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“You kind of have to be a bit superhuman”

**Early childhood teacher beliefs about what it takes to be
a good teacher: A discourse analysis**

A thesis

submitted in fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

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Abstract

The early childhood teaching profession has developed into a community with its own language and culture (Cumming & Sumsion, 2014). Early childhood teacher beliefs and discourses have been developed and sustained within this context which is both influenced by, and influences these beliefs and subsequent teacher practice. This study explores these beliefs within a New Zealand context, and the discourses shaping them, and considers how these discourses have the potential to enable or constrain teacher practice.

Over the past 30 years, there has been growing interest in, and acknowledgement of, the importance of early childhood education (ECE) in New Zealand at both government and societal levels. While participation in ECE can lead to positive outcomes for children, the service must be of high quality. Recent reports however, have identified there is significant variability across ECE services. Teacher practice can make a significant impact on the level of quality children experience therefore this study explores this variability by the examining the espoused beliefs of qualified ECE teachers, working in English medium, teacher-led, ECE centres; particularly in relation to what makes a 'good' teacher. Teacher beliefs have a significant role in driving teacher decision-making and practice but are generally invisible.

Using poststructural feminist and critical discourse analysis, this study identifies three discourses shaping and being shaped by these beliefs; the dominant essential maternal and neo-liberal discourses, and the marginalised discourse of democratic professionalism. It explores these discourses at both the micro level and the macro level of national policy and considers how these beliefs and discourses have the potential to constrain or enable teacher practice. Through a poststructural feminist lens, this analysis makes the invisible visible, providing provocation for individual teachers to examine the discourses constituting their professional lives and either claim them or resist them. In addition, a critical lens recommends structural and policy changes for government and teacher education to help address the constraining effects of these discourses.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The early childhood teaching profession has developed into a community with its own language and culture (Cumming & Sumsion, 2014). Early childhood teacher beliefs and discourses have been developed and sustained within this context which is both influenced by, and influences these beliefs and subsequent teacher practice.

This study explores the espoused beliefs of qualified early childhood education (ECE) teachers, working in teacher-led, centre-based services, about the knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions they need to be effective in their role. In addition, it discusses the discourses shaping and being shaped by these beliefs, in particular the dominant essentialist maternal and neo-liberal discourses, and the marginalised discourse of democratic professionalism. This discussion includes exploration of why democratic professionalism had a marginalised status despite being a significant influence in the underpinning philosophies of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996)¹, the national ECE curriculum of New Zealand.

Discussion of these beliefs and discourses also explores how they have the potential to constrain or enable teachers and the implications of this constraint or enabling for policy and practice.

Background to the study

ECE in New Zealand has a number of distinctive service types that have been categorised into teacher-led and parent-led for the purposes of regulations and funding. Teacher-led services are defined by their requirement to have at least 50 percent of staff holding a recognised ECE teaching qualification. These services have been further broken down into centre-based and home-based. This study focuses on ECE qualified teachers in the teacher-led, centre-based section of the sector.

Over the past 30 years, there has been a growth of interest in the importance of ECE at government and societal levels, especially in relation to quality and

¹ Te Whāriki has subsequently been reviewed however the 1996 version was the current version at the time data was collected.

outcomes (Fasoli, Scrivens, & Woodrow, 2007). As Urban (2012) argues, “[o]ur societies’ engagement with the upbringing and education of the youngest children has finally become a highly political issue” (p. 494). Alongside economic arguments, including parental employment, one of the reasons for this growth in interest is the ever-increasing body of evidence linking participation in high quality ECE to positive outcomes for children (Mitchell, Meagher-Lundberg, Mara, Cubey, & Whitford, 2011; Mitchell, Wylie, & Carr, 2008; Sammons et al., 2004; Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, Sylva, Sammons, & Melhuish, 2008). This evidence comes from “neuroscience research on the developing brain...; econometric research on the contribution to healthy societies of investing in early childhood...; and social science research on the influence of early childhood experiences on child development outcomes” (Smith, 2016, p. 50).

Mitchell, Wylie, and Carr (2008), in their review of national and international literature on the outcomes of ECE, found “ECE participation is positively associated with gains in mathematics, and literacy, school achievement, intelligence tests, and also school readiness, reduced grade retention, and special education placement” (p. 2), particularly for children from low-income/ disadvantaged homes or who have English as an additional language - but only if the ECE services are of high quality. Higher quality programmes have more significant impacts on children’s cognitive outcomes, including their academic knowledge and ability. They also found evidence of positive impacts for children’s development of learning dispositions and social-emotional outcomes.

Evidence such as this “demonstrates that investing in good quality ECE can bring cost savings and benefits to governments and economies as well as to children and families” (Mitchell et al., 2008, p. 6). Quality in ECE is a highly-contested construct. However, it is largely accepted to consist of two components; structural quality and process quality (Smith, 1996). Features of structural quality include teacher qualifications, ratios, and group size and provide the conditions for teaching and learning. Process quality however “refers to the environment, interactions, and relationships that occur in an early childhood education setting and shape children’s learning opportunities and experiences in that setting”

(Mitchell et al., 2011, p. 2). Teaching pedagogy and practice is therefore key to the quality of ECE a child experiences.

The final report from the locality-based evaluation of the New Zealand ECE strategic plan (Mitchell et al., 2011) found positive gains in ECE quality had been made, in relation to observed teaching and learning practices and the implementation of *Te Whāriki*, the national ECE curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996), over the time period 2006 to 2009. These gains were clearly linked to a combination of teacher qualifications, engagement in Ministry of Education funded professional development and significant use of the resources produced by the Ministry to support sector practice (Mitchell et al., 2011).

Recent reports commissioned by the Ministry of Education (Advisory Group on Early Learning, 2015; Early Childhood Education Taskforce, 2011) however, have identified there is still significant variability in quality and effectiveness across ECE services. In addition, some research is indicating ECE teachers continue to place more emphasis on relational and emotional aspects of teaching than curriculum knowledge and skills or encouraging children's intellectual dispositions (Chang-Kredl & Kingsley, 2014; Gibson, 2015; Katz, 2010; Rekalidou & Panitsides, 2015).

This study considers the role teachers' beliefs and discourses may contribute to this variability. Pajares (1992) purported "the beliefs teachers hold influence the perceptions and judgments, which in turn, affect their behaviour in the classroom" (p. 307). Heald and Manuela (2013) agree, "[t]hese personal assumptions and biases invade our image of children and have an impact on what we do and how we behave as teachers" (p. 85). Such beliefs, assumptions and biases are shaped by discourses and ideological norms. These discourses and taken-for-granted cultural knowledge and assumptions (Gee, 2014) potentially enable or constrain teachers' practice (Fairclough, 2010, p. 11).

My interest

My interest in this topic was first piqued in my most recent role as Director Education for Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand (ECNZ), a national private tertiary training establishment that specialises in ECE teacher education.

Two students in the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) programme who have physical disabilities, had their teaching practice assessed as ‘poor’ by their Associate Teachers (AT) during a practicum placement. This poor assessment appeared to arise from concerns about the students’ physical ability to meet the AT’s image of a satisfactory teacher e.g. “he can’t supervise the playground properly because he can’t see far enough” and “she can’t move quickly enough to get to an injured child because she is in a wheelchair” – in other words the Associate Teachers believed the students could not meet the arguably old fashioned supervisory image of a teacher. As ECNZ’s Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) is field-based², both of these students were successfully working in other ECE centres and no issues had been raised by their home centres at that point. This experience made me curious about the notion of ‘fitness to be a teacher’ (Clause 355(2), Education Act, 1989) and whether the ECE sector has a shared understanding of this requirement.

My interest has broadened and deepened over time as ECE centres and lecturing staff advocated for students, who had made insufficient progress in their studies, or had been charged with criminal offences, to remain enrolled in the Bachelor of Teaching (ECE) programme, saying things like “but she is a really good practitioner”. When I asked what they meant by these statements, the lecturers and centre staff responded with explanations like, “the children love her”, or similar responses. There was never any mention of facilitating children’s learning, or engaging children in sustained shared thinking, or intentional teaching – or teaching at all. I had a sense that many of the historical discourses shaping teacher beliefs prior to the introduction of *Te Whāriki*, particularly maternal discourses continued to prevail and I wanted to explore this sense.

While variation in learner outcomes can be attributed mostly to their background and abilities, the most important influence beyond learner context is teacher quality (Connell, 2009a); therefore what is meant by ‘a good teacher’ is an important question.

² Field-based teacher education requires students to be working or volunteering in an ECE centre for a minimum of 12 hours per week during the course of their study.

As children are starting ECE younger, and attending for longer hours, teachers have an increasingly significant influence over, and responsibility for, children's lives. In addition, New Zealand is becoming more diverse. The past few decades have seen significant increases in ethnic, cultural, social and linguistic diversity; diversity which is expected to continue to increase at a faster rate than in most other countries (Royal Society of New Zealand, 2013).

This changing environment requires teachers to carefully consider their beliefs concerning children, teaching and what is taught to ensure the best possible environment for children to experience and learn from (Clark & Grey, 2010). It is hoped the results from this study will be of interest to teachers, provoking them to engage in this process.

It is important teachers, i.e., those who have the most direct role in the implementation of any proposed change, have had an opportunity to have their voices heard (Levinson, Blackwood, & Cross, 2013). As such, this study sought the voices of teachers in relation to their beliefs about what makes a 'good' teacher in New Zealand ECE centres. This voice has been shaped over time by dominant discourses. Therefore the literature used in this study crosses time.

Teacher beliefs

Teacher beliefs have long been recognised as having a significant role in driving teacher practice (for example, Pajares, 1992); therefore examining teacher beliefs is important. Each early childhood setting operates from a complex web of principles and values based on the curriculum, the overarching philosophy of the centre and the values and beliefs of the teachers. The national curriculum for ECE, at the time of this study, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) required each setting to "explore their own perspectives on what counts as 'teaching', 'learning' and 'knowledge'" (Nuttall, 2003, p. 24). In order to do this, each teacher was asked to make explicit their images of children and childhood, their beliefs about the purposes of ECE, and their understandings about the role of the teacher in children's learning.

Unfortunately, beliefs are generally hidden. Clark and Grey (2010) describe teaching practice as an iceberg "of which one-third (our observable behaviour) is visible while two-thirds (the beliefs, values and personal theories) remain

submerged” (Clark & Grey, 2010, p. 4) and therefore cannot be directly observed or measured. Instead they must be inferred from what people say and do (Pajares, 1992). Despite being hidden, beliefs, values and theories guide teachers’ decision-making, and drive what they are and what they do (Goodfellow, 2003), as well as their enthusiasm and subject knowledge (Hedges & Cullen, 2005a).

As well as being shaped by regulatory frameworks and curriculum guidelines, individual teachers’ beliefs and philosophies “are also partly constructed by the professional knowledge base formed by gaining a teaching qualification... [however] [t]heories wax and wane in popularity” (Clark & Grey, 2010, p. 5). If teachers are unable to fully understand the ‘theory du jour’ they are likely to continue to practice from the basis of their beliefs. Riojas-Cortez et al. (2013) found that even when there was a shift in teachers’ “epistemological understanding, there was also a reluctance to relinquish their previously held beliefs” (p. 40). This construction of teacher beliefs through teacher education, both pre-service and in-service, will make the outcomes of this study of interest to teacher education and professional learning and development providers, as well as policy makers.

Discourses

Discourses are ways of enacting and recognising different identities through language, actions, interactions, beliefs and values (Gee, 2014) (see Chapter Three). Analysis of the discourses shaping participants in this study supported the examination and interpretation of their espoused beliefs, and the influence of dominant discourses in ECE. These discourses were often competing and contradictory and led participants to occupy a range of subject positions.

Fairclough (2010) argues, because subjects are typically unaware of the ideological dimensions of the subject positions they occupy “ideologies are **not** to be equated with views or beliefs. It is quite possible to occupy institutional positions which are ideologically incompatible with his or her overt political or social beliefs and affiliations, without being aware of any contradiction” (p. 44, emphasis added). Therefore, they may say they believe one thing, but discourse

analysis highlights discourses that are incompatible with, or contradict, what they state their beliefs to be. This study explores such contradictions.

Osgood (2006) also found teachers can seem to “embody or perform a given policy intention, but they do not believe in it or feel able to resist it” (p. 189). These discourses were important to ‘discover’ as discussions of these contradictions, that is making the invisible visible, may generate greater understanding in the sector of the discourses which have been adopted in rhetoric alone, without accepting the substance required to facilitate real change (Lawson et al., 2004; Nuttall, 2005b). Discourse analysis provided a ‘tool’ to make these inferences about beliefs based on what the participants said.

Robinson and Jones Diaz (2006) argue:

individuals are capable of critical historical reflection and are able to exercise some choice with respect to the discourses and practices they take up for their use... In critically analysing the discourses which constitute their lives, individuals can claim or resist them according to the effects they want to establish and can be creative in this process (p. 38).

This study, therefore, provides provocation for early childhood teachers to engage in such critical analysis, as I sought to understand the following research questions in order to uncover the invisible and make it visible to teachers.

Research questions

1. What are ECE teachers’ espoused beliefs about the most important knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions they need to be effective in their role?
2. What are the discourses shaping and being shaped by these beliefs?
3. How may these beliefs and discourses enable or constrain ECE practice?

Qualitative interview and discussion data (group and individual) were collected and analysed using both critical and poststructural feminist discourse analyses, providing a micro and macro view to inform my understanding and supporting me to ‘zoom in’ and ‘zoom out’ of the data. As there is no single or correct way to engage in this process, I adapted and combined analysis tools in a way that met the needs of this study (Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 2014). Using multiple lenses

and analysis tools, data was analysed through “the use of induction (or discovery of patterns), deduction (testing of theories and hypotheses), and abduction (uncovering and relying on the best of a set of explanations for understanding one’s results)” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17).

Exploring data through multiple lenses enabled me to systematically ‘test’ my ideas and conclusions and supported me to answer my research questions in a way that acknowledges the context and complexity of these questions (Maxwell, 2011). Using two competing and/or complementary versions of discourse analysis added multiple voices, to this study, providing me as the researcher with “a richer, more complex set of possible understandings and readings of the data” (Baxter, 2003, pp. 67–68).

Analysis of these questions, however, completed after data collection, highlighted that the questions are, unintentionally, framed through a neo-liberal lens, in that they were requesting an ‘assemblage’ or ‘list’ of knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions for effective teaching (Connell, 2009a). This is an example of how dominant neo-liberal discourses are (see Chapter Seven), and has forced me to challenge my own taken for granted assumptions. Like Ball (2013), I both struggled against and was enfolded into neo-liberalism. Did I really want a list of differentiated competencies that could be identified and used as a model for an ‘effective teacher? That was definitely not my intention – I simply wanted to know what teachers believe a ‘good’ teacher should have or be and what are their priorities? Everybody seems to have an opinion on the issue including government, parents and general society – but I was most interested in the thoughts of teachers themselves. This study reflects these intentions.

Contribution to theory and practice

While there are studies which explore teachers’ beliefs in relation to specific curriculum knowledge areas, for example science (Duran, Ballone-Duran, Haney, & Beltyukova, 2009; O’Brien & Herbert, 2015; Park, Dimitrov, Patterson, & Park, 2016), literacy (Hindman & Wasik, 2008; C. Lim & Torr, 2007; McLachlan, Carvalho, de Lautour, & Kumar, 2006) and mathematics (Chen, McCray, Adams, & Leow, 2014; Park et al., 2016), I was unable to find any studies that ask teachers about the overarching knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions

they value most. There have also been a few studies focusing on the difference between teachers' curriculum beliefs and their practices (Cobanoglu & Capa-Aydin, 2015; Leung, 2012; Wen, Elicker, & McMullen, 2011). However, these studies did not focus on the genesis of these beliefs nor the discourses within them. In addition, I was unable to locate any New Zealand specific studies. One of the aims of this study is to help fill these research gaps.

Structure of thesis

Following the literature review and methodology chapters, this thesis has six findings and discussion chapters. Chapter Four introduces identified dominant discourses shaping and being shaped by participants in this study providing examples of tension, contradiction and conflict. The following five chapters go on to explore these discourses in more detail discussing how ECE services, teachers, parents, and children are positioned by them. Implications of these positionings are also discussed.

In Chapter Five, dominant essentialist maternal discourses which position the teacher as a substitute-mother are the focus, while Chapter Six explores one of the most significant impacts of these discourses; an over-emphasis on the socialisation of children and teachers to the detriment of the academic purposes of education. Teachers are intentional in their teaching of social competence to children however subject knowledge has less priority with children being expected to gain this knowledge through interaction with the environment.

In Chapter Seven, the second dominant discourse is discussed – that of neo-liberalism. This discourse has shaped participants' beliefs around professionalism. Participants linked the increase in accountability and government control to teachers becoming professional with a subsequent rise in status.

Chapter Eight explores the marginalised discourse of democratic professionalism; often more present in rhetoric than reality despite underpinning the values espoused in *Te Whāriki*.

The final findings and discussion, Chapter Nine, discusses the implications of the marginalisation of democratic professionalism discourses. It focuses specifically on participants' attitudes and beliefs around inclusion.

The final discussion draws together key findings and implications that have been woven through these chapters and suggests ways to make the 'invisible visible' to teachers and teacher educators encouraging a deep critique of 'common-sense' assumptions and 'taken-for-granted' practices.

The following review of the literature provides the context and framework for this these findings.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Teachers' beliefs, as a form of personal knowledge, lie at the very heart of teaching and "may be the clearest measure of a teacher's professional growth, and... [are] instrumental in determining the quality of interaction" (Kagan, 1992, p. 85). Kagan posited that learning about teachers' beliefs, will bring us closer to "understanding how good teachers are made" (p. 85).

Looking backwards to move forwards is important for this study. Fler (2003) challenged the early childhood education (ECE) profession to consider whether the specialised discourses developed to communicate within has locked the profession into a self-perpetuating set of values and 'taken-for-granted' practices that make it difficult to move thinking, arguing "to move forward, we need to look back and analyse what we have inherited" (p. 77). Therefore, in order to understand teachers' beliefs, how these beliefs are positioned by dominant discourses, and their implications for practice, it is important to understand their genesis.

Discursively, the concept of the 'good teacher' has always been informed by "larger social conversations, situations, ideologies and purposes within which it is situated" (Moore, 2004, p. 36). Discourses are threads through time and, while they build, they also rupture into something else. Exploring the history and discourses of early childhood teaching assists understanding of the subjectification of teachers and its subsequent effect on learning environments (Davies, 1994). Historical and contextual issues that may have contributed to the shaping of ECE teachers will be explored in the following sections.

This review begins by exploring various perceptions of the purpose of ECE, and where these perceptions have their genesis. Discussion of the history of ECE in New Zealand, and its gendered nature follows as a way of providing context to explain the current situation. This discussion also includes an overview of the influence of *Te Whāriki*, the national ECE curriculum.

The review then explores the dominant discourses and conceptions that have been identified to have shaped, and been shaped by, teachers and begins to

consider the impact of these discourses on policy and practice. The final discussion outlines what research is saying about what it takes to be a 'good' teacher, while acknowledging the concept of the good teacher is subject to development and change "linked to the historical, social and political situation within which the teacher positions themselves at any given point in time and space" (Moore, 2004, p. 17). As such, it sets the scene for the analysis of how the teachers in this study described and positioned what it takes to be a good teacher in New Zealand today.

Purpose of early childhood education in New Zealand

In 1938, Clarence Beeby, New Zealand's Education Director famously proclaimed:

Every person, whatever his level of academic ability, whether he be rich or poor, whether he live in town or country, has a right, as a citizen, to a free education of the kind for which he is best fitted, and to the fullest extent of his powers (cited in Gerlich, 2013).

This proclamation positions children as citizens with the right to a free education that is responsive to their needs and supports them to realise their potential. Despite this proclamation, however, the right for all children to have free and unfettered access to ECE, alongside schooling, has rarely been articulated in policy or enacted through funding. As such, ECE appears to have been marginalised from the wider education system and therefore the purpose of ECE in New Zealand has been less clearly defined by government.

Perceptions about the purpose of ECE are contested, shaped by differing discourses. Different perceptions have led to differing policy solutions. This section discusses how the purposes of ECE have been framed and re-framed over time.

During the twentieth century, the care of children was a key societal focus around the globe. May (2009) identified, during this time, "social policy was characterised by campaigns calling for the state to support the health, welfare and education of children. A worldwide industry surrounding childhood was the result" (p. 1). Participation in ECE has often been touted as the place to 'solve' societal issues, particularly for children who have been considered 'unfortunate,

'disadvantaged', 'disenfranchised' or 'at risk' (May, 2009). It has also been promoted as a service to support economic success through both the education of future citizens and the employment of women. Participation in ECE through these lenses may be considered 'interventionist' rather than a public good and universal right of the child (Mitchell, 2015).

ECE provision has always reflected "how groups and individuals have understood their world, and how they have responded to technological innovations and social upheaval" (Stover, 2010, p. 10). Regardless of what discourse was driving society at the time, ECE services have often been afforded the duty of "transmitters of government policy to future generations" (Osgood, 2012, p. 85). As such they have "played a pivotal role in constructing particular views of children and how they should be reared" (May, 2009, p. 3), not only reinforcing the accepted views of the time but also pioneering the new.

Child protection

Historically, ECE services have often been positioned as being sites to 'protect' children from their circumstances. In the early 1900's, childcare³ was considered acceptable as a charity service to support women who "by some misfortune were unable to rear their children within acceptable norms" (May Cook, 1985, p. 18). Kindergarten was also considered a philanthropic service, offering protection and education for the poor (Middleton & May, 1997).

By mid-twentieth century, ECE was providing support and expert advice for struggling mothers, with childcare being tolerated "as a last resort for inadequate or incapable parents, where the child was in danger of the mother who could not manage" (Kedgley, 1996, p. 184). In the 1970s, childcare was sometimes perceived as protecting children from stressed full-time mothers who were nagging and hitting their children. It was identified "children would be better off in the hands of people who want them – trained people in a childcare centre, for example" (Kedgley, 1996, p. 236).

Over time ECE has been positioned as a site for 'intervention and investment', with hopes of overcoming "oppression and inequity in society" (May, 2009, p. 8).

³ Now known as education and care services

There has been a view that preschool education can counter disadvantage and deprivation caused by the perceived inadequacies of the family (Middleton & May, 1997). This view continues to be expressed by successive governments who focus on increasing participation in ECE for ‘vulnerable’ or ‘priority’ children.

Care, education and economic success

Traditionally, childcare has been perceived as providing all-day **care** for children whose mother has to work while kindergarten has been seen as providing a sessional **educational** service for children which supports their transition to school (May Cook, 1985).

Recognising the arbitrary nature of such a distinction and following significant lobbying from both ECE and women’s movements, the unification of the ECE sector in New Zealand began in 1986 when ‘childcare’ was moved from the governance of the Department of Social Welfare to join playcentre (a parent-led service) and kindergarten under the umbrella of the Department of Education (May, 2009). By 1988, integrated three-year training for both education and care and kindergarten teachers was being introduced in Colleges of Education. These actions established the notion of care and education being inseparable, a principle Dalli (2008) argued drives policy and curriculum in New Zealand.

This inseparability is based on the socio-cultural belief that “spontaneous and reciprocal interactions within caring relationships are the ingredients that promote children’s early learning” (Smith, 2016, p. 46). Dalli (2008) optimistically claimed these changes “abolished the *education vs care* divide that still persists in many other countries” (p. 142).

Unification continued through the subsequent development of shared regulatory frameworks, funding policies and curriculum guidelines. The move was made “in recognition that care and education are inseparable as children develop” (Cleveland & Colley, 2013, p. 185) and was a critical moment in New Zealand ECE history. Nuttall (2005a) suggested this move to explicitly recognise ECE as an educational service opened the door “to discourses of curriculum and the formalisation of expectations around learning, not just service provision in response to economic or social needs” (p. 13).

As the century progressed, discourses of business management and accountability also began to permeate ECE, increasing the focus on teachers measuring children's outcomes in order to identify the value in the investment in ECE (May, 2009). Urban (2012) argued such discourses reflect "the neo-liberal assumption that everything, including the upbringing of young children, can and should first be understood in economic terms" (p. 496). As such, future economic prosperity became linked with investment in the early years, positioning ECE as a place where children and their families learn to be 'proper' citizens (Macfarlane & Lakhani, 2015). ECE has become positioned as a key driver for the economic success of a nation.

Since the late twentieth-century "early childhood services [have been] seen as necessary conditions for competing economically in an increasingly globalised and marketised capitalism and for ameliorating its associated social disorders" (Moss, 2006, p. 30). Due to the dominance of these discourses, Ball (2007) argued such positioning meant ECE services, regardless of whether they were privately or community owned, were required "to act like businesses and in a business-like way" (p. 19), a concept he has termed 'endogenous privatisation'. Supply and demand were (and, arguably, continue to be) encouraged and facilitated through policy, including ECE licensing and funding rules, network planning and a focus on participation. Education has been spoken of, almost exclusively, in terms of its economic value (Ball, 2007).

Building on the perceived protectionist purpose of ECE, across the Western world, the child has been constructed and represented by governments as "vulnerable, unformed and always in relation to, and dependent upon, adults for their 'needs' to be met" (Osgood, 2012, p. 58) to ensure appropriate developmental progress is made and their 'potential' can be realised. While *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) uniquely positions the child as agentic (Nuttall, 2003), the image of the child as vulnerable remained in other government documentation and has been one of the key drivers behind increased government involvement in ECE, together with the aim to increase parents' economic activity and income. (Stover, 2010).

Employment of women

The provision of education and care for young children has also been constructed as important to achieve the emancipation of women, providing the support needed for women to engage in the paid workforce (Nuttall, 2005a; Osgood, 2012).

By the mid-70s, it was recognised there was a need for childcare as kindergarten and playcentre had been “intransigent and unresponsive to both research and social change” (Stover, 2010, p. 16). Women were calling for this service, looking for assistance outside the home for “baby-minding” due to “motives of self-fulfilment or economic necessity” (Max, 1990, p. 112).

The demand for childcare to facilitate the employment of women continued to grow. In the mid-80s, ECE became a key political issue and government began linking its provision to ensuring “equitable opportunities for women in the workplace” (Middleton & May, 1997, p. 283). This reinforced the societal perception that ECE is a “service to meet parents’ work-related needs rather than having potential benefits for children” (Berthelsen & Brownlee, 2007, p. 348).

Interestingly, Osgood (2012) found people forgot ECE teachers are also often working mothers. “[W]omen working in (child)care do not enjoy recognition and respect for their labour market contribution in ways that mothers working in professional careers can be understood to” (p. 15). Perhaps the reasons for this can be found in the highly gendered nature of the ECE workforce.

A gendered profession

ECE is arguably the most gendered of all professions “The gender imbalance in childcare and early years is extreme: very few occupations have fewer men” (Cameron, 2006, p. 71). This imbalance shapes the way the occupation is viewed, its status, and the nature of the work. ECE has been described as ‘feminised’ both due to the numerical predominance of women and the nature of work, founded upon an essentialist understanding of ‘feminine’ characteristics (Osgood, 2012).

Consistent with international trends, New Zealand has a disproportionate number of women choosing ECE as a career. Ministry of Education statistics indicate that in 2018, 97 percent of all qualified ECE teachers working in New Zealand teacher-led, centre-based settings were women⁴⁴. This is understandable due to the genesis of ECE, which grew from the ideal of motherhood (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007).

Gendered genesis

From the very beginning, ECE in Western societies has been seen as akin to mothering. Influential in the early kindergarten movement (late 1800s, early 1900s), and arguably the ‘father’ of ECE (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007), “Froebel believed that because of their maternal instincts, women were particularly suited to teach children in groups” (Stover, 2010, p. 14). The institutionalisation of Froebel’s practices and beliefs influenced the establishment of maternalism as the basis for being a good early childhood teacher (Ailwood, 2008). Where Froebel was ahead of his time however, was in his insistence that teachers be trained (Stover, 2010); a requirement that was not in response to the emancipation of women, but instead touted as a support for motherhood (Ailwood, 2008). Froebel’s teachers were trained both to complement the mother’s work (May, 2013), and prepare the teacher for impending motherhood (Ailwood, 2008).

The belief that ECE and mothering are similar was not only prevalent in the kindergarten movement. During the same time period, establishing philanthropic crèches for ‘poor’ women and children became a way for liberal women to take up public roles, while still conforming to the dominant discourse on the mothering role of women (Vandenbroeck, 2006).

There have also been strong cultural associations between teaching and femininity, with popular stereotypical identities ranging from Mary Poppins to Lady Bountiful; “the ‘most easily acquired narrative’ of the good teacher is one who is ‘white, feminine and middle class and who undertakes, through love, a calling and *natural* aptitude to save “at risk” children” (Taggart, 2011, p. 89).

⁴⁴ Data found at www.educationcounts.govt.nz

These narratives are informed by assumptions about what is considered natural, appropriate, moral or good (Weedon, 1987). Page (2013) argued the stereotypical image of the white, middle class mother was often viewed as 'normal' and 'good'. If, as suggested by Connell (2009a), the idea of a good teacher is often blurred with the idea of a good mother, this leads to the assumption that early childhood practice "*should be like middle-class mothering*" (Osgood, 2012, p. 44).

Early childhood teaching being positioned as akin to 'mothering' has had mixed associations. Osgood (2012) suggested the custodial and emotional nature of ECE teaching means it is "negatively constructed as an extension of the practical skills involved in mothering" (p. 15). Similarly, Moss (2006) purported that the image of the early childhood teacher as a substitute-mother elicited assumptions that "little or no education is necessary to undertake the work" (p. 34), as the competencies required are innate to women or gained through housework skills. He argued this image was "deeply entrenched in many societies" (p. 64), sustaining highly gendered workforces. In addition, Aitken and Kennedy (2007) suggested the ongoing links between ECE and mothering "provide challenges to early childhood educators being recognised as members of a profession, impacting on their status" (p. 166). Arguably these challenges still exist.

The link to mothering has not always been perceived as a negative however. Teachers have been positioned as 'expert' mothers, filling deficits where mothers have 'failed'. During the 1950s-60s playcentre mothers and kindergarten teachers gained increased recognition and status for their work with children.

[E]ncouraged by the maternalist belief, now strengthened by psychology, that mothers perform a service to the state by raising children... the training of both mothers and teachers as experts in understanding the preschool child was carefully positioned alongside the psychological benefits of full-time mothering at home (May, 2009, p. 26).

Motherhood has continued to be a recurring discourse within the sector, emerging in debates about practice and professionalism. Ailwood (2008) purported that over the years "women in ECEC have worked within, through and sometimes against the discourse of maternalism embedded in the

institutionalised and public definitions of their work” (p. 159). Teachers have struggled to find an acceptable alternative to the maternal image which has stubbornly remained dominant in professional discourse, linked to ‘attachment pedagogy’ and leading to early childhood teachers being conceptualised as substitute-mothers (Moss, 2006). The ECE teachers in Osgood’s (2012) study struggled with the discourse; “maternalism is omnipresent but dismissed as if it were a ‘guilty secret’ – a disposition that is widely taken on but routinely hidden from view or actively suppressed” (p. 115) as it is not seen as ‘professional’.

While it could be argued the persistence of this discourse in the minds of many early childhood teachers over the years means some credence ought to be given to its worth (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007), motherhood does not necessarily equip teachers to enact the full complexities of their work and curriculum implementation (Grieshaber & Graham, 2017). Aitken and Kennedy (2007) argued “[t]here needs to be a re-appraisal of this image in the context of contemporary research and scholarship” (p. 99). This study forms part of this re-appraisal.

This mothering focus has led to the significantly gendered sector we have today and possibly to the comparatively low status of early childhood teachers who have arguably always been “the Cinderella of the education sector” (May, 2009, p. 10). Acker (1983) purported the status of women teachers mirrors the status accorded to women in society. ECE has therefore been positioned as a space where custodial, social and emotional needs are fulfilled rather than intellectual functions (May Cook, 1985). Osgood (2012) argues these dominant constructions remain and “systematically act to devalue the work undertaken and naturalise it as a gendered activity” (p. 95).

It is ironic that the status of early childhood teachers has been low when very high expectations have been placed on teachers over the generations to “generate life-long learning potential in all future citizens” (Moyles, 2001, p. 86). Similarly, mothering is recognised as extremely important yet mothers also have low status in our society. When the general public is asked, most would say the early years are very important (children are our future), yet we have seen “very little action to support those claims; on the contrary, we see irrefutable signs

that the younger the child is, the less status is afforded those who are involved in the care and education of that child” (Stonehouse, 1989, p. 68), teachers or mothers. While Stonehouse made this claim 20 years ago, there are many indications that this still applies today.

Essentialist notions of women

Maternalism in ECE is based on essentialist conceptions of femininity. In these conceptions, the biological differences between men and women, both observed and imagined “ascribe social definitions of the nature and function of femininity and masculinity to a fixed and unchanging natural order... independently of social and cultural factors... [explaining] the naturalness and inevitability of our different social status and function” (Weedon, 1987, p. 128).

Due to biology and reproduction capabilities, motherhood is believed to be natural and instinctual rather than a discursively constructed social practice and is “often perceived to be the essence of what it means to be a woman” (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006, p. 94). Biological debates have suggested that, because women have primary responsibility for childcare both within and outside the family in all known societies, women must be naturally suited to this role (Weedon, 1987). Training for women to become teachers was, therefore, designed to amplify their natural capacities for maternal nurturance (Walkerdine, 1992). The notion that mothering is ‘natural’ and ‘instinctive’ has also influenced perceptions of the early childhood educator’s role and “romanticises highly complex and challenging work... [that] is focused on relationships and responsiveness” (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007, p. 168).

The dominance of essentialist notions can also mean early childhood teachers are located in contradictory subject positions. Robinson and Jones Diaz (2006) found the early childhood educators in their research, despite working with young children, indicated they would not put their own children in care, “believing that it is more appropriate for mothers to look after their children in the early years” (p. 33).

Role confusion

Moyles (2001) argued it is difficult for teachers to separate the mother/teacher roles and important for them to combine them to fulfil the needs of children. For

early childhood teachers, the distinctions between teaching and mothering can be problematic because of the age of the child – “the younger the child, the wider the range of functioning for which adults must assume responsibility” (Katz, 1980, p. 49). Teachers and parents both need to be aware of their scope of functions to avoid role confusion and unclear boundaries. Whilst acknowledging behaviours may overlap, and that teachers will do many of the same things with children mothers do, Katz (1980) identified seven dimensions where there are significant distinctions between mothering and teaching. These are:

Role dimension	Mothering	Teaching
Scope of Functions	Diffuse and Limitless	Specific and Limited
Intensity of Affect	High	Low
Attachment	Optimum Attachment	Optimum Detachment
Rationality	Optimum Irrationality	Optimum Rationality
Spontaneity	Optimum Spontaneity	Optimum Intentionality
Partiality	Partial	Impartial
Scope of Responsibility	Individual	Whole Group

(pg. 49).

Briefly, the distinctions under each role dimension are as follows:

Scope of functions – While there is nothing about the child that is not the parents’ business, relationships between teachers and children are limited, specific and time-bound.

Intensity of affect – There should be “more frequent and greater affective intensity in the behaviour of mothers than of teachers” (p. 50). The teacher-child relationship is less intimate and permanent.

Attachment – The notion of ‘optimum attachment’ between mother and child reflects an attachment that is neither too weak nor excessive (smother-love). In contrast, the relationship between teacher and child should be one of ‘detached concern’ to avoid emotional burn out and to add some objectivity to their work.

Rationality – The optimum irrationality of the mother is about putting the mind to the service of the heart. Teachers, however, “calls for rational analysis of how to proceed in the education of young children on the basis of accumulated

knowledge of how children develop and learn, and of what is appropriate pedagogy for children” (p. 55).

Spontaneity – Mothers should aim to be optimally spontaneous with their children, responding to them flexibly from emotion as well as intellect. Teachers should be more intentional in their responses. It is probably in this intentionality which most clearly distinguishes child-rearing from education.

Partiality – Mothers should be champions of and biased partial their own children. Teachers need to treat children impartially.

Scope of responsibility – Mothers are concerned about one child, their own, while teachers have to be concerned about the welfare of all of the children in their care. This requires teachers to sometimes make decisions that benefit the group rather than the individual.

Katz’s seven dimensions, with their subsequent distinctions between mother and teacher, provide clarification should role confusion occur.

Men in early childhood

The gendering of the workforce has likely been a combination of how early childhood teaching is understood as essentially ‘women’s work’ and of how education and employment have been structured in ways that reproduce gendered workforces (Moss, 2006). These structures have been developed based “on the assumption that women are ‘equal but different’...*naturally* equipped to fulfil different social functions...[which] calls for particular qualities, thought to be naturally feminine, such as patience, emotion and self-sacrifice” (Weedon, 1987, pp. 2–3)

While males and females are equally capable of mothering, nurturing and caring, cultural values have operated to discourage boys and men from displaying these behaviours (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). As a corollary to this, together with the historical positioning of early childhood work as ‘women’s work’, men have tended to be excluded, or at least discouraged, from participating in this sector (Dalli, Miller, & Urban, 2012).

Huppatz (2009) argued gendered occupations can be sites for the exercise of *gender capital*, in particular ‘the paid caring field’ is a site for *feminine capital* where women have some advantages, particularly in relation to employment and societal preference. Because caring is considered “a natural and innate feminine pastime... women are *trusted* to perform in the role whereas men are regarded with *suspicion*... Hence, feminine capital is legitimated within this field” (p. 53). As such, Acker (1983) suggested “once women had carved out this area of influence they held on to it as one of the few arenas in which they could exert any power, even at the expense of further reinforcing stereotypes about women’s sphere” (p. 134), and excluding men.

Feminine capital is limited however, the very qualities that provide the advantage within the field (e.g. attributes of femininity) also appear to have limited the field in society meaning it remains undervalued and underpaid. In addition, women’s confidence in their ‘natural’ capabilities to care and nurture may have equated to a lack of confidence in less stereotypical capabilities (Huppatz, 2009).

Teachers’ role

Changing educational theories and ideologies on how children learn have impacted on teachers’ beliefs, role and practice by dictating both the role of the adult in relation to the child, and the subsequent pedagogical approach. (Nuttall, 2003).

In the 1940s, as ECE moved from being seen as a philanthropic service to the ‘underprivileged’ to a service that is “something that all children could benefit from” (Middleton & May, 1997, p. 28), the role of the teacher became examined more closely. May (2009) outlined “[t]he twentieth-century view of the child was dominated by the explanations of developmental psychology, which presumed a universal (monocultural) and naturalistic view of children’s development as separate from, but leading to, adulthood” (pp. 3-4). As development during the early years was considered rapid and complex, and children were considered most vulnerable, intensive oversight was justified. Teachers were positioned in a passive role by these theories at the time, “with adult interventions largely focused on providing materials and structuring the physical environment”

(Peters & Davis, 2011, p. 15). Walkerdine (1992) argued the teacher's role was also to be "passive to the child's active. She works to his play. She is the servant of the omnipotent child, whose needs she must meet at all times" (p. 21).

Freudian psychology also made an impact with a focus on children's emotional wellbeing and a role for "teachers as psychologists who had to look beneath the outward behaviour of children to understand their inner conflicts" (Middleton & May, 1997, p. 119). John Bowlby's work on the effects of 'maternal deprivation' was also influential. His attachment theory argued that if a child becomes deprived if removed from his mother's care for any reason, even if the person caring for the child is loving. This has been interpreted to include the child attending ECE. He argued that this 'deprivation' subsequently leads to the child growing up anxious, vengeful, guilty and depressed (Bowlby, 1953). While Bowlby's theories have been challenged, they remain influential, including in ECE, where they have led to teachers being positioned as substitute-mothers, and working mothers being positioned as 'bad' (Page, 2013; Vandenberg, 2006).

In the 1990s, sociocultural theories began gaining popularity. These theories recognise that childhood is not universal and highlight the importance of social relationships in children's learning, recognising children learn best in responsive social contexts where their well-being is nurtured (Smith, 1996). As sociocultural ideologies became more prevalent, the role of the teacher also evolved, becoming far more active. From a sociocultural perspective, "young children's learning emerges from their deep engagement in meaningful problems within the context of support and guidance from skilled adults... in cognitively challenging tasks and activities" (Smith, 2016, p. 46). Smith also argued that the role of the teacher is to respect children's agency while offering them guidance, direction and opportunities to "acquire culturally valued skills and knowledge in the context of consistent relationships" (p. 45).

In a sociocultural approach, more emphasis is placed on the role of the teacher to ensure 'learning leads children's development' and not the other way around. Teachers are asked to "have ideas about goals of early childhood education and set about implementing those ideas... [and] have a set of culturally accepted objectives and values to base their practice on" (Smith, 1996, p. 53), developing

and extending these in response to their particular community. The emphasis is on teachers getting to know each individual child and their family context to ensure they are tuned to the children's abilities, strengths and interests and can assist them to take them to the next step (scaffolding), not through a didactic approach but within a dynamic interactive relationship.

Despite the introduction of these new perspectives, the ideological framework of developmentalism, with its strong scientific discourse, remained strongly evident in New Zealand ECE discourse and artefacts (Farquhar & Flear, 2007). Meade (2000) suggested some teachers at that time still commonly acted in passive roles, limiting their ability to address differences in children's competencies and achievements. This passivity was often linked to the tenets of 'children's choice' and 'learning through play' as well a focus on the individual child (rather than the child in context). Teachers were "reluctant to stimulate children's cognitive development" (Meade, 2000, p. 18) except by adding different materials and equipment rather than listening and talking to them. This study explores the influence of these discourses today.

Shifting paradigms appeared to have had greater influence on language than practice, that is "language may frame up new ideas to look just like old ones" (Farquhar & Flear, 2007, p. 35). In their study on teachers' responses to the introduction of new policy discourse, Kilderry, Nolan, and Scott (2017) found teachers experienced a mismatch of old and new knowledge when being introduced to new theories and practices. This mismatch led "to an uncomfortable juxtaposition trying to combine familiar ways of practising and new ways of practising" (p. 351). This discomfort is apparent in other studies. Even though there is greater focus on the active teacher, Peters and Davis (2011), in their research on how educators supported the development of children's working theories, found their participants did not necessarily engage with children in ways that extended their thinking. Instead the adults often assumed the child's interest and subsequently 'high-jacked' the direction of the learning experience.

In addition, throughout these philosophical changes, "[t]he fundamental assumption of child-centred pedagogy, that young children learn through play,

[has] remained the dominating discourse of curriculum, [while] the rationales for the benefits of play [have been] periodically realigned” (May, 2009, p. 9). Despite this, Riojas-Cortex, Alanis and Bustos Flores (2013) argue “[t]he role of play in teaching and learning is perhaps the most misunderstood issue in early childhood education” (p. 41), in that it can ‘look’ the same but be understood in many different ways. Kilderry (2015a) argues “over the years, educators, authors and academics have defined, redefined and debated child-initiated practices in relation to adult-initiated pedagogies. Subsequently, wide ranging views of child-centred and child-initiated practice have been expressed” (p. 22). These wide ranging views have led to role confusion within the sector as teachers themselves struggle to articulate the nature of their identity and what they do.

Physical environments in ECE services have also changed very little. “The material environment of ECE stayed remarkably consistent over the 60 years of this study, involving stories, puzzles, blocks, paints, dough, water, sand, junk and outdoor climbing equipment although by the 2000s the ICT⁵ child was much more evident” (May, 2009, p. 9). My observations indicate that this is still the case. This ongoing focus on play and consistency in environment is likely to have enabled experienced teachers to continue with current practice, regardless of any new theories they are being introduced to (Fleer, 2006).

The teachers’ role has also become increasingly intensified, in the name of professionalism, with the introduction of multiple accountabilities including management systems, assessment of children, teacher appraisal and registration, and self-review and evaluation. The performance of teachers is being measured and they are being held accountable for their performance. In a climate of performativity, “soft services like teaching which require ‘human interaction’ are re-made to be just like the ‘hard’ services... they are standardised, calculated, qualified and compared” (Ball, 2007, p. 28). Teachers work has been recast in instrumental terms with metrics of performance and effectiveness and professional standards (McLeod, 2017).

Even as far back as the early 80s, Apple (1983) was arguing this accountability and intensification was eroding teachers’ working conditions with them having

⁵ Information communication technology

“no time at all to even go to the bathroom, have a cup of coffee or relax [as well as] having a total absence of time to keep up with one’s field” (p. 58). Apple argued one of the impacts may be a reduction in quality (not quantity) of service offered to people. More recently, Lingard (2017) recognised that while “accountability in and of itself is not a bad thing, it can end up having damaging effects” (para. 5). Accountability should involve two elements in balance; being held to account by others and giving account of yourself. Neo-liberal approaches have contributed to the establishment of measures that “almost exclusively involve **holding to account**” (para. 6). Lingard proposes a model of *rich accountability* as an alternative. This model of accountability brings together “multiple partial perspectives from multiple stakeholders” (Rich accountability, para. 2) in order to form a more complete picture of what is happening. Teachers, as the party being held to account, have agency in the process by being involved in determining ‘what counts’ and being able to give their own account.

Qualifications

Teacher qualification levels have been recognised as one of the key predictors of high quality programmes (Mitchell et al., 2011, 2008; Sammons et al., 2004; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2008). Mitchell et al. (2008) found “clear evidence showing associations between cognitively challenging adult-child interactions and gains for children, and the association between teacher qualifications and these kinds of interactions” (p. 42) suggesting having a qualified teaching workforce may provide a path for positive child outcomes.

The importance of having a qualified teaching workforce in ECE has historical roots. Even in 1879, in an attempt to set up crèche to provide a better environment for children of women “who were occupied away from home” (May Cook, 1985, p. 16), the employment of qualified teachers (alongside nurses) was deemed important for quality.

This importance has not always been universally recognised however. In 1960 the *Childcare Centre Regulations*, with their strong emphasis on physical safety rather than development, had no qualification requirements for staff – only requiring they were “17 years old in good health and physical condition” (May Cook, 1985, p. 48). Advocates however, have always argued children in childcare

“deserved the same rights to trained staff and government funding as those attending playcentre and kindergarten” (Middleton & May, 1997, p. 252). By 1963, calls were beginning for a training scheme for staff, aimed at improving the quality of childcare. These calls finally led to a regulation change in 1985 requiring “each centre to have one trained staff member” (May Cook, 1985, p. 48). Despite this, many were still cautious about childcare workers needing qualifications due to the link to mothering and natural instincts. This reticence extended “to the idea that childcare was a lovely job for a ‘not-so-bright’ young girl straight from school, in that it would be excellent training for motherhood” (May Cook, 1985, p. 49). This attitude persists.

Teacher education for kindergarten teachers, however, was funded by the government and, in the mid-70s, shifted into the teachers’ colleges. This move was designed to “upgrade the status of kindergarten training, break down its isolation and provide breadth of curriculum and benefits enjoyed by primary student teachers” (Middleton & May, 1997, p. 277). Unfortunately, as kindergarten training was only two years in duration rather than the three required for primary teaching, improved status did not occur at this time. It wasn’t until three-year programmes for all early childhood teachers was introduced in 1988 this started to change (Middleton & May, 1997), for kindergarten teachers. For those working in education and care settings, improved status has taken longer. This is partially due to the lower qualification requirements for these services. Only one qualified ECE teacher was required to be present in teacher-led centres until 2008 when the regulations were amended to increase the requirement to 50 percent of required staff working with children.

As ECE has taken higher priority in government policy agendas, there has been increased interest in the professionalisation of the workforce linked to the argument higher quality services and better outcomes for children are linked to teacher qualifications (Dalli et al., 2012). In New Zealand, a focus on the provision of a professional, qualified teacher workforce drove early childhood policy for much of the 2000s due to the development and implementation of *Pathways to the future: Ngā huarahi arataki 2002-2012 strategic plan for early childhood education* (Ministry of Education, 2002) (ECE strategic plan). The ECE

strategic plan envisaged a fully qualified and registered early childhood workforce for teacher-led services. This vision was premised on the notion qualified teachers are essential for quality ECE (Dalli, 2008). The aim was for all adults working in teacher-led services to be registered teachers or completing qualifications by 2012. This aim was revoked following a change of government in 2009.

If the early years is seen to be the foundation for 'lifelong learning' then the quality of the teaching workforce needs to be a major consideration (Oberhuemer, 2005). Smith (2016) argued that "qualifications helps teachers understand how to implement a rich curriculum, and to plan, manage[,] assess, and reflect on their practice" (p. 58), moving the provision of custodial care. Similarly, Moss (2008) argued that, for early childhood workers to be democratic and reflective professionals, "strong, graduate-level, initial education, followed by strong continuous professional development supported by collaborative working relations" (p. 126), is required.

Despite this, the perception of the value of qualifications in the sector has been varied. Dalli's (2008) study found, for most teachers, gaining a qualification and engaging in ongoing professional development was seen as the key to the knowledge required for professional practice. Qualifications have also been seen by teachers as an effective way to raise the status of the profession (Osgood, 2004) In contrast, one of the educators in Urban and Dalli's (2012) study saw the relational and affective dimensions of teaching, as expressed through her actions and practices "as more important than the 'badge' of qualifications" (p. 159).

Giroux (1988) argued teachers (and students) embody beliefs, practices, concepts and norms that strongly influence how they teach. These are both historical and social in nature and may be conscious or unconscious. Teacher education is about exposing student teachers to new tools that will influence curriculum decision making and work with children (Nuttall, 2013), however it is not always the strongest influence on teacher practices and beliefs. Teachers are socially constructed and discursively constituted and can struggle to resist different and competing discourses. They are "caught in a tug of war between

what they are supposed to be and who they are trying to become” (Janzen, 2015, p. 117).

Middleton and May (1997) found mid-century teacher students, when faced with new ideas and challenges “did not necessarily put into practice what they had been taught” (p. 121) with 90 percent capitulating and adopting the practices of other teachers rather than what they had been taught at teachers’ college. This was despite the enthusiasm they showed at college. This may be because, as MacNaughton (2005) argued, “[c]reating change as an individual can be hard. It is hard to convince others to join you, it’s hard to remember what you have learnt and it’s hard to avoid retreating to the tried and trusted ways” (pp. 198–199).

The resistance of teachers to practice they have learnt in their teacher education may also be due to the perceived value placed on experience. Wood (2004) identified, as a new graduate, she copied the practices of the more experienced practitioners in her workplace. More recently, Bråten and Ferguson (2015) found student teachers assigned more “weight to the testimonies of practising and preservice teachers than to those of textbook authors and researchers” (p. 19) due to the practising teachers’ closeness to the realities of the classroom..

Sosu and Gray (2012) suggest that questions remain about the extent to which teacher education can change student teachers’ beliefs and subsequently influence their competence as teachers. The question of how much teacher education and theory influences practice does not appear to be exclusive to new or student teachers. Spodek (1988) argued that even experienced teachers will often make opportunistic decisions based on their personal practical knowledge rather than any “technical knowledge of child development and learning theory” (p. 27). This appears to still be relevant today.

Te Whāriki – the early childhood curriculum

In the 1990s, neo-liberal priorities calling for a “greater emphasis on economic outcomes and accountability for student achievement” (Stover, 2010, p. 17) prompted the development of a national curriculum for early childhood, and *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) evolved over the next few years.

There was widespread concern in the sector that the curriculum being developed might be instructional and 'top down' i.e. strongly influenced by the curriculum for schooling. This concern in part, together with consideration of the diverse makeup and philosophical perspectives of the ECE sector (Nuttall, 2003), motivated the developers to create a complex curriculum which is open to diverse interpretations (Stover, 2010). It is a curriculum that protects early childhood from the school curriculum and articulates a philosophy that encompasses the diversity of the sector (Middleton & May, 1997).

Helen May, one of the writers, identified "the development and wide acceptance of Te Whāriki as a curriculum within the early childhood sector was a surprising story of careful collaboration between government and the sector. There was both accommodation and resistance to government agendas" (2009, p. 243). It has also been argued *Te Whāriki* was actually developed with little interference as the government of the day was not particularly interested in ECE - the domain of women and children (Mutch & Trim, 2013).

Following a 4-year development and consultation period, the final version was launched in 1996 by the Prime Minister of the time, James Bolger. Its launch was much celebrated as "[t]his was the first time a prime minister had so explicitly stamped government approval on what children might do on a daily basis in early childhood centres" (May, 2009, p. 243). From this point, early childhood services were required to show their programmes were operating in accordance with the principles, strands and goals outlined in the document.

Te Whāriki's evolution occurred alongside new systems of accountability for ECE including new regulations, and a revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices (DOPs). Stover (2010) wrote that "[t]ogether these documents... signalled the arrival of educational ways of thinking, talking and systems. Programmes became 'curriculum'; 'childcare workers', and 'Playcentre parents', became 'teachers' and 'educators'" (p. 18). In this new environment, and with the advent of sociocultural practice, children needed to be assessed, planning needed to be visible and teaching needed to be intentional. Nuttall (2005a) posited that these systems of accountability 'derailed' the implementation of *Te*

Whāriki somewhat as ECE services focused instead on “achieving regulatory compliance, and learning about assessment practices” (p. 17).

Developed in partnership with Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust (the umbrella organisation for Māori immersion language nests), *Te Whāriki* was revolutionary as it recognises indigeneity and validates Māori knowledge (Ritchie & Rau, 2006). As such, it purports to be a bicultural curriculum, although this is probably more aspirational than actual in practice (Nuttall, 2005a). The bicultural nature of *Te Whāriki* places professional responsibility on ECE services to provide a curriculum that recognises and celebrates Māori ways of being and doing in order to give all children “the opportunity to develop knowledge and an understanding of the cultural heritages of both partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi⁶” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9). This is an important aspiration for Māori families in particular. Ritchie and Rau (2006) found Māori families who sent their children to English medium ECE and schools still wanted their children to learn te reo Māori⁷, expecting these services to support this aspiration.

In *Te Whāriki*, children from birth to school age are viewed as agentic, “active participants in their own learning” (Nuttall, 2003, p. 24). The concept of ‘mana’ (empowerment/ power/ prestige) is central and frames its aims for children (Mitchell, 2018). In addition, childhood is positioned as being “a preparation for adulthood” (Heald & Manuela, 2013, p. 85). These views of childhood are reflected in the aspiration statement which envisages that children “grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9). This use of different views recognises childhood should be seen as “a complex phenomenon not readily reducible to one end or the other of a polar separation” (Prout, 2005, p. 69).

Te Whāriki has been acclaimed both nationally and internationally, “commended for its progressive and non-prescriptive bases, its affirmation of the bicultural nature of New Zealand, its inclusion of attention to infants and toddlers, and its

⁶ Te Tiriti o Waitangi is the Māori language version of the Treaty of Waitangi – a treaty signed in 1840 between Māori and the British Crown which facilitated the colonisation of New Zealand.

⁷ The language of the indigenous people of New Zealand, Māori

emphasis on learning processes and orientations as outcome” (Hedges, 2013, p. 278). It is lauded and reified by ECE teachers.

Despite this acclaim, the implementation of *Te Whāriki* has not always gone smoothly in the sector. While May (2009) argued the introduction of *Te Whāriki* began to define “a more active role for the teacher, whose task was to ‘scaffold’ children towards more complex thinking and increasing competency” (May, 2009, p. 246), Nuttall (2003) posited the role of the teacher is less clearly defined. She argued “[t]he socio-cultural constructivist bases of *Te Whāriki* mean that it is up to teachers to negotiate their role, including those practices that they consider more or less appropriate in implementing a socio-culturally based curriculum” (pp. 24-25). The selection of pedagogical strategies is left up to teachers to determine (Nuttall, 2013).

Due to the reliance on professional judgment, it could be argued the implied adult working with children in *Te Whāriki* is the same as that implied in the *Australian Early Years Framework*, that is, “engage[d] in work typically associated with qualified teachers, regardless of the qualifications held” (Grieshaber & Graham, 2017, p. 94). Those working with young children are “conceptualised as well trained, reflective professionals who will translate fairly abstract goals into effective practice” (Oberhuemer, 2005, p. 12).

McLachlan and Arrow (2015) suggest teachers can have difficulty using *Te Whāriki* as it is a “broad guide, rather than a document offering guidance on specific practices” (p. 103). This concern was reflected in some parts of the sector on its implementation, with one kindergarten teacher stating “[i]t seems to me that it is so open, it doesn’t matter what kind of programme you run, it will fit in... I think it can be a bit frustrating to staff... perhaps it is not defined enough for some people” (Middleton & May, 1997, p. 331).

May does recognise the implementation of *Te Whāriki* has been complex, partly because it resists telling teachers what to do, “by ‘forcing’ each programme to ‘weave’ its own curriculum pattern” (May, 2009, p. 246). The resistance to providing specific guidance may have left teachers unsure about “content selection in curriculum and excused them from the responsibility to be knowledgeable about children’s interests” (Hedges & Cullen, 2005a, p. 11). The

definition of curriculum as ‘everything that happens’ has also been “extremely difficult to operationalise, since it demands simultaneous attention to every aspect of the learning environment” (Nuttall, 2013, p. 178). May (2009) also identified the holistic and bicultural approach to curriculum was a challenge for staff who were more familiar with the traditional focus on play areas and activities in mainstream centres.

The focus of *Te Whāriki* “is to concentrate on processes of interaction, rather than focus on subject matter or content” (Smith, 1996, p. 61). This focus may have contributed to an emphasis on emotional and relational areas over content knowledge. *Te Whāriki* does not appear to have been implemented in its entirety. ERO (2013), the government body responsible for evaluating schools and ECE services, found the principles *family and community* and *relationships* were often the only ones highlighted in pedagogical documentation.

Similarly, *wellbeing* and *belonging* were the most often referred to strands. ERO noted “a distinct absence of some principles and strands in the planned and enacted curriculum of some services, particularly in relation to the principles *empowerment* and *holistic development*, and the strands *exploration, communication and contribution*” (p. 10). Similarly, Mitchell, Meagher-Lundberg, Arndt, and Kara (2016) identified a more limited focus on exploration in the evaluation of the ECE participation programme. Exploration and communication are the strands where the subject knowledge in *Te Whāriki* is most explicit.

McLachlan and Arrow (2015) identify that *Te Whāriki* has “been criticised for its lack of coverage of domain areas of children’s learning, such as literacy, numeracy, science, physical education, and other areas” (p. 95). Perhaps this lack of coverage led to Hedges and Cullen’s (2005a) finding that subject knowledge can be either underemphasised or consciously excluded in ECE curriculum. These omissions may be due to the perception that an emphasis on subject knowledge will create a ‘top down’⁸ curriculum (Hedges & Cullen, 2005a) and/or to the postmodern deconstruction of the universal child (McLachlan & Arrow, 2015) and Western values. Te One (2013) believes the lack of prescriptive content

⁸ In this context ‘top down’ means overly influenced by the curriculum for schooling.

about subject domains in *Te Whāriki* “remains challenging for the sector, particularly when asked to articulate what children are learning” (p. 24).

The perceived lack of guidance and lack of coverage of subject knowledge in the curriculum places greater reliance on teacher educators to ensure teachers have a high level of curriculum knowledge. In relation to literacy education, McLachlan and Arrow (2015) argue “[f]or teachers with strong understandings of literacy, *Te Whāriki* offers maximum flexibility and scope. For teachers with poor understandings, it is potentially a recipe for few or poor literacy practices” (p. 99). Knowledgeable and skilled teachers are therefore important for effective implementation.

Dominant discourses and conceptions positioning teachers

Weedon (1987) identified “the most powerful discourses in our society have firm institutional bases” (p. 109) including education. They function to “position teachers and students so as to privilege particular renderings of ideology, behaviour, and the representation of everyday life” (Giroux, 1988, p. 88). Early childhood institutions “are a microcosm of broader society” (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006, p. 8) where discourses are constituted and perpetuated, including many that underpin social inequalities.

This section explores what literature has identified as the discourses and conceptions that are positioning teachers, both in early childhood and in the compulsory sector, where applicable. Biesta et al. (2015) identify “a contested and often confused terrain of competing discourses underpin teachers’ practices” (p. 630). These discourses need to be individually explored and critiqued as each of them have the ability to constrain or enable teacher development (which is itself discursively constructed), placing too much emphasis on the individual teacher when they may be operating within a faulty policy (Moore, 2004). It is also important to understand these discourses as early childhood teachers have the ability to make a positive difference for children and their families by challenging and disrupting ‘normalising’ discourses through curriculum, policy and pedagogy (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). Due to the dominance of these

discourses, many of the identified discourses and conceptions have similarities and connections.

Stonehouse (1989) identified there are a number of conflicting and stereotypical conceptions of early childhood teachers, all which have impacted negatively on status. These include a 'Mary Poppins' view which portrays teachers as people who frolic happily with children and who have an endless supply of stories and games to keep children happy. The assumption is that, because children spend most of their time playing, teachers do too. This image represents a teacher who does not need a qualification, only natural ability and patience.

This 'Mary Poppins' view is consistent with Moore's (2004) notion of the *charismatic teacher*, one of three dominant discourses of teaching and teacher education identified in his book *The Good Teacher*. The charismatic teacher, has significant popular appeal either in the form of 'teacher as carer' and/or 'teacher as saviour'. Like Mary Poppins, in this discourse good teaching is aligned with "the inherent or intrinsic qualities of character or personality of the teacher, coupled with a deeply 'caring' orientation aimed very specifically at 'making a difference' to pupils' lives" (pp. 4-5). It has an over-reliance on personality and an under-reliance on technique, positioning good teachers as born rather than made (through teacher education), thus undermining teacher education.

Moore (2004) argued the notion of the charismatic teacher also serves to mystify teaching, making it beyond the reach of many individuals, devaluing key pedagogical concerns like planning and deflecting attention away from wider sociocultural concerns. In addition, due to its over-emphasis on the individual, this discourse ignores the social structures and contexts that impact on teacher actions, "supporting the individual at the expense of collective responsibility" (p. 6). It is, however, the discourse that "student teachers 'bring with them' into their courses" (p. 7).

Moss (2006) also discussed three conceptions of an early childhood teacher. The first of these, *teacher as substitute-mother* is also consistent with the Mary Poppins and charismatic teacher conceptions due to its essentialised nature. It is gendered and the work is understood as requiring qualities innate to women. While not unique to ECE, this conception is derived from attachment pedagogy,

“the idea that mother care is needed for secure development and that, in its absence, non-maternal care needs to be modelled on a dyadic mother-child relationship” (p. 34).

Another author to have discussed dominant discourses shaping, and being shaped by, teachers over time is Connell (2009a), who draws from, and expands on Moore’s earlier work. As have previous authors, Connell identified the gender-divisions in teaching with women working with younger children. She argued, “for women, the idea of a good teacher was liable to be blurred with the idea of a good mother” (p. 215). This remained dominant and pervasive in societies where maternal care has been seen as ideal, and non-maternal care as an unfortunate necessity (Moss, 2006). Demonstrating the dominance of maternal images of teachers, Stonehouse (1989) identified a second motherly conception, that of the “old fashioned, motherly, stern but loving teacher” (p. 63). Usually a spinster, she is devoted to educating children impeccably and longs for the good old days, “when things were right for children – Mums were happy at home” (Stonehouse, 1989, p. 63).

In addition to the *charismatic teacher*, Moore’s second dominant conception is that of the *competent craftsperson* “wherein the teacher is configured and understood as one who ‘works upon’ the raw material of their students, improving the extent and quality of learning and skills through the application of identified skills of their own” (2004, p. 4). Lists of competencies and standards were positioned as “helpful descriptors of the qualities that all good teachers need to have, as well as providing a detailed set of criteria by which teachers know that they will be assessed” (Moore, 2004, p. 80). Similarly, Connell (2009a) argued the most dominant discourse at this time is that of the *competent teacher*. Like Moore’s ‘lists’, in this discourse, teachers are required to demonstrate “an assemblage of competencies” in order to provide “a ‘best practice’ that can be instituted and audited” (Connell, 2009a, p. 218). This discourse is “anti-intellectual and anti-theoretical” (p. 102), promoting a view of teachers as technicians rather than thinkers and creators.

Consistent with these conceptions, Moss’s (2006) second conception was that of the teacher as *technician* (p. 35). These discourses gained dominance alongside

neo-liberal discourses as government increased their control over, and influence in, teacher education and links to the development of standards and measures (Moore, 2004), for example the *Graduating Teacher Standards* (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2008). They gained dominance due to the neo-liberal belief that the education of young children can contribute to the achievement of economic and social goals, and requires teachers to be accountable and produce pre-specified measurable outcomes by adopting “a more developmental and/or educational role” (Moss, 2006, p. 35). Through these conceptions, ECE is viewed as an ‘industry’ whose workers need to achieve industry-defined standards and benchmarks, as assessed in the workplace.

Moore (2004) argued such standards and benchmarks sustain a view that the ‘ingredients’ of good teaching can be itemised and acquired by anyone; that teachers are ‘made’. Similarly, Moss (2006) argued, in ECE, technicians need not necessarily be qualified as this conception involves transmission of knowledge and assessing performance against standardised outcomes using prescribed and ‘objective’ methods. For a competent teacher, subject-specific knowledge and technical skills are still required, but there is no need to be able to reflect on bodies of knowledge influencing the curriculum (Connell, 2009a).

As this discourse strengthened, quantitative measures were introduced and an ‘audit culture’ emerged in response to growing attention by policymakers on school and teacher ‘effectiveness’, ‘excellence’ and ‘best practice’. These measures treat “schools and teachers as bearers of variables... to be correlated with pupil outcomes, measured on standardized tests” (Connell, 2009a, p. 217). They include the lists of auditable competencies developed and instituted by teacher registration bodies.

The rise of neo-liberal discourses also brought a focus on the growth of market-orientated politics (Connell, 2009a). Consistent with this, a conception of the early childhood teacher as business person and efficient manager of resources arose (Stonehouse, 1989). She has strong computer skills and spends most of her time in the office, leaving others to focus on the children.

The third discourse Moore (2004) discussed is that of *reflective practitioner*. This discourse moves beyond a skills-based approach to teaching and “places as much

emphasis on teachers' own evaluations of their practice (in specific contexts) as on the planning and management into which such evaluations feed" (p. 4). The reflective practitioner discourse works in parallel with the competent craftsperson discourse, sometimes in ways that are complementary and sometimes oppositional. It emphasises "the particular skills needed to reflect constructively upon continuing experience as a way of improving the quality and effectiveness of one's work" (p. 100). It is as interested in the teacher as it is in the skills. The teacher applies these skills selectively, flexibly and strategically, recognising the full context. They carefully evaluate their own performance in relation to children's behaviour and achievements. The reflective practitioner discourse "implies a sound understanding on the teacher's part of relevant educational theory and research" (p. 101), addressing issues of 'how' and 'why' as well as 'what' and 'when'. The skills required, including communication, evaluation and interaction, are more difficult to identify, codify and quantify than in the competent teacher discourse, suggesting a qualitative, research-based response.

Similar to Moore's *reflective practitioner*; Moss's (2006) third conception was that of *teacher as researcher*. The researching teacher is "constantly seeking deeper understanding and new knowledge" (p. 36). Research is part of everyday practice and involves teachers, children and parents. The teacher is reflective and dialogic, learning through listening and the co-construction of knowledge. Pedagogical documentation makes their work visible and subject to interpretation, dialogue, confrontation and understanding. The teacher as researcher is open to the unexpected and values doubt, uncertainty and subjectivity. The conception of teacher as researcher "has been strongly influenced by left and women's politics" (p. 38) and is situated in a post-foundational paradigm. The teacher as researcher may "choose not to take 'professional' as an identity and not to participate in the discourse of professionalisation" (Moss, 2006, p. 38) due to the multiple meanings associated with this identity, moving beyond non-professional/professional dualisms.

Connell (2009a) was the only author to explicitly link the notion of the reflective and/or researching teacher to qualifications although it was implied by Moore's

insistence on the 'sound understanding of educational theory and research'. In Connell's conception of the *scholar-teacher*, the university-qualified teacher is autonomous in thought and action, and applies disciplined knowledge, acting as "an agent of cultural renewal" (p. 216). This discourse generated the notion of the democratic, reflective and critical teacher. Education was positioned as its own field of study; an intellectual discipline, not just applied knowledge and teachers generated their own curricula. This discourse is evident in *Te Whāriki* despite the minimal qualification requirements.

Moore (2004) argued the two discourses most dominant in official documentation and policy are *competent craftsperson* and *reflective practitioner*. Teachers are encouraged to be both competent and reflective. However, both discourses also over-emphasise 'self-improvement' and focus on individuals, promoting the discourse of individual blame.

There is merit in each of the discourses identified as they offer some help to teachers to support practice (competent craftsperson and reflective practitioner), reinforce the importance of caring relationships (teacher as mother substitute), or remind us that teaching is an art (charismatic teacher) as well as a science. In addition, each of them provides a counter to other discourses. These discourses can, however, become problematic when they are individually afforded too much dominance as this can cause both confusion and the over-simplification of teaching activity, as well as reinforcing stereotypes (Moore, 2004).

Stonehouse (1989) argued the key to getting beyond these stereotypes was to become increasingly professional through uniting the profession; representing it more accurately to people; developing standard terminology for personnel; setting up a system of accreditation of services and personnel; developing a code of ethics; and, seeking opportunities to engage in "dispassionate, rational discourse about our profession in non-early childhood arenas" (Stonehouse, 1989, p. 77). While a number of these key strategies have been met in New Zealand, for example the development of a code of ethics and a united profession, others are yet to be realised.

The 'good' teacher

While variation in learner outcomes can be attributed mostly to their background and abilities, the most important influence beyond learner context is teacher quality (Connell, 2009a). This means “what is meant by ‘a good teacher’ has... become a significant practical [and conceptual] question” (p. 214). This section discusses the qualities of the good teacher described in literature.

Teacher registration

In New Zealand, official definitions of the good teacher reside (and have resided) in the registration standards and criteria developed by the Teaching Council (previously Education Council, Teachers Council and Teacher Registration Board). This crown agency was established under the Education Act 1989 to manage the registration and de-registration of teachers and “represents the interest of teachers, employers and the public, to ensure there is a quality teaching profession” (Teacher Registration Board, 1991, p. 6). These standards and criteria are used to guide teacher appraisal and professional development. They are also closely linked to the approval and evaluation of teacher education programmes. The teacher registration criteria being used at the time data was collected were the *Practising Teacher Criteria* (PTC), however a new code and standards was under consultation and has now been finalised and published. The PTC comprises 12 broad criteria under two overarching categories:

Professional relationships and professional values

1. establish and maintain effective professional relationships focused on the learning and well-being of ākonga [students]
2. demonstrate commitment to promoting the well-being of all ākonga
3. demonstrate commitment to bicultural partnership in Aotearoa⁹ New Zealand
4. demonstrate commitment to ongoing professional learning and development of personal professional practice
5. show leadership that contributes to effective teaching and learning

Professional knowledge in practice

⁹ Aotearoa is the indigenous name for New Zealand

6. conceptualise, plan and implement an appropriate learning programme
7. promote a collaborative, inclusive and supportive learning environment
8. demonstrate in practice their knowledge and understanding of how ākongā learn
9. respond effectively to the diverse language and cultural experiences, and the varied strengths, interests and needs of individuals and groups of ākongā
10. work effectively within the bicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand
11. analyse and appropriately use assessment information that has been gathered formally and informally
12. use critical inquiry and problem solving effectively in their professional practice

(Education Council, 2010).

A number of key indicators provide guidance as to how each criterion may be demonstrated.

Ryan and Grieshaber (2005) identified, however, that differing discourses offer “differing meanings as to what it means to be a “good” early childhood teacher” (p. 40). The concepts of ‘good’ and ‘teacher’ are both contestable (Moore, 2004). All teachers carry a notion of an ideal professional which has been constructed from a wide variety of resources and experiences over time and informs what they believe they need to be doing and achieving to feel they are performing to the best of their abilities.

In order to provide a framework on which to analyse the ways teachers’ beliefs and discourses can enable or constrain practice, it is important to understand what research and literature are identifying as the knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions ECE teachers need to be effective in their role. This section will briefly outline these, integrating, wherever possible, research on teachers’ beliefs and discourses in relation to these knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions.

While I have grouped the knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions into categories, these categories are not discrete and overlap considerably,

acknowledging that “[k]nowing, doing and being all come together in professional ECEC practice” (Urban, Lazzari, Vandenbroeck, Peeters, & van Laere, 2011, p. 35). Effective teaching is both a science and an art blended in ways that “transcend a narrow techno-rational (rules and routines) approach to stir the mind, heart and soul” (Fraser, 2008, p. 48). In addition, “teaching cannot be reduced to isolated techniques” (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2005) or understood as “a collection of finite, technical practices where knowledge is applied (e.g., to children) in order to solve given problems” (Urban & Dalli, 2012, p. 168). It is also important to note each of these categories are very complex therefore this section provides only an introduction which will be explored further in the ensuing chapters of this thesis.

The teaching workforce needs to be diverse, with a range of capabilities, ethnicities, class backgrounds, ages, genders and levels of experience amongst teachers, in order to be responsive to the increasing diversity of children and their families (Connell, 2009a). This means it is inappropriate to define and/or impose a single model of excellence. My aim for this section therefore is to explore these qualities/characteristics in a relatively general way.

Personal attributes and dispositions

There have been a number of studies on teachers in action that focussed on personal characteristics under the assumption “individual personality variables translate directly or indirectly into good teacher performance” (Spodek, 1988, p. 13). Personality could be a key factor behind teacher excellence. Buttner, Pijl, Bijstra, and Bosch (2015) define personality as “relatively enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviours” (p. 463) which are influenced by heritability and environmental factors equally, but are dynamic and can change with life experiences. Despite this dynamism, and their importance to effective teaching, virtues often associated with personality are rarely cultivated within teacher education or professional development as it is assumed they are “a largely adventitious ingredient on the personality of the successful practitioner” (Taggart, 2011, p. 90)

Personality traits which have been reported to be found in effective teachers include, for instance, trustworthiness, empathy, respect, sensitivity,

responsiveness, patience, enthusiasm, commitment and discipline (Buttner et al., 2015). Langford (2007), in her triangulation of data from textbook authors, teacher educators and teacher students found images of the early childhood teacher were consistently imbued with the personal qualities of “passion, happiness, inner strength, caring, and alertness to individual children’s needs” (p. 339). However, Buttner et al. (2015) found it impossible to create an “empirically convincing personality profile of expert teachers” (p. 476), again highlighting the heterogeneity of the teaching workforce and the “rich diversity of individuals thinking and acting professionally in their respective contexts” (Urban & Dalli, 2012, p. 161).

When discussing what makes an effective early childhood teacher, it is important to recognise that affective dimensions are a large part of the role (Moyles, 2001). Berthelsen and Brownlee (2007) define affective functions as “the interpersonal elements of the teaching role” (p. 348). Colker (2008) identified 12 characteristics or dispositions her ECE teacher participants felt they need to be effective. These dispositions are “rooted in feelings and beliefs” (p. 68) therefore cannot be directly observed or assessed, however are important for teacher educators and employers to understand. The dispositions identified are: passion; perseverance; willingness to take risks; pragmatism; patience; flexibility; respect; creativity; authenticity; love of learning; high energy; and, sense of humour.

The affective dimensions of teaching draw on teachers’ emotions. Hargreaves (2000) suggested that interacting with a large number of children and adults every day means teachers use their emotions all the time. Building on this, Osgood (2010) argues that this interaction means teachers can develop strong feelings for children, families, community and colleagues and that this emotional investment is necessary and integral to practice. Similarly, Moyles (2001) purported it is a desirable part of early childhood teachers’ thinking. Hargreaves (2000) is cautious however, arguing that the use of emotion can be either helpful or harmful, uplifting the ‘climate’ of the service or lowering it. As such, it is important teachers are “in touch with their emotions and inner states of mind” (Selleck, 2001, p. 82). This is particularly important when teachers are working with children from cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds that differ from

theirs, where patience, tolerance and flexibility are essential (Siraj-Blatchford, 2001). It is crucial for teachers to moderate their emotional responses in these situations. An overemphasis on emotional caring for marginalised children and families can position them as 'victims', creating a dependency that can act to disempower the very people the teacher is trying to help (Hargreaves, 2000). While it is important to engage with the emotional arena in education, this engagement must be critical and avoid self-indulgence and sentimentality. An overemphasis on personal attributes can also have the impact of reinforcing teacher stereotypes and the diminishing status these stereotypes generate.

Niceness

Bøe and Hognestad (2015) identify a strong discourse of 'niceness' characterising the early childhood sector. Stonehouse (1989) argued teachers generally are nice, caring, considerate and warm people who want to please and do not like to offend, due to gender, personality and/or training. Sometimes this niceness is important; "children do not thrive if they do not also receive loving attention" (Manning-Morton, 2006, p. 45). Osgood (2012) also argued for the necessity of emotionality in ECE practice because of the strong feelings involved in the work. In her study "among the most frequently cited and hence highly regarded attributes that were felt [by the teacher participants] to constitute a professional self were associated with the affective domain" (Osgood, 2012, p. 132); with being caring/loving/compassionate the most cited while being knowledgeable and/or pedagogically skilled were not mentioned at all.

This discourse of niceness could arguably be linked to the dominant discourse of motherhood which idealises and romanticises this role and demands women are altruistic, putting others needs and wishes before their own (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). Gilligan (1982) would agree arguing "[s]ensitivity to the needs of others and the assumption of responsibility for taking care lead women to attend to voices other than their own and to include in their judgment other points of view" (p. 16). Noddings (1984) also reinforced the importance of selfless consideration of others. "Caring involves stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference into the other's. When we care, we consider the other's point of view, his objective needs, and what he expects of us" (p. 16). However, a

professional ideal of selfless service can lead to guilt, when a teacher takes necessary care for themselves, and ambivalence towards the work, due to teachers “simultaneously resenting and enacting the selfless role presented to them” (Taggart, 2011, p. 90). It can also lead to an acceptance of low pay and status, seen as “a sign of genuine commitment to caring for others” (Osgood, 2004, p. 12).

Goldstein (1997) warned teachers can become “prisoners of “the hegemony of nice”... [t]he assumption that all early childhood educators are nice to all children, all of the time and in all circumstances” (p. 88). This notion is rooted in sexist stereotypes and, because ECE teaching has traditionally been a women’s job, teachers can get trapped in this stereotype. Being nice all the time is not necessarily beneficial to children either. Fraser (2008) argued classrooms “lack authenticity if the only emotions that are permitted are pleasant and palatable” (p. 58). This ignores the fact that life and learning is not always nice and there is a lot to be learnt from less than pleasant experiences.

‘Niceness’ and other discursively constituted characteristics can also make “power problematic for those assigned to the female gender” (Davies, 1994, p. 5). It may be one of the reasons why ECE teachers have been identified to be “not so good at fighting for our profession, at saying no, at asserting ourselves, [and] at dealing with conflict” (Stonehouse, 1989, p. 67). These characteristics can also make leadership problematic with leaders finding it difficult to effect change, instead reverting to the status quo to avoid hurting the feelings of others (Taggart, 2011).

Moyles (2001) also cautioned that while strong feelings and emotions are desirable in teachers, they are also capable of “restricting early years practice to a low-level operation in which children receive care but which negates or rejects education” (p. 82). Teachers are faced with a paradox – while heart is necessary for work with young children, it can also limit early childhood teachers from being considered professional; “cheerfulness and amateurish enthusiasm are seen to be all that is necessary” (Taggart, 2011, p. 93).

Ethic of care

Weedon (1987) argued that while feminist criticism has a shared political aim of “understanding and contesting patriarchal relations” (p. 146), how this aim is understood differs from one feminist discourse to another. One strong interpretation of this aim, that is particularly influential in ECE, is the cultural feminist notion of an “ethic of care” (Noddings, 1984), an ethic to always be applied when teaching. Noddings argued caring involves stepping out of your own frame of reference into another’s, considering their point of view, needs and expectations over your own. She believed an ethic built on such caring is essentially feminine, arising out of experiences as women, contrasting it with the traditional ‘masculine’ approach to ethical problems based on logic.

This work “brought centre-stage questions about gender and morality, care relations in the public, and private spheres and notions of women’s way of knowing” (McLeod, 2017, p. 49). Taggart (2011) argued “[p]rofessionalism which is rooted in an ethic of care can... be contrasted with a ‘performative’ professionalism, according to which correct action is determined in relation to universal competence standards and codes of practice” (p. 88). Taggart did however acknowledge there are disadvantages associated with an ethic of care as it suggests an image of a selfless, caring martyr.

Gilligan (1982) purported that women judge themselves by their ability to care and that their “sense of integrity appears to be entwined with an ethic of care, so that to see themselves as women is to see themselves in a relationship of connection” (p. 171). She believed the *truth* of an ethic of care lies in the voice of women – tying relationship to responsibility therefore, unfortunately, this ethic of care has contributed to teacher overload and a subsequent reduction in “teaching quality, job satisfaction and morale” (Nias, 1997, p. 11).

Critique of Noddings’ ethic of care highlights the concept of ethical caring appears to be “based on women’s natural caring role, and thereby casts women as the ‘eternal nursemaid’” (Page, 2013, p. 555). That the notion of ethic of care is based on an essentialist view of women is difficult to argue. Noddings (1984) herself argued women are naturally nurturing due to their biological ability to give birth rather than socialisation or psychological influences.

Hassan (2008) posited that Noddings' ethic of care is not beneficial to feminism as it "hinders a woman's ability to become autonomous, and reinforces traditional gender roles" (p. 159). It implies it is a woman's nature to be compassionate and caring all the time and ignores the other virtues of women, such as justice or room for autonomous growth. In saying this, cultural feminists, such as Noddings, have "challenged the idea that building and sustaining relationships between people are low-level, low-status activities" (Nias, 1997, p. 18) and therefore have contributed significantly to positive perceptions of teachers.

Caring for others can also be disempowering for the other. Aitken and Kennedy (2007) argued that "[w]hen someone cares for us there is a sense that we need this care because there is something lacking in our particular situation or that we have a problem" (p. 169). This enactment of caring contradicts the empowerment intention articulated in *Te Whāriki*. While enacting an ethic of care is generally beneficial to the care and education of children, it should not be done in isolation or at the expense of other important aspects of teaching.

Love

Nutbrown and Page (2008) suggested the work of early childhood teachers not only involves care and education, but also love, in the sense of the professional love practiced by teachers who are secure in their reciprocal relationships with children, and for whom the rights of the child is at the heart of every aspect of their work. It is important children have teachers that demonstrate to children they are loved, respected and valued as they learn about their world (Nias, 1997). Many authors have written about how teachers 'love' teaching and 'love working with children' (e.g. Moyles, 2001). The idea of teaching with love has been at the heart of educational experience. Teachers of young children in particular can secure "psychic rewards by establishing close emotional bonds or emotional understanding with their students as a foundation for teaching and learning" (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 817). They feel rewarded when children show affection and regard for them as it affirms they are achieving their purposes.

One of the reasons teachers feel it is appropriate to form deep 'loving' relationships with children is because of the links between teaching and

parenting (Nias, 1997). Unfortunately, this has had the effect of teachers cheerfully undertaking tiring and repetitive tasks for children, extending themselves to the point of exhaustion and beyond, making do with scarce resources and being content with low status. Just as mothers care for the whole child, so too teachers have been “expected to be aware of and capable of catering for all the needs of every child” (Nias, 1997, p. 14). Nias believes that, while meeting all the needs of all children is impossible, teachers have internalised such expectations and passed them on to new teachers, sometimes as a substitute for the cognitive aims of teaching.

Teacherly love and emotionality is part of the practice of many teachers but is often ignored in research and literature because it cannot be taught, quantified, measured or demonstrated in the form of ‘competencies’ (Goldstein, 1997; Osgood, 2010). Love can also be a word feared by teachers, possibly due to its complexity or in relation to child protection concerns (Nutbrown & Page, 2008).

Palmer (2007) cautioned that the genuine intimacy required for ‘love’ can only be achieved with a handful of people, meaning a “vast range of others and otherness [subsequently] falls beyond our reach... [therefore] we lose our connectedness with the strange and the stranger...[and] our capacity to entertain people and ideas that are alien to what we think and who we are” (p. 93).

Balance is important. Wood (2004) argued “caring hearts unguided by critically thinking and informed minds are just as problematic as... critically thinking and informed minds unguided by caring hearts” (p. 254). Wood believed that in the caring professions (like occupational therapy and early childhood teaching), there has been a tendency to give more weight to the heart than the mind, legitimating practices and approaches that are not theoretically sound and reinforcing society’s confusion about, and lack of appreciation of, the work teachers do. Teaching is intellectual work, drawing on the head as well as the heart and hands (Goldstein, 1997).

Taggart (2011) suggested the mobilisation of qualities such as love is a form of *emotional labour*, a “term used to describe the kind of caring which stems from effort rather than instinct” (p. 89). As a role that requires interaction with many different people, teachers need to manufacture or mask emotions on many

occasions; for example, showing patience with a frustrating colleague or enthusiasm at children's work (Hargreaves, 2000). Teachers need to practise a high level of emotional labour in order to work successfully with children, colleagues, parents and the wider community (Norman, 2017).

Passion

Passion has also been a recurring theme in literature discussing teacher qualities (Clark, 2012). Fraser (2008) argued "passion is one of the defining traits of teachers who make a difference" (p. 53). They have a passion for what they teach and how children learn, demonstrating care and commitment to the children.

Moyles (2001) found ECE teachers often expressed a passion for their work and for children, identifying that "the very nature of the work demands strong feelings towards both protecting and supporting young children" (p. 84) and engaging empathetically with their families and lives. Passion plays an important role in teaching, defined as "a teacher's compelling desire to teach, to work with children, and to facilitate interactions between children and content" (Goldstein, 1997, p. 20). A passionate teacher is energised by the children, is fulfilled by her work with them and teaches with joy and heart.

Maintaining passion can be difficult in the face of familiarity, routine, criticism and disappointments (Fraser, 2008). Passion is not a static quality that teachers have or do not have, and they will not always feel passionate about every aspect of their role. Teachers who manage to sustain their passion in difficult times have a strong philosophical base which gives them guidance and purpose – there is a "sense of destiny, purpose and mission to their work" (Fraser, 2008, p. 56).

Relational skills

There is no denying that attending to relationships and emotions in ECE is important. Manning-Morton (2006) identified that "psychoanalytic theory, neuroscience and developmental psychology all emphasise the centrality of positive relationships between significant adults and children in their earliest years in supporting healthy emotional cognitive and physical development" (p. 45). In addition, emphasis on the relational aspect of teaching in ECE indicates teaching is more than child minding, but not exclusively the transmission of

knowledge (Clark & Grey, 2010, p. 2) and has been considered “a key aspect of being professional” (Urban & Dalli, 2012, p. 161).

Being an early childhood teacher demands a level of interpersonal skills that supports interaction on multiple levels with a variety of people (Desjean-Perrotta, 2006). The teaching environment is shared with children, colleagues and parents leading to a multiplicity of relationships, responsibilities and understandings (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007). Early childhood teachers are expected to develop strong, reciprocal and responsive relationships with children and their parents and whānau, colleagues, and communities. In New Zealand’s 2002 ECE strategic plan, “[s]tronger collaborative relationships are portrayed as strengthening and empowering families to play a significant role in their children’s early education and development, and increasing capacity to engage in other community activities, as well as contributing to the ultimate outcome of children developing strong learning foundations” (Mitchell et al., 2011, p. 97).

The relationship between teachers and children is of primary importance. Smith (1996) stated that “[a] caring and responsive adult-child ... relationship is necessary before children can acquire intellectual skills through social interactions” (p. 56). This requires the teacher to develop ‘real’ knowledge and understanding of the children they work with; “teachers need to know what children can do and understand” (p. 58) in order to build on it.

McLaughlin et al. (2016) found ECE teachers in New Zealand “prioritise and emphasise the importance of strong relationships with children as the core of their practice”, however warn “it is possible to be relationships-focused, but not engage in critical aspects of teacher-child relationships/interactions identified as key for quality ECE, such as asking questions, commenting positively, having sustained interactions, supporting shared thinking, and encouraging exploration and safe risk taking” (p. 182). As such, practice can be more focused on care than education. Similarly, ERO’s report on infants and toddlers (Education Review Office, 2015) identified the ECE services in their study gave priority to establishing warm and nurturing relationships with infants and toddlers, and only 12 percent provided a highly responsive curriculum “that supported infants and toddlers to become competent and confident communicators and explorers” (p.

12). From their perspective, the focus of most of the services appears to be towards the care end of the contested care and education continuum.

This focus on relational aspects appears not to be limited to working with infants and toddlers either. Meade, Robinson, Smorti, Stuart, and Williamson (2012) found in their study on ECE teachers' work, that episodes of sustained shared thinking (SST) between teachers and children were infrequent (less than 10 percent of all adult-child interactions) across all services (although more frequent in services with 100 percent qualified teachers) and age groups, and were more likely to be focused on relationships, children's identity, well-being and contribution to the group rather than concept development within the more traditional curriculum knowledge and skills.

Whatever the reason for the focus on relational skills, it is deeply embedded in the psyche of the sector as evidenced by recruitment campaigns for teachers over time focusing on personal characteristics such as patience, enthusiasm, a sense of fun (Cameron, 2006), and passion (Clark, 2012) rather than academic skills or content knowledge. It is, however, increasingly being recognised that high quality early learning opportunities are required to enhance children's cognitive development. If teachers believe their work is about early education, as well as care, then higher quality practice will ensue (Berthelsen & Brownlee, 2007). Perhaps this is an area where "there is a need to develop and explore new ideas ... [which are] concerned with and help us to include the excluded middle of dichotomies that have been made to be oppositional" (Prout, 2005, p. 69).

Partnership with parents

Actively involving parents in the learning process builds relationships of trust with families over time and facilitates increasing ownership of the ECE programme (Leske, Sarmardin, Woods, & Thorpe, 2015). This requires teachers to find ways to communicate with *all* parents, particularly those whose voices have traditionally been excluded (Oberhuemer, 2005). Developing relationships that support parental engagement is important for children's outcomes (Leske et al., 2015).

Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) argued working with parents does not mean teachers giving parents information about what they are doing, nor is it

educating parents about child development and child rearing through transmission. Rather it means both parents and teachers entering into a “reflective and analytic relationship involving deepening understanding and the possibility of making judgments about the pedagogical work” (p.77), that is a “democratic practice rather than a means of social control or technological transfer” (ibid.). Mitchell et al. (2008) found there were greater learning gains, and reduced behavioural concerns, for children in centres where teachers facilitate parents’ engagement in their children’s learning by including funds of knowledge from home and sharing responsibility for supporting children’s learning.

Stonehouse (1989) argued competent teachers “empower parents to have maximum impact on the experiences that shape their child’s life” (p. 75). At the time of writing, Stonehouse identified this to be an area where “practice lags far behind the knowledge base” (ibid.). More recently, Greenfield (2012) argued that teachers have an element of power over parents which should be recognised. They have the ability to shape, construct and normalise parents “so they feel obliged to do what they are asked to do” (p. 108). Teachers have also tended to treat parents as a homogenous group even though they have diverse needs, backgrounds and values (Greenfield, 2012). However, in multicultural or diverse societies, teachers need to be patient, caring, tolerant, flexible and need to be able to communicate effectively, in multiple ways, with all parents about their work (Siraj-Blatchford, 2001).

Collegiality

Strong working relationships within teaching teams is also important. Urban et al. (2011) stressed that “the quality of the workforce cannot be reduced to the sum of the individuals’ competences” (p. 27), instead determined by the interaction between competent individuals in a ‘competent system’. One of the key things a competent system requires is team collaboration. Much of what happens for children results from the shared efforts of a group of teachers and the teachers’ “*collective* relationship to the *collective* presence of the [children]” (Connell, 2009a, p. 221). For this reason, recognising the collective nature of teaching is important.

A focus on relationships with colleagues can have its downsides too. Curriculum decision making is “complicated by the need for constant negotiation with other teachers” (Nuttall, 2013, p. 181), and teachers’ actions impact directly on other teachers as well as children. In addition, Moyles (2001) found qualified teachers tended to work ‘down’ to the level of their unqualified colleagues, rather than raising standards with their expertise. This was done with the intention of keeping working relationships running smoothly for the sake of children and their families; that is being ‘nice’. This study explores whether this is still the case today. True collegiality occurs, however, when team members are “honest, critically evaluative, and dedicated toward realizing a greater good” (Wood, 2004) rather than ‘making nice’ or needless infighting.

Too much emphasis can be placed on teachers supporting each other when they have less and less available time due to increasing accountabilities. It is important collegiality is not seen as the ‘fix-all’ when teachers are struggling with resource shortages as well as “long-term social, economic and demographic problems” (Nias, 1997, p. 19), a situation which is arguably still occurring. Building and maintaining collaborative relationships takes time, energy and resilience, things teachers may not have in abundance.

Professional

As stated earlier, in recent years there has been growing calls for the professionalisation of the early childhood workforce in order to provide enhanced opportunities and outcomes for children. The professionalisation agenda is also attractive to the sector, seen as the key to increased status and respect (Osgood, 2010).

Discussions around what it means to be an early childhood professional in New Zealand have tended to focus on traditional definitions of professionalism including qualifications, professional distance and objective autonomy (Dalli, 2008). In addition, specific content knowledge has been identified as essential for the professional teacher. This has included knowledge of the policy and compliance documents relevant to their practice including *Te Whāriki*, the *Early Childhood Code of Ethics*, the *Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* and licensing regulations.

Dalli et al. (2012) argue, however, there is no simple, universal definition of professionalism, with finite lists of qualities and attributes; “early childhood professionalism is something whose meaning appears to be embedded in local contexts, visible in relational interactions, ethical and political in nature, and involving multiple layers of knowledge, judgement, and influences from the broader societal context” (p. 6).

Heart is an “indispensable element of professionalism” (Wood, 2004, p. 249) as professionals believe what they do is important for individuals or society at large and place the greater good of the people they serve above self-interest. However, “[a]ny field claiming professional stature must be just as dedicated to cultivating its mind as it is to nourishing its heart, as the two are wonderfully symbiotic” (Wood, 2004, p. 252). In this context, *heart* is defined “in its ancient sense, as the place where intellect and emotion and spirit will converge in the human self” (Palmer, 2007, p. 11). Similarly, commitment to both children and to the curriculum has been seen as a crucial part of a teacher’s professional life and sense of self (Goldstein, 1997).

Questioning traditional notions of professionalism which distance professionals from those they serve, Oberhuemer (2005) argued for *democratic professionalism* in particular. This notion of professionalism “is a concept based on participatory relationships and alliances” (p. 13) which foregrounds collaborative action between stakeholders and emphasises engagement with community. Democratic professionalism asks teachers to be aware of ‘multiple ways of knowing’ and to be willing and able to examine their own personal and publicly endorsed assumptions and taken-for-granted beliefs. This self-awareness supports democratically professional teachers “to sensitively discuss pedagogical and ethical viewpoints against a background of increasing cultural, social and economic diversity” (Oberhuemer, 2005, p. 14).

Similarly, Moss (2008) called for teachers to be democratic and reflective professionals who are comfortable in an “inclusive, experimenting, creative and democratic early childhood centre” (p. 124) which treats children and parents as citizens participating in decision-making, evaluation, critique of dominant

discourses, and change. This professional is qualified and engages in continuous professional development and teacher education.

By 2010, Moss began asking the sector to move beyond a focus on professionalism, even though it promotes enhanced teacher status and conditions. He argued instead for a focus on education (purpose) and educators (requirements) to ensure we are ready and able to respond to the challenges that face us in the future – challenges of “democracy, diversity, justice and the environment” (Moss, 2010, p. 14).

Culturally responsive and inclusive

Building strong collaborative relationships with families and communities requires early childhood teachers to be culturally responsive and “give a voice to cultures other than those from ‘Western’ communities” (Fleer, 2003, p. 77). Increasingly, children from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds are expected to learn in Westernised ECE contexts that differ greatly from the contexts they experience in their families, homes and communities (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010). However, what is valued within ECE is “essentially a western view of childhood... and development” (Fleer, 2006, p. 128).

This changing context demands that teachers are able to respond effectively to diverse ways of knowing and learning (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2005). Teachers need to take “particular care to understand and acknowledge the different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds” (Siraj-Blatchford, 2001, p. 105) of children to support children to settle into the new context and “handle the adjustments of being reared in one way and ... educated in another” (ibid.). This understanding requires teachers to engage in a *pedagogy of listening* which “expects, encourages, invites and embraces diversity, difference, ambiguity and uncertainty” (Macartney, 2012, p. 173). It involves teachers acknowledging and being responsive to perspectives and ways of being outside of their usual way of experiencing the world. This requires them to acknowledge and examine their own biases (Langford, 2007).

Souto-Manning and Mitchell (2010) found being culturally responsive required teachers to position themselves as learners and value the stories and funds of knowledge of the families and cultures in their centre, recognising the everyday

cultural practices that shape children's lives. The teachers in Mitchell et al.'s (2015) study of a small group of ECE centres in New Zealand found their role in the implementation of an effective, culturally diverse learning environment was relationship-based as they: facilitated the intercultural exchange of ideas; found out about family values and catered for these within their practice; co-constructed a learning environment with family members; took time to actively listen to parents and children; and demonstrated a culture of questioning, listening and a willingness to change. Teachers also reflected on their own "taken for granted assumptions", questioning what they did and why.

In New Zealand, the responsibility of being culturally responsive to all is built on the bicultural imperatives and foundation envisaged in *Te Whāriki*. Internationally, *Te Whāriki* is ground-breaking in its recognition of indigeneity and validation of indigenous knowledge. It provides a way forward for ECE in New Zealand to enact an ethical curriculum that honours the original people of this land. Strengthening the provision of these bicultural imperatives "is a central professional responsibility for educators" (Ritchie & Rau, 2006, p. 1).

Unfortunately, bicultural practice is not of as high quality as other areas of practice (Early Childhood Education Taskforce, 2011; McLaughlin et al., 2016; Mitchell et al., 2011; Ritchie & Rau, 2006), and the imperatives remain "more aspirational than actual" (Nuttall, 2005a, p. 14). Teacher beliefs appear to be a factor, in particular teacher self-belief. Ritchie and Rau (2006) found "educators and teacher educators lack confidence and competence in delivering education programmes that are bicultural in content" (p. 2), identifying that, despite good intentions, many practices remain at a surface level rather than reflecting a "deep knowledge of and commitment to Māori values" (p. 22). This finding is likely to reflect the Western origin of most early childhood centres in New Zealand, and the corresponding environments, philosophies and practices, meaning Māori cultural beliefs, like those of other indigenous cultures "are still 'added on' to mainstream fundamental early childhood education" (Fleer, 2006, p. 136)

Beyond being culturally responsive, teachers need to be responsive to, and inclusive of, a range of diverse children and family situations. They need to be

“aware of the multiple and competing meaning systems that offer possibilities for their work and... draw on this knowledge to respond equitably to issues of diversity in their practice” (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2005, p. 43), addressing children’s multiple experiences and understandings in equitable ways. As identified earlier, a responsive teaching workforce may be more possible when the workforce represents differing capabilities, ethnicities, class backgrounds, ages, genders and levels of experience (Connell, 2009a). While few would argue with this sentiment, this may be easier said than done. Langford (2007) found student teachers from minority cultures and ethnicities were “expected to and choose to abandon deeper cultural practices” (p. 342) in order to be successful in their teacher education programme. The good early childhood educator was dominantly positioned as an individual “who draws upon what is [assumed to be] *universally known* about child development” (Langford, 2007, p. 343), emphasis added), learnt through teacher training. Cultural differences are allowed so long as they are consistent with the image of the good early childhood teacher evolved from European, middle-class culture. The students in Langford’s study sought inclusion by excluding cultural practices thought to be inappropriate. Langford (2007) argued there is a need to “expand our conceptualization of the good early childhood educator in pedagogical discourses to include difference” (p. 349), representing the good teacher as “someone who draws upon both deeper cultural knowledge and formal knowledge” (p. 350).

Pedagogical skill and knowledge

Pedagogical skill and knowledge would fall under what Berthelsen and Brownlee (2007) describe as the cognitive functions of teaching as it “include[s] actions that facilitate and support children’s engagement with materials, peers and adults” (p. 348). The teacher who makes a difference needs a wide-range of pedagogical strategies in order to be responsive to the diversity of the children they work with (Fraser, 2008). They know how to teach in ways that make sense to children.

Teachers do not simply convey facts to children, they “*interpret* the world for, and with, their [children]” (Connell, 2009a, p. 224). This interpretation requires both skill and knowledge of “how interpretation is done, of the cultural field in

which it is done, and of the other possibilities of interpretations that surround one's own" (ibid.). This makes teaching thoughtful and intellectual labour.

Sociocultural perspectives emphasise children's rights and acknowledge they are active agents in the construction of their own lives (Oberhuemer, 2005). This perspective, therefore, requires teachers to listen attentively to children, seeking to understand their "points of view, their interests and their intentions, seeking to learn more about their individual lives" (p. 13). In their interactions with children, teachers should be responsive, cognitively challenging, and encourage joint attention and negotiation or "sustained shared thinking" (Mitchell et al., 2008, p. 42), encouraging children to investigate and think for themselves.

Alongside open-ended questioning, sustained shared thinking (SST) is one of the teacher practices identified by Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, Sylva, Sammons, and Melhuish (2008) shown to be predictive of positive child outcomes in the EPPE study, a large-scale, longitudinal carried out in the United Kingdom. Meade et al. (2013) argue "[t]he quality of teachers' interactions with children can be shown in the way teachers move beyond short exchanges to interactive dialogue that provokes and stretches children's thinking" (p. 8). Unfortunately, in their study on New Zealand teachers' work they found episodes of SST to be infrequent suggesting "a lack of understanding and knowledge of both the importance of SST for cognitive outcomes for children and the intentional pedagogical strategies and conceptual knowledge teachers must employ to successfully engage in meaningful and reciprocal conversations aimed to extend children's thinking" (p. 11).

Meade et al. (2013) purport, from a sociocultural perspective, "if teachers are to engage in meaningful inquiry with children, they need to have both relational and pedagogical knowledge to be thoughtful and intentional contributors to playful learning" (p. 7). Similarly, Mitchell et al. (2008) identified teachers need to be intentional, have a focus on valued educational aims and provide an engaging, complex curriculum "involving both cognitive and non-cognitive dimensions" (p. 7). In particular, Meade (2000) emphasised "the need for early childhood staff to see their role as that of an educator who trains children's

physical or mental faculties i.e. who responds more directly to child-initiated learning” (p. 19).

One of the issues grappled with by the early childhood teachers in Kilderry’s (2015a) study was the perceived dichotomy between child-initiated play and intentional teaching, which they sometimes misinterpreted as formal academic instruction or school-like pedagogies. Similarly, Grey and Clark (2013) believe intentional teaching requires teachers “to reflect on the tensions that exist between teaching curriculum that starts from the child’s interests and teaching curriculum that is directed by the teacher” (p. 6).

Kilderry defines intentional teaching as “planful, thoughtful, and purposeful actions where the teacher recognises an opportunity for a child to learn academically or developmentally” (p. 20). From a sociocultural perspective, intentional teaching, or conscious pedagogy is required to “provide scaffolding which extends [children] and builds bridges between the known and the unknown” (Smith, 1996, p. 56), not through a didactic approach but in dynamic interactive relationships with children. Smith believes “teachers should have ideas about goals of early childhood educare and set about implementing those ideas” (p. 53). These goals should be culturally determined and do not necessarily come solely from the child but also from the parents, teachers and community.

Hedges and Cullen (2005b) call for “a reconceptualization of practices that on the surface appear dichotomous and conflicting, such as emphasising play-based or subject-based curriculum and child-centred or teacher-centred pedagogical approaches” (p. 73). The Researching Early Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) case studies in the United Kingdom also indicate moderation is beneficial for children. The researchers in this study, Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004), found the most effective ECE services achieved “a balance between the opportunities provided for children to benefit from teacher-initiated group work and in the provision of freely chosen, yet potentially instructive, play activities” (p. 720).

From a poststructural perspective, MacNaughton (2005) argued teachers should challenge the idea that there are good (or bad) pedagogies, believing many

truths are possible. While acknowledging diverse ways of being, this approach has the potential to lead to teacher confusion and a subsequent loss of a sense of agency – if ‘anything goes’ in the classroom how do teachers know ‘what to do’.

Teacher agency, responsibility and advocacy

Education is often regarded simply as “social reproduction – transmitting the culture to a new generation, producing the workforce, or handing on the traditions” (Connell, 2009a, p. 225), however it is also involved in *forming* a culture, creating a social reality and producing something new. Teachers have a part to play in setting the direction for society, requiring them to use their agency, responsibility and advocacy to support change.

Robinson and Jones Diaz (2006) define agency as “our ability to act with intent and awareness” (p. 38). It is not something people can have, rather it is something people do (Biesta et al., 2015), and “should be understood as a configuration of influences from the *past*, orientation towards the *future* and engagement with the present” (p. 626). Agency is an important dimension of teachers’ professionalism and depends on the personal qualities, capacity, knowledge and skills they bring to their work (Biesta et al., 2015).

Further to this, education is about teachers making choices “to ‘do’ curriculum in particular ways..., to prioritise one set of goals over another and to address an issue or not” (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 105). Teachers make these choices based on their beliefs, taking agency over their practice. These beliefs “play a role in the way in which past experience impacts on the achievement of agency” (Biesta et al., 2015, p. 628), in particular whether the teachers believe they have the agency to make a difference. ECE teachers may sometimes focus too much on aspects of the child’s life outside of their control, like their family circumstances, believing they lack agency to make meaningful change. Katz (1980) suggested teachers instead “take responsibility for the time a child is actually directly in his or her care and focus on making that time as supportive, enriching and educative as possible” (p. 62).

Similar to agency, teacher self-efficacy is also influenced by beliefs – in particular the belief a teacher has about whether they will complete teaching tasks

competently (Bullock, Coplan, & Bosacki, 2015). Teacher agency and self-efficacy (or lack of it) is often influenced by factors beyond their control like government policy and societal attitudes (Biesta et al., 2015) which can have a dramatic effect on teachers. Stonehouse (1989) identified most descriptions of a profession “include that members play the key role in changes in our field” (p. 72). She believed however, ECE teachers are not guiding changes, they are victims of change having to respond to changes they have not initiated. In this process teachers can feel marginalised, compromised and powerless to resist (Osgood, 2004, 2010), even if they feel policies are inappropriate. Bullock et al. (2015) identified teachers with lower self-efficacy report less job satisfaction and are more prone to burnout.

Taking responsibility for others should not be confused with “responsibilisation in neoliberal forms of government [which] requires each individual to accept responsibility for self but to shed any responsibility for others – except to participate in acts of surveillance and control” (Davies, 2006, p. 436). McLeod (2017) re-positions responsibility “as a productive and affirming orientation to self and other in educational work, particularly in teaching” (p. 46); a relational disposition that requires a fresh look. She argues that “[k]ey attributes of the good teacher encompass responsibility for the learning of children, their well-being and future success” (McLeod, 2017, p. 48).

Teachers need to be aware they cannot take responsibility for everything however. There is a tendency to see education “as *the* answer to everything” (Moss, 2010, p. 14). There has been continuing demand for teachers to assume responsibility for social ills, requiring them to ‘care’ about their children in an “ever-broadening sense” (Nias, 1997, p. 11).

Part of taking responsibility is to be an advocate for children, personally and collectively (McLeod, 2017). MacNaughton (2005) argued “the capacity to see how existing relations of power are embedded in our actions and our understandings and a refusal to naturalise them is the hallmark of a quality teacher who seeks social justice and equity in and through their work with young children” (p. 18). Teachers must take responsibility to examine documents and practices that are taken for granted in educational institutions and ask “what

conditions of possibility are they creating and maintaining for us and our [children]?” (Davies, 2006, p. 436).

Sometimes advocacy in teachers can be controversial, particularly if teachers' professionalism and identity is defined externally, for example by government. Connell (2009a) argues that definitions of good teachers are not likely to include “[t]he capacity to talk back to management, to dissent, or to follow independent judgement” (p.222) however this capacity may be crucial if teachers are to pursue the interests of children and to take part in the social action required to create good learning environments.

Subject knowledge

While pedagogical encounters can be transformative, particularly with respect to achieving social justice and democratic aims, teachers also have responsibility for curriculum and knowledge building alongside relational responsibilities (McLeod, 2017). There are risks to emphasising the affective and downplaying the knowledge functions of teaching, leading to another either/or situation. It is important all functions are considered to be integral to a teachers' role.

Teacher subject knowledge is important, and can make a difference in the implementation of a sociocultural curriculum (Fraser, 2008). Hedges and Cullen (2005a) “contend that early childhood teachers need abundant subject knowledge to teach confidently within holistic, integrated, early childhood contexts” (p. 18). They argued teachers are limiting children's learning if they do not have (or will not access) the knowledge to build on children's deep, and sometimes comprehensive, interests. Young children have the ability to move from “novice to expert” (p. 14) in different subject areas when new knowledge is constructed on existing knowledge, supported by the teacher. Meade (2000) identified, from a sociocultural perspective, knowledge transference is “central to children's thinking” (p. 19), and requires that teachers have extensive knowledge themselves in order to ‘transfer’ appropriately when children seek to know more.

Hedges and Cullen (2005a) also posited that “teachers' beliefs and their lack of subject content knowledge ... impact both on the curriculum provided for

children and on teachers' ability to effectively construct knowledge with children" (p. 16). The notion of teacher beliefs is a messy construct (Pajares, 1992). Not only do teachers have to consider what they believe about how children learn and what they should learn, they also need to reflect on their own fears and belief in their own self-efficacy (Bandura, 1988). Hedges and Cullen (2005a) found "early childhood teachers who are uncomfortable with their level of subject knowledge may rarely include certain content in the learning environment they provide or extend interactions to their full potential" (p. 16).

Science education is one example of a knowledge area early childhood teachers have sometimes struggled to integrate into the early childhood curriculum, often due to a lack of self-confidence. O'Brien and Herbert (2015) found a lack of self-belief in their science knowledge and capacity to integrate science into their curriculum continues to perpetuate a lack of teacher confidence in science education. This means that, while teachers are "responsive to children's interests they did not necessarily introduce science concepts themselves" (p. 45), missing opportunities to pique children's interests through the introduction of new and exciting concepts children are yet to experience due to their limited life experiences.

Insufficient subject knowledge, or a lack of subject content included in the curriculum, can prove to be problematic. Mathematics is another area where concerns have been raised. Anthony and Walshaw (2007) identified that while there are many "opportunities available for children to develop mathematical ideas in early childhood education settings, these opportunities are not always utilised systematically and purposefully" (p. 25). If this is still the case this is a concern because there is evidence many basic mathematical understandings and practices are present in young children which should be drawn out and elaborated in meaningful and authentic ways. They argued effective mathematics teaching in ECE may require "a radical change in mindset amongst many early childhood practitioners" (p. 25).

Similarly, Arrow, McLachlan, and Greaney's (2015) study found literacy practice in New Zealand early childhood services focuses more on the social nature of language rather than the development of specific language and literacy skills,

most likely because the adults do not have sufficient knowledge of the processes of literacy acquisition. Prochnow, Tunmer, and Greaney (2015) argue such knowledge gaps may be due to *Te Whāriki* placing “minimal emphasis on the development of early literacy-related skills” (p. 30).

Arguably, there is an imperative on ECE teachers to ensure the children they teach have the best chance of ongoing success by incorporating subject and content knowledge in authentic and meaningful ways. Hedges and Cullen (2005a) argued “the subject knowledge of teachers requires more explicit attention in order to extend children’s learning” (p.12), particularly in a play-based curriculum based on children’s interests.

An overemphasis on relational skills, rather than a more balanced focus incorporating subject knowledge may be due to teachers’ lack of confidence and/or knowledge. Hedges (2014) identified the teachers in her study found it difficult to judge the moment when to challenge children’s working theories and feed subject knowledge into children’s interests and experiences. She argues it is important for them to do so as part of a sociocultural approach however, “in order for learning to eventually lead development” (Hedges, 2014, p. 42).

Child development knowledge

Pugh (2001) argued effective ECE needs teachers who have knowledge of how children learn and develop, and use this knowledge to plan for children’s learning, working in partnership with parents. They also need to be able to articulate this knowledge effectively. Goodfellow (2003) argued ECE teachers have contributed to their lower status with their silence and inability to “represent their knowledge effectively in the public arena” (p. 61).

One way teachers have sought to represent their knowledge and grow their professional status is to legitimise early childhood pedagogies through the use of scientific data about child development (MacNaughton, 2005). Moss (2008) argued that ECE “is dominated by a positivistic paradigm, that values certainty and mastery, linearity and predetermined outcomes, objectivity and universality; and believes in the ability of science to reveal the true nature of a real world” (p. 123). Ryan and Grieshaber (2005) argued that this ‘science of education’

marginalises women's way of knowing. The latest source of scientific data to influence the provision of ECE is neuroscience, which "supports the view that early experiences... stimulate brain activity and influence how neural pathways develop" (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 26).

In contrast, "a cultural feminist discourse validates the relational and caring aspects of knowledge that women use to make sense of experience" (p. 42). Taggart (2011) would have agreed with this perspective, arguing the language of care provides a counter discourse to dominant thinking about quality improvement. She believed the "suggestion of a need to go 'beyond caring' simply testifies to the persistence of an outdated equation between caring and female irrationality or anti-intellectualism". This 'either/or' approach appears to be an unnecessary binary, both forms of knowledge can be used in complementary ways to provide a holistic view of the child and ECE. Palmer (2007) asked us to move beyond this sort of binary thinking "What would it look like to "think the world together", not to abandon discriminatory logic where it serves us well but to develop a more capacious habit of mind that supports the capacity for connectedness on which good teaching depends?" (p. 65).

Furedi (2008) believed the 'scientification' of early childhood, with its focus on infant determinism, has also led to a diminished view of children. Many in early childhood have believed children are "uniquely vulnerable to emotional damage" (p. 45), losing sight of the fact children can develop new strengths and resilience following an emotionally difficult experience. This study explores the currency of these beliefs.

MacNaughton (2005) argued the accumulation of knowledge in its own right is problematic unless teachers understand it is "impossible to have 'undistorted' knowledge free from the interests of the people it services. Knowledge can never be free from ideology, because all knowledge is biased, incomplete and linked to the interests of specific groups of people" (p. 22). All fields of knowledge, including early childhood studies, "expand by developing officially sanctioned truths that govern normal and desirable ways to think, act and feel"

(MacNaughton, 2005, p. 29). So much so, that it can be “difficult to imagine how to think, act and feel in any other way” (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 32).

Teacher knowledge may be difficult to observe. Spodek (1988) argued that the assumption that teaching competence can be determined by what a teacher does is inherently wrong as “there is more to teaching than observable actions” (p. 13). Even when teachers are physically inactive they could be reflecting on what has taken place, what they want to happen and how they might make this happen. To understand the nature of teaching, you need to look below the behaviour observed to understand the teacher’s thought processes and what theories, paradigms and discourses drive these (Spodek, 1988). It is the intentionality that arises from these thought processes that “most clearly distinguishes mothering from teaching and child-rearing from education” (Katz, 1980, p. 57).

Reflection and critical thinking

Urban and Dalli (2012) believe professional teachers maintain an attitude of critical inquiry in all aspects of their role. They need to be able to reflect openly on their personal and professional beliefs, seeing themselves as interpreters, rather than just implementers of curricular frameworks.

When teachers engage in critical and reflective thinking, they are applying executive functions or metacognitive elements of teaching. Berthelsen and Brownlee (2007) posited that teachers who are critical thinkers are more likely to be reflective about their actions, choices and decisions; all of which are “informed by theoretical understandings about children’s development and learning or derived from reflections about important tenets of practice for working with young children” (p. 349). Reflective practice also moves teachers beyond “the techno-rational approach which reduces teaching to a series of tips and techniques to be applied to learners” (Fraser, 2008, p. 61) and it helps teachers to moderate their emotions (Hargreaves, 2000).

Teachers themselves have also emphasised the importance of reflection. The teachers in Dalli’s (2008) study valued “[t]he ability to be a reflective practitioner, willing to critique and improve one’s practice” (p. 149). Pound (2008) was

particularly emphatic about the importance of reflection, stating teachers must be reflective or be “counselled out of the profession” (p. 236).

Ongoing learning

More than simply being knowledgeable, Pound (2008) argued early childhood teachers must be ‘lifelong students’, continuing to learn to ensure they keep up to date with ever changing knowledge. Developing and improving one’s teaching requires a willingness to learn, not only new skills, strategies and knowledge, but also learn from their own critique of current discourses (Moore, 2004). Openness to new experiences has been positively related to efficacy (Bullock et al., 2015). ECE teachers who are open to learning are more likely to engage in opportunities to successfully learn and practice techniques with children that lead to greater self-efficacy and the ability to cope with the stresses of the job.

Selleck (2001) identified that intellectual curiosity also supports teachers to “sustain vitality and a capacity for reflection, analysis and creativity” and can be exercised in ongoing involvement in “training, reading and professional team talk” (p. 85).

To support this intellectual curiosity, teachers need the capacity to engage in research, exploring emerging knowledge, techniques and technologies “that we cannot possibly define in advance, and apply them to the need[s] of [children] that we also cannot predict” (Connell, 2009a, p. 225), recognising the dynamic nature of knowledge and teaching. If teaching is not to be the mere application of technologies “it needs to be open to new thought, new theories and new practices” (Moss, 2010, p. 16) through constant research, exploration and experimentation.

Physical fitness

There is a dearth of literature on the physical fitness required to be an effective early childhood teacher even though teaching is acknowledged to have a physical component: “the day-to-day detail of practitioners’ relationships with children, parents and colleagues ...demand high levels of physical, emotional and personal knowledge and skill” (Manning-Morton, 2006, p. 42). Manning-Morton recognised teaching in ECE is “necessarily manual work” and teachers should “value physical care as a key aspect of professional practice” (p. 45).

The physicality of the role of the ECE teacher was also acknowledged in a 2016 report on a survey conducted by ChildForum¹⁰. Alexander (2016) found many of the physical injuries reported by the practitioners responding to the survey, were caused by the nature of work with young children including picking up children, moving heavy equipment, and bending and kneeling to work at children's level. Despite this, discussion of the physical attributes required by teachers was almost silent in literature other than the requirement for teachers to have "high energy" (Colker, 2008, p. 72).

The Education Act (1989) requires that the Education Council must be satisfied an applicant demonstrates 'fitness to be a teacher' however provides no guidance to the sector on what this means in relation to physical fitness. Perhaps the physical attributes required to be an effective teacher are a part of teachers' 'secret language' (Cumming & Sumsion, 2014) where everyone knows what is required so nobody has to articulate it.

Conclusion

In this review of the literature, I have argued that teacher beliefs lie at the heart of teaching therefore understanding them and the discourses that have shaped them will bring us closer to understanding how 'good' teachers are made.

In ECE, these beliefs have been shaped over time by specialised discourses, both historical and contemporary, that influence teachers' taken-for-granted assumptions about what qualities a 'good' teacher must have. Therefore, looking backwards to move forwards was important in relation to the selection of literature to be reviewed.

This chapter has explored the genesis of these discourses, including the various conceptions of the purpose of ECE and the gendered origins and nature of ECE teaching. It has identified some possible implications for teachers and their practice arising from this genesis.

The way the teachers' role has evolved over time, including the influences of theory, discussions about qualifications and the influence of *Te Whāriki* is

¹⁰ ChildForum is a private research, membership and advocacy organisation for ECE services. It regularly surveys the sector on a range of issues and uses the information gained to inform their advocacy and publishing work.

explored. In addition, to inform understanding of the dominant discourses shaping ECE teaching in New Zealand today, discourses of teaching and conceptions of teachers identified in literature over time were compared and discussed. These historical explorations provided a framework for the final section discussing the teacher qualities as identified in literature.

Many of the research findings around teacher beliefs and the discourses shaping these were dated in the 2000s however, and I have been unable to find more recent examples that demonstrate the currency, or otherwise, of these findings. The academy appears to have moved in a different research direction. Aitken and Kennedy (2007) argued the need for a re-appraisal, based on contemporary research and scholarship, of the recurring discourse of maternalism in particular, in relation to the 'good' teacher. This study aims to contribute to this re-appraisal.

In addition, a number of studies were completed during the first decade of the 21st century which examined New Zealand teachers' responses to the introduction of sociocultural theories and discourses in practice (e.g. Farquhar & Fler, 2007, Meade, 2000, & Peters & Davies, 2011), often as a response to the introduction of *Te Whāriki*. These studies found that many of the tenets of socioculturalism adopted by teachers in theory did not necessarily translate to practice. There has been little exploration of these discourses in relation to teachers' beliefs since this time. This study explores the influences of these discourses today.

Similarly, this study updates research findings in relation to claims made during the same time period about the importance teachers placed on the relational aspects of teaching over other aspects (e.g. Anthony & Walshaw, 2007, & Hedges & Cullen, 2005a).

There were also other 'gaps' in relation to the positioning of the 'good' teacher in the literature. Very rarely were teachers asked for their perspectives. Only one American article (Colker, 2008) was found that sought the perspectives of teachers about what qualities they need to be effective in their role.

In order to address these identified gaps in literature, the following research questions have been explored:

1. What are ECE teachers' espoused beliefs about the most important knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions they need to be effective in their role?
2. What are the discourses shaping and being shaped by these beliefs?
3. How may these beliefs and discourses enable or constrain ECE practice?

Chapter Three: Research Methodology and Theoretical Underpinnings

Introduction

This is a qualitative study using a pragmatist conceptual framework. I have used a range of data collection methods and two analytical frameworks (critical discourse analysis and poststructural feminist discourse analysis) in order to best address the research questions (Creswell, 2013).

Using more than one method and analytical framework has enabled me to fit together insights and solutions rather than being forced to focus on a particular methodological and/or epistemological preference (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

While it would appear any discourse analysis that attempts to accommodate both critical and poststructuralism ideologies is impossible, like MacLure (2003), I have noted crossover 'traffic' of ideas and assumptions across each paradigm. This study draws connections between the fine detail of what people say and the broader sweep of discourses - connections that are, however, inexorably unstable, partial and tangled.

McLaren (2009) argues that there is no one truth about the subject experiences of participants and there is no one truth about how researchers or analysts should make sense of these experiences. We, as researchers, can only speak of our own personal observation of discourses. My analyses and interpretations of these discourses come from my own observations, histories and experiences.

The word 'teacher' "is already overpopulated with other contexts; with other people; and with competing forms of knowledge" (Britzman, 1999, p. 37). The concept of teacher is a site of multiple, fragmented and contradictory meanings (MacLure, 2003), meanings that cannot be separated from the speaker, from the listener or from history, thus from the various discourses that constitute it. (Britzman, 1999). My intention is not to try and distinguish the authentic 'good' teacher from rhetorical ones, instead I have attended to multiplicity of meanings that arose across different discourses (MacLure, 2003).

Fairclough (2010) argues social institutions contain a range of ‘speech communities’ with their own discourse and ideological norms which the relevant community has ‘naturalised’ and therefore consider them to be ‘common-sense’, rather than a particular construction of reality (Locke, 2004). Members of these communities may not be aware of the ‘way of seeing’ they have naturalised, much like the cultural lens through which people view the world.

Communication and culture are like ice-bergs. Only a small “tip” is stated overtly. A vast amount lies beneath the surface, not said, but assumed to be known or inferable from the context in which the communication is occurring (Gee, 2014, p. 14).

Despite its perceived diversity, I argue the English-medium, centre-based, teacher-led ECE sector in New Zealand may be treated as one social institution for the purposes of this study with its own ‘speech communities’ and ‘common-sense’. As a social institution, this sector both facilitates and constrains the actions and interactions of its members; and teachers, as members, have both agency in, and are affected by, this social institution (Fairclough, 2010).

To become a teacher, one must master the discursive and ideological norms which the [ECE centre] attaches to that subject position – one must learn to talk like a teacher and ‘see things’ ... like a teacher (Fairclough, 2010, p. 42)

These ways of talking, being and seeing become teachers’ ideological norms. In this study, I have attempted to identify the ideological norms of this group of ECE teacher participants in with respect to teacher knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions required to be effective, exploring how these ideological norms were generated and the potential impact of these. By focusing on the discursive, rather than the individual, I was concerned with the influences of the power of dominant discourses (Janzen, 2015).

Fairclough (2010) does however acknowledge that social institutions are pluralistic, not monolithic, and provide alternative sets of discursive and ideological norms which may vary in time and place, in accordance with factors like the balance of power, and relative integration or autonomy. In addition, vocabularies change over time to reflect these norms. The invention of new

vocabularies is like the invention of new tools to replace inefficient tools (Rorty, 1989). However, it is possible to identify discourses which dominate others at any one time in a particular context. These dominant discourses are likely to be most 'opaque' and therefore not necessarily visible to members.

The aim is for the observations generated by this research to resonate with ECE teachers, and provoke reflection, reflexion, greater awareness and/or change/d thinking, where necessary. Through highlighting the effects of dominant discourses in the lives of ECE teachers, I hope to be able to help teachers re-author the stories they tell about themselves in order to support them to make change going forward (Winslade, 2005). As they evaluate their discursive positioning/s, teachers will have the opportunity to re-position themselves and renegotiate their relationships and 'identity conclusions' (Winslade, 2005).

In this chapter I will outline theories and epistemologies that have influenced the research design, methodologies, methods, and data analysis I have engaged with and in as I have conducted this research. In addition, I will outline the research and data analysis process undertaken.

Theoretical underpinnings

Pragmatism

When originally exploring theoretical frameworks with which to underpin this study, there was no single framework that I connected with enough to believe that it would support me to fully engage with my research questions. Through this exploration however, I discovered that it was not imperative to be singular or 'purist' in my thinking, resonating with Abbott (2001, cited in Maxwell, 2011) who argued that selecting one philosophical stance is not necessary.

[P]hilosophical and methodological positions..., function ... as heuristics, conceptual and practical tools that are used to solve specific problems in theory and research. ... the idea of heuristics is to open up new topics, to find new things. To do that, sometimes we need to invoke constructivism... sometimes we need a little realism (p. 28).

Subsequently I chose a conceptual framework which gave me direction while allowing me to explore a range of theoretical frameworks, articulate my

philosophical ideas and use a 'multi-lens' approach to both my data collection and analysis. To this end, I was drawn to the conceptual framework of pragmatism.

Pragmatism was developed in the early twentieth-century by American philosophers, especially Charles Peirce and John Dewey. Pragmatists believe "ideas are not immutable universal concepts residing in some metaphysical reality" (Guttek, 2004, p. 70), but instead are developed in the context of shared human experience, and are practical and relevant instruments for solving life's problems. Truth, meaning and knowledge are viewed as tentative and evolving over time, meaning research findings can only ever be viewed as 'provisional truths' (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Pragmatists are concerned with real issues that make a concrete difference in human life - using problem-solving methods that make it possible to arrive at flexible hypotheses that can be revised and subject to further testing to meet ever changing situations in light of new evidence. Pragmatism is thus associated with "ethical and moral relativism" (Guttek, 2004, p. 75) and takes a value-orientated approach to research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

As such, to be pragmatic does not mean to be uncritical or not transformative. John Dewey, as an early exponent of pragmatism, was both constructionist and critical. Charles Peirce was also seeking a critical philosophy, arguing pragmatism is a method of reflexion designed to provide clarity to ideas (Crotty, 1998). My hope is this study reflects the original critical intent of these founders.

The practical, solutions-focused nature of pragmatism also links to post-structuralism's aims: "Post-structuralism is a practice. It is not about abstract arguments or detached observations, but about a practical expression of the limits in a given core" (Williams, 2005, p. 6). As such, this study contains "an action agenda for reform that may change the lives of participants, the institutions in which they live and work, or even the researchers' lives" (Creswell, 2013, p. 26), that is, strengthening ECE practice in New Zealand. The qualitative data I collected was analysed using both critical and feminist post-structural lenses, both informed by the work of Michel Foucault, as outlined in the following sections.

Foucauldian influences

While often classified as a poststructural theorist, Michel Foucault “spent a great deal of time and energy avoiding being or being seen or positioned as structuralist, post-structuralist..., historian, philosopher or postmodernist” (Ball, 2013, p. 9). Many who follow his thinking do, however, classify themselves as poststructural and he has also been influential in the development of critical discourse analysis methodology (e.g. Fairclough, 2001, 2003 & 2010; Locke, 2003). This means his ideas have played a strong influence in this study. In saying this, like Stephen Ball (2013), my intention is not to “do Foucault” and I am not a Foucauldian” (p. 2). I would, however, like to recognise the significant influence Foucault has had on the critical and poststructural thinkers whose work I have drawn from (e.g. Fairclough, St. Pierre, Baxter, Weedon, Davies), even though, in relation to the poststructural feminists I have used, the relationship with Foucault has, at times, been “uneasy and ambivalent” (Davies, 1994, p. 39).

Foucauldian theory explores relationships between historical discourses and construction of identity (Baxter, 2016). A fundamental “premise in Foucault’s work is that discourses, as knowledge and truth claims, play a significant role in constructing what is ‘real’ for each of us” (McLaren, 2009, p. 1). His theory of discourse “illustrates how language gathers itself together according to socially constructed rules and regularities that allow certain statements to be made and not others” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 485). Discourse is not the same as language (Ball, 2013), instead it “is the conditions under which certain statements are considered to be the truth” (p. 19). Discourses cannot be separated from reality, being involved in the production of this reality – they are our lives (Fadyl & Nicholls, 2013).

Through his discussion of discourses, Foucault’s writing assists us to consider processes of ‘knowing’ and ‘being’ differently (Davies, 1994) by disassembling the humanist subject – “the thinking, self-aware, truth-seeking individual..., who is able to master both ‘his’ own internal passions, and the physical world around him, through the exercise of reason” (MacLure, 2003, p. 175), and replacing it with a subject that constitutes, and is constituted by, discourse. He sought to disrupt the idea of an individual taking authorship of their own life through their

inner self-actualising potential or instinctual biological drive. He focused instead on work done by and through discourse (Winslade, 2005).

A lot of Foucault's work focused on systems of thought and challenged notions of 'truths', arguing instead that knowledge is unstable and contingent. He explored social conditions that may have led to different 'knowledges' and ways of thinking, creating a 'history of the present' (Fadyl & Nicholls, 2013) and argued that, by illustrating how things have been historically 'created', we can begin to question their existence and necessity (St. Pierre, 2000). The aim of this process is not to make sense of our history in the present but to make it unacceptable, a violent imposition of the 'truth' (Ball, 2013).

From a Foucauldian perspective, language is never just linguistic as it organises ways of thinking and acting in the world. Language systems do not transparently and neutrally represent human experience, instead they exist within historical discourses which are often competing and serve different power interests. These power interests, and the discourses that represent them, usually reside, or are entangled, in institutions (e.g. education) and disciplines (e.g. pedagogy) which provide the structure to produce, regulate and 'normalise' dominant forms of social knowledge and the associated behaviours of those within the purview of these institutions (Baxter, 2016; MacLure, 2003). Once discourse is 'normalised', it is very difficult to think and act outside it. Discourses circumscribe what you say, know and do, as well as what kind of person you are obliged to be within any particular discourse (MacLure, 2003).

Foucault was also very interested in power. He theorised it exists in human relationships, when one person tries to control the conduct of another, rather than belonging to individuals. Therefore, power is mobile, unstable and ever-shifting and operates through discourses (Foucault, 1997). MacLure (2003) eloquently describes power, from a Foucauldian perspective, as a "sinuous and insinuating mechanism that works its way in a 'capillary' fashion into the 'very grain' of individuals, inhabiting their bodies, their beliefs and their self-hood, binding them together as institutional **subjects**" (p. 49, emphasis added). Foucault's writing identified two distinct meanings in relation to the word 'subject', the first of these is the notion of being subject to someone else by

control and dependence (Ball, 2013). This is the meaning implied in MacLure's quote.

The second meaning envisaged the subject as tied to his/her own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge (Ball, 2013). This meaning of subject articulates a view of individuals as always being in creation and taking some agency in this process (Winslade, 2005). Foucault argues there must be an element of freedom on both sides for power relations to occur. Even when one side is more dominant, there is always possibility of resistance (Foucault, 1997). Ball (2013) argues that while individuals cannot operate outside power relations, they can change them through this resistance. Once discourses are located and named, we can begin to refuse them. Shifts in thought can occur when people resist dominant discourses and related taken-for-granted assumptions (St. Pierre, 2000). Individual choices, interactions and behaviours together can produce more general social patterns (Ball, 2013). For Foucault, power is neither inherently good nor bad; it is dynamic and unstable, yet productive (Foucault, 1997).

While he did not deny power can be concentrated in the hands of certain groups at the expense of others (MacLure, 2003) , Foucauldian power is not that of monolithic sovereign power. His was the notion of disciplinary power, linked to discourse practices based on surveillance and normalisation. From this perspective, people are normalised through the way they are subjected to daily surveillance and scrutiny of other people and official institutions (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). Instead of seeing knowledge as power to do things, he was interested in the way knowledge is used to control others through these systems of surveillance through which others can be managed and regulated (Davies, 1994), and behaviour becomes normalised. This normalising process means individuals become self-surveillant and thus self-managing of their own behaviours, being constituted by, and constituting discourses of the institutions (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006).

For Foucault, it was important to analyse power in order to understand what power produces (St. Pierre, 2000). He theorised "the relationship between knowledge and power and how this constructs individual speech and behaviour" (Baxter, 2016, p. 35), arguing that Western knowledge is organised in discursively

produced binary opposites (e.g. culture/nature, masculinity/femininity, science/art) which always essentialise both terms and privileges one opposite over the other. The privileged knowledge inevitably systematises itself into, what Foucault describes as, a 'regime of truth' which "is like saying that my superior knowledge of the world enables me to hold power over you and your inferior knowledge" (Baxter, 2016).

In relation to this study, I am particularly interested in the 'regimes of truth' depicted by my participants. Regimes of truth are discourses sanctioned within discursive fields (such as education) and which reinforce and maintain the field's 'truths' and power relations (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006, p. 36). "[I]nstitutionally produced and sanctioned truths [that] govern and regulate us" (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 29) are woven together into a system or 'regime' which "governs what is held to be normal and desirable ways to think, act and feel in ... institutions" (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 33), including early childhood education. It is within these regimes of truth, however, "inequity is produced and reproduced" (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 36) as one or more truths dominate, marginalising or silencing others.

While Foucault never articulated a method of discourse analysis, he did identify a set of societal 'problems' and outlined some methods of analysis and a toolbox of concepts for others to use and develop further (Ball, 2013), as many have done. I am, therefore, drawing on methods developed by researchers who have been influenced by his theories, and who have developed discourse analysis tools to suit their theoretical perspectives. In saying this, regardless of how closely I have tried to engage with these methods, my analysis of discourses shaping and being shaped by my participants is likely to have yielded different results from others who may have used the same processes. From a poststructural perspective, this is not seen as problematic as the aim is to question 'truths' we have taken for granted rather than replace them with another 'truth' we have created (Graham, 2011).

Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism is part of the matrix of postmodernism (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). As such, it "views identities as multiple, complex, discursively produced,

and changing over time (Gibson, 2015, p. 144). 'Post' epistemologies reject foundational 'truths' located in disciplinary knowledges, focusing instead on the deconstruction of taken-for-granted historical structures (Luke & Gore, 1992).

Baxter (2016) explains, from a postmodern (and therefore a poststructural) perspective, knowledge is "socially constructed, not discovered; contextual, not foundational; singular, localised and perspectival rather than totalising or universal; and egalitarian rather than hierarchical" (p. 35). Therefore knowledge is always provisional, open-ended and relational – there can be no finite and unitary truths (Luke & Gore, 1992).

Poststructural approaches bring a range of radical, pragmatic and transformative perspectives that both challenge and complement dominant paradigms (Baxter, 2016). Poststructuralism does not have one fixed definition, instead different theorists (e.g. Foucault, Derrida & Kristeva) have introduced a range of "diverse and competing perspectives on the relationship between language, meaning and identity" (Baxter, 2016, p. 34).

Weedon (1987) believes "poststructuralism offers a useful, productive framework for understanding the mechanisms of power in our society" (p. 10). In particular, it is a "way of conceptualizing the relationship between language, social institutions and individual consciousness which focuses on how power is exercised and on the possibilities of change" (p. 19). Weedon argues poststructuralism theorises that social meanings are produced within these social institutions (and their practices). The individuals within these institutions, are both shaped by institutions and shape them as agents of change - change which may either reinforce hegemonic interests or challenge existing power relations.

While postmodernism is a broad, cross-disciplinary movement, poststructuralism is primarily linguistic (Baxter, 2016). Language is "the common factor in the analysis of social organization, social meanings, power and individual consciousness" (Weedon, 1987, p. 21). It is where our identity is constructed and performed. The assumption is "language enables us to think, speak and give meaning to the world around us. Meaning and consciousness do not exist outside language" (Weedon, 1987, p. 32). Poststructuralists do not see language

simply as a tool we use, rather as “a site of struggle where subjectivity and consciousness are produced (Orner, 1992). In other words, meaning is produced within language rather than being reflected by language (Baxter, 2016).

Language is also understood to be intimately connected with politics of knowledge (MacNaughton, 2005). It is the place where forms of social organisation are defined and contested, and where our various subject positions are constructed. There is no self separate from these subject positions “through which we fabricate our selves [sic] and are fabricated” (Davies, 1994, p. 23). Subject positions provide us with a set of concepts, images, metaphors, ways of speaking and thinking we adopt as our own when we take them on (Dagg & Haugaard, 2016).

As such, language acts as a regulatory force to ‘pressure’ individuals into conforming to socially approved behaviour and speech patterns associated with particular subject positions (Baxter, 2016). Weedon (1987) argued that “[t]o speak is to assume a subject position within discourse and to become *subjected* to the power and regulation of the discourse” (p. 119) Language gives meaning to behaviour, teaching us what is socially acceptable and ‘normal’. Therefore, as Dagg and Haugaard (2016) argue, “subject positions are different from social roles in that they are the product of interaction, in which some accounts of subject positions are made to count and others are invalidated” (p. 398). In addition, the concept of ‘positioning’ highlights the dynamic aspects of encounters where the concept of ‘role’ refers to static and formal aspects (Davies & Harré, 2000).

This is not to say the subject is powerless in the process. While being socially constructed in discursive practices, the subject exists as thinking and feeling, capable of resisting and innovating when faced with contradictory subject positions (Weedon, 1987), exercising choice in relation to discursive practices (Davies & Harré, 2000). They work on themselves to bring about change and sometimes become aware of “the constitutive effect of inequitable discourses and set out to change those discourse” (Davies & Saltmarsh, 2007, p. 6). The subject also has the ability to reflect on, and choose between contradictory positions and discursive practices which constitute them and the society in which

they live (Weedon, 1987). In this way, individuals have agency, that is, the ability to act with intent and awareness (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006).

Building on the notion of agency, St. Pierre (2000) argues strongly poststructuralism 'does not allow' blame to be attributed elsewhere and 'demands' we examine our own complicity in discourses of social injustice. Where there is power, there is also resistance (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006) and resistance changes power relations (St. Pierre, 2000). By taking different subject positions, people can take agency by resisting discursive positions they are offered in a social exchange through contradiction, taking opportunities to make choices or take a stand (Winslade, 2005). While their agency is 'conditioned', individuals can "reflexively and critically examine their conditions of possibility and in which they can both subvert and eclipse the powers that act on them and which they enact" (Davies, 2006, p. 426).

The various discourses we take up as our own are "both constituted in and perpetuated through the language that we use in our daily interactions" (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006, p. 29), particularly in institutional settings. Poststructural critiques "make visible how language operates to produce very real, material, and damaging structures in the world" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 481), particularly through the use of 'deconstruction' (Derrida, 1979). This study aspires to make visible potentially damaging language constituting early childhood education in New Zealand.

Poststructural feminism

As early childhood education is so gendered, I was particularly interested in applying a feminist lens to this research. From a feminist perspective, poststructuralist theory has opened up new ways of analysing the discursive ways we become gendered, exploring why gender binaries are so intractable and how we can change them (Davies, 1994). MacLure (2003) argues founding categories, like gender, race and class, "are saturated with effects of power and prejudice, and ... productive social change will not take place if these terms are kept beyond questions" (p. 181). For this reason, both education and feminism have taken up theories, methods and practices that have been categorised under

'post' labels, including poststructuralism, and the relationship between feminism and poststructuralism is "invigorating and fruitful" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 477).

Creswell and Creswell (2013) identified that feminism draws from a range of different theoretical orientations and seeks to "make problematic women's diverse situations and the institutions that frame those situations" (p. 29). As the ECE sector is one of these institutions, feminism is a logical framework to use in this study. Traditionally, many feminist perspectives have portrayed and universalised oppression of women by men as the main form of inequality women experience, arguing women are uniformly disempowered (Baxter, 2003). Such universalised macro-explanations only provide a narrow view with which to understand micro-relations of power which are multi-faceted, contextual and changing (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). Social constructionism, for example, privileges external factors in its explanation of gender, often discounting the contribution of individuals to their own construction (Gunn et al., 2004).

Moving beyond social constructionism, incorporating aspects of feminism with poststructural understandings provides a richer framework for analysis that mitigates the limitations of feminism and poststructuralism (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). While both feminism and poststructuralism are highly contested terms, a "rhizomatic hybrid" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 477) has appeared and "continues to become" (ibid.) as it is used in response to contextual demands. As St. Pierre explains

[F]eminists who are fond of poststructural critiques have given up on finding out "exactly" what is going on. They are sceptical of exactly that kind of question, because it is grounded in descriptions of knowledge, truth, rationality, and subjectivity that humanism put forward centuries ago to make sense of a world very different from the one we live in today, one that many now believe requires different inscriptions (p. 477).

Poststructural feminism stresses the difference not just between male and female, but between female and female (Davies, 1994). It promotes an understanding of ways in which women "are simultaneously positioned as relatively powerless within certain discourses, but as relatively powerful within alternative and competing discourses" (Baxter, 2003, p. 99). It is these

contradictions that provide important sites for exploring how individuals “negotiate gendered subjectivities in relation to the subject positions made available to them in particular historic and discursive locations” (Davies & Saltmarsh, 2007, p. 6), through positioning.

Positioning is the discursive process whereby individuals “are located in conversations as observable and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines” (Davies & Harré, 2000, p. 91). There are two types of positioning: interactive positioning, where one person’s utterances positions another, and reflexive positioning, where an individual positions themselves. This positioning is not necessarily conscious nor intentional (Davies & Harré, 2000). In speaking and acting from a position, people bring their own particular history as one who has been in multiple positions and engaged in multiple discourses, as do those they are in conversation with.

Through a feminist poststructuralist lens, it is acknowledged subjects are constantly negotiating different power relations, and are viewed as “irrational, contradictory and complex” (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006, p. 8), changing and shifting discursively over time and context. Gender and sexuality is framed in relation to how they intersect with other forms of identity such as ethnicity, social class and ability. The language and actions women actively take up from contexts in which they live become prioritised. Struggles are local and specific rather than universal (St. Pierre, 2000). As explained by Gunn et al. (2004),

Our understanding of ourselves as gendered is an understanding produced and reproduced through the particular words, images and actions we draw on to perceive of ourselves at any given time. We take up our gender then by the ways we speak it, think it and act it (p. 131).

Weedon (1987) believes one strength of poststructuralist approaches to feminism is they enable women to attend to the practical implications of particular theories “determining which existing theories might be useful in the fight for change” (p. 6). One example of this is the culture/nature binary which has historically positioned women in the realm of the natural and emotional, with men in the realm of culture, thought and reason (St. Pierre, 2000). Poststructural feminists work to make visible assumptions that allow binaries like

this to exist, seeking to understand how binaries have been used to justify and naturalise power relations (Orner, 1992). Britzman (1999) describes this process as the researcher positioning themselves 'behind the back' of the researched "to point out what they could not see, would not do, and could not have said" (p. 32). As women develop their awareness of the limitations of these categories of masculinity and femininity, they can both hold on to and work to dismantle the categories at the same time (Davies, 1994).

Poststructural feminist approaches also support researchers to "choose between different accounts of reality on the basis of their social implications" (Weedon, 1987, p. 29). For example, these approaches can be used to understand why women tolerate social relations and 'truths' which subordinate their interests. Through poststructural feminist lenses, the process of construction of subjectivity (or the 'self') is critical to understanding different 'truths' we take up. Subjectivity encompasses "the unconscious and conscious thoughts and emotions of the individual - ... their sense of self and how they relate to the world" (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006, p. 27). It is socially constructed therefore it is fluid, unstable and dynamic. The truths linked to these subjectivities are the "foundations of our judgements of and interactions with others in the world" (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006, p. 17). The discourses that form our subjectivity shape what we perceive we can and should do (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006).

Examining subjectivity "enables us to see the diversity and richness of our experience of being a person as we find ourselves positioned now one way or another, inside one set of power relations or another, constituted through one discourse or another, in one context or another" (Davies, 1994, p. 3). Women's subjectivity is open to multiple meanings and possibilities, each with different political implications (Weedon, 1987). We can speak from multiple positions within multiple discourses and are not bound by any one.

In relation to this study, I have applied a poststructural feminist lens to my data to highlight the process of subjectification, something Foucault says is mundane and constitutive of everyday life (Dagg & Haugaard, 2016). As teachers are all subjectified (or constituted) through much the same array of discourses, my aim

is to identify, and draw attention to, the 'common threads' through which being an ECE teacher in New Zealand is accomplished (Davies, 1994).

Like all subject positions, the teaching subject "is socially constructed and discursively constituted through ongoing relations with power" into an identity which has essentially been determined in advance (Janzen, 2015). An understanding of this process is important for teachers' understanding of the way their perspectives are constructed and how this impacts on the ways they interact with the world, including children, families and colleagues (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006).

As poststructural Foucauldian discourse analysis has been criticised for its lack of a text-analytic dimension (MacLure, 2003), I have also complemented a poststructural lens with a textual lens using critical discourse analysis tools. This has enabled me to analyse how meanings, subjectivities and power relations are manifested in what my participants actually said.

Critical perspectives

Also drawing from the work of Foucault, Locke (2004) identifies a range of assumptions associated with a critical orientation. From the assumptions he identifies, the ones underpinning the critical lens I have applied to this study include the notions that:

- all thought is mediated by social and historically situated power relations
- 'facts' can never be isolated from values or ideology
- concepts are never stable or fixed
- language is central to subjectivity formation
- certain groups in any society are privileged and "the oppression that characterizes contemporary societies is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary or inevitable" (pp. 25-26)
- oppression has many forms and focussing on only form one at a time (e.g. gender) ignores interconnections between them.

I believe these assumptions are complementary to the poststructural assumptions already outlined.

A critical lens differs from a poststructural one in relation to how language and discourse is understood to interact with the material world (Baxter, 2016). From a critical worldview, a discursive event, such as a teacher demonstration, is seen as having a potential impact on material practices, such as an increase in the number of teachers and altering the nature of future demonstrations. Critical researchers therefore place emphasis on challenging the power bases of competing discourses (Locke, 2004), and use an emancipatory approach starting from the experiences and opinions of members of dominated groups.

In contrast, poststructuralism tends to take an 'anti-materialist' stance as it views social 'realities' as discursively produced. So, in the same scenario, if teachers demonstrate to try and change material conditions, those conditions are understood through discourses on protest and government policy (Baxter, 2016). Baxter also argues that poststructuralism does not support emancipatory approaches to discourse analysis, seeing these as ultimately leading to their own oppressive 'grand narratives'. Instead poststructuralists tend to support bottom-up, local transformations.

Both critical and poststructural feminist lenses are cast over data through a discourse analysis methodology.

Methodology – Discourse analysis

Introduction

I chose discourse analysis as my methodology because, like Janzen (2015), I wanted to explore where discourses shaping and being shaped by participants may have been derived, what impact they may be having, and where they are being resisted.

It was important for me to define what is meant by the term discourse to assist my analysis of it. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I chose to adopt Gee's (2014) definition of Discourse (with a capital 'D')

"Discourses [with a capital 'D'] are ways of enacting and recognizing different sorts of socially situated and significant identities through the use of language integrated with characteristic ways of acting, interacting,

believing, valuing, and using various sorts of objects (including our bodies), tools, and technologies in concert with other people” (p. 157).

As such, they are “a patterned set of meanings and social practices established through a multitude of conversations (written and spoken) across a wide social landscape” (Winslade, 2005, p. 357). Discourses are systems of language use and power relations, which work as ‘technologies of governance’ to encourage individuals to self-regulate and behave ‘properly’ (Macfarlane & Lakhani, 2015). This means a discourse can be institutionalised at many levels including political, cultural and small group level.

An individual’s subscription to a discourse is likely to be “an *unconscious* effect of the processes of discursive formation that occur at the societal level” (Locke, 2004, p. 32). Davies and Harré (2000) argue discourses can develop around specific topics (e.g. gender) and compete with each other creating distinct, and often incompatible, versions of reality.

Fairclough’s (2003) discussion builds on these descriptions of the all-encompassing nature of Discourse when he adds

“Discourses not only represent the world as it is (or rather is seen to be), they are also projective, imaginaries, representing possible worlds which are different from the actual world, and tied in to projects to change the world in particular directions... Discourses constitute part of the resources which people deploy in relating to one another – keeping separate from one another, cooperating, competing, dominating – and in seeking to change the ways in which they relate to one another” (p. 124).

Gee (2014) sums Discourse up using the metaphor of ‘dance’, describing it as being able to recognise and engage in a particular dance – enacting words, actions, values, technologies, places and times to “get recognized as a distinctive sort of *who* doing a distinctive sort of *what*” (pp. 183-184). Each dance, however, can be recognised in multiple, partial, contradictory, disputed and negotiable ways by others.

Discourse analysis in the social sciences “describes a heterogeneous range of social science research based on the analysis of interviews and texts as well as

recorded talk” (Silverman, 2006, p. 223). It focuses on “the social features, political ramifications, and power relations inherent in textural and behavioural aspects of a body of knowledge” (Powers, 2001, p. 36).

Graham (2011) describes discourse analysis as a flexible term, how you do it depends on the epistemological framework you are drawing from. Researchers using discourse analysis as a methodology agree there is no single or correct way to engage in this process, each analyst must adapt and combine analysis tools in a way that meets the needs of their particular discipline and study (Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 2014).

From a pragmatist perspective, I was interested in exploring data through multiple lenses to systematically ‘test’ my ideas and conclusions against alternative understandings and support me to answer my research questions in a comprehensive manner which acknowledges the context and complexity of these questions (Maxwell, 2011). Using two competing and/or complementary versions of discourse analysis has helped to add *polyphony*, or multiple voices, to this study, providing me as the researcher with “a richer, more complex set of possible understandings and readings of the data” (Baxter, 2003, pp. 67–68).

The data collected in this study has been analysed using two different, but interpretive discourse analysis lenses which both supplement and complement each other (Baxter, 2016). The ‘frameworks’ I employed were:

- Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and
- Feminist Post-structural Discourse Analysis (FPDA)

Both of these discourse analysis methods “seek to identify and describe the plurality of reality and the precarious nature of knowledge claims” (McLaren, 2009, p. 1).

Critical discourse analysis

One of the ways I analysed interview and discussion transcripts data was using a Fairclough-like approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA) designed to identify discourses that are privileged or legitimated, and those that are marginalised (Kilderry, 2015a). Analysts engaging in CDA are interested in issues of power and dominance, and have a political commitment to redressing social inequities

(MacLure, 2003). As some discourses are more powerful than others, subscribers of less powerful discourses can be marginalised and relatively disempowered (Locke, 2004). It is therefore important to recognise these inequities and make them visible by exposing the effects of power at work in discourse.

CDA “attempts to marry the ‘bigger picture’ of discourse offered by social theory with the technical sophistication of linguistic analysis to produce an integrated approach to discourse” (MacLure, 2003, p. 186). One of the main tasks of discourse analysis is to ‘disarticulate’ the texts of everyday life in order to disrupt ‘common-sense’ understandings about the naturalness or inevitability of identities, values and concepts these texts contain (MacLure, 2003), unravelling these to open them up for further questioning. Interview transcripts and Facebook™ posts were treated as text for the purpose of these analyses (Fairclough, 2010). As people’s perceived ‘free actions’ are already an effect of power and individuals are not separate from larger discourses, the transcripts and posts were treated as one single text (Bazzul, 2014) when analysing from this lens. This means the role of the individual author/speaker was minimised as they were writing/speaking within a larger discourse. Text analysis is only part of discourse analysis, which also includes analysis of how the text is produced and interpreted, and of relationships between text, processes and social conditions (Fairclough, 2001).

Fairclough (2010) advocates for discourse analysis to be critical to ensure discourses are not simply being described, but also assessed in relation to their determination by, and their effects on, social structures - in this case the social ‘institution’ of the centre-based, teacher-led ECE sector. In this way, critique makes visible both that which is assumed by participants, and therefore cannot be ‘seen’, and the interconnectedness of things, including the distribution and exercise of power. A critical lens “allowed taken-for-granted understandings to be revealed within the data..., identifying social and cultural dominance and providing insights into ideology and subjectivity” (Kilderry et al., 2017, p. 344). It is hoped by making participants’ ‘common-sense’ positions visible, these will become *demythified* or *denaturalised* (Locke, 2004), providing revelations for them.

The issue of language and power in education is part of the wider debate about language and power discussed earlier. Lawson, Harrison, and Cavendish's (2004) interpretation of the Foucauldian conception of society is that postmodern societies are no longer governed through strong authoritative coercion, instead power is ever present in the "micro-politics of everyday life – everywhere, mundane and hardly noticed" (p. 82). Control is achieved through 'moulding' individuals through social institutions (including educational institutions). In recent times "there is an enhanced role for language in the exercise of power: it is mainly in discourse consent is achieved, ideologies are transmitted, and practices, meanings, values and identities are taught and learnt" (Fairclough, 2010, p. 531). This highlights the need for the use of CDA as a methodology in educational research.

Similar to a poststructural world view, CDA "views a prevailing social order as historically situated and therefore relative, socially constructed and changeable" (Locke, 2004, p. 1). Where CDA differs, however, is that it explores discourse at micro, meso and macro levels using linguistic and analytical devices that reveal participants' common-sense assumptions, values, ideologies and beliefs (Kilderry et al., 2017). CDA seeks to expose "ideological distortions wrought by powerful elites upon a real or innocent world" (MacLure, 2003, p. 102) and is therefore emancipatory in nature.

In this study, I used the critical and emancipatory approach offered by CDA to: identify the discourses found to shape and be shaped by the espoused beliefs of teachers about the most important knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions they need to be effective in their role; consider these discourses in relation to historical and political contexts in which they have been formed; and evaluate the discourses in relation to how they may constrain or enable effective ECE practice.

Feminist poststructural discourse analysis

Building on CDA, the second lens I have used to analyse data is Feminist Poststructural Discourse Analysis (FPDA). I chose this lens as it is complementary and supplementary to CDA (Baxter, 2003). Both approaches are social

constructionist in spirit and assume identities are constructed discursively and power relations are inscribed within discourses (Baxter, 2016).

FPDA has equipped me with thinking that has supported me to 'see through' ambiguities and confusions of a gendered discursive context (i.e. ECE teaching) where females are located as both powerful and powerless simultaneously (Baxter, 2016). Therefore, FPDA has allowed me to explore the gendered nature of ECE teacher discourses, and their potential impact and ramifications, in a deeper, more contextual way.

FPDA draws upon post-structural insights, and is "a feminist approach to analysing the ways in which speakers negotiate their identities, relationships and positions in their world according to the ways in which they are located by competing yet interwoven discourses" (Baxter, 2003, p. 1). As such, FPDA offers a different epistemological framework to CDA and the inclusion of this analytical lens fits comfortably within the pragmatic structure of this study. To provide a poststructural analysis, texts are considered "in terms of who is speaking, from what position, in what context and with what political effect" (Davies, 1994, p. 18). In this way I have looked at statements, not so much for what they say, but what they *do* (Graham, 2011).

Unlike CDA, FPDA is concerned with the complex and often ambiguous ways power relations can shift continuously, and are constantly negotiated, during any discursive context where women can be positioned as both powerless and powerful in alternative and/or competing discourses (Baxter, 2003). Baxter argues "[W]hile CDA is more likely to polarise the argument casting males as villains and females as victims, FPDA is more likely to argue that females are located in multiple positions and cannot be so dichotomously cast as powerless, disadvantaged or victims" (p. 55).

FPDA highlights "key discourses on gender as they are negotiated and performed within specific, localised contexts" (p. 66), in this case, the context of ECE. It is particularly concerned with making space for marginalised voices, diverse opinions, contradictory thinking and fragmented messages, and can provide opportunity to see multiple and changing discourses employed by a group (Engebretson, 2016). FPDA recognises that, as contradictory subjects, women are

constantly negotiating power relations in their everyday lives, shifting according to how they read and negotiate daily interactions with others. As such, if they consider it would be more beneficial and desirable to locate in one discourse rather than another, they can shift their discursive position in order to gain more power (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). I have tried to make these shifts visible.

I am interested in “identifying the reasons progressive change has proved so difficult to accomplish” (Bacchi, 2000, p. 46), particularly with respect to ECE teacher practice, therefore in this study I have considered possible constraints imposed by dominant ECE discourses. From a poststructural perspective, however, it is important to emphasise any ‘findings’ that emerged from my analyses are only partial as there will be many other perspectives from which to interpret participants’ responses. As such, the ‘truths’ I have proposed and discussed are contingent and subject to scrutiny (Graham, 2011).

Research methods

Introduction

Data for this qualitative study was collected through three group interviews, four individual interviews and a Facebook™ online group forum. This section outlines recruitment, selection and data collection processes as well as introducing participants and outlining ethical considerations.

Recruitment and selection

This study employed a range of data collection methods, each method requiring samples of different sizes and scope. To meet selection criteria, all participants had to be ECE qualified and registered teachers working in centre-based, teacher-led ECE settings. The following strategies were used to recruit and select research participants to support data collection.

For group interviews, I selected a representative sample of centres (Education and Care and Kindergarten) using the Ministry of Education directory of ECE services for the three areas where interviews were to be held. Access to this database for this purpose is allowed as I was not selling or promoting a product or soliciting business. To select the centres to invite to participate, I originally

employed random stratified sampling by dividing the services into three homogeneous groups using Ministry of Education categories. These groups were:

1. Kindergartens
2. Education and care centres – community-owned
3. Education and care centres – privately-owned

In order to determine the number of each service required in my sample – based on a group interview of eight participants, I identified the proportion of each centre type in that geographical location and translated this across. For example, as one of the chosen urban areas had 22 kindergartens and 114 education and care services (32 community and 82 private), I identified the most appropriate proportion of each service type to recruit for the group interview would be two kindergarten teachers, two teachers from community-based education and care and four teachers from private education and care centres. The appropriate number of centres from each group was then drawn, physically and randomly, 'out of a hat' (Cohen et al., 2011), or a shoe box in this case. Due to the dominance of English-medium services across the three cities chosen (349 out of 355), all services randomly selected were English medium.

After informing relevant umbrella organisations about my research, I invited selected centres to send one qualified teacher (regardless of role) from their centre to the interview. In some cases, the umbrella organisation recommended I contact other centres under their purview due to the circumstances currently being faced by the centre I originally drew.

The first approach was conducted using email to the management contact, asking them to forward my email (with research information attached) to teachers in the centre. In the email I identified I would be following up the next week and sought the email recipient's advice as to the best form this follow up should take. When centres declined (n=32) to be involved in the study, I drew more names out of the shoe box and repeated the process.

Recruitment presented its challenges. In total I contacted 40 centres through the process of initial email contact and follow up - either by telephone or face-to-face visit (when local). Through this process I recruited ten participants from

eight services, and nine of these were able to attend their local group interview. While the original intention was only to have one participant from each centre, the decision was made to include two additional interested teachers from one centre to ensure a reasonable group size.

This process was most successful, however, where I had a previous relationship with the person in the management role. These contacts were more supportive and encouraging of their staff to participate. To ensure participants were not coerced however, I specifically confirmed with each of these potential participants that they were volunteering willingly to be involved in the research.

To boost the number of participants recruited through this strategy, and get sufficient numbers of teachers for three group interviews, I made use of my professional networks to spread the word about my research and invite participation. These approaches included:

- Posting on my personal Facebook page and inviting my 'friends' to share more widely
- Placing a request for participants in Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand's weekly newsletter which is distributed by email to over 400 centre and individual members
- Emailing personal contacts seeking their support for the distribution of research information. These contacts were owners or managers of centres or teacher educators, with personal contacts in a range of centres.

I was able to recruit the final eight participants through these strategies, two of whom came from the same centre. This gave me a total of 17 participants.

Ethical considerations

As the participants are adults and participated as individuals in their own time, I did not require permission from umbrella organisations or management. However, in order to gain access to the teachers through their employer, via the centre's email address, I provided the employers with information about the study.

With regards to data collection, I gained participants' informed consent using an information letter and informed consent form approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee. Physical copies of the forms were completed and signed prior to interviews. All ethical documentation may be found in Appendix C.

Participants were unable to maintain anonymity as they were engaging within a group environment with other participants – both in face-to-face group interviews and in the online discussion forum (see later sections in this chapter). Therefore, they were each required to complete a confidentiality agreement. Participants were also asked to provide a pseudonym to use when reporting on the data, particularly when using direct quotes. The participants invited to an individual interview were not divulged to the whole group.

I made it clear in participant information that participants were able to withdraw from the study at any time up until data analysis commenced – nobody elected to do so. In addition, online participants were able to request their posts were removed from the discussion and individual interview participants could request the audio recorder was turned off at any time – again, nobody chose to do so. Participants were supplied with full contact details for me and my supervisors in the information for participants.

Individual interview participants were given the opportunity to review, amend and approve their transcripts and initial findings from group interviews were shared with the online discussion forum participants to ensure they were accurate and representative of conversations to date.

Engaging in research using a social media platform required further ethical consideration. The Facebook group developed was 'closed' which means participants were unable to 'share' any posts from this group onto their own personal sites.

Participants

It is important to recognise “early childhood educators are a heterogeneous group from a variety of backgrounds, with a multiplicity of perspectives and voices based on their different locations within social discourses” (Robinson &

Jones Diaz, 2006, p. 3). The final group of teachers who participated in this research represented some of these voices although, as stated earlier, they all came from English medium services. Davies (1994) identified “any analysis of discourse... must include information about who it is that is speaking, the site from which or out of which they speak and the positions available to them as speakers within any particular context or set of relations” (p. 47). Table 1 (also Appendix A) summarises the participants’ details however I will introduce you to some of them more fully in subsequent chapters.

Table 1: Participant details

Name ¹¹	f/m	Ethnicity	Exp-Year	Svce Type	Ownership	Qual	Role
Christine	f	NZ Euro	20+	Kgtn	community collective	DipTch ECE	Head Teacher
Natalie	f	NZ Euro	7	Kgtn	community collective	Bachelor	Teacher
Kate	f	NZ Euro	20+	Kgtn	community collective	DipTch ECE	Head Teacher
Betty	f	NZ Euro	7	Kgtn	community collective	Bachelor	Teacher
Nancy	f	Chinese	< 1	E & C	community standalone	Grad-dip	Teacher
Sally	f	Fijian Indian	7	E & C	corporate	Grad-dip	Centre Manager
Gudrun	f	NZ Euro	11	E & C	private standalone	DipTch ECE	Teacher
Megan	f	NZ Euro	19	Kgtn	community collective	DipTch ECE	Head Teacher
Sam	f	NZ Euro	4	Kgtn	community collective	Bachelor	Teacher
Maree	f	NZ Euro	2	E & C	private collective	Grad-dip	Teacher
Daniel	m	NZ Euro	6	E & C	private collective	Bachelor	Teacher
Jo	f	NZ Euro	18	Kgtn	community collective	Grad-dip	Teacher
Dawn	f	NZ Euro	14	E & C	private collective	Bachelor	Head Teacher
Lorna	f	NZ Euro	13	E & C	community standalone	PG Dip	Teacher
Bill	m	NZ Euro	30+	E & C	private standalone	NZFKU Dip	Teacher Owner
Jay	f	NZ Euro	16	E & C	community collective	Bachelor	Head Teacher
Kay	f	NZ Euro	15	E & C	community collective	Bachelor	Asst. Head Teacher

Of the 17 participants who engaged in this research, two were men and 15 were women. They tended to be more experienced with the majority having over 10 years teaching experience. Interestingly, early childhood teaching was the second or subsequent career for nine teachers, often a career move being made after they had children (n=7). Almost half held leadership and/or management

¹¹ All names are pseudonyms

roles in their services. This is likely to be due to them having first and easiest access to information coming into centres.

While all of the centres represented were English medium, the teacher participants represented a range of ECE centres within this cohort. In relation to centre ownership, due to the second recruitment strategy and additional teachers from one centre attending, there was a slight over-representation from community-based services (n=11). This also led to kindergartens being overrepresented with seven teachers participating (41 percent) even though kindergartens make up approximately 20 percent of centre-based, teacher-led ECE services (Ministry of Education, n.d.).

Group interviews

I began the data gathering process by holding three regionally-based group interviews of the centre-based, ECE qualified, registered teachers I had recruited across three urban locations. Each of the interviews was approximately two hours long and were audio-recorded.

I chose to hold group interviews to support the discourse analysis process. Winslade (2005) argues as people speak they create and exchange pieces of social discourse, producing and reproducing it in their participation in social exchange (including conversation). As such, “the interview is a social practice, and the interview and interviewee[s] are participating in the reproduction of discourse” (Fadyl & Nicholls, 2013, p. 26). Research interviews are a means of obtaining a ‘text’ for analysis. As they speak, participants are also positioning themselves in relation to others in the conversation as well as in relation to previous conversations. I was interested in the subject positions participants took up.

I held each interview in tertiary teacher education institution meeting rooms. The intention of using these sites was to provide a venue for participants that felt comfortable and familiar, even if they had not attended this institution. In addition, management of these institutions were supportive of my research, allowing me access out of hours and use of tea and coffee making facilities. Being responsive to the needs and prior commitments of my participants, I changed

venues and dates on a couple of occasions. Working with a supportive institution meant they were also responsive to these changes. I also allowed time at the beginning for participants to eat a light dinner and spend time getting to know each other informally with the aim of providing a relaxed environment more conducive of free and frank discussion.

The group interviews were semi-structured and served two distinct purposes: to gain “access into what is “inside [people’s] head[s]” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 411) and to provide situated conversations and power dynamics valuable to discourse analysis in relation to the issues I wanted to explore.

Although there was no set interview schedule, the questioning direction included questions around the following - what the participants believe in relation to:

- Their image of a great ECE teacher
- The most important knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions an early childhood teacher should have and why
- The purpose of early childhood education
- What society expects of them as an early childhood teacher
- What supports them to be effective in their role
- What barriers there are to them being effective in their role

I also explored with participants why and how they came to be working in early childhood education, that is, their motivation and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1988) as this was likely to influence the qualities they prioritised.

To set the scene for the interview I began with “easier and less-threatening, non-controversial questions” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 423) in order to build rapport and put participants at ease. The first thing I asked them to do was to outline their ECE journey – how they got to be where they are today. Interviews were relatively unstructured “to enable exploration rather than strict comparability” (David & Sutton, 2004, p. 92) and to ensure participants had freedom to answer as fully as they chose rather than being constrained by questions (Cohen et al., 2011). Ground rules were negotiated at the beginning, with particular emphasis on confidentiality and respectful interactions and re-checking informed consent.

My role was to facilitate discussion: asking probing questions; clarifying and paraphrasing responses; and encouraging participation from less active members.

In two interviews, none of the participants were previously known to me. In the other interview however, four participants were well-known to me. I managed this potential conflict by being particularly conscious of my effect, minimising my role in the discussion and encouraging participants to expand on their responses to mitigate against volunteer bias and them potentially saying what they thought I wanted to hear.

I also had to be conscious in the interview where three participants had come from the same centre – the head teacher and two teachers. There was potential for this group of teachers to dominate conversations due to their familiarity and comfort with each other. There was also potential of team dynamics influencing individual teacher contributions as they were familiar with each other's perspectives and values. Again, I tried to encourage individuals from this team to 'dig a little deeper' while also ensuring other participants had opportunity to contribute freely.

Vignettes

To supplement questioning, I used two vignettes to provoke conversation. Vignettes are "short descriptions of a person or a social situation on which the respondents build their judgement or responses" (Al Sadi & Basit, 2016, p. 1). They are hypothetical but simulate real life and were created based on my own experiences are as follows:

Vignette one – 'fitness to teach'

A student teacher, completing a field-based teaching qualification, has a significant visual impairment, meaning that she is unable to see more than 10-feet in front of herself and requires a visual aid for reading. The student teacher is currently employed to work with infants and toddlers in a small, community-based ECE centre, licensed for up to 10 children under the age of 2. As part of course requirements, the student completed a practicum experience in a kindergarten. The student failed the practicum as the Associate Teacher believed that she needed to be able to see the entire outdoor play area to teach effectively.

Vignette two – ‘the children love him’

Another student teacher was struggling to successfully complete the academic requirements of the teaching degree he was enrolled in. Failures in two papers meant that he was referred to the academic committee for making insufficient progress in his course of studies. As part of their consideration of the student’s case, the committee spoke with the manager of the centre where the student was employed. The manager was concerned that the student may not be able to complete the programme because she considered him to be ‘a really good practitioner’. When asked what she meant by that, she replied “the children love him and he loves the children”.

The questions and vignettes were designed to elicit participants’ beliefs, not only about real situations, but also about the images of the ideal teacher which are thought to strongly shape their professional lives (Visser-Wijnveen, Van Driel, Van der Rijst, Verloop, & Visser, 2010, p. 199). The use of vignettes, in particular, supported me to elicit responses that may have been difficult to access through questioning alone (Macedo, Khanlou, & Luis, 2015). In addition, active listening during interviews assisted me to identify parts of the dialogue “that an outsider might find strange, worth commenting on, or worth asking about” (Gee, 2014, p. 27). I used these moments to provoke participants to ‘dig below’ the taken-for-granted through further questioning.

The questions and vignettes were deliberately designed to be “broad and general so that the participants [could] construct the meaning of a situation, a meaning typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons” (Creswell, 2013, p. 25). The aim was not to reach consensus, instead I sought to elicit different viewpoints wherever possible, trying to create an atmosphere where individuals felt comfortable to share personal and conflicting viewpoints (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As such, another aim of group interviews was to “stimulate recall and opinion elaboration... [and] assist the respondent[s] to re-evaluate a previous position or statement (Frey & Fontana, 1991, p. 179). In this way, group interviews provided a source of validation in their own right.

Despite careful facilitation, I was aware emerging ‘group-think’ seemed to inhibit individual expression on occasion, with the views of some participants

dominating (Rezabek, 2000). While this 'group-think' process revealed some very interesting and useful data for analysis, participants were closely scrutinised for identifiers which may have indicated disagreement, discomfort or discord, including silence. When I noticed these identifiers, I addressed the situation in two ways – firstly, where possible, I asked probing questions to seek more information from the participant at the time. Secondly, I offered the participant the opportunity for an individual interview, allowing me to explore their contribution further with them. Baxter (2003) identified silence can also “constitute a powerful means of *resistance*” (p. 72), which was beneficial to consider.

Individual interviews were not only offered to those participants who appeared uncomfortable however. Following transcription of group interviews, I also approached participants who raised issues I was unable to follow up on at the time or that I 'missed' and wanted to explore further. The discourses I discovered in group interviews were both complementary and conflicting, highlighting power relations of “dominance, resistance, marginalisation, innovation, and so forth” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 359). The individual interviews gave me opportunity to explore and understand these further.

While some members of the group interviews were specifically identified for invitation to contribute further through individual interviews, providing a purposive sample, there was also an 'open invitation' to all members of group interviews to continue the group conversation in the online discussion group if they chose to do so. Interestingly, a small number of group interview participants chose to email me following the interview to express their thoughts about the interview and/or the group discussion. I have added these emails to other data I collected (with the participants' permission) to inform my thinking, analysis and discussion.

Individual interviews

The group interviews were followed by individual interviews with a selection of participants (as outlined above). Five group interview participants were offered an opportunity to participate in an individual interview. Four of those invited took up this opportunity and one did not respond. Each interview was

approximately 30 minutes long and were designed “to follow up unexpected results ... [and] go deeper into the motivations of respondents and their reasons for responding as they do” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 411).

Participants who were offered the opportunity for individual interviews were: Sally, who expressed a strong belief qualifications are not important in relation to the quality of the teacher; Natalie, who at the very end of the group interview identified she felt she had been treated unfairly in her employment due to a physical injury; Sam, who regularly brought up how hard teachers’ work is; Lorna, who identified she had failed eight students on practicum; and, Jo, who appeared to be unconvinced early childhood education has any impact on children’s lives – “I didn’t go to early childhood, I didn’t go to kindergarten and I’m alright”. She also appeared to be uncomfortable and possibly angry at different times in the interview.

All but Jo accepted the invitation for an individual interview. Jo did not respond. This may not be due to an unwillingness to participate however. The only contact details I had for her were the details for the kindergarten where she was relieving during the period I was recruiting participants. Her fixed term tenure at this kindergarten was completed by the time I identified participants to follow up with individual interviews.

The individual interviews allowed individual participants to describe their own beliefs in detail, particularly in relation to the focus I chose to raise with them. Their stories have been recognised as a valuable data source in their own right, separate from the collated analysis. I used ‘snippets’ of the transcript from the group interview, and open-ended questions generated from these snippets, as provocations to ‘dig deeper’ into the beliefs of the selected teachers and provide them with the opportunity to share anything they felt unable to share in the group situation.

Online discussion group

As outlined earlier, all participants in the group interviews were invited to continue the conversation in a single online group discussion, using a private Facebook™ group page. Collecting discussion data online is cost and time efficient as it reduces travel costs and time, and there is no need to transcribe.

The asynchronous nature of the conversation also allowed participants to contribute at a time and space that suited them, encouraging careful consideration and deeper reflection (Creswell, 2013). The group page was intended to provide a platform “to elicit rich data that are more cumulative and elaborate than individual responses” (Ping & Chee, 2009, p. 51), therefore supporting me to acquire a breadth of perspectives as well as encouraging social interaction and collaborative learning (Ferrante et al., 2016). Stewart and Williams (2005) believe the “perceived anonymity, reduced social cues and the realization of the time-space [distancing] may lead individuals to reveal more about themselves within online environments that would be done in offline equivalents” (p. 399). The relative anonymity was meant to encourage greater participation from those who may have been reluctant to speak up in the face-to-face group situation – unfortunately, this was not the case.

The intention of taking discussion online was also to allow me to engage with participants over a longer period of time. (Rezabek, 2000). In addition, I was hoping “more heated and open exchanges could occur” (Creswell, 2013, p. 159), and ‘group-think’ could be reduced through a focus on textual arguments rather than social cues (Rezabek, 2000). The participants in Zwaanswijk and van Dulmen’s (2014) study found it was easier to stick to the original topic and avoid being distracted by visual cues when engaging in online focus groups rather than in face-to-face groups.

In order to provide a platform that was familiar and non-threatening I looked at the advantages and disadvantages of a range of social media platforms for this purpose. Social media is often used to create professional communities of teachers where they share information, resources and practice ideas (Sumuer, Esfer, & Yildirim, 2014). I chose Facebook™ in particular as it is the most popular and frequently used social media platform among teachers who find it useful for “sharing information and resources, and connecting with professional colleagues” (Sumuer et al., 2014, p. 538), therefore I assumed it would be the same for my teacher participants. I personally belong to a number of Facebook™ ‘groups’ specifically targeting early childhood practitioners and leaders, both nationally and internationally.

Facebook™ also offers researchers with the ability to disseminate results quickly and start conversations around research-related topics that may offer insights into the research (Sheffield & Kimme Hea, 2016). The online discussion group was intended to provide me with opportunities to ‘test’ my initial thinking, generated from my analysis of interview data, with the group, using this as provocation for richer discussion about the research questions and increasing the trustworthiness of my study. In this way, I envisaged Facebook as an information sharing and communication tool rather than one of primary data collection (Sheffield & Kimme Hea, 2016).

Unfortunately, discussion on this platform was sporadic, stilted and guarded. Only eight of the original group interview participants chose to join this group despite me sending up to three invitations to their email contact address. Some participants indicated an interest on the night of the interview however they did not have Facebook™ accounts at that time and were unsure about setting one up for this purpose. In retrospect, I could have encouraged them to develop a Facebook™ page as a professional identity, perhaps using their chosen pseudonym, to use for this purpose (Moreno, Goniu, Moreno, & Diekema, 2013).

As this group combined all three regional groups, I initially asked participants to introduce themselves to try and engender a sense of comfort and familiarity amongst participants. Three participants gave brief descriptions of themselves in their role. This was the only contribution made by one of these participants. Two participants made no contribution to the online discussion despite having read my posts and the contributions of others, as well as receiving invitations to contribute. Like Ferrante et al. (2016), I believe more research needs to be done on “best strategies to engage inactive participants and ‘lurkers’ in online discussions forums” (p. 1858). After three months, responses to posts got less frequent so I changed the format to being more ‘blog-like’, presenting my musings for participant contribution while still offering participants the opportunity to contribute. Interestingly, this format engendered more comments than the open-ended discussion questions.

Like Sheffield and Kimme Hea (2016), I had hoped the research study-related posts would incite comments from participants however, similar to their study,

only a few comments were received. The reticence of participants may have been due to them being unfamiliar with each other. They knew the participants from their own group interview but did not know the teachers in the wider group. It may also have been the dominance of one group member who was usually the first to comment when I added a post and who often disagreed with the opinions of others.

Another possible oversight that potentially hindered the success of the group discussion was the lack of clear role definition for participants (Ferrante et al., 2016). While they had the ability to post and initiate discussions themselves, none of them did. I also wonder whether, because engagement in an online discussion forum was a 'new' genre for them to engage in, they weren't quite sure of the 'rules' of the discourse, e.g. how to enact the subject position of online research participant. The adult participants in Zwaanswijk and van Dulmen's (2014) study found it easier to have discussions with the whole group in a face-to-face forum, rather than online, as it gave them opportunity to provide clarification and nuance when required – often after reading the body language of other participants. The participants in my study also seem to prefer face-to-face communication. While I selected a familiar platform, i.e. Facebook™, the way it was being used was unfamiliar. Subsequently they resisted the discourse through silence.

Participation in online discussions does require teachers to have some technical skill and confidence. Furthermore, it can be difficult to 'read' tone and intent in participants' words unless indicators like capitalisation and 'emoticons' are used. Assumptions about the audience may also have influenced how participants portray themselves (Wilson, Gosling, & Graham, 2012). All of these may have been factors impacting on the limited contributions of participants.

Despite the issues, data generated was analysed as text alongside interview transcripts.

Data analysis

The group interviews, individual interviews and online discussion forum generated over 300,000 words to analyse. Using multiple lenses and analysis

tools, data was analysed through “the use of induction (or discovery of patterns), deduction (testing of theories and hypotheses), and abduction (uncovering and relying on the best of a set of explanations for understanding one’s results)” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17).

Underpinning my data analysis were the following assumptions:

1. All teachers and researchers “operate out of sets of assumptions that are discursively constructed and complex both in their nature and in their origin” (Locke et al., 2009, p. 21);
2. Descriptions of discourses “are not neutral and are simply ways of reading the world and making it meaningful” (Locke et al., 2009, p. 21);
and
3. Making meaning from data is relative to when it is read, by whom and under what conditions. As such, understandings I have reached are temporary, partial, speculative and contingent (Janzen, 2015).

I have summarised the data analysis process below using the framework suggested by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011).

Preparing data for analysis involved transcribing texts from interviews and cutting and pasting text from the online discussion forum and email correspondence into a word document. Participants from individual interviews were given the opportunity to comment on, review and/or amend their transcripts.

Audio data was listened to many times and written data was read and re-read. Short memos were created as the first step (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), capturing my initial thinking as I engaged with the data. In this study these included emerging discourses as I looked for evidence of discourses around the characteristics of ‘good’ teachers, evidence of discomfort, contradictions in participants’ understandings and/or evidence of power relations (Warren, 2014).

In addition, I created a spreadsheet using the discourses around, and conceptions of, what makes a ‘good’ teacher (identified in literature) as columns – exploring data to search for evidence in the teacher participants’ responses.

Interview transcript data was analysed using an adaptation of the model of critical discourse analysis proposed by Fairclough (2001) and adapted by Kilderry (2012). This model involves three overlapping stages:

1. *Description*, which is concerned with the formal properties of the text, including vocabulary, grammar and textual structures
2. *Interpretation*, which is concerned with the relationship between text and interaction, and:
3. *Explanation*, which is concerned with the relationship between interaction and social context” (Kilderry, 2012, p. 95)

Locke (2004) sees these interrelated processes as both highlighting the socially and discursively embedded nature of any text, and permitting different foci for analysis. Foci can include the socio-cultural and historical context that gave rise to the discourse and the way the text positions ‘readers’. It is important to remember, however, these processes “are not neutral, but are constructed in discourse” (p. 88).

In the description phase I focused on vocabulary, grammar and textual structures with the aim of seeing the language features in the text (Kilderry, 2012). Kilderry believes “[i]t is the ideological significance of the words that are the focus at this point, in particular the way words co-occur and how words are ideologically contested” (p. 97). Gore (1992) argues “meanings of words are always ‘up for grabs’ [as] there are no essential meanings - only ascribed meanings... Social definitions of terms are products of the contexts surrounding their use and the discourses in which they are embedded” (p. 56). Words take on different meanings according to the “discourses from which they emanate, and the institutional and social location of those who are making or critiquing them” (MacLure, 2003, p. 16). I was particularly conscious of the meanings being subscribed to words during this process – both by my participants and by me.

Graham (2011) also identified *description* as the first step in her proposed approach to poststructural discourse analysis arguing “[i]n order for an object of discourse to be ‘produced’, it must first be definable in order to be locatable” (p. 668). As language is the tool for the communication of ideas, the more specific we are with our language choices, the more accurately we can be in conveying

and understanding meaning. The *words* we use to describe *things* is how we define and shape what Foucault referred to as 'objects of discourse'. Description in this sense, therefore, is analysing how the words used ended up producing the objects which were spoken about. When we are described, "we can then be 'recognized' and classified" (p. 670).

I used a range of methods to complete the description phase including looking for frequently cited 'collocations' (Fairclough, 2003), words that frequently appear together, particularly those generated from key early childhood documents, for example *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). In addition, I examined the value of relational words such as will, can, should, must, may etc. and identified metaphors participants used to describe actions, values and concepts (Kilderry, 2012).

As part of the description phase I also employed Gee's (2014) '*Situated Meaning Tool*' (p. 157). This tool asks discourse analysts to "ask of words and phrases what situated meanings they have. That is, what specific meanings do listeners have to attribute to these words and phrases given the context and how the context is construed" (p. 159). Listeners (for example, me as researcher and other participants) situate the meanings of words and phrases based on previous experience and knowledge. Speakers assume the sorts of experience and knowledge their listeners have is shared enough to communicate. For example, participants in this study did not elaborate on the word 'quality' assuming a shared understanding in the room of what this word means in an ECE context.

The interpretation phase focused on participant understandings as well as my interpretations of texts (Kilderry, 2012). A close analysis of the text examined how discourses were represented and operated within the context of English-medium, centre-based ECE in New Zealand. I considered the emerging discourses against the discourses, identified in the literature review, that have influenced this context, including the way they were historically constituted. Powers (2001) identifies one of the objectives of discourse analysis is to "document the historical conditions of the existence of the discourse" (p. 54). This is in order to "show the accidental historical status of the discourse and broaden our

perspective to include practices still alive that have not been co-opted or removed” (p. 55).

I achieved this using deductive analysis, specifically looking for dominant discourses that had been identified by other researchers (see Chapter Three). In this way I moved beyond simply analysing participants’ descriptions and reflections on experience to envisage a ‘history of the present’ by considering the historical social conditions and power relations “that have enabled the emergence and continuation of these discourses, subjects and knowledge” (Fadyl & Nicholls, 2013, p. 25). Through this lens, participants’ accounts were not treated as points of origin for the construction of meaning as they had been constituted within these discourses.

This deductive process is similar to the second phase of the poststructural discourse analysis process envisaged by Graham (2011). She called this phase *recognition*. Similar to the CDA process of interpretation outlined above, once description has occurred, the recognition phase involves tracing processes involved in the constitution of the identified ‘objects of discourse’, that is, examining bodies of knowledge which build and reaffirm that perception of the phenomena and the way it is described.

As part of the interpretation phase I also used inductive and abductive analysis to identify different subject positions being taken by participants during the group interviews, considering the moment by moment negotiation of meaning. This process is important for both critical and poststructural lenses being applied to this study as I was paying attention not just to immediate linguistic features of the discussion but also how the dominant discourses were shaping and being shaped (Winslade, 2005).

It was in this phase I also looked for ‘presuppositions’ (Fairclough, 2001) which took “the form of a propositional assumption and can appear as fact” (Kilderry, 2012, p. 100). To do this I looked for ‘must’ and ‘should’ type statements as well as statements that were universal or definitive in their nature, for example “all children...” or “teachers will...”, particularly when participants are describing qualities and work of teachers.

In addition, I identified contested concepts within interview transcripts as these are considered a good place to start interpreting data from a CDA perspective (T. Locke, personal communication, May 17, 2018). Locke envisages concepts as empty vessels which keep getting filled with discursively constructed content. Like words, concepts “are always open to contestation and redefinition as the struggle for the ‘true’ meaning” (Baxter, 2016, p. 37) takes place. They can be constructed in different ways, some with negative implications. Identifying contested concepts supported me to deconstruct the text. Appendix D outlines the concepts, collocations and presuppositions explored during analysis.

Introduced by Jacques Derrida, deconstruction is a poststructural ‘tool’ which takes “apart concepts and meanings in texts to show the politics of meaning within them” (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 77) Deconstruction recognises “texts are constantly open to rereading and reinterpretation both within the particular context and ...when/if they are shifted to other contexts” (Baxter, 2016, p. 36). In other words, meaning is never fixed or knowable. Deconstruction exposes these language shifts so meaning can always be contested (St. Pierre, 2000) thereby exposing contradictions and questioning the impact of these. It also identifies how binaries within any text “produce norms and standards of practice and expectation” (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 96) in order to build a more complex and dynamic understanding of how regimes of truth influence teacher practice. McLaren (2009) argues we are all subsumed by truth claims, participating in them, perpetuating them or resisting them. I used deconstruction to identify truth claims made by participants.

As part of this process it was important for me to identify binaries in the data. Prout (2005) identifies binaries, also known as dichotomies, “are highly resistant to change” (p. 67). The use of dichotomies “directs attention away from the mediations and connections between the oppositions they erect” (p. 68). We contend with such dualisms daily however they ignore the complexity and interrelatedness of terms and “exemplify a mode of thought which has serious consequences for us all” (Orner, 1992, p. 78). Prout argues for the need to explore new ideas that include the excluded middle of dichotomies. This ‘included middle’ does not eliminate opposites, just turns them into a continuum

so they cease to be mutually exclusive (MacLure, 2003, p. 179). I also identified 'contradictory' discourse, adapted from Gibson's work (2013, 2015). This category was used to identify points where "discourses intersect, compete and collide" as participants attempt to "hold together seemingly opposing discourses" (Gibson, 2013, p. 114).

While deconstruction is a critical practice aimed at dismantling, it is not about 'tearing down' but instead about 'rebuilding' – not pointing out an error but "looking at how a structure has been constructed, what holds it together, and what it produces" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 482). Deconstruction supported me to identify, expose and explore oppositional binary structures (or as MacLure (2003) calls them – 'unfair pairs') and regimes of truth presented by participants, with the intention of contributing to the reconstruction of these. St. Pierre (2000) argues "[w]e have constructed the world as it is through language and cultural practice, and we can also deconstruct and reconstruct it ... we are all *responsible* for those structures and the damage they do" (p. 483).

As such, deconstruction is also part of the final explanation phase which "explains the relationship between discursive processes and wider social processes" (Kilderry, 2012, p. 101), in order to show how social interaction is determined by social structures (Fairclough, 2001), including power relationships. Powers (2001) calls this a "power analysis" (p. 61) which involves careful reading of the discourse to look for discursive patterns which highlight power relations. Part of the analysis for this phase required me to identify and explore changes that may have occurred during group interviews due to 'group think'.

From a critical perspective, this involved exploring the question of whether participants' responses supported particular discursive hegemony and/or whether they stood in a counter-hegemonic relationship to prevalent conditions (Locke, 2004), highlighting any potential social effects of either stance. Knowledge and practices that were legitimated or privileged by participants became clear in the text when participants gave particular social practices 'authority' through explanation and justification. When knowledge and practices were relegated to compromised positions, the discourse became marginalised, it was here resistance sometimes occurred. Powers (2001) argues the

powerful process of power/knowledge used by well established [sic] discourses serves to silence and marginalize resistance to the normal that has been constructed and reinforced by the discourse ... What is said is as important as what is not said (p. 37).

Therefore, I attended to this marginalisation. In this way my research aims to be “a project of resistance to the institutionalized forgetting that takes place when matters attain the status of common sense, in educational policy, pedagogy and research itself” (MacLure, 2003, p. 179).

Similarly, using the poststructural discourse analysis process proposed by Graham (2011), I engaged in the final *classification* phase. This moved the analysis beyond the discursive object into consideration of how this object is producing subjects – “key to understanding people’s actions is an appreciation of how discourse shapes their identities, beliefs and actions” (p. 671). The aim was to interrogate “discursive practices that both objectify and subjugate the individual” (p. 672), individuals in the room and those participants were referring to, for example, other teachers, students, parents and children. In this way I moved beyond a focus on specific linguistic features that make up text (micro), into a focus on what is ‘made up’ by text (macro).

In presenting the data, when I have used direct quotations I have presented these using Gee’s (2014) notion of stanzas. He argues “[s]peech is often organised into groups of idea units” (p. 80) he has called stanzas. Each stanza is about one important event or happening, or focuses on a specific character, topic or perspective. When the event or perspective changes, a new stanza is started.

Limitations

There are limitations in the approaches I have used to collect and analyse data for this study.

Fadyl and Nicholls (2013) identified distinct limitations in the use of interview data as text in a Foucauldian influenced discourse analysis. They argue an interview conducted by a researcher involves decisions and interactions, including the topic of discussion, which impose the researcher’s ‘law of truth’ on

participants, a truth which they must recognise and which governs their responses. In this way, the researcher may be 'subjectifying' participants and can play an unintended role in the proliferation of discourses they are interested in. In previous sections I have outlined the steps I have taken to try and avoid this occurring. It is important to note, however, that throughout this process I was not searching for the 'truth'. Due to the transient and elusive nature of meaning, we can never 'get to the bottom of things' and know exactly what something means (St. Pierre, 2000). In the "kaleidoscopic nature of language and meaning" (Graham, 2011, p. 672), I was searching for my own partial, subjective and contextual meaning.

In addition, from a Foucauldian perspective, the group interview could also represent an expression of disciplinary power with participants regulating themselves through the internalisation of the regulation by other participants (Orner, 1992). What participants shared would have been the result of "conscious and unconscious assessments of the power relations and safety of the situation" (Ellsworth, 1992, p. 105). This may mean that, for some participants, the group interview was not a safe and democratic place in which they could articulate their voices despite my efforts to make it so.

The next six chapters explore participant voices, as these were articulated, and discuss key findings arising from application of the methodology and methods outlined in this chapter.

Chapter Four: Discourses in the ECE sector

Introduction

This chapter introduces two dominant discourses shaping and being shaped by participants in this study – essentialist maternal and neo-liberal. It also introduces one discourse that was apparent but marginalised, that of democratic professionalism. The chapter provides examples of how these discourses can be contradictory and conflicting as participants take a range of subject positions. It also provides examples of a range of classifications used by participants when speaking from these discourses, illustrating their eclectic approach to defining what makes a ‘good’ teacher.

The following five findings and discussion chapters discuss how these discourses position early childhood teachers (‘teachers’¹²), parents and children, and the possible implications of these positionings.

Discourses

Using a mix of deductive and inductive discourse analysis (see Chapter Three), two dominant, capital ‘D’ discourses have been identified (Gee, 2014): essentialist maternal and neo-liberal. A third capital ‘D’ discourse was also identified, that of democratic professionalism, however this discourse was marginalised and had less influence in shaping participant beliefs. These discourses were identified through an examination of participants’ language to determine their “characteristic ways of acting, interacting, believing and valuing” (p. 157).

The differing discourses that shape teacher identity offer differing meanings about what it is to be a ‘good’ teacher (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2005). Each of these discourses shaped the ways participants talked about themselves and their work, and the ways they positioned both parents and children. They were often expressed through ‘taken-for-granted’ assumptions.

Discourses have the power to constrain or enable teachers’ practice; the first two discourses in particular (essentialist maternal and neo-liberal) appeared

¹² Throughout this thesis the terms teacher or teachers refers to early childhood teachers unless otherwise stated.

almost incontestable, restricting participants' recognition of viable alternatives (Cumming & Sumsion, 2014). In saying this, the discourses were also often confused and competing (Biesta et al., 2015).

Each of the capital 'D' discourses also had many small 'd' discourses embedded in them - subsets of the overarching Discourse that were specific to the context of ECE and added complexity to the way such Discourses shaped participant discussions. These small 'd' discourse were maintained, developed and resisted in participants' responses. These will be explored in the upcoming chapters and are summarised in table 2.

Table 2: Summary of capital 'D' and small 'd' discourses

Capital 'D' discourses	Small 'd' discourses
Essentialist maternal	Care Natural teachers Charismatic teachers Mothering = teaching Childhood innocence Infant determinism Socialisation
Neo-liberal	Authority Professionalism Regulatory Scientific 'First three years' Business/ Industry
Democratic Professional	Open to learning Teacher as qualified intellectual Advocacy Biculturalism Inclusion

Classifications

Discourse analysis helped to make sense of contradictory data by identifying the different discourses in the one passage (Powers, 2001). Early childhood education (ECE) and teaching has been influenced by a range of ideological perspectives and discourses that have shaped teachers' knowledge around children's development and learning over the years. These frame teachers' reality; how they think, feel, understand and practice (MacNaughton, 2005); and

include classifications schemes that constitute a particular ideological representation of that reality (Fairclough, 2001). Teachers tend to adopt a pragmatic approach to pedagogy, drawing from a range of practices and philosophies they have learnt through teacher education, engagement with colleagues and/or policy documentation, or from beliefs strongly held prior to becoming a teacher (Moore, 2004). For example, Nuttall (2003) found that teachers can use discourse associated with developmental theories, socio-cultural theories and neuroscience in the same sentence.

Participants in this study were no exception. The following statements from one group provide examples of where participants' responses drew from discursively represented "pre-existing classification schemes" (Fairclough, 2001, p. 96) of children's learning and development:

Table 3: Classification schemes of children's learning and development

Excerpts	Classification/ Discourse
"I know it's really important to deepen and scaffold children's learning further to a level that creates a high level of capability and competence in their learning"	Sociocultural
"Brings you back to attachment theories and the first and foremost relationship with mother being essential to being able to bring other people into their world and develop safe and secure relationship"	Attachment theory
"Meeting all of those different styles of learning, the hands-on kinaesthetic learners, the ones that need visual cues rather than hands on cues"	Learning styles
"It's interesting with all of that brain science... talking about how wonderful and valuable it is for children to be in high-quality learning environments and how the first three years are so important"	Neuroscience
"Have an environment that invites the learning to happen"	Developmental
"Connecting children to the wider community is growing that democratic viewpoint. And I think children are citizens of our kindergartens, of families and of the community"	Democratic

Despite a strong sociocultural emphasis in early childhood teaching programmes in New Zealand (since the mid-1990s), many other discourses and classifications

came through in discussions. These classifications could even be mixed in the same sentence:

Excerpt 4.1:

1. Natalie (K): It's our role to come along and to notice what that child is doing
2. and to respond to their learning positively to capture that teaching moment
3. and then to scaffold it to the next learning stage
4. and to introduce new possible lines of direction.

In this example, Natalie has used mixed classifications in the same sentence. On line 3 she mentioned both scaffolding (a sociocultural reference) and learning stages (a developmental reference). This is a good example of teachers taking on new language (or a new discourse) and layering it on top of a previously held one (Farquhar & Flear, 2007); maybe engaging in the same practice but calling it by a different term, framing up new ideas to look like old ones.

The theoretical models Natalie referenced often stand in contradiction to each other. This would appear to indicate participants only partially understood the models they referred to (Nuttall, 2003). This partial understanding is likely to have impacted on their definition of a 'good' teacher and has possibly been caused by the mixed theoretical underpinnings of the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996).

The introduction of sociocultural approaches, predominantly through the development of *Te Whāriki*, began to define a more active, scaffolding role for the teacher (May, 2009); a teacher who leads rather than follows children's development. Developmentalism was also still prominent in *Te Whāriki*, even while attenuated with more culturally inclusive perspectives (Farquhar & Flear, 2007), so has continued to strongly influence ECE in New Zealand and was strongly evident in participants' responses. Participants made many references to, and gave descriptions of, the 'good' teacher from the developmental era; a teacher who set up the environment and supervised children at play.

Consistent with a developmental ideology, Natalie also bemoaned a perceived loss of content about children's 'expected' progressions from teacher education:

Excerpt 4.2:

1. Natalie (K): I've just written education/ understanding of ages, stages and development.
2. I think that's been downgraded.
3. I think there's not a lot of people who can understand what's happening from the baby in here to the five-year-old that eventually gets to school.

The pluralised vision in *Te Whāriki* can validate and reinforce teachers' ingrained developmental beliefs and practices, exacerbating their unwillingness to challenge their long-held beliefs and values in response to other ideologies introduced in the document (Delaune, 2019). This sort of tension has occurred in ECE previously. Middleton and May (1997) posited the 'free-play' movement of the 1960s created confusion in the ECE sector with teachers holding parallel and often contradictory beliefs about free-play and teacher-directed skill and knowledge development. This confusion led to teachers being unsure how to put this perceived binary together and often unable to articulate what they were doing. Findings in this study would indicate some teachers are currently going through a similar dilemma with sociocultural theories overlaying strongly held developmental beliefs.

Subjectivities – positioning self

In addition to exploring discourses, the next five chapters discuss how participants adopted different subject positions or subjectivities throughout discussions through the process of subjectification. Robinson and Jones Diaz (2006) argue:

This process of subjectification is crucial to an understanding of the different perspectives or 'truths' that we take up as our own ways of looking at the world; the 'truths' become the foundations of our judgements of and interactions with others in the world (p. 17).

Historically produced in specific discourses, subjectivities are multiple, complex, discursively produced and change over time (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006; Weedon, 1987). This study identifies the various and contradictory subject positions participants took, as it was in these contradictions they exercised agency by making choices and taking stances (Winslade, 2005).

Gibson (2015) found her preservice participants were able to resist some discourses while taking up others. Participants in this study also changed their subjectivities during the course of the interviews, locating themselves in differing discourses, that is shifting their discursive position, in line with shifts in conversation and which discourse was more perceived to be more beneficial and desirable to them at the time (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006), sometimes in contradiction with prior statements.

Contradictions are common because teachers, while socially constructed in discursive practices, exist as thinking, feeling subjects and social agents, capable of resistance and innovation when confronted by contradictory subject positions. They are able to reflect upon the different discursive relations which constitute the society in which they live and work, and choose from the options available (Weedon, 1987). Teachers can sustain, further develop and/or resist discourses shaping the early childhood sector. Through resistance, participants helped to shape discourses.

Consequently, participants took a range of, often contradictory, subject positions throughout discussions, particularly as the interview progressed. In fact one participant, Megan, noted “I feel like we’re getting a little more relaxed and honest as this progresses”, indicating they may have felt more able to express their true beliefs and take on differing subject positions once they had developed trust in other participants. Perhaps participants were moving beyond what they thought were the ‘right’ things to say to other teachers. Examples of these shifts and contradictions are woven into the next five chapters.

Positioning others

Dependent on the discourse and associated subject positions participants were speaking from, they also positioned parents and children in different ways. The process of positioning others is known as ‘objectification’ (Graham, 2011); a process which makes a group ‘visible’, positions them in the social hierarchy and formulates how they are seen or known. These positionings will be discussed in detail throughout the next five chapters however are summarised in table 4 below:

Summary of subjectivities and positioning

Table 4: Summary of Subject Positions by Discourse

Discourse	Teacher	Parents	Children
Essentialist maternal	Protector Hero Natural	Neglectful Needing support	Innocent Victim Needing protection
Neo-liberal	Technicist Accountable 'Professional'	Client Protective Misunderstanding/ unknowing	Economic resource 'At risk' Needing to be kept safe
Democratic professionalism	Researcher/ Learner Intellectual Collective	Partners Collaborators	Agentic decision-makers Co-constructors

Each of these subject positions influences the relationships and interactions between the teacher and the 'objectified' other in ways that constrain and/or enable practice and, potentially, children's learning.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have introduced the three capital 'D' discourses, with a range of embedded small 'd' discourses, that will frame discussions over the next five chapters. ECE has been influenced by a range of ideological perspectives with embedded classification schemes. Participants drew from many of these even when they were contradictory, sometimes adopting a new language without necessarily changing beliefs, particularly strongly-held developmental beliefs.

The identified discourses have shaped the way participants positioned themselves and others, and appeared both incontestable and competing. Participants adopted a range of changing and contradictory subject positions, subsequently sustaining or resisting discourses. The possible implications of such positioning are discussed in the ensuing chapters.

Chapter Five: “Early childhood teachers are nice”: Essentialist Maternal Discourses

Introduction

The most dominant discourses shaping participants were essentialist maternal discourses; gendered discourses which position the teacher as “mothering”. The subject position of mothering teacher requires qualities and competencies considered either ‘innate’ to women and/or acquired through domestic labour rather than education (Moss, 2006). Despite feminism and research on the complexities of early childhood education (ECE) teaching, these discourses and the inherent subject positions remain entrenched; even amongst teachers.

Weedon (1987) provides us with a possible reason why they remain so dominant arguing “the structure and function of the position of the subject within discourse is the precondition for the individual to assume historically specific forms of subjectivity with particular discourses” (p. 31). The structure and function of ECE has, indeed, changed little since its genesis (May, 2009).

In addition, societal perceptions have remained relatively static. Aitken and Kennedy (2007), in their discussion of critical issues facing ECE in New Zealand, identified beliefs about mothering as a natural or instinctive way of behaving continues to influence both outsiders’ **and** insiders’ perceptions of the work of teachers. According to this belief, mothers’ and, by historical association, teachers’ responses are “emotionally derived from an internalised knowledge base gained through personal experiences” (p. 167); a perspective which romanticises both of these roles and manifests itself in an almost exclusive focus on relationships and responsiveness.

This chapter explores participants’ responses as shaped by essentialist maternal discourses including the prioritisation of the care and custodial functions of teaching and subsequent prioritisation of affective qualities in teachers. It discusses where participants have sustained, developed and resisted the strong yet contrasting regimes of truth ‘children are better off at home’ and ‘ECE protects children from their lives’, and examines how teachers, parents and children are positioned by these discourses.

Prioritising care

One of the small 'd' discourses associated with essential maternal discourses was the discourse of 'care', specifically in the use of the term to describe the custodial functions of ECE. Because of its close alignment to 'mothering', ECE has been seen as "fulfilling custodial, emotional or social needs as opposed to the presumed intellectual functions of the rest of the education system" (May Cook, 1985, p. 85). While this binary, or 'unfair pair' (MacLure, 2003) is arbitrary and inaccurate, it appears it is still a dominant discourse today. Binaries like this are highly resistant to change and have the impact of directing attention away from the mediations and connections between the two 'sides', in this case, care and education (Prout, 2005).

While it has often been argued care and education are inseparable (for example, Smith, 1996), when shaped by essentialist maternal discourses, the custodial, social and emotional purposes of ECE appeared more dominant than intellectual functions in the ways participants described their roles. Bill discussed why these purposes were important to him considering the length of time children spend in ECE:

Excerpt 5.1:

1. Bill (EC, M, O)¹³: They're with us for 30 hours,
2. first and foremost they've got to have fun...
3. and then anything else that comes on top of that is a bonus.

For Bill the priority appears to be to provide a place of fun for children who are in ECE for long hours. Highlighting his perception of the importance of custodial and emotional care, he goes on to imply any intellectual or other gains for children are unintentional and a 'bonus' (line 3). Nias (1997) argues the provision of fun in education should not be considered an end in itself; instead it should be a means to an educational end. Contrary to this, for Bill, 'fun' is the main end.

¹³ The list of initials beside participants names indicate the service type they currently work in and their role. K=kindergarten, EC=education and care, HT=head teacher, M=manager, O=owner.

Discourses of care were also woven into participants' descriptions of what knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions a teacher needs to be effective in their role. Consistent with Osgood's (2012) study, affective attributes were often first mentioned, and most often mentioned by participants, suggesting they are the attributes prioritised by participants. In two groups, participants did not describe any attributes other than affective attributes until prompted. The attributes prioritised included teachers being caring, nurturing and nice in their interactions with children. This prioritisation may be limiting participants' practice. Moyles (2001) argued while 'emotional' responses to young children and teaching are vital to the teachers' role, they are also capable of being overpowering, restricting early years practice to a low-level operation in which children receive care but where education is marginalised. In contrast, if teachers believe their work is about education, as well as care, it is likely to generate a higher quality of practice (Berthelsen & Brownlee, 2007).

Participants sustained, developed and resisted discourses of care throughout discussions, consistent with Ailwood's (2008) assertion women in ECE have "worked within, through and sometimes against the discourse of maternalism embedded in the institutionalised and public definitions of their work" (p. 158). At times, participants both invested in and rejected maternal discourses (Osgood, 2012). While lengthy, the following conversation between two teachers illustrates different responses to discourses of care. Jay is the head teacher of an infants centre and Jo is a kindergarten teacher. They were discussing being part of the selection process for entry into teacher education. Jo sustained the notion of teachers of infants being mother substitutes, a discourse Jay strongly resisted:

Excerpt 5.2:

1. Jay (EC, HT): We ask "why is it that you want to do ECE?"
2. "Because I love children"
3. No, that's not a good reason to do this job, you need more than that...
4. "I love cuddling the babies", it just drives me nuts...
5. Jo (K): You've gotta cuddle the infants though...
6. Wouldn't the nurturing at that first stage be really important?
7. What else are you doing with that baby?

8. They sleep, they eat...
9. What are they needing?
10. Jay: And see... even within early childhood...
11. within those teachers who teach two to five-year olds,
12. there's still that idea that we're just babysitters,
13. that children aren't actually learning...
14. Jo: No, that's not what I'm asking for a baby.
15. For a baby, the most important thing is that they are nurtured.
16. Jay: It is an aspect of their learning
17. Jo: Because they're not walking, maybe they're not crawling.
18. So when they're not sleeping or feeding, what is expected of the teacher?...
19. Jay: The curriculum, the whole curriculum
20. Jo: So their normal development.
21. They need a nurturing person, don't they?
22. Jay: They need more than a nurturing person...
23. They need a person that understands how they can engage this baby in their learning

Jo appeared to maintain developmental discourses which focus on children developing 'readiness' in a linear fashion with little intervention from adults (Meade, 2000). Such developmental theories have been criticised as limiting children on the basis of their age. This is demonstrated through Jo's use of the term "normal development" (line 20), indicating her scepticism teachers can add value to the learning and development of infants. She also appeared to prioritise infants' physical development over other aspects of their learning and development – limiting their perceived needs due to their lack of mobility (lines 17-18).

While being nurturing is important in a teacher, so is intellectual curiosity and ongoing study (Selleck, 2001). Jay reinforced the importance of nurturing but also demonstrated a strong conviction that teachers need to be knowledgeable and provide an holistic curriculum for infants that goes beyond parenting (line 19).

Interestingly, throughout this study, when the word 'love' was used in relation to a teacher's role, it was used with negative connotations (lines 2-4). While Nutbrown and Page (2008) also found the word love was used with caution by early childhood professionals, their reasoning related to child protection concerns. For these participants, the derisive way 'love' was used indicated a belief it is naïve and unprofessional for teachers to 'love' the children they work with.

This excerpt illustrates shifting power between participants within the conversation as each teacher debated their point. From a poststructural perspective, this sort of disunity and conflict is central to both political change and preservation of the status quo (Weedon, 1987), therefore the shifting power is interesting. Robinson and Jones Diaz (2006) argue where there is power there is always resistance. Jay resisted dominant maternal discourses, acting as an agent of change by resisting hegemonic understandings of teacher as substitute-mother, challenging existing power relations (Weedon, 1987). Jo's apparent underestimation of the role of teachers of infants challenged Jay's professional identity and she responded accordingly.

This conversation also appears to derive from the traditional education and care 'divide' which has its genesis in the origins of formal ECE in the 19th century. 'Childcare' was deemed to be for working parents, with 'education', usually through the free kindergarten movement, being provided for children over three (Moss, 2006). Despite Dalli (2008) optimistically declaring this divide has been 'abolished', this discussion between a kindergarten teacher (Jo) and a teacher from an education and care setting (Jay), demonstrates it may still be embedded in teachers' thoughts and beliefs, if not in policy. From a discursive perspective, the notion of the 'good' teacher is always influenced by larger social conversations and ideologies (Moore, 2004). Jay and Jo, having come from different service types, are being shaped by different conversations.

While Taggart (2011) argues teachers' language of care represents a contemporary counter-discourse to the neo-liberal notion of 'quality improvement', the findings in this study seem to indicate the prioritisation of care has often been shaped by traditional maternal discourses rather than

contemporary thinking. As such, discussions of care overshadowed discussions about the more cognitive purposes of teaching and how they can be achieved (Nias, 1997).

It is unsurprising many participants prioritised care when prominent feminists, such as Nel Noddings (1984), argue the primary aim of education must be the maintenance and enhancement of caring. Other researchers have subsequently attempted to balance this notion. In the 1990s, Anne Smith (and others) promoted use of the term 'educare' to challenge the view that the education and care components of ECE are separable binaries and to encourage a rethink in approach (for example, Smith, 1996). The notion of educare appeared to be an attempt to "include the excluded middle of dichotomies that have been made to be oppositional" (Prout, 2005).

An overemphasis on the 'caring' side of this binary can also be detrimental to children. Caring can sometimes be considered disempowering as "when someone cares for us there is a sense that we need this care because there is something lacking in our particular situation or that we have a problem" (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007, p. 169). This contrasts with the notion that children are competent and agentic.

Caring and nurturance have often been thought of as natural and innate to mothers. Due to the close link between teaching and mothering, these qualities are also often ascribed to the 'natural' teacher.

'Natural' teachers

With the emphasis on teachers' affective over their intellectual attributes, it is unsurprising participants expressed a prevailing belief that much of what is required to be an effective teacher is 'natural' to the individual. Within maternal discourses, many of the characteristics of a 'good' teacher are deemed to be innate rather than learned. Women teachers continue to have their skills and knowledge attributed to natural mothering instincts (Ailwood, 2008).

Notions of women as naturally maternal, and therefore suited to early childhood teaching, have been reinforced by authors such as Noddings (1984) who argue women are naturally more interested in caring, supporting and cooperating and

should retain this natural orientation, finding ways to make it work for them in public life, for example, through teaching.

Critics of Noddings argue her ethic of care essentialises women as eternal nurturers or nursemaids (Page, 2013; Woodrow & Busch, 2008), reinforces traditional stereotypes and ignores women's other virtues, such as being moral or just (Hassan, 2008). However, discourses of the 'naturally' caring and mothering feminine teacher still dominate. As such, there was a strong perception amongst participants that some people are 'born' to be teachers – that is, they apply 'natural' dispositions and skills to their work rather than learned ones.

Emphasising the perception of innate qualities, many participants used the word 'natural' to describe the 'good' teacher. As such, their thinking appeared to have been shaped by maternal discourses that emphasise the ability to work effectively with young children comes 'naturally' especially for women. When describing 'good' teachers, many participants also identified and prioritised specific personal attributes often perceived to be naturally acquired.

Excerpt 5.3:

1. Maree (EC): We are generally positive, communicative and energised people... we're passionate and
2. Gudrun (EC): And we're usually nice...
3. Early childhood teachers are nice
4. Maree: We're normally people people aren't we?

A number of personal attributes have been listed in this short excerpt, all of which are often considered to be innate personality traits rather than learned skills or behaviours. It has been argued personality is a key feature behind teacher excellence, and that personality is relatively enduring, however emerging evidence suggests personality is more dynamic than originally thought (Buttner et al., 2015). What may appear to be 'naturally occurring personality traits' may well be behaviour which has been learned or unlearned.

There was also an emphasis on being 'nice' (lines 2 & 3), an indication of the 'culture of niceness' in ECE (see Chapter Six).

The perception of the 'natural teacher' links very closely to one of the dominant discourses Moore (2004) identified in schooling, that of the 'charismatic teacher'. This discourse has great popular appeal and continues to be reinforced through popular media including movies. Together with intrinsic character qualities, the charismatic teacher has a deeply 'caring' orientation aimed at making a difference to children's lives. Successful teachers are not 'made' through teacher education, they simply possess 'the right stuff'. Maree provides a strong example of this discourse shaping her beliefs:

Excerpt 5.4:

1. Maree (EC): To me it is people who have just got that.
2. They come into the room and it just calms down,
3. and [they are] attuned to what the children's needs are.

By using the term 'got that' (line 1), Maree inferred the teachers she admires have some sort of indescribable and innate ability to be able to control the environment (line 2) with their presence. They have 'the right stuff'. While she described the effect of an inspiring teacher, she did not suggest their 'attunement' to children is derived from a conscious way of working. Instead she appeared to suggest this is something the teacher has 'just got'.

In addition, Maree does not finish her sentence in line 1. This seems to indicate there was no need to finish what she was saying; the other participants will understand both what she is referring to and what 'that' certain something is (line 1). This lack of specificity when describing what makes a 'good' teacher was common throughout discussions and is a strong indicator of participants assuming a shared 'common-sense' understanding with other participants (Locke, 2004), shaped by shared discourses.

The notion of the charismatic teacher also came through when participants described a teacher who had inspired them. One example of this was when Jo described her favourite teacher at school:

Excerpt 5.5:

1. Jo (K): My favourite teacher at school... got the best out of me...

2. I worked for her because I loved her...
3. It was her personality that brought that out in me.
4. Some people just haven't got it

Jo argued it was her favourite teacher's personality that brought the best out of her as a student (lines 1 & 3), ignoring any knowledge and skills the teacher may have brought from teacher education. The innateness of the teacher's personality and strategies is implied when Jo states "some people just haven't got it" (line 4). One of the issues with the charismatic teacher discourse is it can mystify teaching – what is 'it' and how can other people get it? (Moore, 2004). As such, it does not provide guidance to those wishing to be teachers.

As outlined earlier, with regards to ECE, there is a particularly strong association between the natural teacher and femininity in popular media, with heroines like 'Mary Poppins' illustrating that a 'good' teacher is one who is white, feminine and middle-class, and who responds to a calling with a natural aptitude to save "at risk" children through love (Taggart, 2011). This image of the teacher is derived 'common-sense' assumptions about teaching based on discursive definitions of what is natural, appropriate, moral or good (Weedon, 1987). Amongst these participants, such discourses are likely to have their origins in the genesis of ECE in New Zealand, when teachers were generally women from genteel backgrounds fulfilling their philanthropic duties (Middleton & May, 1997).

Within conversations foregrounding the 'natural teacher' discourse, participants minimised the role of teacher education and qualifications, emphasising instead intrinsic characteristics and experiences:

Excerpt 5.7:

1. Sally (EC, M): A lot of it depends on who the person is.
2. For a good early childhood teacher, you have to have humour, you have to have passion,
3. and not everyone has that...
4. A lot of it does come from personalities... who they are.

This excerpt builds on a previous conversation where Sally questioned the need for teachers to be qualified. She went on to argue the quality of the teacher primarily depends on 'who they are' (line 1) and personality traits are more important, listing two she thinks are particularly important – humour and passion (line 2). Grey and Clark (2013) argue teacher passion is important as it means they “care for those they teach and have made a commitment to be the best teacher they could be” (p. 6). From this definition, it could be argued that passion, and its associated 'commitment' should include engagement in teacher education.

Sally however positioned these traits as innate; demonstrated by her use of 'who they are' (line 4). This again denies any impact of teacher education. Consistent with this denial, Sally attributed her own successful transition from secondary school to early childhood teaching as being due to her own personal attributes; being positive and accommodating:

Excerpt 5.8:

1. Sally (EC, M): being a high school teacher, then getting down to this level was a bit hard...
2. I'm a positive person.
3. And I just try to accommodate myself to any situation.
4. So I tried to learn things and adapt to the new environment.

Consistent with her expressed belief about teachers not needing formal teaching qualifications (discussed in Chapter Seven), Sally talks about how her personality supported her to learn 'on the job' (lines 2-4) and adapt to her new teaching role rather than the teacher education she was undertaking.

The myth of the charismatic or natural teacher, values the personality and actions of the individual, undermining the importance of teacher education in shaping teacher practice (Moore, 2004). This was demonstrated by Bill who stated “I prefer the instinctual than the intentional”.

Ambivalence around qualifications and the emphasis on the 'natural' teacher may stem from the 'unqualified' genesis of many parts of the sector (excluding

kindergarten). Having a 'maternal instinct' has often been seen as the primary qualification for employment in ECE (Grieshaber & Graham, 2017). May Cook (1985) identified, in the 70s and 80s people linked together the mother at home, and the women who work with children in a centre, believing because they 'loved little children' the skills just came naturally and training wasn't necessary. Mothering is something women have been doing for centuries without any formal training or financial remuneration (Stonehouse, 1989), so why would a qualification be necessary when working with young children in an early childhood service?

Compounding this is the historical privileging of vocational pedagogy. The notion of teaching being a vocation gives little recognition to the abstract or theoretical knowledge that supports the teaching process (Grieshaber & Graham, 2017). From a vocational perspective of professionalism, relational and affective dimensions are considered more important than qualifications (Urban & Dalli, 2012).

Good parents becoming good teachers

Berthelsen and Brownlee (2007) argued that beliefs teachers hold about their role arise from intuitive theories about what constitutes good teaching; theories sometimes based on experiences prior to teacher education, including becoming a parent. Consistent with essentialist maternal discourses, it was inferred by participants that many of the feminine traits associated with being an effective teacher were honed when they became a parent.

In this study, 'good' teaching was often equated with 'good' mothering. For some participants, their path to becoming a good teacher did not begin until after they became a mother. Seven of the 17 participants became teachers after having children and subsequently realising working with young children is something they enjoyed and were good at. Megan provided one example of successful parenting leading to early childhood teaching:

Excerpt 5.9:

1. Megan (K, HT): I was very naturally a good parent. I just intuitively knew what I needed to be doing.

2. And through [my daughter] I got exposed to different early childhood experiences
3. and just loved being around small children...
4. So, when she was two and a half, I decided to study.

Megan expressed earlier that she had originally not been drawn to working with children, despite having had opportunities to engage with them alongside her kindergarten teacher mother. It was not until she experienced success and enjoyment in raising her own daughter she decided to pursue teaching as a career. Evidence of Megan having been shaped by maternal discourses are found in her use of the words 'naturally' and 'intuitively' (line 1) when describing her success at parenting. Through the use of this language she implied being a good mother was somehow innate in her rather than a product of socialisation and the experience of being parented herself.

While Megan recognised her own strengths, for other participants, it was another person that recognised their potential to become a good teacher and encouraged them to undertake teacher education. Dawn was one such person:

Excerpt 5.10:

1. Dawn (EC, M): I wanted to teach but never saw myself as a teacher until someone else saw it in me....
2. She said I had a passion
3. and she said that I had a voice for children...
4. It was funnily enough through having my own children that I actually discovered that this was a real passion for me.

For Dawn, it was a mix of a long-held desire (line 1), affirmation from another person (lines 1-3) and having a child of her own (line 4) that created the impetus to complete teacher education. Passion (line 2) and communication skills (line 3) appeared to be the qualities recognised in Dawn that inspired the suggestion she become a teacher.

Page (2013) identified mothers' decisions about work and childcare are influenced by their identity; for some women, motherhood defines 'who they are'. While she was specifically referring to mothers who chose not to go back to

work, Megan and Dawn's stories seem to indicate the sense of identity created by being a successful mother may also become the impetus for a career change to teaching.

Engaging with maternal discourses, some participants indicated, directly and indirectly, that being a mother provides important knowledge and experience that can be applied to teaching:

Excerpt 5.11:

1. Lorna (EC): I asked my girl...
2. "what makes a good teacher?"
3. And she said "being a mum... cause they understand kids better..."
4. Becoming a parent did change a lot of things for me. Put a different lens on things.

Lorna shared this story in her individual interview. In preparation for the interview she asked for her 5-year old daughter's opinion. Her reflections on what her daughter said implied her agreement (line 4). Lorna was not a parent when she began teaching and had only become a parent when she began fostering her daughter a few years earlier. Because Lorna was her daughter's teacher before she was her mother (and after this time), it is likely the roles have been merged a little for both of them.

Bill also implied life experience and motherhood can provide mature women with the skills and confidence to be a successful teacher:

Excerpt 5.12:

1. Bill (EC, M, O): It's interesting if you sit in a graduation...
2. Middle-aged women...who come back to training...
3. have found that actually they've got a brain,
4. they've actually [discovered] "I can do this"...
5. Going back to our education system,
6. what has it done to a whole generation of our people who raised families, looked after the house, done an amazing job.

Bill discussed women who made the decision to complete teacher education after they raised their own children (line 6). Consistent with maternal discourses, he implied that, for women, raising children and performing domestic duties is sufficient background for success as a teacher. His response included a critique of the education system, inferring many of the women he is talking about did not previously realise their potential due to an inequitable schooling system (lines 5-6).

Later in the discussion, Bill again alluded to the contribution of parenthood in relation to giving women (in particular) the skills they need to work in ECE, this time in relation to working with infants and toddlers. Similar to Jay and Jo's earlier discussion (see excerpt 5.2), the discourse of good teachers having natural, rather than taught, knowledge and skills was particularly strong when the discussion involved working with infants and toddlers. In the following example, Bill talked about a mature female teacher in his team who is skilled at working with the youngest children:

Excerpt 5.13:

1. Bill (EC, M, O): I'm not intuitive enough. I'm too silly.
2. I don't pick up on those small nuances that she does.
3. She automatically goes into the role...
4. It is the hardest job to get a good under two carer...
5. Sometimes Sarah¹⁴ goes in there and she'll solve the problem straight away...
6. That's the person
7. Jo (K): Because she has that nature
8. Dawn (EC, M): It's that experience.
9. Bill: She has that knowledge [of] parents

After having spoken about Sarah's skill with infants and toddlers and the specialised nature of working with these children (lines 4-5), in lines 7-9, participants devalued Sarah's skills by implying they were natural, experiential and parental. In this way, they reinforced maternal discourses by attributing her

¹⁴ A pseudonym

expertise to her personality and mothering experience rather than application of intentional and knowledgeable practice. Clarke and Grey (2010) identify teachers can be 'living contradictions' who espouse values that are not internalised. This may be an example of this. Work with infants can be seen as "nurturing motherliness that precludes intellectual curiosity and ongoing study" (Selleck, 2001, p. 85). While nurturing motherliness is indeed an asset, professional learning is required to develop and sustain knowledgeable teaching.

While Bill did not refer to Sarah's parental knowledge as being specific to a mother (line 9), he inferred this by putting himself, a father, down; referring to himself as 'not intuitive enough' and 'too silly' (line 1) to work with infants. Consistent with essentialised parenting roles of men and women, throughout the discussion Bill presented himself as providing 'fun' and his colleague Sarah as providing 'nurture'. As such, Bill demonstrated evidence of being shaped by and continuing to shape maternal discourses, particularly in relation to mothering providing the knowledge and skills needed for women to be effective teachers.

Resisting this discourse, and the associated implication that being a parent is 'enough', Kay was particularly explicit about the importance of teacher education in an email following the group interview:

Excerpt 5.14:

1. Kay (EC): We are supporting and developing the knowledge, interests and dispositions a child has.
2. And that comes through seeing yourself as a teacher, not just a "nice caring mother"
3. You need to be trained and taught child development, teaching strategies, positive guidance, how to extend your inclusive lenses and be challenged on them, curriculum areas and how to recognise children's learning/interests and how to add complexity to that etc. to achieve this.
4. An ECE teacher needs both education and care.

Kay passionately discussed the benefits of teacher education in relation to meeting the complexities of the teaching role. She equated "seeing yourself as a

teacher” to the completion of a teaching qualification; a notion that was not always shared amongst participants (see Chapter Seven).

Being a parent does not necessarily provide teachers with the knowledge they need to be effective in their role. Whilst acknowledging behaviours may overlap, and teachers do many of the same things mothers do, Katz (1980) identified seven dimensions where there are distinctions between mothering and teaching. These are: scope of functions, intensity of affect, attachment, rationality, spontaneity, partiality and scope of responsibility. She argued that for teachers of very young children the distinctions can be problematic; the younger the child, the wider the range of functioning for which adults must assume responsibility. This wide range of functioning can (and does) give rise to confusion between the two roles as demonstrated above.

Teaching, however, unlike mothering, requires knowledgeable analysis of children’s learning and development and an intentionality on how to proceed in their education (Katz, 1980). It is this informed intentionality which most clearly distinguishes mothering from teaching and, arguably, teacher education provides the necessary information and skills.

Teachers as ‘experts’

Consistent with the notion of good parents becoming good teachers, when speaking from maternal discourses, the teacher was sometimes positioned as an ‘expert’ mother, providing support and advice to other parents:

Excerpt 5.15:

1. Dawn (EC, M): We’ve had young mums come along and they’ve just wanted to be with us to get some knowledge, to get some support...
2. and to get ideas, “oh, I never knew how to do it that way”.
3. Quite often you’ll have a parent come to you and say “how do I do?...”
4. It’s not just about educating the children, it’s about helping parents.

Dawn has positioned herself as knowledgeable and with expertise to impart to parents – particularly young and inexperienced mothers (lines 1), subsequently positioning parents as needing support and education.

In addition to the close alignment between mothering and teaching discussed in previous sections, this positioning may have had its genesis in the mid-20th century when ECE centres were seen to be a site of expert advice for failing mothers (May, 2009). These discourses have influenced the practice of both teachers and parents and were mostly sustained in this study.

Alongside maternal discourses (and others) shaping teaching, parenting practices have also been shaped through discourse. The most dominant of these have been neo-liberal discourses, often using the term “parents as first teachers”, which have reconfigured parenting as a ‘job’ that has ‘outcomes’ for young children. This shaping has meant parenting has become a skilled job in which amateur parents need professional advice (Norman, 2017, p. 117). The teacher, in their role as expert parent, therefore, has sometimes assumed this advisory role.

The positioning of teacher as ‘expert’ was sometimes justified by linking it to the desire to make a difference; for example, when Bill stated “I think we have more impact with the parents than we do with the children”. The use of the word ‘impact’ implies this desire. Certainly teachers have the capacity to shape and construct parents’ thinking, sometimes to the point parents feel the need to seek approval from teachers and obligated to do what the teacher asks them to do (Greenfield, 2012; Nutbrown & Page, 2008).

A relationship with parents based on the teacher taking on the role of ‘expert’ parent could be problematic. When researching family support professionals, van Houte, Bradt, Vandenbroeck, and Bouverne-De Bie (2015) identified that while professionals’ espoused a commitment to involving parents, they did not have high expectations of the parents’ capabilities and therefore adopted an expert role when dealing with them, treating parents as passive recipients. Some of the positioning of parents in this study would indicate this tension is also present in ECE. Participants also perceived their ‘expert’ role beyond supporting parents to parent, in this case the role of teacher merged into that of community advisor:

Excerpt 5.16:

1. Christine (K, HT): You are helping them through all sorts of things that are happening in their life.
2. They can't find rental accommodation...
3. [you are] trying to put the word [out], "does anyone know?" ...
4. Or "heard there's a new window factory opening up in Nightshade¹⁵? I know you're looking for work, it might be worth going down and having a look".
5. Always being really tuned into the ways that you can support your community.

Christine demonstrated a sense of obligation beyond the care and education of children to providing a wider service for families. She appeared to be using her social and cultural capital to support parents to have the economic means to provide their children with a life that more closely aligns with her understanding of a 'good' life. This excerpt provides an example of how teaching can extend beyond the gates of the ECE service, and even beyond teaching, when teachers adopt expert positioning.

Teachers adopting the 'expert parent' subject position can lead to role confusion. Bill discussed this confusion in a discussion on Facebook™, following a provocation around ECE teaching being seen as akin to 'good' mothering. I specifically asked "do you think ECE teachers are sometimes positioned 'in competition with' or 'making up for' parents?"

Excerpt 5.17:

1. Bill (EC, M, O): I think that teachers think that,
2. and they confuse their role, or forget their role,
3. and make huge value judgements on parents.
4. I get particularly concerned when they begin to educate them re things such as peaceful play and so on,
5. Good intentions, but miss their reality.

The notion of 'parent education' (line 4) can work against the aspiration for partnership with parents (see Chapter Eight) as it can be based on the idea

¹⁵ Not the real name for the community

parents are too ignorant to understand their children and therefore need help from 'experts' (Furedi, 2008). Parent education also normalises teacher expertise and privileges this over parent knowledge (Thomas, 2012).

Interestingly, while Bill critiqued other teachers for judging parents (line 3) and subsequently offering parenting advice through parent education (line 4), he also demonstrated pre-conceived assumptions about parents' wishes, and potentially their capabilities. In this excerpt Bill, referring in particular to working with parents in lower socio-economic areas, made the assumption that the notion of 'peaceful play' is not part of these parents' reality (line 5); that they would not be interested in this topic. He made the same sweeping generalisations as the teachers he was critiquing. As such, this excerpt demonstrates the dominance of this hegemonic discourse – even while attempting to challenge it.

Protecting children from neglectful parents

Building on (or perhaps emerging from) the notion of teachers as 'expert', is the positioning of ECE as a site of child protection. Like the other aspects of maternal discourse present in teaching, this conception also has historical roots.

Middleton and May (1997) identified in the 1920s, kindergarten was considered a philanthropic service, offering protection and education for the poor. Over the next 20-30 years, however it became recognised all children could benefit from kindergarten. This perception has prevailed; "by the 1950s those children not attending preschool came to be regarded as unfortunate, by the 1960s as disadvantaged, by the 1970s-1980s as disenfranchised, and by the end of the century as 'at risk'" (May, 2009, p. 2). Kindergarten has arguably been presented as providing protection from hardship through education.

Similarly, childcare has been positioned as a site of protection, but in this case, protection for children from their mothers. Kedgley (1996) identified, in the 1950s, childcare was tolerated for children with inadequate or incapable parents; where the child was in danger of the mother not managing.

Later in the century the notion of childcare offering protection for children evolved in response to the feminist movement. During the 1970s, psychologists argued mothers needed time away from the constant care of their children by

sending them to childcare, benefitting the mother and protecting the child. This sentiment was summed up by Dr Fraser McDonald, who wrote in the magazine *Sexist Society*, “[t]hese nagging, hitting, slapping “full-time” mothers are under great stress. Their children would be better off in the hands of people who want them – trained people in a childcare centre” (Kedgley, 1996, p. 236).

Having been shaped by these discourses, there was a strong sense amongst participants that ECE still plays a significant role in the protection of children and, by association, so do teachers. On a number of occasions participants took up the position of the children’s ‘heroine’ (Gibson, 2015), ‘rescuing’ the victim (child) from their lives. When teachers are positioned as heroines, parents are subsequently positioned as ‘enemies’, neglectful and not meeting the teacher’s perceptions of a ‘good’ parent. I have examined these positionings through a feminist poststructural lens, framing the perspectives of the ‘good’ mother through another site of identity relevant to this discussion, the frame of social class. (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006).

“New” middle-class

The myth of the stereotypically ‘good’ white, middle-class mother is pervasive and hegemonic in white Western culture (Goldstein, 1997). The notion that the ills of the ‘modern world’ are a result of poor parenting and ECE is only second best to expert mothers has been around since the late 19th century (May, 2009) and still impacts on mothers (in particular) today. This myth underlies the tensions and dilemmas women experience when faced with economic policy drivers and personal career choices to return to work after the birth of their children (Page, 2013).

This myth can also underlie teachers’ perceptions of working mothers. This section discusses how participants, being shaped by maternal discourses, positioned parents as neglectful when they were working long hours and subsequently not meeting the teacher’s expectations of ‘good’ parenting. This positioning is indicative of a strong ‘regime of truth’ that ran through discussions; that of ‘children are better off at home’.

Sets of ‘truths’ within a given field were described as a ‘regime of truth’ by Foucault (MacNaughton, 2005). Regimes of truth generate a consensus about

what and how things need to be done within that field and are depicted through the use of contextually sanctioned discourses “that are mutually reinforcing and operate to maintain particular ‘truths’ and power relations” (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006, p. 37). Their meanings dominate the understanding of participants in a conversation because they resonate with the dominant discourses in a field, not because they are true (Winslade, 2005). It is in regimes of truth “inequity is produced and reproduced” (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 36), therefore they serve a hegemonic function.

These truth claims played a significant role in constructing what was ‘real’ for participants (McLaren, 2009). Many of the excerpts in this section reinforce this regime of truth, particularly when participants discussed education and care for infants and toddlers. This regime of truth was apparent in every group, despite participants also extolling the value of ECE as ‘preparing children for life’, and has been deconstructed to expose its internal contradictions (MacNaughton, 2005). The following example reinforces this ‘truth’, illustrating conflict between teachers’ personal beliefs and values, and what they are employed to do:

Excerpt 5.18:

1. Sam (EC): You want them to be able to be at home with their family...
2. I think that we’re doing a great job,
3. but I also have a lot of fears about, in 20 or 30 years,
4. the follow-on effect of all of these children that are with us from less than a year old, for 50 hours a week.
5. That to me is like not okay.

Sam demonstrated significant concern about perceived longitudinal impacts of children starting ECE very young and attending for long hours (lines 3-4). While she did not overtly blame mothers, she was strong in her belief that young children doing long hours is “not okay” (line 5).

Interestingly, Mitchell et al. (2008), in their literature review on the outcomes of ECE, found **longer duration** participation in high-quality ECE has the strongest positive impact on children’s cognitive and dispositional learning. Starting ECE before age three has been proven to be beneficial. While the evidence is mixed

about whether starting ECE before two years is even more advantageous, this finding does seem to imply that starting high-quality ECE early in life can enhance children's learning. Findings such as these were silent in the discourses shaping participants, with maternal discourses and the notion of parental neglect dominating.

Sam also stated she thinks the ECE sector is "doing a great job" (line 2), however, this espoused belief isn't supported by her insistence very young children are better off at home. While Sam is not a parent, it is likely some of the other participants' beliefs were shaped by their own experiences as a parent:

Excerpt 5.19:

1. Gudrun (EC): when my children were young, I was always focussed and busy
2. and I thought, if I don't invest my time in my children,
3. they're gonna grow up and I'm gonna be busy and I'm going to miss those important years.

The concerns Gudrun raised in this excerpt (lines 2-3) led to her changing her job and to her family joining the local playcentre¹⁶. This was a choice she was able to make.

The notion of 'choice' came through clearly in discussions, specifically in relation to the mother's choice to work outside of the home. Page (2013) argues "the rhetoric of parental choice is linked to social class, access and affordability" (p. 550). While she is referring to choices of ECE service, the same could be argued for the 'choice' to return to work after having children. For Gudrun, it was important to make the choice to stay at home with her children and engage fully in their ECE. For many participants, this was the preferred choice for mothers, even though they argued this choice may not be available for some:

¹⁶ Playcentre is a parent-led early childhood service in New Zealand where parents are responsible for the governance and management of the centre, as well as the care and education of the children.

Excerpt 5.20:

1. Natalie (K): [Parenting has] changed because of the split.
2. Talking about dad being able to have mum at home and look after the children,
3. our economic climate is so different now.
4. You know we used to be one of the top places to raise children and to have a good standard of living.
5. The average rent now apparently is \$500 a week.
6. How the hell, if you've got two children, and you work in retail or a labouring job, are you to pay for a roof over your head?

Despite the rise of feminism, Natalie appeared to imply mothers are only choosing to work due to economic need rather than for career opportunities or personal and professional ambition. She also reinforced the 'children are better off at home' regime of truth when she implied New Zealand is no longer one of the 'top places to raise children' (line 4) due to the cost of living 'forcing' mothers to work. This notion of mothers being forced to work came up in another group:

Excerpt 5.21:

1. Sam (EC): You want them to be able to be at home with their family.
2. Maree (EC): You have to get over that and you have to decide that, that's not your choice, it's their choice
3. Sam: I don't know if they all have the choice. To survive now, a lot of people have to work full-time.

Participants in this excerpt clearly reinforced the regime of truth 'children are better off at home'. Maternal discourses position the mother as 'needing' to be at home with her children, and participants sustained these discourses by either judging mothers for choosing to use ECE, or justifying the choices of, and making excuses for, working mothers.

They have used the word 'you', in a collective sense, a number of times in this excerpt, implying they are talking about the community of teachers. The use of 'you' gives more authority to what they are saying and gives the impression this

is an endorsed perspective (Kilderry, 2015b), adding power to the 'truth' they are speaking.

The notion of 'choice' wasn't only implied in relation to mothers choosing to work outside of the home, it also influenced participant perceptions of other parenting decisions:

Excerpt 5.22:

1. Maree (EC): I've found that probably the hardest thing for me personally, is that I think "oh, come on, can't you come home from work earlier, can't you just really spend more quality time with your own child"...
2. You know we have some that come
3. Gudrun (EC): 50 hours
4. Maree: Yeah, come in with their breakfast, come in with their dinner.
5. The parents say "well they won't eat for us".
6. I think "oh, take them home, spend time with them, eat with them", you know,
7. that is my own personal struggle.

In this excerpt, participants implied parents are making the choice not to spend 'quality time' with their children (lines 1 & 6), a choice many didn't approve of. Consistent with the findings of this study, Ailwood (2008) found women working within ECE reiterate the 'natural' place of mothers in the lives of young children. She went further however, indicating teachers were "making these statements from positions of relative middle class, educated privilege and authority" (Ailwood, 2008, p. 161), implying they 'looked down on' the mothers who chose not to, or were unable to, be at home with their children.

There was certainly a strong sense of judgement on parents demonstrated in this study. However, deconstructing this regime of truth highlights its irony considering the teachers' role (and what they are paid to do) is to provide the best possible learning environment for children as well as a service to parents who choose to work. In the following excerpt, the choice (or lack of choice) Bill was interested in was whether children choose to be in ECE:

Excerpt 5.23:

1. Bill (EC, M, O): These kids, if they had the choice, they would be at home with mum and dad...
2. I see our job [is] to invest in parents' children the things that the parents themselves can't do while they are working...
3. We all know that if we all stayed at home with mum and dad, we'd still be okay

Consistent with maternal discourses, Bill infers the role of the teacher is to be *in loco parentis* that is, to parent the child while the parent is working (line 2). However, it was his comment on line 3 that initiated significant discussion within this group (discussed in the next section). If children will be 'okay' if they stay home with Mum and Dad rather than attend ECE – what value does ECE add to their lives?

Bill's comments are not uncommon. Berthelson and Brownlee (2007) identified a dominant social understanding that childcare, in particular, is a service that meets parents' work-related needs rather than a service that provides potential benefits for children. The 'surety' of this pronouncement however, was surprising from a teacher.

Parents feel tension from mixed messages they receive from government and popular media (Furedi, 2008). While it is often suggested good parenting is *the* most important role, parents are also told the only way out of poverty is through employment, leading to a need for childcare (Page, 2011). Some mothers subsequently feel guilty when trying to balance work and family life. The perceived 'need' for teachers to assuage this guilt was also discussed in one group as part of a wider discussion on how parents view the purpose of ECE:

Excerpt 5.24:

1. Megan (K, HT): For some it's a place to dump children while they go to work...
2. Gudrun (EC): We have to spend half our time working through the parent's guilt of going off to work...

3. I just always say to them “well at least you are sending them here and we care”.

While Gudrun acknowledged parental guilt (line 2), there appeared to be a general lack of empathy from most other participants. Megan used the emotive and judgemental term ‘dump’ to infer parents discard their children in an ECE setting in a blasé fashion before going on to their place of employment. Elfer, Goldschmied, and Selleck (2012) posit parents, feeling anxious and uncertain, can sometimes appear casual and uncaring as they rush to leave the centre. Misunderstanding parental distress, therefore, may lead to the perception of the child being ‘dumped’.

Gudrun seemed to reinforce this judgement on parents (line 3) implying that teachers care more than the parents, or at least teachers are fulfilling the supposedly unmet (by the busy working mother) needs of the child (Katz, 1980). While this may not have been Gudrun’s intention, her aim may have been solely to speak favourably of the centre where she works; a mother who already has mixed and intense feelings about using ECE, may perceive comments like this as judgement. Gudrun’s positioning in this excerpt is consistent with her expressed perception of a great teacher being ‘firm but fair’ (Chapter Six). The stern but loving teacher depicted by Stonehouse (1989) who “longs for the good old days, when things were right for children [and] Mums were happy at home” (p. 63).

The ‘good old days’, however, were not that good for women. Kedgley (1996) identified that, from the 1950s onwards, women who were not with their children constantly, 24-hours a day, 365-days a year, as prescribed by John Bowlby (1953), including women who leave their children in childcare centres, were accused of being neglectful. Bowlby’s early work on attachment theory and the effects of maternal deprivation, advocated for ever-present motherhood with dire consequences for the child if this did not happen (Middleton & May, 1997).

At this time, Bowlby was a strong supporter of infant determinism, that is “the assumption that infant experience determines the course of future development” (Furedi, 2008, p. 41). As such, he suggested a bad start in life wholly predicts

poor life outcomes, including “nervous disorders and instability of character” (Bowlby, 1953, p. 12), regardless of what else happens for the child (Slater, 2007). Bowlby’s theorising may be a significant factor in the dominance of the maternal discourses and the subsequent positioning of teachers as substitute-mothers. If the mother cannot be with the child to form the attachment relationship, the teacher may feel obligated to form an attachment relationship to the child themselves (Page, 2011).

Educational psychologists are largely sceptical about the relevance of attachment theories (Slater, 2007). While Bowlby claimed an infant’s relationship with her/his mother is special and different, other studies have argued quality, consistency and closeness of relationships, regardless of who with, is what matters most (Page, 2013). Infants having several attachments is usual and each serves the same relational purpose, including relationships with teachers (Slater, 2007). Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) argue “[t]here is no convincing evidence that young children necessarily suffer harm or that their relationship with their mother is inevitably undermined if care is shared” (p. 47). They go on to posit exclusive parental care can actually constrain the child’s opportunities for inclusion, citizenship and fulfilment. Despite these challenges, some participants spoke of these theories as if they are ‘the truth’:

Excerpt 5.25:

1. Kate: (K, HT): Brings you back to attachment theories
2. and the first and foremost relationship with mother being essential to being able to bring other people into their world and develop safe and secure relationships.
3. We have children being dropped off to us that have had hurried mornings and things like that
4. so that relationship, sense of belonging, attachment
5. We are instrumental and our role in that is really, really important.

Kate’s beliefs were shaped by Bowlby’s theories (lines 1-2), particularly in relation to the perceived importance of the maternal attachment bond (line 2). This belief, together with other maternal discourses, has influenced Kate to

position teachers in a substitute-mother role, picking up where the 'busy' mothers have left off and assuming the attachment role mothers would have been assumed to take.

The provision of education and care is imperative to enable parents (in particular mothers) to engage in paid employment, whether by choice or necessity. It is important ECE is provided without judgement on working mothers. Instead, teachers should recognise how the role of the teacher has changed over time as the division of tasks and responsibilities between families, institutions and the government has evolved (Norman, 2017). This evolution means young children can now be more dependent on professionals for their education than their parents – a responsibility for teachers to take seriously.

There is currently no substantive body of research that implies there are negative effects on children of spending a long time in **high-quality** ECE. The British large-scale, longitudinal EPPE study found no evidence that children whose mothers worked outside of the home were behind at school entry. In contrast, their evidence suggested children with pre-school experience showed positive impacts in relation to pre-reading, early number concepts, language, peer sociability, independence, concentration and cooperation (Sammons et al., 2004).

It would appear, therefore, the concerns raised by participants are largely unfounded, so long as the education and care they are providing is of high-quality. While long hours in **low-quality** ECE has been associated with behavioural problems in children, these “could be tempered by subsequent high-quality ECE” (Mitchell et al., 2008, p. 59). The key to children’s experiences and outcomes, therefore, is the quality of the education and care they receive, something teachers can influence. The concerns raised by participants therefore appear to be taken-for-granted assumptions strongly shaped by essentialist maternal discourses.

Throughout this section there have been a number of examples where the notion of 'childcare' has been cast in a negative light; even from those working within this sector. The lack of support for out-of-home education and care has

traditionally been inextricably “enmeshed in the contradictions and conflicts in the lives of women in relation to men, children and work” (May, 2009, p. 10), and these contradictions are still apparent today. The legacy of this work still influences the beliefs and actions of parents and teachers, held in place by ongoing media sensationalism, amongst other influences, which condemn women who work (Page, 2013). This attitude appears to prevail in much of the ECE sector. The condemnation of participants for parents in this study is consistent with those from Robinson and Jones Diaz’s (2006) study, whose teacher participants indicated they would never choose to put their own children in care, believing it is more appropriate for mothers to care for their children in the early years. Ironically, this logic renders ECE, and teachers, as not necessary (Gibson, 2015).

“Working-class”

As outlined earlier, feminist poststructural theory acknowledges the issue of ‘class’ as well as gender within discourse analysis (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). This section explores participants’ responses in relation to children and families from less affluent circumstances, arguably ‘working-class’.

Consistent with the notion of the teacher as the ‘heroine’, saving ‘at risk’ children (Taggart, 2011), one group discussed their perception of the experiences of children in lower socio-economic areas and the role of the teacher to protect them, sustaining a regime of truth ‘ECE protects some children from their lives’. This conversation was sparked after Bill stated “we all know that if we all stayed at home with mum and dad, we’d still be okay” (see excerpt 5.23). Other participants in the group disagreed:

Excerpt 5.26:

1. Lorna (EC): Some of our children, we’re their safe place...
2. The only place where they’re protected.
3. The only place where somebody cares about them...
4. Kay (EC): The only place where they get food and warmth
5. Dawn (EC, M): and security and routine...
6. Lorna: We’ve had children where we’ve said “sorry, you can’t take your child home, you’re too high” or “you’ve had too much to drink”...

7. Bill (EC, M, O): There's a difference. That's not saying those parents don't love their kids.
8. It's just that they aren't skilled in parenting...
9. Jay (EC, HT): But that's why I challenged you when you said "they'll all be okay"
10. I disagree. Some children won't be okay if they're left at home.
11. Bill: Yeah, but you're talking very small percentage...
12. Dawn: Depends where you work
13. Jay: In some centres it's a large percentage

This excerpt, while long, provides a good example of tensions teachers face when they are working in communities that challenge their notion of 'good' parenting. Bill's belief children will still be 'okay' if they do not attend ECE definitely challenged both other participants and the regime of truth 'ECE protects some children from their lives', a regime of truth that, while pervasive throughout groups, contrasted with the earlier regime of 'children are better off at home'.

Both of these regimes have their genesis in maternal discourses. The child protection regime of truth, however, appears to have originated in the early twentieth century, when the dominant discourse on mothers' natural giftedness to raise children began to be challenged by growing support for intervention in families to save children from their mother (Vandenbroeck, 2006).

McLaren (2009) argues individuals are subsumed by regimes of truth embedded in discourse; perpetuating them, participating in them, resisting them or rebelling against them. In contrast to Bill's resistance to the regime 'ECE protects some children from their lives', there was no active resistance from participants in relation to the 'children are better off at home' truth, illustrating its dominance. The differentiation between these two regimes of truth, therefore, appears to be directly related to the 'class' or socio-economic status of the child and their family.

The focus on ECE as a site for child protection, rather than education, is interesting given a significant body of research indicates children from low-income and/or disadvantaged homes make additional **educational** gains through

participation in high-quality ECE (Mitchell et al., 2008). Again, maternal discourses dominated, shaping participants' attitudes, priorities and responses.

Lorna in particular, has been shaped by the positioning of ECE as a place of protection. She worked in a lower socio-economic area and had experienced situations that reinforced this positioning and her own subject position as 'heroine'. She began the conversation by positioning teachers as the only ones who care about the children who are experiencing challenges (line 3). This position was reinforced by other participants who added to the 'list' of services the centre provides the child that the parent ostensibly does not (lines 4-5).

Bill challenged this notion by arguing some parents do not have the skills to raise children successfully (line 8), at least in relation to white, middle-class expectations. Furedi (2008) argues that, with the turn of the 21st century, exacerbated by neo-liberal discourses, 'parent-bashing' has been normalised. Many societal problems are now being blamed on deficits in parenting rather than failures in society. The rise of this discourse, together with the philanthropic genesis of ECE, reinforces the role of the teacher as protector.

At numerous times in the discussion, Lorna spoke about how teaching is hard work. In an individual interview I asked her what she meant by 'hard work' and whether this is exacerbated for her as a teacher in a centre supporting families who face significant challenges. Reinforcing her positioning as the 'heroine', Lorna responded:

Excerpt 5.27:

1. Lorna (EC): We have a different stress on top of it.
2. Of wondering about these families when they go home.
3. Are the children being fed? Are the children being looked after?...
4. You see so many kids that you think "if I could just take you home and give you a nice place to live where you are supported and can grow",
5. what a different child they would be.

Lorna expressed a desire to change children's lives through taking them home and providing them with what she perceived to be a better life (line 4). She appeared to worry about the children she teaches when they are not in the

centre being protected by the teaching team (lines 2-3). Connell (2009a) posits 'good' teachers have been steadily burning themselves out and self-destructing since the mid-1970s, often due to the significant "emotion work" (p. 221), they are engaging in providing support for children – work that is neither 'measured' nor recognised. Positioning herself as a 'heroine' has added to Lorna's emotional labour.

Bill, on the other hand resisted the expectation implicit in maternal discourses to 'take your work home':

Excerpt 5.28:

1. Bill (EC, M, O): I also don't believe that we can do a lot to change some of those social conditions that you're talking about,
2. that's not our job.
3. That's the government's job.
4. All we can do is the best we have in the time we have those kids.
5. But I don't lose sleep at night about what happens to those kids outside that because I can't change that.
6. All I can do is do my job.
7. What I'm paid to do is to provide something really important for those kids when they come to me.

Unlike Lorna, who portrayed an ongoing sense of responsibility for children beyond classroom walls, Bill assigned the responsibility for providing the conditions children need to thrive to the government (line 3). He was clear that the role of the teacher is to provide the best possible environment for children when they attend ECE (line 8), focusing on what they can control (Katz, 1980). His ability to resist such maternal discourses may have been strengthened due to his gender and the subsequent expectations associated with perceived differences between men and women.

Despite the pragmatism of Bill's advice, it could be argued neither response is particularly helpful. Worrying about children when they leave the centre, like Lorna, will make no difference to their lives and could cause the teacher to position the child as a victim. Hargreaves (2000) warns an excessive emphasis on

emotional caring can marginalise poor children as teachers prioritise maternal warmth over being a 'warm demander' (Meade, 1995); having warmth but also challenging children in ways that produce good intellectual outcomes.

Abdicating responsibility to the government, like Bill, is also not helpful. Teachers, collectively, can advocate for change on behalf of individual children and their families. The importance of advocating to improve the social context of childhood is discussed further in Chapter Eight.

Shaped by maternal discourses, Western ECE is consistent with middle-class mothering but in conflict with working class mothering (Spodek, 1988). Reay (2004) argues this reification of middle-class mothering has meant "the relegation of working-class mothering to the realms of deficit and pathology" (p. 69). Certainly, a number of participants expressed implied and/or overt judgement on parents from these backgrounds.

Teaching does demand strong feelings with regards to protecting and supporting children. however, these feelings should also include empathy towards children's families (Moyles, 2001). There was very little empathy demonstrated by participants when being shaped by maternal discourses. This sort of emotional distance can threaten understanding between teachers and parents as the teachers' purposes are at odds with the parents they are working with and there appears to be no mechanisms to resolve these differences (Hargreaves, 2000).

Robinson and Jones Diaz (2006) argue "we are constantly reading other people from the discourses that we take up, often making judgements about who we perceive them to be"(p. 33). If teachers are judging parents and their parenting through white, middle-class mothering discourses – they are potentially 'othering' those parents who are different.

The teachers are also unlikely to recognise value in diverse parenting styles. It is important for the teacher not to be judgemental or critical of parents' child-rearing practices" (Nutbrown & Page, 2008, p. 5). The examples given in this section position the parent as neglectful and the teacher as the protector. This conception of the parent must be challenged.

Despite the espoused belief in the importance of partnerships with parents (see Chapter Eight), more deeply held beliefs that parents either need education or should not enrol very young children into ECE for long hours influenced participant responses. Unless these beliefs, and the discourses that underpin them, are critiqued and challenged, true partnership with parents will remain rhetoric rather than reality.

Children as passive and innocent

When the teacher is positioned as heroine or protector, or even as substitute-mother, children are often subsequently positioned as innocent, needing protection and passive in the education process rather than capable and agentic. Socially constructed images of young children as innocent and vulnerable continue to permeate sections of society and lead to anxiety about protection (Nyland & Rockel, 2007); anxiety demonstrated by these participants. Despite the introduction of sociocultural theories and the representation of the child in *Te Whāriki* as “competent and confident learners and communicators” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9), most excerpts in this chapter demonstrate participants have often been unable to resist these images, positioning children as passive recipients rather than active agents in their education and lives.

Resisting these discourses, however, immediately following excerpt 5.26, Bill discussed his experience of children becoming strong and resilient when brought up in environments that differ from the expectations of white, middle-class parenting underpinning maternal discourses:

Excerpt 5.29:

1. Bill: I’ve taught in Southside¹⁷ Kindergarten where we’ve had lots of kids... cooking their own lunches, doing those sorts of things,
2. and they are amazingly resilient. So it’s not all grim and bad stories...

Bill’s arguments are the strongest example in this study of children being positioned as competent and confident, in line with the aspiration statement in *Te Whāriki*. His stance is also supported by research; for example, Furedi (2008) argues children frequently develop new strengths following emotionally difficult

¹⁷ Not the Kindergarten’s real name

encounters - vulnerability exists alongside resilience. Bill appears to be resisting the positioning of teachers as child-protectors; resistance that, again, may be easier for him as a male who has not been socialised into the benevolent protector role.

It is interesting that the strongest conceptions of children as vulnerable **and** as competent and capable were both provided in a discussion about children experiencing perceived challenges in their home life. As such, participants both sustained and resisted maternal discourses. The positioning of children as innocent and vulnerable was contested by the child successfully overcoming perceived challenges; building resilience and coping skills.

Discourses of childhood innocence can limit what teachers offer and do with children, including the avoidance of addressing critical events and issues as they are considered developmentally inappropriate. Children, however, are experiencing these issues therefore avoiding them is reinforcing “hegemonic constructions of childhood and the child” (Osgood, 2012, p. 61).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that essentialist maternal discourses were the most dominant shaping and being shaped by participants in this study. These discourses remain entrenched and romanticise the roles of both teachers and mothers. They require teachers to demonstrate qualities that are considered innate to women and led to participants assuming the role of substitute-mother. As such, they prioritised the custodial and care functions over other functions, often positioning care and education as a binary rather than complementary, particularly with respect to infants and toddlers, often justified through the length of time children spend in ECE. Similarly, affective attributes were also often prioritised over other qualities in participant descriptions of the ‘good’ teacher.

Examples of where participants sustained, developed and resisted discourses were discussed. Resistance was particularly strong when participants’ identities as teachers were challenged, however, discourses of the natural teacher who has innate and often indescribable abilities were sustained. These abilities were

often linked to gender and/or maternal experience, minimising recognition of any impact of teacher education and qualifications.

Participants often took on the role of expert when working with parents, subsequently positioning parents as needing support and guidance. Similarly, ECE was positioned as a site to protect children, with teachers as heroines who rescue children from their parents and their lives. Parents (mothers) who work long hours and require ECE for their children were positioned as neglectful and uncaring. This positioning of parents reinforced the strong, yet contrasting, regimes of truth – “children are better off at home” and “ECE protects some children from their lives”

Children are starting ECE younger and attending for longer hours. This means the teacher becomes a significant influence in their early lives and therefore needs to think carefully and critically about their beliefs and values concerning children and teaching (Clark & Grey, 2010). Personal assumptions shape our image of the child and have an impact on our practice and behaviour (Heald & Manuela, 2013). Teachers need to challenge these assumptions and question the genesis of their beliefs to consider whether they are relevant today and of benefit to children.

Any subsequent change in practice must be accompanied by a change in attitude for the change to be sustainable. The data in this study suggests there isn't always a strong relationship between teachers' espoused beliefs and their espoused practice (Wen et al., 2011). Examples where there was a weaker relationship include discussions about the ideals of partnership with parents, inclusion and biculturalism (see Chapter Nine), and the positioning of children as competent and confident. Manning-Morton (2006) argues unless teachers truly believe change is better for children, the change will be rhetoric only, and therefore without substance.

In Chapter Six, teachers' beliefs shaped by dominant maternal discourses is explored in more detail, in particular an over emphasis on the socialisation of children and teachers, identifying where substantive change may be required to provide a more balanced curriculum for children.

Chapter Six: An (over) Emphasis on Socialisation

Introduction

Biesta (2015) posits there are three interrelated domains of educational purpose: qualification, socialisation and subjectification. Qualification is “the transmission and acquisition of knowledge, skills and dispositions” (p. 77); socialisation initiates children into traditions and ways of being and doing, including cultural and political; and, subjectification is the way children come to exist “as subjects of initiative and responsibility rather than as objects of the actions of others” (p. 77).

This chapter explores one significant impact of the dominance of maternal discourses; that is, the belief portrayed by participants that, first and foremost, the development and application of social competencies is the most important thing for both children and teachers; prioritising the socialisation purpose of education over the qualification and subjectification purposes. Biesta (2015) argues any one-sided emphasis can damage the other two purposes. While he is arguing for a greater focus on socialisation and subjectification in schooling, in ECE most focus is placed on socialisation. Findings in this study indicate there may need to be a greater focus on the academic (qualification) purpose of education.

As such, this chapter explores the emphasis on socialisation in teacher priorities and practice, and where this emphasis may have been generated. It provides examples of the socialisation discourse being sustained and resisted. It also identifies some possible implications of this emphasis in relation to teacher status and children’s learning; in particular, how the emphasis on social competence – both for teachers and children – has the potential to limit the provision of holistic curriculum, therefore limiting possibilities for children’s learning, and to reinforce teaching as a low-level, low-status profession.

Socially competent teachers

Social competence is subjective and contextually defined, that is “an evaluative term based on judgment that a person has performed social tasks competently”

(S. M. Lim, Rodger, & Brown, 2013, p. 115) in a specific context. It is influenced by a range of factors including culture, class and gender. This section discusses how, consistent with the gendered nature of early childhood teaching and the dominance of maternal discourses, the model of social competence most valued by participants was, again, that of the white, middle-class mother. This model prioritises personal attributes, relationship management and communication skills that position the teacher as a kindly, substitute-mother (Taggart, 2011).

Being considered socially competent in an early childhood environment requires teachers to display the personal attributes associated with this role. These attributes are often shaped by maternal discourses and emphasise personal characteristics such as patience, enthusiasm, 'niceness' and a sense of responsibility rather than academic qualifications and knowledge (Cameron, 2006). Participants in this study were not immune to these discourses, identifying and prioritising personal attributes, when describing the 'good' teacher, over the need for academic and/or pedagogical knowledge. There was particular emphasis on essentialised feminine attributes including being calm, nurturing, 'nice' and altruistic. Sam particularly emphasised her perception that teachers need to put others first:

Excerpt 6.1:

1. Sam (EC): we constantly have to self-regulate
2. and put others first
3. and keep calm

Sam's image of a good teacher is one that selflessly ignores their own needs, connecting the altruistic premise of 'putting others first' to teachers needing to 'self-regulate' their emotions and remain calm, even in the face of challenges. Altruism is an expectation of many teachers and of society. This expectation has led to societal perceptions that "teachers' dedication should exceed their desire for reward or, sometimes, for reasonable working conditions" (Nias, 1997, p. 13), and has sometimes led to teacher burn out.

Elsewhere Sam emphasises the importance of altruism using terms like "good personhood", "superhuman" and even stating "you kind of have to be a saint to

really do a good job”. To be considered a ‘saint’ requires a person to be completely selfless and to always put others before her own needs. This expectation is reinforced by authors such as Noddings (1984) who suggest teachers’ ‘mental engrossment’ should always be on the ‘cared for’ rather than themselves, attributing all actions to the other’s wants and desires. The ideal of ‘selfless service’ is often socialised through teacher education and can lead to guilt, when teachers do self-care, and subsequent ambivalence towards the work (Taggart, 2011).

Sam also uses the notion of ‘self-regulation’ to describe teachers being conscious of their own emotions and responding in a calm and measured way to any given situation. Reinforced by other participants, the notion of emotional control was presented as a significant dimension of social competence required of a teacher:

Excerpt 6.2:

1. Megan (K, HT): We spend a lot of our day just maintaining composure.
2. Like this underneath [making paddling gestures with her hands]
3. but peaceful on top, just calm swanning around...

This suppression of emotions may be appropriate in many situations, particularly if a child is distressed. It could also be perceived, however, to reinforce the ‘culture of niceness’ with teachers feeling they need to be consistently selfless and ‘happy’, demonstrating ‘professional dedication’, regardless of their real needs and emotions (Cumming & Sumsion, 2014).

One way teachers can support children to learn to manage their own emotions is through expressing how they (the teachers) are feeling. Acknowledging there are a range of emotions all people have and feel (including teachers) and presenting strategies to deal with these emotions is important to promoting children’s emotional well-being (Hearron & Hildebrand, 2013).

Conforming teachers

Teachers can become prisoners of “the hegemony of nice” (Goldstein, 1997, p. 88), impacting negatively on the quality of their practice. The desire to be ‘nice’ and socially acceptable is strong in ECE and can lead to teachers to conform to the practices at the settings where they are employed, working ‘with the grain’,

even when it does not 'match' their pedagogical knowledge and/or philosophies (Cumming & Sumsion, 2014). Moyles (2001) found qualified teachers in the early years sector tended to work 'down' to the level of their variously trained and qualified colleagues, rather than raising the standards within their settings. Working down maintained positive working relationships which the teachers valued over the provision of high-quality education for children. Similarly, participants in one group expressed their belief newly graduated teachers often 'work down' to the centre where they are first employed. These new teachers behaved in a way that conformed to the practices and culture of the centre, that is, they behaved in a way deemed to be socially competent in that setting. The following excerpt records this discussion:

Excerpt 6.3:

1. Dawn (EC, M): You go through years [of] training at teachers' college;
2. You come out the other end and go to your centre and you conform...
3. Kay (EC): Why do early childhood teachers do that?
4. Bill (EC, M, O): Let me start with the woman industry...
5. You don't get above your place. You don't get above your station.
6. And there's a huge socialisation process...
7. We appoint people for all the different skills they bring to our centres and then we spend the rest of the time trying to make them just like us.
8. Dawn: I've seen people go into a centre and they are talking like their head teacher inside of six months and the practices...
9. Jo (K): You've got to be a bit respectful too when you first go into a place
10. Dawn: Exactly... You come in going "I want to please, I want to be a part of this group"...
11. You look and you go, "I'm gonna model myself on this person because this person I respect and I admire"
12. Jo: You just wanna get along with the team

Conforming was positioned as a gendered response. While Dawn and Kay begin by talking about teachers collectively (lines 1-3), Bill distances himself from this stereotype by referring specifically to women (line 4), gendering teaching as part of 'the woman industry'. This assertion goes unchallenged and demonstrates

how in the moment interactions can re-shape the relationship of participants to discourses (Winslade, 2005).

Bill then speaks in a generalised way about how women behave, reinforcing gender stereotypes about it being unacceptable for women to be outspoken or ambitious (line 5) (Gunn et al., 2004). Other participants pick up on this and discuss further why they think this conforming occurs – linking it to being respectful (line 9) and wishing to please (line 10) rather than focusing specifically on gender, although these behaviours are arguably gender stereotypical.

Dawn's perspective appears to have been influenced by the discussion. She was originally bemused new teachers appeared to disregard their teacher education to conform to centre practices (lines 1-2 & 8). By the end of the interaction, however, Dawn has justified the behaviour she originally judged, implying new teachers are only emulating a role-model they respect (line 11). Disagreeing, Jo reinforces the discourse of 'niceness' and the associated desire to 'fit in' rather than emulate (line 12), for the sake of being socially acceptable in this new context. Socially competent teachers who act in acceptable ways are viewed positively and subsequently gain credibility and power in the setting (Warren, 2014). This change in Dawn's stance could possibly be an example of conflict avoidance (that is an argument with Jo) rather than a meaningful and ongoing change of beliefs, hence evidence of conforming.

Conforming to the behaviours and values of your place of employment is not unique to ECE. As Weedon (1987) points out, social institutions (like ECE) pre-exist individuals. When we enter them "we learn their modes of operation and the values which they seek to maintain as true, natural or good" (p. 3). Conforming is also not new to ECE. When free-play pedagogy was first introduced into colleges of education in the post-war era, only 10 percent of teaching students saw this as an opportunity to do something different; 90 percent capitulated to the practice of the teachers of the time (Middleton & May, 1997).

Both curriculum and colleagues engage discursive power to constitute teachers into 'being teacher' in a particular way (Janzen, 2015). In particular, student teachers, and arguably new graduates, assign more weight to the perspectives of

practising teachers (colleagues) than researchers because they believe the teachers have more understanding of the realities of the classroom (Bråten & Ferguson, 2015). After graduation, the socialisation of new teachers shifts from a setting of discussion informed by research and theory to one where two or three teachers have the strongest influence (Sachs, 2000). Sosu and Gray (2012) posit that questions remain about how well teacher education can change students' epistemic beliefs, and whether any change of beliefs impact on teacher competence. The perceptions of participants in this study would seem to support these questions.

If new teachers indeed do conform to the practices in their first centre, this is an issue if these practices do not reflect current thinking about high-quality ECE. Discussing the comparative importance of new teachers graduating from teacher education programmes with curriculum subject knowledge, one group raised concerns about the ability of the sector to support new teachers' development:

Excerpt 6.4:

1. Bill (EC, M, O): Subject content, can be taught...
2. You can learn it from seeing staff modelling...
3. Jay (EC, HT): This is my problem...
4. New teachers coming out can only learn those things when they are in quality centres...
5. The problem is we haven't got enough of those, and so our new teachers are not learning good things.

At the beginning of the excerpt, Bill is arguing it is not really necessary for teacher education programmes to focus on students accumulating subject knowledge as they can learn this through engagement with teachers once they graduate (lines 1-2). Jay, however, identifies a perceived flaw to Bill's argument – that the quality of what the new teacher learns depends on the quality of the practice they are observing in their place of employment.

Jay's notion there are not enough high-quality early childhood services to ensure graduating teachers enter an environment that will support them to grow as teachers has been reinforced in many government publications over the last 10

years including various ERO reports and, most recently, in the draft *Early Learning Strategic Plan* (Ministry of Education, 2018a), usually framed as “significant variability across services” (Early Childhood Education Taskforce, 2011, p. 29)

The idea of the new graduate conforming to practice they experience in the centre where they are first employed was also seen as problematic in another group. Sam talks about the importance of new teachers being employed in functional teams with positive work environments:

Excerpt 6.5:

1. Sam (EC): When you teach you are being heavily influenced by the other teachers around you and,
2. if you're in a negative environment,
3. it can make or break your career.

Sam is speaking from her own personal experience. In her first teaching role she was employed in a privately-owned centre in a low socio-economic community with an unqualified head teacher and manager. She found this a very challenging environment and felt unsupported by the manager when dealing with complex issues. She identified she was learning bad habits and was in danger of ‘burning out’. When she found herself in the situation of being required to lead an area of the centre without the ‘tools’ or support to be successful, she left. Unfortunately, some new teachers remain in ‘negative environments’ that impact negatively on their practice.

The sense from both of these groups was that the sector is not as strong as it used to be, despite increased qualification levels. There are possible solutions however. Connell (2009a) posits the informal processes that pass on practical know-how to new teachers on-the-job need to be acknowledged as a major part of teacher education and subsequently supported by teacher education providers beyond graduation. Such support will impact on occupational culture, an area which should become a key focus in discussions of teacher quality.

Discourses of 'relationships'

A particularly dominant theme running through participants' responses was the importance of teachers having the social competence to develop and maintain positive relationships with a multiplicity of relevant stakeholders; including children, their parents and the teachers' colleagues. This theme demonstrates the dominance of relational professionalism discourse in ECE (Warren, 2012). This discourse is based on similar values to maternal discourses, that is warm, nurturing, instinctive and natural relationships. 'Relationships' (usually without any qualifier) was seen as the key to being an effective teacher:

Excerpt 6.6:

1. Nancy (EC): But isn't really relationship the most important thing?
2. When you want to buy a house they say location, location, location
3. and then I think it's just relationship, relationship, relationship.

Relationships were also described by another participant as being "the essence of everything" (Kate). It was a word used often by participants but mostly in very general terms. The word itself requires a qualifier to give meaning; for example, relationships can be abusive, victimising, cooperative or constructive, to name but a few. Examining the data for the words that were collocated with the term 'relationships' highlighted that participants used very few qualifiers, possibly assuming a shared understanding between participants of what was meant, therefore deeming it unnecessary to qualify the quality of relationships being discussed. The situated meaning (Gee, 2014) of the term 'relationships' in this context, therefore, assumes shared knowledge and experience between teacher participants.

The qualifiers that were used included 'respectful', 'good', 'positive' and 'safe and secure'. These qualifiers are also relatively general and do not seem particularly specific or meaningful in relation to effective teaching. Another adjective used was 'genuine' however this is almost as vague as having no qualifier at all – are any relationships not genuine? Even if the people involved are acting in character, the relationship is still real, if somewhat dysfunctional.

This lack of specificity may also indicate ‘relationships’ is one area where teachers have taken on rhetoric without truly thinking about meaning. Meaningful interaction in ECE cannot be just about relationships per se – it must be about strong, collaborative learning relationships in order to make a difference for children and their families (Smith, 2016). In addition, a focus on relationships in early childhood settings should not be about simply developing relationships as an end in itself. From a sociocultural perspective, reciprocal and responsive relationships are used as the medium to support children’s learning in many areas, not just **about** relationships. People learn **within** and **through** the contexts of consistent relationships as well as about (Smith, 2016).

Despite a lack of clarity around the quality of relationships being discussed, participants spoke strongly about the importance of being able to manage a multiplicity of relationships to ensure effectiveness as a teacher, highlighting the many and varied relationships teachers have to engage in to facilitate the care and education of the child.

Excerpt 6.7:

1. Maree (EC): Not only between the children,
2. between the children and the other teachers,
3. between the children and yourself,
4. and between parents.
5. And I see that very much as a community... that helps the children.

Maree appears to believe the teacher is responsible for facilitating the development and maintenance of a range of relationships, including those they are not part of, in order to develop a sense of ‘community’. Alongside supporting children to develop the social competence they need to work alongside each other (line 1), she also infers teachers are responsible for supporting children to develop relationships with other teachers (line 2), and for facilitating relationships between parents (line 4). This expectation places a significant amount of responsibility on teachers, reinforcing the maternal stereotypes of the ‘mother’ (in this case of the early childhood centre) being the peacemaker and mediator of the ‘family’ – with the family being the centre community.

Due to the emphasis on social competence, when participants were discussing the qualities of a good teacher, one of the first and most emphasised qualities was the importance of teachers having sound communication skills to facilitate the development and maintenance of relationships. Summed up by Jo as “you’ve got to be able to talk to people”, this acknowledgement of the importance of communication skills is consistent with the emphasis on relationships.

Daniel takes this sentiment further, providing a strong rationale for the importance of communication skills:

Excerpt 6.8:

1. Daniel (EC): Interacting with your teaching team,
2. and your parents and whānau is a HUGE part of the job.
3. Adults, like children have a variety of personalities and dispositions,
4. but no matter your personality type,
5. sound communication skills are a must.

Like Sam, Daniel appeared to highlight the issue of self-management, implying that sometimes teachers may have to change their communication preferences to engage effectively with others (lines 4-5).

Participants were again very general, this time in their articulation of the importance of having communication skills without specifically identifying what these skills are. Similar to ‘relationships’, they very rarely used a qualifier when mentioning communication skills and, on the one occasion when they did (in the example above, line 5), simply using the term ‘sound’ without expanding what this means. Again, this may indicate a taken-for-granted assumption other participants knew exactly what they were talking about in relation to ‘communication skills’ and what effective communication skills actually are in an early childhood teaching context.

Relationships with children

Part of the ambivalence around the need for qualifications, as framed through maternal discourses (see Chapter Five), is that the ‘most important’ work of teachers, interacting with children, is being successfully exercised by unqualified

staff. Sally, in her individual interview, discussed why qualifications are not necessarily essential for a good teacher:

Excerpt 6.9:

1. Sally (EC, M): Education plays a major role in terms of understanding the policies, the procedures, why we do certain things.
2. And [that] there's learning going on, what are the dispositions... and all that.
3. But I have come across people who haven't had educational background [and] still they are really good teachers.
4. Maybe not so good in the documentation side, but on the floor, with the children, they are amazing.

Sally appeared to demonstrate a belief that the social competence required for positive interactions with children is the most important quality in a teacher – social competence derived from personality rather than teacher education. In lines 1-2, Sally almost dismissed the importance of understanding policy and procedure, the theories underpinning teacher practice, and even what children are learning. To be a good teacher from this discourse simply requires positive interaction with children.

Positive teaching interactions was seen by many participants as the key to success as a teacher. Again, however, most references to these interactions were discussed using very general terms, for example, “really good at interacting with children”, “working with children” and “working alongside the children”. Surprisingly, only one participant, Kay, mentioned listening to children. This may indicate a tendency of teachers to assume children's interests and knowledge (Peters & Davis, 2011), and to adopt more ‘developmental’ approaches to teaching.

Observations of interactions with children appeared to be the main way participants determined who was a ‘good’ teacher – what they saw and heard. The ‘naturalness’ and authenticity of interactions appeared to be significant:

Excerpt 6.10:

1. Lorna (EC): It's the quality of the person that the children respond to.
2. They know if the person's a genuine person... and genuinely interested in them...
3. That's what makes... a good teacher,
4. how they interact with children and how children interact with them.

When describing characteristics, Lorna talked about the quality of the person (line 1), explaining this is what children respond to. The quality she referred to is being 'genuine' (line 2), however she does not elaborate on how she would observe this – it appeared to be another innate quality people 'just have' and you know it when you see it. It is the same with interactions between child and teacher, again it is assumed other participants will know a 'good' interaction when they see one (line 4). The only specificity she uses in her description is the teacher must have a genuine interest in children (line 3).

While teachers prioritise and emphasise the importance of relationships with children, this focus does not always translate into the practice of teacher-child relationships or interactions that have been identified as key for high-quality ECE (McLaughlin et al., 2016). Understandably, therefore, despite the significant emphasis on relationships in relation to what makes a good teacher, there were surprisingly few specific references to teachers developing strong teaching and learning relationships with children. Participants preferred to speak more generally about relationships. Where relationships with children were specified, they were sometimes linked to the importance of teachers forming an attachment with individual children (see excerpt 5.25), illustrating the dominance of Bowlby's theories.

While participants articulated they 'can tell' who is a good teacher by the way they interact with children, they were silent on what high-quality interactions 'look' like. Attempting to dig deeper into participants' ideas through the Facebook™ discussion, I invited participants to elaborate more specifically on how teachers support children to learn through interactions. Unfortunately, participants chose not to engage in this discussion.

This lack of response may have been due to a range of factors including fear of exposure to others and getting the 'wrong' answer, or a preference for face-to-

face contact (Ferrante et al., 2016). It may also, however, be due to participants finding it difficult to articulate exactly what it is they know and do (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007). To resolve this difficulty, McLaughlin and Cherrington (2018) purport bringing greater intentionality to teaching will enable teachers to more easily describe and explain their actions and intentions.

The lack of reference to teaching and learning relationships with children is concerning. High-quality, respectful and responsive staff-child interaction, in particular sustained shared thinking, is one of the key factors to children achieving gains through ECE (Mitchell et al., 2008). Teachers need a sound understanding of how to support children's thinking and learning through these "cognitively challenging" (p. 42) interactions in order to realise the full potential of ECE for children. Intentional and engaging interaction with children is key to supporting their learning within a sociocultural context (Meade, 2000; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2008; Smith, 1996).

Relationships with parents and whānau

The importance of developing positive relationships with parents, in order to work together for the best interests of children, was more apparent in participants' responses, who acknowledged this as an important component of a teacher's role.

Participants discussed a range of relationship management and communication strategies to be used when working with parents and whānau. These included teachers articulating what they are doing and trying to achieve in order to inform parents about the nature of the centre's programme and pedagogy, and to reassure parents about their child's progress and learning. It also included engaging the whānau with the centre programme and beyond.

When discussing communication with parents, however, there was a sense much of the communication is expected to be uni-directional, predominantly the direction of teacher to parent. One example of this came from Daniel:

Excerpt 6.11:

1. Daniel (EC): During the course of your day you will greet parents,
2. feedback to them,

3. perhaps call them if an accident occurs.

The emphasis on uni-directional communication from teacher to parent is likely to be linked to maternal discourses which position teachers as experts, claiming the power in the relationship and positioning parents as passive recipients (van Houte et al., 2015). This denies parents opportunities to impact on the experiences that shape their child's life (Stonehouse, 1989).

There were also isolated examples given where the uni-directional communication was parent to teacher – particularly in relation to areas where participants did not feel as confident (for example, being bicultural – see Chapter Eight). Uni-directional communication from parent to teacher, accepted without discussion, particularly in relation to one of the imperatives expressed in *Te Whāriki*, can also be problematic. In these situations, learning experiences offered to children may be limited based on the parent's incomplete knowledge of the complexities of ECE.

Both uni-directional communication channels are contradictory to the espoused expectation it is important for teachers to work in partnership with parents (Ministry of Education, 1996), as the notion of partnership denotes reciprocal, open and informed discussions (Stonehouse, 1989). While participants espoused a belief in the importance of this partnership, the practices and expectations discussed in interviews appeared to contradict this aspiration. Instead there was evidence of tension between the rhetoric and the reality (see Chapter Eight).

Consistent with maternal discourses, and the way parents are sometimes positioned as requiring support, participants also talked about the importance of teachers providing parents with pastoral care in these relationships. The following excerpt provides an example of this; Kate is responding to the question "What do teachers need now, in this climate, that perhaps is new from what they needed in the 1950s, 1960s?"

Excerpt 6.12:

1. Kate (K, HT): Relationships with parents,
2. understand those stories about what's happening before the child walks in...

3. It involves not just teaching. It's community counselling...
4. Having knowledge of the events and the impact.
5. It's more social awareness for our families.

Kate suggested one of the roles of the teacher is community counselling (line 3). This suggestion arose more than once across interviews, signifying participants' perceptions about the socially competent teacher. Usually the suggestion was linked to added complexity in people's lives, particularly now both parents work outside the home. Participants perceived their role as providing a kind listening ear for busy mothers, in particular, again moving beyond taking care of children into taking care of parents.

One of the identified tensions of managing multiple relationships was that of prioritising the child. No matter how close the teacher's relationship is with the parents, the relationship with, and the needs of the child must come first. For Daniel, ensuring the best possible outcome for the child means relationships with parents should be based on honesty.

Excerpt 6.13:

1. Daniel (EC): Be honest about the behaviour of the children in your care.
2. As much as I value the idea of seeing children through a 'positive lens',
3. we have had some children of late whose parents have basically been told a fairy story about their child's behaviour.
4. This doesn't do the parents, the child, or their peers, any favours.

This honesty can be challenging. Difficulties sometimes arise because socially competent teachers form close relationships with parents; professional relationships that sometimes becomes friendships. As such, the proposed imperative for teachers to maintain 'professional distance' from children and their families (Education Council, 2017b)¹⁸ was seen by some participants to be in tension with the realities of ECE (see Chapter Seven). Honesty can also be challenging due to the expectation socially competent teachers are 'nice',

¹⁸ Now known as Teaching Council

denying the need to be, for example, questioning and assertive in their professional roles (Gunn et al., 2004).

Relationships within teaching teams

There was also more emphasis placed on developing and maintaining strong working relationships with colleagues than with children. Centre-based teachers do not work in isolation, they are always working alongside at least one other teacher.

The perceived 'counselling' component of a teacher's role, discussed in relation to engagement with parents, was also applied to engagement with colleagues. Participants purported their role involves providing support for team members, giving them a place to offload concerns, thereby helping them manage their emotions and maintain the calm, positive exterior expected of a 'good' teacher.

Despite the emphasis on suppressing emotions identified earlier, maintaining positive and collegial relationships with colleagues was presented by some participants as involving being self-aware and sharing personal circumstances and 'moods' with colleagues in order to avoid misunderstandings.

Excerpt 6.14:

1. Sam (EC): All of the teachers that I think cope really well with this job...
2. are very aware of how they are.
3. And if they're having a bad day or they didn't sleep they say "oh, I haven't slept" and they let the team know that they're just a bit tired...
4. In that way it doesn't evolve into anything.

Teachers were perceived by participants as requiring a level of self-awareness to be a socially competent colleague. This self-awareness included knowing when to ask your team for help. In addition to self-awareness, expectations of social competence as a colleague included knowing other individuals in their team well enough to recognise when they need support, understanding their strengths and weaknesses, and appreciating their contributions. Consequently, providing positive feedback to colleagues was highlighted as an important social competence. Just prior to the following excerpt, Maree was discussing how much

she has learnt from observing her colleagues in action. Gudrun picked up on this and emphasised how this should be fed back to the relevant colleagues.

Excerpt 6.15:

1. Gudrun (EC): It's nice to feed that back to your colleagues too, isn't it?
2. Like "I really like the way you did that" ...
3. It's really important isn't it?...
4. Megan (K, HT): Yeah, you establish that culture.
5. Gudrun: We're in such a confined space and we're working there...
6. We're not running our own show, are we?

Participants demonstrated their belief in the importance of providing positive reinforcement for positive team relationships; relationships that need to be maintained, due to the closeness with which colleagues work, in order to provide a supportive emotional culture in the centre.

Sustaining the discourse of 'niceness' however, there was little mention of the need to be 'open and honest' and provide critical feedback to colleagues when it is perceived they are not meeting the requirements of the job. Communication with colleagues when challenges arise could support the colleague to develop their knowledge and skills through feedback. If teachers can engage with each other "in ways that are honest, critically evaluative, and dedicated toward realizing a greater good" (Wood, 2004, p. 255), true collegiality can grow to ensure all are practising at the highest levels.

Despite the potentially relationship-damaging consequences, participants were mostly silent about having challenging collegial discussions. There was only one brief discussion of the importance of debate in teams:

Excerpt 6.16:

1. Jay (EC, HT): It's also a place where you encourage... just a little bit of conflict.
2. Dawn (EC, M): Of critique, exactly, of critique
3. Jay: You encourage that idea that people can think differently...
4. try to disestablish this notion that people come in and fit into you.

This discussion also responded to the earlier discussion about new graduates conforming to the practices of their place of employment (line 4) and suggested open team discussions as a way to address this. Wood (2004) describes this team dynamic as a 'soulful' teaching and learning community that invites creative conflict in order to correct biases and illuminate blind spots. This type of community invites a diversity of voices and ideas into conversations to strengthen practice (see Chapter Eight).

The emphasis on relationships with teams, over relationships with children, may possibly be due to the temporary nature of relationships with individual children. Children come and go from early childhood services whereas the relationship with the team is more longstanding and can potentially have more impact on individual teachers.

Resisting the culture of niceness

The highly gendered nature of ECE is widely considered to shape the way this profession is viewed and the status that is attached to the work, including pedagogy and relationships (Osgood, 2012). Gendered subject positions, like 'teacher as substitute-mother', shape expectations about how teachers should look and behave, often in ways that are 'naturally feminine' (Weedon, 1987). The essentialist discourses shaping mothering (and by association, early childhood teaching) often demand women put others first, even at the expense of their own needs and wishes (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). The dominance of these discourses, rooted in sexist stereotypes, means all teachers are assumed to be 'nice' to all children, all of the time and in all circumstances, something Goldstein (1997) has labelled the "hegemony of nice" (p. 88). Many participant contributions in this study reflect these stereotypes.

Beginning to resist essentialist maternal discourses however, Sam began to consider how much emotional labour and skill is involved in being able to remain calm amongst chaos – bringing into question whether this attribute is innate or learned:

Excerpt 6.17:

1. Sam (EC): A really important thing... [is] being able to not have yourself part of the situation all the time... selflessness.
2. The teachers that are doing really well don't really tend to get too frustrated with children or other teachers...
3. They're probably not shut off from feeling,
4. because you have to be able to be empathetic throughout the day.
5. It's a skill to be able to rarely get affected by the chaos and the stress...
6. It's hard to do our job all day, every day and enjoy it, unless you're like that.

While Sam again referred to teachers being selfless (line 1), she was no longer implying a need to put others first regardless of their own needs or wishes. Instead, she seemed to indicate a belief that the ability to emotionally remove yourself from a situation, and not be unduly affected by others' emotions and opinions, is a learned skill practised by good teachers. Sam's beliefs in this regard are consistent with Buttner et al.'s (2015) finding that 'expert' teachers don't take things personally and have come to terms with what they can and cannot do and what problems they can solve.

Moving beyond being 'nice', teachers need to practise a high degree of emotional labour in order to work successfully with colleagues and manage the emotions and expectations of parents (Norman, 2017). Emotional labour is "caring which stems from effort rather than instinct" (Taggart, 2011, p. 89), therefore learned behaviour. Through cognitive reflection, teachers can wilfully moderate their emotions, moving themselves into another emotional state (Hargreaves, 2000), in order to get through the day.

Other participants also resisted the discourse of niceness. Daniel rejected 'niceness' in favour of fairness, particularly in relationships with children.

Excerpt 6.18:

1. Daniel (EC): Accept the fact that you will like some children more than others...
2. The most important thing is not to show favouritism
3. and be fair in your dealings with children,

4. and have the same rules and expectations for everyone.

Consistent with the dominance and gendered nature of the niceness discourse, Daniel, as one of two male participants, was the only teacher to raise the issue teachers will not have the same level of positive emotions for all the children they teach. No other participants identified or discussed any issues or internal conflicts that have been raised for them when they did not truly connect to a child. He raised this point by email, however, so it was not able to be discussed by others. It is possible the context of the interview inhibited other participants, who wished to be perceived by the group as a 'good' teacher, from expressing similar thoughts.

It could also be argued Daniel, as a man and representative of a significant minority in ECE, is more able to challenge the dominant gendered discourse of niceness associated with early childhood teaching, without fear of judgement from others. Men are assigned different essentialised or 'natural' attributes and qualities than women in maternal discourses and therefore it can be considered more acceptable for men to be direct and critical, that is less nice, than it is for women.

Also resisting maternal discourses, Jay was particularly critical of the perceived over-emphasis on teachers being 'nice', caring and loving the children, arguing vehemently against these 'motherly' attributes being central to a 'good' teacher:

Excerpt 6.19:

1. Jay (EC, HT): I see too much of this nice lady... syndrome in early childhood...
2. All of these things we're saying are extraordinarily important in early childhood teachers: relationships, kindness, caring, empathy...
3. But... there's more than that...
4. They're a thinking teacher, they're intentional teachers.

Jay is adamant teachers need to have a range of knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions in order to be effective in their role. While being socially competent and demonstrating a range of affective dispositions are important – this is not all that is required, teachers also need to be thoughtful and intentional.

Generally, teachers *are* nice, caring, considerate, warm ladies, who like to please and not offend. (Stonehouse, 1989). While being 'nice' is an attribute valued in the early childhood sector, maybe this is one reason teachers are not so good at advocating for our profession, saying no or dealing with conflict.

Subject knowledge

The attributes and qualities associated with teachers being considered socially competent were valued more highly by most participants than other attributes. This meant a lack of emphasis on teachers having, and using, curriculum subject knowledge. Consistent with the gendered nature of early childhood teaching and the associated perceived and stereotypical 'strengths' of men and women, the only time subject knowledge was mentioned, without prompting, was by the two male participants. Daniel emphasised the value of traditional subject knowledge:

Excerpt 6.20:

1. Daniel (EC): Having been positively influenced by some excellent teachers...
2. I believe a sound general knowledge and curiosity about the world are hugely beneficial...
3. This world is fascinating,
4. and maths, science, philosophy, music and art all have their part to play in making it what it is.

Daniel clearly expressed his belief teachers need this knowledge in order to provide a rich curriculum for children, linking 'sound general knowledge' (line 2) to 'excellent teachers' (line 1).

Bill also discussed the importance of subject knowledge to ensure a rich curriculum is offered to children. He expressed concern about the lack of emphasis on this knowledge in teacher education, arguing the sector is therefore required to pick up the teaching of these areas with new graduates.

Excerpt 6.21:

1. Bill (EC, M, O): Curriculum is very little taught so people come out into the sector very reliant on the existing teachers to teach curriculum...
2. Students that we are seeing have to really struggle in terms of understanding what are some maths concepts to pull through...
3. What we have the moment is an integrated curriculum...
4. to be able to integrate a curriculum, you have to know what the different components of curriculum are...
5. And I think our colleges are struggling with that.
6. we lost a lot of learning I believe.

The curriculum Bill is referring to is knowledge about traditional subject knowledge areas which he refers to elsewhere as “the building blocks of knowledge”. When Bill completed his qualification in the early 1980s, these areas would have been a key focus in the programme. In this excerpt he is referring to maths in particular, later in the discussion he talks about science, music and physical education. He demonstrated a strong belief in the value of teachers integrating subject knowledge into the programme they offer children.

Unlike the male participants, however, there was a general reluctance to discuss the place of subject knowledge by female participants who spoke very generally, only after being prompted, about the ways this knowledge is integrated into the curricula they offer children – mostly through the environment.

Excerpt 6.22:

1. Christine (K, HT): So you have an environment that sort of invites the learning to happen
2. and then work alongside the children to sort of extend their thinking about things.
3. I’m thinking about science - this time of year there’s heaps of butterflies and caterpillars changing and we’ve got tadpoles changing to frogs and that sort of thing,
4. so just drawing their attention to it,
5. getting them involved in catching the flies
6. and using lots of open-ended questioning when you are sitting there observing it...

7. So I think your environment initially, it invites the learning to happen?
And you sort of set it up,
8. I suppose for those interests that are happening, that some science, and then say literacy might...
9. you have your props for encouraging literacy
10. I don't know
11. you might have, in the family corner you might have your little clipboard things
12. and when children start looking interested, you might sit alongside them and then talk to them about what they're doing.
13. Through sort of the environment, your interaction with the children and getting them to help alongside.
14. Sally (EC, M): Yes, it's mostly the environment providing children with different areas of play which provide them those learning opportunities such as literacy, mathematics, science and all that... throughout the play.
15. Natalie (K): You've gotta remember that our ratio, well particularly in kindergarten, is one to ten...
16. So the environment allows the children to interact independently with resources.

You will notice how tentative Christine's language is through her use of terms like 'might' (lines 11-12), 'I suppose' (line 8), 'sort of' (lines 1-2) and 'I don't know' (line 10). This seems to indicate a lack of confidence about what she is saying – she appears to be unsure about how her words will be received by the group. The tentative nature of her language also downplays the active role of the teacher in relation to intentional pedagogy.

Overall, in relation to traditional subject areas, there appears to be a regime of truth amongst the teachers that 'children learn from interaction with the physical environment and resources' with the teacher almost passive in this process. This regime may reflect developmentalist positioning of the teacher as a passive supervisor (Meade, 2000) and/ or may also be an indication of a lack of confidence and/or comfort in their own subject knowledge. This lack of confidence and comfort may impact on the curriculum offered to children and on

the ability of the teacher to co-construct knowledge with children (Hedges & Cullen, 2005a).

The traditional reliance on free-play in the environment, rather than the more active role of the teacher envisaged in sociocultural theories (Nuttall, 2003), created tensions for participants. While Christine began discussing the role of the teacher in facilitating children's learning about subject knowledge (for example, line 12), Sally (line 14) reinforced Christine's original deferment to the environment, inferring children learn subject knowledge simply through engaging with the environment, without teacher interaction.

The importance of the environment over the teacher is a fundamental assumption of dominant child-centred, play-based curriculum discourses (May, 2009). While the benefits of play have been "periodically realigned" (p. 9) from a focus on the emotional and social wellbeing of the child to considering children's rights and the power dynamics in adult/child relationships, it would appear many participants in this study are still emphasising the first focus.

Riojas-Cortez, Alanis, and Flores (2013) argue the role of play in teaching and learning is "perhaps the most misunderstood issue" (p 41) in ECE. The changing purposes of play only adds to the confusion. From a sociocultural perspective, play environments and experiences are only effective in supporting children's learning if they provide cognitive challenge **and** are mediated, for example modelled, explained or encouraged, by an adult (teacher) or more experienced peer (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2008).

While there is evidence children should be provided with an environment that encourages investigation and discovery (Mitchell et al., 2008), teachers need to mediate this environment through engaging with children in cognitively challenging ways. Children do not learn by osmosis. Consistent with Meade's (2000) findings, this aspect was often ignored by participants, possibly indicating a reluctance to accept an active role to extend children's thinking and cognition. Bill, however, is clear the teacher's role is to be the mediator between the environment and children when he states "teachers need to know how to use those resources and equipment, that's the advantage of being a teacher".

Aside from this one statement from Bill, there appeared to be an overall tentativeness, and almost resistance to the intentional teaching of subject knowledge content and concepts. Instead, participants discussed building on opportunities if they arise through children taking an interest in the resources and props provided. This finding suggests many participants may underestimate the importance of subject knowledge (Hedges & Cullen, 2005c).

There does, however, appear to be an element of personal conflict for Natalie, who became almost defensive, justifying the use of the environment as a teaching provocation due to teacher: child ratios (lines 15-16). Group size is recognised as a contextual constraint (Hedges & Cullen, 2005c). Certainly, teachers who 'supervise' large groups of children engaging in 'free-play' are in a poor position to engage in the dynamic interactions with children (Smith, 1996), thereby constraining learning opportunities.

The point of education is that children "*learn something*, that they learn it for a *reason*, and that they learn it from *someone*" (Biesta, 2015, p. 76). In a sociocultural framework, teachers should have ideas about culturally accepted objectives they want to achieve with children, including subject knowledge, and should subsequently work to implement these ideas, being sensitive to children's current skills and competence (Smith, 1996). This implies a significant amount of intentionality or 'consciousness' in their pedagogy. For Katz (1980), this intentionality is the characteristic that most clearly distinguishes mothering from teaching.

In the context of teaching, being intentional "refers to the purposeful and deliberate actions of teachers, drawing on both their knowledge of individual children and professional knowledge and skills to provide meaningful and appropriate curricular experiences for all children" (McLaughlin et al., 2016, p. 176), during both planned teaching and spontaneous teaching interactions. Unfortunately, intentional teaching was not well understood by many participants who often confused it with teacher-directed activities. One example of this came from Kate who talked about 'doing' intentional teaching:

Excerpt 6.23:

1. We see some children have an interest in this area
2. and I'll do intentional teaching
3. and the others will pick up and come with that

This confusion, and the reticence to actively teach subject knowledge, may reflect perceived tensions between child-led and teacher-directed curriculum (Grey & Clark, 2013); another instance where two approaches are positioned as a binary rather than an 'and/and' situation. Unfortunately, the structure of *Te Whāriki* only gave teachers a broad guide in relation to the role of the teacher (McLachlan & Arrow, 2015), therefore does not offer much to resolve these tensions. McLaughlin et al. (2016) posit this guidance for teachers overemphasised learning and under-emphasised teaching. As such, teachers have been positioned as passive, with the predominant teaching role being the provision of resources and experiences rather than interactive teaching (McLaughlin & Cherrington, 2018). This positioning is apparent in this study.

In addition, there was a lack of prescriptive content on subject knowledge in *Te Whāriki* which may have made it challenging for teachers to identify and articulate children's learning in these areas (Te One, 2013). This lack of content and guidance in relation to the teachers' role may also have contributed to the apparent lack of confidence demonstrated.

Another probable influence on the reticence of participants to integrate subject knowledge into ECE curricula are concerns about subject-based approaches being inappropriate as they are contrary to the way children learn and may lead to a "push-down" curriculum and pedagogy (Hedges & Cullen, 2005a). These concerns do not apply, however, to the thoughtful and contextual integration of subject knowledge, designed to extend children's deep interests and promote culturally-valued knowledge development. Instead, the concerns are more around didactic teaching approaches to imparting such knowledge.

If the social competence of a teacher is emphasised at the expense of other attributes, qualities and knowledge, including subject knowledge, then teaching may be seen as low level and as not requiring specific pedagogical knowledge.

Instead good teachers are perceived to 'naturally' have the personality and skills to be effective in their role.

While Clark and Grey (2010) argue an emphasis on the relational aspects of teaching indicates it is more than child minding and not confined to subject knowledge transmission, the opposite can also apply. When teachers place disproportionate value on being relational and other social competencies over other aspects of teaching, subject knowledge can be de-valued and they can be drawn into talking about early childhood teaching as an occupation which requires little more than 'natural' communication and relational skills – skills strongly tied to essentialised maternal discourses. Care is valued disproportionately over education.

Any additional responsibility for current teachers to 'pick up' the teaching of subject knowledge, as identified by Bill (excerpt 6.21), would potentially become problematic as it relies on individual teachers within early childhood centres to both have subject knowledge and to know how to integrate this knowledge into the curriculum. Strong subject knowledge is not hugely evident in, or even valued by the sector (Hedges & Cullen, 2005a); and has not come through strongly in this research. This lack of subject knowledge currently in the sector may then worsen should the sector hold this responsibility. Passing on any knowledge that is held also requires current teachers to know how to support beginning teachers to gain and use this knowledge, something they are not necessarily equipped to do.

Social competence for children

The ambivalence towards intentionally and actively teaching children subject knowledge is in stark contrast to the active and intentional role implied by participants in relation to supporting children to gain social competence. Teachers' curriculum decisions are driven by their values (Spodek, 1988); in this case the value they placed on the socialisation of children made this area of the curriculum a priority. Social competence, in the form of 'niceness' and self-regulation, were attributes highlighted in participants' description of a 'good' teacher. These attributes were also common goals for children.

There was a strong emphasis in discussions about the development of socially competent children. This emphasis meant learning about relationships, and how to be in them, appeared to be prioritised over learning within or through such relationships. One example of this is Gudrun's response to the question "what is the purpose of ECE?"

Excerpt 6.24:

1. Gudrun (EC): you work with them with their social skills so that they have that ability, how to work out conflict,
2. it's not about specific skill sets, except maybe social skill sets...
3. Early childhood's about supporting them to go out into the world... with a skill set that helps them further that.
4. Cause it's not really academic learning

Gudrun implied active and intentional teaching of social competencies, in particular, is an important role of the teacher (line 1). She is less emphatic about any academic purpose ECE may have (line 4), again prioritising the socialisation domain of educational purpose rather than the qualification (Biesta, 2015). This is consistent with Meade's study of over 20 years ago. Meade (1995) found student teachers were more likely to intervene in relation to social learning than with subject knowledge, subsequently missing opportunities for language and cognitive extension. It appears this has not changed. Lorna was even more direct than Gudrun about the teacher actively teaching social competence when she stated "We **are teaching** kindness, patience, love and caring".

One teacher did discuss teaching through relationships, as well as about, although again her priority was on socialisation. The instillation of empathy had become very important to her following negative news stories at that time.

Excerpt 6.26:

1. Betty (K): I want to help children learn about empathy...
2. It's about slowing down and focusing on relationships...
3. but also relationships between children,
4. stopping and having those conversations;
5. feelings, and how I feel, and that kind of thing.

Betty highlighted her belief that the role of the teacher is to facilitate relationships between children (line 3), supporting them to develop social competence through expressing their feelings to others.

The use of the term 'focus' (line 2) is interesting as it highlights the priority 'on' (or about) relationships. The word focus suggests a close-up, concentrated view and organised and efficient action (Ball, 2013). As argued earlier, people learn through, in and about relationships. While helping children to develop the social skills to get along with others, particularly those different from themselves, will have a significant impact on their lives (Siraj-Blatchford, 2001), having a solely social competence focus on relationships has the potential to limit the children's learning to learning 'about' relationships. It also does not recognise the emphasis in *Te Whāriki* on "the critical role of socially and culturally mediated learning and of reciprocal and responsive relationships for children with people, places, and things. Children learn **through** collaboration with adults and peers, through guided participation and observation of others" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9, emphasis added).

In contrast, learning experiences designed to capture and extend on children's interests, together with sustained shared conversations that grow children's working theories and subject knowledge, provide opportunities to support children to develop social competencies, and dispositions for learning, alongside 'academic' understanding (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). When teachers share such experiences with children, working alongside them in dynamic and interactive ways to sensitively scaffold and build their understanding, children have the opportunity to learn **through** relationships (Smith, 1996) as well as about them. Simply changing the focus would broaden the curriculum offered to children and position them as competent and capable, able to engage with complex thinking while learning to learn alongside, with and about others.

An emphasis on developing social competence in children can also lead to an expectation of the 'good' teacher prioritising behaviour management. Participants' responses to my initial question about what makes a good teacher, outlined personal attributes and social competencies, including being 'nice'. However, niceness was not listed in descriptions of the 'great' teachers they had

worked with. More commonly these teachers were categorised as ‘firm but fair’, consistent with Stonehouse’s (1989) image of the stern but loving teacher, devoted to socialising children. One example of this was Gudrun’s description of a teacher she admired:

Excerpt 6.25:

1. Gudrun (EC): She was really firm...
2. She had a passion for behaviour management...
3. She was always very clear in how she dealt with the children.

Gudrun was not alone in her appreciation of ‘firm but fair’. Surprisingly, due to the perceived ‘culture of niceness’ in ECE, or perhaps in resistance to it, other participants also identified these traits admirable in a teacher. By being linked to ‘firmness’, the notion of fairness expressed by participants appeared to be specifically in relation to managing children’s behaviour, thus supporting them to become socially competent.

Teachers need to move beyond such an overarching focus on socialisation. Smith argued that “[e]ducare is provided in caring, responsive social contexts where adult-child and child-child interactions and opportunities for play and exploration promote children’s social **and intellectual** development” (Smith, 1996, emphasis added). It appears however, her vision is not always fully realised and teachers are still prioritising children’s social competence over other areas of their development including intellectual and subject knowledge.

Parental aspirations

Perhaps justifying their own (over) emphasis on socialisation, participants expressed a belief parents are also mostly concerned with children developing social competence through their experiences in ECE, particularly when the child is younger, or is an only child. This following example from Dawn sums this sentiment up:

Excerpt 6.26:

1. Dawn (EC, M): From a parent's perspective, they all want their children to get along well and learn how to negotiate and turn-take and all of that kind of thing.
2. And particularly in a one-child family, they're not going to get that unless they go to a centre.

Again, this comment was made in the group discussion about the purpose of ECE. Dawn has used the presupposition "they all want..." in this excerpt to generalise about the universal parent. Presuppositions make truth claims, and it is through these "that discourses demonstrate their inevitable conservatism, their investment in particular versions of meaning and their hostility to change" (Weedon, 1987, p. 131).

Teachers have tended to treat parents as a homogeneous group when, in reality, parents have different needs, backgrounds and values (Greenfield, 2012). Thomas (2012) argues that serving the needs of parents, as a unified group, is a normative construct in ECE with the associated expectation of 'partnership with parents' involving the teacher having, and exercising expertise in their relationships with parents. Dawn's generalisation about parents reinforces her position that teachers should focus their expertise in children's development of social competence.

Through the presupposition "they're not going to get that unless...", Dawn has also implied universal truths around the experiences of only children. Her lack of tentativeness demonstrates both a confidence in other group members agreeing with her and the dominance of these discourses. The perceived importance of ECE providing socialisation for only children was a common theme, sometimes drawing on participants' own experiences growing up:

Excerpt 6.27:

1. Bill (EC, M, O): The children who come to our centre, they get to come into another whānau grouping...
2. Our whānau is created from a lot of children who are single siblings, sole siblings.
3. They get all the stuff that I got as part of a big family

Bill has demonstrated his underlying belief that children ‘need’ siblings in order to develop strong social competencies. He particularly valued his upbringing in this regard (line 3) and believes all children should have the opportunity to learn through engagement in a family, even if this family is not related by blood, seeing this provision of family as a key purpose of ECE.

Even in relation to infants, participants perceived developing social competence was high on the agenda for parents:

Excerpt 6.28:

1. Jay (EC, HT): I think in under twos, parents just want their baby to be loved and cared for.
2. Kay (EC): And possibly gain some good social skills
3. Dawn (EC, M): Confidence and social skills
4. Kay: With others in small group play

This perceived parental aspiration was considered unproblematic by participants as it, again, reinforced their own beliefs in the importance of social competence and their sense of themselves as socially competent teachers.

Unlike the integration of Māori language and culture (see Chapter Nine), and due to the alignment of teaching to mothering, social competence is an area of the curriculum where teachers feel confident in their expertise. Therefore, they are more likely to see engagement with parents on this issue as an opportunity to adopt the expert parent position. Megan provided an example of this from her practice.

Excerpt 6.29:

1. Megan (K, HT): I had a parent once tell me that she didn’t like the word ‘angry’.
2. I said “well your children actually need to learn language like that word. You can call it grumpy or cross or whatever, but they need to be able to express it appropriately”

Consistent with the prioritisation of socialisation over academic learning, participants were also confident in their responses when parents expressed

aspirations in relation to subject knowledge like mathematics and literacy, particularly in relation to preparation for school. Reinforced by a strong regime of truth, “we don’t prepare children for school”, participants were more likely to ‘push back’ rather than engage with this particular parental aspiration. An example of this comes from Kate:

Excerpt 6.30:

1. Kate (K, HT): We give them skills that are going to enable them to experience success when they go on to school,
2. so they are able to sit, they are able to follow instructions, they know what holding a pencil is and those sorts of things.
3. But we certainly don’t prepare them for school.

This excerpt demonstrates the contradictory nature of discourse and binary thinking (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). Almost all of the skills Kate is referring to are social competencies she believes children will need to behave appropriately in a primary classroom setting, including being able to sit ‘on the mat’ and the ability to ‘follow instructions’ (line 2), even though she is adamant about ‘not’ preparing children for school. This, again, reflects the importance teachers place on the development of social competence (and behavioural compliance) over academic skills. It may also be an example of the ‘smugness’ of teachers (Stonehouse, 1989), illustrated in the use of the word ‘certainly’, a condescension towards people who don’t have the knowledge they have – in this case, parents.

Consistent with the dominance of this regime of truth, only one participant was explicit about the role of ECE to support ongoing educational success:

Excerpt 6.31:

1. Sally (EC, M): I see early childhood education is a foundation for education and the development in children.
2. So if the foundation is strong,
3. then primary and high school will be easier for them.

These statements received no response from the other participants in this group and the discussion quickly moved on. This silence potentially indicated disagreement, or discomfort in what she was saying. MacNaughton (2005) argues regimes of truth are evidence of the domination of one truth over others, causing them to become marginalised and/or silenced. Sally's 'truth' of ECE preparing children to do well at school appeared to be marginalised in this context. Influencing Sally's perspective is likely to be her previous role as a high school science teacher, having personally experienced the impact a strong educational foundation can make for students at that level.

The regime of truth around not preparing children for school could be problematic. While the purpose of ECE is not solely on preparing children to take the next step in their educational journey, teachers do children a dis-service if they do not work to ensure children develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions they need to transition into a schooling environment with as little trauma as possible. Mitchell et al. (2008), in their literature review on the outcomes of ECE, found consistent evidence that participation in ECE is associated with gains in mathematics, literacy, school achievement and school readiness, amongst other positive impacts. These gains are all related to ongoing educational success and should be recognised and promoted while the child is in ECE.

While teachers should always be supporting children to make the most of 'being' in the now, there is also an obligation for teachers to consider what the child is 'becoming'. Neglecting the next steps for the child may also lead to instances where teachers do not identify areas where the child may need additional support – focusing only on the child's current interests (and social competencies) rather than considering how these interests can be used to progress the child's learning in other areas.

The rhetoric about 'not preparing children for school' has become another common-sense assumption that is uncritically accepted by most teachers but is both contradictory and sometimes self-defeating. Arguably, part of the purpose of ECE is to support children's holistic learning to ensure they have what they

need to be successful learners and citizens. Ensuring they have the tools to engage meaningfully with the compulsory education sector is part of this.

While most participants resisted the notion that ECE prepares children for school, they also demonstrated a regime of truth 'ECE prepares children for life'. Unfortunately, many appeared to ignore the fact attendance at school is a significant part of a child's early life. The following excerpt illustrates that the 'preparation for life' regime was used to justify the emphasis on developing children's social competence:

Excerpt 6.32:

1. Sam (EC): For me it's more about preparing children for life...
2. It's all about emotional well-being.
3. That they are going to be able to cope in the world and do well.

Conclusion

It is important to understand why the focus on social competence is so dominant and what factors 'hold' it in place. Giroux (1988) argued that historically specific practices of moral and social regulation, like an over-emphasis on social competence, are produced when knowledge, discourse and power intersect. Participants' responses and practices represent a particular politics of experience, shaped by essentialist maternal discourses that position the teacher as substitute-mother.

While the gendered and maternal genesis of ECE has been a prime influencer in the development of this discourse – there are also contemporary influences that reinforce its dominance. The emphasis on social competence has likely been reinforced through the structure of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996 & 2017). This document is made up of five strands: wellbeing, belonging, contribution, communication and exploration. The first three strands emphasise these 'soft' skills while most other areas identified as important for children to learn are compacted into the last two. Meade (1995) argued the first four derive from a developmental perspective with only the fifth, exploration, having more to do with an educational perspective. By over-emphasising social competence,

the participants were resisting the increasing emphasis on education from government and subsequently shaping discourses of education.

Te Whāriki has also been criticised for a lack of coverage of subject knowledge (McLachlan & Arrow, 2015). Similarly, while the assessment framework developed to support the implementation of *Te Whāriki (Kei Tua o te Pae*, Ministry of Education, 2005-2009) asserts that the development of higher mental functions in children depends on scaffolding by adults and more capable peers, examples of children engaged in, for example, sophisticated literacy practices are overlooked in the teachers' interpretations, where the focus tends to emphasise dispositions such as collaboration and exploration (Nuttall, 2005a).

The socialisation purpose of education can be a double-edged sword. While it can set children up with the skills and attitudes to engage successfully with others in society, socialisation can also work to reproduce existing hegemonic social structures and inequalities which impact either positively or negatively on the child's identity development (subjectification) (Biesta, 2015). If the definition of social competence in ECE mirrors white, middle-class values, children from other backgrounds may be negatively impacted.

While Mitchell et al. (2008) identified the importance of high-quality staff-child interaction and the provision of a supportive environment in relation to children making gains from ECE, they also highlighted other factors that contribute. One of these factors is services having "a focus on educational aims" (p. 3). This highlights that a focus on social competence in teachers and children, while important, is not enough to realise the full potential of what ECE can offer children and their families.

Unfortunately, the reduction in qualification requirements from the aim of 100 percent, to only legislating 50 percent, may also have perpetuated the view teachers do not have to attend to academic engagement in ECE (Delaune, 2019), reinforcing the socialisation focus. Participants' ambivalence about the need for teachers to hold qualifications is discussed more fully in the next chapter which introduces another dominant discourse with the potential to limit ECE quality.

Chapter Seven: “We have to prove that we’re worth having that title as teacher”: Neo-liberal Discourses

Introduction

Another dominant discourse shaping participants was that of the teacher as competent or effective technician, which gained dominance with the rise of neo-liberal thought. This discourse requires ‘good’ teachers to gain an “assemblage of competencies” (Connell, 2009a, p. 217) associated with a market-orientated society, linked to measurable outcomes and a defined 'best practice' that can be instituted and audited from above. Teachers need to have curriculum knowledge and technical skills but intelligent reflection is not required. As such, Moss (2008) argues “[t]his paradigm calls for technicians trained in right answers, not professionals trained to reflect and question” (p. 123)

The neo-liberal adoption of “a market model for ‘childcare’, delivered overwhelmingly by private, for-profit providers and premised on parental fees” (Moss, 2008, p. 123), cannot ‘afford’ the cost of a well-educated and well-paid workforce. ECE services have become producers and businesses (Dahlberg et al., 1999) requiring teachers to be accountable for delivering pre-specified measurable outcomes (Moss, 2006).

Neo-liberal discourses gained dominance in governmental education policy due to a belief the education of young children can contribute to the achievement of economic and social goals. Neo-liberal discourses portray ECE as having immediate benefits to parents, who can increase their economic activity, and longer-term benefits to society when an individual’s potential is ‘maximised’ (Stover, 2010).

This chapter explores how neo-liberal discourses have shaped and are being shaped by participants in this study, particularly in relation to their responses to increased accountabilities, workload intensification, professionalism and performativity. It argues that discourses of business have reinforced maternal discourses’ lack of value in teacher education and qualifications, focusing on observed ‘products’ of teaching rather than ‘process’. In addition, the positioning of parents as clients and children as an economic resources is discussed.

Illustrating the dominance of these discourses, most participants accepted my neo-liberal research question (see Chapter One) at face value, answering without challenge. One participant, however, struggled with the terminology selected. The following was her response at my attempt to get a wider range of responses from participants as to what makes a ‘good’ teacher; responses that had originally been limited to relational and affective qualities.

Excerpt 7.1:

1. Interviewer: What are core teaching skills that they need?
2. Christine (K, HT): Skills,
3. I don’t know what, skills and knowledge, they always blend in. They intermingle really.
4. I mean you’ve got to be knowledgeable about your curriculum,
5. [and] have an interest in the different sorts of theories that make up that curriculum.
6. So you should have quite a complete picture in your mind about what that looks like for you.
7. Don’t know if that’s a skill or a knowledge.
8. It’s probably more of a knowledge isn’t it?

Christine appeared to be more concerned about whether having knowledge of the curriculum and the theories that underpin it is a knowledge or a skill (lines 7-8) than she was about the quality/ies she was describing. This may be due to her wanting to provide the ‘correct’ answer to the question. It may also have been subtle resistance to the neo-liberal emphasis on teachers having an assemblage of measurable skills and competencies. Interestingly, ‘scaffolding’ was the only teaching ‘skill’ identified in response to this question with the conversation returning very quickly to the importance of relationships, not as a means to support children’s learning but in their own right (see Chapter Six).

Increased accountability

Neo-liberal policies first appeared in ECE in the late 1960s when ECE began to be seen as “a testing site for possibilities of intervention and investment” (May, 2009, p. 8), with the lofty aim of overcoming oppression and inequity in society.

Initially driven by developmental psychology, ECE has been seen as ameliorating social disorders in order to support countries to compete economically in a globalised and marketised world (Moss, 2006). To understand the economic and social possibilities and impacts of ECE, however, evidence was required. This requirement led to increased importance given to child observations and assessment.

One of the hallmarks of neo-liberal discourses in education is a lack of trust in teachers, also leading to increased accountability and monitoring (Connell, 2009a), in particular, bureaucratic accountability rather than democratic (Biesta, 2015). By the late 1990s, the culture of audit and accountability, adopted from business, meant teachers were using these child observations to “discern measurable outcomes of learning in the minutiae of children’s daily activities” (May, 2009, p. 9). It was in this climate of calls for greater teacher accountability for children’s outcomes that *Te Whāriki* was developed. Alongside *Te Whāriki*, other systems of accountability were introduced including new regulations for ECE and the introduction of charters¹⁹ (Stover, 2010).

While accountability in education is not necessarily a bad thing, it can result in negative effects, primarily when framed through neo-liberal discourses as teachers being ‘held to account’ (Lingard, 2017). Participants who had worked in ECE before the main inculcation of neo-liberal thinking reflected on the changes which introduced ‘measures’ to hold teachers to account and closely monitor their performance. Kate considered the impact on the kindergarten teachers in her association:

Excerpt 7.2:

1. Kate (K, HT): In the 90s there was a change.
2. I remember Janet²⁰ arriving and coming through as a senior services manager...
3. She brought about stickies²¹ and documenting children’s learning.

¹⁹ Charters were formal agreements between ECE services and the Ministry of Education required for services to receive government funding. They contained commitments as to how the service was going to meet the required *Desirable Objectives and Practices*.

²⁰ pseudonym

²¹ ‘Stickies’ refers to the Post It notes™ often used to support centre programme planning.

4. There was a shift in accountability and documentation.
5. There were people that coped with that and were flexible with the times.
6. There were others that went “nope, this is not what being a teacher is about” and they made the decision to leave.

The 1990s was a significant time in New Zealand ECE following the development of the Education Act 1989 and the subsequent official integration of care and education (Dalli, 2008). This decade saw the expansion of centre licensing, the introduction of the *Desirable Objectives and Practices* which formed services' 'charters', the development of *Te Whāriki* and the introduction of 'Learning Stories', structured learning narratives designed to assess valued learning in a way that complements the sociocultural philosophies and values of *Te Whāriki* (Carr, 2001).

It is primarily the introduction of narrative assessment Kate is referring to in this excerpt (line 3). For many teachers, this was a move away from assessing children's competence in discrete knowledge and skills (for example, holding a pencil and cutting with scissors), with reference to expected ages and stages, to a more holistic, and subsequently more complex view of children's learning (Farquhar & Fler, 2007).

Shaped by neo-liberal discourses which emphasise the necessity of increased accountability for individuals, and reinforcing participants' emphasis on teachers being flexible and self-managing (see Chapter Five), Kate, through her use of the phrases 'coped with that', and 'were flexible with the times' (line 5) appeared to imply that teachers who chose to continue teaching at this point were somehow stronger than those who left.

Neo-liberal focus on individual teachers has led to greater responsibility resting on their shoulders and a reduction in emphasis on the structures and systems that support high-quality education. This focus is perhaps best summed up in the *Starting Well* report (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012), commissioned by the Lien Foundation. It states “[a]n inspirational teacher can make a substantial difference to a child, almost regardless of the quality of the environment and resources at hand” (p. 25).

Professionalism and performativity

In this study, neo-liberal discourses in relation to accountability were most dominant when the professionalisation of the ECE sector was being discussed. While no specific questions were asked of participants in relation to 'being professional', the discourse of professionalism was woven into all groups. Professionalism in ECE is considered "a widely contested and variously constructed term" (Osgood, 2012, p. 1) and this study provides evidence of teachers negotiating what being a professional teacher means; expressing competing and contradictory ideas as they discussed qualifications, accountabilities and status.

Foregrounding neo-liberal, 'technicist' approaches, however, participants most often deemed themselves to be 'professional' when 'performing', and being judged against, externally defined competences (Osgood, 2010). Such performances serve as measures of productivity, or displays of 'quality', that are standardised, qualified and compared. This mode of regulation is known as performativity (Ball, 2007). Performing as professional, therefore, included completing documentation accountability requirements, predominantly assessment documentation on children. In this example, Jay and Jo are discussing the impact of expectations on teachers to assess children's learning.

Excerpt 7.3:

1. Jay (EC, HT): We are changing as a profession. We're becoming more professional.
2. And with that, is an expectation that you are actually teaching.
3. Jo (K): We got sick of being told we weren't teachers.
4. We needed to prove it...
5. Jay: We have to prove that we're worth having that title as teacher...
6. and that we deserve our pay.

It appeared Jay had always regarded teaching as a profession (line 1) however her concept of a profession was changing to focus more on being accountable (line 5). Rather than portraying the process of completing assessment documentation as being beneficial for children's learning, both participants portray it as an externally imposed requirement to 'prove' (lines 4-5) their

professionalism; specifically, that they are worthy of the title of teacher (the same as their compulsory sector colleagues) and are meeting 'obligations'.

While participants clearly articulated a belief that the completion of documentation provides proof of teachers' performance, they were rarely specific about to whom this proof needs to be provided. It could have been to a range of stakeholders including society, management, parents, external authority bodies, or even to provide proof to themselves.

Participants' need to provide proof appears to have been shaped by neo-liberalism's implicit suspicion and distrust of professions who operate in a non-competitive way – in particular teachers (Connell, 2009a), leaving them feeling as if they continuously need to prove their worth. Teachers have reduced status in a neo-liberal results-driven culture and feel the knowledge they hold is no longer valued (Kilderry, 2015b). Trying to gain status back, at other times in the interview, Jay linked the assessment of children's learning to being recognised as a 'professional teacher' as opposed to other conceptions of teachers, for example, 'glorified babysitter'.

Internationally, the neo-liberal distrust of teachers manifested itself in the establishment of teacher registration institutions, for example the New Zealand Teacher Registration Board²². These institutions created lists of auditable competencies for teachers to meet. (Connell, 2009a). In New Zealand, this audit culture also led to the creation of the Education Review Office (ERO), an external body which regularly monitors, evaluates and publicly reports on the performance of early childhood services and schools.

Linked to authority discourses, the provision of 'proof' of practice has subsequently become a normalised part of the teacher's role, as this study demonstrates. Participants both claimed, and were claimed by, authority in ways that positioned them as teachers (Warren, 2014). The authorities in this study reflected the requirements of New Zealand's educational context around regulations, teacher registration and external evaluation.

²² The teacher registration body in New Zealand which has also been subsequently known as the Teachers Council, Education Council and currently Teaching Council.

Normalisation of 'proof providing' is likely to have occurred through a process known as 'self-surveillance'; a process introduced by Foucault. Foucault theorised "that the need to control large populations of people resulted in the utilization of surveillance processes in order to regulate and normalize people's behaviour" (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006, p. 37). The surveillance processes used to control teachers' behaviour include the introduction of ERO and teacher registration. Similar to Ofsted, in the United Kingdom, ERO has become the embodiment of accountability and the audit culture (Osgood, 2010) in New Zealand.

The accountability generated through surveillance by external agencies and the subsequent perceived importance of documentation in 'proving' their performance was a common discussion amongst participants. Kate attributed the official documentation created once ECE services have 'proven' themselves to ERO as raising societal perceptions of teachers. In this example, she discusses the impact of this 'official' documentation on the perceptions of her father:

Excerpt 7.4:

1. Kate (K, HT): His interpretation of what I did changed when I started sharing documentation with him...
2. ERO reports.
3. It added some substantiability [sic]... mana²³ behind what I was doing.
4. That's how my profession gained recognition in my father's eyes.

Kate had spoken earlier about her parents' disappointment when she chose to change her career path from health professional to kindergarten teacher. In this excerpt, the presence of 'official' documentation helped her parents to appreciate this change of direction, and recognise teaching as a valid and 'acceptable' career choice for their daughter. As such, Kate has 'proven' her performance as a teacher (Kilderry, 2015b), with the authority to make this determination residing with ERO. While these documents are likely to reflect what Kate had been expressing all along, their official status appears to have provided the key to her parents' acceptance.

²³ Māori word loosely translated as prestige or authority

Throughout this study, authority discourses were positioned as both legitimising and unjust (Osgood, 2010). In this example, authority discourses legitimised Kate's career change to teaching. Similarly, teacher standards documents have also outlined the complex work teachers do and provide a public definition of professionalism, which has been welcomed by many teachers (Connell, 2009a).

With responses like Kate experienced, it is not surprising teachers' increased accountability, under a neo-liberal agenda, was considered by many participants to be part of gaining professional status within society. Positive effects of such performativity do include the acknowledgement and valuing of teachers work (Kilderry, 2015b). As such, the professionalism agenda is attractive to the early childhood sector as it is seen as the key to a strengthened labour market position and increased respect for teachers (Osgood, 2010). Apple (1983), however warns against mis-recognising increased control, 'technicisation' and intensity in teaching as increased professionalism.

Workload intensification

The expectation placed on teachers to complete a range of documentation was also considered by some participants to have intensified teachers' workloads. There was a regime of truth woven into participants' discussions about their role of 'things aren't as good as they used to be'. This regime was particularly woven into discussions on assessing children's learning. Jo, in particular, resisted the notion that narrative assessment is important to support children's learning:

Excerpt 7.5:

1. Jo (K): I asked teachers that were doing [assessment] before narratives came in...
2. "do you think those children missed out?"...
3. It's so much now about articulating what we do and children's learning...
4. Were those children back then, would you consider they didn't get the best they could have got?
5. Cause I wouldn't.

Jo was attempting to ascertain from other participants whether increased requirements to complete assessment documentation has actually improved

anything for children (line 4). Other participants deflected this question at the time, returning to the issue of proving their worth through the completion of documentation rather than considering the impacts this documentation can have on children and their learning. Jo therefore revisits these concerns again later in the discussion after being asked whether teachers have changed their practice as a result of the introduction of sociocultural theories:

Excerpt 7.6:

1. Jo (K): I think it has to an extent...
2. because you've now got to do your narratives.
3. You've got to concentrate on those children that are yours a bit more...
4. and that doesn't work that way,
5. so I'm always struggling.
6. And you may be doing something and enjoying it and "oh, I better get the camera because blah blah's there" ...
7. It's taken a bit of the joy out of it...
8. Interviewer: Has it changed how you teach?
9. Jo: Sometimes I think you're just having a great time and then I have to articulate it differently so they're not just having a great time, they're doing this while they do that...
10. Dawn (EC, HT): So are you saying that it's taking you away as a teacher?...
11. Jo: No, but sometimes I'd just run off and go somewhere else but I'm thinking "oh I haven't got a story on that child yet and it's getting to the end of the term so I'm gonna have to hang out with that one for a bit and take some photos"
12. and for me it's arbitrary

While regulatory discourses, like requiring assessment documentation to be completed, claim to be about quality, the internalisation of this particular regulatory discourse appeared to impinge on Jo's perception of her professional autonomy and freedom, potentially impacting on her passion for teaching (Cumming & Sumsion, 2014). This is demonstrated in her comments about the content (line 9) and process (line 11) of completing narrative assessment.

Completing such documentation not only makes teacher accountability visible, it also constructs teaching practice in particular ways (Kilderry, 2015b). In this case, the practice that has constructed in many early childhood services has been to 'assign' children to teachers (line 3); making it that particular teacher's responsibility to collect assessment information on that group of children rather than a collective responsibility of all teachers. For Jo, this has changed the way she has worked with all children in the past. She now feels obliged to focus particularly on 'her' assigned children and meet the centre's policy requirements in relation to the number of narrative assessments written about each child, regardless of whether the teacher is capturing a 'critical incident' (Carr, 2001) of learning for that child or not. Shaped by authority discourses, teachers, like Jo, will fulfil tasks to account for their practice, even when they don't agree with them (Kilderry, 2015b).

One of Jo's main concerns appears to be the prioritisation of quantity over quality. Apple (1983) argued one of the most significant impacts of workload intensification is reduction in quality, in both product and process, with focus being on completion of tasks. Like teachers in the post-war era, for Jo, "day-to-day survival, rather than grand theory" appeared to be her main preoccupation (Middleton & May, 1997, p. 108). This particular practice of completing a Learning Story because it is that child's turn, while common and considered part of teachers' professional obligations, is inconsistent with the intent of Learning Stories to provide a credit-based and cumulative series of qualitative 'snapshots' of 'critical incidents' where children are demonstrating dispositions for learning (Carr, 2001). The emphasis for quantity over quality is also inconsistent with the intent of formative assessment however some participants appeared unable to resist this pressure.

Despite recognising the role of documentation in raising the status of teachers, other participants also expressed how meeting these requirements added to the intensity of their work:

Excerpt 7.7:

1. Lorna (EC): I think it's stressful for all teachers,
2. meeting the expectations in terms of ERO ...

3. there's so much paperwork you've got to do,
4. and you know you're always being judged.

Building on the notion of surveillance and the perceived requirement to prove their worth, Lorna is expressing a feeling of being judged (line 5). While she has mentioned ERO in particular (line 2), the sense from this excerpt is judgement goes beyond external evaluators. The use of the word 'always' would seem to indicate the judgement is more constant and perhaps includes judgement from parents, managers, employers and colleagues. Lorna and Jo both appeared to be suffering from performative anxiety (Kilderry, 2015b), perceiving that outside expectations are impacting on the way they do her work.

Some participants also expressed a sense of pressure about getting documentation 'right' in order to avoid judgment. This pressure, as well as increased levels of required documentation, and the introduction of digital tools, highlighted the importance of teachers having strong technical writing and computer skills. One example of this came from Kate, responding to a challenge I put to this group to move beyond relational qualities:

Excerpt 7.8:

1. Kate (K, HT): We need to be able to read and write,
2. be able to spell check,
3. know how to operate a computer programme and do all those sorts of things...
4. Because the requirement of the job is such that the documentation just continues to increase.

This sense of pressure also led to concern about the way documentation completed by some teachers reflects on others in the team, particularly when judged by external authorities and/or parents. Highlighting the dominance of neo-liberal discourses, pedagogical documentation was predominantly positioned as a *product*, completed for external purposes to meet accountability requirements, rather than a *process* of assessment for learning which ultimately benefits children and their families.

There was also a strong sense amongst participants that teachers' workloads have intensified due to the perceived 'push' for professionalism demonstrated by increased accountabilities. For Bill, this intensification has particularly impacted on those in leadership roles:

Excerpt 7.9:

1. Bill (EC, M, O): there is a big issue about the number of teachers... giving up their head teacher's [roles] and going relieving.
2. It's a very common trend.
3. Yeah, and you can understand why.
4. No one trained to do the work that we do now.

Responding to Jo's announcement she had recently resigned from her role as a kindergarten head teacher, Bill linked Jo's resignation to the nature and quantity of work teachers in leadership roles are required to fulfil. Apple (1983) argues intensification erodes teachers' work privileges in both trivial and complex ways. This erosion influences teachers' job satisfaction, and its impact on time-poor and tired teachers was threaded through participant responses. Bill, as a centre owner and manager, was particularly aware of the pressures on his staff:

Excerpt 7.10:

1. Bill (EC, M, O): People are tired, people are worn down...
2. I have to be very careful as a leader to ensure that, if I'm going to keep them [after hours for a staff meeting] it's got to be worthwhile...

Despite these challenges, participants, having been shaped by neo-liberal discourses, mostly accepted increased accountability for teachers without challenge. Lorna even compared it favourably to increased accountability in the compulsory education sector:

Excerpt 7.11:

1. Lorna (EC): the freedom thing was the biggest thing for me...
2. [ECE] was so different to the straight path that you have to travel on primary,

3. “tick this box, tick this box. You do this, this and this and then that’s what you do”.
4. And I was like, “what if I feel like doing something else?”
5. And to be able to actually go and do it

Lorna was originally a primary school teacher who moved to ECE after being unable to secure a role in a primary school. After working in ECE for a period of time, she chose to complete an early childhood teaching qualification. Her primary rationale for making the shift to early childhood was because it was more ‘fun’ – “jumping around and being an idiot whenever you feel like it” and it provided her with relatively more ‘freedom’ as a teacher.

In the early 80s, Apple (1983) warned about changes to the discourse around teaching in the compulsory sector brought about by neo-liberal ideologies:

teachers have been... faced more and more with the prospect of being deskilled because of the encroachment of technical control procedures into the curriculum in schools. The integration of management systems, reductive behaviourally based curricula, pre-specified teaching procedures and student responses, and pre- and post-testing was leading to a loss of control and a separation of conception from execution (p. 53).

It seems in some ways ECE has been protected from the changes he posited, perhaps due to its non-compulsory nature, and the lower status it had in society at that time. Lorna appeared to have felt constrained within a primary school environment, possibly due to the reductive curriculum and pre-specified teaching procedures Apple warns against. After relieving in ECE, Lorna found she had the freedom to create her own learning experiences (line 5).

While *Te Whāriki* was written partly as a response to neo-liberal calls for greater accountability, it is also a symbol of resistance to these very discourses through its focus on the value of community in a time of heightened individualism (Delaune, 2019). The development and universal acceptance of *Te Whāriki*, and the non-prescriptive way it has been written has also played a major role in protecting early childhood teaching from becoming too technicist. *Te Whāriki* avoids the neo-liberal notions of knowledge transmission, linear progression and

predefined outcomes (Moss, 2006). It has protected ECE from “the inroads of the national school curriculum” (Middleton & May, 1997, p. 331). Despite this, some participants also reported expecting the ‘push-down’ from what is happening for their primary colleagues, concerned ECE may move in the same direction.

Resisting assessment for accountability

As outlined earlier, meeting documentation requirements generally went without challenge from participants, however there was a little resistance expressed in relation to teachers being required to ‘prove’ their performance:

Excerpt 7.12:

1. Bill (EC, M, O): The whole crap coming with the documentation’s all about accountability on teachers.
2. I don’t think we need to prove anything.
3. I think it’s about government trying to tie us down.

Bill articulated a belief that increased documentation requirements are about teacher accountability rather than the provision of higher quality education and care for children (line 1). Unlike participants discussed earlier, he was specific in his identification of who the ‘enemy’ is, identifying the government as the antagonist (line 3). Interestingly, Bill appears to contradict himself in relation to the benefits of documentation later in the conversation:

Excerpt 7.13:

1. Bill (EC, M, O): to be honest, I think the kids get a better deal now...
2. Certainly, staff are pulled away from interaction with children because they have the documentation demands and there’s more pressure on workloads and things like that.
3. But there’s more staff now...
4. And I think we’ve moved with technology...
5. Storypark™²⁴ has been the most wonderful thing I’ve ever used...
6. shares really cool things our kids are doing with our parents and their parents who often live in England and Canada.

²⁴ Storypark™ is the brand name of a popular e-portfolio platform used by many ECE services to record children’s learning and communicate with parents.

7. All of a sudden, the world is small...

In this excerpt, Bill talked specifically about assessment documentation, the main documentation requirement identified by participants throughout discussions. This statement was in response to a question asked earlier by Jo; “Were those children back then, would you consider then they didn’t get the best they could have got?” It was obviously a question Bill was reflecting on during discussions.

While Bill acknowledged completing assessment documentation has the potential to intensify teachers’ workloads (line 2), he also posited there are more teachers available to complete this documentation and discussed the benefits of using a digital platform for assessment documentation (lines 5-6). The main benefit Bill identified, however, was around the provision of a record of children’s experiences for parents and wider whānau (line 6) rather than any benefit to the child. While communication with parents is important, it is not the sole, nor primary, purpose of assessment documentation (Carr, 2001).

In contrast, Jay reflected on how the completion of assessment documentation has focused her understanding of infants’ learning:

Excerpt 7.14:

1. Jay (EC, HT): Over the years I’ve become particularly interested in assessment.
2. Partly because I became very interested in learning and what learning looks like when you are talking about a two month, or three-month-old baby.
3. So that drew me to what we were documenting about children,
4. and then I became very passionate about what are we assessing.

By moving beyond the discussion of assessment documentation being purely a product required for accountability purposes, Jay moved beyond neo-liberal discourses and their subsequent positioning of the accountable professional, being shaped by more democratic professionalism discourses (see Chapter Eight).

The contested concept of ‘teacher’

Participants clearly believed meeting accountability requirements was part of what makes teaching a profession. In most definitions, however, being considered a professional also requires individuals to hold a tertiary level qualification (Dalli, 2012). Despite this, the concept of who should, and who shouldn't, be considered a teacher was highly contested, particularly with respect to qualifications. This section discusses the contested nature of this concept and its possible implications.

MacNaughton (2005) posits there are no true meanings for words, only meanings that are “linked, cultural, historical, contradictory and shifting” (p. 90). What each participant brought to their understanding of the concept of ‘teacher’ was based on their own history and context.

The Education Act (1989) outlines the requirements to be met for an individual to become a registered teacher (and therefore be considered a member of the teaching profession). Section 353(c) of this act requires that the individual is recognised by the Teaching Council as “satisfactorily trained to teach”. Subsequently, the Teaching Council have outlined satisfactory training as that offered by an accredited ITE provider that leads to the individual holding a teaching qualification at, at least, level 7 on the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) *Register of Quality Assured Qualifications* (or an equivalent international qualification) (Education Council, n.d.).

Despite this requirement, the term teacher was used consistently by almost all qualified teacher participants in this study when referring to **any** adult working with children in ECE, regardless of whether the adult had a qualification or not. Qualifiers were sometimes used by participants, most frequently ‘trained’ and ‘untrained’, but generally the term teacher was used inclusively. Only one participant, Natalie, used different nouns (untrained ‘reliever’ and untrained ‘person’) to distinguish the unqualified staff from the teachers in the centre. This is likely because she is a kindergarten teacher and kindergarten has a tradition of only employing qualified teachers to work with children (Middleton & May, 1997). Kindergarten teachers, therefore, are more likely to consider (and even assume) qualifications when using the term ‘teacher’.

This differentiation between qualified and unqualified by kindergarten teacher participants was not universal however. When specifically asked whether an unqualified person could actually be considered to be a teacher, the answer, from those in one group who responded, was 'yes'. This group of seven contained two current and one previous kindergarten teachers. One participant was silent however this person was not a kindergarten teacher.

As the interviewer, I wanted participants to consider whether being classified as a 'teacher' required a qualification. These participants, however, appeared to classify anyone who is working with children as a teacher, simply using the qualifiers 'trained' or 'untrained' to differentiate. Building on maternal discourses equating teaching with parenting, this use of nomenclature devalues early childhood teaching, positioning it as a low-level role, requiring little knowledge and few skills.

This section explores the neo-liberal positioning of teachers as competent technicians rather than learned and thoughtful scholars. This positioning also builds on maternal discourses, reinforcing the inclusive use of teacher. In neo-liberal discourse, teachers are not 'trusted' so their practice is measured and monitored through accountability requirements; requirements which value the 'products' of teaching rather than the process. These products include **observed** teacher practice and, as such, can lead to an over-simplification of teaching activity (Moore, 2004), by ignoring the thoughtful decision-making that may underpin this practice.

Following initial analysis of interview data, I initiated a Facebook™ discussion to explore why the word teacher was being used so inclusively. This topic generated more discussion amongst participants than other topics and a range of responses were received. For some, reflecting essentialist maternal discourses, the collective use of the term was about being inclusive to all staff, ensuring nobody feels 'lesser' than others:

Excerpt 7.15:

1. Dawn (EC, M): It comes back to the same old "be nice", "be encouraging", "get along and don't rock the boat" attitude in staff /team dynamics.

2. Maybe its inherent in our natures as teachers,
3. coupled strongly with the realities of trying to provide quality ECE on a shoe string, using untrained "teachers"

The inclusive nature of teachers demonstrated through the 'culture of niceness' may contribute to the use of a singular term to describe all those working in this sector (line 1). This inclination to be inclusive was highlighted in Dalli's (2012) research on professionalism. She argued definitions of professionalism based on structural benchmarks, like qualifications, are problematic for a sector which includes services led by parents, such as playcentre and ngā kōhanga reo²⁵. Arguably, defining 'teachers' using benchmarks like qualifications could be similarly problematic for such a sector. Consistent with maternal discourses, however, Dawn linked the perceived inclination of teachers to be inclusive to their innate 'nature' rather than an ethical decision to include all service types (line 2).

Dawn's contribution also provided an example of how some participants tied the inclusive use of the term 'teacher' to the impact of neo-liberal policies. From their perspective, the term teacher was used as a collective term to market centres; aiming to portray to potential parents that all staff are 'teachers' without having to highlight only a proportion hold a recognised qualification.

Dawn also highlighted the need for ECE services to employ unqualified staff to mitigate financial constraints. Services are no longer incentivised (through funding) to employ more than 80 percent of their staff as qualified teachers. The loss of the 100 percent qualified teacher funding rate occurred following a change of government in 2008 who subsequently discarded the ECE strategic plan and all of its goals, including the goal to have a fully qualified teaching workforce in early childhood by 2012 (Mitchell, 2015), thereby removing such incentives.

In addition, due to a targeted funding model, basic funding rates to most ECE services remained stagnant for nine years, despite the rising cost of living, meaning the amount of funding provided to individual services by government

²⁵ Parent-led language 'nests' where children are immersed in the Māori language and culture.

was effectively reduced. This had the consequence of many centres filling staffing gaps with unqualified staff in order to remain economically viable (Mitchell, 2015). It would appear these staff have also been called ‘teachers’.

The notion of calling all adults who work with children ‘teachers’ is problematic and makes the concept of ‘teacher’ in ECE, without the need for qualifiers, unclear for parents as well as staff. It also potentially undermines the status of qualified teachers working in this area of education. Natalie questioned why the inclusive use of the term ‘teacher’ only occurs in early childhood:

Excerpt 7.16:

1. Natalie (K): I wonder if the voluntary nature of ECE makes it easier for teacher to be used loosely by colleagues.
2. I doubt it would happen in primary or secondary schools.

In referring to the early childhood sector as ‘voluntary’ she is referring to the fact it sits outside the compulsory education (schooling) sector. While strongly encouraged, particularly in relation to its perceived economic benefits (see section on children as economic resource), it is not compulsory in New Zealand for children to attend ECE. From this perspective, the all-inclusive use of the term ‘teacher’ appears to be associated with educational setting.

It may also be due to how maternal discourses have shaped society’s perception of the educational needs of young children (or lack of them) due to their age, and subsequent perceptions about what ‘teaching’ they therefore require, and who is ‘qualified’ to offer this. Dawn considers the prolific use of the term ‘teacher’ beyond the education sector:

Excerpt 7.17:

1. Dawn (EC, M): There is such fluidity in the term teacher,
2. we acknowledge our parents as first teachers...
3. [And] anyone pretty much thinks they can teach a pre-schooler...
4. I wonder if the internet with its “do-it-yourself” teaching ideas, accessible to all, is also adding a dimension of pressure to teachers too,

5. as parents I've noted recently coming in and telling the teacher how to teach.

The points Dawn raised in this excerpt highlight ongoing role confusion between parents and teachers (Katz, 1980). In this situation, however, this confusion has been exacerbated by neo-liberal discourses. In an era of increased accountability, parents have come under pressure to take on pseudo-teacher roles in order to provide the 'best possible' start for their children to ensure their future economic success (Furedi, 2008). Dawn alluded to some tensions between teachers and parents when these roles become confused.

For a sector that has been officially unified in legislation and curriculum, ostensibly having abolished the *education vs care* divide (Dalli, 2008), it is unsurprising that many in teacher-led ECE sector is seeking a universal term for the staff who are working with children, particularly those in education and care services. While in the kindergarten sector the term 'teacher' has consistently been used, reflecting the historical requirement for staff to be qualified, in education and care various nomenclature has been used over the years including childcare worker, carer, educator and educarer, reflecting the historical origins and development of different service types, and professional boundaries that can exist in the sector (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007).

The term *kaiako*²⁶ has been adopted in the 2017 revision of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017a). The introduction of this term received considerable feedback from the sector, many of whom argued "its use conflated non-qualified and qualified **teachers**" (Ministry of Education, 2017b, p. 13, emphasis added). Even in this official Ministry of Education document summarising the feedback, the term teacher is used as a universal descriptor, with the qualifiers "non-qualified" and "qualified", adding 'official' acceptability to its all-inclusive use.

While a discussion about nomenclature may appear to be about semantics; title, and its associated status, underlies the public's view of adults working with children. Nyland and Rockel (2007) argue "discourses are revealed in titles such as caregiver, worker, supervisor or teacher" (p. 77). The ambivalence towards

²⁶ The indigenous (Māori) word for teacher which denotes the reciprocal nature of teaching where the teacher is also the learner.

the use of the title 'teacher' revealed the ongoing dominance of maternal and neo-liberal discourses and is part of the challenge of ECE being recognised as a profession (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007).

As far back as 1989, Stonehouse argued one of the keys to raising the status of ECE is to represent the ECE profession more accurately to people by developing standard terminology for personnel. This is yet to be realised.

The need (or otherwise) for qualifications

The ambivalence with respect to the inclusive use of the term 'teacher' also applied to whether or not participants believed early childhood teachers need to be qualified. These issues are strongly connected; if the term teacher is being used regardless of qualification held, it is implied qualifications are not necessarily required to be a teacher.

There was a wide continuum of responses in relation to the perceived need (or otherwise) for teachers to hold qualifications. The continuum was not only in relation to the perceived need, but also the perceived purpose, of a qualification.

Qualifications for status

In one group of responses, the perceived importance of teachers having recognised qualifications was linked to status and the recognition of teaching as a profession. This emphasis was particularly strong amongst kindergarten teachers and reflects the drive of the "early childhood professionalisation project" (Dalli, 2012, p. 3) for higher qualifications and accountability measures. Kate linked the importance of qualifications to early childhood teachers having the same status and salary as teachers in the compulsory sector.

Excerpt 7.18:

1. Kate (K, HT): We fought really hard for pay parity
2. and there became an acknowledgement of our profession...
3. that sent a message to the wider community and our country that there was value in what we were doing,
4. and now [4 secs silence] the economic climate impacts so much... it's really hard...

5. We've lost 100 percent qualified, dropping to 80 percent qualified so it just devalues, and devalues and devalues.

In the first part of this excerpt, Kate discussed how kindergarten teachers advocated strongly for improved status and salary. She appeared to be referring to the success of a working group set up in 2001 to explore pay parity between kindergarten teachers and their primary colleagues. This working group recommended a phased approach to pay parity implementation which the Labour-led government accepted and introduced from 1 July 2002 (Meade & Podmore, 2002). This work was not continued once National came into power in 2008.

Kate, it appeared that the loss of status she associated with the loss of pay parity has been exacerbated by the decision of her employer, a kindergarten association, to employ unqualified staff in their all-day²⁷ kindergartens to support teachers rather than maintaining the kindergarten's traditional philosophical position of only employing qualified teachers. It is likely this decision was made in response to the decline in 'actual' funding (Mitchell, 2015), discussed earlier. Kate appeared, however, to be more worried about the impact on teacher status from the reduction in qualified teachers than any impact on children's experiences.

There was also some sense that having more qualified teachers would raise the status of the ECE teaching profession from education and care participants, although it was less common. Jay provided one example however:

Excerpt 7.19:

1. Jay (EC, HT): I don't think being trained necessarily makes you a good teacher.
2. And I don't think being untrained necessarily makes you a bad teacher...
3. But when I'm thinking about the profession, and advocating for our profession, in terms of how we get paid,

²⁷ While kindergarten has traditionally been sessional, running one or two sessions of approximately three hours per day, over the last 15-20 years a number of sessional kindergartens have become 'all-day' and now run for the six-hours per day. Changing to all-day lowers the adult:child ratios from 1:15 to 1:10 and requires therefore requires additional staffing including cover for lunch breaks.

4. even how we're seen in society, how we are perceived,
5. then I want fully trained teachers.

In this excerpt, Jay argued having a qualified workforce is important to encourage the raising of salaries (line 3) and societal perceptions (line 4). She does not, however, specifically link the gaining of a qualification to being a 'good' teacher (line 1). As such, Jay gave little recognition in this excerpt that teachers need to be qualified in order to fulfil the complexities of the role. This was reinforced through other participant responses and a regime of truth became apparent; 'teachers don't really need to be qualified'.

Contradictorily, at other times in discussions, Jay spoke passionately about teachers requiring a range of pedagogical knowledge and skills, arguably qualities gained only through teacher education (see Chapter Eight). Her statement about needing qualified teachers specifically to increase the status and salary of teachers, rather than teacher quality, is therefore surprising.

The 'products' of teaching

Neo-liberal discourses position the 'educational economy' in the same way it positions the broader market economy, focusing on end products and performance (Moore, 2004). Shaped by these discourses, key judgements about teachers' abilities were often made by observation of end products. While some participants argued passionately for qualifications to boost professional status, most were less emphatic about the need for qualifications in relation to being a good teacher. Some participants used comparisons between qualified and unqualified individuals to make their point:

Excerpt 7.20:

1. Sally (EC, M): I have come across unqualified teachers who are amazing with children
2. while some of the qualified teachers are not.
3. Education probably plays a little role in... acquiring those skills that we need as teachers...
4. but probably it's not necessary

Sally is explicit about her belief that teacher education is not necessary to create a good teacher (line 4). She goes on to describe a good teacher specifically in relation to the 'products' of teaching:

Excerpt 7.21:

1. Sally (EC, M): what I can see in [unqualified staff] is the real passion for teaching...
2. They're always engaged with the children.
3. They're always setting up activities for children...
4. I've come across qualified staff as well who pretty much sit all day.
5. And, they'll like throw something on the table and that's it.

Consistent with the neo-liberal focus on observable and measurable activity and technical skills, Sally appeared to value the provision of 'activities' (line 3). Both qualified and unqualified staff can appear to be meeting such technical competencies. Spodek (1988) identified many studies of teacher effectiveness have focused on what the teacher does. He posits, however, there is more to teaching than observable actions. Even when appearing to be inactive, teachers may be reflecting on what has happened and thinking about what they want to achieve and why. A teaching qualification is likely to support the quality of this thinking. A teacher who is qualified, knowledgeable and intellectual is likely to have a completely different thought process behind their actions than an unqualified educator who is imitating a behaviour or activity they have previously observed – even if their actions appear to be the same.

The development of teaching standards within a neo-liberal context may also have contributed to the ambivalence around qualifications. The requirement to demonstrate auditable competencies, rather than engage as intellectuals (Connell, 2009a), may have added confusion in a sector which employs both qualified and unqualified staff. Auditable competencies, by their very nature, are able to be observed by the end product. Urban and Dalli (2012), in the *Day in the Life* project found what teachers **did** in interactions with children and adults underpinned their image of themselves as professionals. There was no sense in their research that the thinking behind the actions was important.

As outlined earlier, a neo-liberal market model of ECE cannot 'afford' the cost of a well-educated workforce (Moss, 2008). Reinforcing maternal discourses which position teaching as an extension of 'mothering', thereby not needing qualifications, neo-liberal discourses have shaped many participants' perspectives about the importance of qualifications. If teachers' performance as skilled technicians is measured through the observable 'product' of their practice, rather than the process and thinking behind the creation of this product, then a qualification may not be deemed to be necessary.

In lines 4-5, Sally inferred the qualified teachers she used for comparison lacked energy and motivation. Dawn also identified qualified teachers who appear tired and disinterested and compared them negatively to unqualified staff.

Excerpt 7.22:

1. Dawn (EC, M): I saw a teacher who was tired, disinterested, overworked...
2. and I saw an energised, invigorated, keen to work with children, awesome attitude, untrained

Dawn's use of the word 'overworked' may be telling. Participants indicated elsewhere that staff without qualifications are generally not required to complete the accountability documentation that has intensified teacher workloads. While they did not elaborate on the reasons why, this may be due to the perception that unqualified staff do not have the necessary skills or knowledge to complete such documentation. It may also be an attempt by employers to justify lower remuneration for these staff.

This lack of requirement to complete documentation, however, could facilitate the demonstration and maintenance of the 'passion' referred to by Sally (excerpt 7.21, line 1). Intensification and accountability pressures (Nias, 1997) may be contributing to unfavourable comparisons between qualified and unqualified teachers.

When Dawn and Sally described a 'good' unqualified 'teacher' there was no mention of teacher knowledge, understanding or intentionality, or even ways teachers extend children's learning through conversation, just how they *appeared* to interact with children. In other words, participants valued the

external 'products' of 'teaching' – specifically activities and interactions with children - over the knowledge, thought processes, intellectual work, planning, assessment and evaluation that should underpin practice.

Dawn later acknowledged the completion of accountability documentation requires knowledge and skill:

Excerpt 7.23:

1. Dawn (EC, HT): you almost need to be trained in order to be able to do the [assessment] documentation requirements.
2. And to be able to be provisionally registered, you've got to just about have a degree to do it.

Ironically, Dawn mentioned that to be registered, teachers have "got to just about have a degree to do it". To meet the criteria to become registered, teachers **do** require a qualification at least at level 7 on the NZQA framework, which is the level of a Bachelor's degree.

Beginning to resist neo-liberal shaping and the subsequent importance of product, Nancy reflected on her own experiences of learning what needs to underpin teachers' practice. She discussed how, as a new student teacher, she used to believe the practical aspects of the role were more important than the theoretical:

Excerpt 7.24:

1. Nancy (EC): When I did my first practicum, I walked in and spent several weeks in the centre,
2. [and] I thought "[teacher education] is a waste of time... I should have spent more time learning children's songs
3. instead of doing all the theories..."
4. My opinion about this is changing a long way...
5. That's how I felt, but now I feel differently...

Nancy developed an appreciation for the knowledge she had gained through the completion of a teaching qualification. As a recent immigrant from China, she identified in discussions that qualifications are a very important part of her

culture. As such, she had completed two bachelor's degrees and various other qualifications before completing a graduate diploma in teaching. Due to this strong cultural influence, it is not surprising Nancy grew to value her teaching qualification more than other participants of Pākehā descent. She moved beyond the external indicators of technical knowledge and skills, into recognising the deeper knowledge and skills she has gained through her teacher education - in particular, critical reflection.

'Training' teachers

The discussion about the need for and efficacy of teaching qualifications was discussed most comprehensively in one group, with minimal in the second and none in the third. When qualifications were first discussed, one participant, Bill, posited that initial qualifications are not as important as the ongoing development of the 'teacher' (qualified or unqualified).

Excerpt 7.25:

1. Bill (EC, M, O): Let's not worry about trained teachers because trained suggests a period, stopped.
2. What we should be calling them is training teachers which suggests an ongoing learning process...
3. I trained 1981 and 82.
4. What relative difference does it actually make?
5. It's what I've done since that's far more important than what I did then.

Bill considered his own situation of gaining a two-year kindergarten diploma over 30 years ago, reflecting on the relevance of this qualification to his current teaching work. He implied experience is more important than teacher education.

Consistent with the desire to be inclusive (see Chapter Six), the notion of 'training teachers' received support from other participants and was thus revisited, even suggesting learning 'on the job' may be 'enough' to develop an effective teacher in lieu of formal teacher education.

Excerpt 7.26:

1. Lorna (EC): They're there with the trained people...

2. So as long as you've got [untrained] together with trained, they're still learning, they're still training.

There was a definite sense life experiences “are more influential on who we become as a teacher than actually what we learn in our training” (Jay). Dawn related the influence of experiences to children’s development:

Excerpt 7.27:

1. Dawn (EC, M): When we look at children, it is the experiences and the interconnections they have with other people that actually form them.
2. So, by the time you get to being at teachers’ college...
3. there’s a lot of who you are...,
4. the dispositions and knowledge and skills and attitudes, attributes;
5. they’re pretty much set.

Dawn argued teacher education has very little influence in the shaping of teachers; rather the teacher has been shaped by life experience prior to entering the programme. This denies, or at least minimises, any impact of teacher education on the teacher, again reinforcing charismatic teacher discourse (see Chapter Five) – teachers who just ‘have it’.

Despite support received from other participants during this discussion, later in the interview Bill’s stance on the need for teachers to be qualified changed when he stated adamantly “under-twos need trained teachers. *Like all teachers need to be trained*”.

Conclusion

The contested concept of ‘teacher’ and the subsequent ambivalence around qualifications demonstrates a regime of truth; ‘teachers don’t really need to be qualified to do this job’, despite a convincing body of research that links qualifications levels to levels of quality for children (May, 2009). Qualifications help teachers to plan and implement a rich curriculum, and those with qualifications are more likely to provide mere custodial care (Smith, 2016). In

addition, if teachers' beliefs stem from informed understanding, such as that gained through teacher education, practices are likely to be of higher quality than those that stem from intuitive understanding (Berthelsen & Brownlee, 2007).

These excerpts provide good examples of the moving power relations and the seemingly contradictory subject positions people take during the course of a conversation. Participants sometimes appeared to change their minds as new ideas were introduced by other participants. This may indicate many teachers are not really convinced of the need for teaching qualifications and therefore can be swayed by 'group think'.

Only a small number of participants were steadfast in their belief teachers must be qualified; that being a good parent or a competent technician is 'not enough' to be an effective teacher. The majority of participants did not mention the need for a qualification at all. While this 'silence' could be read as a taken-for-granted assumption all teachers should be qualified (and perhaps in the case of the kindergarten teachers this was the case), for the majority of participants, it is likely to be another indicator of the ambivalence around the need for qualifications and the contested concept of 'teacher'.

The language of business and industry

Shaped by neo-liberal discourses, participants often used metaphors that appeared to have been adopted from business and industry. A strong example of this came from Dawn when she was discussing the purpose of teaching qualifications:

Excerpt 7.28:

1. Dawn (EC, M): it comes down to setting a standard...
2. Trained teachers [have] to attain a certain level of proficiency...
3. so that it regulates the education for early childhood
4. so that we have at least some benchmarks...
5. it keeps children safe,
6. it gives parents a guide,
7. it gives us a guide, it gives us a direction, we have something to attain,

8. it's measurable, it makes sense.

In this excerpt, Dawn talked about 'setting a standard' (line 1), 'attaining a level of proficiency' (line 2), 'regulating' education (line 3), having 'benchmarks' (line 4), giving teachers 'direction' (line 7), and being 'measurable' (line 8) – all terminology which emphasises accountability and measurability, and reinforces the positioning of the teacher as a proficient technician providing a somewhat prescribed education to children within a regulated and standardised environment. Dawn also positions parents as clients with qualifications providing them with a guide (line 6) to help select an early childhood service. Children are simply kept 'safe' (line 5).

While using language adopted from industry, the actual word 'industry' was not used by participants in relation to ECE, despite it often being referred to in literature as "the childcare industry" (for example, (Kim & Smith, 2007; Zaman, Amin, Momjian, & Ting Lei, 2012). This terminology is most often used when researchers are focusing on teachers' employment conditions or providing services for parents, rather than ECE for children. They did, however, speak about being 'on the floor' with children, a term that is derived from industry and manufacturing and refers to the factory floor.

Participants regularly used construction metaphors, particularly when discussing children's learning and the role of the teacher. Curriculum knowledge was described as 'building blocks', a metaphor which closely links to the perceived purpose of early childhood to provide a 'foundation' for children's learning and development. Children were also being constructed by teachers who have a set of 'tools' in their 'toolbox' to use to review their own practice and support children to 'build' self-knowledge, empathy and relationships. The language of technology has also started to creep into the teachers' vernacular. Some participants spoke about the need to 'download' their concerns to their colleagues. Using this type of language reinforces the perception ECE is a technical role rather than professional.

The economic language of the market, while not as prevalent as the language of construction, was also woven into participant responses. Teachers were

described as 'investing' in the children they are working with, adding 'value' to their lives through helping them develop a 'wealth' of knowledge. Teachers were also considered to be 'undervalued' and 'devalued' by the government, society and parents.

One participant critiqued how the language of business has been interwoven into ECE, using the marketing of ECE services as an example:

Excerpt 7.29:

1. Natalie (K): ECE is marketed these days.
2. "If your child goes to brand A, your child will get brand A outcome. If your child goes to brand B, your child might only get brand B outcome. We can do this at brand A better than brand B. If you just want to do a little bit of DIY yourself with your child and have a bit of maybe brand C"

Within neo-liberal discourses, early childhood services are positioned as 'producer and business' with matching positioning of teacher. As effective technician, the teacher's task is to ensure the efficient production well-educated children, and as entrepreneur, the teacher markets and sells her product (Dahlberg et al., 1999). The use of this terminology by participants reinforces the dominance of these discourses.

Teacher education or teacher 'training'?

Consistent with the use of industrial language, participants also predominantly used the term 'trained' rather than 'qualified' when talking about those who hold a recognised teaching qualification. The words train/ed/ing were used 144 times during the interviews and online discussion whereas the term qualify/ied/ication was only used 26 times by participants.

Similar to the discussion about the term 'teacher', this section may appear to be simply about semantics, but again, it appears this nomenclature has been shaped by neo-liberal discourses. Historically, colleges of education, where the majority of teacher education was completed, were sometimes called teacher training colleges. The significant use of the term training in this study may be a remnant of this era, however it may be more significant. Shaped by neo-liberal discourses,

participants appeared to consider teacher education to be teacher training; a way to create competent teachers (Moore, 2004).

Consistent with a focus on products, Chaney (2017) posits that, in teacher preparation, training refers to the acquisition and mastery of concrete skills, whereas education focuses more on abstract knowledge and understanding. As such, “Education aims to improve the mind while training aims to improve performance” (p. 1). Oberhuemer (2005) conceptualises the term *training* as problematic, particularly over recent years with the dominance of neo-liberal discourses. She believes “it has increasingly taken on technical, competencies-and-skills connotations in the education field” (p. 7), failing to do justice to the broader aims of professionalisation. As such, it values the practice of observable ‘skills’ over the application of scholarship and disciplinary knowledge (Stephens, Tønnessen, & Kyriacou, 2004). Unfortunately, however, it is a term that retains common currency.

The notion of teacher ‘training’ is also consistent with the expectation new teachers will move easily from the campus to the centre, ready to teach; again valuing practical over theoretical knowledge (Stephens et al., 2004). This expectation was regularly expressed by participants throughout discussions.

Consistent with the perception of teacher as technician, the use of the term ‘training’ as opposed to education, may also be aligned to the expectation all teachers behave in the same way. O’Neill (1986) defined training as “[t]he *systematic* development in a person of the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary for him to be able to perform adequately in a job or task... that requires a fairly *standardised* performance” (p. 259). Even in 1986 he was arguing ‘teacher training’ is an antiquated concept that should not be used in relation to modern teacher preparation. Like the findings of this study, however, he found this expression was still part of teachers’ vernacular, possibly relegating them to “the rank of second-class citizens in scholarly and scientific communities” (p. 264), again exacerbating their lower status.

Parents as 'clients'

May Cook (1985) posited ECE serves the needs of various groups including parents, teachers, management and society as a whole, as well as children. The needs of these various groups can be in conflict so priorities and trade-offs need to be made. To generate discussion on participants' priorities, I asked them to consider "what is the purpose of early childhood education?"

A strong theme running through all groups, as a response to this question, was the prioritisation of service provision to parents, particularly mothers, to enable their engagement in paid employment. This emphasis is likely to have been influenced by historical and neo-liberal emphases in research and policy on the economic function of ECE to facilitate women's access to the labour market (Vandenbroeck, 2006). This theme positions parents as 'clients' of the centre, and 'consumers' of ECE and requires services to improve their product and become more accountable to them (Palmer, 2007).

While some participants appeared comfortable that an important part of ECE is to support parental employment, others resisted. The following example records support for and resistance to this idea:

Excerpt 7.30:

1. Jay (EC, HT): [This is] where we have a problem with getting ourselves seen as part of education.
2. I think the government believes we're there to look after children so families can go back to work...
3. Bill (EC, M, O): I don't mind being there for that reason.
4. Jay: So that parents can go back to work?
5. Bill: Absolutely.
6. Jay: I don't mind if that's part of what happens
7. Bill: If they want to give me their kids for a whole day and I can have fun with them, then that's great...
8. Jay: If we advocate that we're okay with that, we are almost advocating that we are okay with being technically babysitters.

Instead of outlining her own beliefs about the purpose of ECE, Jay introduced the concept of how it supports parental employment, portraying this purpose as a governmental perspective (line 2). This perception will have been reinforced through the predominance of this purpose in government policy and rhetoric, particularly the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) which constructed the child as the private responsibility of parents, and ECE (particularly education and care) as a private good (Mitchell, 2010). MSD posited that support for families to participate in training and paid employment was a key focus of education and care centres, arguing “[n]ot all care arrangements have an educational component, and often all that is needed is safe childcare to meet families’ labour market needs” (Ministry of Social Development, 2003, p. 7, cited in Mitchell, 2010, p. 333)

Jay argued that the emphasis of this purpose in policy is one of the reasons why ECE struggles to achieve the same recognition as teachers in other parts of the education sector (line 1). Arguably, schooling also serves a custodial purpose by ‘freeing parents up’ for employment. However, because schooling is compulsory, and children are required to attend, this purpose is not reinforced in the same way. Despite policies recognising the importance of ECE and encouraging participation, neo-liberal discourses can still position ECE as a ‘choice’ made by parents who wish to pursue employment opportunities and subsequently require ‘care’ for their children.

In contrast, Bill expressed comfort with this purpose, positioning ECE teaching simplistically as having ‘fun’ with children (line 7) while their parents are at work. While agreeing ECE does fulfil a role in supporting parental employment (line 6), Jay resisted the neo-liberal idea that this care function should be a primary purpose (line 8), arguing this emphasis positions teachers as merely babysitters.

Reinforcing the positioning of teachers as experts (see Chapter Five), and shaped by neo-liberal discourses that position parents as clients, many participants subsequently portrayed their relationships with parents as one of mostly uni-directional communication, with the teacher being responsible for keeping parents informed about the child’s day (see Chapter Six).

There was also a sense amongst some participants that the service they provide needs to meet parental expectations, keeping them 'happy', regardless of whether these expectations are reasonable or reflect teachers' professional knowledge. For one participant in particular, it appeared this emphasis on keeping parents happy may have led to an overemphasis on keeping children 'safe'. The following conversation occurred as a result of the introduction of the vignette about a teacher with a visual impairment (see Chapter Nine):

Excerpt 7.31:

1. Nancy (EC): A lot of the parents...
2. care the most about the physical safety of their children.
3. So if something happened, the parents will probably say, "oh it's because of you"...
4. and say "you should be responsible because of this"

Reinforcing MSD's message about education and care centres being primarily safe, Nancy's primary consideration in relation to the inclusion of teachers with disabilities appeared to be about the perception of parents in relation to children's safety, particularly should an accident occur. Furedi (2008) argues contemporary parenting is imbued with feelings of fear and paranoia, leading to a significant focus on child safety. Teachers, who often have been shaped by the same discourses shaping parent's fears, can feel failure if a child gets injured. Therefore they can be overprotective.

While children's safety is very important, overemphasis on this can limit the learning opportunities offered. Physical competence and activity patterns are established during the early childhood years therefore ECE is an important context for children to engage in physically active and risk-taking play. Risk-taking "allows children to test their limits, try new skills and activities, and learn about their bodies and their capabilities" (Little & Sweller, 2015, p. 338), acquiring physical competence and confidence. Unfortunately, issues related to risky play can mean opportunities for this play are restricted due to safety concerns.

Positioning parents as clients, who can choose to ‘take their business’ elsewhere, can place additional responsibility on teachers to be ‘perfect’ and heighten the perception they are being judged. Like Nancy, Lorna was particularly concerned about parent responses:

Excerpt: 7.32:

1. Lorna (EC): You have the expectations of the parents and what they want you to do,
2. and then if you make mistakes... it’s upsetting to the parents...
3. It’s like trying to meet everyone’s expectations,
4. but you can only do so much at a time, you’re only human.

Lorna articulated a sense of needing to meet parental expectations (line 1) and not make mistakes. Concern about making mistakes was raised a few times across discussions, highlighting the ‘pressure’ teachers feel in relation to the perceived ‘make or break’ nature of their work with young children, discussed more fully in the next section. At times, teachers can feel burdened by the enormity of their perceived responsibility to change children’s lives, even though this is an unfair expectation (Fraser, 2008).

Another area where participants felt judged by parents, was in the production of assessment documentation that meets parents’ expectations. They used words like ‘mortifying’ to describe their response to a ‘poorly written’ learning story being available to parents, worried about parents “reading that and thinking that’s what we do” (Sam). As such, many participants argued the need for teachers to use *professional* language in written documentation designed for communicating with parents.

In contrast, reinforcing ‘teacher as expert’ positioning, Dawn discussed her belief teachers need to ‘dumb down’ their language so parents can understand what the teacher is saying:

Excerpt 7.33:

1. Dawn (EC, M): We have to do the teacher jargon.

2. We then need to take away from our assessment [to make it suitable] for parents...
3. you then need to take it down a notch to be able to communicate on the level of your parents.

While other participants positioned parents as being discerning consumers who would not appreciate a badly written learning story, Dawn has positioned parents as needing the teacher to simplify the language they use to ensure they are communicating 'on their level'. In both cases however, the communication being referred to appeared to be uni-directional.

Professional distance

Positioning parents as clients can require teachers to maintain an element of 'distance' from children and their families, sometimes known as 'professional distance' (Dalli, 2008). To explore the complexities of working in partnership with parents when their values differ from teachers, I raised the question "how can judgement be cast aside to ensure partnership can happen?"

Excerpt 7.34:

1. Bill (EC, M, O): I don't think it can
2. hence the warnings from the Education Council's new standards re taking on the parent role...
3. I think in ECE we are really challenged because of the closeness we work with whānau
4. and the so-called professional distance doesn't happen so easily

Bill referred to the Education Council's draft *Our Code, Our Standards* which was out for consultation at the time (line 2). His response appears to question whether, in ECE, it may be more difficult for teachers to meet these professional codes and standards due to the context in which they work. A context where partnership with parents is strongly advocated (Dalli, 2012) and the relational nature of teaching facilitates closeness between parents and teachers (lines 3-4).

The draft standard guidance he appeared to be referring to (line 2) asks teachers to avoid "adopting a welfare role with [learners] that is beyond the scope of

[their] position, such as becoming a counsellor, confidant or friend, or **taking on a type of parenting role**” (Education Council, 2017, p. 23, emphasis added). This did not make the final document or guidance.

This notion of professional distance was also woven into the guidance for the proposed standards on engaging with parents and whānau, asking teachers to be “aware of professional boundaries” (p. 29) and be “transparent about actions which could be interpreted as blurring professional boundaries” (ibid.). The guidance on this standard however, was less clear about what professional boundaries are, leaving it open for interpretation. It is also in the final guidance document.

For Bill however, it appeared the closer teachers are to parents, the more likely teachers are to judge them. This idea is in direct contrast to the discourse in official documentation which purports stronger relationships with parents lead to greater understanding and the suspension of judgement. For example, *Te Whāriki* states “[c]hildren’s learning and development are fostered if the well-being of their family and community is supported; if their family, culture, knowledge and community are respected; and if there is a strong connection and consistency among all the aspects of the child’s world” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 42). Respect denotes the suspension of negative judgement.

With his use of the term “so-called” (line 7) Bill also appeared to be starting to resist the traditional definitions of professionalism which have dominated scholarly discussions in ECE (including the notion of professional distance) (Dalli, 2008). Oberhuemer (2005) identifies a growing body of literature is questioning traditional notions of professionalism which distance professionals from those they serve. Bill’s resistance is in line with this thinking and is contributing to the shaping of this discourse.

Positioning parents as clients envisages the provision of ECE as an economic transaction, where the teacher starts from the assumption the parents know what they want and it is the teachers’ role to give it to them. Professional practices, like education, however, should service the needs of their clients **and** play a role in the definition of those needs (Biesta, 2015). The role of the teacher

is to move children beyond what the parents want them to learn, opening up new opportunities and perspectives.

Children as an economic resource

With the rise of neo-liberal discourses, children began to be positioned as an economic resource with ECE being charged to ensure their educational achievement and subsequent labour market outcomes (Mitchell, 2010). The positioning of children in the ECE strategic plan also reinforced these discourses. In general, children were positioned as future contributors to the social, educational and economic health of New Zealand; with the exception of a small group of predominantly Māori and Pasifika children who were deemed to be 'missing out' (Nuttall, 2005b).

By the mid-2000s, there was unprecedented political interest in early childhood education as a result of insights from neuroscience and the costs and benefits of early intervention (Fasoli et al., 2007), both known and unknown. The premise of this interest was that money spent on children's education now saves the economy money in the future (up to 17 percent) due to a reduced need for remedial education as well as lower crime and less reliance on welfare (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012).

Shaped by the neo-liberal discourses promoting this thinking, most participants stated firm beliefs ECE is important if children are to be successful later in life. Despite the neo-liberal focus on educational success, this was not seen to be the main purpose of ECE for most participants. Instead, this was perceived to be about supporting children to be successful in life (without actually defining what life success means). While Biesta et al. (2015) found the teachers in their study had a short-term, instrumental understanding of the educational purpose of ECE, participants in this study were longer term in their aspirations:

Excerpt 7.35:

1. Natalie (K): it's those first few years that are so influential on their future educational trajectory.
2. And not that early childhood education is all about what their academic focus will be in the future,

3. because it's about building children for life.

Natalie began by stating her belief in the importance of a child's early years in relation to their ongoing educational success. However, consistent with the regime of truth "we do not prepare children for school" (discussed in Chapter Six), she quickly stressed that ECE is not **only** about academic success.

Positioning children as an economic resource encourages the notion ECE can 'fix' children who are 'at-risk' of poor life outcomes, including educational failure, supporting them to successfully contribute to 21st century workforces (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012) . Dawn framed this as "catching" any children that need to go to the "right services", highlighting this perceived purpose of education shaped by neo-liberal discourses. Other participants also showed evidence of having been strongly shaped by these discourses. One example of this came from Kate:

Excerpt 7.36:

1. Kate (K, HT): There is really substantial research that shows that if we invest in early childhood that all these changes will happen further up the line
2. and it's not going to be as stressful on the economy
3. or our prison services, all those sorts of things.

In another group, Bill discussed what he believes are the origins of this thinking:

Excerpt 7.37:

1. Bill (EC, M, O): if you go back to the beginning of psychology really in a big way...
2. They put all these resources, picked up especially the undeveloped environments...
3. [and decided] if we do certain things, there's a good chance a lot of these kids will be better than okay...
4. We have early childhood to counter some of the social problems that actually exist in the reality

5. and give kids a chance to get involved with [things] that they may not get in their original home.

In this excerpt, Bill referred to the ‘discovery’ children from deprived homes can benefit from access to resources and rich learning environments in ECE. For him, this has become one of the key purposes of ECE. These two excerpts represent an instrumentalist view of ECE’s purpose (Lally, 2005) which envisages the child as a ‘work in progress’ which ECE will prepare for ‘adequate functioning’ in the future, and ensure they are not damaged and likely to become a drain on society.

Bill also linked this ‘discovery’ to the introduction of scientific interest in ECE (line 1). Shaped by neo-liberal discourses, “ECEC is dominated by a positivistic paradigm, that values certainty and mastery, linearity and predetermined outcomes, objectivity and universality; and believes in the ability of science to reveal the true nature of a real world” (Moss, 2008, p. 123). This paradigm believes science can ‘prove’ the value of ECE and has led to the popularity of neuroscience. Reinforcing Bowlby’s theories (discussed in Chapter Five), neuroscientific ‘evidence’ is being used to demonstrate the “irreversible vulnerabilities of early childhood, and the proper responses of the state” (Wastell & White, 2012, p. 398), which include participation in ECE. Interestingly, Bowlby later rejected this deterministic approach, focusing more on risk and resilience (Slater, 2007). Infant determinism however, has still remained a dominant discourse in society.

Caring professions, as highly gendered, have not traditionally been sites of authority from which to speak about political problems (Luke, 1992). Adopting the discourse of science provides women teachers with political ‘voice’. While Kate spoke generally about ‘research’ earlier (excerpt 7.36, line 1), later in the interview she referred to the findings of neuroscience in particular to validate the role of ECE in supporting future economic development:

Excerpt 7.38:

1. Kate (K, HT): It’s interesting with all of that brain science coming through,
2. talking about how wonderful and valuable it is for children to be in high-quality learning environments,

3. and how the first three years are so important...
4. Then “we’re just going to cut the funding” ...

Kate expressed frustration that, despite the findings of neuroscience regarding the value of ECE, government funding to ECE has been cut (line 4). The sense in the group was that the government was ignoring the findings of research and subsequently reducing the ‘value’ of ECE and teachers.

Alongside other participants, Kate also made reference to the perceived importance of the first three years, a policy discourse which argues the early years constitute a ‘once-and-for-all’ critical period in brain development. This discourse is used to promote early intervention to solve later social problems (Wastell & White, 2012). Furedi (2008) challenges the notion of infant determinism, arguing that it is a cultural myth with little support in empirical research. Similarly, Wastell and White (2012) argue that neuroscientific claims supporting interventionist policy initiatives have received little critical commentary, operating as ‘truths’ while neuroscientific knowledge is still in an ‘embryonic’ and provisional state.

MacNaughton (2004) warns against the uncritical acceptance of neuroscience in early childhood, even if findings do seem to ‘prove’ ECE is important through cause and effect logic. She argues the meaning of ECE is more complex and chaotic than this and findings based on ethnocentric measures should not be generalised across diverse populations; diversity and changeability cannot be objectively controlled for. In addition, research is showing the brain continues to be highly plastic and adaptable beyond the early years and that gains for ‘disadvantaged’ children made during ECE have been found to be generally short-lived or statistically insignificant (Wastell & White, 2012).

Despite research that challenges the perceived critical importance of this time period (for example, (Bruer, 1999), the ‘first three years’ message reinforces the importance of early childhood experiences, thus was taken up by participants. Teachers have connected strongly with economic research that ‘demonstrates’ the value of ECE in relation to improving outcomes for children as it validates their role and strengthens their argument for additional funding. These

discourses, however, sit in tension with dominant maternal discourses which argue children are 'better off at home', a tension it appears teachers are yet to resolve.

Conclusion

This chapter argues that, under neo-liberal discourses, ECE is seen as a way to ameliorate social disorders in order to ensure the ongoing economic success of a country. Increased recognition and funding has led to increased requirements for evidence that ECE services are adding value to children's learning and life outcomes.

Despite participants linking increased accountability and surveillance by authorities as providing 'proof' of their professionalism, subsequently raising their status, neo-liberal positioning of parents (and their children) as clients, the culture of accountability and the replacement of subjective judgement with scientific evidence are all actually undermining teacher professionalism (Biesta, 2015). All of these factors minimise the importance of teacher judgement and highlight a distrust in teachers being able to act as professionals.

Neo-liberalism has increased pressure on teachers and has forced services to compete for children, increasing expectations leaders will be entrepreneurs (Connell, 2009b). Within this environment, which places greater responsibility on individual teachers and services and less emphasis on systems and structures, teachers have had their work intensified and their performance managed. As such, they often do not have the time and space to exercise such judgement (Biesta, 2015).

Both maternal and neo-liberal discourses prioritise individual teachers over the contexts and systems within which they operate (Moore, 2004). They also have similar outcomes for teachers; low status and a questioning of the need to be qualified. In contrast, Democratic Professionalism discourses prioritise collectivism and shared responsibility. It positions the teacher as thoughtful, intelligent and qualified. These discourses are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Eight: “We need to be critiquing ourselves”: Democratic Professionalism – A Marginalised Discourse.

Introduction

Other discourses that emerged from my data were those of the scholarly or researching teacher, grouped together under the big ‘D’ discourse of ‘democratic professionalism’. Democratic professionalism is a concept based on participatory relationships and foregrounds collaborative and cooperative action. As such, it emphasises engagement with the local community (Oberhuemer, 2005).

Reflecting the underpinning philosophies of *Te Whāriki*, teachers who are shaped by these discourses, are aware of multiple ways of knowing and being, and are willing to reflect on their personal and professional assumptions and beliefs. They are researching teachers who constantly seek and co-construct new knowledge and a deeper understanding through research, a part of everyday practice. Reflective and dialogic, they depend on strong relationships with others (Moss, 2006). This can be best be achieved in a collaborative, democratic culture.

Shaped by democratic professionalism, the good teacher knows how to run a classroom, think for herself, apply disciplined knowledge and act as an agent of cultural renewal. Democratic principles are embedded in the curriculum “translated by a workforce of intellectually autonomous, university-educated teachers” (Connell, 2009a, p. 216). As such, teachers are interpreting, rather than just implementing curriculum (Oberhuemer, 2005), for, and with, children (Connell, 2009a). These discourses are reflected in the structure and intent of *Te Whāriki* where early childhood services are expected to develop and interpret local and contextual curriculum within a broad, principles based, curriculum framework.

While these discourses have been dominant in the schooling sector since the mid-twentieth century (Connell, 2009a), many aspects did not develop strength in the wider ECE sector until the late 1990s, following the development of *Te Whāriki* and the ECE strategic plan, the latter of which overtly envisioned a fully-

qualified teaching workforce, one of the hallmarks of these discourses. The development of *Te Whāriki* resisted many of the neo-liberal policies of the day, instead embedding democratic principles. This meant democratic professionalism discourses tentatively emerged in ECE alongside the neo-liberal discourses more dominant in society.

These discourses still appear to be marginalised however. *Te Whāriki* was rarely mentioned or quoted by participants. Nuttall (2005a) argues its implementation “became somewhat derailed” (p. 17) due to the simultaneous release of other, strongly neo-liberal, policy documents focusing on regulatory compliance and accountability. Perhaps this is one reason why it did not feature more strongly in the data, however the underlying democratic professionalism discourses underpinning this document have helped to shape some of the participants’ espoused beliefs even though not as dominant as maternal and neo-liberal.

This chapter discusses how democratic professionalism discourses have shaped participants’ beliefs about reflective practice, moving beyond self-audit to an emphasis on being critical of their own biases and being open to other ways of knowing and being. It explores the collective nature of teaching and the role of the teacher to be intellectual and an advocate for the sector, for children and for their families. The discussion also identifies areas where teachers have been more strongly shaped by essentialist maternal and neoliberal discourses, subsequently influencing the marginalisation of democratic professionalism identified above.

Reflective teachers

Individuals gain knowledge from their everyday social interactions however this knowledge is often based on stereotypes, taken-for-granted beliefs and limited insights into the world (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). This ‘knowledge’ constructs our understandings about the world and those who live within it. Oberhuemer (2005) argues democratic professionalism requires teachers to reflect on their taken-for-granted beliefs and “to sensitively discuss pedagogical and ethical viewpoints against a background of increasing cultural, social and economic diversity” (p. 14), recognising and examining their own and publicly endorsed assumptions.

The concept of reflection, however, has long been contentious, often used as a “‘catch-all term’ that carries ‘mixed messages and confusing agendas” (Moxnes & Osgood, 2018, p. 298). Neo-liberal discourses and the standards and criteria that come with them, introduced the notion of being reflective to the ECE teaching sector, specifically as a skill for teachers to employ to ensure their continuous improvement.

Under a neo-liberal reflective and performative lens, teachers turn the gaze on themselves, self-auditing to see if they measure up (Ball, 2013). As such, personal reflection can act as a “conduit for shaping hegemonic professional subjectivities” (Cumming & Sumsion, 2014, p. 233), and be used by teachers to make themselves conform. Reflection can function as a mirror to foster “normative practitioners who act and think in normative ways” (Moxnes & Osgood, 2018, p. 299), rather than to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions.

This neoliberal lens on reflection came through participant responses. The notion of the teacher never being good enough and always seeking self-improvement through professional development and reflection was woven through all groups, sometimes linked to self-review:

Excerpt 8.1:

1. Maree (EC): part of our professional practice is always to be self-reviewing.
2. Yourself and the team.
3. “How things are working, what could we do better? What would work better for the children we have at the moment?”

Maree’s contribution is an example of participants’ inherent belief in continuous self-improvement. She uses the word “better” twice to emphasise teachers should always be looking to improve –they are never ‘good enough’, an attitude prevalent in neo-liberal discourses (Ball, 2013), and reinforced through authority discourse in ‘official’ documentation, for example *Our Code Our Standards* (Education Council, 2017a). This sense of the need for self-critique and constant improvement came through consistently:

Excerpt 8.2:

1. Christine (K, HT): You can never stop.
2. Never always think you know it,
3. you never do

Excerpt 8.3:

1. Maree (EC): As a teacher you should always be learning....
2. and have an attitude that you haven't learnt everything.

Excerpt 8.4:

1. Kay (EC): We're lifelong learners,
2. we need to be critiquing ourselves.

The use of the presuppositions 'can never' (excerpt 8.2, line 1), 'should' (excerpt 8.3, line 1) and 'need' (excerpt 8.4, line 2) demonstrate the intensity of the belief in self-critique demonstrated by participants.

The dominant discourses shaping participants' thinking about reflection, however, more closely aligned with democratic professionalism and the researching teacher. As such, they moved beyond self-auditing into the consideration of ongoing learning and research, focusing on how occupational knowledge can be developed.

Frede (1995) argued teaching, at its best, equates to research as "good teachers generate questions, gather data, test hypotheses, and draw conclusions that guide their interactions with [children]" (p. 122). The notion of researching teachers moves beyond the competent technician model as it values teachers' own evaluations on their practice as much as the accountability documents these evaluations feed into (Moore, 2004).

The notion of the reflective and ever-learning teacher came through strongly in all groups however the concept of reflection was sometimes contested. Dawn appeared to be developing an understanding to the different lenses that can be applied to reflective practice:

Excerpt 8.5:

1. Dawn (EC, M): I was going to say reflective before but it feels it's been overdone so much...
2. But... if you're open-minded and you challenge your own internal biases, then you are actually being reflective.

Sensing the tension in the use of this term, Dawn expressed some discomfort in using 'reflective' (line 1). To clarify her use of the term however, Dawn provides her own definition (line 2) which reflects critical theory, however does not yet connect the act of reflection with acts of change or transformation. There was some discussion in the group as to whether action needs to occur following reflection:

Excerpt 8.6:

1. Kay (EC): Reflective is really important but from reflecting, you've actually got to implement
2. Bill (EC, M, O): Do you? Do you?
3. Kay: Well you should, shouldn't you?
4. We're lifelong learners, we need to be critiquing ourselves.

Beginning to be shaped by the discourses of democratic professionalism, Bill appeared to be resisting the neo-liberal discourse of teachers never being 'good enough' (line 2) and in need of continuous improvement. The notion of teachers considering themselves to never be 'good enough' was also critiqued in another group:

Excerpt 8.7:

1. Megan (K, HT): when I'm learning to talk about me, in terms of how great I am, it does feel really arrogant and it does not sit comfortably...
2. I shouldn't feel embarrassed to say that because I'm really proud of me, as a teacher, and I'm really proud of my team...
3. It's hard to say, isn't it?
4. Sam (EC): It is... we don't really do that, put oursel[ves] through like that

5. Megan: Yeah, I think we're self-critical...
6. Sam: And that's part of being reflective.
7. It's good because we're always thinking "oh I need to do this better..."
8. But it also means that we're less likely to sit there and say "oh I'm really good at this"

Megan raised the discomfort felt by many teachers in relation to articulating their own strengths with selflessness and altruism being qualities that are encouraged in women (Nias, 1997). Sam, picking up on this, argued teachers need to be able to present themselves as confident in their skills and knowledge rather than criticising themselves continuously through the reflection process. She began to allude to reflection needing to be used more constructively by teachers to highlight their strengths as well as identifying their weaknesses (line 8). This appears to be the point where a neo-liberal construction of reflection gives way to the strengthening approach consistent with democratic professionalism discourses.

In these excerpts, Megan, Sam, Bill and appeared to be resisting discourses that teachers need to engage in continuous improvement, instead arguing teachers, in particular, need to also recognise their strengths. This argument also appears to be resisting participants' earlier positioning of teachers as 'nice' and 'altruistic' (see Chapter Six). The emergence of this argument, therefore, demonstrates how complex and contradictory teacher beliefs are.

The reflection these participants are referring to, however, appears to be that of description i.e. "I'm doing a really great job" – an assessment rather than an evaluation. An evaluative approach may see teachers take on more of the researching scholar disposition, leading to the teacher applying the strength they have identified in themselves, transforming their practice by combining critique with possibility (Giroux, 1988).

Drawing on discourses which position the teacher as ever-learning, other participants argued being reflective needs to go beyond description and requires more than just technical skill. This means it takes time for teachers to develop the necessary knowledge and dispositions. They questioned whether all teachers take the time to become truly reflective, arguing many only complete reflections

to meet accountability requirements and argued teachers should not only reflect on their practice (as neo-liberal discourses would dictate), they should also reflect **in** their practice (Schön, 1983), to ensure they are being responsive to children:

Excerpt 8.8:

1. Natalie (K): You have to be reflective to be an effective practitioner...
2. and I don't mean you have to be willing to sit and write screeds of documentation for the Teachers Council.
3. I mean being able to reflect, right then and there...
4. Sometimes [a planned activity] needs to be dropped for the greater good.

For Natalie, this meant moving beyond writing reflective documentation as part of accountability requirements (line 2), into reflecting and responding in the moment with children (line 3). Natalie's hypothetical decision to 'move with the children', due to an understanding this is important to 'the greater good' (line 4), demonstrated intentionality in her teaching based on pedagogical knowledge and knowledge of children. As such, she re-interpreted her planned curriculum with the children (Connell, 2009a).

In line with Oberhuemer's (2005) notion of the democratic professional reflecting on and challenging their own assumptions, for some participants being able to change direction like this requires a teacher to be self-aware and self-regulating. Bringing a mature self-awareness to their job enables teachers to become experts in themselves, understanding their own motivations and, through this self-knowledge, better understanding and adjusting their responses to children (Manning-Morton, 2006). Changing direction requires a teacher to be flexible, something Megan identified she learned from experience:

Excerpt 8.9:

1. Megan (K, HT): There are other teachers that can't see beyond their intention and they can't let go...
2. I know as a beginning teacher myself, I wanted to keep the yellow fingerpaint separate from the blue fingerpaint for a while...
3. But flexibility of thinking, you learn to let things go.

For these participants, being aware of your preferred ways of working, and challenging these, can support teachers to be more flexible in their role and, subsequently, allow different ways of thinking and being to emerge. Self-awareness and self-knowledge supports teachers to examine their own motivations and subsequently adjust their responses to children in emotionally intelligent ways (Manning-Morton, 2006).

In both of the previous two excerpts, participants, while being shaped by democratic professionalism discourses, position children as having agency, able to make decisions to influence the curriculum they experience. The teachers were the ones to make the allowances and change their direction and plans in relation to children's engagement with the experiences being offered (Smith, 2016).

While Megan seemed to attribute her ability to 'let things go' to experience, in another interview, Betty attributed the ability for teachers to reflect and change direction to teacher education, discussing how reflective practice can be used by teachers to choose and change pedagogical strategies in the moment, understanding the impact of these strategies on children.

Learning teachers

Shaped by democratic professionalism discourses, most participants expected teachers to continuously engage in reflection and ongoing learning. Initial teacher education (ITE) was considered only the beginning of the journey. Willingness to engage in ongoing personal and professional development or being "open to learning" was seen as a vital disposition to ensure teachers continue to grow in their role.

Most participants argued good teachers are always seeking to challenge and improve themselves, considering this to be "a professional responsibility" (Megan). Pound (2008) would agree, positing passion to be a lifelong student is imperative for teachers as knowledge is continuously changing. A few participants expressed this passion for learning in relation to their choice to be a part of this research:

Excerpt 8.10:

1. Gudrun (EC): I am always looking for professional development opportunities.
2. I was very excited about taking part in a discussion like this...
3. because I think the professional aspects of teaching are really important...
4. and we need to keep fresh in that.
5. And so, if I feel like I'm getting stagnant, I will pursue something else that just expands my creativity a bit further.

Gudrun highlighted how invitations to participate in research can attract teachers seeking professional development. It is therefore unsurprising the importance of professional learning came through so strongly in participants' responses. To be involved in a research process of this nature shows an openness to learn about and consider new things which support them in their teaching role. Gudrun also identified that seeking professional development opportunities is important in order to avoid becoming stagnant as a teacher (line 5). Without professional development, teachers can become disconnected from scholarly conversations that influence practice, basing their own practice of the teachers they see around them (Wood, 2004), often uncritically.

Teachers shaped by democratic professionalism have an awareness of 'multiple ways of knowing', and are open to learning (Oberhuemer, 2005). The notion of teachers being curious and learning came through particularly strongly in one group:

Excerpt 8.11:

1. Megan (K, HT): You're wanting to learn from the children,
2. you're wanting to learn from the families.
3. Open to learning means that you're prepared to receive people...
4. And you can respond individually in appropriate ways to them.

Megan implied the awareness of 'multiple ways of knowing' required for democratic professionalism through her stated willingness to learn from children and their families. Being open to each family's 'ways of knowing' supports teachers to move beyond 'what they have always done' into the provision of curriculum that connects to children's lived experiences (Fleer, 2003). Diverse

ways of knowing can also challenge teachers, particularly when a family's beliefs and values differ significantly from the teacher's beliefs and values. This issue is discussed more fully in Chapter Nine.

Shaped by democratic professional discourses of collaboration (Oberhuemer, 2005), Sam highlighted the importance of engagement with others in relation to teachers keeping themselves learning and engaged, bemoaning how difficult this can be when teachers leave ITE:

Excerpt 8.12:

1. Sam (EC): I kind of miss teachers college in that sense that we could just get all excited about ECE and spend time talking about it...
2. you just get so busy throughout the day, from day to day...
3. It's really hard to just sit down and do this stuff though, within the context, when you're always bringing up specifics and thinking "oh, what are we going to do about this? What are we going to do about this?"

This was part of a larger discussion on the importance of teachers engaging in professional learning opportunities when they arise. Other participants were talking about attending conferences and having team discussions. For Sam, talking with colleagues was important to maintain excitement in her role (line 1). However, she identified a barrier to teachers engaging in enriching reflection and learning, beyond meeting external accountabilities; the barrier of time. Time to have deeper discussions as a team rather than simply remaining at the operational. The intensification of teachers' work, discussed in Chapter Seven, can mean more intellectual pursuits are the last to be prioritised in a teacher's day.

Recognising the importance of these opportunities, Sam appeared to be caught in what Nias (1997) calls 'guilt traps', created through the social conditions of their work, in particular "a general commitment to care; the open-ended nature of the job; the pressures of accountability and intensification; and self-imposed demands for perfectionism" (p. 20).

While Megan and Sam stressed the general importance of learning, Daniel argued teachers need to remain current, specifically in relation to early childhood research:

Excerpt 8.13:

1. Daniel (EC): Staying abreast of research into the benefits of play-based learning, brain development and behaviour management is highly pertinent.
2. The battle we face is between 'community wisdom' and what the research shows...
3. I say, trust the research.

In contrast to Megan's emphasis on the knowledge held by children and their families, Daniel placed greater weight on research generated in the academy (line 1), positioning himself on the side of academic research rather than community knowledge. This excerpt illustrates both Daniel's emphasis on ongoing learning and on science to inform the 'right' way to do things. This latter emphasis may see him challenged when faced with issues of diversity where there is arguably no one 'right way' (MacNaughton, 2005). Daniel also advocated for teachers to be open to learning beyond educational research:

Excerpt 8.14:

1. Daniel (EC): Being a passionate teacher doesn't mean you can only be passionate about education.
2. See movies, go to plays, go to the art gallery, go on walks, read books, interact with other adults.
3. There's no need to be a dull person, who is then a dull teacher!

In order for teachers to understand different ways of knowing and being they need to engage in a wide range of experiences beyond the classroom. To inspire children to have a love of learning, teachers must model this love (Colker, 2008).

With an ideology, and the structural conditions, to research and work together to produce meaningful curriculum, teachers can function as transformative intellectuals (Giroux, 1988). This ideology can be informed by theoretical

resources and critical reflection, and subsequently enhance teachers' sense of their practice as intellectual work rather than purely emotional or maternal (Cumming & Sumsion, 2014).

Teaching as an intellectual pursuit

Democratic professionalism discourses also position teachers as intellectual and **tertiary educated** agents of democracy and cultural renewal. Viewing teaching as intellectual work helps to move it beyond the purely instrumental or technical (Giroux, 1988). It also supports the sector to move beyond 'niceness', recognising teachers are also thinking and astute, and teaching draws on the head as well as the heart and the hands (Goldstein, 1997).

The intellectual teacher is proficient in her work and can think for herself (Connell, 2009a). In order to interpret the curriculum for children, teachers need the skill to do this and a "knowledge of how interpretation is done, of the cultural field in which it is done, and of the other possibilities of interpretation that surround one's own" (p. 224). This defines teachers not just as 'knowledge workers', but specifically as 'intellectual workers', and defines ECE services as democratic sites dedicated to self and social empowerment (Giroux, 1988). A few participants alluded to the thoughtful and intellectual work required to be a good teacher.

A few participants honed in on particular skills that require teachers' intellectual engagement:

Excerpt 8.15:

1. Natalie (K): it's our role to come along and to notice what that child is doing
2. and to respond to their learning positively to capture that teaching moment
3. and then to scaffold it to the next learning stage
4. and to introduce new possible lines of direction.

In this excerpt Natalie used the language introduced in *Kei Tua o te Pae, Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars*, a series of books produced by the Ministry of Education to inform assessment for learning practice in ECE,

primarily through narrative assessment and Learning Stories. This series asks teachers to notice, recognise and respond to children's learning as part of formative, narrative assessment (lines 1-2). She alluded to teachers needing the knowledge to understand individual children's learning and the intellect to know where and how to progress this learning. This is an example of the intellectual work, discussed by Connell (2009a), which requires teachers to interpret a curriculum in response to the children they are engaging with. For Jay, the children she was engaging with were infants:

Excerpt 8.16:

1. Jay (EC, HT): it's about reading infants really well.
2. Knowing where those opportunities to add complexity [are],
3. and in what ways.
4. And that actually takes a very knowledgeable teacher.

Like Natalie, Jay discussed the role of the teacher to interpret learning that is occurring (line 1) and to strengthen this learning in appropriate ways (lines 2-3). She acknowledged teachers need to be knowledgeable to do this (line 4), particularly when children are pre-verbal, as infants are. The teacher has to have the knowledge to 'read' the child through interpreting body language and pre-verbal communication. Nancy also considered the intellectual components of a teacher's job:

Excerpt 8.17:

1. Nancy (EC): a lot of people think children are happy and that's the end of it.
2. Cause they don't think about the planning of the programme and how you analyse the learning...
3. Because you have the qualification... you have the quality of being critical and you are able to reflect on your own teaching and then look back and think deeper about it,
4. instead of just making children happy.

Again the intellectual work of analysing children's learning was highlighted. Nancy also identified how this analysis is used to respond to this learning,

specifically in relation to programme planning and critical reflection. As such, being shaped by democratic professionalism discourses, she focused more on the process of teaching rather than simply the observed product; in this case, happy children (lines 1 & 4). Nancy attributed having a teaching qualification to the ability to engage in these processes (line 3).

When speaking from a democratic professional discourse, “a strong, graduate-level, initial education” (Moss, 2008, p. 126) is seen as imperative. Highlighting the contradictory nature of teacher beliefs (MacLure, 2003), while Jay demonstrated ambivalence towards qualifications (Chapter Seven), she also articulated a range of qualities ‘good’ teachers need to have, intellectual qualities that arguably are only developed through engagement in teacher education.

Excerpt 8.18:

1. Jay (EC, HT): I think we need knowledgeable teachers who actually understand curriculum,
2. who actually understand pedagogy,
3. who have things to fall back [on],
4. They actually are not just developing relationships with children and thinking that will be enough

The ‘things to fall back’ (line 3) referred to by Jay are arguably the knowledge and understanding a teacher gains through teacher education. Elsewhere in the interview, Jay is more specific about what she means by a ‘knowledgeable’ teacher, specifically in relation to the implementation of *Te Whāriki*, an integrated curriculum that is not explicitly segmented into specific subject areas. Again, it could be argued strongly that only qualified teachers have the pedagogical knowledge and skills to effectively integrate subject knowledge into the daily curriculum offered to children. As discussed earlier, these skills require the teacher to take an active role in children’s learning, with teachers leading instead of following children’s development (Smith, 1996). Mitchell et al. (2008) found clear associations between teacher qualifications and these high-quality adult-child interactions that lead to positive gains for children in ECE. Completion of teacher education was seen by a few as imperative to being a good teacher:

Excerpt 8.19:

1. Natalie (K): people need time to really explore [why teachers do what they do] and to dig deep, and to reflect on it for themselves...
2. how they can work that out in their practice.
3. And you get that when you do a substantial training programme...

Natalie highlighted the importance of comprehensive programmes to give teachers time to understand and internalise the content and concepts they are learning, arguing elsewhere programmes need to be at least one year in duration. As such, she positioned teaching as an intellectual rather than a technical or maternal pursuit.

Society is rapidly changing. Teachers therefore need to operate as intellectuals, researching emerging knowledge, techniques and technology and applying them to increasingly diverse groups of children and families. Beyond the transmission of culture, education is a process that creates social reality and sets the direction for social movements (Connell, 2009a), even at early childhood, therefore we need qualified, knowledgeable, intentional and intellectual teachers. Viewing teaching as an intellectual pursuit requires teachers to be critical thinkers, analysing their taken-for-granted practice, the cultural norms that influence this, and how this is subjectively experienced (Giroux, 1988). Teachers take active responsibility for raising questions about what they teach, how they teach and for what greater purpose. They do this through advocacy (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006).

Teachers as advocates

Good teaching requires engagement in social action to create the best possible learning environments for children (Connell, 2009a). As such, good teachers need to be strong advocates to ensure systems are competent and support high-quality ECE (Urban et al., 2011). The critical reflection they engage in needs to go beyond considering individual practice into critique of the context and preconditions of this practice (Urban & Dalli, 2012), in order to advocate for structural and systemic change.

When shaped by democratic professionalism discourses, advocacy was presented by some participants as being an important teacher behaviour, both in relation to speaking up for themselves as a profession, and advocating for children. For some participants, being an advocate meant providing critique of the education system. Bill linked the importance of this critique back to John Dewey, an educational theorist who focused on democracy:

Excerpt 8.20:

1. Bill (EC, M, O): a really difficult problem that we have...
2. goes back to that old quote by Dewey, about that “the best thing a teacher has to do is criticise the education system”.
3. Because we don’t have critical thinking.
4. We do not have people challenging.

Bill bemoaned a perceived lack of advocates in ECE currently; an issue he returned to several times, often relating this lack to a perceived weakening of unions. Ball (2007) argues the side-lining of unions has occurred through the neo-liberal agenda to break-up collectivist systems as part of the ‘flexibilisation’ of the state, re-working labour relations and employment conditions in the process.

This group was particularly passionate about teachers being strong advocates for children, collectively and individually. The issue was originally raised early in the interview when the group first began discussing the qualities a good teacher needs to have to be effective in their role, and was linked to the importance of being inclusive.

For Bill, however, advocacy to improve teachers’ employment conditions, in order to facilitate the optimum environment for children, was a main concern. He spoke about the long hours teachers in education and care centres work and how they don’t get ‘term breaks’ – making them very tired. He blamed the intensification of teachers’ work on the perceived lack of advocates to challenge this – a cycle keeping teachers down. He argued a need for change, through advocacy, in children’s macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1996) of government

regulation and employment conditions. This form of advocacy may be crucial to ensure the interests of the children and families are progressed (Colker, 2008).

The perceived reduction of strong ECE advocates may be due to the rise of neo-liberal policies. With the standards that shape teacher identity and professionalism being defined and audited from the outside (see Chapter Seven), teachers with the propensity to dissent, follow independent judgement and challenge the status quo may be positioned as 'unprofessional' and not meeting registration standards (Connell, 2009a). Tensions also exist between the notion of advocacy and activism and the image of the teacher as caring, nurturing and self-sacrificing shaped by essentialised maternal discourses (Woodrow & Busch, 2008).

Some participants also demonstrated doubt about the efficacy of teacher advocacy. Having previously advocated for, and successfully won, improved employment conditions and pay parity with primary school colleagues, the kindergarten teachers in one group reflected on how these gains seem to have been diminished (see Chapter Seven). They attributed this to the current economic climate and the decisions of (mostly male) politicians 'up there' in government making poor funding decisions with no acknowledgement of research which highlights the benefits of high-quality ECE.

Perhaps the lack of self-efficacy expressed by these participants is one of the reasons behind the perceived lack of advocates in the sector. When someone has lost what they fought so hard to gain, it may be difficult to take up the fight again. Biesta et al. (2015) argue the achievement (or otherwise) of agency is always informed by past experience, and teacher beliefs play a role in the impact of this past experience. In this case, past experiences, which were outside of their immediate control, appear to have heavily influenced participants' perceived lack of agency. Palmer (2007) advocates for 'new professionals' who have the will and skill to resist and advocate for transformation of such "institutional pathologies that threaten the profession's highest standards" (p. 202).

Building on arguments there is a dearth of advocates in the wider education arena, Jay discussed the ability of teachers to advocate through articulating what they do:

Excerpt 8.21:

1. Jay (EC, HT): I think we're talking about different levels of advocacy too...
2. There's also advocating for early childhood as a sector.
3. That would be, to me, the area we're failing in the most.
4. Early childhood teachers today are not good at articulating what we do.

Shaped by democratic professionalism discourses, a number of participants expressed that teacher advocacy includes being able to clearly articulate the complexity of their role, that is, what they do and why they do it. Jay stated a belief that teachers may struggle in this area. As such, she represents one of a growing group of teachers who are beginning to question how well the ECE sector communicates the richness of their work and knowledge to others (Goodfellow, 2003). The importance of being able to articulate this complexity was also raised in other groups. Being an articulate advocate was positioned as a way to raise teachers' status:

Excerpt 8.22:

1. Daniel (EC): We need people in this profession who can speak truth to power about how important our work is...
2. so be an advocate.
3. Our profession is undervalued by the Government, other teachers, and even some of the parents of the children we teach...
4. Value our profession and expect high-quality from yourself and your fellow teachers.

Daniel stressed the importance of teachers advocating on behalf of themselves in order to educate the wider public about the importance of their role. He also implied a strong regime of truth woven throughout all discussions, that of 'people don't get what we do' (line 3), highlighting the role of the teacher to change this (lines 1-2). Daniel and Jay's thinking aligned with Aitken and Kennedy's (2007) assertion that teachers often struggle to articulate the nature of what they do, leading to role confusion and misunderstandings, both in and out of the sector. Bill reflected on the impact of this regime of truth and one possible reason why this perceived lack of understanding has arisen:

Excerpt 8.23:

1. Bill (EC, M, O): I understand why early childhood practitioners get really angry in feeling that they're not loved by families who don't truly understand what the nature of their role is and the job they do,
2. but let's be honest, we struggle sometimes to find what it is we do too.

While the government was often positioned as the primary instigator of the low status of teachers in New Zealand society, these examples demonstrate how some participants were beginning to consider teachers themselves may have a role to play in the way they are perceived. For Bill, when parents do not fully appreciate the complexity of the teachers' role, it may be because teachers are not fully clear about their role themselves. This perceived lack of clarity is likely to be an outcome of the dominant and competing discourses shaping the ECE sector, as discussed in previous chapters; particularly the role confusion between teacher and mother that has plagued the ECE sector (Katz, 1980; Nias, 1997).

Other participants felt the lack of societal understanding about the teachers' role was more to do with how teachers articulate their role to others rather than not understanding it themselves:

Excerpt 8.24:

1. Sam (EC): I think we contribute to [the low status of teachers in society]...
2. I realise that everything... I'm doing well,
3. and it's really hard work.
4. [When] people talk to me about it...
5. I belittle everything I do...
6. and I think a lot of us do that.

Sam reflected on teachers' tendency to always speak positively about their role, minimising the work that has gone into any success they have achieved. Goodfellow (2003) argues ECE teachers have also contributed to their status with their silence and that "[t]he empowerment of teachers will only occur when they can represent their knowledge effectively in the public arena" (p. 61). This perceived reticence of teachers to speak highly of what they do may link back to

maternal discourses and the traditional feminine qualities associated with early childhood teaching, for example being 'nice' and displaying humility.

Also, of note is Sam's reference to how 'hard' the work of the teacher is (line 3). This was a constant theme throughout the group interview which I explored further with her in an individual interview. The hard work she referred to is the emotional labour and self-regulation teachers engage in as part of their work with children and their families (Taggart, 2011), work that would potentially be difficult to articulate.

The tendency of teachers to focus on the positive, implied by Sam, may also contribute to dynamics within teaching teams, discouraging teachers and student teachers from questioning and critiquing the practice they observe:

Excerpt 8.25:

1. Jay (EC, HT): I encourage [my team], and I say to my students as well, "challenge what you see. Ask questions"
2. "Ask why teachers believe"
3. Kay (EC): Do what they do...
4. Jay: "Why are you doing that?"
5. Dawn (EC, M): But unfortunately, cultures aren't always like that

This excerpt implied a desire for teachers to articulate and discuss their practice in clear, open, honest and constructive ways which includes being willing to listen to, and engage with colleagues (Wood, 2004). The sense from these participants, however, was that there was not enough of this happening in teams. This sense is supported by Gunn et al. (2004), who purport practising teachers reinforce a disempowering gendered discourse by expecting student teachers to be caring, nurturing and nice without also expecting them to be questioning and assertive. Perhaps this excerpt demonstrates the beginning of a change in these expectations, resisting neo-liberal individualism and highlighting strength in the collective.

Teaching as a collective pursuit

Greater than the notion of the reflective and/or researching teacher, democratic professionalism "is a concept based on participatory relationships and alliances.

It foregrounds collaborative, cooperative action between professional colleagues and other stakeholders. It emphasises engaging and networking with the local community” (Oberhuemer, 2005, p. 13). This suggests teachers have responsibility beyond the ECE centre including contributing to the wider community, the education system and the broader profession (Sachs, 2000).

Shaped by democratic professionalism discourses, taking responsibility for children’s learning and development is considered relational and collective rather than an individual responsibility shouldered by individual teachers (McLeod, 2017). Democratic politics requires all ‘citizens’ of the ECE service (teachers, children, parents and whānau) to have opportunities to participate in decision-making, evaluation, contesting dominant discourses and change (Moss, 2008).

Many participants highlighted the range of stakeholders contributing to children’s education, particularly in ECE. A strong example of this came from Betty:

Excerpt 8.26:

1. Betty (K): In other areas of education you are much more on your own [with] children...
2. In early childhood you are very seldom working on your own.
3. You have to communicate really well with adults; as well as you communicate with children.
4. Because you are working with whānau and you are providing care in a team.

Like McLeod (2017), Betty identified early childhood teachers, in particular, work as part of a team rather than shouldering individual responsibility. Because of this collectivity, teachers require strengthened communication skills to ensure all are working together. Other participants referred to the collective and relational nature of early childhood teaching to highlight other attributes they believed are important in this role:

Excerpt 8.27:

1. Nancy (EC): being flexible and being open-minded.
2. Cause children are different, teachers as well...
3. It's not only working with children but also working with families and whānau and other teachers as well.

For Nancy, the collective nature of early childhood requires teachers to be flexible and open-minded (line 1). By highlighting the importance of being open-minded in relation to difference, Nancy demonstrated the influence of democratic professionalism discourses in shaping her perception of the good teacher; one who cultivates and fosters a sense of openness to others within a framework of equality (McLeod, 2017). In this context 'others' include colleagues, leadership, parents and children.

A collective of teachers

Connell (2009a) argues children's learning in educational institutions results from the shared efforts of a group of staff and from interactive learning processes between children. A better understanding of good teaching comes from recognising its collective nature. She purports "[i]t is often the group of teachers, and the institution they work in, that are effective or not effective" (pp. 221-222), rather than the individual teacher. Indeed, teachers' actions have an immediate impact on other teachers as well as on children (Nuttall, 2013).

Some participants raised the importance of having a strong and supportive team. The influence of the team in creating a positive (or otherwise) teaching and learning collective was particularly important for this group of teachers, and being a 'team player' was considered an important attribute (see Chapter Six). While the influence of the team can lead to conformity and lower quality practice, when shaped through a democratic professionalism lens, it can also lead to an enhanced learning culture and high-quality care and education for children. When creating change as an individual it can be hard not to retreat to tired and trusted ways (MacNaughton, 2005). Working as a collective is more likely to be successful.

Acknowledging, and making the most of, individual team members' strengths and weaknesses came through as an important aspect of working together successfully:

Excerpt 8.28:

1. Sally (EC, M): Someone might have one or two weaknesses
2. but they have some strengths there as well.
3. And another person could have some other strengths.
4. That's how we try to work our team here,
5. using each other's strengths.

Sally highlighted the importance of focussing on the collective strength of the team rather than focussing on one teacher holding all of the qualities expected in a 'good' teacher, balancing one teacher's weaknesses against another teacher's strengths. Similarly, Lorna identified having one good teacher on their own does not necessarily mean a strong centre:

Excerpt 8.29:

1. Lorna (EC): To make a good teacher, part of that is the team environment...
2. It doesn't matter if that one teacher's good or not,
3. It's about how the team works together and how they build each other up,
4. and that is what can create a really good teacher as well.

Recognising the importance of a strong collective, not only did Lorna identify that a conducive teaching and learning environment requires more than one 'good' teacher, she also identified a good team supports individual teachers to be good. Some participants felt a supportive collective could ensure individual teachers disengage from events, attitudes and feelings that occur outside of the ECE service, bringing a positive mindset into their work with children and their families. The team could provide a culture of "no judgement" where individual teachers share their feelings without the need to rationalise or justify. This level of acceptance in a team develops through members having a high level of trust in

each other. Teachers who value collectivity, as well as individuality, promote values such as trust, cooperation, tolerance and consideration, carrying these values into their interactions with others (Nias, 1997). They also accept their own need for support and seek this when needed.

Support within a collective of teachers, however, should not be about being 'nice' or suppressing problems (Wood, 2004). Teachers who espouse an ethic of care can revert to status quo, rather than taking action to effect change, in order to avoid hurting the feelings of others (Taggart, 2011; Woodrow & Busch, 2008). Being shaped by democratic professionalism discourses, some participants began to question this culture of 'niceness' by promoting a culture of honesty, tolerance and empathy.

As highlighted by Lorna earlier, working in a strong high-functioning team can support the development of strong individual teachers:

Excerpt 8.30:

1. Maree (EC): That's probably what I've learnt most since I've been working...
2. how to word things, and how to talk to the children.
3. And I've learnt that from my colleagues...
4. You can be told as much as you like, but until you actually experience it.

Maree identified that observing the practice of team members can support teachers to make sense of the theory they have learnt through teacher education (line 4). This, of course, relies on the practice of colleagues being strong. Participants' perceptions about teachers' tendency to conform to the practice of the service they work in was discussed in Chapter Six. Dawn further discusses the impact of the team on shaping teachers:

Excerpt 8.31:

1. Dawn (EC, M): we've touched on the idea of coming in and conforming to the construct of that team,

2. and what can be a barrier is those biases that maybe get formed in the group, and that lens that maybe gets quite narrowed...
3. But on the flip side...
4. If you have a great team around you... and you work together really well...
5. then it's gonna really work well for children.

Shaped by democratic professionalism discourses, Dawn implied the importance of teaching teams reflecting on and challenging their own assumptions and biases by contrasting this with the notion of teachers conforming, highlighting the importance and impact of team relationships on children. If there is unaddressed conflict between team members, this can impact significantly on work environment stress levels, which may ultimately impact negatively on teachers' work with children (Myers & Myers, 2010).

Unfortunately, neo-liberal policies work against the notion of teachers as a collective, with standards documents evaluating individual teachers within the collective and popular culture continuing to portray individual charismatic teachers (Connell, 2009a). The intensification of work associated with a culture of bureaucratic accountability also inhibits teachers' ability to work together as a collective to examine not only their practices but their beliefs. One group reflected on their participation in this research, highlighting the challenges faced by teachers:

Excerpt 8.32:

1. Megan (K, HT): I could never have a conversation like this with my team...
2. Gudrun (EC): Cause we're so busy
3. Megan: We've done our pathway to teaching... but never really thought about these other elements...
4. Heather (EC): Part of our professional practice is always to [be] self-reviewing... yourself and the team...
5. Megan: I think we review a lot of our practice but we don't review our attitudes.

Wen et al. (2011) posit most professional development focuses on content rather than helping teachers understand and reflect on their own beliefs or

attitudes. This excerpt indicates a similar prioritisation may apply in team discussions and reviews.

As Jo succinctly put it “the quality of the team therefore determines how good it is for the children”. Quality that is influenced by both individual and teams of teachers. Recognising the collective nature of teaching, rather than just focusing on the individual, is therefore essential to better understand ‘good’ teaching (Connell, 2009a).

Kay was the only participant that emphasised the collective nature of teacher education beyond individual service level, an opinion she sent to me personally following the group interview:

Excerpt 8.33:

1. Kay (EC): There are great untrained teachers and terrible trained teachers
2. but that's when all of us, training providers, associates, centres and teachers need to lift the benchmark,
3. challenge and critique
4. or we are just letting the sector down...
5. Most importantly we are letting children down!

In her email, Kay implied the benchmark for graduating teachers may be too low and that it is a collective responsibility of all teachers, ECE services and ITE providers to raise this benchmark (line 2). The responsibility of teachers to contribute to these bigger picture conversations about education has previously been led by unions. Neoliberal weakening of unions however may mean new teachers will not experience the collectivity that has supported teachers in the past (Connell, 2009b). It is therefore important to create new, and/or strengthen existing, cooperative opportunities for teachers to work together.

Leadership and management

The participatory culture of peer learning discussed in the previous section represents a model of distributive leadership consistent with democratic professionalism discourses (Oberhuemer, 2005), and supports organisational evaluation and change. This model needs to be developed and supported by those in leadership and management roles in early childhood centres. While

leadership was discussed less often than peer relationships with colleagues, some participants highlighted the importance of this support.

Excerpt 8.34:

1. Natalie (K): I have a head teacher who recognises that we all go through transitions in life
2. and at times that may mean we need to support each other...
3. It's not a place for condemnation.
4. It's a place of understanding the complexities of life and how that has an impact on your practice.

Consistent with the importance of a 'judgement-free zone' mentioned earlier in relation to team dynamics, Natalie acknowledged the role of the pedagogical leader in facilitating this 'zone' and making necessary allowances to support teachers who require additional support. Lorna also highlighted the importance of management support for teaching staff:

Excerpt 8.35:

1. Lorna (EC): If you're working in a centre,
2. management [need to be] aware of the stresses that are around
3. and [ensure there are] extra people to talk to,
4. with support come down from management.

This excerpt came from Lorna's individual interview and was part of her response to being asked to consider what environmental factors could support teachers who may be feeling stressed and overworked – a theme that ran through Lorna's contributions. The key to this response is the perceived importance of management awareness of the role of the teacher and resourcing extra support for teachers when required.

It is difficult to build and sustain leadership where there is a culture of 'niceness' (Bøe & Hognestad, 2015) as this culture can facilitate conformity and compliance (Hard, 2006). Taggart (2011) found leaders who espoused an ethic of caring often reverted to the status quo rather than hurting the feelings of individuals, thereby limiting critical discussion and a social justice agenda. In addition, horizontal

violence can emerge when there are limited opportunities to address concerns (Hard, 2006) (see Chapter Nine).

For ECE centres to be positioned as democratic sites dedicated to self and social empowerment (Giroux, 1988), which value “dialogue; critical thinking; researching; listening and openness to otherness; uncertainty and provisionality; subjectivity; border crossing, multiple perspectives and curiosity” (Dalli et al., 2012, p. 9), strong leadership is necessary. Creating a team culture such as this requires leaders to model and encourage each of these qualities, moving beyond being ‘nice’.

Parents as partners and collaborators

The collective that provides support for children’s learning also includes parents, whānau and caregivers. It has long been recognised teachers and parents working closely together improves the teacher’s ability to understand the child and support their learning (Frede, 1995). Through a democratic professional lens, parents and teachers enter into a democratic, reflective and analytic relationship (Dahlberg et al., 1999) through meaningful and inclusive communication (Oberhuemer, 2005), which is not uni-directional or positioning the teacher as ‘the’ expert.

The ideal of ‘partnership with parents’ was regularly expressed by participants. It is a key imperative within *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). Unfortunately, this ideal did not seem to be well understood or realised by most participants – it appeared more rhetoric than reality.

The original notion of ‘partnership’ comes from business discourse and has become a buzz word in education which is dangerously close to being made meaningless due to overuse (Ball, 2007). While Ball is talking about public private partnerships, the same could arguably be said of partnerships with parents. He argues the notion of partnerships can dissolve important differences and obscure any power imbalances between the identified ‘partners’.

In line with Ball’s warning about overuse leading to a loss of meaning, most participants in this study spoke very generally about partnership with parents, rarely considering what this means. For example, “we strongly believe that we

need to work in partnership with the parents and family” (Sally). Many of the other statements they made during the interviews, however, contradicted this aspiration (as discussed in previous chapters). It appeared they were repeating popular rhetoric rather than thinking deeply and critically about what these statements might mean. Back in 1989, Stonehouse posited the practice of partnering with parents lags behind the knowledge base. These findings may indicate practice has not moved significantly since this time.

In contrast, Gudrun began to think critically about power imbalances she has experienced between teachers and parents – both as a parent and a teacher:

Excerpt 8.36:

1. Gudrun (EC): I think it’s about partnership with the parents.
2. I find that can be challenging.
3. Some teachers go in thinking that they know more than the parents
4. and that really grieves me...
5. Also with the experience that I’ve had as a parent.
6. There’d be times where I probably didn’t do it the childcare way.
7. You make your decisions for a number of reasons and they’re not always quantifiable to other people.
8. But they are important at the time.

Gudrun alluded to the need for teachers to have greater confidence and trust in children’s parents – in particular, trust the parent is making the right decision for the child at the time based on a range of factors which the teacher may or may not be aware of. The practice of teachers believing they know more than the parent, is consistent with maternal discourses discussed earlier. Shaped by these discourses, teachers, as experts, give parents uncontextualized and unproblematised information about what they are doing, or seek to ‘educate’ them (Dahlberg et al., 1999). Resisting this notion, Gudrun’s reflection demonstrated her thinking has been partially shaped by discourses of democratic professionalism which position parental participation as democratic practice.

Oberhuemer (2005) argued “democratic professionalism implies finding ways of communicating in a meaningful way with *all* parents whose children attend the

centre, particularly with those groups hitherto excluded from contributing to the formative discourse” (p. 13). Alongside Gudrun, other participants also showed evidence of being shaped by democratic professionalism discourses; often in relation to situations where the teacher faced challenges or where the families did not meet the ‘white middle-class’ category, and as such, have sometimes been excluded from contributing (Page, 2013). Christine discussed how democratic ‘partnership with parents’ can be demonstrated in a low socio-economic area:

Excerpt 8.37:

1. Christine (K, HT): Get parents and family on board participating as much as possible,
2. not just voting on something or having a little say in it,
3. totally immersed and involved in it,
4. involved in the learning and how the curriculum’s played out within your centre.

Shaped by democratic professionalism discourses, Christine was the only participant in this study to articulate the purpose of ECE is to promote democracy through participation. This emphasis is apparent in this response. Christine discussed an approach which promotes the full participation of families in their children’s learning and the centre curriculum.

Working with another group of parents who have sometimes been marginalised, Megan discussed what partnership may look like when working with parents of children with additional learning needs:

Excerpt 8.38:

1. Megan (K, HT): We have a lot of children at our centre who have special needs or high needs...
2. And it’s not for me to say “hey, we’ve noticed this with your child, they need help”.
3. [Instead] it’s “hey we’ve noticed this with your child. What have you noticed at home? Let’s have a meeting about this.

4. Here's some pathways we can pursue. Are you interested in exploring anything?"
5. Trying to get that real sense of partnership.

Promoting a pedagogy of listening (Macartney, 2012), Megan highlighted the importance of seeking, and listening to, information from parents about their child (line 3). She also suggested teachers integrate their own professional knowledge into discussions about possible approaches to seek support for the child, offering the parent real choices (line 4). As such, this is a good example of the notion of participatory partnership envisaged in democratic professionalism discourses.

This excerpt refers to situations where a child has particular learning needs. Responding to specific needs like these often falls outside of a teacher's area of expertise. Perhaps Megan felt more willing to work in partnership with parents when she recognised she did not hold this expertise. As such she was alert to voices and perspectives that were outside her taken-for-granted ways of experiencing the world (Macartney, 2012). Teachers need to be able to discuss concerns about children with their parent in a way that is open, responsive, and acknowledges the knowledge the parent has of their child. This way of engaging with parents, however, would be also useful to progress **all** children's learning and would acknowledge each child's unique set of strengths and areas for development.

For teachers to successfully collaborate with parents and whānau they need to be "respectfully open to different world views and able to demonstrate through their words and actions a willingness to responsively incorporate these into the everyday knowledges and practices within the educational setting" (Ritchie & Rau, 2006, p. 33). Participants in this study however, appeared to struggle with this aspect of the teacher's role, remaining mostly silent about this imperative (see Chapter Nine).

Children as powerful and agentic

Democratic professionalism discourses acknowledge children have rights and are actively constructing their own lives (Oberhuemer, 2005); children are

considered powerful and participating (May, 2009). These discourses are inherent in the positioning of children as competent and confident in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996 & 2017).

Analysis of the ways in which children were positioned by participants throughout interviews and discussion (in relation to the frequency of co-located words) identified, however, children were most often positioned as passive in the learning process; powerless and needing protection or as ‘becoming’ directly through teaching. This positioning was most pronounced when participants were being shaped by maternal and/ or neo-liberal discourses.

When being shaped by democratic professionalism discourses however, children were positioned as active agents in their own learning; as explorers, learners and teachers who were key influencers in the centre’s curriculum. One example of this was Kay acknowledging the ‘background’ children bring with them into the early childhood centre – they are not an empty vessel to be filled:

Excerpt 8.39:

1. Kay (EC): These children come with their whakapapa²⁸.
2. They are filled with knowledge as they come out of the womb.
3. It’s about acknowledging that, observing, listening.
4. And with them, extending it.

Kay raised these issues during a discussion on the purpose of ECE. She extended the thinking of other participants by repositioning children as being already ‘filled with knowledge’ (line 2). This repositioning of children also repositions the teacher as co-constructor, someone who works alongside the child to extend the knowledge they already have (line 4). Kay’s reference to whakapapa (line 1) acknowledged the influence of a child’s culture and ancestral roots.

Consistent with her emphasis on the promotion of democracy, Christine began discussing the teachers’ role in supporting children’s full participation in the curriculum:

Excerpt 8.40:

²⁸ Genealogy – very important in Māori culture

1. Christine (K, HT): Connecting children to the wider community is growing [a] democratic viewpoint.
2. Children are citizens of our kindergartens, of families and of the community...
3. You respect children and you get them to fully participate as capable, competent children.
4. Because democracy for me is about participation.

Democratic professionalism presupposes a pedagogical lens which emphasises children's rights and participation (Oberhuemer, 2005). Shaped by these discourses, Christine used term 'citizens' to position children as having full contributing rights to the decisions made in kindergartens, families and community (line 2). From Christine's perspective, the kindergarten was not simply an isolated environment that provides care and education for children, it was part of the wider community children belong to. This positions children as powerful; able to influence what happens for them, not only in their family and early childhood centre, that is, their microsystem, but beyond into their mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1996).

The instances of participants speaking from discourses of democratic professionalism in relation to their positioning of children were few and, it could be argued, surface level. Other researchers have also questioned how teachers are translating the aspirations of *Te Whāriki* into practice arguing that "its deeper possibilities of power sharing have seemed too dangerous and difficult for teachers to consider" (May, 2009, p. 301).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the notion of reflection as a contested concept. When shaped by neo-liberalism discourses it can be used by teachers to self-audit against normative subjectivities to ensure they are conforming. Moving into democratic professionalism however, participants were more concerned about applying a critical lens to their work, challenging their personal biases and assumptions about children and their families. Through this lens, reflective practice led to an openness to, and love of, learning as well as an acknowledgement of their own and others' strengths. It promoted self-

awareness and flexibility to respond to children's learning and to recognise families 'ways of knowing'.

This chapter also discusses the collective nature of ECE teaching. Shaped by democratic professionalism, teachers are agentic advocates and collaborators. They are also qualified and intellectual, able to interpret curriculum for and with children. In addition, parents are genuine partners in decision-making. Interestingly, this partnership appeared to be strongest when the teacher recognised their own lack of expertise, for example when working with parents of children with additional learning needs. Children, however, are positioned as active and agentic in their own learning.

Many of the qualities and positioning identified above, however, appear to be marginalised in this study, only mentioned by a few participants, often in contradiction with other responses. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, participants' underlying beliefs appear to have been strongly shaped by maternal and neo-liberal discourses, marginalising democratic professionalism and shaping the discourse of partnership. One area of marginalisation, that of democratic professionalism discourses of inclusion, is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Nine: “We’re just being inclusive when it suits us?”

Introduction

One of the outcomes of the marginalisation of democratic professionalism discourses has been the shaping of teachers’ attitudes towards diversity and inclusion. Moss (2006) argued the researching teacher is “open to the other, striving to listen without grasping the other and making the other into the same” (p. 37). This aspiration appeared difficult for many participants to achieve.

While participants espoused a strong belief that it is important to be inclusive, both of diverse teachers and of diverse children, discussions often highlighted that meeting the desire to be inclusive is complex and fraught with tensions – the reality rarely matches the rhetoric. The mis-match between desire and reality is not exclusive to this group. Moss (2010) argues that, despite a lot of talk about the importance of diversity, valuing and practicing diversity (that is, being inclusive) remains the exception rather than the norm. This chapter discusses some of these tensions and explores some reasons for teachers’ struggles.

Inclusion of diverse teachers

Connell (2009a) argues good teaching is collective and needs to be diverse. A well-functioning ECE service requires a range of capabilities amongst its teachers as well as “a range of ethnicities, class backgrounds, gender and sexual identities, age groups and levels of experience” (p. 223).

Like ECE in most English-speaking countries, traditional practices and pedagogies in New Zealand, derived from philanthropic roots, have been reified, and a specialist discourse has evolved which values a Western view of childhood and development (Fleer, 2006), and teaching. Thus, when considering the qualities a ‘good’ teacher should have, participants often appeared to find it difficult to envisage a teacher who did not meet the stereotypical narratives of being female, white and middle-class (see Chapter Five).

Cultural difference

To illustrate tensions faced by teachers of different ethnicities learning to 'fit in' to ECE in New Zealand, I am using Nancy as a case study. Nancy is of Chinese descent and moved to New Zealand in 2015, after having completed a range of undergraduate degrees in both China and Canada. In New Zealand she has completed a graduate diploma in early childhood teaching. At the time of data collection, Nancy was in her first year of teaching at a community-based education and care service.

Similar to what Langford (2007) found in relation to her study on student teachers from minority cultures and ethnicities, it appeared Nancy felt she was expected to abandon her Chinese cultural practices in order to be successful as an teacher in New Zealand. In a "relentless effort to belong" (Arndt, 2012, p. 2), on a number of occasions she sought inclusion in the group by explicitly criticising the education system in China, denying Chinese beliefs, values and practices about education and contrasting these with the image of the good teacher that has evolved from European, middle-class culture; an image she learnt through New Zealand teacher education.

Excerpt 9.1:

1. Nancy (EC): I used to think the knowledge is very important
2. but now I feel like that there's so many more qualities that a teacher should have.
3. And I think a heart is really important.
4. So that's how I try to count for myself when I compare myself to those who have been teaching for a long time,
5. and know a lot,
6. I just tell myself I have the heart

This excerpt was part of Nancy's initial contribution when she was introducing herself to the group. At this stage, the discussion was just beginning and participants had been asked no questions other than to talk about their journey into early childhood teaching. Nancy was the only participant who began discussing the research questions at this point. This may indicate a desire to

demonstrate her understanding of the attributes valued in New Zealand teachers, despite her cultural difference.

In line 1, Nancy appeared to be denying the importance of being a knowledgeable teacher in favour of having 'heart' (lines 3 & 6). Teacher knowledge is very important in the Chinese culture, however, through her exposure to the New Zealand education system, Nancy has 'picked up on' the importance placed on affective qualities, appearing to interpret this as an either/or binary rather than a both/and situation. This binary can be problematic. Caring hearts unguided by informed minds and critical thinking are problematic; as is the reverse (Wood, 2004).

Nancy also appeared to be very conscious of her difference. While not associating this 'difference' with her culture, she compared herself to other teachers, often unfavourably (line 4). Following initial denials of the importance of knowledge, she compared herself unfavourably with teachers who she perceived as having more knowledge than her (line 5), consoling herself she has 'heart'. This contradiction may indicate that, while Nancy stated she now prioritises heart over knowledge, this is an espoused belief only. It is unclear how she is defining knowledge in this excerpt however because she is contrasting the need for knowledge in an either/or binary with 'heart' in relation to teaching, I have assumed the knowledge she is referring to is pedagogical and/or knowledge of educational theory.

Nancy's unfavourable comparisons also included what she perceived to be the differences between Chinese and New Zealand childhoods, including ECE. The following example was in response to the question "what do you think the purpose of early childhood education is?"

Excerpt 9.2:

1. Nancy (EC): When I think about the purpose of early childhood education,
2. I think about my own childhood growing up... in China
3. Their early childhood education in kindergartens are very different from kindergartens here.
4. I was watching a TED™ video on You Tube™

5. and in it says that the qualities you only develop once,
6. which is during your early childhood...
7. things like creativity
8. You either have it or not, you can't do anything to make up for it.
9. That's how I feel about my childhood.
10. A lot of things have been killed because of the way our early childhood system is...
11. I don't want children to grow up like the way that I grew up...
12. I kind of feel motivated to do it because I just want an opposite...
13. When I was doing teacher training... a lot of my classmates, they shared their play experience[s] when they were little...
14. and then I say, "we don't have any play" ... I was encouraged not to play that much...
15. It's just math and reading and knowing how to write my name before I could go to school

Nancy appeared to reject her upbringing and education as a response to the different values and priorities highlighted in her teacher education programme, in particular the perceived importance of play. As such, she sought inclusion by rejecting cultural practices from her childhood that are deemed to be 'inappropriate' by Western standards. In their meta-analysis of the ways teachers negotiate discourses, Cumming and Sumsion (2014) found teachers managed and denied their culturally-diverse beliefs and values about teaching in favour of a culturally hegemonic notion of the 'good' teacher, with unquestioning compliance. Nancy appeared to be doing the same.

The discourse of play was also reinforced through popular media, in particular a TED²⁹ talk on creativity (lines 4-8), the key messages of which she accepted uncritically. It is likely this talk was based on some initial findings of neuroscience, again reinforcing the 'scientification' (and therefore validity) of Western early childhood parenting and teaching practices (see Chapter Seven). MacNaughton (2005) argues the ECE sector seeks to legitimise their pedagogies using scientific

²⁹ Technology, Entertainment and Design (TED) is a popular media "nonprofit devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks" published online at <https://www.ted.com/talks>

data in their desire to be seen as a profession. The perceived 'truths' generated as a result of these data become regimes of truth which govern and regulate the sector's behaviour and how the teacher thinks, acts and feels.

A number of findings like these, limiting learning to specific time periods, have been challenged with some scientists arguing brain development can continue to be developed throughout the lifespan (Bruer, 1999). Nancy's uncritical acceptance of this video however appeared to be because it reinforced the messages she had received, from her experiences and education in New Zealand, about the perceived 'poor' quality of her childhood.

In response to Nancy, however, another participant demonstrated a developing understanding of cultural plurality:

Excerpt 9.3:

1. Kate (K, HT): You are being set up for success in the environment that you are growing up in...
2. Different countries have different expectations for their children.
3. You're really lucky that you've experienced that, and then you experience this
4. So you come with a whole different wisdom behind your practice.

Kate expressed an understanding of the importance of context, and that understanding is perspectival and partial (Moss, 2010). She linked the variety of Nancy's experiences to how this has supported her development as a teacher. The impact of her comment, however, was to reinforce Western educational values and priorities – implying now Nancy 'knows better' and can apply her 'new' knowledge to her practice with children and parents.

Amongst Pākehā participants, there was a sense that student teachers from other cultures can also struggle to become successful teachers in New Zealand. Megan articulated her concerns about the 'plight' of international students:

Excerpt 9.4:

1. Megan (K, HT): When I was studying, we had international students.
2. I felt really bad because there was no way they were going to qualify.

3. But let's keep taking their money. They paid thousands for the privilege
4. I think my responsibility is to advocate for children and children deserve the best

In line 2, Megan made the assumption international students will not be successful, even though she did not elaborate on why they were unable to complete the teacher education programme. International students have to meet at least the same selection criteria as New Zealand students in order to get accepted, often with the additional requirement of English language testing. Megan, therefore, may have unconsciously been speaking from the assumption that 'good' teachers act like white, middle-class mothers (see Chapter Five). Megan also implied international teachers could never be "the best" (line 4), therefore it is her responsibility to advocate against the acceptance of such students. Culturally different students have traditionally been viewed as less competent as they need to learn, and articulate, the discourses of the 'good' teacher; discourses deemed to be 'common-sense', natural and universal by other students (Langford, 2007).

Megan subsequently linked the presence of international students in her class to a critique on neo-liberal teacher education and the perceived 'bums on seats' mentality (line 3). She implied the acceptance of students is more about money for the provider than providing high-quality teachers, particularly in relation to international fee-paying students.

Other participants also reinforced the image of culturally different students as less competent. In her individual interview, Lorna was overt about her expectation student teachers from other cultures will conform to the Western ideal of a teacher. She explained why she had failed one student:

Excerpt 9.5:

1. Lorna (EC): there was one that was cultural differences...
2. If they're doing their training here, then they need to be able to adapt to our culture, to suit what we're doing.

The culture Lorna referred to as 'ours' (line 2) is likely to be the dominant Pākehā culture that shapes ECE in New Zealand (Smith, 1996). She has made no

allowance in this example for 'other' ways of doing things. Beliefs such as these shape the discourse of inclusion. As discussed previously however, teachers are complex and contradictory; later in the interview Lorna appeared to give an opposing opinion when discussing the positive impact on the centre of having a male student, arguably a representative from another 'diverse' cohort of teachers in the early childhood sector.

Excerpt 9.6:

1. Lorna (EC): it's actually shown me the value of having somebody,
2. like a male,
3. or somebody different, even if it was a different cultural perspective
4. in a centre as well.

Lorna reflected on the new experiences offered to children by this student and seemed to be beginning to recognise the value of diverse teachers (line 3). Her language around the potential benefits gained from having teachers with differing cultural perspectives was still tentative however – demonstrated through her use of the term “even if” (line 3). Langford (2007) found that, within ECE teacher education programmes, cultural differences were only 'allowed' if they did not unsettle the white, middle-class conception of the 'good' early childhood teacher. Perhaps Lorna's tentativeness reflected her discomfort at being unsettled. While she appeared to value the introduction of a male perspective wholeheartedly, she likely presumed this male would share her cultural values and practices. Based on her previous contributions it was still likely to be important to Lorna that any new cultural experiences introduced did not conflict with those valued in Western 'best' practice. In this context, only surface level 'niceties' and artefacts of culture are acceptable, becoming “quirky enrichments of the curriculum” (Arndt, 2012, p. 10) , rather than valued pedagogical contributions.

Differing abilities

As outlined in Chapter One, my interest in exploring teacher beliefs came from my experiences in teacher education. In order to provoke discussion around the issues raised by these experiences, participants were presented with two

vignettes (found as Appendix B) designed to elicit their attitudes towards teachers with diverse needs, one with a physical disability and one who struggled academically.

In this section participants' responses to these vignettes, as well as other areas where the tensions of working with teachers who are unable to fulfil all 'expected' requirements of a teacher arose, are discussed.

Vignette one – 'fitness to teach'

Participants were conflicted in their responses to this vignette, illustrating the complexity of the issue and what the lack of guidance given to teachers about 'fitness to be teacher' (Education Act, 1989) means in relation to teachers with disabilities or physical fitness. They espoused a belief in the theory of inclusion but struggled with potential difficulties that could arise, particularly in relation to ensuring children's safety.

Excerpt 9.7:

1. Jay (EC, HT): It is very difficult
2. because there is trying to be inclusive, including teachers.
3. But... we are responsible for these children while they are in our setting.
4. We have to make sure that we can keep them safe.

While Jay spoke generally about the aspiration to be inclusive (line 2), in the excerpt below Nancy is more specific about why the inclusion of teachers with physical disabilities is important in relation to children's learning (line 1):

Excerpt 9.8:

1. Nancy (EC): It's a good thing that children are learning the differences between people,
2. and I think this person is capable of doing that.
3. Then what if something happens,
4. how will you explain to the parents of the injured?

While Nancy originally acknowledged the educational potential of teachers with disabilities (line 1), consistent with neo-liberal positioning of parents as clients, she struggled with the perceived conflict between keeping parents 'happy' (line 4) and giving children the opportunity to learn about differing abilities.

Both Jay and Nancy assumed having a teacher with a physical disability is likely to put children at risk of physical harm, highlighting that “society doesn’t expect people with disabilities to perform up to standard” (Pope, Bowman, & Barr, 2001, p. 254). This assumption, however, does not appear to be supported by research but has turned the student’s visual impairment into a disability (Parker & Draves, 2017) and ‘failed’ the student teacher because of potential rather than real problems (Stevenson, 1987). As Sally pointed out, children can get injured in ECE regardless of teacher vigilance and precautions:

Excerpt 9.9:

1. Sally (EC, M): [Disasters] always happen right in front of you anyway....
2. Sometimes the person with normal sight is out there in the playground,
3. and as soon as you turn your back something happens.

As outlined in Chapter Eight, participants espoused a belief in the strength of collectivism and working in teams; utilising the strengths, and mitigating against the weaknesses of individual team members. This espoused belief was less apparent, however, when the weaknesses of the team member were physical; physical weaknesses were seen by some to be difficult to mediate due to the stress it placed on other team members:

Excerpt 9.10:

1. Lorna (EC): You’re a team,
2. and if one of your teachers can’t see that child over there,
3. then that affects everything that rolls on.

Lorna’s comment demonstrated a “widely held yet perhaps unspoken belief that sight is an essential function of teaching” (Parker & Draves, 2017, p. 398). With the lack of official discourse around what ‘fitness to be teacher’ means beyond satisfactory police checks, there is likely to be other unspoken assumptions circulating the sector. Responses like this highlight the perceived importance many participants placed on physical attributes over other qualities in relation to being a ‘good’ teacher.

Physical disabilities were deemed to be particularly problematic when considered in relation to working in a kindergarten environment due to teacher: child ratios and large group sizes. One example of this came from a discussion between Jo (a current kindergarten teacher) and Bill (an ex-kindergarten teacher).

Excerpt 9.11:

1. Bill (EC, M, O): She's failed the posting at kindergarten, it's contextual
2. Jo (K): Yeah... because it is kindergarten, your ratios are different,
3. there are times you're outside on your own.

Problematizing this issue with respect to kindergartens appeared to have its genesis in the days when all kindergartens were sessional with the required teacher: child ratio of 1:15. Interestingly, all of the kindergartens in this study were operating as all day services with the same teacher: child ratio (1:10) as education and care services. A similar discussion arose in another group:

Excerpt 9.12:

1. Megan (K, HT): I'm really conflicted by it as a kindergarten teacher...
2. because we've got such a big group of 40 children,
3. I need to know that I can trust people to have eyes everywhere.

In this excerpt the focus moved from ratios to group size. Again, there is the perception group sizes are different in kindergarten than they are in education and care however all centre-based, teacher-led services operate under the same regulations. One kindergarten teacher however chose to prioritise children's learning over perceived risk:

Excerpt 9.13:

1. Natalie (K): How does this person who can only see ten feet in front of her,
2. how does her interaction in the kindergarten enable the children to learn about difference?
3. And to develop an understanding of individual physical strengths and weaknesses?

Pope et al. (2001) argued teachers with disabilities provide positive role models for other teachers and children, normalising disability in society. Natalie recognised this potential and was one of only a few participants who demonstrated minimal concern about working with a teacher with a significant visual impairment. Natalie's acceptance may be due to her experience of suffering an injury which impacted on her teaching, leaving her unable to complete some physical aspects of her role for a period of time. She identified that responses to this injury caused a relationship breakdown with the head teacher of the kindergarten where she was employed. Natalie's experiences may have meant she was more able to bring a different perspective to this discussion. Her perspective could also have been influenced by her experience of working with an educator with a similar visual impairment. Kate, who works at the same kindergarten as Natalie, also chose to highlight the educator's strengths.

Excerpt 9.14:

1. Kate (K, HT): We've currently got an untrained part-time person with us whose sight is challenged...
2. But in saying that, she is absolutely stunning...
3. It doesn't impact on her ability to be amazing at what she does.

This vignette and the subsequent discussions highlight the complexity of trying to define who has 'fitness to be teacher' from a physical capability perspective. Most participants struggled to find the 'bottom line', broadening the discussion of disability into learning disabilities, mental health issues and even obesity. They also acknowledged health concerns and disabilities can strike teachers at any time.

Participants generally concluded, however, context is important, arguing the teacher described in the vignette could work successfully in some settings but not others. A range of perspectives were expressed however around where would be an appropriate place for a teacher with a visual impairment to work. Earlier Megan expressed her belief it would be inappropriate for this teacher to work in a kindergarten setting, in this excerpt, Sally articulates her belief that working in an under-two environment would also be unsuitable.

Excerpt 9.15:

1. Sally (EC, M): Having those people,
2. like especially with younger children
3. where it's a lot of physical work...
4. Routine based and care for the little ones.
5. It would be really hard.

Similar to Jay and Nancy's emphasis on safety, Sally's focus on the care and custodial aspects of ECE diminishes the importance of the educational and intellectual aspects in relation to what makes a good teacher. Sally also appears to be 'othering' teachers with disabilities through her language; referring to them as 'those people' (line 1). This sort of language and the reticence of most participants to work alongside the student teacher described in the vignette seem to indicate that, in general, the ECE sector, while purporting to believe in the philosophy of inclusion, would prefer the inclusion of teachers with physical disabilities to occur in settings other than their own. In all but one case, the contexts they identified as appropriate were not the services they currently worked in.

While participants came to the broad consensus that suitability was contextual, and employment of this teacher was up to the specific centre, they questioned whether they, themselves would employ this teacher:

Excerpt 9.16:

1. Lorna (EC): You couldn't hire them and say you're outside; they can't see outside...
2. They are going to graduate, they are going to be teachers,
3. how can they work in the environment?

Using definitive presuppositions such as 'couldn't' and 'can't' (line 1) demonstrated Lorna's strong belief that a teacher with such an impairment is unemployable. While it could be argued that saying 'no' is 'safer' (Stevenson, 1987) for the centre, if the aspiration to be inclusive and value difference is genuine, it must also include difference amongst teachers.

The only participant that indicated she would consider employing the teacher in the vignette was Dawn:

Excerpt 9.17:

1. Dawn (EC,M): I'm working at a licence for 5 unders,
2. so I personally could see that working...
3. Where is that line for fit to teach?...
4. My sister's deaf, she wanted to teach, she wasn't allowed to finish cause she couldn't hear...
5. We talk about being inclusive,
6. we're just being inclusive when it suits us?

Because of Dawn's personal experiences of having a sister who was unable to finish a teaching qualification due to a physical disability (line 4), Dawn appeared to be more open about working alongside the teacher in the vignette. Shaped by democratic professionalism's concept of understanding multiple ways of knowing (Oberhuemer, 2005), Dawn pointed out the contradictions that arose in the discussion about the vignette (lines 5-6).

Challenging the idea 'fitness to be teacher' is contextual, Megan, in another group, raised that qualifications are not specific to a particular demographic or setting. Teaching qualifications indicate the person has met the standard to teach in any early childhood environment. The elusive bottom line had dropped away and the complexity of this issue was highlighted yet again.

Participants also appeared reticent to challenge and/or adapt the way they currently work, for example the way their work and environments are structured, to accommodate a teacher with a physical disability. Similar to Lorna's earlier perspective (excerpt 9.5), teachers are usually the ones who are expected to 'adapt' who they are to fit into (and conform to) a centre. This attitude reflects the medical model of 'impairment as a personal deficit' the individual is responsible to mitigate (Parker & Draves, 2017). In the case of physical disabilities however – this is often not possible. Attitudinal and employment

barriers are, however, the most significant barriers student teachers with disabilities face (Pope et al., 2001).

While maternal and neo-liberal discourses remain dominant, notions of 'protecting' children, impact on the individual, and parent satisfaction will continue to drive teacher beliefs around the inclusion of teachers with differing abilities, regardless of the espoused intention to be inclusive. Maternal discourses, in particular, prioritise the custodial and care purposes of ECE over the educational. This may make it challenging for teachers with physical disabilities to find employment, regardless of how skilled they are at fulfilling the intellectual functions of teaching.

Teaching in ECE is necessarily manual work (Manning-Morton, 2006). As such, teaching can be, by its very nature, physically demanding. Alexander's (2016) survey of over 700 adults working in early childhood found almost one third suffered a workplace related injury during a 12 month period – mostly back and joint injuries. However, do all teachers have to be able to do 'all' things? Treating all teachers as if they are the same is a form of discrimination (Reiser, 1990). The advantages for children's learning about disability outweigh the disadvantages of providing the support needed for teachers with physical impairments to complete some aspects of the role. Parker and Draves (2017) argue teachers with disabilities are needed to support education on issues of disability, disrupting the medical model of disability and expanding understandings about effective teaching. They would also challenge unidimensional models of teachers and teaching (Reiser, 1990).

Literature on effective teaching does not list the teacher's physical capability as one of the attributes that makes a difference for children. Teachers with disabilities in Dvir's (2015) research, mobilised their limitations as professional strengths and recognised them as adding value to their teaching. Teachers who have felt excluded, for any reason, are uniquely able to fully accept and include their students.

Vignette two – 'the children love him'

The second vignette was designed to get participants thinking about the relative importance of a teacher having strong, positive affective qualities in relation to

the completion of an academic qualification. Some participants continued their conflicted feelings when they were considering this vignette, however there was a lot more inclination to give the student the 'benefit of the doubt' with regards to the quality of his practice.

Excerpt 9.18:

1. Betty (K): She holds him in high esteem...
2. There's obviously something really special about him that she sees
3. but she's not putting any academic swing on it.

Betty accepted the response of the manager that the student must be a good teacher because the children love him, regardless of his academic ability and the subsequent knowledge he brings to his teaching. Again, this demonstrates the assumption 'good' teaching is mostly about affective qualities and observed interactions with children – denying the other complexities of the role.

Similar to other caring professions, this may also indicate teachers are more tolerant of an imbalance of heart over mind than they are of mind over heart (Wood, 2004). This imbalance can lead to a tolerance of problematic and theoretically poor practice, and public confusion about the nature of teaching. In addition, it potentially undervalues the purpose of ECE, highlighting only the custodial/ socialisation purpose.

Kate, however, began to consider the knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions required for a teacher to be effective in other aspects of the role.

Excerpt 9.19:

1. Kate (K, HT): He is a really good practitioner,
2. I mean the children love him and he loves the children,
3. but does he understand what he's doing and why he's doing it and the impact it has?

Even in this excerpt however, the student is being referred to as 'a really good practitioner' (line 2) and it is inferred practice, or at least what is observed by others, does not necessarily need to be informed by an understanding of child

development or pedagogical knowledge. This assumption is part of what influences the ambivalence shown towards teacher qualifications outlined in earlier chapters.

Similar to the teacher with a visual impairment, some participants identified the potential burden on other teachers when working with a teacher who is potentially unable to fulfil all of the requirements of the job. The introduction of this vignette provoked some participants to connect the academic components of a teacher education programme to the requirement to complete assessment documentation:

Excerpt 9.20:

1. Gudrun (EC): I don't know if it's academic qualification but...
2. It's not fair on the rest of the teaching team if you have to carry people that can't write good learning stories
3. Or at least get the essence of what the child's learning and make that visible.

Gudrun was still hesitant to link the ability to complete 'good' learning stories with the completion of teacher education (line 1), despite having moved her thinking beyond teachers simply having the ability to write in a clear and coherent way to considering the importance of them understanding children's learning (line 3). Farquhar and Fler (2007) argue "learning stories require high levels of teacher understanding, reflection and sophisticated interpretation within a sociocultural framework" (p. 32). This level of understanding is unlikely to be possible without a teaching qualification.

The perceived burden on the team of having to 'carry' (line 2) teachers who struggle with written documentation expectations is, again, in contrast to the notion of ECE teaching being a collective pursuit; a pursuit which utilises the strengths of all team members and mitigates against individual weaknesses. The expectation that all individuals will be able to competently meet all aspects of the teaching role may have been shaped by individualistic neo-liberal discourses (Osgood, 2010). The following excerpt, while a long one, demonstrates the

tensions raised for teachers in relation to working with others who are unable to write coherently in English:

Excerpt 9.21:

1. Sam (EC): I've been moderating the stories that have been coming from teachers.
2. One of them has English is a second language...
3. It has hit me how far off some of the stories are from being publishable...
4. At what point are you capable of doing the job?... it is hard on the rest of the team...
5. My worry is parents reading this...
6. If it's so simplified and lacking any real learning or depth...
7. and they're reading that and thinking that's what we do.
8. Megan (K, HT): I have a teacher at the moment who has dyslexia...
9. If you know what you mean, but you're just not quite sure how to say it and you need some help there, I can support that...
10. Megan: [But] I won't lie, it is a burden. It's still compensating for someone's lacking

Participants were concerned about the burden placed on colleagues when teachers were unable to complete coherent assessment documentation, even when the teacher's inability to write was based on English language competence or a learning disability.

Sam also outlined potential risks to the reputation of the centre should documentation not be of a high standard and not accurately demonstrate the work of the teacher. She raised concern about any negative impression being made on parents, and the subsequent influence on their view of teachers. Again there is a sense parents are judging teachers based on the 'products' teachers create, in this case assessment documentation.

Consistent with the increased emphasis on documentation and accountability under neo-liberal discourses, the ability to write well for parents has become important to participants, making them less tolerant of teachers who may have learning disabilities or English as a second language.

Participants placed more 'blame' on teacher education and the manager's role in the practicum placement when discussing this vignette, neither of which were mentioned when discussing the student with physical limitations in vignette one. Their comments indicated dissatisfaction with the selection of participants, the content of teacher education programmes and the passing of students who they believe to be unsatisfactory.

While participants appeared to be very clear about the importance of having teachers who are able to fulfil all aspects of the role, including professional and academic responsibilities, this emphasis was not apparent until the introduction of the vignettes. Instead, groups mostly prioritised affective qualities in their initial discussions of what makes a good teacher. Arguably, the manager in this vignette was just doing the same.

Teacher gender

As already discussed, there was very little acknowledgement amongst participants in relation to the need for a diverse range of teachers to cater for the increasingly diverse range of children in early childhood services (Connell, 2009a). The discussion of diversity amongst teachers was mainly limited to gender. Bill, as a male teacher himself, argued strongly for the inclusion of male teachers in **all** areas of the curriculum.

Excerpt 9.22:

1. Bill (EC, M, O): Some men are discriminated against changing nappies...
2. Why's this even an issue? Of course men should do it... with the whole thing about looking at the family unit in terms of the roles that we have got to play in society.
3. Children need both male and female perspectives
4. and education needs a male perspective as well
5. And men need to see men in that role.

Initially Bill highlighted an ongoing concern for men working with young children (lines 1-2), that of the "long-standing cultural unease about male carers" (Cameron, 2006, p. 69), often linked to child abuse. He goes on to argue the importance of having male teachers, appearing to link this to changing family

circumstances in society (line 2). Without explicitly stating it, however, Bill seems to be reinforcing the dominant heteronormative regime of truth held in society that children who are brought up in single mother, or two mother families are somehow 'worse off' than children being brought up with a mother and a father (lines 2-3). This regime assumes these children lack a male perspective in their upbringing, sustaining nuclear family discourse which normalises heterosexual gendered identities over other gendered identities (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006).

Bill appeared to believe male teachers in early childhood are somehow required to 'fill the gap' for children who are perceived as needing positive male role models in their lives in order to develop into 'real' men (Davies & Saltmarsh, 2007). This regime of truth also draws from the protectionist genesis of early childhood discussed in Chapter Five. Bill also indicated education in general, not just ECE, is highly gendered and needs to be more balanced (line 4). This argument has been raised regularly across New Zealand with the perceived 'over-feminisation' of pedagogies and practice being touted as impacting negatively on boys' academic achievement (Gunn & Mac Naughton, 2007).

In contrast, Daniel is almost dismissive of his gender, arguing it is irrelevant with regards to his ability to be a good teacher:

Excerpt 9.23:

1. Daniel (EC): I'm just a teacher who happens to be a guy.
2. To some people it's a big deal to have their child go to a centre with a male teacher,
3. but personally, I just want to be a good teacher and my gender is irrelevant.
4. I don't expect special treatment.

As well as the dominance of maternal discourses in discussions, and the inferred gender stereotypes implicit in these, a number of generalised statements were made about men and women throughout interviews, many of which demonstrated an overall assumption that teachers are women. Participants used gender specific language when referring to groups of teachers, often in a derogatory way.

Excerpt 9.24:

1. Sam (EC): I think my biggest fear is becoming stagnant,
2. being one of those teachers that probably should leave but they haven't yet...
3. It's very cruel of me to say, but it's kind of like the old ladies' club.

The notion of being an 'old lady' was portrayed as negative, reinforcing both gender and age stereotypes. Sam has associated this term with teachers becoming stagnant and immovable in their practice. The use of the metaphor 'old ladies' club' brings to mind stereotypical images of elderly women sitting around knitting and complaining about the younger generation.

Teachers were also portrayed stereotypically and negatively by other participants, including; "I still feel like I see too much of this nice lady..." and "they're teachers not babysitters; the nice old lady who sits and looks after the kids" for example. It is also interesting the word 'lady' was used rather than perhaps women. Potentially, this nomenclature again references the genesis of ECE where it was predominantly 'gentile' women or 'ladies' that worked with young children of the lower classes (May, 2009).

Gender stereotypes were also applied to teacher behaviour, particularly when discussing new teachers conforming to the practices of the centre they are first employed in (see Chapter Six) which was perceived by Bill to be a trait associated with women. Throughout the discussion, Bill made stereotypical comments about women, including using the metaphor of the "crab bucket":

Excerpt 9.25:

1. Bill (EC, M, O): Horizontal violence is a really interesting process
2. and it's usually attributed to nursing because of course it's a female...
3. They call it the crab bucket mentality.
4. You put a whole lot of crabs in a bucket and one tries to get out
5. and the others try and they pull it back in.
6. You don't get above your place. You don't get above your station.

Bill attributes the crab bucket metaphor to the concept of horizontal violence as widely researched in nursing (line 2). (For example, King-Jones, 2011; Purpora & Blegen, 2015), attributing the violence to the gendered nature of nursing through his use of the term 'of course' (line 2). Hard (2006), found horizontal violence is also a feature of ECE, with teachers who have stepped into leadership roles, or who are trying something 'new' experiencing it the most.

King-Jones (2011) defines horizontal violence as "overt and covert nonphysical hostility, such as criticism, sabotaging, undermining, infighting, scapegoat, and bickering" (p. 80). This hostility is also often associated with bullying, which is arguably an issue in New Zealand ECE. Alexander (2016) found 34 percent of the qualified teachers in her survey had been subject to bullying, including personal nastiness and prejudices, particularly teachers from a different background or culture.

The concept of the crab bucket has been attributed to Paulo Freire's work on the oppressed where he asserted it is "the behavior of oppressed people who coped with feelings of powerlessness by displacing negative emotions and aggressiveness onto each other rather than onto the dominant social group" (King-Jones, 2011, p. 81). In this situation, Bill has positioned women as 'the oppressed' (line 2) and, as such, has attributed any hostile behaviour experienced by new teachers as stereotypically gendered. Ironically, Hard (2006) attributes the presence of horizontal violence in ECE to the 'culture of niceness'. This culture demands conformity and compliance to expected behaviours, with consequences for those who don't.

In another gendered comment, Bill also asserted women who work together "cycle together" and this is another reason why new teachers conform in their first centre. He often used humour to make these assertions which, in most situations, went verbally unchallenged by the women teachers. Instead, shaped by the same essentialist discourses, some of the women in this group also referred to gender stereotypes when discussing groups of women working together:

Excerpt 9.26:

1. Lorna (EC): There's lots of stresses involved in teaching.
2. You have the stress of a workplace environment with a group,
3. usually predominantly women, all working together.
4. That in itself creates friction.

Male teachers were also referred to using gender stereotypical language and descriptions. Some of these stereotypes positioned the male teacher as being a valuable addition to the teaching team. Lorna shared the following at her individual interview:

Excerpt 9.27:

1. Lorna (EC): we've actually got a student here at the moment that's a male student...
2. the kids have absolutely loved having a male student here.
3. And the different ideas that he's provided,
4. different to what we would just naturally think up...
5. [The children] really relate to him cause he's got different ideas ...
6. they keep trying to engage with him in different things.
7. Interviewer: What about what he does is different?
8. Lorna: maybe it's more hands on things and... more technical side of things like creating pulleys and things like that...
9. science and maths.
10. Things that go together that we just haven't got the knowledge
11. and haven't thought about doing.
12. And even the way of setting up the playground...
13. He's got different ideas that challenge, particularly [in] physical ways

Lorna highlighted the traditional and stereotypically perceived masculine strengths the male student has brought to the curriculum including science and maths (line 9), technology (line 8) and physical challenges (line 13). In addition, Lorna drew on maternal discourses, reinforcing these gender stereotypes by asserting the other (female) teachers do not have knowledge of (line 10) and would not 'naturally' think of providing these types of learning experiences for children (lines 4 & 11). From a feminist poststructuralist view, we all produce and

reproduce our gender by the ways we speak it, think it and act it (Gunn & Mac Naughton, 2007). Lorna appears to have reproduced her understanding of gender through the use of essentialised ideas about what it means to be male and female.

Huppatz (2009) argues women in caring professions, such as teaching, are likely to have 'feminine capital' meaning gender-related characteristics are valued and women are more trusted in the role. This can be a double-edged sword however, these characteristics are usually depicted as 'natural' to women, rather than acquired, and are therefore undervalued and underpaid. In addition, women's confidence in their practice of these gender-stereotypical characteristics can equate with a reduction in confidence in less stereotypical capacities. This lack of confidence is apparent in Lorna's response to the male student teacher.

Not all participants were as open to increasing the number of male teachers however. Kate discussed the perceived emphasis on attracting men into early childhood teaching. Like Lorna, Kate drew on gender stereotypes, but this time focussing on negative stereotypes:

Excerpt 9.28:

1. Kate (K, HT): I was just thinking about the drive to have more male teachers...
2. Their primary sort of thing is that they come in and start roaring at the children and throwing them in the air,
3. and think that's it.
4. What are you doing here?

Cameron (2006) found men who work with young children often encounter queries about their status, presence and motives. Kate, drawing on her ideas about good teaching, seemed to question the practice she has observed as well as the male students' motives (line 4). As discussed previously, institutionalised and gendered assumptions about good teaching have been strongly shaped by maternal discourses which align good teaching with good mothering; positioning the teacher as gentle, nurturing and kind. The behaviour of male teachers, as described by Kate, does not 'fit' these assumptions and is therefore dismissed as

inappropriate. This excerpt is an example of how historical and essentialised 'natural' discourses discourage and/or even exclude men from becoming early childhood teachers (Dalli et al., 2012). Again, this reflects a lack of awareness of the multiple ways of knowing envisaged in democratic professionalism discourses (Oberhuemer, 2005).

These examples highlight a strong regime of truth in ECE – male teachers are different from female teachers. Regimes of truth like this influence the curriculum offered to children by limiting the range of experiences provided only to those that 'match' gender stereotypes. They also shape our subjectivity and identity, and the perceptions about what we can and cannot do (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006).

Teachers, instead of considering how to offer a full, rich and complex curriculum to children, can excuse their limitations as being gender-related, bemoaning the lack of experiences offered rather than taking responsibility to provide a breadth and depth of curriculum themselves. The aim of poststructural feminism is to deconstruct the male/female binary that locks individuals into particular subject positions (Davies et al., 2006); in this case, challenging notions of the 'mothering' female teacher and the 'physical' male teacher.

Making space for diverse teachers

While much of the participants' discussion in this section appeared to limit diversity amongst teaching staff, there was some acknowledgement of the value of having a range of teachers in ECE. While the following example is in contrast with other statements made by Lorna, it demonstrates a growing awareness of the importance of diversity:

Excerpt 9.29:

1. Lorna (EC): If you've got an environment where it's mixed, then it's beneficial for the children.
2. You can have a good environment with just females but [having a male teacher] is nice, [puts a] different perspective on things...
3. If you had somebody from a different culture, strong in their culture, coming through,

4. then that would be another aspect.
5. It's just having lots of different varieties of people for children.

Winslade (2005) argues it is hard “to resist the ongoing position calls that the dominant discourses of race and gender exert” (p. 361). Based on findings, I would add ability to this argument. To do so requires ongoing vigilance.

Any definition of teacher quality that imposes a single model of excellence is likely to damage education (Connell, 2009a). However, by considering teaching to be a collective pursuit, opportunities to have a diverse range of teachers could emerge. We need to expand our conceptualisation of the ‘good’ teacher to include difference and value diversity rather than always looking for teachers to be an ideological “rearticulation” (Langford, 2007, p. 348) of teachers of the past. New voices will support ECE to find new terms and concepts to support teachers to think differently and acknowledge diverse approaches, beginning to see other ways ECE can be enacted (Fleer, 2003).

Cultural responsiveness and inclusion

Surprisingly, the quality of teachers being inclusive of all children and their families was only raised in one group, where it was threaded throughout the discussion. In other groups it was implied through discussion around acceptance and the importance of treating children as individuals, however was never explicitly stated. Perhaps the lack of overt acknowledgement of inclusion is another demonstration of the marginalisation of democratic professionalism discourses. Certainly, participant responses were fraught with tensions and contradictions when considering cultural inclusion and the provision of a bicultural curriculum.

Being bicultural

Despite *Te Whāriki* explicitly outlining the right of all children to “be given the opportunity to develop knowledge and an understanding of the cultural heritages of both partners to Te Tiriti o Waitangi” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9) through a bicultural curriculum, discussions around the importance of being a bicultural teacher (and what that may mean) were rare and approached very tentatively, sometimes failing to move beyond very general statements. May

(2009) identified the bicultural approach to curriculum embedded in *Te Whāriki* has been an ongoing challenge for teachers who are more familiar with a focus on play areas and activities in 'mainstream' centres. While the sector's aspiration to be bicultural was strong enough to be embedded in *Te Whāriki*, this aspiration had not been actualised in the early 2000s (Nuttall, 2005a).

Despite *Te Whāriki* being in place for over 20 years, it appears it is still a challenge. Bicultural discourses were marginalised amongst most participants, who all work in English medium early childhood centres, and silent in one of the groups. Consistent with Ritchie and Rau's (2006) finding 'mainstream' teachers lack the confidence and competence to deliver bicultural programmes consistent with *Te Whāriki*, having the knowledge and skills to provide a bicultural curriculum was only mentioned by two participants in relation to what makes a 'good' teacher, with only one of these mentions being in a group. In addition, experiences that would be considered bicultural practice were also only mentioned once. The most meaningful discussion about this issue came after Kay raised it in one group. The following excerpts from this discussion highlight the tensions, reticence and lack of confidence surrounding this issue:

Excerpt 9.30a:

1. Kay (EC): I don't know how to put this actually,
2. I don't know how to word this,
3. I think for me within a,
4. like I've talked about there being inclusiveness and everything,
5. but we do live in New Zealand,
6. there is a treaty, and teachers need to be skilled, equipped.

Kay was very tentative in the group when raising the importance of teachers having knowledge of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the ability to implement this in their practice. This is the most tentative initiation of any topic in any of the groups or discussions. It took her several attempts to make her point. While other participants expressed support for her position, they began to raise experiences that were perceived to be barriers to the bicultural imperative. Lorna raised an

issue their centre faced when attempting to integrate the Māori culture into their centre:

Excerpt 9.30b:

7. Lorna (EC): One of our parents'... feedback from when we were asking about Māori and what they wanted us to do...
8. said "it's my job to teach them about the Māori culture, it's not your job. I don't want you teaching them cause you might teach them the wrong stuff... You teach them the other side of things and I'll teach them that culture"...
9. So it's the parent, it's what the parent's wanting

Lorna's experience differed from Ritchie and Rau's (2006) study which found Māori families who send their children to English medium centres want their children to learn te reo Māori (Māori language), supported by the centre. It may therefore be the exception rather than the rule, however it does highlight a tension many teachers face; the tension between enacting the curriculum in the way intended and 'doing what parents want' (line 9).

Participants were less confident to respond to parents in a constructive and informed way about curriculum implementation when they perceived the parent to be the expert, particularly with respect to cultural expertise, as in this case. When teachers are still developing confidence, it is easier for them to defer to the parent's wishes rather than to seek further knowledge and guidance, for example involving local iwi (tribe) or other parents with knowledge.

Consistent with the positioning of teacher as expert, in an area where participants were more confident (for example, socialisation, see Chapter Six), they were more likely to justify their practice, explaining to the parent why it is important rather than opting out. In contrast, a teacher in Souto-Manning and Mitchell's (2010) study positioned herself as a learner, supporting families to share their funds of knowledge with children, as experts, and was therefore able to provide a democratically negotiated curriculum.

Perhaps Lorna's example is one of "Pākehā paralysis", a phrase Tolich (2002) coined when considering the reticence of Pākehā postgraduate students to

include Māori in their research of the general population. The notion of paralysis means being “unwilling or unable to think through this political minefield” (p. 168). Like the students in Tolich’s study, who had previously been told they had no place researching Māori, some participants in this study, like Lorna, had been ‘told’ (or at least given the impression) they had no place teaching te reo Māori. Tolich went on to argue that the ethical principle his participants had violated by omitting Māori participants was ‘harm’ as they had subsequently excluded Māori voices from being heard and benefitting from the research. In addition, harm was caused to the researchers who missed the opportunity to gain cross-cultural understanding and to work in a Te Tiriti o Waitangi based partnership. Participants in this study also appeared to have been denied similar benefit by not working this issue through with parents. Children were also caused harm through missing the opportunity to make connections and to hear their language used and normalised in settings other than their home.

Jo raised another issue which also cast doubt on the non-Māori teachers’ role in relation to the use of te reo Māori; that is the numeric dominance of Pākehā teachers and the issues this may raise for Māori in relation to the ‘ownership’ of their language and tikanga (protocols):

Excerpt 9.30c:

10. Jo (K): So if ...we’re all teaching te reo Māori, and tikanga Māori,
11. there’s more of us than actual Māori,
12. so who then is controlling.
13. Kay (EC): But we live under a treaty
14. At the end of the day, education is the equaliser...
15. Jo: Should be
16. Kay: It should be...
17. So, if we’re not fulfilling our,
18. Oh, I hate the word ‘our’
19. Jay (EC, HT): Obligations
20. Kay: I hate that word so much. Then how are we allowing
21. Jo: Creating

22. Kay: Articles one, two and three³⁰ to occur

23. Jo: I don't know, this actually came from within the Māori community

Nelson (2018), in her recent report to the Māori Language Commission, argued it is vital Pākehā support te reo Māori, either actively or passively, to ensure its ongoing survival. Like Jo, however, she suggests this support needs to ensure Māori maintain ownership of the language and its integrity. This suggestion is part of a larger conversation that needs to be had by the nation as part of wider strategy to revitalise and re-normalise te reo Māori. What this support could and should look like is yet to be determined, however Pākehā attitudes and engagement will be influential. The complexity of this issue is demonstrated in participants' responses.

Kay appeared to be unsure as to how to respond to Jo's challenge about who holds the power, therefore she reverted to general statements like "education is the equaliser" (line 14), which hasn't actually been the case historically, hence the 'should' statements that followed (lines 15-16). In the same way Māori have not traditionally been well served by Pākehā researchers (Tolich, 2002), Māori have not been well served by Pākehā education. It is therefore understandable Māori parents are suspicious of ECE's 'adoption' of te reo Māori. A key feature, therefore, of any attempts to be bicultural is that they benefit and empower Māori. Kay demonstrated an understanding of this imperative. She went on to refer to the obligations embedded in the articles of the Treaty of Waitangi to justify the need for bicultural curriculum.

Again, participants were uncertain how to act due to the differing responses they have received from parents and the community (line 23). Maintaining and practising a commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi can require courage and put teachers in challenging and uncomfortable positions. It can be made easier, however, when the whole team shares the same philosophy and commitment (Ritchie & Rau, 2006). Tolich (2002) argues for a collaborative and interactive approach to research that includes Māori; where the power lies with whānau

³⁰ The Treaty of Waitangi has three written clauses or articles which outline the two parties' rights and responsibilities under this treaty.

and the researcher is accountable to them. The same principles should arguably be applied to teaching.

As a Pākehā, Kay's reticence to use the word 'our' is interesting (lines 17-18). 'Our' in this context referred to the Crown's obligations under the treaty, therefore it is appropriate to use the word 'our' to refer to all non-Māori. In other circumstances, the use of the word 'our' has been critiqued due to its 'othering' nature when used by the dominant group to make other groups appear 'not normal' or 'more exotic' (MacNaughton, 2005). I believe it is this critique that caused Kay's reticence, demonstrating her consideration of the power of language and her genuine desire to be inclusive.

There is another interesting word play in this excerpt. Jo 'corrected' Kay's use of the term 'allowing' (line 20) by inserting the word 'creating' (line 21); another example of the ways participants considered their use of language carefully when discussing bicultural issues – wanting to make sure they 'got it right'.

Official regulatory documentation does not appear to provide much clarity for teachers either. Dawn reflected on a situation shared by Jay where a Māori family chose to send their bilingual child to their English medium rather than their bilingual centre:

Excerpt 9.30d:

24. Dawn (EC, HT): We have an obligation to [provide a bicultural curriculum], as teachers and in the criteria.
25. To actually do that honourably and well...
26. And you offer, whether they choose to accept, that is up to the individual... and what their aspirations are for the child.

The 'criteria' Dawn referred to (line 24) are licensing criteria which outline the legal imperatives for early childhood services. Curriculum criterion 5 states "The service curriculum acknowledges and reflects the unique place of Māori as tangata whenua. Children are given the opportunity to develop knowledge and an understanding of the cultural heritages of both parties to Te Tiriti o Waitangi" (Ministry of Education, 2018b, p. 10). While reinforcing this criterion, Dawn was still tentative, referring to parental choice (line 26) over the integration of te reo

Māori into ECE programmes. As such, she was perhaps reflecting the tentative way the criterion is worded - “children are given the opportunity” – there is still choice as to whether this opportunity is taken up. As discussed earlier, there were other areas of the curriculum where participants were more adamant about their importance and confident in their ability to enact them. These areas become not negotiable.

The only other mention of teachers providing a bicultural curriculum was made by Natalie during a discussion about the ways subject knowledge is woven into the environment and curriculum offered by centres:

Excerpt 9.31:

1. Natalie (K): We use nature and our place within New Zealand to educate,
2. we talk about bicultural curriculum,
3. we talk about Waitangi Day,
4. we’re talking about Matariki,
5. we’re talking and sharing reo³¹ and waiata³²,

Key foci for Natalie, however, were the artefacts of culture, for example celebrations and events (lines 3-4). This focus is common in New Zealand ECE services. Souto-Manning and Mitchell (2010) argue it is important for teachers to move beyond celebrations, acknowledging everyday cultural practices that shape children’s lives.

The lack of emphasis on providing a bicultural curriculum may indicate this requirement is taken-for-granted by participants. It may also be that there is still a significant level of discomfort for teachers who feel they do not have the knowledge or expertise to be bicultural. Ritchie and Rau (2006) argue strengthening bicultural curriculum is a “central professional responsibility” (p. 1) for teachers. If participants identified strongly with the knowledge of Māori language and culture being ‘required’ knowledge for teachers, would this mean they would have to admit to not meeting this knowledge requirement and therefore not meeting all identified criteria to be ‘effective’ in their role? This

³¹ language

³² songs

may have been an area of anxiety for participants as a number of reports, including national evaluation reports completed by ERO, for example *Early Learning Curriculum* (Education Review Office, 2016), critique the sector's fulfilment of the bicultural imperatives and aspirations in *Te Whāriki*.

Increasing the social power of marginalised discourses, such as biculturalism, even in a small way, may take "extreme and brave actions on the part of the agents of challenge" (Weedon, 1987, p. 111). This may involve a concerted effort to recruit more Māori into teacher education programmes. Barnes and Ewens (2014), in a needs analysis completed for the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, found Māori made up only 9 percent of the ECE teacher-led teaching workforce, even though Māori children made up 21 percent of the ECE population. At approximately 61 percent qualified, they were also less likely to be qualified than other ethnic groups. Indigenous, community-connected teachers act as a bridge to bringing cultural knowledge into ECE programmes (Leske et al., 2015), therefore, to progress curriculum bicultural aspirations, recruitment of Māori teachers may be critical.

It is also critical, however, to ensure ECE teacher education programmes and services create inclusive settings welcome of all teachers to support any recruitment initiatives. To promote inclusion, Tolich (2002) argues for cultural safety, focusing on Te Tiriti o Waitangi, to be a core curriculum component of any research methods programme. This may also be useful in teacher education. One group expressed concern about Te Tiriti o Waitangi being 'missing' from current teacher education programmes:

Excerpt 9.32:

1. Kay (EC): There is a treaty,
2. and teachers need to be skilled, equipped.
3. I think it's gotten, with the changes from teachers college to the merging with university,
4. possibly that it's not happening to the same degree.

Kay expressed a belief that the move of teacher education from Colleges of Education (where she completed her qualification) into Universities has meant

there have been some losses to the programme provided for student teachers, in particular teachers no longer gaining the necessary knowledge and skills to implement a bicultural programme. Other participants in the group supported Kay's perspective implying treaty specific knowledge may have been absorbed into bigger discussions about inclusion and multiculturalism.

Cultural responsiveness

Despite research identifying ECE services, where family engagement is high and "social/cultural capital and interests from home are included" (Mitchell et al., 2008, p. 7), are most likely to contribute to positive outcomes for children, discourses of cultural responsiveness were similarly marginalised. The only time the importance of teachers being culturally responsive was inferred was by the Fijian Indian participant:

Excerpt 9.33:

1. Sally (EC, M): I think it is important to treat children as individuals...
2. and every child comes in with a wealth of knowledge which includes the culture with they come,
3. so knowing that helps us to get to know the child better
4. and helps us to provide better learning opportunities for that particular child.

Even in this excerpt, Sally was not explicit about the importance of being culturally responsive, instead linking the importance of cultural understanding to 'knowing' individual children. She did, however, appear to recognise responsive teaching requires teachers to understand the cognitive and cultural perspectives of the child so they can scaffold their learning further (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004). After acknowledging the culture the child brings with them, Sally alluded to the role of the teacher being to acknowledge and respond to each child's 'wealth of knowledge' to shape the curriculum.

While not explicitly mentioned, the tensions and complexities of working with families whose values and beliefs differ significantly from the teachers was

highlighted in one group. To demonstrate these tensions and complexities, I have used Kay as a case study. Kay began teacher education as a mature student, after having children and a previous career working with adults with intellectual disabilities. She has lived and worked in early childhood centres in London as well as New Zealand. Kay is of Pākehā descent and is committed to being inclusive. When asked to bring to mind a great teacher, and what made them great, she responded:

Excerpt 9.34:

1. Kay (EC): Being inclusive...
2. but also being able to speak out and speak up for best interests for children...
3. even though that can be hard...
4. But, yeah, inclusive...
5. especially [with] the changing dynamics of the country we live in - with our rising Pasifika, Māori, refugees, everyone coming in.
6. We're taking on a slightly different lens now...
7. You've got your values and your morals, but you can't judge.
8. Because I do something doesn't mean it's wrong, it's just slightly different...
9. Definitely being able to advocate for the child.
10. That's really, really important.
11. You may have lots of enemies in that.

The main area of inclusion being referred to in this excerpt is cultural inclusion. Kay raised two areas she associates with inclusion, foregoing judgement (line 8) and advocating for the child (lines 2 & 9). Kay appears to equate the teacher advocating for the child to the provision of an inclusive environment that supports a diverse range of children to learn and develop.

There have obviously been some personal challenges Kay has had to face in relation to her advocacy for individual children, particularly those from minority cultures (line 5). This is evident through her use of the words 'hard' (line 3) and 'enemies' (line 11) and the personalisation of the statement about recognition of

difference (line 8). It is unclear who the enemies were Kay was referring to, however later in the discussion she recounts her experiences in London in relation to advocating for children experiencing female genital mutilation and indoctrination into ISIS. Knowing this, perhaps the enemies she referred to in this excerpt are the children's parents and their associates. She may also be referring to colleagues who she sees as judging when/if they disagree with her practice or her stance (lines 7-8).

Interestingly, perhaps due to the challenges she has faced, she appeared to describe a very uni-directional stance, discussing the suspension of judgement however failing to acknowledge any learning she may experience from engagement with other cultures. Working in an intercultural way requires teachers to work openly with families, being open to their contributions and negotiating the curriculum (Mitchell & Bateman, 2018).

During Kay's international teaching experience, some events challenged Kay's beliefs about inclusion. These were linked to cultural rituals, values and beliefs that were contrary to what she believed to be 'right'. Later in the interview she returned to these events in a discussion about whether children who don't attend ECE will still be 'okay' (as initially proposed by Bill):

Excerpt 9.35:

1. Kay (EC): Where I taught in London,
2. there are children there who were not okay.
3. Majority were in the classroom, but I'd say quarter of them, they weren't okay.
4. When you've got little children, girls being genital mutilated [sic]...
5. When sadly there are children who are being trained and indoctrinated into ISIS.
6. Bill (EC, M, O): I don't think your education's gonna change that.
7. So you can't count them.
8. Jo (K): You were talking about not changing culture just a wee bit ago...
9. Now you're gonna change it?

10. Kay: At the moment New Zealand is quite removed to a degree, but that world is coming to us very, very quickly.
11. Majority of children, yes they are [safe]
12. but there are some in which, they're not safe.

The perceived abuses Kay raised (lines 4-5) are both culturally based. In lines 9-10, Jo picked up the contradiction between what Kay was saying earlier about not judging other people based on difference, and what she is saying now about children not being safe within their own culture. Jo assumed Kay wanted to change these circumstances for children.

Kay appeared to struggle to make sense of families' values and beliefs when they differed from hers (and 'common-sense' beliefs in New Zealand society), particularly when she believes these beliefs and practices will harm children. This is despite her genuine intention to be inclusive and non-judgemental of cultural difference, perhaps even because of it.

Both Kay and Jo appeared to struggle with the tensions implicit in cultural relativism which challenges the idea we can actually identify good (or bad) early childhood pedagogies, as our knowledge about the world is contradictory, and many different truths are possible (MacNaughton, 2005).

As New Zealand becomes a more ethnically diverse society these conflicts and tensions will become more regular and more apparent as teachers are faced with cultural practices that confront their beliefs. Early childhood teachers are more likely than others to witness practices like female genital mutilation (FGM) due to their role in care routines. While performance of FGM is illegal in New Zealand (and has been since 1996), teachers may not necessarily be aware of this and may be unsure as to what actions to take should they discover a child has experienced this practice.

Bill also pointed out that the children Kay spoke about were not made 'safe' through attending ECE (line 6). This topic is brought up again later in the discussion when participants were asked their perspectives on the purpose of ECE:

Excerpt 9.36:

1. Jay (EC, HT): We may not be able to make immediate change to... these bigger world things that you're talking about.
2. However, do we offer at least the opportunity of different perspectives,
3. that might, in some of those little minds, grow to question?...
4. Bill (EC, M, O): No
5. Jay: I don't think it will be immediate change
6. but part of learning is having the opportunity to understand others. See other perspectives. Understand things from a different lens.
7. That creates an opportunity for the mind to go "mmm, maybe I'll question that. Maybe there is a different way of looking at things".
8. Whereas if children don't ever have that opportunity, if they are completely indoctrinated into something without ever the opportunity to understand there could be a different way of thinking, then of course you're never going to change those things...
9. Jo (K): So something better than their home life are you saying? The culture that they grow up in. Something better than their family?
10. Jay: I'm not saying necessarily better
11. Cause I'm not making those judgements.
12. I'm saying that there is [sic] other possibilities...
13. Kay (EC): Nurture the seed so it can blossom...
14. Provide experiences, different perspectives...
15. so that child, that seed, can take whatever path they want...
16. Their decisions come from a pool of things, not just a little square box.
17. Bill: It would be very hard to quantify you doing that to be honest,
18. because what you are talking about are pre-schoolers who are very limited in terms of power...
19. They are just beginning on their journey and their journey is made up of a whole lot.
20. And remember most of the pre-schoolers don't remember us as teachers.
21. I would suggest to you that we are a very small part in a long progress of change.

Again, Jo questioned the judgements made by other participants about the cultural beliefs and practices that challenge them (line 9). Even though Jay denied making judgements (line 11), the use of the value-laden term 'indoctrinated' (line 8) and the metaphors of growing and nurturing seeds so they can blossom (lines 13 & 15), taking differing paths (line 15), and moving outside 'a little square box' (line 16), all indicated both Jay and Kay would like to influence these children to make different choices from their parents, choices more in line with what the teachers think is 'good' and 'right'.

They also, however, demonstrated a belief ECE can provide children with knowledge and dispositions to influence their world's beyond their microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1996). While mixing metaphors significantly (e.g. lens, seeds, paths, pools and boxes), they positioned ECE as a place where children can be exposed to a range of ways of knowing and being that may help them challenge the 'status quo' and provide them with different options and the ability to make informed decisions in their future.

In contrast, Bill questioned teachers' ability to make any real difference in the lives of children despite their best intentions, resisting the commonly held regime of truth that 'ECE prepares children for life' (Chapter Five). However, the agreement he got from other participants following these statements, including from Jay, seemed to indicate a perceived lack of agency in making positive change for children.

Robinson and Jones Diaz (2006) argue agency "is about our ability to act with intent and awareness" (p. 38), assigning individual and collective responsibility to teachers to "take responsibility for their position in discourse and its implications for the perpetuation of social inequalities and injustices" (pp. 38-39). Agency is not something individuals *have*, rather it is something people *do* (Biesta et al., 2015), and teachers' beliefs play a role in their achievement of agency. Biesta et al.'s (2015) model highlights achievement of agency is informed by past experience, orientated to the future, and enacted in the present, influenced by cultural, material and structural resources. For these participants, their beliefs about whether they can make a difference is likely to have been influenced by their past experiences, and their agency has been influenced by factors which

have often been beyond their immediate control. Consistent with Biesta et al.'s (2015) findings, the strong discourses shaping their beliefs about teaching seemed to limit their agency in relation to offering a curriculum that influences the changes they seek.

Interestingly, Bill contradicted himself somewhat later, when the purpose of ECE was discussed, when he stated “we have early childhood to counter some of the social problems that actually exist in the reality” (see excerpt 7.37). In this statement he expressed a belief access to early childhood **can** provide children from disadvantaged backgrounds with experiences that support future development. He has not, however, made the connection to how this belief could be applied to other forms of, what is arguably, child abuse and deprivation, some of which is culturally derived.

Siraj-Blatchford (2001) argued teachers need to take particular care to understand the different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds of the children they work with to ensure “children are brought up to balance the tensions and handle the adjustments of being reared in one way and being educated in another” (p. 105). Teachers need to be tolerant, flexible and able to communicate effectively with parents about their work. Bill discussed the potential challenges in this approach:

Excerpt 9.37:

1. Bill (EC, M, O): I think you will talk about multiple perspectives.
2. In practice we like the idea,
3. but in reality, it seems that we struggle with that.
4. If anyone's outside the norm, the approach that we use is different,
5. then all of a sudden sometimes we're seen as the anti-Christ.

Bill recognised the tensions teachers face when confronted by values, ideas and practices different from their own. He posited the notion that this is one area where the rhetoric struggles to match the reality.

Being inclusive and culturally responsive has been recognised as being extremely important for a teacher, with many benefits for the children and their families

(Mitchell & Bateman, 2018). This case study, however, demonstrates the aspiration to be inclusive is complex and fraught with tensions and contradictions. Teachers need to be aware of and engage with these tensions and contradictions reflexively in order to critique and challenge their own values, whilst still upholding the wellbeing of children. There are likely to be times when teachers have to make a decision between cultural acceptance and advocating for the rights of the child and they need to have enough information and knowledge to do this sensitively and with the best interests of all concerned at heart. These will be times of moral and ethical dilemmas that require both intelligence and empathy.

ECE transmits cultural values and has a role in passing on culturally valued skills. While these values should not always be those of the dominant culture, they often are (Smith, 1996). Children from culturally diverse backgrounds are often expected to learn in cultural contexts different from what they have experienced (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010). As one of the three purposes of education is subjectification, or identity development, it is important teachers are aware of the impact of what they choose to teach (academic), and how they choose to teach it (socialisation), to ensure a child has the opportunity to develop a strong and positive sense of self (Biesta, 2015).

Smith (1996) argues it is necessary to acknowledge the culturally determined goals that underpin ECE programmes and practice, and to work together with parents to make these goals explicit and public. This will assist to break down stereotypical views on both sides (Greenfield, 2012). Teachers need to critically examine their cultural values to confront 'taken-for-granted assumptions' and identify where there are spaces for values other than those of the dominant culture to be recognised and even celebrated in their curriculum.

Conclusion

Moss (2010) argues, when it comes to ECE policy and practice, "[u]niversal laws and practices are propounded; diversity is ignored and, therefore, threatened" (p. 10). Normalising terms such as 'quality' and 'best practice' assume only one right answer, usually that of the dominant white, middle-class culture. Participants in this study sometimes found it difficult to envisage a 'good' teacher who does not

meet the stereotypical image of being female, white and middle-class, or at least demonstrating the characteristics associated with this image.

In this chapter, the impact of such images on a participant of Chinese descent (Nancy) was discussed, highlighting how she denied aspects of her culture in order to fit in. Students and teachers from cultures other than Pākehā were positioned as being 'lesser than' and were subsequently 'othered' by many participants.

Teachers must develop an understanding of how this dominant culture functions at all levels to "disconfirm the cultural experience of the "excluded majorities"" (Giroux, 1988, p. 7), by examining their own cultural capital and basic assumptions about curriculum and pedagogy, and the way these either benefit or victimise others. Teachers may be unintentionally 'othering' colleagues, children and families through their daily practice (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). If they do not examine their own unquestioned attitudes, beliefs and taken-for-granted truths, they may unintentionally strengthen rather than challenge oppression through normalising discourse in the hidden curriculum.

Similarly, the use of vignettes identified how teachers with differing abilities were often viewed through a deficit lens. A strong regime of truth was demonstrated - that teachers need to be physically fit to teach in an early childhood setting. Being physically fit enough to meet the role of 'supervision from afar' was considered to be more important by most participants, than the other knowledge, skills and attributes the teacher could bring to the job, despite teachers working collectively in teams.

Generally, there was slightly more tolerance for teachers exhibiting academic or intellectual challenges. The perception was teachers who have physical limitations are more likely to jeopardise children's safety and wellbeing. In comparison, the shortfalls of the teachers with academic challenges were able to be supported by other team members, while still acknowledging the additional support placed extra burden on other staff.

Discussions about teacher gender were fraught with stereotypes, positioning men and women in both positive and negative gender stereotypical ways. Such

positioning needs to be challenged in order to provide a full, rich and complex curriculum for children.

Teachers are in an ideal position to make a positive difference in the lives of children and their families, not only through advocacy but also by challenging normalising discourses that influence interactions, policy and practice. How teachers are located in, and shaped by, discourses of diversity and inclusion will impact on how these issues are perceived and approached (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). Throughout discussions, these discourses were marginalised and participants did not offer any ideas on ways to critically engage with diversity. They also did not offer any suggestions about engaging with children about diversity. Natalie and Nancy suggest having a teacher with a visual impairment might prompt thinking about this – but this does not necessarily just happen – teachers need to adopt critical pedagogical approaches.

The marginalisation of inclusion was also manifested in a reticence and lack of confidence to implement a bicultural curriculum, despite 20 years of imperatives in *Te Whāriki*. Participants demonstrated ‘Pākehā Paralysis’ (Tollich, 2002) and appeared unable to progress practice in this area. Being culturally responsive to, and inclusive of, families whose values differed from their own was also challenging for participants, particularly where there was concern about harm to children. A lack of confidence again limited their agency to enact change.

The aspiration to be inclusive is fraught with tensions and contradictions which teachers need to be aware of in order to challenge their own values while still upholding the wellbeing of children. The hallmark of a high-quality teacher is their capacity to critique existing power relations embedded in practice and their refusal to normalise them (MacNaughton, 2005). Teacher education can support teachers to put aside the ‘ideal’ image of the good teacher and become aware of multiple and competing meaning systems that impact on their work, providing them with the knowledge they need to respond equitably to diversity (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2005). In addition, this could also perhaps be achieved through teachers adopting of a ‘pedagogy of listening’ which “expects, encourages, invites and embraces diversity, difference, ambiguity and uncertainty” (Macartney, 2012, p. 173).

Chapter Ten: “You kind of have to be a bit superhuman”

Introduction

This final chapter returns to the research questions underpinning this thesis.

1. What are ECE teachers’ espoused beliefs about the most important knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions they need to be effective in their role?
2. What are the discourses shaping and being shaped by these beliefs?
3. How may these beliefs and discourses enable or constrain ECE practice?

It also makes recommendations for policy and practice before identifying areas for future research.

ECE teachers’ espoused beliefs about what it takes to be a ‘good’ teacher

The teachers in this study demonstrated a significant sense of responsibility to be everything for everyone, often beyond human capability. This is particularly well summed up through Sam’s words “You kind of have to be a bit superhuman” hence this phrase becoming the title of this chapter and this thesis.

Despite the emphasis in *Te Whāriki* on collectivity, many participant responses focused on a perceived requirement for all teachers to demonstrate all of the knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions identified in discussions, particularly when being shaped by essentialist maternal and/or neo-liberal discourses.

The perceived burden for all teachers to embody the ‘perfect’ teacher and be everything to everybody meant that, on occasion, participants expressed that they felt over-worked and stressed despite being driven by a commitment to young children.

The qualities most valued by teachers and the discourses that have shaped these prioritised qualities are discussed in the following sections.

Enabling and constraining discourses

Biesta et al. (2015) identify “a contested and often confused terrain of competing discourses underpin teachers’ practices” (p. 630). My findings reflect this. Discourses intersected, competed and collided as participants attempted to “hold together seemingly opposing discourses” (Gibson, 2013, p. 114).

My thoughts and discussion in relation to this data are not truths – they have been shaped by the complex and contradictory entanglement of discourses shaping, and being shaped by me. My aim is merely to open up dialogue through making the invisible visible, as I ‘see’ it at this time.

Figure 1 represents the dominance and intersection of the discourses identified in this study. The size of the circles represent the dominance of the identified discourse.

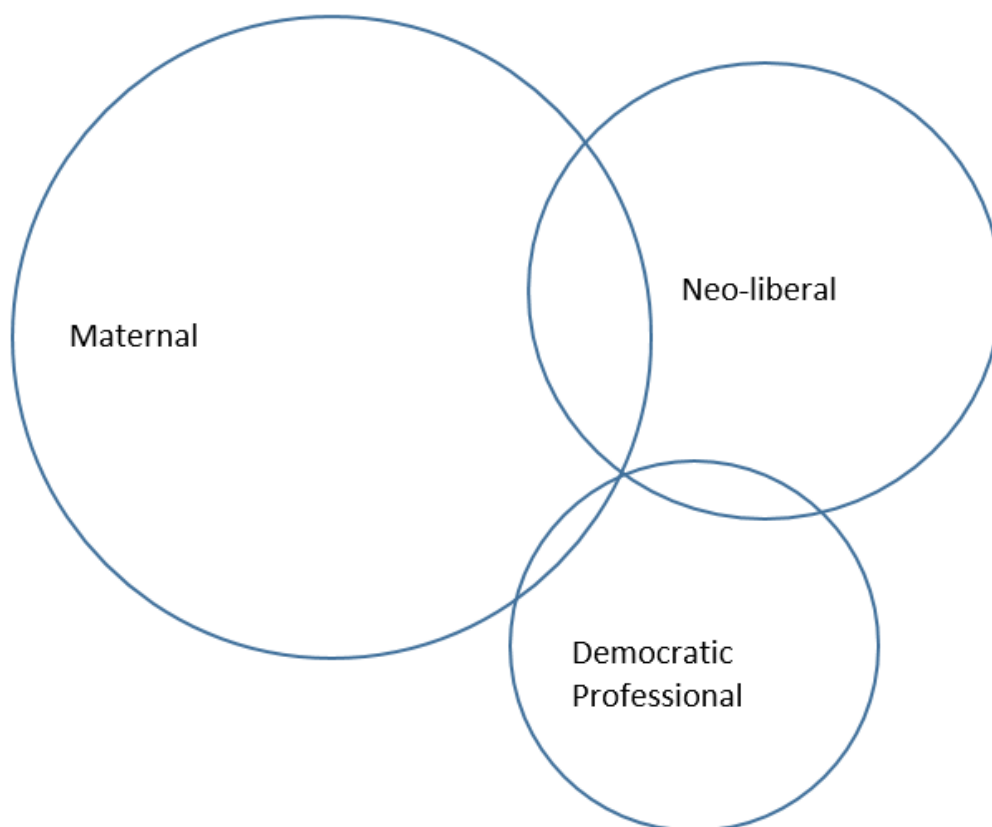


Figure 1: Intersecting, competing and colliding discourses

The intersections between the discourses are where participants demonstrated similar beliefs while being shaped by the competing discourses. The intersection between maternal and neo-liberal discourses represents the lack of value

participants placed on teachers having qualifications and the focus on the individual rather than supporting structures and systems. Between neo-liberal and democratic professionalism is where the notions of reflective practice and professionalism reside. The importance of caring for others is represented in the intersection between maternal and democratic professional. While this is a static image, the nature of discourse means they are far more dynamic and tangled than this and the intersections will expand and contract accordingly.

There is merit in each of the discourses identified and each provides a counter to other discourses. They also have the ability to constrain teacher practice and development therefore need to be individually confronted and critiqued. The next three sections summarise how each of the dominant discourses can enable and constrain, from my perspective.

Essentialist maternal

As the most dominant discourse shaping participants, maternal discourses are very important in enabling high-quality ECE. They emphasise the importance of providing caring and nurturing environments where children feel safe, loved and accepted. Consistent and caring relationships with adults give children the confidence to engage with and in play experiences that support their learning and development. Maternal discourses can also mitigate against ECE becoming overly technical and 'schoolified'.

They can, however, also constrain practice as teachers prioritise the custodial care, socialisation and 'fun' functions of ECE, and the academic purpose of education (Biesta, 2015) is marginalised, limiting children's learning opportunities. As such, when shaped by maternal discourses, teachers take a more passive role with children, supervising their development rather than actively progressing their learning as envisaged in sociocultural theories. Their focus is on being in relationships with children per se, rather than considering how these relationships can support children's learning.

Maternal discourses also create a stereotypical image of good teachers being like white middle-class mothers. Teachers fulfil cultural gender stereotypical roles and affective qualities are prioritised over intellectual, restricting interactions with children to the transactional rather than those intentionally designed to

progress their thinking, for example sustained shared thinking. Teaching is positioned as a 'natural' extension to mothering, therefore minimising the need for teacher education and qualifications. The knowledge and skills required are considered innate to women and honed through being a mother.

In saying this, teachers can be positioned as 'expert' mothers who provide support and guidance to mothers who need it. This support and guidance is often provided uni-directionally with the teacher claiming and holding the power in the relationship.

Stereotypical images of the teacher also inhibit recognition of diverse ways of being and doing, again limiting children's experiences and opportunities, including the avoidance of subject knowledge in areas where women have traditionally been less confident. Teachers who are from non-Western cultures are expected to 'become' like Western middle-class mothers and there is little room for teachers with disabilities.

In addition, the normalisation of these images can lead teachers to judge parents who do not meet the image of the kindly mother who stays at home with her pre-school children. Ironically, one regime of truth associated with these discourses is that of 'children are better off at home', a truth that effectively makes ECE teaching redundant except in situations where children face perceived challenges in their home life.

Maternal discourses can shape teachers into operating from a 'culture of niceness'. Teachers put others' needs and wishes before their own and maintain a pleasant persona, regardless of the emotions they are experiencing (and suppressing). This culture of niceness can lead to teachers 'working down' to the level of others. As such, they conform to practices they may not agree with, or that differ from what they have learnt, in order to be socially acceptable and avoid conflict. Ironically, the culture of niceness can also lead to horizontal violence and hostility (Hard, 2006) towards teachers should they not conform. Subsequently, team cultures are not based on collegial discussion and debate about practice.

The culture of niceness can also impact on relationships with parents, leaving concerns unaddressed, and relationships with children who do not get the opportunity to learn that everybody feels a range of emotions and to learn how to deal with these, equipping the child to deal with life realities.

Children are positioned as innocent and as simply needing nurturing and protection, often from their parents, particularly infants. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013) argue this image of the child “generates in adults a desire to shelter children from the corrupt surrounding world... by constructing a form of environment in which the young child will be offered protection, continuity and security” (p. 49). However, by doing so adults are not taking children seriously or respecting them. By trying to hide children away, this positioning again limits teacher engagement and interaction with children to the transactional and conveys the adult as being in control of children. Caring in this way can be disempowering as it can limit children’s agency.

Neo-liberal

Shaped by neo-liberal discourses, teachers are encouraged to be both competent and reflective. However, reflection in this discourse over-emphasises ‘self-improvement’ and focuses on individuals often promoting discourses of individual blame or ‘responsibilisation’. Responsibilisation requires each individual to accept responsibility only for themselves and participate in acts of self-surveillance and control (Davies, 2006). It is typically associated with intensified pressures on teachers (McLeod, 2017) asking them to be accountable and responsible for their conduct and performance without acknowledging the impact of such influences as government policy, governance and management structures or employment conditions.

Accountability is not necessarily a bad thing when it involves two elements in balance; being held to account by others and giving account of yourself (Lingard, 2017). Neo-liberal approaches, however, are almost exclusively about being held to account, and, in the case of teachers, being held to account by multiple stakeholders. This can have damaging effects. Having to prove themselves over and over again leaves teachers feeling stressed, over-work and tired, as well as becoming disenfranchised with teaching and/or leadership leading them to leave

or change their role. Often teachers' work is quantified with quality (e.g. depth of thinking) being less valued, so long as boxes are ticked, particularly in relation to assessment of children's learning.

Neo-liberal discourses were also associated with being professional and raising the status of teaching. Validation of practice by external organisations such as ERO and the Education Council were seen as supporting recognition for the sector. In addition, scientific and economic 'evidence' of the perceived importance of ECE for children's long-term outcomes provided gravitas to the teaching role, even if funding levels did not match.

When shaped by neo-liberal discourses, the observed 'products' of teaching, e.g. interactions with children, were valued over the unobserved thoughtful and intelligent 'process' that underpinned that 'product'; that is, informed judgement. This reinforced the perceived lack of need for teaching qualifications that arose from maternal discourses. Qualifications were valuable for status and recognition only. In fact, qualifications were rarely discussed with the technical and industrial term 'training' being the preferred description, implying a mastery of skills rather than abstract knowledge and understanding.

Connected to the perceived lack of need for qualifications, under both maternal and neo-liberal discourses, the concept of a teacher is contested. Rather than recognising those who have completed a teacher education programme culminating in a qualification that enables teacher registration, from a culture of niceness, **all** adults working with children are called teachers in order to be inclusive. Neo-liberal marketing discourses reinforce this unified nomenclature, calling all adults 'teachers' in order to market the service they are offering parents.

Both of these issues also position children unfavourably, as not needing qualified and skilled teachers due to their age. Under neo-liberal discourse in particular, however, the child is positioned as an economic resource to be shaped into a contributing adult, particularly children who are considered 'at-risk' of unfavourable life outcomes due to family circumstance.

Neo-liberal discourses position parents as clients who can choose to go to another service, therefore teachers need to keep them 'happy', sometimes by keeping their child 'safe', ensuring they do not get hurt. This reinforces the positioning of children as needing protection and the over-prioritisation of custodial functions. Uni-directional communication is also most prevalent when teachers are shaped by these discourses.

Democratic professionalism

When shaped by democratic professionalism discourses, teachers value democratic team cultures of critique, discussion and constructive debate. They acknowledge the collective rather than individual nature of teaching and value the contributions of all members of this collective – colleagues, leaders, parents and children. This includes recognising the strengths that can be garnered from diversity in both teachers and families, and mitigating any weaknesses. Parents are partners and collaborators, participating in decision making and critique.

Similar to neo-liberal discourses, teachers are encouraged to be reflective, however reflection is framed differently through a democratic professionalism lens. Reflection encompasses team discussions and critique, considering and challenging commonly held assumptions, beliefs and values. It can also be completed 'in the moment' supporting self-aware teachers to change direction if needed to maximise children's learning by going with children's interests and passions at the time. As such, children are positioned as agentic, making active decisions to influence the curriculum they experience.

High-level tertiary qualifications and ongoing learning, both formal and informal, are valued through a democratic professionalism lens. Teachers are positioned as learners who seek and engage in a range of opportunities to learn and grow. They bring thoughtful intelligence to their intentional work with children and their families, focussing more on the process of teaching than any measurable product. Teaching is considered a complex profession that requires professional judgement.

When shaped by democratic professionalism, teachers are also advocating, for children (individually and collectively) and for the profession. This requires them to be knowledgeable and articulate about their work. They are aware of, and

open to, multiple ways of being and doing. This includes being ready to acknowledge and value their own strengths and those of others. Sometimes however, teachers can be overwhelmed by diversity, particularly in relation to cultural diversity. Listening to all opinions, and acknowledging them as valid, can cause a cacophony in teachers' heads which can lead them to be unsure what is the 'right' thing to do. This can paralyse them to the point of doing nothing.

Marginalisation of democratic professionalism discourses also can constrain practice. While the tenets are espoused, the dominance of maternal and neoliberal discourses mean they remain rhetoric rather than reality. Teachers struggle to be 'open to the other' therefore inclusion of diverse teachers is undervalued, and the 'ideal' teacher remains a white, able, middle-class woman. The role of the teacher to apply professional judgement to the contextual interpretation of the curriculum, in particularly *Te Whāriki*, is marginalised. In addition, critical discourses are almost silenced; apart from Betty trying to build empathy in children there was no discussion of supporting children to engage with and understand the wicked problems of our world (climate change, racism etc).

Teacher struggles

The ECE teachers in this study have adopted language and terminology representing a range of theoretical and philosophical perspectives, apparently without full understanding. This led to them struggling to define and articulate what it takes to be a good teacher. This can be perceived in two ways. The struggle to define can be perceived as positive as it allows space for diverse ways of being a teacher. In contrast, the struggle can also be interpreted as participants not understanding and therefore not engaging with the full complexity of the teaching role.

They also demonstrated a significant struggle for recognition and status, from government and society at large, leaving them feeling under-valued. Could these two struggles be linked, as suggested by some participants? Are early childhood teachers their own worst enemies on occasion, being unable to clearly articulate what they do and why they do it? There was a definite sense that things are not

good enough in the sector and 'better' is required; better teachers, better centres, better conditions, and better recognition.

Contribution to theory and practice

While many of the findings in this study reinforce and build on the findings of others, there are three areas where a unique contribution has been made to the scholarship on ECE teacher beliefs and practices in New Zealand.

Firstly, the use of the three discourses: essentialist maternal, neo-liberal and democratic professionalism, as a framework to discuss how conflicting and contradictory regimes of truth exist alongside each other and collectively produce confusion around what is a 'good' teacher is a strong and original contribution. The regimes of truth where tensions were identified and analysed included "ECE protects some children from their lives", a 'truth' which is sometimes in tension with another 'truth', "children are better off at home". Another pair of regimes discussed that appeared to sometimes sit uncomfortably were "we do not prepare children for school" and "ECE prepares children for life".

The second unique contribution is the adaptation of Tolich's (2002) notion of 'Pākehā Paralysis'. While Tolich used this term to discuss the reticence of Pākehā post-graduate researchers to include Māori in their research of the general population, I have adapted it to help explain the reticence of Pākehā teachers to implement a bicultural curriculum. I have argued that the mixed messages these teachers have received about Pākehā using and teaching te reo Māori has left them unsure and lacking confidence to meet the bicultural imperatives embodied in *Te Whāriki* and *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*.

Lastly, the use of vignettes regarding teachers with differing abilities provoked discussion and unearthed participants' attitudes towards diverse teachers. Without the use of vignettes, these attitudes would have remained hidden as part of teachers' secret and hidden language. By bringing negative attitudes to light, these can be challenged and addressed to support the development of inclusive environments that welcome diverse teachers. The discussion about teachers with physical disabilities will also add to the dearth of literature around teachers' physical attributes.

Making the invisible visible

In 2010, Moss asked the sector to move beyond a focus on professionalism, to a focus on education (purpose) and educators (requirements) to ensure that we are ready and able to respond to the challenges of “democracy, diversity, justice and the environment” (Moss, 2010, p. 14). This thesis contributes to this suggested change of focus.

While I have focused on making the invisible visible throughout this study, very few people will read the content in its entirety. Therefore, I will write and present on the key findings, primarily to teachers and teacher educators, bringing visibility of these findings to the sector. The aim of this visibility is to generate discussion and provide the opportunity for teachers to critique the values, beliefs and taken-for-granted assumptions that underpin their practice.

The key findings that are useful to make visible include:

- The imbalance between the socialisation (care) and academic (education) functions of ECE, currently being treated as binary pair. I will suggest the sector considers reclaiming education, not by caring less but educating more, broaden the focus of intentional teaching beyond socialisation.
- The need for more (or renewed) focus on *Te Whāriki* after its implementation “somewhat derailed” (Nuttall, 2005a, p. 17) by the release of other, strongly neo-liberal, policy documents focusing on regulatory compliance and accountability. I will encourage teachers to get back to the core beliefs and philosophies underpinning *Te Whāriki*, exploring the active role of the teacher and the opportunities to develop bicultural, contextual and meaningful curriculum. This will reinforce democratic professionalism discourses.
- The regimes of truth that:
 - ‘male teachers are different from female teachers’
 - ‘children are better off at home’
 - ‘we don’t prepare children for school’
 - ‘teachers are born not made’

By making these regimes explicit, teachers will have the opportunity to confront their own beliefs in relation to each of these ‘truths’ and consider how they might constrain their practice.

- The all-inclusive use of the word ‘teacher’ and the related perception that ECE teachers do not necessarily need to be qualified. I will challenge teachers to deeply consider both of these findings, particularly in relation to the intentional teaching process.
- The inclusion (or otherwise) of diverse teachers. Being considered a ‘good’ teacher is contextual informed by “larger social conversations, situations, ideologies and purposes within which it is situated” (Moore, 2004, p. 36). If those ideologies are shaped by democratic professionalism, diverse teachers will be perceived to add value to the sector.

Recommendations:

Consistent with a critical lens focussing on structural conditions, rather than individual teachers, I have prioritised the following recommendations for structural change:

Addressing conforming behaviour:

1. That government funding is provided for:
 - a. Teachers to continue to have relationships with their teacher education provider for two years following graduation in order to gain support from their lecturers and each other and make sense of the practice they are encountering.
 - b. Mentor teachers, supporting new graduates to complete their full teacher registration practising certificate, to receive professional development (PD). This PD would be designed to ensure these leaders are up to date with current theory and practice and have the skills needed to coach the new teacher to question and reflect on the practice they are encountering.

Reclaiming education:

2. The imbalance of care and education may be partially addressed through:

- a. A greater emphasis on the academic purpose of ECE, including increasing subject knowledge in teacher education programmes, particularly that which has traditionally been considered 'masculine' (for example, science, maths and physical education).
- b. Consistent official nomenclature is introduced with the term teacher being used only for those who meet the Teaching Council's definition – that is, they have completed a teacher education programme offered by an accredited ITE provider that leads to a teaching qualification at, at least, level 7 on the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) *Register of Quality Assured Qualifications* (or an equivalent international qualification). Another term, for example educator, can apply to those without a teaching qualification.
- c. The development of resources and professional development to support renewed understanding of *Te Whāriki* and the complexities and opportunities within it, including the contextual integration of subject knowledge.

Increasing teacher diversity:

3. That the government puts in place strategies to increase the diversity of teachers in New Zealand including:
 - a. Recruiting sufficient Māori teachers to ensure they are proportionate with Māori learners, ensuring pathway options if required;
 - b. The Teaching Council developing guidance for education institutions with regards to the employment of teachers with differing abilities.

Future research

I also propose the following to be explored in future research:

- Exemplars of subject knowledge being woven into curriculum in contextually relevant ways;
- How to support ECE teachers to move beyond 'Pākehā Paralysis' to provide a rich, bicultural curriculum; and,

- How to support the inclusion of diverse teachers in ECE services

Final thought

I sense that the increase of feminism and the gendered nature of ECE means many people being attracted to this profession tend to be 'nice' rather than intellectual. While only limited choices used to exist for women as career options, and these were often in the caring professions e.g. teacher and nurse, now there are a lot more options available for women to choose from; for example, accountant, lawyer, engineer. With the lower status of teaching, these are the careers that appear to be attracting the more academically able (more research will be required to confirm). In addition, if women are no longer staying at home for significant periods of time to raise their children, they may not discover the passion for teaching that many of my participants did. So how do we bring deep and critical thinking back into ECE teaching through the recruitment of high-quality applicants? Raising entry criteria may limit the pool in different ways and therefore reinforce Western dominance due to the history of who has educational success in New Zealand. There are no easy solutions therefore innovation and creativity will be required; this issue requires further exploration.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Group interview participants

Name ³³	f/ m	Ethnicity	Exp- Year	Service Type	Ownership	Qual	Role
Christine	f	NZ Euro	20+	Kgtn	community collective	DipTch ECE	Head Teacher
Natalie	f	NZ Euro	7	Kgtn	community collective	Bachelor	Teacher
Kate	f	NZ Euro	20+	Kgtn	community collective	DipTch ECE	Head Teacher
Betty	f	NZ Euro	7	Kgtn	community collective	Bachelor	Teacher
Nancy	f	Chinese	< 1	E & C	community standalone	Grad-dip	Teacher
Sally	f	Fijian Indian	7	E & C	corporate	Grad-dip	Centre Manager
Gudrun	f	NZ Euro	11	E & C	private standalone	DipTch ECE	Teacher
Megan	f	NZ Euro	19	Kgtn	community collective	DipTch ECE	Head Teacher
Sam	f	NZ Euro	4	Kgtn	community collective	Bachelor	Teacher
Maree	f	NZ Euro	2	E & C	private collective	Grad-dip	Teacher
Daniel	m	NZ Euro	6	E & C	private collective	Bachelor	Teacher
Jo	f	NZ Euro	18	Kgtn	community collective	Grad-dip	Teacher
Dawn	f	NZ Euro	14	E & C	private collective	Bachelor	Head Teacher
Lorna	f	NZ Euro	13	E & C	community standalone	PG Dip	Teacher
Bill	m	NZ Euro	30+	E & C	private standalone	NZFKU Dip	Teacher Owner
Jay	f	NZ Euro	16	E & C	community collective	Bachelor	Head Teacher
Kay	f	NZ Euro	15	E & C	community collective	Bachelor	Asst. Head Teacher

³³ All names are pseudonyms

Appendix B – Vignettes used in group interview

Vignette one

A student teacher, completing a field-based teaching qualification, has a significant visual impairment, meaning that she is unable to see more than 10-feet in front of herself and requires a visual aid for reading. The student teacher is currently employed to work with infants and toddlers in a small, community-based ECE centre, licensed for up to 10 children under the age of 2. As part of course requirements, the student completed a practicum experience in a kindergarten. The student failed the practicum as the Associate Teacher believed that she needed to be able to see the entire outdoor play area to teach effectively.

Vignette two

Another student teacher was struggling to successfully complete the academic requirements of the teaching degree he was enrolled in. Failures in two papers meant that he was referred to the academic committee for making insufficient progress in his course of studies. As part of their consideration of the student's case, the committee spoke with the manager of the centre where the student was employed. The manager was concerned that the student may not be able to complete the programme because she considered him to be 'a really good practitioner'. When asked what she meant by that, she replied "the children love him and he loves the children".

Appendix C – Ethical documentation

Early childhood education (ECE) teacher beliefs about the most important knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions they need to be effective in their role

INFORMATION SHEET

Background

The teacher-led ECE sector is now more qualified than it has ever been before with the overall proportion of qualified teachers working in teacher-led ECE services increasing from 49 percent to 75 percent between 2002 and 2014, (Ministry of Education, 2015). This increase has contributed to positive shifts in overall quality in the ECE sector. Recent reports however, have identified there is still variability in quality and effectiveness across ECE services. This study considers the role teachers' beliefs and discourses may contribute to this variability and is being undertaken to fulfil the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree through the University of Waikato.

Aims

The study will address 3 research questions:

4. What are ECE teachers' espoused beliefs about the most important knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions they need to be effective in their role?
5. What are the discourses within these beliefs?
6. How may these beliefs and discourses enable or constrain ECE practice?

What I plan to do

I will invite teachers to share their beliefs with me through:

- Group interviews of 6-7 ECE qualified and registered teachers conducted in Hamilton, Wellington and Dunedin.
- Individual interviews with a small number of teachers designed to explore matters raised in the group interview in more detail.
- Ongoing discussion in a closed Facebook™ group for approximately 3 months following the group interview to give participants the opportunity to explore the topic further and comment on any findings that emerge from initial data analysis.

The results from this process will be used to develop a survey which will be distributed across all ECE teachers working in teacher-led centres.

Participants are invited to participate in as many, or as few, of these opportunities as they would like to.

Analysis

Teacher beliefs will be explored using discourse analysis where I will be looking for the discourses used by early childhood teachers in relation to the knowledge, skills,

attributes and dispositions they believe are the most important for them to be effective in their role; and the implications of these for practice.

Who's responsible?

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact Jane Ewens in the first instance. All of the following people may be found in the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240:

Jane Ewens	Dr Linda Mitchell	Dr Jeanette Clarkin-Phillips
WMIER Doctoral Scholar	Associate Professor	Senior Lecturer
+64 21 686 080	+64 7 838 4466 ext 7734	+64 7 838 4466 ext 4875
sje17@students.waikato.ac.nz	lindamit@waikato.ac.nz	jgcp@waikato.ac.nz

INVITATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

Kia ora,

Early childhood education (ECE) teacher beliefs about the most important knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions they need to be effective in their role

My name is Jane Ewens and I am a PhD student at the Faculty of Education at the University of Waikato. I am a qualified and registered ECE teacher myself and have worked as a teacher, a teacher educator and in policy.

As discussed by telephone, this letter is to invite you to take part in my research on *Early childhood education (ECE) teacher beliefs about the most important knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions they need to be effective in their role*. This research is being completed to fulfil the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree through the University of Waikato. The aim of the research is to gain a deep understanding of how teacher beliefs about the most important knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions may impact on their practice. This research is being carried out during March 2017 – April 2018, beginning with group interviews of teachers.

I am inviting you, as a qualified and registered ECE teacher working in a teacher-led centre, to share your thoughts and beliefs about the research topic with me. Your support for the research would be very valuable. I hope that the research will support teacher reflection and professional development. The findings are also likely to be of interest to policy makers, teacher education providers and teachers.

What your involvement would mean

If you agree to participate, you will be invited to take part in a group interview with 5-6 other teachers between March and May 2017. This interview will be approximately 2 hours long, probably in the early evening at a time that suits participants, and I will provide light refreshments. The group interview will be videotaped.

Following this interview, I will review the videotape to identify any areas of interest that I would like to discuss further with individual participants. If I think it would be useful to explore your ideas in more depth, I would contact you at that time and offer you an individual interview. This interview would take about an hour. During the interview, you will not be asked to alter any of the group interview material – instead you will be offered the opportunity to add new insights. Your participation would of course be voluntary. This interview would be audiotaped however you have the right to request that the recorder is turned off at any time.

In addition, as a participant of the group interview, you will be invited to continue the conversation beyond the group interview in a closed Facebook™ group, together with participants from the two other group interviews I will be conducting in other regions. I envisage that this group would run for approximately three months, however you could

contribute as little or as often as you wanted to during this time. This will give you the opportunity to explore the topic further and comment on any findings that emerge from my initial analysis of the group interviews. I will ask you to invite other eligible and interested teachers to join the conversation if you choose to do so.

Finally, the key discourses that have been identified through the interview, online discussion and data analysis process will be used to develop a national online survey. The survey will be a tool to 'check' the agreement with these discourses with the centre-based, teacher-led ECE sector.

Information generated through this study will be used in my thesis and other scholarly publications and/or presentations. Every effort will be made to preserve your anonymity and ensure confidentiality, however this cannot be guaranteed.

From here, I will contact you within the next week to discuss the research further with you and answer any questions you may have. If you agree to participate, I will liaise with you regarding a suitable time for the group interview.

I am attaching a copy of the information sheet for your reference. I have also attached a consent form which asks you for a few details to support my analysis. Please bring this completed to the group interview should you choose to participate.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss anything at sje17@students.waikato.ac.nz or on 021 686 080. If you text me, I will call you back.

I look forward to working with you.

Noho ora mai

Jane Ewens
PhD Candidate

Early childhood education (ECE) teacher beliefs about the most important knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions they need to be effective in their role.

CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this study and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I understand that:

1. My participation in any or all aspects of the study is entirely voluntary;
2. I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, until data analysis commences, without any disadvantage;
3. Personal identifying information will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study but any raw data on which the results of the study depend will be password protected and retained electronically for at least five years;
4. This study involves an open-questioning technique. The general line of questioning explores the beliefs I have about the knowledge, skills, attributes and dispositions you need to be an effective early childhood teacher. The precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. In the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or may withdraw from the study;
5. In any individual interview, I understand that I have the right to request that the audio recorder be turned off at any time;
6. I agree to maintain confidentiality in relation to the identity of the other members of the group interview anything that is discussed in these groups;
7. The results of the study will be published and made available in the University of Waikato Library (Hamilton, New Zealand) and in conference presentations and journal articles. Every attempt will be made to preserve my anonymity and ensure confidentiality, however this cannot be guaranteed.

Agreement

I,, agree to take part in this study.
(Full name of participant)

.....
(Signature of participant)

.....
(Date)

This study has been approved by the University of Waikato, Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee.

PARTICIPANT DETAILS SHEET

Teaching qualification: _____

Other relevant qualifications: _____

Years of teaching:

- Before gaining teaching qualification: _____
- Since gaining teaching qualification: _____

Type of centre where you are currently employed (please select one):

- Kindergarten
- Education and Care

Centre ownership (please select one)

- Community based collective
- Corporate
- Standalone community
- Standalone private

Your role in this centre: _____

Pseudonym for this study: _____

Appendix D - Summary of discourse analysis

Analysis type	Words/terms sought
Collocations and contested concepts	Children
	Teacher
	Quality
	Relationships
	Education
	Early Childhood Education (Early Childhood, ECE)
	Qualification
	Care
	Play
	Work
	Student
	Graduate/d
	Presuppositions
Should/n't	
Could/n't	
Believe	
Need	
Of course	
You know	
Obviously	
Can't	
To be honest/ honestly	
Will/won't	
All/none	
Not	