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Whānau Stories:
**Creating meaningful engagement and wellbeing for the
indigenous culture of Aotearoa New Zealand**

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
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of

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Abstract

This research sees my interests coalesce into a particular focus on how collaborative partnerships with parents/caregivers can provide whānau Māori with opportunities to strengthen wellbeing in their own lives. It is located in Aotearoa New Zealand and within the context of Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996), Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum. The Ministry of Education has a target that 98% of all children in Aotearoa New Zealand under 5 will attend an early childhood education setting (Ministry of Education, 2016), with Māori children having lower participation rates than the national participation rate (Ministry of Education, 2013). The premise for this thesis is that meaningful whānau engagement in early learning contexts within Aotearoa New Zealand can empower whānau Māori, and honour the promises made in Te Tiriti o Waitangi of partnership, participation, and protection.

Therefore, this thesis sets out to examine what constitutes meaningful engagement for whānau Māori in an early childhood setting in Aotearoa New Zealand, and how meaningful engagement can assist whānau to enjoy an increase of wellbeing.

To explore this issue, I conducted research within an early childhood setting in Aotearoa New Zealand, using methodologies of Kaupapa Māori Research and Narrative Inquiry. I listened to the narratives of whānau Māori indicating how meaningful engagement was created for them, and investigated if links were generated between engagement and wellbeing for their whānau. These links were identified in the literature as significant levers for educational success.

This research discovered three stages of engagement for the whānau Māori who participated in this study: establishing engagement, developing engagement and solidifying engagement. Once created, meaningful engagement can lead to flourishing, indicating that there is relationship between meaningful engagement and whānau wellbeing.

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Writing this thesis has been similar to when I climbed the Pinnacles in the Coromandel ranges when I was a teenager: it was the hardest thing I had ever done, I wanted to quit at times, I cried, I even sat down and refused to go any further. But I got up and kept going, and once I made it to the top of that summit, it was the best view of my life.

My parents encouraged me to go on that hike, and they have also encouraged me every step of the way on this thesis journey. Mum and Dad - thank you for encouraging me to dream. Growing up, money was scarce, but dreams were not. Dreams were created as I climbed to the top of our tree in the front lawn, and gazed over the city lights. Dreams were fuelled by campfires at Raglan beach, as we played by the light of the setting sun. Dreams were stoked as I rolled down the leaf-covered hill, by the Waikato River's edge. I will never be able to express my true gratitude to you both, but I can start by dedicating this thesis to you. Mum, thank you for coming down to help me finish this thesis. I love you both.

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Glossary

The terms found in this glossary can be extremely complex in themselves, but for the purpose of this thesis, this glossary has been kept concise.

Ako: Teach/ learn

Ākonga: student

Aotearoa: New Zealand

Awahi: Love, embrace, cherish

Kaiako: Teacher

Kaupapa Māori Research: A research methodology, informed by Māori culture and values

Kaupapa: Topic, purpose

Kōrero: To talk, speak

Mana Whenua: Belonging

Māori: The indigenous culture of New Zealand

Mātauranga: Knowledge, Education, realms of knowing

Pākehā: Everyone who is non-Māori

Tamaiti: Child

Tamariki: Children

Taonga: treasure, valued, not limited to physical objects

Te ao Māori: The Māori world

Te reo Māori: The Māori language

Te Tiriti o Waitangi: The Treaty of Waitangi; New Zealand's founding document

Tikanga: Customs, correct procedures, practice

Tino rangatiratanga: Self-determination, autonomy

Whakamā: Ashamed, shy, embarrassed

Whakapapa: Layer, genealogy

Whakawhanaungatanga: Relationship building

Whānau Tangata: Family and community

Whānau: A holistic concept of family that extends beyond the immediate family

Whanaungatanga: Relationships

Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis examines how meaningful engagement can be created for *whānau Māori* within an Aotearoa New Zealand¹ early childhood setting, and the potential there is for meaningful engagement to create wellbeing for the indigenous culture of Aotearoa New Zealand. This research was made possible through the gift of receiving *taonga*, in the form of narratives from people who identified as *Māori* and were parents, caregivers or *whānau* of children currently attending an early childhood setting in Aotearoa New Zealand. This thesis will argue that it is essential to firstly understand the historical grievances that have occurred in the education arena and that continue to be felt and experienced by some *Māori*. It is also asserted that the promises made under *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* to *Māori* can be upheld through creating authentic and genuine partnerships between early childhood educators and *whānau Māori*.

To begin this introduction, I shall share some of my own stories to give a greater understanding of how my own philosophies on *whānau* engagement were initially formed. These stories led me to research the field of engagement in greater depth. I am of *Māori* ancestry, and stories are of great importance to myself and my culture (Careers New Zealand, 2017). My narratives have framed the approach that I took for this thesis, coupling *Kaupapa Māori* Research methodology with Narrative Inquiry methodology to listen to the voice of some *whānau Māori*.

1.1 Locating the thesis in my story

My philosophies on engagement began to form as a young child, and embedded within my stories (Cruse, 2015) are examples of both positive and negative engagement). I vividly remember being an excited three year old, starting my first day at kindergarten. I had never left my mother before, but my kindergarten teacher was right beside me throughout my

¹ Aotearoa New Zealand is the name for the country of New Zealand that will be used throughout this thesis, recognising both the *Māori* and *Pākehā* names for the country.

entire early childhood education. Some of my favourite early childhood memories were sitting next to her as I did marble paintings, feeling like the most important person in the world.

My teacher also included my entire whānau in my kindergarten journey. She had a relationship of trust with my mother especially; I remember them talking together a lot, and I remember beaming with pride on our dress up evening when my whānau came to my kindergarten and I was able to show them around.

As an educator, terms such as “building responsive and reciprocal relationships”, “forming collaborative partnerships”, and “creating meaningful engagement with whānau and community” spring to mind when reflecting on my experiences of early childhood education, but as a three year old, I simply called this “being nice”. Whatever it was called, it led to my own positive engagement with education and has formed the basis of this investigation.

Fast forward years later and I had my own infant and toddler. I was a young mum, living in a new community and I had spent that morning crying. I felt lonely and isolated and I was not sure what to do. And then my supervisor from Playcentre turned up on my doorstep. I had stopped going to Playcentre, struggling with the adjustment of having a toddler and a newborn. But despite my dis-engagement from Playcentre, she turned up, “just popping in to say hi and to drop off some paintings”. When she appeared, I felt like she was my miracle. I returned to Playcentre and became actively engaged in the centre and it was the best thing for myself and my boys. They got to experience quality early childhood education and I got out of the house.

It was also through Playcentre that I discovered my love for early childhood education, and later went on to train as an early childhood teacher. Playcentre became our second home, where I developed some of my closest friendships and created a support network for myself and my children, a network that I still am a part of to this day.

Whilst I have been fortunate to have had inspirational teachers throughout mine and my children's lives, I have also experienced hurt as a result of lack of meaningful engagement as well, as illustrated by a story I will share from my own parenting years, from the day of my middle son's seventh birthday.

Excitedly, I had made cupcakes for my son and his classmates. That morning I took the cupcakes over to their classroom. I walked in and noticed the District Health Nurse in the classroom. She did not know me, but I was aware of who she was. I had heard her speak at public hui about engagement. "But why won't they engage?" she had lamented. She instantly looked at my chocolate iced cupcakes and then looked at me with a look of judgement. My son was beaming with excitement as he and his best friend handed the cupcakes out. They offered one to her as well. She replied with an abrupt "no, I don't eat that. There's too much sugar in there". She was looking at me when she said it; that message was for me. She could have just said, "no, thanks", but instead, she decided to use that moment as a teaching moment to share her message of health to the young mum, wearing paint-covered jeans.

Through this negative engagement I felt I had been immediately cast within a predictable and damning cultural and economic deficit, as a young, single, low income, Māori mum who needed advice on health and nutrition. I am what one might classify as the 'target population'² for health promotion, and social and educational intervention. Millions of taxpayer dollars have been spent, trying to engage the stereotypical 'me'. So, I challenge the public health nurse or educator who laments; "but why won't they engage?" to re-word that question and ask "why am I making it so hard for others to engage with me?".

² Relative to the Pākehā population, the Māori population "have lower incomes, higher rates of unemployment, poorer educational and health outcomes, a greater likelihood of living in rental accommodation, and proportionately more convictions for criminal offences (Parliamentary Library, 2000).

1.2 Orienting the thesis: Engagement in early childhood education

My orienting focus for this thesis is grounded in my own narrative and my querying if meaningful whānau engagement can create wellbeing. To define wellbeing, this thesis draws upon Māori models of health that focus on the holistic nature of human beings. As I have examined the notion of engagement, I have come to appreciate the relationship between engagement and its potential to improve wellbeing for young children, families and communities. This understanding is based on the premise that as meaningful engagement occurs, relationships between educators and family are developed and, as a consequence, wellbeing can be strengthened.

This orientation influenced my decision to focus this study on the whānau, rather than on the child alone, as Māori models of health view health in the context of family and community. This contrasts with mainstream models, such as that used by the World Health Organization (1946), which focuses on the individual.

Early childhood centres can play an important part in engaging families (Sumsion & Wong, 2011). Educators provide the setting for relationships to be developed between the families at the centre, between teachers and families and, of course, children; therefore increasing a family's support network and sense of belonging (Sumsion & Wong, 2011).

1.3 Family engagement as a priority

Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996) is New Zealand's early childhood curriculum. One of its five learning and development principles is: *Whānau Tangata*, with this principle recognising that the wellbeing of a child is interdependent with the wellbeing of adults in close proximity to the child. *Te Whāriki* also encourages *Mana Whenua*, where whānau know that they belong and have a place.

The New Zealand Curriculum for English-medium Teaching and Learning in Years 1-13 (Ministry of Education, 2007) also prioritises connecting with students wider lives, and engaging families, whānau and communities.

Both of these curriculum documents emphasise family engagement as being of high importance in education within Aotearoa New Zealand.

1.4 Whānau Māori engagement as a priority

Te Tiriti o Waitangi established the relationship between Māori and the British Crown and is Aotearoa New Zealand's founding document (New Zealand History, 2016). One of the articles in this document promises Māori the right to govern things that are taonga to them, which includes *mātauranga*. This guarantees Māori the right to govern over their own educational pathways. In Aotearoa New Zealand's education system, this promise can be respected through the creation of culturally responsive partnerships. The Education Review Office (2012) outlines that culturally responsive partnerships occur when both managers and educators listen to whānau Māori and respond to their aspirations. Key documents in Aotearoa New Zealand include: *Ka Hikitia – Accelerating Success 2013 – 2017* (Ministry of Education, 2013) which is a strategy to “guide action to make a significant difference for Māori students in education” (p. 6), *Te Whatu Pōkeka* (Ministry of Education, 2009), a Kaupapa Māori assessment for learning document that places the child and their whānau at the centre of assessment methods; *Tātaiako* (Ministry of Education, 2011), a document that focuses on cultural competencies for teachers of Māori learners, that recognises the importance of *whanaungatanga* for Māori students; and *Te Kotahitanga* (Ministry of Education, 2017) a Kaupapa Māori research and development project that strives to lift educational achievement for Māori in mainstream secondary schools. The Te Kotahitanga programme highlighted that *ākonga* Māori were under-achieving in secondary schools, compared to non-Māori students, and that relationships between students and teachers were the key to improving Māori children's success.

All four documents emphasise the importance of relationships to the indigenous culture of Aotearoa New Zealand, which is the foundation of *Te Ao Māori* (Pere, 1988). However, what was not evident in the Ministry of Education literature was how whānau Māori perceive their relationships

with early childhood education centres and teachers, or how experiences of engagement and dis-engagement with staff and services influence whānau wellbeing.

1.5 Research questions

With this in mind, this thesis aims to investigate the following research questions:

1. What does meaningful engagement look like for whānau Māori attending an early childhood setting in Aotearoa New Zealand?
2. What is the potential for meaningful engagement in early childhood education to strengthen wellbeing for the indigenous culture of Aotearoa New Zealand?

1.6 Research position

During my studies towards the Graduate Diploma of Teaching at the University of Waikato, I discovered that parental involvement in their children's education is beneficial for children (Fraser, 2005; Mitchell, Wylie, & Carr, 2008). This piqued my interest as I aimed to further understand if meaningful engagement with families could create positive social change for children, families and communities alike. The current literature on the topic of family engagement is helpful and will be explored in the following chapter, but I also needed to address my own local and indigenous interpretations of meaningful engagement for whānau Māori in an early childhood setting. Hence my empirical encounter with whānau engagement within an early childhood education context from a kaupapa Māori perspective.

1.7 Outline of this thesis

To answer the research questions, this thesis is presented as follows: **Chapter 2** synthesises the literature on family engagement on international, national and indigenous levels. Colonisation and the effect it has had on engagement for whānau Māori in education is explored,

concluding with a focus on wellbeing from both western and indigenous points of view. This interrogation is necessary in order to build the claim that engagement in educational services can be 'risky business' for many Māori today. **Chapter 3** outlines the research methodologies and methods employed in this thesis, which were located within a Kaupapa Māori Research methodology and influenced by a Narrative Inquiry methodology that used semi-structured interviews as the method of data collection. I employed a Kaupapa Māori Research methodology to provide self-determination for both myself and my research participants, and a Narrative Inquiry methodology to honour the stories found within the data as taonga. **Chapter 4** identifies the findings of this research, which highlight how meaningful engagement was created for the participants who shared their experiences with me. **Chapter 5** concludes the thesis with addressing limitations of this research and implications of these findings.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter explores the literature that orients the significance of family engagement in early childhood education and its central relevance to the strengthening of wellbeing for whānau Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand. The central question guiding this exploration is whether meaningful engagement between whānau Māori and early childhood teachers can lead to an increase in wellbeing for whānau Māori, on both a micro and macro level.

In this context, I explore definitions of meaningful family engagement both internationally and within Aotearoa New Zealand. I look at definitions of relationships, partnerships and culturally responsive partnerships. I also highlight specific strategies used to create meaningful engagement for whānau Māori.

The historical consequences of colonisation that has resulted in the current state of non-meaningful engagement will be examined. Current policies and educational curriculums employed to mitigate against these historical effects are also discussed, to understand if these policies are successfully creating meaningful engagement for whānau Māori.

To understand if a relationship exists between engagement and wellbeing, the theory of wellbeing will be examined from both a western and an indigenous point of view. The chapter culminates in highlighting the weighty evidence-base that foregrounds the importance of positive engagement between the early childhood education sector and whānau Māori as a key lever in strengthening their wellbeing. In so doing, the chapter sets the scene for the investigation of whānau engagement in an early childhood education context that forms the heart of this thesis.

2.1 Defining family engagement

There is no consistent definition of family engagement, as both of these terms can be problematic. Bull (2009) notes that engagement has

numerous terms, including “parent involvement/ engagement/ participation/ partnerships” (p. 1) and Daniel (2009) observes that home-school partnerships is also another term used for family engagement. Constantino (2003) defines family engagement as “the interaction between schools and families and the degree to which families are involved in the educational lives of their children” (p. 5). Similarly, Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) describe parental engagement as involving learning at home, school-home and home-school communication, in school-activities, sharing of power and collaborating with the community, and The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2012) propose engagement is when parents and staff work together to support children’s learning, development and health. The idea that communication and partnerships are important in family engagement is also supported by Emerson, Fear, Fox, and Sanders (2012) who define parental engagement as “partnerships between families, schools and communities, raising parental awareness of the benefits of engagement in their children’s education, and providing them with the skills to do so” (p. 7). Smith, Kuzin, De Pedro, and Wohlstetter (2009) also concur that communication is a vital component of partnership, with the development of their seven family engagement principles to create parental engagement: be prepared, be respectful, be specific, be strategic, be flexible, be creative, be collaborative.

A specific definition of family engagement in the early childhood education context has been developed by Halgunseth (2009), based on definitions of family engagement developed by Henderson and Berla (1994), Epstein (2001) and Weiss, Caspe, and Lopez (2006). He identified five characteristics of engagement between families and early childhood education programmes. These are: families act as advocates for their children as they actively take part in decision making opportunities; two-way communication is facilitated; there is a collaboration and exchange of knowledge; there is an emphasis on creating learning activities at home and in the community; and families create a home environment that values learning. These definitions emphasise the importance of advocacy,

communication, and family knowledge and shared power, which are likely to be important considerations for teachers working with whānau Māori.

2.2 Defining further terms

With this definition of engagement in mind, relationships, partnerships and culturally responsive partnerships will be further explored and defined. From the outset, these terms can look deceptively similar, but on further exploration, it is apparent that these terms are extremely distinctive in nature.

2.2.1 Relationships

For whānau Māori, relationships are the foundation to partnerships. In research conducted by Ritchie and Rau (2005), a participant commented that respecting of people is central to her teaching philosophy: “to me it’s about, people are the most important things, not the material things around us. And if we are kind and respectful of all people then everything else just falls into place” (p. 5). Another teacher observed: “I’ve learnt a lot from our whānau, and just making myself slow down” (p. 6). In these examples, *ako* is evident, a concept that is grounded in reciprocity, where the teacher is also learning from the student (Ministry of Education, 2009). *Ako* recognises the learner and the family as being inseparable (Ministry of Education, 2009) and this affirms that the building of relationships with whānau is an important and substantial part of a child’s learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Whānau Māori would agree with this, as the *tamaiti* is central to te ao Māori.

Ways to create these relationships come from a place of *awhi*. In their research, Ritchie and Rau (2006)’s participants stated: “I am not in agreement with non-teaching staff making the first contact... It is not very welcoming to have a form thrust into your hand and being told to fill it in. It can be very intimidating” (p. 13), and “[teachers] saying ‘we can’t see your child till quarter to nine... we don’t open...’” (p. 13). Both of these comments note the need for a warm welcoming and having open doors (Ritchie & Rau, 2005); both literally and figuratively. Informal ways to

achieve this are frequently mentioned throughout the research (Ritchie & Rau, 2005; Ritchie & Rau, 2006, 2008), such as having a kitchen available or offering to make drinks for whānau members, although this commitment needs to be supported through having adequate staffing ratios, for example “if you’ve got quality in the centre where you’ve got enough staffing... you can actually take that time to sit down and talk with you parents and tell them what you’re doing in the programme” (Ritchie & Rau, 2006, p. 13). This literature demonstrates that taking time to *kōrero* and to be together is a way of fostering relationships.

In a sociocultural examination of ways to create affordance networks for engagement, Clarkin-Phillips and Carr (2009) discussed ‘gateways’ for parents’ engagement and children’s learning, that assisted in building relationships with parents for further engagement in their child’s learning. Gateways included establishing a playgroup at a local kindergarten that parents and younger children attended, whānau becoming involved in the assessment process and having their voice feature more throughout their children’s learning stories, and children taking home a digital camera over the weekend to take photos of their toy mascot in their home environment, thus building links between home and centre. All of these gateways can lead to whānau participation and parents and whānau taking on leadership roles. This is *whakawhanaungatanga*; the building of relationships.

The Education Review Office (2012) also expressed that respectful relationships are crucial to becoming more responsive to whānau aspirations and expectations. Clarkin-Phillips and Carr (2009) emphasised the importance of having responsive and reciprocal relationships as the foundation for empowering and supporting parents. This literature highlights authentic relationships with whānau Māori as the foundation to creating successful and robust partnerships.

2.2.2 Partnership

Lumb (2007) revealed that whilst participation and involvement are words often used to describe relationships with families, these words can also suggest that the services are giving the opportunity to families to be

involved, whilst still omitting to share power in the decision-making process. Therefore the word partnership was suggested, as this is more indicative of a two-way relationship involving collaboration, respect and equality. The Children's Commissioner advocated that "any strategy to engage parents and whānau in their children's learning would need to treat them as partners, and should be designed and delivered in collaboration with them" (Children's Commissioner, 2013, p. 5). Similarly, Stonehouse (2012) observed there was a difference between family involvement and partnerships, with the primary difference being around who has the power and authority, with partnerships being described as having a say in their child's experience. It was further observed that it is possible for a family to be very involved and have no partnership with their children's educators or to not be involved in the service, but still have a robust relationship with the educators. Thus, "partnerships focus directly on the shared aim of supporting children's learning" (Stonehouse, 2012, p. 2).

For whānau Māori, partnerships are enabled when their voice in the programme is sought after, valued, respected and appreciated (Education Review Office, 2012). However, the Education Review Office further observed that chats over cups of tea and "catching up with whānau" (Education Review Office, 2012, p. 1) are not partnerships. The Education Review Office distinguished between relationships and partnerships, and observed that while 78% of early childhood services had positive relationships with whānau Māori, only 10% of early childhood services had effective and culturally responsive partnerships with whānau Māori. Therefore, this point emphasised the goal for early childhood educators should be to turn these relationships into effective and culturally responsive partnerships.

In the early childhood sector, Gonzalez-Mena and Widmeyer Eyer (2004) recognised that partnership with families occur when both parents and teachers are acknowledged as having the knowledge and expertise needed for the best education for each child. *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (ELYF;

Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009) observed that in genuine partnerships, families and early childhood educators value each other's knowledge and contributions, and there is a relationship of trust enabling them to communicate freely and respectfully, share insights and perspectives, and make decisions collaboratively. As educators protect whānau Māori's right to participate in their taonga of educating their *tamariki* and promote genuine partnerships, they are honouring promises made under the Treaty of Waitangi (Glynn, 1998).

2.2.3 Culturally responsive partnerships

According to the Education Review Office's report *Partnership with Whānau Māori in Early Childhood Services* (Education Review Office, 2012), culturally responsive partnership is evident when both educators and managers:

- listen to whānau Māori and respond appropriately to their aspirations
- recognise and respect the diverse and unique perspectives of whānau Māori
- involve whānau Māori in all aspects of management, programme planning, implementation and evaluation
- recognise that Māori culture is an advantage for children and their whānau
- use the knowledge of Māori children and whānau to develop rich learning
- appreciate that New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* is a document based upon the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and partnership with whānau
- use the skills and expertise that whānau Māori bring to the service. (p. 1)

In her research, Gonzalez-Mena (2002) discussed cross cultural miscommunications that can occur. As foregrounded within *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), early childhood educators can remedy this

through creating a sense of Mana Whenua. When whānau feel that they truly belong at an early childhood centre, this can help them to feel less *whakamā* and a greater sense of belonging.

2.3 Families recognised as experts about their own children

González & Moll (2002)'s research demonstrated how teachers created bridges between school and home environments that drew on the family's fund of knowledge. In research conducted by Cruse (2014) with families in a early childhood setting in Aotearoa New Zealand, a parent discussed how they felt that their career before children did not have any benefits for their current role as a parent. This idea was further discussed and the parent realised the positive influence of their own funds of knowledge in their family.

2.4 Strategies and resources to create meaningful engagement

One of the key components of the literature is the need for families to feel welcomed and respected, to feel that they belong to a learning community and that they are also empowered in their child's experience (Stonehouse, 2012). Smith et al. (2009) also found that making family members feel welcome fostered participation far more successfully than any specific activity.

As demonstrated throughout this literature, for engagement to be effective there are significant structural and dynamic support systems and networks that are needed to make it possible. Much of the literature that focuses on these support systems is lodged within primary school contexts, but can still be relevant to an early childhood context.

2.4.1 Staff

Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) stated that a whole school approach regarding parental engagement is required and that staff should receive training to enable them to engage effectively with parents, especially when working with parents from different backgrounds to their own. Indeed, staff are paramount to the success of engagement implementation, as

highlighted in research conducted by Emerson et al. (2012) where “the single most important factor was found to be the enthusiasm of the head-teacher” (p. 24), and Clarkin-Phillips (2016) observed the enhancing of cultural capital that occurred through staff members who had existing links with the community. Staff members can also assist family members who may have had negative schooling experiences themselves (Smith, et al., 2009). Cacciopoppi & Cullen, (2006) and Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa (2014) observed that many whānau Māori have had negative schooling experiences that has resulted in lack of engagement, *te reo Māori* and *tikanga* not been valued, and identity and culture not reflected in the curriculum. Staff can help these whānau to experience positive educational experiences.

2.5 Information and communication technology

Information and communication technology can also contribute to an increase in parental engagement with their children’s learning (Daniel, 2009). The Ministry of Education (2017) also observed that digital technologies could assist to form stronger connections with parents, families and whānau, such as through the use of social networks, websites and online surveys.

2.5.1 Space

MacNaughton (2004) noted that the physical space can make families feel unwelcome and the lack of space to talk privately left some parents feeling disrespected. In MacNaughton’s Australian-based empirical research (2004) one teacher called out across the centre and in front of other parents, to discuss a sensitive issue with a parent, which left that parent feeling embarrassed. This sense of embarrassment may be heightened for whānau Māori due to not wanting to be singled out (Sachdev, 1990; Lock and Strong, 2012; Metge, 1985).

2.6 Evidence of engagement

While engagement has been clearly identified as a central issue for whānau in the Aotearoa New Zealand education context, the literature is less clear on how it might be evidenced. While there have been recent reports by the Ministry of Education concerning engagement, including Mitchell, Meagher-Lunderg, Arndt, & Kara (2016)'s recent report evaluating how a Participation Programme addressed barriers to participation in early childhood education, it can be hard to know how a family is actually engaging with their child's education provider. According to the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (2013) in an international study of student engagement in schools, the development of more reliable measures of engagement may mitigate against this problem. Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) examined student engagement and observed that engagement is defined in three ways: i) behavioural engagement, which refers to participating in activities; ii) emotional engagement, which refers to relationships and how these impact on willingness to participate; and iii) cognitive engagement, which is the most difficult to measure, as this is based on the thoughtfulness and willingness to exert an extra effort. Achieving a level of cognitive engagement where the participant willingly engages and exerts extra effort to produce positive outcomes is the level of engagement required for engagement to be genuinely meaningful, according to this view.

The extent to which such international measures of engagement can be attributed to the indigenous experience in Aotearoa New Zealand is described by several indigenous writers as dubious at best, with Mika, (2012) and Cacciopoppoli & Cullen, (2006) both arguing against Western views that orient Māori experience in education.

2.7 Colonisation and the impact on education

To understand the experience of engagement for whānau Māori within Aotearoa New Zealand education, and to determine a means of understanding its significance, an indigenous view is summoned. A central orientation to this perspective is Te Tiriti o Waitangi as a

foundational document for engagement with Māori, and an awareness of its aftermath in Aotearoa New Zealand's native schooling.

2.7.1 The Treaty of Waitangi

In 1840, Te Tiriti o Waitangi was signed between the British Crown and Māori signatories (Ritchie & Rau, 2003), allowing “for settlement of the British under the jurisdiction of British governance in exchange for guaranteeing to Māori the protection of their land, resources, rights, belief systems and self-determination” (Colbung, Glover, Rau, & Ritchie, 2007, p. 145).

Gracey and King (2009) and The Waitangi Tribunal (1991; as cited in Reid et al., 2016) observed that the loss of traditional lands for Māori has resulted in intergenerational poverty, unemployment and dependence on social welfare, but the effects go far beyond economic marginalisation. Such mass traumatic events have caused chronic and acute collective psychological suffering for Indigenous peoples (Atkinson, 2002; Brave Heart, 2003; Duran and Duran, 1995; Evans- Campbell, 2008; Walters, Beltran, Huh & Evans-Campbell, 2011; as cited in Reid et al., 2016).

The second Article of the treaty guaranteed Māori protection over their taonga and *tino rangatiratanga* (Carr, 1993) which refers to the self-determination to sustain their own wellbeing and resources (Ritchie & Rau, 2003) with education being considered as taonga. These promises have been repeatedly breached since the signing of the treaty (Pocock, 2001). This breaching has occurred in most facets of life, including in the arena of education (Carr, 1993; Glynn, 1998).

Pre-colonisation, Māori had their own unique identity (Hemi, 2007). As Hemi explained, Māori enjoyed independence alongside their unique language, customs and protocols, and land that was owned by the tribe and used for the welfare of all. As Jackson (1987) observed, “Maoridom was something to be proud of, very disciplined people, and they had purpose... now make a comparison with the Māori of today where we are dispersed and depressed and you will understand what has happened” (p.

15). The link between cultural identity and wellbeing is observed by Reid, Varona, Fisher, and Smith (2016), with the loss of culture having the ability to cause a grief reaction (Bhugra & Becker, 2005).

2.7.2 Native Schools

The Native Schools Act of 1867 established a national system of village primary schools where the priority of the schools was to teach the English language (Calman, 2015). As time progressed, use of the Māori language was prohibited with many Māori children being punished for speaking their native language (Calman, 2015). Native schools had “the quest to ‘civilise’ Māori children and adults” (May, 2003, p. 10). As Simon and Tuhiwai Smith (2001) asserted:

The Native School thus was intended as a structured interface between Māori culture and European culture – a site where the two cultures would be brought into an organised collision, as it were – with one culture being confronted by the other in a systematic way. *Pākehā* teachers appointed to these schools were expected to engage with Māori in specific ways designed to systematically undermine their culture and replace it with that of the Pākehā. (p. 3)

The “wild child” (May, 2003, p. 2) was to be tamed and trained through orderly mission schooling. This schooling was a “well-ordered environment apart from the perceived disorder of the child’s home, and the focus was to produce an educable and orderly child” (May, 2003, p. 2).

2.8 The dominant discourse in education

The deficit view of Māori is linked to evidence-based claims, based on western measures. For example, Whitmarsh (2011) observed that the idea of partnership can be seen as the dominant discourse of white, middle class motherhood, who understand what is expected of them to achieve partnership. In agreeance to this, Crozier and Davies (2007)

argued that parents from minority ethnic groups were invisible, set apart, ignored, rebuffed and “treated with disdain” (p. 310).

Therefore the question arises: can whānau Māori feel empowered enough to speak up and create the change that they require? Benham (2003), Crozier and Davies (2007) and Whitmarsh (2011) claimed that it is also common that those feeling invisible or ‘othered’ to be less likely to speak up and ask for help and those. Whereas if the dominant voice feels wronged, they are more likely to ask for help (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 1999; Vincent & Ball, 2001).

2.9 Current steps to rectify negative educational experiences

In recent times, there has been a shift of Governments increasing their interest in parental engagement in education. The Dutch Childcare Act 2005 was created which gave parents increased power in deciding which centres to send their children to, along with advisory rights for parents (de Graff & van Keulen, 2008). England created the ‘Supporting families in the foundation years policy’ in 2011 (Taguma, Litgens, & Makowiecki, 2012) and the United States of America have seen federal and state policies created with the aim being to create partnerships between families and schools (Epstein et al., 2002), including the No Child left Behind Act 2001 that included a focus on parental engagement (Emerson et al., 2012).

Whilst it will always be unacceptable that whānau Māori may endure negative schooling experiences, there has been considerable actions taken to help rectify this. In Aotearoa New Zealand, parents and whānau as partners in early childhood education is a key component of both New Zealand’s Early Childhood curriculum and policy. One of the most notable achievements in New Zealand is Te Whāriki, New Zealand’s first bicultural curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996). As part of the curriculum, it is a goal that “children and families feel a sense of belonging” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 15). This is made evident when families and children experience an environment where the belong and “connecting links with the family and the wider world are affirmed and extended; they know that

they have a place; they feel comfortable with the routines, customs, and regular events; they know the limits and boundaries of acceptable behaviour” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 15). However, despite this commitment the Education Review Office (2010) reported that:

One of the biggest challenges for early childhood managers and educators is to understand, review and develop processes that enable them to listen, respect and respond to what parents and whānau of Māori children expect of the service. To make such a commitment, early childhood services have to find out about parents’ aspirations and expectations, and acknowledge and respond to these in authentic ways. (p. 1)

This indicated that despite a policy commitment, in practice, Mana Whenua may not always be successfully implemented and this may impact on the engagement and wellbeing of whānau Māori.

2.10 The importance of engagement for well-being for Māori

Cram (2014) observed that “Māori wellbeing is the foundation of Māori development, yet indigenous peoples (including Māori) are often invisible in universal measures of wellbeing”(p. 20), due to Western society’s preoccupation with the individual self (Durie, 1999; Kowal, Gunthorpe, & Bailie, 2007; as cited in Cram, 2014).

2.11 Encouraging participation – purely benefits?

Chilman (1993) remarked that there had been an increase in policies that encouraged women to put their young children into childcare and enter the workforce (improving outcomes such as income), but this could lead to maternal overload; particularly for single mothers. So whilst one outcome is being achieved, the overall wellbeing of an individual and family wellbeing may suffer. The use of Māori models may mitigate against this, where the holistic wellbeing of individuals and families are considered. These show now be explored.

2.12 Māori models of health

Wellbeing is often associated with health, with The World Health Organization (1946) considering health as: “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease”. This holistic view is consistent with Māori views on health, as observed by contemporary theorists including Durie (1985) and Pere (1988). Whilst there is currently not a model of wellbeing for whānau Māori, such Māori models of health provide a positive starting point to considering wellbeing for whānau Māori. Durie (1985)’s well-known Māori model of health, *Whare Tapa Whā*, illustrated that whānau is an important component of health. This model compared health to the four walls of a whare (house), with “all four being necessary to ensure strength and symmetry, though each side representing a different dimension: taha wairua (the spiritual side), taha hinengaro (thoughts and feelings), taha Tinana (the physical side), taha whānau (family)” (Durie, 1994).

Another indigenous model *Te Wheke* compared health to an octopus (Pere, 1988) with the tentacles representing: wairuatanga (spirituality), taha tinana (the physical side), hinengaro (the mind), whanaungatanga (the extended family), mana ake (the uniqueness of the individual and whānau), mauri (life principle, ethos), Ha a kore ma a kui ma (the ‘breath of life’ from forebears) and whatumanawa (open and healthy expression of emotion) and the eyes of the octopus representing total well-being (Durie, 1994; Pere, 1988). Both of these models emphasised the connections and relationships that add to wellbeing.

2.12.1 How do relationships affect wellbeing?

Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed that mesosystems help to connect two or more systems of the child, parent and whānau, with the ability to connect affecting wellbeing (Mental Health Foundation, 2016). As Swick and Williams (2006) noted, powerful mesosystem agents are people who create links between systems; such as the friend from church who babysits for their friend, so they can attend an evening adult education course, assisting people to move beyond the dyad relation. “Without

strong mesosystems families tend to fall into chaos (L'Abate, 1990; as cited in Swick & Williams, 2006, p. 372). Schools and early childhood centres can potentially be powerful mesosystem agents; such as the kindergarten mentioned in Clarkin-Phillips and Carr (2009)'s research that supported families to create links with other families. Armed with this insight, early childhood educators can assist in creating mesosystems between their families, which can add to the wellbeing of families and children. These support networks can also develop social capital within communities (Muller, 2009), a point also highlighted by Clarkin-Phillips (2016) through the enhancement of social and cultural capital at the kindergarten involved in her research.

Henderson and Berla (1994) noted that when schools work together with families, this led to success not just in school, but throughout life. Gonzalez-Mena and Widmeyer Eyer (2004) remarked on the effect that this can have on families, with well-planned family learning and support activities increasing parents and family members self confidence, which encouraged them to pursue a high school diploma, additional job training and higher education. Grace, Bowes, and Elcombe (2014) observed that positive flow-on effects of participation offered to families and communities potentially increased the resilience of vulnerable families. Biddulph, Biddulph, and Biddulph (2003) discerned that genuine collaboration can lift children academically, and Emerson et al. (2012) also highlighted that parental engagement can have a positive impact on student achievement and student development, such as better social skills and an increased sense of personal competence.

Through creating meaningful whānau engagement, early childhood educators can have the ability to create positive social change in the lives of whānau Māori.

2.13 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, literature has been presented that frames contemporary interpretations and applications of engagement in education, with a particular emphasis on indigenous Māori engagement.

The literature consistently outlines whānau engagement as the foundation for building responsive and reciprocal relationships that lead to wellbeing for ākonga Māori. The strategies that have the best success in achieving this are often informal, welcoming, warm and genuine. From these relationships, partnerships can flourish where parents, family and educators share power and take ownership for their child's learning. However the colonisation of Māori knowledge, Māori culture and Māori voice has played a significant role in creating mistrust and reluctance to engage in the education sector for some whānau Māori.

In tandem with this emphasis I have also explored significant policy shifts in Aotearoa New Zealand, which also signal the importance of engaging whānau Māori with one key mechanism for this being achieved through participation in early childhood education. The strong imperatives for early childhood educators to create meaningful whānau engagement, as a mechanism to increase in wellbeing for whānau Māori is widely asserted.

In the chapter that follows I pick up on this imperative as a central orienting focus for an investigation of how meaningful engagement is created for whānau Māori that I conducted research with, and if this led to an increase in their whānau wellbeing.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Up until now this thesis has drawn on sources that widely assert the importance of engagement for whānau Māori in early childhood education. What that actually ‘looks like’ for whānau and how it impacts on their well-being, however, is less clear. In this chapter I present a methodological argument for understanding engagement through the lens of Māori which places emphasis on indigenous experience and its meaning. During this chapter I will explain the narrative approach I used for the research that I conducted to explore whānau experience with whānau themselves. Correspondingly, I will discuss the ethical issues I faced in the course of this research activity.

3.1 Theoretical framework

As I began to embark upon this research, a quote from research by Moana Jackson (1987) rang loudly in my ears: “our people are the most consulted in the world to the point of being the most insulted you know – will anybody listen this time?” (p. 16). I needed to be able to conduct this research in a manner that ensured participants felt safe, respected and empowered.

3.2 Kaupapa Māori Research Methodology

“Kaupapa Māori is a discourse of proactive theory and practice... [promoting] the revitalization of Māori cultural aspirations, preferences and practices as a philosophical and productive educational stance and resistance to the hegemony of the dominant discourse” (Ministry of Education, 2017, footnote 1). As I considered research methodologies, Kaupapa Māori Research consistently proved to be a methodology that would respect and empower participants.

Kaupapa Māori research has a number of significant dimensions that set it apart from traditional research with a focus on operationalism of *tino rangatiratanga* by Māori (Barnes, 2000; Bishop, 1999). Kaupapa Māori

research is also collectivistic and has the intention to benefit all the research participants (Bishop, 1999). This was an important reason for why I chose Kaupapa Māori Research as one of the methodologies for this thesis, as it involves the collective whānau voices of the community, and this research strives to benefit all participants.

I shall discuss the principles of Kaupapa Māori Research (Smith, 1990; Pihama, 2001; Pohatu, 2005; as cited in Rangahau, 2017) that guided this research, in relation to how these principles were applied to this research.

3.2.1 *Tino Rangatiratanga* - The Principle of Self-determination

I sought to determine how this research could benefit whānau Māori and provide them with a safe space to share their voice. I also strived to empower them to guide this research also.

3.2.2 *Taonga Tuku Iho* - The Principle of Cultural Aspiration

Through this principle, I was able to take into consideration spiritual and cultural ways of doing research, such as valuing the importance placed on meeting kanohi ki te kanohi.

3.2.3 *Kia piki ake i ngā raruraru o te kainga* - The Principle of Socio-Economic Mediation

This principle was one of the driving principles behind the purpose of this thesis, being to assist whānau Māori to have an increase in positive experiences through their children's education, and to also strengthen wellbeing for families and communities.

3.2.4 *Whānau* - The Principle of Extended Family Structure

"The principle of whānau sits at the core of Kaupapa Māori" (Rangahau, 2017, para. 7). I aimed to encapsulate this principle through researching whānau voices. I also understood that I was connected with my participants, which implied an element of care. Whakawhanaungatanga was an important component of my research, and I was able to build positive relationships with my participants.

I strived to create research that would add to the collective *kaupapa* and vision of Māori, and to create wellbeing for our people, by understanding how meaningful engagement can be created for whānau Māori, through hearing stories from whānau Māori. The aim to encapsulate stories led me to also use Narrative Inquiry Methodology as part of this research.

3.3 Narrative Inquiry Methodology

Narrative Inquiry Methodology is consistent with a Kaupapa Māori Research Methodology, as Narrative Inquiry explores experiences situated within cultural and social contexts (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). Due to this synergy, I have adopted both Kaupapa Māori Research Methodology and Narrative Inquiry Methodology for this research.

Narrative inquiry is a way of “narratively inquiring into experience and thus allows for the intimate study of individuals’ experiences over time and in context... within this space, each story told and lived is situated and understood within larger cultural, social, and institutional narratives” (Clandinin & Caine, 2008, p. 1). Narrative Inquiry aims to make meaning of experience through conversations and dialogue, emphasises relational engagement, enhances the research relationship between researcher and participant, and demands a high level of ethical care (Clandinin & Caine, 2008).

As affirmed by Atkinson (2007), “we are a story telling species. Storytelling is in our blood... Our life stories connect us to our roots, give us direction, validate our own experience, and restore value to our lives” (p. 2). Through employing narratives we are able to organise, integrate and seek accommodation (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997), understand experiences, and narratively inquire into experiences (Clandinin & Caine, 2008).

Narrative Inquiry complements Kaupapa Māori Research, as story-telling and oral histories are an integral part of indigenous research (Rangahau, 2017b, paga. 6). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) observed that narrative inquiry focuses on human experience and has a holistic nature, which is

another reason why narrative inquiry is a complementary methodology for this research.

Therefore, both of these methodologies were employed to explore this topic of inquiry:

1. What does meaningful engagement look like for whānau Māori attending an early childhood setting in Aotearoa New Zealand?
2. What is the potential for meaningful engagement in early childhood education to strengthen wellbeing for the indigenous culture of Aotearoa New Zealand?

3.4 My narratives as a part of the research

In alignment with both of my methodologies, I wove my own narratives throughout this research. Grace & Benson (2000) proposed that an autobiographical life narrative can be used as a way of knowing. Brookfield (1995) also recognised that the influences that shape teachers' lives are found in formative memories and experiences.

3.5 Method

I used a semi-structured interview method (for interview questions, see Appendix G) to gain greater perspective (Patton, 1990; as cited in Carson, Gilmore, Perry & Gronhaug, 2001) and understanding (Desimone & Le Floch, 2004). I generated a set of themes that were discussed throughout the interview (Qu and Dumay, 2011), but found that my questions changing during the interview in response to the narrative that was told (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In many respects this called for a more fluid, inquiry approach than the traditional literature suggests and I was greatly informed by Lewis-Beck, Bryman and Liao (2004).

For the interview, I used a recording device. I also made notes using pen and paper.

3.6 Data analysis

To analyse the data, I employed theoretical thematic analysis to identify, analyse and report patterns or themes within data, and code for specific research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I used the following phases for theoretical thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke, 2006):

3.6.1 Phase one: familiarise myself with the data

This phase began with transcribing the data. To transcribe the audiotape, I used two software programmes: ExpressScribe and InqScribe. Once the data was transcribed, I re-familiarised myself with the data with repeat readings in an active way, searching for meanings and patterns.

3.6.2 Phase two: generate initial codes

I then generated an initial list of codes, giving each data item full and equal attention (see appendix H for an example of initial data coding). During this phase, “codes identify a feature of the data (semantic content or latent) that appears interesting to the analyst” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 88). For the initial coding, I used highlighters, coloured pens and post-it notes to identify initial codes.

I approached the data using a theory-driven approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006), as I had specific research questions that I was trying to answer.

3.6.3 Phase three: searching for themes

During this phase, I sorted the codes into potential themes, using a thematic map. To begin this phase, I did an initial thematic map (Appendix I) to help me identify relationships between codes, and different levels of themes. Any codes not belonging to a theme were temporarily stored in a miscellaneous theme to see if any additional themes arose, or if there were any interesting points to address. By the end of this phase there was a collective of themes, and sub-themes.

3.6.4 Phases four: reviewing themes

During this phase, I refined themes. During the process, some themes had the data to support them, some themes were merged together, and some themes were further broken down. At this stage of analysis, I further developed my thematic map, where coherent patterns and themes were formed (Appendix J).

This phase also consisted of re-reading the entire data again, to ensure that the themes accurately represented the data. I did a final thematic map (Appendix K) demonstrating these themes.

3.6.5 Phase five: defining and naming themes

As guided by Braun and Clarke (2006), using the final thematic map that was produced during the previous phase of data analysis, I defined and named the key themes of this research, which will be further discussed in the following chapter.

3.6.6 Phase six: producing the report

From this set of fully worked-out themes, I produced the research in the form of this thesis, forming an argument in relation to my research questions.

3.7 The research context

To enlist participants, I approached a mainstream early childhood centre in my local region to see if they would be willing and able to have me conduct this research with whānau from their centre. The centre was licensed for 50 children, and had a very positive Education Review Office report, citing that families feel welcomed and valued. I consider this as important information as it may explain why I got a lot of data explaining how meaningful engagement was created, but not a lot data discussing examples of dis-engagement.

3.8 Recruiting research participants

I gave an information letter to the Centre Manager (Appendix A) and the *kaiako* at the centre (Appendix D). I met with the Centre Manager, where we further discussed the study in greater depth. The Centre Manager gave their written consent for their centre to be involved with this study (Appendix B). Once this consent was obtained, the centre sent out an invitation to all families at the centre to participate in the study (Appendix C).

Potential research participants were able to contact myself to request further information. At this point, they were given an *Information hui letter* (Appendix E) and we set a date, time and venue for an information hui together. At this session, I broadly explained the study. I also provided the opportunity for questions and answers, discussion of key ethical aspects, and the process for providing feedback to whānau during the study, and also at its end. I left a *Whānau Participant Consent form* (Appendix F) that was returned to me if they were still interested in being involved in this research. Upon receiving the signed *Whānau Participant Consent form*, I contacted the whānau and set a date, time and place for the interview to be conducted.

3.9 Research participants

I had initially aimed to conduct research with four to five whānau groups. I had two whānau groups volunteer to participate in this research. One interview was conducted with one parent at their workplace. This family consisted of two working parents, and two children – the youngest child attended the early childhood centre and was four years old at the time of the interview. The older child was at school and had not attended that early childhood centre. The second interview was conducted with a family of two parents, and three children (all of whom were present for the interview), at their home. The youngest child attended the early childhood centre and was also four years old at the time of the interview. The older children were of primary school and high school age.

3.9.1 Informed consent

To ensure informed consent was given, I gave ample time for the participants to consider the research project. I ensured that my interactions were culturally appropriate, such as giving people respect, space and time to think about their decision to participate or not. If I suspected that a participant did not want to be involved in the research, the option to decline to participate was reiterated.

Pseudonyms were used in the reporting of the research. I allocated these pseudonyms during the reporting, as I had informed the participants that I would give them pseudonyms.

3.9.2 Confidentiality

All data collected remained confidential and there was no identifying names or identifying features of participants or the centre used in this report. The centre will not be named in any public forum nor the thesis itself.

For the purpose of anonymity and confidentiality, if the interviewee used a gender specific term such as he or she, I replaced it with they or them.

3.9.3 Anonymity

As all participants were sourced from one centre, anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

3.10 Conclusion

Through combining the methodologies of Kaupapa Māori Research and Narrative Inquiry, I was able to answer the research questions of this inquiry, which are:

1. What does meaningful engagement look like for whānau Māori attending an early childhood setting in Aotearoa New Zealand?
2. What is the potential for meaningful engagement in early childhood education to strengthen wellbeing for the indigenous culture of Aotearoa New Zealand?

These findings will be presented and discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Four: Findings and discussion

In the previous chapter I discussed the methodologies used to frame the research for this thesis. This chapter will present these findings from this research, coupled with the literature and my own narratives.

To answer the first research question “what does meaningful engagement look like for whānau Māori attending an early childhood setting in Aotearoa New Zealand?” this research discovered three stages of engagement for the whānau Māori who participated in this study: establishing engagement, developing engagement and solidifying engagement.

To answer the second research question “what is the potential for meaningful engagement in early childhood education to strengthen wellbeing for the indigenous culture of Aotearoa New Zealand?”, once meaningful engagement is created, this can lead to flourishing, indicating that there is relationship between meaningful engagement and whānau wellbeing.

For each key finding, I will share my own narratives, reflect upon the literature and share findings from the research.

4.1 Stage one: establishing engagement

A core component of this stage is the initial contact and the settling in period that occurs when a child’s early childhood journey begins.

Whenever I enter an education setting with my children for the first time, there is always a knot in my stomach, a pink flush of my cheeks, and my senses are on high alert. The first point of contact either amplifies or calm my nerves. I can recall going to enrol one of my children at an early childhood centre, and after wandering around for a some time without being spoken to, I left and did not return.

In this research, participants discussed the feelings that they experienced on their first day at the centre. One interviewee commented, “they made

us feel like whānau really” (1:2:5). Another participant discussed how they were welcomed on their first day:

We got to see the sleep room, so they went through all of the processes of where and how and when, and it was so much about they just want to carry on with what we do at home, so that was really cool, so we didn’t have to fit in with them, they just fitted in with all of our ways as such, when we slept, did we do routine or demand and all of that kind of stuff. (2:2:5)

Interviewees discussed that developing authentic relationships with teachers was the most important way to make them feel welcome at a centre, and to gain a sense of belonging. Such relationships creating a sense of welcoming were also discussed in Clarkin-Phillips (2016), with these relationships being to the enhancement of the social and cultural capital of the kindergarten.

Participants also spoke of the existing relationships with some of the teachers, which was a reason for choosing to use that early childhood setting for their children. One participant commented: “we already knew them quite well... we had that link (1:2:5)”. This link was due to knowing each other through the community. Another spoke about the friendship that had developed between their family and a teacher that had spanned nearly sixteen years:

Anahera was our primary caregiver for [second child] and we managed to be able to ask for them again for Anahera, so that was really cool, that we knew someone that was in-tune with us from [second child] to Anahera, so they kind of knew us and we knew them, and yeah, very welcoming. (2:2:3)

These findings are consistent with the work of Ritchie and Rau (2005) who also found that a warm welcome is important step in creating meaningful engagement for whānau Māori, based on the principle of whakawhanaungatanga. It is evident that relationships are the foundation of engagement is built upon, and the quality of engagement is largely

dictated by the initial and on-going relationships that whānau have with early childhood staff. For these participants this includes the daily welcome, the on-going conversation and engagement through various events. Community relationships were also so important for the whānau in this research, as discussed in the literature (Clarkin-Phillips, 2016).

4.1.1 Māoritanga

One of my favourite memories from my children's education, was during their early childhood when their knowledge of te ao Māori was being nourished. Another time was when my middle child was in a bilingual classroom. Walking into that room and seeing Pāpātūānuku on the wall (and hearing the children being able to share the creation story in-depth), hearing them perform the haka, and listening to the reo being openly spoken and understood by all was an empowering step in my parenting journey. To be wrapped in te ao Māori was an experience that I have hoped to exemplify in my teaching practice and my life.

An anticipated time of year were his parent-teacher interviews, compared to normal parent-teachers interviews which still make me nervous (even now, as a qualified and experienced teacher). But this interview was different. Our whaea would come to our home, and would sit and talk with us; not about our child's reading ability, or the way he held a pencil, but about his abilities, our whānau, and things that made us smile.

This research also demonstrated the importance of having Māoritanga woven throughout the curriculum. If it was present, this was a positive. If it was lacking, this was a negative. Comments included: "that's the thing I'm most happy about... [the centre] just talks about [Māoritanga] like it's an everyday thing and that's just nice" and "he talks about all of the Māori legends and stuff like that. And he's confident in that sense, and he's really wanting to do the haka... what I really like is that it is so embedded in what they do (1:5:3)". An idea was given of having a *whakapapa* or whānau tree, to link the children with their whānau (2:6:7); once again highlighting the desire for whānau Māori to have their culture, language and identity clearly visible throughout the centre. Having an early

learning setting where you can feel your culture can add to your sense of your belonging at that centre (Ministry of Education, 1996).

In contrast with this, other participants felt that “there’s a little bit of te reo, but not a lot, you probably have the token words, to do the sit down and stuff (2:1:2)”. These differing opinions exemplify that each individual is different in their expectations of what constitutes Māoritanga being evident in the environment, hence recognising that whānau Māori cannot be compartmentalised. Once again, having culturally responsive partnerships is a key way for educators to find out differing needs from individual whānau Māori.

4.2 Stage Two: Developing engagement

The core components of this stage look beyond the first meeting and settling in stage, but still recognises that engagement is being formed.

In my previous narrative, I used the strategy of avoidance to deal with a situation when I left the early childhood centre and did not return. Another time I used this strategy was when I collected my son from his early childhood centre, earlier than normal. As I read his daily diary that evening, it stated the time that he had his afternoon tea and bottle. However, I knew that that was inaccurate, as I had picked him up prior to that time. I concluded that the book must have been filled out in advance. I could see their point of view - they were busy teachers, just trying to get through the paper work of the day, but I felt as though I could not trust the relationship anymore. I did not feel brave enough to voice my concern, but I also knew that I could not take my son back. I did not give them a reason, we just never returned.

In contrast to my experience, participants of this research easily discussed meaningful engagement (1:2:4,8,10-14 and 2:2:3,5,7) and struggled to discuss any examples of dis-engagement (1:5:7 and 2:6:7). One participant commented that the teacher’s “daughters would pick Anahera up, so we got a really good friendship bond with those kids, and yeah, we’re still friends with kids that [older sibling] went to crèche with (2:6:2-

3)”. This shows the relationship extending not just to the family of the child at the centre, but also to the teacher’s family, and the creation of friendships (between both adults and children) and relationships that were sustained over time.

The literature (Birenbaum-Carmeli, 1999; Vincent & Ball, 2001) and my own narratives support the idea of empowering families skills to assist in rectifying potential power imbalances, or to proactively deal with problems that arise. This research did not highlight this problem, highlighting that this centre was actively creating culturally responsive relationships.

4.2.1 Communication is the keystone of relationships

My narratives also consist of positive memories, such as spending hours informally talking with my son’s kindergarten teachers. The layout of the kindergarten was also supportive to creating these relationships. Some of the most pivotal conversations I had were generally held in the sandpit or under a tree. This felt more natural and less confrontational for me.

Whānau narratives also supported this concept. One participant remarked, “the communication with them is awesome. Even if Ngatuere wasn’t there for a couple of days in the holidays, Morgan [Ngatuere’s key teacher] would ring that night and say ‘just letting you know that ‘we’ve got this going on, so Ngatuere might need to bring this, this and this (1:2:8).”

Other examples of helpful communication included: “One day when I dropped Ngatuere off and he wasn’t in a good mood, Morgan sent a text message an hour later saying ‘just letting you know Ngatuere is having a great day’... just so you knew and don’t worry about it throughout the day (1:2:10)” and “the centre checks up on stuff with you, like if they’re a little concerned... like, hey “is there anything wrong, or he’s been grouchy lately, is he getting enough sleep?... they’ll keep in contact with the family, like they’re concerned about it (2:5:5)”.

It also became evident that this constant communication formed the basis of a meaningful relationship. One participant remarked: “When you’re in there, and you’re talking to them... they really know your child, it’s not like

it's any old child, they know their personalities (1:2:10)". The participant also remarked that they could talk to the teachers at any time needed. One participant observed: "they were really good at greeting every parent as they came in the door (2:1:4 – 2:2:1)" and how this helped their whānau to feel welcome at the centre.

One participant noted that "if it wasn't a digital world (2:5:2)" they would not be able to communicate with their child's primary caregiver, as "I don't actually get to see Morgan because they work inside the hours I work... so I don't get to physically see them... but we did get to pick who would be their teacher... so that was my choice too (2:5:2)".

Another form of communication mentioned was a website where "Hone sends me the information about Anatea's daily trips and we can communicate back and forth and it's a lot easier, that way. Other than that, I usually just write a note in their book... And I've got their cellphone, so if there's any issues we need to urgently get in touch with, I'll usually just send them a text and we'll talk to each other (2:2:7)".

Interviewees also observed that they used "text or Facebook (2:3:9)" to communicate with other parents from the centre also. These comments highlight that technology can help to bridge a possible gap that is sometimes caused due to the absence of *kanohi ki te kanohi*. To concur with the literature (Daniel, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2017a), there can be a wide range of strategies used through digital technology to meet engagement needs.

Another participant noted that they would like "more communication, like one on one (2:5:2)", which demonstrates the desire for some whānau to be engaging in more one on one conversations. Another comment was that in "the under 2's, we'd get a daily report on them... but now [that the child had moved up to the over 2's] it's more generic, like: the whole group was doing this... and then they talk about Anatea... at the end (2:2:11)".

My experiences, the participant's narratives, and the literature all emphasise the important role that communication – in a variety of modes - plays in relationship building.

4.2.2 Beyond the class room – engagement takes a village

Reflecting on my own experience as a parent, I can remember one administrator in particular that I valued as a friend. They exuded patience, especially around areas when I already felt vulnerable: forms, fees, and policies.

From management, to office staff and cooks, the literature (Epstein, 2001) observed various staff as being key personnel in the ability to create meaningful engagement. Clarkin-Phillips (2016)'s research highlighted the importance of key personnel that helped to enhance engagement with families.

This research also agreed with this point. One participant remarked about the centre manager of their centre: "I think that Clive does a great job overseeing and they really know what's going on and they spoke to me as well about Ngatuere needing a speech therapist and so we went through that and it's not just a job for them, it really is meaningful for them, what they're doing, so I think Clive's great as well (1:2:14 – 1:3:1)". Another interviewee mentioned how they regularly emailed the administrator and how the conversation was "always quite friendly (2:2:12)".

This participant also highlighted another interesting point, when the participant noted: "it's not just a job for them, it really is meaningful for them (1:2:14 – 1:3:1)". This point encapsulates that meaningful engagement is just not for the betterment of whānau, but also for staff. Creating relationships and meaningful whānau engagement helps to create a community in the early childhood centre that can benefit staff and whānau alike.

Reflecting on my narrative shared at the start of this thesis, my whānau were all included in my own education. The narratives also drew attention to the fact the fact that relationships weren't just limited to meaningful

relationships with the children, or just with the parents, but to the entire whānau. This was demonstrated through comments such as: “the whole place is so welcoming to Nanny and they all crowd round Nanny, like ‘Nanny’s here, Nanny’s here’. And Grandad got to go for ANZAC, because he spent some time in the war, World War Two, in the Maori battalion. And they did a big thing on the ANZAC’s this year and Grandad came along and they welcomed him really well and whenever they do the reading, they invite Nannys along and Nanny goes along to whānau time, which is pretty cool (2:6:2)”.

Another comment was “when [older siblings] visit the centre they are really interested to see how they’re going as the big kids now (2:4:5)”. One participant commented that their child had “brought their whole class in to have a look at my office one day (1:4:1)” and that the children would often come to their work to see other events that were occurring.

An interesting point in this research was highlighted when when one key member left the centre. One of the participants commented that “[they were] awesome at keeping up with the kōrero, but after they left, it kind of lapped a bit, I don’t think everyone got the gist of whakawhanaungatanga, even though they tried, it was marginal” (2:1:2). This demonstrates the importance of staff members similar to the literature (Estyn, 2009).

4.3 Stage Three: Solidifying engagement

During this stage, the whānau now seemed to know their place in the education setting. For them, this stage consisted of moving beyond the relationship and analysing other core components that can affect engagement.

4.3.1 The significance of events

From my own narratives, a memorable teaching experience is when I made a movie highlighting the tamariki learning through play. We got a projector screen, invited each whānau and had kai. We had over 80 whānau attend our centre that evening. Through creating an event that

was based on the interests and needs of our whānau, we were able to solidify engagement with our centre whānau.

One participant mentioned how they enjoyed being involved in the centre's events that they had. "At Matariki time it's quite nice to go over there... they invite us all over for some kai at lunch time and then the kids get up and do some performances and stuff like that (1:3:3)". Other events included Friday boy's trips, which whānau (particularly male whānau) would often attend (1:3:5-15; 2:4:11-16). Rugby tournaments, trips into the community, fundraising events, AGMS, and ANZAC events were also some further events mentioned (1:4:1; 2:3:4-7; 2:6:2).

Another participant remarked that they often didn't attend these events as "we just have enough going on and it gets hard to fit it all in (2:3:9)". This participant remarked that "we have been there so long, we don't feel that we have to go to keep in contact with everybody (2:3:9)". This highlights the point of the different levels of engagement, as observed by Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004). This participant doesn't feel the need to be regularly involved in events at the centre, but this doesn't impend on their feeling of having meaningful whānau engagement with the centre.

4.3.2 Funds of knowledge

I recall having my own funds of knowledge appreciated as a young parent at Playcentre. This feeling of appreciation further encouraged me to become engaged in the centre.

The research found connections from home being made, through the wider family unit.

The literature (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002) also demonstrated that helping families to discover their funds of knowledge can empower them, and create meaningful engagement between families and education settings.

4.4 Flourishing

As my narratives that were shared at the begin of this thesis (1.1) demonstrated, wellbeing can be strengthened for whānau through

engaging in the early childhood arena. One example from my teaching career was when I worked at a centre that had a parent educator programme. Parents would have a three hour workshop a week, and would also work (paid) on the floor alongside kaiako for three hours a week. Whilst the effects of this programme have not been published, they are evident in the community. Many parents went on to further education and employment. They also relied on each other as a source of information. Clarkin-Phillips (2016)'s research also had similar findings, with participants reporting an increase in participating in adult education and employment, due to the participation with their child's kindergarten.

The literature (Swick & Williams, 2006; Clarkin-Phillips, 2016; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Gonzalez-Mena & Widmeyer Eyer, 2004; Grace, Bowes, & Elcombe, 2014; Emerson et al., 2012) also supported the concept that wellbeing can be strengthened through family engagement.

Participants linked happiness and the health of their children as being the first important step to whānau wellbeing. Comments included "we are lucky to have happy children (2:5:5)", "it's important that when our children are happy and confident and that makes us happy and not to have to worry about anything (1:4:4)".

Whānau members talked about how they have created networks of friends through the early childhood centre. One participant observed: "we get to know the parents quite well (1:4:8)", and now have friends and networks through these relationships (1:4:7-8). Another observed that they'd made "lots of new friends" (2:6:5) through their child's early childhood centre. As the literature demonstrated, these friendships create support networks. Participants also felt that they could definitely ask these networks for information to help their whānau if needed (1:4:4-1:5:1). I had similar experiences whilst I was at Playcentre and Kindergarten with my sons; I developed a large support network of friends from these centres, that I relied on as my main source of information gathering about children.

Through the literature, research and my own narratives, three ways that early childhood centres can strengthen wellbeing were emphasised: i)

creating networks, ii) using these networks to share and gather information, and iii) improving outcomes for family members. The strengthening of wellbeing for these families was achieved due to the meaningful engagement that was initially created.

The next chapter will conclude with a summary of the findings of this research, limitations of this research, implications of this research, and areas for further research.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This thesis addresses the topic of meaningful engagement in the early childhood sector for the whānau of Māori children. At the commencement of this study the primary focus was twofold: firstly to explore what meaningful engagement might look like for whānau Māori attending an early childhood setting in Aotearoa New Zealand, and secondly, to gauge the potential for meaningful engagement's ability to strengthen wellbeing for whānau Māori.

To investigate this question I gathered data that was accumulated from a series of semi-structured interviews with different whānau members from the same early childhood community. The findings from this research were considered through an extensive review of the literature relating to culturally responsive family engagement, and compared with policy documents of relevance to culturally responsive teaching practices in the early childhood sector.

In this chapter I provide a synthesis of the different dimensions explored in this study, examine potential limitations of my research, and identify possible implications for the wider early childhood community.

5.1 Revisiting the Context for this Thesis

This thesis commenced with my reflection on a selection of experiences which directed me into this area of research. Through my subsequent deconstruction of engagement, and its essential counterpart of dis-engagement, I was led to question whether wellbeing for the families of Māori children could be created through meaningful engagement in early learning environments. This inquiry led me to ask the following questions:

- 1. What does meaningful engagement look like for whānau Māori attending an early childhood setting in Aotearoa New Zealand?**

2. What is the potential for meaningful engagement in early childhood education to strengthen wellbeing for the indigenous culture of Aotearoa New Zealand?

5.2 Summary of the Findings

For the duration of this thesis I endeavoured to visualise if meaningful engagement from the early childhood community would support wellbeing for whānau Māori.

This research discovered three stages of engagement for whānau Māori in this study: establishing engagement, developing engagement and solidifying engagement. Once created, meaningful engagement can lead to flourishing.

5.3 Research Question 1:

What does meaningful engagement look like for whānau Māori attending an early childhood setting in Aotearoa New Zealand?

5.3.1 Establishing engagement

This stage begins with the family's first contact with an early learning centre, their subsequent first visit, and the starting day at the centre. All of these first instances of engagement were identified as important moments in the engagement journey by the whānau interviewed.

Existing community relationships, and a warm welcome were ways to create positive experiences during this stage.

Creating an environment where whānau Māori were able to experience their culture also added significantly to their feeling of belonging at the centre.

5.3.2 Developing engagement

This stage builds upon the initial relationships from the previous stage. Communication is the key to creating sustainable relationships. Communication can also occur using digital technology.

All staff play a part to create engagement, including administrators, centre managers and cooks. Similarly, family engagement extends beyond the child and the immediate family, and includes the wider extended family and community.

5.3.3 Solidifying engagement

This stage included the creation of engagement being solidified. This occurs over time, once the initial relationships have been established and developed.

This can occur through activities such as events, where whānau engage with the centre. Centres can also draw upon families' funds of knowledge, recognising the unique skills that each family brings to the early childhood education environment.

5.4 Research Question 2:

What is the potential for meaningful engagement in early childhood education to strengthen wellbeing for the indigenous culture of Aotearoa New Zealand?

5.4.1 Flourishing

When meaningful engagement is developed through the first three stages of creating meaningful engagement, whānau can flourish as their wellbeing is strengthened.

This can occur through families having an increase in their networks, with the early childhood setting acting as a mesosystem (Swick & Williams, 2006). Through these networks, families can gather and share information, thus increasing their ability to access support if needed. Families can also experience an increase in outcomes, such as having an increase in opportunities for work and study.

5.5 Limitations of my research

A limitation of this study includes the small sample size of this research. Any conclusions drawn from this small sample can only be indicative of

potential outcomes, and perhaps sketch the landscape for future investigation.

Another limitation is the specificity of circumstance, which in this instance saw all the participants drawn from the same community. It is possible that different or additional factors could be identified in different communities. In turn, this may result in this research not being broadly applicable to whānau Māori in different communities and regions of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Numerous personal challenges were also faced during the duration of this thesis, which challenged my ability to work as thoroughly through the thesis process as I would have liked.

5.6 Implications of this research

The findings in this study foreground the primacy of teacher-whānau relationships, as these impact not only the wellbeing of the child or children, but also the wellbeing of the whānau unit, including parents and extended family members.

5.6.1 Practitioner awareness

This thesis found that meaningful engagement can be created with whānau Māori through three stages: establishing engagement, developing engagement, and solidifying engagement. This can potentially lead to whānau flourishing, as their wellbeing is strengthened through an increase of networks and an increase in their outcomes of personal worth. The implication for practice here could be a practitioner awareness of how their whānau are currently positioned within this process. Through increased awareness, teachers could consciously employ additional ability to actively support Māori families in appropriate ways, in order to foster their progression towards eventual flourishing.

5.6.2 Whānau Māori must be not compartmentalised

A further implication from this study also highlighted that whānau Māori cannot be compartmentalised; what constitutes meaningful engagement

for one does not automatically constitute meaningful engagement for another. The whānau that took part in this research were experiencing meaningful engagement. Once again, this further highlighted the need to not compartmentalise all whānau Māori, and assume that all Māori have negative experiences when engaging in the education arena.

Perhaps this becomes something of a cautionary note moving forwards, as teachers cannot blindly apply strategies in the belief that these will promote flourishing, neither can these approaches be offered from any kind of deficit perspective.

5.6.3 An entire staff approach is required

As emphasised, staff are the key to establishing genuine and reciprocal communication, caring relationships and sincere engagement. The departure of key staff members whom had acted as anchors between families and centres highlights the need to extend engagement efforts beyond a few key staff members. This implies the need for an entire staff approach, one that perhaps begins with the philosophy of a teaching team.

5.6.4 Empowering whānau Māori

I have reflected on my narratives where I used avoidance as my coping strategy, and wondered if things may have been different if I was equipped with skills that could have helped me deal with this situation differently, rather than resorting to avoidance. Silencing and avoidance did not appear to be themes for my research participants, but I wonder how many other whānau Māori also feel disempowered and choose to silence their own voice, rather than risk having their voice silenced by others? The composition of the centre and its inclusive philosophy, and the professional backgrounds of those who volunteered may mean that the experiences of these whānau are not representative of other whānau. Their experiences of meaningful engagement did not capture the ‘invisible voice’ of Māori who do not experience meaningful engagement, or the disempowerment that I felt as a young Māori parent. Now as educator

and researcher myself, I still wonder how many whānau are still silencing their voice.

5.7 A further area for research

Further research could look at how whānau Māori can empower themselves if they are currently experiencing dis-engagement, rather than waiting for an invitation from educators. Such skills could possibly be facilitated through Iwi, Hapu and Marae.

5.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis addresses the need for early childhood teachers within Aotearoa New Zealand to be actively engaged in creating meaningful engagement for whānau Māori within their own communities. And through such engagement, the diverse needs of different individuals, whānau and communities can be met, and the wellbeing of whānau Māori further strengthened. In doing so, early learning communities can honour the articles in Te Titiri o Waitangi of participation, partnership and protection.

Appendices

6.1 APPENDIX A: Centre Manager Information letter

Kia ora _____,

I am a Masters of Education student at the University of Waikato and I am writing to introduce myself. I am also writing to seek consent to conduct the research for my Masters thesis at < centre name>.

- Ko Kahuranaki te maunga
- Ko Poukawa te Waiu
- Ko Takitimu te waka
- Ko Ngāti Kahungunu ki Heretaunga te Iwi
- Ko Ngāti te Rangikoianake te hapū
- Ko Kahuranaki te marae
- Ko Diana Cruse ahau

My research is titled “Whānau Stories: creating meaningful engagement and increased outcomes of worth for the indigenous culture of Aotearoa New Zealand.”

The purpose of my research is to understand what meaningful engagement is to Māori and how such engagement can create outcomes of value for tamariki and whānau. My research will consist of me interviewing whānau members of tamariki whom attend your early childhood centre. The interviews will take approximately one hour each and will take place off-site of the early childhood centre.

Prior to each whanau group meeting I will also be conducting an information hui which I would like to hold at the centre, at the end of a session, if possible.

Each family will receive an invitation to participate in the study. Interested parties will receive an information letter inviting them to an information hui regarding the study. Any parties still interested in participating in the study will receive a consent form and will be considered a “participant”.

Data to be collected from the Participant Group will include audio recordings and written documentation taken by myself, as researcher. All data gathered will remain confidential, and the names of participants and the centre will be altered. Anonymity cannot be ensured though, as all participants will be from the one centre and may be able to identify each other as they may know each other.

Included with this letter is additional documentation that includes the Whānau participation letter, the kaiako information letter, the information hui letter and the Whānau consent forms.

If at any time you have questions or concerns about the conduct of the research, you can contact me in the first instance. If you have any further questions or concerns, you can contact my supervisor, Associate Professor Jayne White of the University of Waikato.

Naku noa, nā

Diana Cruse

6.2 APPENDIX B: Centre Manager consent form

☐ I have read and understood what the research project is about, and I agree to Diana Cruse conducting the research for her Master's thesis at <centre name>.

☐ This consent is given on the following understandings:

- That Diana will carry out the interview component of her Masters thesis at a location off-site from the centre and collect data from the same.

Method to become participants:

- Each family will receive an information letter.
 - If they would like more information about participating in the study, they will be given an invitation to an information hui from a teacher/ centre manager.
 - At this information hui, further information will be given about the study and any questions about the study will be answered.
 - If people are still interested in being involved in the study, they can sign the consent form and will be considered a 'participant'.
- That this process will be ethical for participants. Their information will be kept confidential and secure. Their real names will not be used, and neither will the name of the centre, to protect the anonymity of the participants, although anonymity cannot be guaranteed.
 - That this process will be respectful of participants by working collaboratively with them.

☐ I understand that copyright and ownership for the thesis and any additional papers or presentations resulting from this study belongs to Diana.

☐ I understand that if I have any concerns or questions about the project, I can discuss these with Diana in the first instance. If I have any concerns or questions that I do not wish to discuss with Diana, I can contact her supervisor, Associate Professor Jayne White of the University of Waikato.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____

Position in the Organisation:

6.3 APPENDIX C: Whānau participation information letter

Kia ora _____,

I am a Masters of Education student at the University of Waikato and I am writing to introduce myself and let you know about a research project that I will conducting in your centre.

- Ko Kahuranaki te maunga
- Ko Poukawa te Waiu
- Ko Takitimu te waka
- Ko Ngāti Kahungunu ki Heretaunga te Iwi
- Ko Ngāti te Rangikoianake te hapū
- Ko Kahuranaki te marae
- Ko Diana Cruse ahau

The research is for my Masters thesis, titled “Whānau Stories: creating meaningful engagement and increased outcomes of worth for the indigenous culture of Aotearoa New Zealand.”

My research will consist of me interviewing whānau members of tamariki whom attend or recently have attended <centre name>. The interview will take approximately one hour.

To participate in this research project, individuals/ groups of individuals need to:

- a). Be an individual or group of individuals who perceive themselves to be whānau of tamariki at the centre.
- b). They must identify as Māori.

If you are interested in the possibility of being a participant in this study, please let a teacher/ manager know and they will give you further information about an information hui I am holding, to answer any questions there may be about this research project. Attendance at this hui does not mean that you are consenting to participate in the research project.

Data to be collected from the Participant Group will include audio recordings and written documentation taken by myself, as researcher. All data gathered will remain confidential, and the names of participants and the centre will be altered to protect the anonymity of the participants, although anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

Participants will be given the opportunity to check the transcripts (of the interviews) before the transcripts are used for data analysis.

If at any time you have questions or concerns about the conduct of the research, you can contact me in the first instance. If you have any further questions or concerns, you can contact my supervisor, Associate Professor Jayne White of the University of Waikato.

Naku noa, nā

Diana Cruse

6.4 APPENDIX D: Kaiako information letter

Kia ora _____,

I am writing to introduce myself and let you know about a research project that I will shortly be conducting, using whānau participants from your centre.

- Ko Kahuranaki te maunga
- Ko Poukawa te Waiu
- Ko Takitimu te waka
- Ko Ngāti Kahungunu ki Heretaunga te Iwi
- Ko Ngāti te Rangikoianake te hapū
- Ko Kahuranaki te marae
- Ko Diana Cruse ahau

The research is for my Masters thesis, titled “Whānau Stories: creating meaningful engagement and increased outcomes of worth for the indigenous culture of Aotearoa New Zealand.”

The purpose of my research is to understand what meaningful engagement is to Māori and how such engagement can create outcomes of value for tamariki and whānau. My research will consist of me interviewing whānau members of tamariki whom attend your early childhood centre. The interviews will take approximately one hour each and will take place off-site of the early childhood centre.

Data to be collected from the Participant Group will include audio recordings and written documentation taken by myself, as researcher. All data gathered will remain confidential, and the names of participants and the centre will be altered. Anonymity cannot be ensured though, as all participants will be from the one centre and may be able to identify each other as they may know each other.

If at any time you have questions or concerns about the conduct of the research, you can contact me in the first instance. If you have any further questions or concerns, you can contact my supervisor, Associate Professor Jayne White of the University of Waikato.

Naku noa, nā

Diana Cruse

6.5 APPENDIX E: Information hui letter

Kia ora _____,

I am conducting a research project for my Masters thesis which is titled “Whānau Stories: creating meaningful engagement and increased outcomes of worth for the indigenous culture of Aotearoa New Zealand.”.

My research will consist of me interviewing whānau members of tamariki whom attend or recently have attended your early childhood centre. The interview will take approximately one hour.

To participate in this research project, individuals/ groups of individuals need to:

- a). An individual or group of individuals who perceive themselves to be whānau of tamariki at the centre.
- b). They must identify as Māori.

I am holding an information hui on <date> at <location> to answer any you may have about this research project.

Attendance at this hui does not mean that you are consenting to participate in the research project.

If at any time you have questions or concerns about the conduct of the research, you can contact me in the first instance. If you have any further questions or concerns, you can contact my supervisor, Associate Professor Jayne White of the University of Waikato.

Naku noa, nā

Diana Cruse

6.6 APPENDIX F: Whānau consent form

- ☐ I _____, understand what the research project is about, and I agree to be a member of the Participant Group.
- ☐ My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions or discuss any related matter with the researcher at any time.
- ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may withdraw my consent to participate up to the point at which data analysis begins.
- ☐ I understand that because this is a research project, data will be collected that will include audiotapings. I will have the opportunity to obtain copies of this data at the conclusion of the data collection.
- ☐ I understand that the data collected will be analysed and used in the researcher's thesis. If the researcher wishes to use any data that was created by myself, for any purpose other than the thesis, she will consult with me first and obtain my written consent before doing so.
- ☐ I understand that my identity and the name of the early childhood centre will be kept anonymous, and that any information gathered will be kept safely and confidentially, although anonymity cannot be guaranteed.
- ☐ I understand that if I have any concerns or questions about the project, I can discuss these with Diana in the first instance. If I have any concerns or questions that I do not wish to discuss with the researcher, I can contact her supervisor, Associate Professor Jayne White of the University of Waikato.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____

6.7 APPENDIX G: Interview questions

1. **Looking to the past**, please tell me about your first time you went to your tamariki's early childhood centre (possibly to have a look at the centre or to enrol your tamariki). Was there anything that helped your whānau and yourself feel welcomed/ that you belonged/ that "this was your place?"
2. Can you please tell me about your tamariki's first day. Was there anything that helped your whānau and yourself feel welcomed/ that you belonged/ that "this was your place?"
3. **Looking to the present**, please tell me about anything that helps to create that sense of meaningful engagement and belonging for your whānau and yourself? (feeling welcomed each day? Communication/ time/ spaces to talk/ the ability to participate at the centre, events)?
4. Is there anything/ anyone that has really stood out that has helped you to feel a sense of belonging/ created meaningful engagement for your whānau and yourself?
5. *Possibly ask...* Please tell me about anything that you wish could've happened (or wish didn't happen) to further help your whānau and yourself feel a sense of belonging/ create meaningful engagement?
6. ***Has meaningful engagement improved the wellbeing of your whānau?***
7. Please describe what your whānau's ideal 'wellbeing' (what constitutes a "good life") looks like to you?
8. Are there any ways that meaningful engagement with your tamariki's centre has helped (or could help) to improve your whānau's wellbeing?

6.8 APPENDIX H: Raw data analysis

1 about [C] needing a speech therapist and so we went through that and it's not just a job for her, it is really meaningful for her, what she's doing, so I think [CM]'s great as well.

2 D: Very nice. Is there anything else? Like maybe events that they hold?

3 I: Yeah. So at Matariki time it's quite nice to go over there. And they often have events there. I mean, their Christmas break up is always a good little get-together with a picnic and lots of little activities going on. I don't know if you've been involved in what they do for Matariki at all?

4 D: No, no.

5 I: So, they invite us all over for some kai at lunch time and then the kids get up and do some performances and stuff like that and we are always invited and welcome to go on their boy's trips.

6 D: oh cool!

7 I: To begin with, I think it was meant to be fathers, because the boys liked it to be boy's trips, but after a while, I think some mothers can go along now as well.

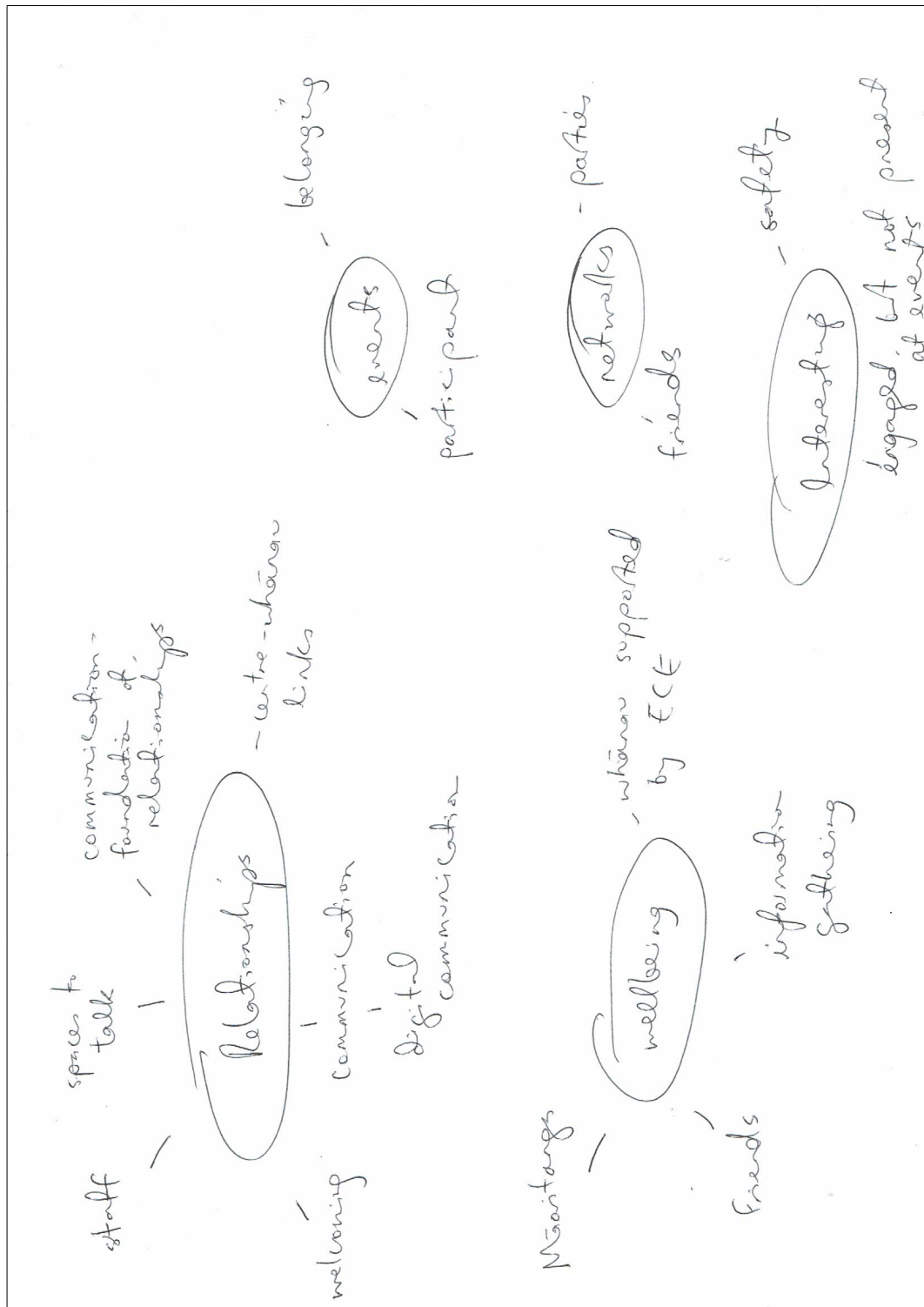
8 D: So the boy's...?

9 I: So the boys have boys trips every Friday. And that was because they decided that there was quite a number at the 4 year old stage, nearly moving into school, and it was sort of to give them some more engagement as well. So they do bush walks, they do high ropes, or low ropes, but I guess they call it high ropes-low ropes, but it's lower or higher, and glow worm caving and they do little activities every Friday.

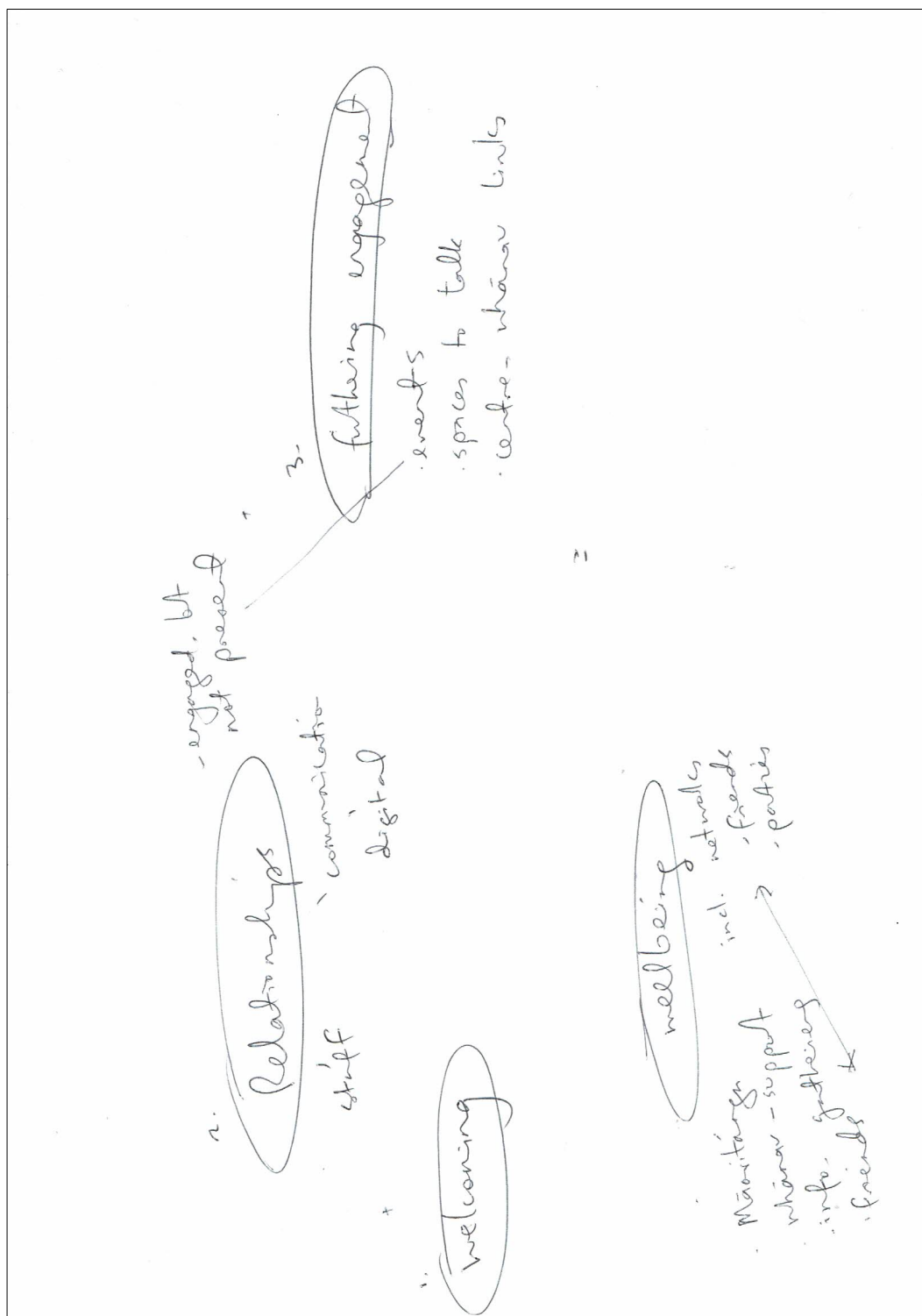
10 D: Awesome.

Handwritten notes and markings on the right margin include: "events" (with a bracket pointing to lines 3-4), and a vertical list of numbers 1 through 10. Blue arrows point from the right margin to lines 3, 5, and 9.

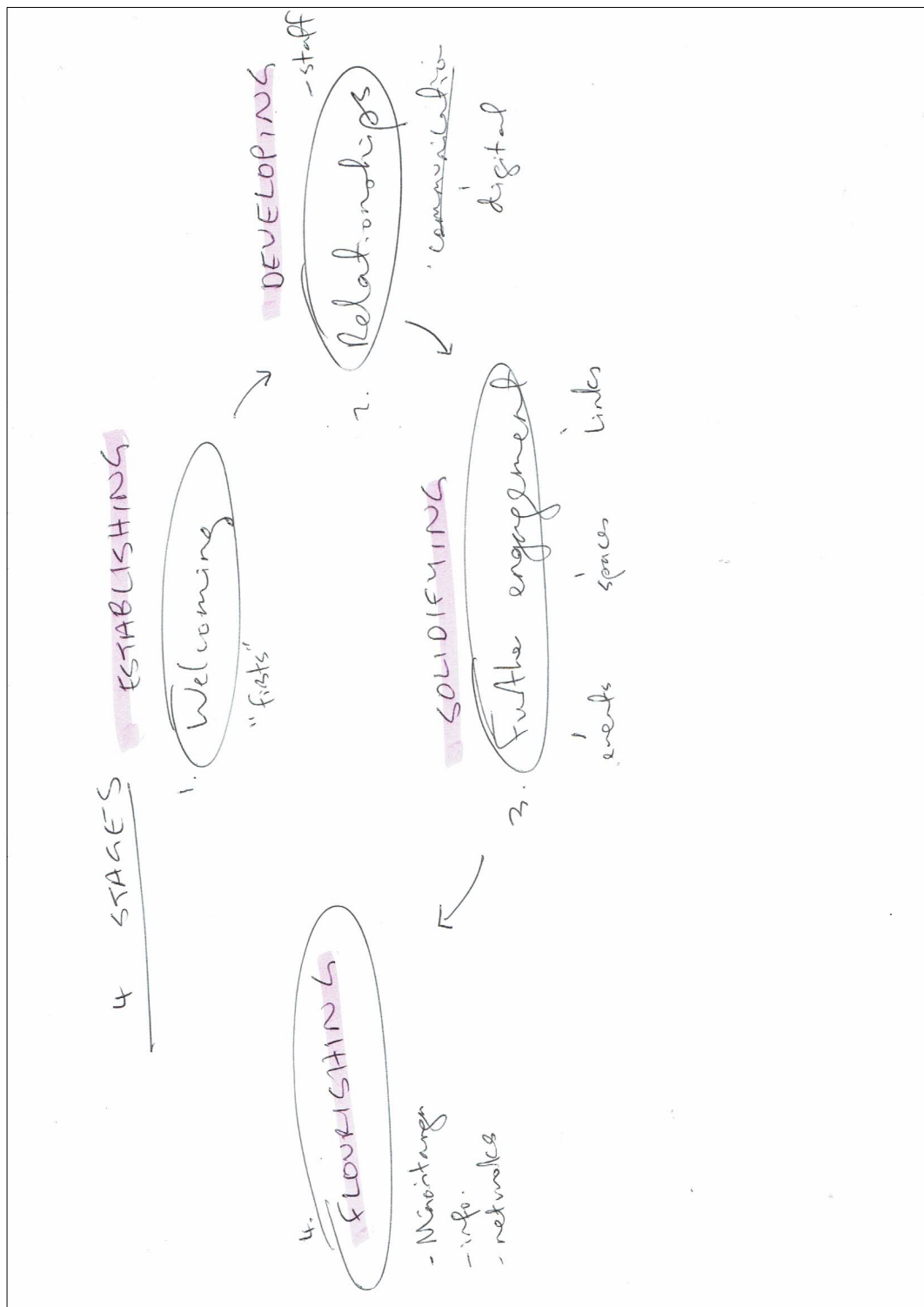
6.9 APPENDIX I: Initial thematic map



6.10 APPENDIX J: Developed thematic map



6.11 APPENDIX K: Final thematic map



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