetuating heteronormativity - opposing it? Somewhere other or in between?

Story Four: Your student Rose retells this story in class, it has come up in line with a discussion on working in partnership with parents... I was outside with Tom, Jesse and Lucia playing 'going shopping'. The children were all dressed up, handbags, high heels, hats and had just given me, the bus conductor, their tickets to go to town. Tom's dad walked outside and on seeing his boy playing said, "get that off you're not a poof! Tom hurriedly got off the bus and took off the dress ups with his dad looking on. As they turned to go inside, Tom's dad said to me that his son wasn't allowed to do that again.

What do we think is going on here? What attitudes and assumptions are at work? What messages might the players in this situation be receiving? What was happening here that we might want to address and how might we respond? What attitudes and assumptions might be operating through our responses? How might we characterise them? Perpetuating heteronormativity - opposing it? Somewhere other or in between?

Story Five: You're talking with your student after class and she asks your ideas about a situation she experienced at the centre. The student was approached by the publishers of the local pink pages (a queer community resource book that contains information about local queer friendly business and organisations). She took the request to the licensee to see if it would be fine for the centre's details to be published in this year's edition. The licensee was less than happy saying, that the centre's name would not be associated with that sort of thing.

What do we think is going on here? What attitudes and assumptions are at work? What messages might the players in this situation be receiving? What was happening here that we might want to address and how might we respond? What attitudes and assumptions might be operating through our responses? How might we characterise them? Perpetuating heteronormativity - opposing it? Somewhere other or in between?

APPENDIX THREE - STARTING POINTS, FOCUS GROUP TWO

Starting points: focus group two.

Early childhood pedagogy: Social justice and some puzzling queries/queeries.

Contact: Alex Gunn, alex.gunn@++++++.++,

ph. 03 364+++++ extn.++++, fax. 03 364 +++++

Kia ora XXXX

Greetings and salutations.

This letter is to touch base and feedback to you about the first focus group meetings in the project. The three groups met over the four weeks between April XX and April XX. Since then I have transcribed the tapes and met with my Supervisors at Waikato University to talk about the transcripts and the next focus group meetings.

I'm happy to report that we covered a lot of ground in the first round of meetings. We certainly had a lot to say and because of the richness thus far in the data, I have some quite important themes and ideas to share with you now.

Each group contributed a lot to the discussions and the transcripts of our meetings are long. That being said, I decided that I wouldn't send individuals copy's of the full transcripts, this is different to what I had first planned. They are each about 50-60 page documents I didn't want to inundate you with a whole lot of extra reading. I will bring a copy of each group's transcript to the next meeting and if you wish to read the full document then I'll make a copy available to you.

There were several threads of thinking I think, weaving themselves in and around participant groups' discussions. So we can talk about some in our next meetings, I have summarised and collated those that I think really matter to central questions in the research. That is, the questions about heteronormativity and how this phenomena impacts on teachers and teaching. Attached to this letter, you'll find an explanation of each of the threads that are apparent to me, along with them there is an example of text illustrative of the threads I have interpreted. The examples are not from direct quotes but are typical of the type of talk that bought the threads of thinking into focus for me.

Additionally, we did speak at times about teaching practices we thought might send messages about valuing diversity and about practices that might help teachers manage the dilemmas. Sometimes we made suggestions about practice that I think would interrupt heteronormative discourses or homophobia, sometimes we made comments that maintained the status quo or even perpetuated a heteronormative discourse. I have written a little about these ideas too and hope that we can talk more about these next time we meet.

In preparation for our next meeting at XXXpm on Wednesday May XX, I'd appreciate it if you'd have a look through the materials I'm sending you here. I'd like to know what you think. I'd like to know if you think these ideas are credible, do they resonate with you both as a participant in the research and as a teacher?

At our next meeting I will want to have our discussion focus more specifically on a discussion about the materials I am sending you here and on any issues, dilemmas or successes you may bring to share about your work and our queer thinking.

Finally, as you know our last planned meeting is for a full workshop with all participants. I am hoping to hold this meeting on a Saturday (say 9.00 – 1.00), so we have more of a chance of all of us being able to attend. I expect that some of us might have children in tow, and I am hoping to have us meet at a room at the University so there'll be plenty of space for group work, a snack and discussion. Can you have a look in your diary now and see how either of these dates might suit for this gathering: Saturday XX August or Saturday XX August.

Cheers,

Alex

Here are six threads I want to check out with you.

Thread One: Is this really a queer issue? Oh, of course it is, oh, but maybe not...

It seemed like we sometimes wondered if the topics and ideas we were talking about really were related to heteronormativity or queer matters. As a consequence I think we adopted a pattern in our talk that would silenced the issue then bring it back to the fore then silence it again before it became once more, apparent. We said things for instance like,

I don't really think this is an issue about homosexuality, it's really about sexuality in general and New Zealanders discomfort about sex...

and then we'd refocus on perceived homophobia by commenting,

...but hang on, it was really a bad response you know, she really is bringing in her homophobic beliefs here, her bias...

after which we might have changed the focus completely bringing up something else like for instance,

...but you know, if those kids hadn't been allowed behind the shed to play in the first place this would never have happened.

Does this thread resonate with you and your experience as a teacher thinking about sexualities issues? From your participation in the research so far, is it familiar? What do you think this pattern of talk might be about? I wonder how it might support or contravene our desire to teach in a socially just manner. What do you think?

Thread Two: If we had some resources we'd be able to teach queerly.

Quite a prominent thread that I thought was a feeling of a lack of resources for teachers so that they could reflect diverse family structures and identities and therefore teach in a way that celebrated difference and diversity.

I was in a centre in Marlborough where they were absolutely desperate for some books that had children in with same-sex parents, not something like 'so and so has two mummies', but a real story with real characters that just happened to be lesbian or gay.

Where are the posters on the walls? The story books with same-sex parent families in them? What about the policies and enrolment forms that reflect the fact that some children have many mothers and fathers?

This thread was also apparent when we wondered about how teachers could make themselves informed about lesbian and gay perspectives and experiences.

Well it's not like the teachers were really homophobic or anything but they just didn't know how this family worked and they didn't have anywhere to go to find out so it was like I could be a resource for them you know. I used to say to them, "look you can ask me about how my family works" and I think that kind of helped you know.

It's like, teachers and parents want resources to know how to deal with it. It's like something you don't know about, like another culture, like why they wear the clothes they do or have certain festivals and celebrations so you know, books and things like that would really help so they'd know what to do or what to say if it came up.

Is this familiar to you? I wonder what this perceived lack of resources is about. How do you think teachers should or could become informed about sexualities issues? What should or could we be doing in our programmes to reflect difference and diversity in relation to queer families, colleagues, queer experiences of the world?

Thread Three: There's only really a problem as children get older or go off to school.

There were a few stories where we recalled boys who would wear 'feminine' clothing. In some cases these were children who came to the centre dressed like this or who would change clothes once their parents had left them at the centre for the day. There seemed to be two dimensions to the discussions about this thread:

we talked about the idea that families and teachers considered this behaviour to be o.k. because the children were only playing; and

we talked about the idea that children should be allowed to play like this in their early childhood centre but that the behaviour would definitely stop as the children got older and / or went off to school.

Well his mum said to me, "once he turns five he can't wear dresses any more". I said "what are you talking about?" and she said to me "he's just been so lucky here because everyone knows he's playing and exploring, but it's just not acceptable at primary school for him to be like that, he can't wear a dress to school, he'd get beaten up in the playground!"

Well I mean, if it's a five-year-old then they are supposed to have learned by then that there are certain types of clothes that boys don't wear, it really is much more of a problem then because it's like they should know better, whereas if you're younger then you're just playing and it seems like not such a big deal.

At school you see, at least at lunch times and probably other times too, they're more on their own so if a peer is going to get at them then there's not actually the teachers around to actually support the child who might be doing something a little bit different.

What does maintaining the idea 'that boys who dress in 'feminine' clothing are simply engaging in exploration or in play', do for us as teachers and parents? What might some implications of this explanation be? What about the second dimension? Does the idea that this behaviour is more acceptable in an early childhood setting resonate with you? What about the 'age of the child makes a difference' idea? What do you think about this?

Thread Four: It's the individual's problem, the centre isn't really like that.

This thread came up for me when I was reading through our discussions about some of the original scenarios I sent you. There was a story where the teacher found the two boys looking at each others 'willies', one about the licensee, and one about the dad who didn't want his boy to 'grow up as a poof'.

The teacher she was bringing her own values into this, imposing her own biases like when she said 'especially two boys' it should never have been that, it should simply have been, "at preschool you keep your pants up" and that's the end of the story.

I don't know what that Licensee's problem was, I mean if we were asked to have our centre's details listed in the book it'd be like an honour, like we were really sending a message that homophobia isn't o.k. at our place.

That dad, he was, oh yuck, just so homophobic. I would love to be able to stand up to someone like that and say, "hey what's your problem?"

Do you think there was an element of this 'it's the individuals problem' thread in our discussions? How might this individualistic thinking impact on you if you were working with such a person? How do you think it might impact on teachers abilities to make change in a whole early childhood centre?

Thread Five: This is just like...

In all of the groups we talked about similarities between lesbian and gay experiences of oppression or discrimination and experiences of oppression or discrimination in multi-ethnic populations and single parent families. It seemed like we were making links and drawing comparisons with what we already knew or had thought about.

I see real similarities between gays and a Māori person, you know, Māori walk in and around in society and there's nothing Māori, well there's beginnings maybe, but it's just like there's nothing gay out there.

It's like when you have just one mum, or just one dad, you're not really going to not take a liking to a child because they happen to have two mums or two dads.

If we take on the idea that working successfully with sexual diversity is just like working successfully with other diverse families and people then what is stopping us taking real steps towards change here? Do you think it could be to our advantage to approach sexualities matters by drawing in such links and comparisons or might it need to be different when we're talking about sexualities? What do you think?

Thread Six: We don't want to upset anybody / the equilibrium or, staying silent is keeping safe.

For me, this thread seemed to occur in three ways. First, we sometimes spoke about teachers keeping quiet because they don't know how to respond to sexual diversity in the centre, second, we spoke at times about how we can be accepting of queer families and adults as long as they don't make a fuss, and finally we talked about how fear of recrimination keeps us in check and prevents us from standing up to discrimination or oppression in our work.

I don't know what I would have done if I'd been there when that child was correcting the other child's play, saying, "no you can't have two mummies", 'cos I don't know whether its our place to explain lesbians to him, I mean should we really be teaching that? It might open up a whole new can of worms.

Yeah, this whole belonging and accepting thing it's interesting you know because in some places its like "you can come in to our nice, straight, white, middle class centre and we'll accept you as long as we don't have to change and you don't make waves".

But it would be good to just be able to say, "well I think you're coming from a really homophobic place you know, and that's really damaging to your child and to your child's development, and he might grow up to be gay and he might not we just don't know, and by the way, you need to support your child along the way". But, I don't feel that brave.

Does this theme resonate with you? Do you feel familiarity with these ideas about keeping quiet or maintaining silence? What might the impact of maintaining this silence be on our ability to teach in a manner consistent with social justice? What do you think?

Here are some of things we said about how teachers might respond to the situations I sent you. I wonder what you think about these ideas?

Episode One: Playing behind the shed.

The teacher should never have been concerned about the fact that there were two boys she should have just retrieved the children and sent them on the way with the message that “you keep your pants up at preschool”.

I wouldn't give the teacher any credit here, her comment about ‘two boys’ should never have been made.

By offering no judgement about the fact that it was two boys you are not imposing any negativity on the situation, you should just ignore it and redirect them to other play.

Episode 2: “You can't have two mummies”.

I would explain, I'd be saying “in Rita's household there are two mums and that's why Rita's got the girl dolls being the mummy and the ‘daddy’.”

If we just acknowledge that in some households there can be two mummies then we're kind of opening it up for those children to know that family can be done differently. It can be different than a mummy and a daddy, and we're not making a judgement about that at all aye?

I might explain, but if I did I'd be sure to talk to the parents to say “look he was a bit confused about the idea of having a family with two mums in it and we talked about that today”.

I don't think I'd explain because I'm not sure that that's really our role you know, to explain the world to him like that.

Episode Three: Assessment

I would not give out that information to the partner because it's only for the parents or the guardians, it's not our right to decide who the parents might want to share that information with.

I'd be happy to share the information but I'd need to check it out first so I'd say to him, “sure but I'm just going to Abby's dad to make sure it's fine for you to read it”.

Well I guess you could open up who you mean by parent and have like on your enrolment form, a space where it said, who can your child's profile book be shared with?

It almost needs to be that you would only share that information with Abby's dad's partner if Abby's dad is there too, yeah, only if the biological parent is present.

Well I think the profile book is for the child and if this man is Abby's parent then he should be able to read the book with Abby.

Episode Four: The homophobic dad.

I think you should just stay quiet, it's not safe if he's being homophobic to say anything or challenge it.

It depends on the relationship but you could say "hey what's the big deal, he loves handbags and you know he's just been doing this amazing day's shopping, the bags were for carrying their stuff in".

You could say to him, "look there's nothing to worry about, they're just playing"

Episode Five: The pink pages.

Yep I'd push it, I'd argue the case on this one, the licensee doesn't make the decisions about what happens in the centre.

Well you could turn it around and say that it builds the centres reputation in the community you know, it'll show that we're a quality centre and open to diversity.

Finally, there were several times where people had some general comments to make about how they might perceive teachers teaching queerly or being supported to do so. One such example was at the end of a discussion about a 4-year-old boy child who came to the centre each day dressed in frilly pink dresses, high-heels and carrying a handbag.

The teachers in the centre thought that the parents were brave to bring their child to the centre dressed like that and most of the teachers in the centre didn't have a problem with it, but they really loved it when he came to the centre wearing a kilt. This was because the teachers could say to the boy on those days, "we love your kilt, you know, men and boys wear kilts in Scotland"...signposts for teaching in an anti-heteronormative way would be... all the teachers would feel comfortable, none of them would think the parents brave and they would comment positively or not at all whether or not he had on a kilt or a pink dress.

Another example was in a discussion about how teachers might choose to uphold or foreground diversity rather than ignore it when they saw children behave in ways that were oppressive.

When I'm in centres I see children monitoring each other as well and you know teachers, always I see teachers choosing to ignore it. If I were in a situation where teachers were choosing to address it, to confront that heteronormative view, that'd be another signpost.

A final example was where we were discussing how the centre environment, policies and procedures can help or hinder teachers in their work in trying to address broader social justice issues and sexualities matters.

What became clear to me was the way that our policies and a lot of the other things that go on in our centres make gay families invisible, you know we talk about parents but who are they? We only have pictures or posters to show with mum and dad and the kids. We don't have the stories that have gay families in them. If we had these things, then at least the environment might change.

Do these ideas resonate with you? What do you think about them? How might we get to a point where teachers might be able to act in these ways more often than not? What do you think?

APPENDIX FOUR – DOCUMENTS, FOCUS GROUP THREE

Starting points: focus group three.

Early childhood pedagogy: Social justice and some puzzling queries/queeries.

Contact: Alex Gunn, alex.gunn@+++++.++,

ph. 03 364++++ extn.++++, fax. 03 364 +++++

Tēna koe XXXX,

Well, it's getting near to the final focus group meeting associated with the project and I am writing today to update you about this final meeting. I am happy to confirm that we will meet at the University on August XX (Saturday) in room XX of the XX building. The room is on the ground floor, I enclose a map with directions. We agreed that we'd meet from 1.00 - 5.00pm.

XXXX, this is the focus group where all project participants will come together. It is an opportunity for us to collectively strategise and discuss the social justice issues we've been grappling with throughout. As usual, discussions will be audio-taped and there will be several large and small group activities occurring. In these, your views and ideas on concepts emerging from the research will be sought.

I will appreciate you bringing your Participant Journal to this meeting. I'll take the opportunity to copy it while you're here and you'll be able to take it with you once the meeting concludes.

I'm looking forward to seeing you again when we meet in August.

Many regards,

Alex.

Focus Group 3 Plan

1. Introductions

2. Discourse: explanations & definitions: Draft discourse wheels: early childhood education / queer sexualities.

3. Particular discourses can become so prevalent...

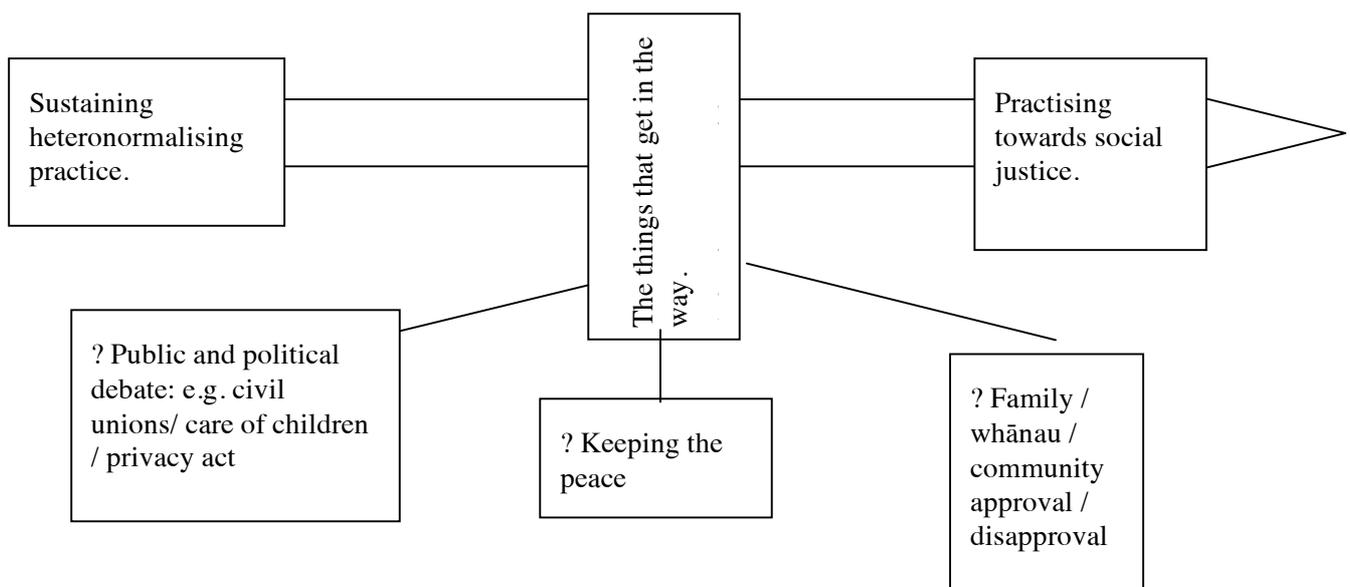
Here are some phenomena that are central to conceptualising / creating / maintaining the early childhood teacher.

<normalising discourse wheels: genders, families (parents) sexuality (related to childhood)>

4. Feedback and ask how the heteronormative conceptualisations of these phenomena help or hinder teachers in their work towards the T.W aspiration which speaks to socially just practice.

5. Participants to go back into their groups and to imagine what types of discourse wheels might be needed if teachers were to take up practices that interrupted the (hetero)norm. Every time in the process that they find themselves saying 'but this wouldn't work because'... participants are to write a 'but' note and a corresponding 'so' note.

6. Continuum: Participants to place their new discourse wheels on the continuum.



What types of messages to we as teachers hold onto that helps to keep our practice in check? Examples?

So: how to counteract these?

7. Conclude the group. Talk about timeline. ? Community of practice group / ongoing feedback from the project etc.

APPENDIX FIVE - A CHRONOLOGY OF A FOCUS GROUP MEETING

-
1. (FG1: QT) Salutory beginnings.
 2. Drawing attention to the scenarios – what attitudes and assumptions are underpinning these practices?
 3. I'm lucky, I haven't experienced these sorts of things
 4. I've written in my journal
 - Scenario of a boy trying to stop 2 girls getting married and a girl child's defence of that possibility and the inclusion of the boy in a supporting wedding role
 - I talked to the girls mother who knew I was gay – they were so honest with their children
 - It's the only thing in 6 years that I can really think of as having happened.
 - Those children must have had incredibly different life experiences
 5. Magnet board Goldilocks story
 - I'm happy for you to use my family as an example of difference so that it is made real for children
 6. I thought it would be a real drag having to deal with those scenarios
-
7. I haven't actually worked in a place where someone has been that blatantly homophobic although I can imagine it happening (L.53) 7. I came out to a parent last year – I always think you know, how much am I going to tell? She was really affirming. I work where other lesbians have worked before so the teachers are aware and they've done study and PD and taken steps to get some queer visibility into the centre
 8. Shouldn't people coming through teacher education nowadays be a bit more aware?
 9. I had a queer family who didn't settle until I took responsibility for the caregiving of their infant. It was very affirming for the family
 - The other teachers weren't doing anything wrong, they just didn't know how the family worked (L.70)
 10. I talked at a professional development course and teachers were really eager for information and resources
 - Teachers need information as well as families. I'm always being asked lots of questions by teachers who are in non-lesbian situations
 - We gave some literature to our child's teacher because she was a bit miffed or something (L.82)
 11. Joke
 12. Resources seem to be sought after but how will that make a difference?
 - It's just like a place to get some information maybe
 - It's like doing cultural differences research
 - Like – what do you say if it comes up?
 - Teachers need a starting point – somewhere to begin the discussions from. A resource would do that
 - Would a public domain resource give people permission to have these discussions?
 - It gives confidence not permission so much – it's like Te Reo
 - I've dreamed about writing quality literature that has queer characters, New Zealand characters
 - Teachers' resources from Australia
 - Convention buzz – let's do something
 - In Canada 6-8 yrs ago there were plenty of resources
 - We need resources that have queer families as ordinary families (L.153). We don't want it shoved in peoples' faces
 13. A book that happens to have queer characters is key
 - The children's bookstore
 - We don't get demand for these things (L.172)
 - Teachers' idea to get all their colleagues to ring and request books
 14. E.C teachers if given a chance can be very active
 - So do queer families have some work to do there then? (L.186)

15. As a queer parent I do it every day – starting a new job and deciding to come out or not.
16. Incident at work where a new colleague assumed heterosexuality and the teacher put her straight ... 'she wouldn't have picked me' (L.213)
17. My coming out has impacts on the way some colleagues approach new families and relationships – they are more aware and inclusive
18. It's really hard if a parent asks, do you have a boyfriend? For me, I think we no I haven't, do I just say no? I'm still being honest – or do you tell them and stress them out?
 - Are you prepared to deal with their reactions?
19. One parent out of hundreds has ever asked me if I had a boyfriend or a girlfriend – it was significant
20. It seems as though we're continually facing this coming out question – could it ever be different do you think?
 - Not in our lifetime
21. Because it's not normal, people ask lots of intrusive questions about how the family works
 - Or what you do?
 - That's why we need to demystify it
 - "Oh, did you want to know about my sex life?"
 - Corner a lesbian and ask
22. This research will make a difference because we can be more out, safer and ordinary (L.307)
23. I want to stop having to self monitor my speech, relationships etc. (L.307)
 - You get good at judging people (L.311) – when I first meet someone it's the first thing I wonder – are they queer friendly? (L.316). I shouldn't have to think that, but every day an opportunity to come out presents itself
24. (FG1.1: QT) Every day you keep a part of yourself hidden
 - It can cause a rift because my workmates can talk so freely about themselves (L.13)
25. How could our e.c. worlds change to free us up?
 - We need allies, advocates to get alongside us
26. How do people know you're queer friendly?
 - It's how you portray yourself – either open or not (L.40)
27. Parent's story of a teacher who confuses all the lesbians in the school (L.64)
28. Do sexualities matters, matter in e.c.?
 - Yes, it's an issue
 - There is a fear around anything sexual and young children
29. Gender diversity scenario
 - More pressure to conform to gender roles happens as you get older e.g., e.c. and primary settings, 4-10 yrs
 - How come early childhood teachers can be accepting and primary teachers less so?
 - I think it's bigger than the teachers – it's related to society and peer culture
 - In schools children are more at risk – there's less teacher involvement and more peer variables
30. There's a big difference in how people perceive early childhood and primary education
 - Early childhood children need to play / school is more structured and serious
 - In school you're learning now
 - No – it's different learning – at school you're not learning about and celebrating individuals, you're driven by other outcomes, expectations and timeframes.
 - What about this idea of 'growing out of it'?
31. Tom's dad (episode four)
 - It's just play response
 - It's different at school and as you get older
 - Your response would be contingent on your relationship with the dad – what's the big deal? – divert the attention to the play and away from the homophobia (L.188)
 - Adults' connotations can put totally other messages into situations
 - It would be good to be able to say 'you're being homophobic'
 - "are you worried about him being gay?"
 - "Yeah, he might grow up to be gay, he might not, we don't know this and anyway, you need to support your child"

- When I listen to this – we’re really a long way from it aren’t we? I don’t feel that brave
 - I feel less inclined to be able to say that than say a straight teacher
32. Internal homophobia
- Some people would accuse you of pushing a particular agenda (L.245)
 - I would be fearful that a dad like Tom’s would turn on me
 - I’ve been more up front with students at confronting this than with families in centres
 - Teacher vulnerability, especially where your job might be compromised
 - Community responses to queer teachers could be catastrophic to a centre
 - Letter writing
 - Removal of children
 - I’ve been out at work with staff because I don’t want my status as a lesbian to “turn around and bite me on the ass” (L.289)
 - Your ‘outness’ can sent a message about intolerance – we won’t tolerate discrimination here
33. How does this discussion compare with the others?
34. How could it be so that sexual diversity and difference was recognised as being of value to how we could be together?
35. I think there are lots of lesbians working in early childhood education but it’s still not easy to talk about
36. Kids would ask me “are you a man?” – a good way to talk about stuff that’s different
37. Gender markers: hair, hairy legs, boots, big watches
38. Hair length and cultural differences
39. What has bought you to the project?
- My supervisor handed me the stuff and said I should come
 - (FG1.2, QT) I have more of an issue being left handed than I do with being gay
 - I was very sceptical of this project but now I’m glad I came – because I thought it was going to be really intense, but it’s really relaxed
 - It has been quite cleansing – to get some of this stuff down and out
 - I just thought it looked interesting and offered a chance to come and chat a bit
 - I am political and I was stoked that this research was happening and I thought well I’ll definitely have something to say
 - We’ll I’m the kind of person who always ways yes but I was also thinking it would be good to meet other lesbians
 - I agreed to do it because I respect you and your brain and I knew you’d do a good job and because of all the things we’ve been talking about. It is hard for us, we do feel vulnerable at times and the great job we do will be recognised in this research. We can feel good about being lesbian teachers.
40. Journal
41. The ‘pick me’ seminar
42. The pleasure of meeting as a group of lesbians