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**Where have all the children gone?**  
**Experiences of children, parents and teachers in a  
changing early childhood education service.**

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of  
**Master of Educational Leadership**  
at  
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by  
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## **Abstract**

This study analyses the experiences of children, parents and teachers in a changing early childhood education (ECE) service in New Zealand. This thesis was derived from the researcher's growing awareness of neo-liberal politics and the institutionalisation of children resulting from social, economic and cultural changes. An interest in connecting children within ECE services to the local community outside of the ECE service's gate was also explored. The study revealed experiences and perspectives from children, families and teachers within one independent, community-based, not-for-profit ECE service that recently underwent changes.

Drawing from literature, the thesis acknowledges the changes that have taken place within ECE in New Zealand over the past 20 years. The changes identified within the literature are identified within the historical, economic and social contexts. The changes include marketisation, competition, the increase of hours and days that young children are placed within ECE services, and the government support of families to return to work.

The study was based on a social constructionist framework that used a qualitative inquiry research methodology. Perspectives and views were gathered from the head teacher, parents and children at the ECE service utilising the Mosaic approach. The methodological tools included semi-structured interviews, walking interviews, a diary of outings collated by the head teacher, children's auto-photography and interviews with the children while viewing their learning journals.

The data was analysed in relation to the study's social constructionist framework. The patterns and themes that emerged included marketisation, intrinsic and extrinsic pressures on children, parents and teachers, leadership, changes to the operational structure of the service, and curriculum experiences for parents, teachers and children.

Foundational to the study are the rights of the child and need for children to have their perspective heard. The Mosaic approach to the methodology utilised within the study raises the perspectives and views of the child, giving equitable value to their contribution within the study. The outcome of the study is to propose an ideological framework that could assist in ensuring the child is heard within ECE and that the child is represented within all matters affecting them. This ideological framework aspires to be an underpinning framework that is utilised by ECE leaders and teachers when making decisions on all matters relating to children, their families, and the ECE service.

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# CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

This study analyses how children, families and teachers experience an early childhood education (ECE) service in New Zealand, after recent changes in operating hours and the addition of younger children into the ECE service. It examines the reasons for the changes and sets these within the context of wider economic and social changes.

## Background

Prior to this study I had become increasingly aware of the growing absence of children in public spaces within my local community. I was also aware of the effects of societal changes on early childhood provision, as noted in the *Early Childhood Curriculum, Te Whāriki* “The growth of full-day early childhood education services reflects social and economic changes in society as women increasingly move into employment while their children are young” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p.18). However, I had not anticipated the effects of these social and economic changes on children, families and teachers.

The social and economic changes identified within *Te Whāriki* have led to changes for children, families and ECE services. Many writers (Brennan, 2007; Clark, Kjörholt & Moss, 2005; Grille, 2005; Kjörholt, 2011; Mitchell, 2013a; Moss & Petrie, 2002; Nilsen, 2011; Prout, 2005; Rogoff, Paradise, Arauz, Correa-Chávez, & Angelillo, 2003) state that these changes to the economy have resulted in children now spending longer periods of time within ECE services. There is concern that these social and economic changes have led to the growing institutionalisation of children and of childhood (Kjörholt, 2011).

The study was undertaken within an independent, not-for-profit community-based pre-school. The pre-school began to make changes to the daily management and operation in 2007. These changes were a direct result of New Zealand’s ECE funding policy. The changes included the pre-school joining the twenty free hours of ECE scheme for three and

four year olds and shifting from a sessional licence to an all day licence in 2008. The changes at the pre-school continued over the next seven years as the teaching staff and parent board of management felt the unrelenting effect of competition from the new profit driven ECE services being established within the local community. Central to this study are the changes in operation that occurred in 2013.

In 2012, the pre-school experienced a large drop in children attending the service, with half of the child spaces being vacant. At the beginning of 2013, the five teachers, one administrator and the members of the management team collaborated and devised a strategic plan as a foundation to move forward. It is the outcome of this plan and the resulting changes that are significant to this study.

## **Researcher background**

In 2009, I was the co-recipient of the Margaret May Blackwell Travel Fellowship. The purpose of the fellowship that year was to explore international learning environments for teachers and children with a focus on the natural outdoor area. I travelled to Singapore, The United Arab Emirates, and then on to Europe to meet my colleagues for a tour of the Forest Kindergartens in Germany, Denmark, England and Wales.

It was in the Forest Kindergartens that I observed pedagogy based on trust and deep respect for the child, a pedagogy based on relationship and visible connection with nature and the local community. This relationship seemed to be treasured by the teachers and was visible both within dialogue or the fragile silence. The pedagogy that I observed seemed to respect the mind, body, spirit and soul of the child, the child was treated as capable and competent at all times. It was here that I wondered if such pedagogy was either possible or evident within the New Zealand context.

Inspired by what I had seen and experienced on my travels, I returned to New Zealand to the harsh realisation that my personal practice in ECE had been inhibited by the perceived fences and gates of both the ECE regulatory requirements and the fences within my own mind. I became

intent on changing my practice and endeavoured to include the natural environment of our local community within the everyday programme for children. I was determined to open the gate.

Sharing my travel experiences with researchers at the University of Waikato, I became a co-researcher in the Ngahere project; teaching and learning possibilities in nature settings (see Kelly et al., 2013). Working alongside Jayne White and Janette Kelly, I explored children's multiple ways of seeing within nature-based ECE through photography and stimulated recall interviews with young children. The Ngahere Project was significant to this study, influencing my selected research methodology and the use of the Mosaic approach - a mixed method approach that acknowledges the children and adults as co-constructors of meaning within the research (Clark et al., 2005; Clark & Moss, 2011).

Additionally, in beginning my study toward my Masters in Educational Leadership, course material and my personal learning in regards to neo-liberal policy consolidated my growing concern about the increased hours that children were spending behind closed fences and gates within ECE.

I believe that this study will contribute towards a clearer understanding of the experiences of children, parents and teachers as they have been and continue to be affected by the social and economic changes within New Zealand.

## **Research question and aims**

The research question is:

How do children, parents and teachers experience a changing early childhood education service?

The research aimed to explore the experiences and perceptions of children, parents and teachers within the process of change that recently occurred within their ECE context. The process of change was also explored. This study aimed to contribute a set of balanced principles that could assist ECE services that experience similar change.

## **Research design**

The study is based on a social constructionist framework and uses a qualitative inquiry research methodology. The Mosaic approach was used to collect data within semi-structured interviews with parents, a teacher and children, walking interviews with children where children led the researcher to their favourite place in the ECE service and the place they did not like, a diary of outings into the community and visitors to the ECE service, children's photography, and interviews with the children based on their personal learning journals. A process of thematic analysis was then used to create meaning and compare experiences of all involved within the change process.

## **Thesis contribution**

It is hoped that this research will contribute to an understanding of how children, parents and families experience change within the context of an ECE service. This study analyses the participants' perceptions and experiences and then suggests methods for bringing balance into the decision-making process that give equal value to the perspectives and experiences of all involved within the change process.

## **Thesis outline**

The thesis is organised into five chapters.

Chapter One provides an overview of my interest and the rationale for my selection of the research topic. It positions me as the researcher within the context of the study.

Chapter Two reviews the literature from both the national and international perspective in order to provide a theoretical foundation for the research.

Chapter Three outlines the process and design of the study. It introduces the theoretical framework, methodology, selection process, methods of data collection and the analysis process. The methodological issues such as ethics, the use of photography, bias and limitations, are also addressed.

Chapter Four analyses the research findings in relation to the research question.

Chapter Five summarises the findings in relation to the research question. Further limitations to the research are identified. To conclude, recommendations are presented.

## **CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

The past twenty years have seen a period of widespread social, cultural and economic change leading to major reforms in education, to including early childhood education (ECE). The changes that have taken place within ECE are worthy of investigation. Also of interest are the experiences of those children, families and teachers affected by these changes. This review of literature explores multiple aspects of the changes with a particular focus on the political neo-liberal context and the mechanism and impacts of marketisation.

The literature review begins with a brief overview of the historical context to the changes that took place in education in regards to both the international and national context. The terms institutionalisation and childhood are then explored in reference to the context of ECE in New Zealand. The chapter concludes with reference to the importance of providing a space to restore balance to the seesaw that has tipped in favour of the market and family needs while neglecting to provide a platform for the voice of the child.

### **Context to the change in early childhood educational**

A radical restructuring of the New Zealand educational system began in the mid-1980s based on neo liberal policy. This era was guided by an ideological shift to the economic right (May, 2001). The New Zealand Budget was in deficit and the country's international debt was increasing. There was external pressure on New Zealand to conform to the global economic thinking of organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Additionally, there was pressure to follow the lead of the United States of America with President Ronald Reagan and the United Kingdom with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (Olssen & Morris Matthews, 1997). New Zealand moved away from policy that supported the welfare of all within an egalitarian society, and shifted to



policy that was competitive, with free and deregulated markets and reduced government spending in health, welfare and education (Atwool, 1999; May, 2001; Olssen & Morris Matthews, 1997; Thrupp, 2007).

Central to the neo-liberal policy is education which is regarded as the key to the economic growth of the country (Codd, 2005). Consequently, neo-liberal policy shifts education into the government's economic policy and prioritises the market value of education over the human need.

Additionally, neo-liberalism views education as a commodity, a private rather than a public good (Codd, 2005; Moss & Petrie, 2002; Stevenson 2007). Neo-liberalists view the primary goal of educational policy as enabling the "individual learners to acquire the skills and abilities required for them to perform more effectively, hence more productively, within a changing global market" (Codd, p.194). Furthermore, within neo-liberal policy, the state seeks to create an individual that is enterprising, a competitive entrepreneur, a lifelong learner, a manipulatable person who is moulded and created by the state's education system and is perpetually responsive to fitting within the economy (Apple, 2004; Olssen & Morris Matthews, 1997).

The neo-liberal policy was a radical move away from the prior New Zealand education policy. The benchmark of previous policy was placed within an era of social democracy in an egalitarian society. This prior education policy was based on fairness, respect and the social well-being of all New Zealanders (Thrupp, 2007). In contrast, neo-liberalism, a form of capitalism (Moss & Petrie, 2002), promotes marketisation, the self-management of educational organisations by local governance, competition within a free and deregulated market, globalisation, user pays, the individual and their right to choice, managerialism and controlled performance measures (Atwool, 1999; Codd, 2005; May, 2001, Mitchell, 2013b; Moss & Petrie, 2002).

### **The marketisation of education**

Wright (2001) states, that the market system is the greatest generator of national wealth known to mankind. Therefore, it makes sense that neo-

liberalist policy with the mechanisms of managerialism, performativity and marketisation was accepted as a solution to reform the economy and the perceived educational failure of child-centred learning (Apple, 2004; May, 2001; Olssen & Morris Matthews, 1997). The aim was to reduce the cost of state intervention as the neo-liberalist claimed that the invisible hand of the market would lead to improvement within education (Apple).

Subsequently, in the 1990s, the neo-liberal reforms introduced free, deregulated and decentralised markets within education. The belief was that schools and ECE services would become more disciplined and competitive. The competition between services was, in turn, supposed to contribute to the efficiency, cost effectiveness and high quality of ECE services (Lloyd, 2013; Mitchell, 2013a; 2013b). In addition, the competition was thought to ensure that only the good services would survive (Apple; Wright), assuming that parents would not use a service that did not meet their needs (Mitchell, 2013b).

### **Competitive bulk funding mechanism**

Central to neo-liberal marketisation was the influence on education of the Government's Treasury Department. This occurred in the late 1980s when Treasury policy was applied to education. As a result, the 1991 Budget introduced funding cuts to ECE; these cuts were "the highest level of cuts to any education or social service" (May, 2001, p.219). What then followed was the introduction of bulk funding into ECE. The Government bulk funding was attached to every attending child within all licensed ECE services for a maximum of six hours per day and thirty hours per week.

The bulk funding was paid to the ECE service whether it was privately or community owned. The community owned services include incorporated societies, charitable, community or statutory trusts or organisations owned by the community. Privately owned ECE services are owned by individuals, partnerships, private trusts, private companies and publicly listed companies (Mitchell, 2013b).

The move from state dependency to self reliance and the application of the business model to ECE resulted in New Zealand being the only

country in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) where private ECE services received government funding that could in turn be converted into profit (May, 2001). Educational leaders had no time to prepare for such a radical change in direction as reviews and agendas were kept secret and well hidden (Apple, 2004; May).

### **Parental employment needs**

In line with the Government's neo-liberal policy to grow the economy, there was a parallel trend for women to return to work soon after their maternity leave (Mitchell, 2013b; Moss, 2013; Penn, 2013). As a further incentive for families to return to work, the Government established policy that was introduced within the 2004 Budget (Boulton & Gifford, 2011; Ministry of Social Development & Inland Revenue, 2003). This policy incorporated additional family tax credits and payments to working families. The working for families payment was paid to two parent families who worked over thirty hours per week and to one parent families who worked over twenty hours per week (Ministry of Social Development & Inland Revenue).

In addition, the Government introduced 20 hours of free ECE per week for all three and four year old children. This policy, and the attached funding, was originally designed for community based, not-for-profit, teacher-led ECE services. However, the Early Childhood Council argued that the 20 hours free ECE and the attached funding should be available to all ECE services. The argument was accepted and the policy was nationally introduced to both community and privately owned for profit ECE services in June, 2007 (Ministry of Education, 2007; Mitchell, 2013b).

Predictably, the growing trend for women to return to work led to an increased demand for ECE. Parents required placement of their children within ECE for longer periods of time and from a younger age (Clark et al., 2005; Kjørholt, 2011; Mitchell, 2013a; Prout, 2005). The Annual ECE Census (2013) confirms that:

... in 2004, 56% of ECE enrolments were made up of children who attended ECE for an average of up to 15 hours per week. By

2013, this distribution had switched; now a greater proportion of children (67%) attend ECE for an average of more than 15 hours per week. (Ministry of Education, 2013)

The combined factors of parental increase in demand for ECE and the inclusion of Government funding for the private for profit sector from the late 1980s, led to a rise in ECE service numbers (Mitchell, 2013b) and a proliferation of private providers (Duhn, 2010). In 2013, there were 5,100 licensed ECE services in New Zealand compared with 4,374 in 2004 (Ministry of Education, 2013).

### **Competition for children**

As the number of ECE services increased, so did the competition between services. The shift toward a market economy has seen ECE services that are placed within the community and voluntary sector begin to compete more assertively with the market sector, that is, private for profit ECE services. Although values formed through democracy are embedded in the community sector (Mitchell, 2013a), the values of the market have started to influence it. This move has seen the community sector, consciously or perhaps subconsciously, change their practice to align with those practices of the competitive market sector (Glensor, 2014).

The changes to practice within the community-based ECE sector were many and varied. They included the move away from volunteers that managed the service operations towards operating in a more professional and business-like manner with paid positions (Davison, Mitchell & Peter, 2011; Mitchell, 2013a) such as Chief Executive Officers and finance managers. The changes to practice also included the introduction of advertising, the use of performance appraisal systems to check outcomes (Mitchell) and the adoption of market-based thinking and discourse (Hannigan, 2013; Moss, 2013) that oozed market values. There was also pressure to shift from a collaborative model to a competitive model of practice (Glensor, 2014). In addition, many community ECE services changed from requesting a donation from parents to the formal charging of fees for every hour their child attended ECE.

However, try as they might, the community-based ECE services were not established to raise funds in the same manner as the market for profit sector (May & Mitchell, 2009). As a result, such ECE services struggle to compete within an aggressive market place and continue to be squeezed out of the market (Mitchell, 2013a). The struggling community services are then, in turn, often purchased by the big corporate services (Duhn, 2010; Mitchell, 2013b). The survival of ECE services is now dominated by the large corporate business model. Duhn states that ECE in New Zealand is in danger of becoming a publicly funded corporate sector.

In addition, the market economy within New Zealand “has shrunk and blurred the boundaries between and within countries, enabling easier transfer of products, people and ideas that make for an interconnected world” (Mitchell, 2013a, p.56). As a result, national and international investors have been welcomed into New Zealand and have purchased large chains of ECE services. These ECE services are dominated by an economic business ethic and have an overriding universal value to offer high return on financial investment (May, 2001; Mitchell, 2013b; Moss & Petrie, 2002). A recent example of such an investment opportunity was published in the national Sunday newspaper in an article stating that “Australian investors are buying up New Zealand childcare businesses with an eye to floating on the NZX” (Hunter, 2014, p.3). The article further named Kidicorp as being the largest corporate national provider with approximately two hundred and fifty childcare centres (Hunter). ECE and childhood are now emphasised as an object of investment (Kjørholt, 2011). In New Zealand, ECE has become a marketable commodity and a big business that is for profit (Apple, 2004; Duhn, 2010; Moss, 2013).

Educational leaders who work within the current ECE sector are constantly aware of the fierce and competitive fight for each attending child and their allocated Government funded dollar. Ministry of Education approved ECE services have sprung up within local communities on a very regular basis, frequently in areas that are already catered for with ECE services. In the year from June 2012 to June 2013, an additional 155 new ECE services

opened throughout the New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2013), many of which will be licensed to place 150 children.

In direct contrast, during the past ten years, community-based not-for-profit ECE services such as kindergarten and playcentre experienced a decline in attending children (Ministry of Education, 2013). Davison et al., (2011) state that the decline in numbers at kindergarten services is reflective of the child's attending session time being extended from three hours to the full day, or six hour, session. The increase in each child's attendance time, therefore, effectively halves the number of child spaces available. The changes to the children's session times are a direct result of the loss of children attending kindergartens due to the growing competition within ECE and the changing needs of attending families.

### **Homogenisation of ECE**

The decline in the attendance in community ECE services could also illustrate the homogenisation of ECE (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007; Moss, 2010). Moss (2013) warns that society can fall prey to neo-liberal capitalism that becomes a hegemonic system of thought and practice. Hegemonic discourse is not only expressed through the words of the ECE service but also through their actions, values, practices and the ECE environment itself (Dahlberg et al., 2007). From an enquiring parental perspective, perhaps all ECE services appear to be similar or even one and the same, whether they are community or privately owned. Moss (2010) argues that the competition within the ECE sector has created an environment of sameness.

Moss (2013) also raises concern for the absence of contestation regarding marketisation in England. He comments that there was no moment when the government argued the case of marketisation as an approach to ECE; no policy document where differing options were provided or discussed; no parliament or public debate on the matter; and "no evaluation of the experiment in marketisation and privatisation" (2013, p.200). A similar absence of contestation perhaps applies to the context within New Zealand. Moss further notes that marketisation is:

...a symptom of sclerotic state of democracy, no longer able to envisage and articulate alternatives or to deliberate the claims of conflicting ideas. Instead the nation gradually absorbed and came to speak a new hegemonic early childhood discourse, market thinking becoming taken for granted as the only way to go. (2013, p.200)

As a result of market thinking, parents are now becoming increasingly suspicious of anything that makes their child less competitive (Bruno, Gonzalez-Mena, Hernandez, & Sullivan, 2013). Neo-liberalism continues to support an enterprise approach to education, giving value to and focusing on competition in a market environment. The role of education is to now foster a culture of enterprise, delivering skills and attitudes required for New Zealand to compete within a competitive international community (Codd, 2005).

Malaguzzi (1998) suggests that concern may arise as society finds itself in an era where the time and rhythm of profit dominate those of human beings. Within this society, the values of the private sector may start to compete and overshadow the values that were formed through democracy and that are embedded in community ECE services (Mitchell, 2013a). Evidence of such a shift in such values is perhaps apparent within Farquhar (2008) who states that “kindergartens [are] now financially motivated” (p.14) to provide extended hours for children. Farquhar (2008) further states:

that the way funding to ECE teacher-led services is structured to encourage services to provide longer days for children gives no added value for children’s educational achievement. It should be questioned as to whose interests are being served by public policy incentivising services to provide longer hours and parents to use longer hours of childcare. (p.14)

The challenge now, therefore, is to find a place of balance somewhere between the values of marketisation and the values of community ECE

services, community values that have social and ethical concerns. Moss and Petrie (2002) argue that “rather than abolishing capitalism, which no longer faces any competition as an economic system, the challenge seems to be how to get things back to a better balance” (p.51).

## **Institutionalisation**

Kjørholt (2011) comments that the “growing institutionalisation of children’s lives is a characteristic feature of childhood in (post)modern societies... from an early age children spend a major part of their everyday lives within institutional education and care” (p.1). The term institutionalisation refers to organising children into an environment that ensures safe, secure, ordered, routine, education and care of the children while their parents are working, or in some cases, not working (Grille, 2005; Moss & Petrie, 2002).

Institutionalisation has become a new and distinctive aspect of modern day childhood (Brennan, 2007; Grille, 2005), as working parents need to ensure their children are safe and secure (Moss & Petrie, 2002) when they return to the work force. Brennan (2007) notes that “in order to protect and emphasise the specific qualities and needs of young children, we separate this age group from others to signify they deserve our special attention” (p.6). ECE services are now emphasised within society, as being “the proper place for children and childhood” (Kjørholt, 2011, p.1).

The institutionalisation of children separates children from adult socio-cultural communities (Brennan, 2007; Rogoff et al., 2003). However, Brennan (2007) further comments that, although children are regularly separated from the adult community, they are still expected to learn the social and cultural tools of society.

The increasing process of institutionalisation means children are spending large portions of the day within fenced adult-organised environments (Nilsen, 2011). Prout (2005) states the progressive removal of children from public spaces now locates them within special and protected spaces,



creating “special islands of childhood to and from which [the children] are transported” (p.33). Prout further comments that:

This phenomenon [institutionalisation of children] represents a refocusing of modernity’s drive to control the future through children. This tightening of control over children derives from a declining faith in other mechanisms of economic control, combined with increasing competitive pressure from the world’s economy... shaping children as the future labour force is seen as an increasingly important option. (p.33)

In institutionalising and fractionating children away from the community, Jukes (2009) believes society is in danger of beginning the process of creating highly educated useless people. These are people who become confident with the knowledge they require to function within the education system and to pass the required tests (Thrupp & Hursh, 2006), but who are not equipped with the knowledge they require to manage within their local community.

However, the learning of new knowledge about one’s local community can be gained in many of the teachable moments within everyday local settings including parks, on buses, at the community shopping centre, library, city museums, in open fields, the bush and at the beach (Jukes, McCain & Crockett, 2010). Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, Senge and Smith (2005) discuss the fragmentation within education and the need to choose to re-connect as a whole within our communities, with the natural environment and our fellow global citizens. Kleiner et al. (2005) articulate the need to apply systems thinking and to see ourselves connected to this social system, a system that is alive, that operates as a living organism and that has multiple levels. The relationships within these systems are fundamental within the interrelated learning communities (Southworth, 2000) and the development of thoughtful and mindful education programmes (Costa, 2008).

## **Childhood as a social construct**

Childhood is described by Prout (2005) as being produced within a complex, non-linear, ever-moving and socially constructed system of relationships. These relationships are inclusive of the child's family, local community, society and government (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Mitchell, 2010; Prout, 2005).

Mitchell (2010), however, defines the complexity of childhood into three concise constructs linked to dominant discourse: the child as dependant within the family; the child as a learner within a community of learners; and the child as a citizen within the social community. Each construct produces a different way of thinking about childhood, different public provision and different ways of working with children (Moss & Petrie, 2002). The construct of the child as dependant within the family is based on market, economic and welfare discourse and is concerned with reducing the cost to the government and increasing parental employment while utilising a discourse of the child in need (Mitchell). In addition, the discourse of this childhood construct regards children as being the private responsibility of their parents and considers children to be the passive dependants of the parents who are considered to be the market consumers (Moss & Petrie). The second construct is of the child as a learner within a community of learners with the focus on pedagogical discourse. The third construct of childhood places the child as a citizen within the social community and is based on human rights discourse. This is a new paradigm that places the child's rights and agency at the forefront and acknowledges both care and education (Mitchell). The child is not only regarded as a citizen within a social community but a citizen of the world with associated rights, who has perspectives and views on all matters affecting them (Clark et al., 2005; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Eide & Winger, 2005; Kinney, 2005; Mitchell, 2013b).

The child's right to express themselves on all matters affecting them is supported within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, with particular reference to Article 12 that:

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceeding affecting the child, either directly or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with procedural rules of national law. (United Nations, 1989)

Article 13 states:

1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice. (United Nations, 1989)

Honouring the rights of the child and considering the child as the expert in their own life requires the time to see from the child's perspective and acknowledge both their right to express themselves and their right to be silent (Clark & Moss, 2011; Rinaldi, 2006). Children have to be taken seriously and be believed in. They can no longer be swept under the carpet (Malaguzzi, 1998), to be seen but not heard (Clark et al., 2005), or in New Zealand society today, seldom seen. For children not only have the right to be heard but also have important things to say and adults need to allow time to listen to and understand their messages (Kinney, 2005).

In acknowledging the child's rights discourse and the important place this discourse has in improving the lives of children, Kjørholt, Moss and Clark (2005) identify the need to supplement the child's rights discourse. They recognise the need to include an interpersonal and relational perspective of what it means to be a child. They state the importance of a new paradigm for understanding the world and the child's relationship to the world. The foundation to this understanding and relationship is listening: listening to the hundreds and thousands of codes and symbols each child

uses to communicate and express themselves: listening to the child with sensitivity and openness. This type of listening requires not just our ears but all of our senses (Rinaldi, 2006). When children are listened to, space could then open up for a whole new range of visions, hopes and dreams related to childhood. New practices in ECE could be discussed and created (Kjørholt et al.).

However, moving forward, it is also important to acknowledge that there is a place for business values in society. Moss and Petrie (2002) state it is time to get social and economic concerns into a place of balance. The state is now reliant on the market to provide education and care for the nation's children, while meeting the needs of their parents (Mitchell, 2013a; Moss, 2013). Therefore, different ways of thinking about children, childhood, ECE public provision, and different ways of working with children are required (Moss & Petrie, 2002).

Moss (2013) argues it is time to start asking difficult and critical questions. However, Moss and Petrie (2002) propose that before we can arrive at the right answers, time is required to ask the right questions. Questions that challenge society to think about, "What do we want for our children?, What is a good childhood? What is the place of children and childhood in our society" (p.4). Moss and Petrie further argue that neglecting to answer such fundamental questions and the issues they raise has resulted in policies and services that do not adequately meet the needs of children.

### **Re-establishing balance**

Moving forward and exploring possibilities within the current ECE context, there is hope and the possibility of meeting the needs of children.

Currently in New Zealand, all ECE services are monitored by government regulations and licensing criteria if the service is to receive the government early childhood education funding (Ministry of Education, 2008). These regulations have the intention of maintaining the children's safety within the confines of regulated fences and secured gates. However, within the regulations there is provision to take the children on outings and excursions outside of the gate and into their surrounding community. In

addition, the ECE regulations have mandated the ECE curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). *Te Whāriki* states the relevance and importance of the interconnected systems of relationships surrounding the child from the home, early childhood environment out into the local and natural community.

The curriculum encourages teachers to explore the natural environment and value “the wider world of the community as an integral part of the early childhood curriculum” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p.14). *Te Whāriki* further states that “children learn through active exploration of the environment ... where they develop working theories for making sense of the natural, social, physical and material worlds” (p.82). Pere (2003) comments that education is based on experiences and understandings and that the universe is the university of such teaching. Pere further argues that an “education in this context knows no boundaries” (p.5).

Therefore, within the context of ECE in New Zealand, there is support from theorists such as Pere (2003), the mandated ECE regulations, licensing criteria for ECE and care centres (Ministry of Education, 2008) and the ECE curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) to open the gates and safely re-connect children with communities. Consequently there is hope.

There is hope for the return of ECE services that choose to be part of civil society rather than the economy (Dahlberg et al., 2007), ECE services that acknowledge and re-align their principles with the values of democracy (Mitchell, 2013a), services that choose to re-connect children with the community (Brennan, 2007), and safely explore the universe of experiences and understanding (Pere, 2003). Services that listen to the child (Kjørholt et al., 2005), acknowledge the child’s right to be heard (United Nations, 1989), and believe that “children are the greatest legacy the world community has” (Pere, p.4). In doing so, it is hoped that society will endeavour to find a place of balance within the social system that includes a balanced platform from which to hear equally the voices and the rights of the market place, the family and the child.

## **Summary**

This literature review has acknowledged the changes that have taken place within ECE over the past 20 years. I have identified the historical, economic and social contexts for these changes in ECE, and examined the impact of marketisation, including the resulting competition between ECE services encouraged by the introduction of a competitive bulk funding mechanism. The changing needs of families for their child to attend ECE for longer hours and the government support and encouragement to families for both parents to return to work have been explored. I have then examined literature that states concern for the growth in the institutionalisation of children.

Through my analysis of literature, I have then identified a way forward that could assist in returning the balance within what currently seems like an unbalanced system, with the rights of the market and the family being seen as being more important than those of the child. The way forward identified includes upholding the rights of the child and listening to their perspective in all matters affecting them, while also listening to the perspectives of families and the market.

I have concluded the chapter with an identification of space within theory and the mandated ECE licensing criteria for ECE and care centres and ECE curriculum framework (Ministry of Education, 2008) to take children outside of the gates and fences of regulated ECE services. Providing children with the opportunity to connect with their local community and natural environment could be seen as a move away from the institutionalisation of children.

The next chapter explains the methodology, data gathering, analysis process and ethical considerations of this study.

## **CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

Educational researchers have the potential to extend knowledge, solve problems, answer questions and illuminate situations (Mutch, 2005). The overarching objective of this research was to shed light on the experiences and perspectives of the children, parents and teachers within an ECE service. The ECE service needed to change its method of operation to maintain a financially viable and sustainable position within the rapid growth of local ECE competition. This study is a hope-filled act of illumination that intends to disturb the silence (Mutch, 2005).

The research is based on a social constructionist framework. The study utilised a qualitative inquiry research methodology. Children, their parents and the head teacher's experiences and perspectives within the change process were studied using the Mosaic mixed method approach (Clark & Moss, 2011). The data was then collected and analysed in search of examples of both connection and disconnection in experiences and perspectives between the children, parents and head teacher.

This chapter states the research question and introduces the theoretical framework utilised in this study, social constructionism. It then presents the methodology, qualitative inquiry. The Mosaic approach, a method for gathering data, is then described. Data analysis and the selection process are explained. Finally, methodological issues, including myself as researcher, my relationship to participants, ethical matters and limitations are discussed.

### **Research question**

The research question is considered to be the heart and soul of the research, the guide that leads the study from the beginning to the end (Menter, Elliot, Hulme, Lewin and Lowden, 2011; Robinson & Lai, 2006). The research question in this study is:

How do children, parents and teachers experience a changing early childhood education service?

## **Social constructionism as a theoretical framework**

The study is guided by the research question, and the theoretical framework of social constructionist theory underpins the study. This theoretical framework influenced the data gathering methods, analysis and theorising methods (Mentor et al., 2011).

My interest in exploring how children, parents and a head teacher experience their changing ECE service has led me to a deeper realisation of the complexity of the social world. That is people, including researchers and participants, create knowledge through an interpretative and therefore subjective meaning-making process. This study is grounded in social constructionist theory that values meaning-making processes that are co-constructed through dialogue, experience, seeing, interpretation, and understanding. Consequently, within one small, yet complex, social group there were multiple perspectives and multiple understandings on one topic (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2005; Markula & Silk, 2011).

Values and beliefs underpinning social constructivism include an ontology that views new knowledge as being constructed within the human mind, embodied and relative to the social and political context of time, place and space. Ontologically, social constructivists value the existence of multiple realities rather than one pure truth (Bochner & Ellis, 2003; Clandinin, 2006; Lincoln et al., 2005; Markula & Silk, 2011). Considering the hermeneutic nature of the study and the need to gain understanding by interpreting the multiple and lived truths of the participants, the social constructivist ontology is appropriate (Lincoln et al.).

Epistemologically, social constructivism believes knowledge as being within the minds of the participants and therefore, in the mind of myself, the researcher, the two cannot be separated. Consequently, the new knowledge is co-constructed with both myself and the participants (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Lincoln et al., 2005). Considering the



relational aspects of the research and, in particular, the relationship between the early childhood setting and myself, the social constructivist epistemology is suitable for the study.

Social constructivist research data does not necessarily have a common unit of measurement. Research can be approached with different styles and methods that can produce multiple forms of data (Lincoln et al., 2005). The study has utilised the Mosaic approach of mixed methods to collect data, thereby providing a broad and rich data source, making the social constructivist theoretical framework fitting to the study.

Additionally, the theoretical framework of this study is influenced by the ECE context in which it is situated and the New Zealand ECE curriculum framework, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). The curriculum document is underpinned by child developmental theory and the key theorists Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson, the socio-cultural theory based on theorist Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner and Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (Te One, 2003). Te Tiriti o Waitangi is foundational to *Te Whāriki*, as are the principles of the Māori world view (Ministry of Education, 1996). The principles of the Māori world view place the child central to the social groupings and surround them in love. The child's education is based on their life experiences and understandings providing an education that knows no bounds (Pere, 2003). The principles of both *Te Whāriki* and the Māori world view influenced my thinking in regards to naming of the research site, the social construct of the child and the thematic analysis of the data.

### **Qualitative inquiry as a methodological approach**

Qualitative research aims to provide rich descriptions in order to illuminate particular ideas, views and experiences (Mutch, 2005). Qualitative research is, therefore, based on data that is descriptive and searches deeply for thoughts, feelings, meanings, stories and experiences of participants (Markula & Silk, 2011; Mutch, 2005). However, research in social science can be complex and is often difficult to do well. This is generally due to the social nature and the humanness of the research

(Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Therefore, it is important for educational research to be methodological, sophisticated, rigorous and ethically correct (Borko, Liston & Whitcomb 2007; Labaree, 2003). The rigor and ethics of the study are discussed further within this chapter.

## **Methods**

### **ECE service**

The research was conducted between January 2014 and December 2014. The data collection time was over the month of June, 2014. This study took place in one ECE service. The pseudonym, Te Ra, the Māori word for the sun, is used to protect the identity of the ECE service in this study. Pere (2003) explains that the Māori word for children, tamariki, derives from the word Tama-te-ra, the central sun, the divine spark and the word ariki means senior most status. Pere's (2003) definition holds children, the divine spark, within the centre of everything that takes place not only in early childhood education but in society. The pseudonym, Te Ra, therefore seemed most fitting for the study.

For the purpose of the study, I approached Te Ra, as it is an independent ECE service that is known to me, but is separate from my day-to-day employment within the ECE sector. Te Ra is a community-based not-for-profit service that is operated by a voluntary parent board. It was established by the local community in 1967 for ten children who attended on Tuesday mornings and Thursday afternoons for two hours (Research field notes).

Te Ra is now licensed for 30 children consisting of a range of ethnicities (80% identify as New Zealand European, 19% as Māori or Pasifika and 1% that identify as other). Since the introduction of 20 free ECE hours in 2007 (now named "20 hours ECE"), Te Ra has changed from a service that offers five morning sessions for three hours and three afternoon sessions for two and a half hours to one which offers sessions whereby the children attend from a minimum of two four and a quarter hour sessions per week up to a maximum of three six and a half hour sessions per week and two, four and a quarter hours per week making a total of 28

attendance hours per week. The hours of maximum attendance per week have therefore increased from 15 hours to 28 hours.

Te Ra has five teachers who have been working together for six years. The head teacher has been working at Te Ra for eight years and is the only member of the staff who works full time. The other four teachers all work part-time. There is one administrator who works 20 hours per week. All of the teachers are fully qualified and registered ECE teachers with their teaching experience ranging from six years to twenty years.

Te Ra is located next to a decile eight primary school. The parent community of Te Ra has an average age in the mid-thirties. These parents generally work fulltime, part-time or study.

### **Process**

After informally discussing the study with the head teacher, I set up a formal meeting time to explore the possibility of completing the study within Te Ra. I prepared an information sheet explaining the purpose, process and ethical responsibilities of the research project (see Appendix A). Additionally, I explained the parent consent form (see Appendix B), the adult consent form (see Appendix C), and the child consent form (see Appendix D). I then explained the guiding questions for the semi-structured interview with the child, parent and teacher (see Appendices E, F & G). The diary of visits outside of preschool (see Appendix H) and the poster for the notice board stating: children photographing here today (see Appendix I) were also provided.

After gaining the head teacher's formal consent, I was introduced to the governing parent committee and their president by her. The committee president formally consented to the study. The head teacher and her colleagues then selected four families that met the selection criteria:

- the child is aged three or four years old;
- the child is able to communicate verbally;
- the child is likely to be willing to positively take part in the research;
- the child attended the preschool prior to the change in operation.

- the child attends either a full day or short day session;
- the parent is likely to be willing to positively take part in the research; and
- the head teacher is of the opinion they will feel positive participating in the research.

The parents selected were initially approached by the head teacher to seek their potential expression of interest in the research. I was then informed of the parent's interest and was introduced directly to the four parents and their four children. An individual formal meeting with all involved parents was then established to explain the detail in the information sheet and the consent required when researching with both adults and children. Interview times for the adults were then confirmed and diarised. In respect of the other families at Te Ra who were not selected to be involved, an open information session was held to explain the purpose, process and ethics and to answer any questions they had about the study.

Gaining the consent of each child who participated in the study required longer time than for the adults. I needed to ensure that the consent of every child was gained in a manner that was informed and respectful of their age and understanding (Alderson & Morrow, 2011; Harcourt & Conroy, 2005; Mutch, 2005). Firstly, I endeavoured to build a relationship with the children at Te Ra. I was introduced to all the children at the first mat time on my first day as a visiting teacher. I explained to the children that I was writing a big book about the children, their mums and dads and the teachers at Te Ra. After my introduction, I spent time with the children in the hope I would become familiar to them all. I attended Te Ra on most days during one month, paying particular attention to the four children that had been identified as potential co-researchers. I knew these four children needed to feel safe with me (Lincoln, 1995). During the first two weeks I gained consent from all four children.

### **Characteristics of participants**

The participants were the head teacher, four parents, and four children. The head teacher who was a European Pākehā female between the age

of 40 to 49. The four participating parents were all female New Zealand European /Pākehā between the age of 30 and 45. Their occupations were two from the medical profession, a student and an artist. The participating children were three female and one male. The youngest child was three years and seven months and the oldest was four years and nine months.

### **Methods of data collection**

The data collection methods utilised within this study are based on the Mosaic approach (Clark et al., 2005; Clark & Moss, 2011). The Mosaic approach brings together a range of methods for listening that acknowledges children and adults as co-constructors of meaning. It is an integrated approach to data collection that combines the visual with the verbal, in order to create both an individual and collective perspective (Clark, 2005; Clark & Moss, 2011). The methods I have utilised within the Mosaic data collection are semi-structured interview with parents; the head teacher and four children; walking interviews with the children; a diary of outings and visitors collated by the head teacher; children's auto-photography; the children's learning journals (a portfolio of the children's assessment); and an interview with each of the children based on their favourite learning story ("a narrative based practice for assessing and documenting learning" (Carr, Jones & Lee, 2005, p. 141), that is the predominant form of written assessment at Te Ra). These methods all fit within the qualitative research methodology. Data collection methods are outlined in diagrammatic form in Figure 3.1.

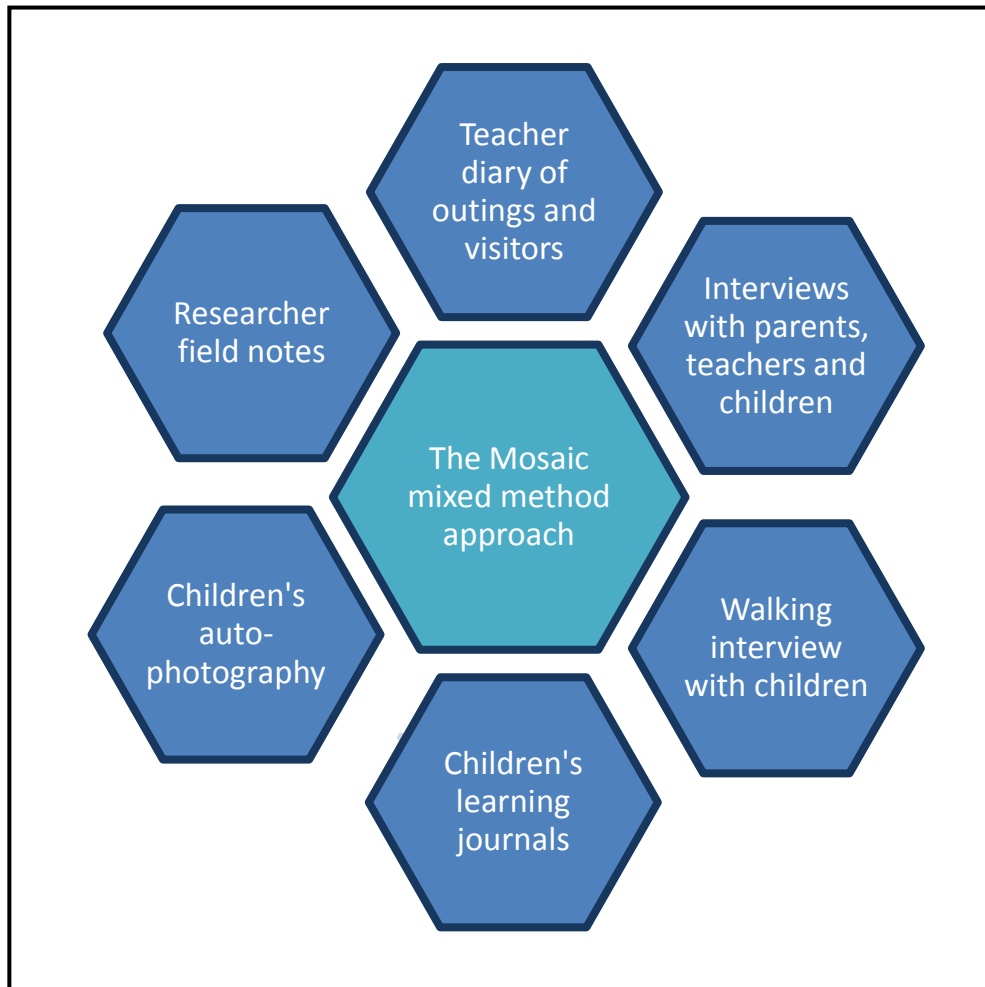


Figure 3.1: A personal interpretation of Clark et al., (2005) concepts represented in the Mosaic mixed method approach.

### **Pieces of the Mosaic**

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

In the interview, an instrument utilised within this study, questions that had no right or wrong answers were asked, questions that illuminated the views and enhanced the understanding of the social actions of the participants (Menter et al., 2011). The interview is a flexible qualitative, data generation tool that assisted me to understand, explain and interpret the social world of the participants from a multi-sensory perspective, including the spoken and the silent information (Cohen et al., 2007; Menter et al., 2011). Through the interchange of views between two or more people, the interview is considered to be a construction site of knowledge (Cohen et al., 2007; Kvale, 1996).

The interview is a useful data generation method within qualitative research situations that seeks the thoughts, views, experiences and interpretations of the participants (Menter et al., 2011). It provided an opportunity for me to gain a deeper insight into the lived experiences of the people within the study, to document their stories and seek out their silent voice (Bishop, 1997; Eisenhart, 2006; Lincoln, 1995). The interview provided a flexible method to recover and celebrate hidden knowledge. The interview is frequently utilised in conjunction with other methods of research, therefore making it a suitable instrument to be used within the Mosaic approach utilised in the study (Cohen et al., 2007; Weiler, 1997).

Semi-structured interviews have a set of key questions that provide a more open ended format (Mutch, 2005). The semi-structured interview is considered to be a sketch map to guide the interviewer through the territory that is to be explored (Menter et al., 2011). Bishop (1997) refers to them as co-authored statements of collaborative narrative construction. Other academics and writers on the topic use terms such as constructed conversation, co-construction of shared understanding, an appearance of conversation or discussion, and a dialogue aimed at eliciting information (Cohen et al., 2007; Menter et al., 2011).

Semi-structured interviews are flexible and allow for the interviewer to adapt the questions to suit the participants' understanding and therefore glean greater knowledge of the participant's perceptions and thoughts. Participants can express themselves naturally within the flexibility of the interview and ask for clarification of the interview questions (Menter et al., 2011).

However, prior to any interview taking place within the study, I needed to form a relationship with the participants based on a sense of trust, openness and mutuality (Cohen et al., 2007; Lincoln, 1995). I, as the researcher, required interviewing skills that probed the participant's areas of knowledge and interest. I required flexibility and the ability to accommodate the unexpected within the interview (Menter et al., 2011). I was aware within the interview process and throughout the study to

respect the participants and to mitigate my potential dominance, therefore allowing space for the co-construction of shared understanding (Bishop, 1997).

Within the study, three different sets of semi-structured interviews took place. The first interview was between the head teacher and me. I asked questions relating to the recent changes in operation to the service at Te Ra and the head teacher's values, beliefs and perspectives surrounding the changes. Additionally, I asked about the opportunities and experiences that the children have for accessing the wider community while attending Te Ra. The second set of interviews occurred between the parents and me. I asked questions about their choice of ECE for their child, the changes that occurred at Te Ra and the effect these changes had on themselves and their child. I also asked the parents about their perspective on their child's experiences in the wider community while at Te Ra. The third sets of interviews were with the children. I asked questions about their auto-photography, their learning journals and their favourite places at Te Ra. The children's interviews were further explored through auto-photography, learning journals and walking interviews.

The interviews with the adults took place in a range of locations that were discussed and decided upon between the participant and me. These venues included a quiet room at Te Ra that was easily separated from the main children's play area, the participant's own home, and a local coffee shop that had a very quiet outdoor space.

In conducting the children's interviews, the head teacher offered the office as a quiet space. However, as this area was not part of the children's regular play area I felt the children could be too easily distracted in this location (Cameron, 2005). I therefore proposed the interviews took place in a room that was part of the main play area but that had a glass door we could close to reduce the nearby sounds yet still feel connected to the external environment. This room had a small child-sized table with child-sized seats that the child or children and I sat at while talking. Within one interview, the child insisted on bringing the four pieces of Lego she was



playing with prior to the interview. Cameron (2005) notes that children can find it comforting to do something with their hands while they talk within interview situations. Within another interview, the two children wanted to be in the room together, in listening to and agreeing with the children's request we continued with the interview together.

### ***Auto-photography***

Photography was utilised within the study by the children to capture their visual perspectives in regards to their experiences at Te Ra. When the child is the photographer they are seen as strong, competent and in charge of their learning. This is reinforced by the post-modern perspective that sees the child as knowledgeable, strong, and a powerful member of society (Einarsdóttir, 2007). The child's personal photography raises the status of young children's image making, to enable them to enter adult debates in a way that young children's art work would not (Clark, 2007). Clark argues (2005, 2007) that the camera is a tool to visually listen to the child, hear the child and include the silent voice of the child. Article 12 of the United Nations rights of the child, (1989) states that it is the child's right to be listened to.

Digital cameras were given to each of the four participating children. These cameras were Panasonic, Lumix, 14 mega pixel, shock and waterproof. Time was required to familiarise the children with the cameras with a minimum of two practice sessions provided. Lanyards were attached to the cameras to give children the free use of their hands when they were not taking photographs. While data collection took place the children were encouraged to take photographs of "*What you see at pre-school*". After data collection, the photographs were printed into two A4 size booklets with nine photographs evenly sized and spaced on each page. One copy of the child's photography booklet was utilised within the interview process and the other booklet was given to the child to keep. A short interview then took place with the children using the following questions as a guide: Can you show me your five favourite photographs? Can you tell me about these photographs? Why did you choose these photographs? What were you thinking when you took these?

### ***Learning journals***

This study endeavoured to listen to the many codes and symbols that children use to illuminate their feelings and experiences (Rinaldi, 2006). Using multiple forms of data collection, the children's personal learning journals were examined with the children to provide another perspective (Clark, 2005). I asked the children to show me their favourite learning story and then used the following three questions as a guide while looking at their selected story: Can you please tell me about this story? What was happening here? What were you thinking in this picture?

### ***Walking interviews***

Davey (1999) argues that interpretations and understandings are embodied, therefore they are expressed through the body, thought and verbal or silent language of the child. The visual world is created by the seer, it is the seer's interpretation, so respectful dialogue with the child illuminates this understanding.

Walking interviews with me being led by the child were carried out around the pre-school. I used the following interview questions as a guide in the walking interview: Can you please take me to the place you like the best at pre-school? Can you tell me why you like this place the best? Is there any place you don't like at pre-school? Can you take me there? Why don't you like this place? Can you tell me why you come to pre-school? How long do you spend at pre-school?

The children were in charge of all their pieces within the Mosaic and were considered to be co-constructors of knowledge with me, the researcher (Clark, 2005). I endeavoured to be sensitive to the relational context and the power relations between myself and the child. Additionally, I tried to uphold the child's rights, acknowledging that children must be allowed NOT to participate and NOT to speak (Eide & Winger, 2005). The children either answered or did not answer each question. I did my best to ensure the children were comfortable throughout the process. If I sensed that they were uncomfortable, I either moved on to the next question or ended the interview. I was very aware of how essential it was that I gained the child's confidence, I needed to wait to be invited in and allowed to participate with

each child, the child needed to trust me and be willing to engage with me (Warming, 2005).

The walking interviews allowed each child a freedom to talk verbally and non-verbally about experiences at Te Ra and provided me with an opportunity to listen to the child using all of my senses as they expressed their feelings with their words, their eyes and their bodies (Clark & Moss, 2011; Warming, 2005). These interviews took place while walking around in the general play area. Each of the children seemed relaxed as they freely led me to the various places around Te Ra.

### ***Diary of outings and field notes***

To further complete the perspectives within the Mosaic, I wrote and collected field notes while gathering data. These included notes from the journal I kept while collecting data and notes from both the teacher and parent presentations that I held when the raw data was thematically organised. In addition, the head teacher completed a month-long diary of outings and excursions. All pieces of data were brought together to form the basis of dialogue, reflection and interpretation. The variety of data collection tools provided different mirrors to reflect the central research question (Clark, 2005).

### **Triangulation and validity**

An important procedure for the validation of the interpretations within the study is triangulation (Robinson & Lai, 2006). The Mosaic approach utilised within the study allows for triangulation of data due to the multiple methods of data collection. The intention of this approach to triangulation was not necessarily to reach a single neat answer but to reveal the complexities of lived experiences and assist in bringing clarity to these experiences (Clark & Moss, 2011).

Robinson and Lai (2006) also note that an important way of increasing the validity of a study is to check the collected data with the participants. Gaining feedback from them assisted me to ensure I had correctly understood the participants. The adult participants within the study were emailed a copy of the interview transcript to review. I then presented the

findings from the study in thematic order at a presentation to the teachers and another presentation for the parents and the children. Within both the presentations, I frequently asked the adults and the children if I had accurately interpreted the data. Participant feedback provided an important validity check (Robinson & Lai).

## **Data Analysis**

The method of thematic analysis was utilised within this study to search for patterns and themes in relation to the study's social constructionist framework and the epistemological and ontological position. Thematic analysis is seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis, as it is flexible and allows for both the reflection of reality and the unravelling of the surface of reality (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Krauss, 2005). The processes involved within this form of analysis are coding, defining and redefining of patterns and themes within the data that are relevant to the research question (Braun & Clarke).

Thematic analysis provided an opportunity to flexibly interpret, understand and make meaning out of the experiences of the participants within the study (Krauss, 2005). This approach involved repeated listening, reading and viewing of the data in the search of meaning, understanding and interpretation. It is within the interpretation that the researcher's abilities in expression, intuition and insight must be utilised to gain understanding. Seeing others' perspective is made possible as the understanding is revealed (Davey, 1999).

## **Interview analysis**

The process of analysing the interview data within the study required me to have a capacity to think carefully while making connections and looking for new order. There was a need for rigor and consistency within the analysis process as I allowed time to transcribe the interviews, index the data, generate themes and categories, order, code, file, search for meaning, interpret and think about the data (Delamont, 1992; Hart, 2002; Mutch, 2005). I was also mindful of respecting and honouring the participants by not only including their words but their body language,

including facial expressions and gestures (Alderson, 2001; Krauss, 2005). These records were included within collected interview notes. As well as all adult participants being given their transcript to read and confirm for accuracy, the children and adults were all invited to a presentation where I shared the findings to date. At the presentation, the children were given the opportunity to confirm their findings were correct. They did so by verbally agreeing with the data presented within the presentation or by using body language such as shaking or nodding of their head, smiling or screwing up their face and physically turning away.

### **Photographic analysis**

The photographic data was analysed based on emerging themes. These themes aligned with aspects of Te Ra that the children had a relationship with. The themes included such people as, friends, teachers and other children; such places as, areas within the indoor and outdoor environment of Te Ra; and such things as puzzles, play dough, Lego, and books. The themes were then further defined into patterns and sub-themes that further exemplified the children's experiences at Te Ra (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I was, however, mindful within the analysis that photography does not provide instant access to a child's perspective. As Clark (2007) and White (2011) both state, interpretation and meaning-making processes are required in collaboration with the child. This collaboration took place within the interview process whereby the children choose whether or not to share their perspective in answering the interview questions. Data from the walking interviews also assisted in the photographic analysis by further emphasising areas that were liked or disliked by the children. Analysis of the photographic data alongside the interview data assisted me in gaining an accurate, rather than assumed, understanding of the tacit knowledge of the child (Richards, 2009).

### **Methodological issues**

#### **Ethical issues**

Educational research requires ethical considerations that are based on trust and respect for the research participants. Care needs to be taken to ensure the rights and the protection of the research participants are

upheld throughout the enquiry (United Nations, 1989). Ethics within research are underpinned by morals. These morals and associated values need to be at the heart and soul of the research enquiry (Labaree, 2003; Lincoln et al., 2005; Mutch, 2005).

Qualitative researchers are described by Smith (2005) as being knowledge hunters and gatherers with their search for new knowledge knowing no bounds. The following of respectful and ethical practice is therefore essential within all aspects of research (University of Waikato, 2008). As qualitative researchers are guests into private spaces of the world, their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict throughout the entire research (Stake, 2000).

Ethical considerations were made from the inception of the study. An application for ethical approval from The University of Waikato Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee required an assurance that I would conduct every aspect of the study in an ethical manner. Rigorous justification of the research topic, procedures for recruiting participants and obtaining of their informed consent to participate within the study were all required. Finch (2005) states that it is the informed consent of participants that provides a cornerstone in the ethics of the research. The confidentiality of the participants and the pre-school required the safe guarding of their identities with the use of pseudonyms. Issues of potential harm to the participants required identification and the right of each participant to decline to participate or withdraw from the study needed to be honoured and respected throughout the study. Arrangements for participants to receive information were addressed, as was the secure handling and storage of information and materials produced within the research. Conflicts of interest surrounding my relationship with the participants and the pre-school were considered, along with social and cultural considerations. Underpinning these ethical guidelines were my personal morals and values that hold central the wellbeing of children and the upholding of the child's right to be heard (United Nations, 1989).

Although the clear set of procedural ethics was followed, ethical issues arose. In establishing a relationship with the children participating within the research, there was one child who was very wary of me, preferring to regard me from afar. As the days went by, she slowly began to sit closer to me at mat times, find me in the playground, and invite me to be part of what she was doing. Her trust in me was growing. This became particularly evident in week two of my being at the pre-school, when I attended an excursion with a small group of children. The child either sat next to me or held my hand for the entire trip. I then gained her consent to participate within the research. She took hundreds of practice photos prior to the day of data gathering. Her enthusiasm was contagious as she then proceeded to teach the other children at Te Ra how to use the camera. It felt as if she was truly my co-researcher and my assistant in teaching the other children at Te Ra. Her trust in me was very high. This was confirmed by her parents who said she spoke about me at home and the photography she was doing with me at pre-school.

After attending Te Ra for a month and collecting the data, it was time for me to leave. I said goodbye to all the children on my last day at mat time and gave them a book as a token of my gratitude. I returned two weeks later at the end of a session and saw the child who had become so attached to me. She looked at me and turned away, she would not engage in any conversation with me. It felt like I had deceived her, she had trusted me, trusted and perhaps understood that I would be there, and then I had left. At this point in time I was ethically challenged, had I caused her harm in that I had seemingly broken the trust of how she understood and interpreted our relationship? Although Stake (2000) states that it is essential that researchers exercise great caution to minimise the risk and follow the rules in protecting research participants. I had not predicted this aspect of potential emotional harm to participants when seeking ethical approval.

### **Pseudonyms**

When I meet with the parents I invited them to select their own pseudonym. No parents accepted this offer. I therefore randomly selected

a pseudonym for each parent participant: Kate, Anna, Vinny and Jane. However, when I asked each child what they would like their “pretend name” (Research field notes) to be, they were very quick to respond with a pseudonym. These were Jess - three years seven months, Batman - four years seven months, Princess - four years five months, and Georgia - four years nine months.

When it came time to choose a pseudonym for the head teacher I invited her to select a name but I then withdrew my offer. I explained to her that I selected a name for her that aligned with the pseudonym of the centre, Te Ra, which I had previously chosen. As the head teacher was the only full time member of the teaching team I saw her role as one that had to shine through the every aspect of the ECE service like a sun beam or a ray of sunshine. It was her knowledge, leadership and skills in building relationships that were essential to Te Ra. In keeping with the developing metaphor of the sun I chose to call the head teacher Ray. The head teacher agreed with my decision and the association to the metaphor I had created.

### **Photography**

The children within the study used cameras to take photographs within the environment of Te Ra. It was, therefore, possible that the identity of Te Ra could be revealed through the use of these photographs of places and things within the study. However no photographs of people were included to ensure their confidentiality was maintained. Notification of this issue was clearly identified to all participants.

Additionally, there were other children at Te Ra who were not participants within the study but who wanted desperately to be part of the photography, the walking interviews and the sharing of favourite journal entries (Harcourt & Conroy, 2005). In respecting the relationship I had established and not wanting to bring any harm to the wider preschool, I shared the four cameras I had with the other children when they were not being used for data collection. I also took the time to listen to the children as they showed



me their favourite places at the pre-school and shared their learning journals with me.

### **Bias**

To achieve quality, it is also essential for the qualitative researcher to be reflexive. The researcher needs to reflect critically on themselves as a researcher (Lincoln et al., 2005) and reveal their position within the research, as this is never neutral (Eisenhart, 2006; Lincoln, 1995). Revealing the researcher's position at the beginning of the research allows for existing knowledge and nuances to assist within the study and can extend follow up questions to ensure clarity and further quality of the interview (Menter et al., 2011). This was clearly stated to participants within the information sheet (Appendix A).

To eliminate issues surrounding validity of the research the study was conducted in an ECE service that was entirely separate from my place of employment. This further ensured the protection of both the research participants and myself and the elimination of any conflict of interest.

### **Limitations**

The study was small in size and the researcher was relatively inexperienced. Both of these aspects could be regarded as limitations to the study. The findings cannot be generalised - they are specific to the small cohort of participants. Nevertheless, they offer a qualitative account that, along with other studies, can constitute a picture that can be more widely generalised.

The limited response from some of the children within the interview context resulted in answers such as "Coz I like her" and "Yeah, ahh, um I don't know". These responses could have been an indication that the questions were too difficult or confusing for the children. This could also be considered as a limitation to the study.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the social constructionist framework that underpinned this research. The Mosaic approach was described as a

method of interpretive meaning-making that provided multiple modes of rich data. The thematic data analysis and the participants' varied opportunities to check the data further supported and validated the trustworthiness of the study. The bias and limitations of the study were then provided to allow a balanced perspective to the research findings.

In the next chapter, Chapter Four, the findings are presented. They follow the five thematic headings; the effect of marketisation on the ECE service, the children and parents; the intrinsic and extrinsic pressures that affect children, parents and teachers; the leadership of the ECE service throughout the process of change; the change to the operation of the ECE service; and the curriculum experiences for the children, parents and teachers as a result of the changes.

# CHAPTER FOUR – CHILDRENS', PARENTS' AND TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN A CHANGING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SERVICE

## Introduction

In this chapter the collected data is analysed in order to address the research question: How do children, parents and teachers experience a changing early childhood education service?

The first stage of analysis was placing the raw data into themes within the context of the metaphor of the sun, Te Ra. The strengths within the change process at Te Ra were placed into the sun's rays and the aspects that challenged Te Ra were placed into clouds. The twinkling sparkles within the sun represent the child. The beginning themes of the study are outlined in metaphorical form in Figure 4.1.

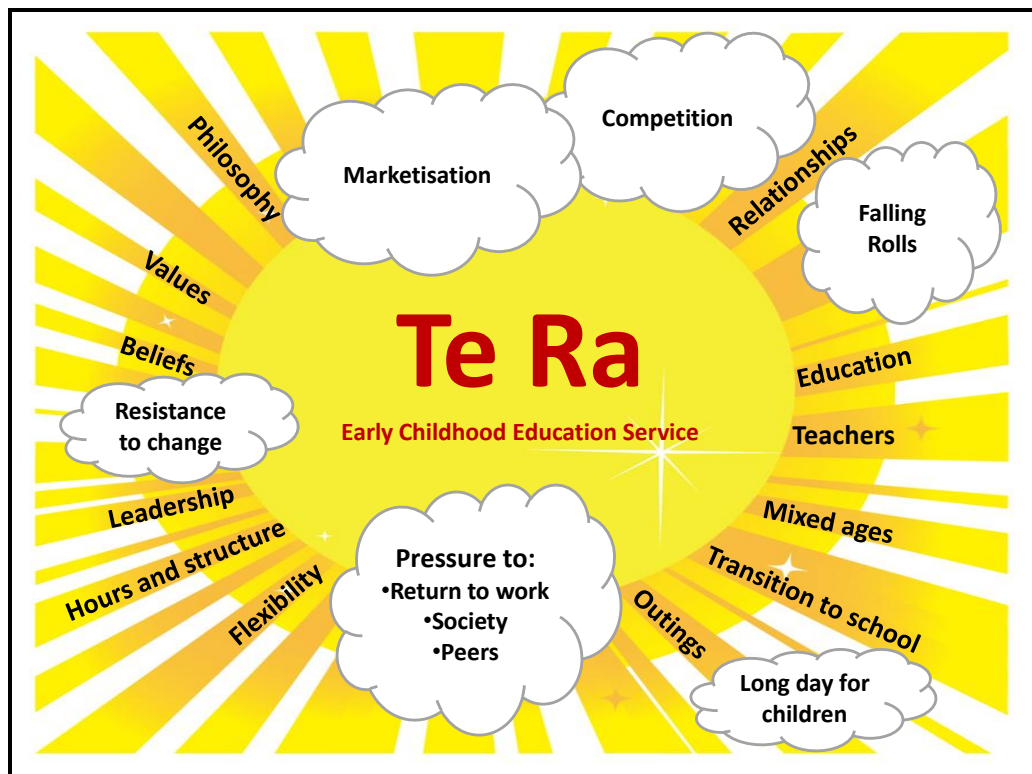


Figure 4.1: A personal metaphorical interpretation of the raw data gathered at Te Ra

Five main themes based on the experiences of the children, parents and teachers then emerged from the raw data. The themes were then placed in order from the external spheres of influence to the internal spheres surrounding the child.

1. The effect of marketisation on the ECE service, the children and the parents.
2. The intrinsic and extrinsic pressures that affect the children, parents and teachers.
3. The leadership of the ECE service throughout the process of change.
4. The change to the structure of the ECE service and the effects of these changes for the children, parents and teachers.
5. The curriculum experiences for the children, parents and teachers as a result of the changes: programme, people, places, and things.
  - a. Programme: The planned and spontaneous experiences, activities and events that occur at the ECE service.
  - b. People: The interwoven relationships of the children, parents and teachers and the community from a past and present perspective:
    - i. History;
    - ii. Teachers;
    - iii. Friendships; and
    - iv. Community.
  - c. Places: The places within the outdoor and indoor environment of the ECE service that the children liked and disliked.
  - d. Things: The various things at the ECE service that the children liked and disliked.

In this chapter, data from the children, parents and head teacher is interwoven and utilised to explore each of the themes identified. The data is analysed in relation to the children's, parent's and head teacher's experiences in a changing ECE service.

## **The effect of marketisation on the ECE service, the children and the parents**

Competition is now a common issue for ECE services within the local community in which the study took place. In the middle of the year 2013, Ray (head teacher) and the team from Te Ra ECE service, became aware that by the end of the term, over half of the service's child attendance spaces would be vacant. This disturbing revelation provided the catalyst for the process of change for the teaching team.

The parents interviewed collectively named 11 local ECE services, excluding Te Ra, from which they could have selected as an ECE service for their child. All of these named services were private, for profit ECE services. This revelation is consistent with research by Mitchell (2013a), who states the increase in private for profit ECE services has, in some communities, swamped the ECE market through an oversupply of services. Te Ra began to feel the squeeze of the market. The intense competition and the resulting drop in the number of attending children at Te Ra, as parents chose other ECE services, inspired the need to change. Te Ra needed to resume its presence as a viable and sustainable service within the community it had been part of for close to 50 years (Research field notes).

The dramatic drop in the child attendance roll at Te Ra led to reductions in the bulk funding from the government, since bulk funding is based on the number of children attending. The bulk funding grant is utilised at Te Ra to pay for the teachers' salaries, purchase educational resources, support teachers' ongoing professional learning and subsidise the children's daily attendance at Te Ra. The impact of the reduction to the bulk funding led to the redundancy of a staff member, and the staff "were advised by the management committee to make a stop on all professional development for staff and for purchases of equipment that was non-essential" (Te Ra, 2014, pp. 1-2, confidential document)<sup>1</sup>. The reality of the effects of marketisation, particularly the cut to staffing and the removal of the

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<sup>1</sup>The Te Ra 2014 citations are referring to the annual general meeting minutes. These are kept confidential to comply with ethics protocols.

teachers' professional learning budget, had the potential to impact on the quality of the service that Te Ra provided for their children, families and community. In endeavouring to hold tight to their working conditions, the teachers saw this as a strong warning that it was time to change.

The change at Te Ra began in the third term of 2013. At this time, there was a big shift at Te Ra as the teaching team and management committee became aware of the fierce ECE market and the discourse of the market place. Consciously influenced by the privatisation of the early childhood sector, and perhaps subconsciously influenced by neoliberal politics, Te Ra staff and their communications to the community quickly began to talk the language of marketisation. Time was spent raising the public image of Te Ra. Terminology such as "business", "market plan", "marketing strategy", "strategic planning", "seeking unique qualities to find the point of difference", "improving profile", "brand development", "remained viable in such a competitive market place" and the introduction of a "new marketing tag line" (Te Ra, 2013; Te Ra, 2014, confidential documents)<sup>2</sup> quickly began to appear. A new website was designed, advertising on the radio and in local publications was introduced and a big new sign was created for the front fence (Te Ra, 2013; Te Ra, 2014, confidential documents). Te Ra had joined the fight for children within an intensely competitive market.

There is a need for ECE teachers to be conscious and intentional with the discourse they are using. At Te Ra, the marketisation terminology seemed to rapidly become normalised, with this language then sneaking into the children's curriculum. For example, the annual general meeting minutes state that "one of our marketing strategies to raise the profile in the community was to venture out into the community on walks and visits more regularly" (Te Ra, 2014, confidential document). The walks and visits included taking the children from Te Ra out into the community on outings to the local bush area, mud flats, retirement home, garden centre, supermarket, airport, museum and library. All of these outings are rich in authentic and spontaneous learning opportunities that clearly linked to the

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<sup>2</sup> The Te Ra 2013 citations are referring to the timeline. These are kept confidential to comply with ethics protocols.

early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*. These experiences extend the children's knowledge of their local community. Additionally, children's confidence is raised as they develop strategies to explore and make sense of the wider world (Ministry of Education, 1996). However, rather than the outings being highlighted for their pedagogical value they were identified as part of the marketing strategy. Apple (2004), Duhn (2010) and Hannigan (2013) warn that marketing discourse is drifting into everyday language within ECE. I am sure that if teachers were conscious of their language they would be quick to identify not only the marketing rationale but the pedagogical worth of such experiences. This could, perhaps, lead to more intentional pedagogical purpose.

Although all of the parents interviewed and children attended Te Ra prior to the changes that took place, they were very conscious of why they chose Te Ra as the ECE service for their child. These reasons were generally linked to the atmosphere, the location and the friendliness of the teachers at Te Ra. Jane (parent) said:

I came here to suss it out and I liked [it]. What I did like about it was it ... was kind of modelled on ... the kindergarten with sessional times.

Whereas Anna (parent) stated:

...[Te Ra] was my closest preschool and so it was local and I like the idea of local, like I like the idea of making connections with people in your local community. Also the fact that they were really friendly in there, yeah I liked the service [and] what they offered. And also that it was right next door to the primary school so it meant that it was going to be easy to transition from kindy or a primary school.

### **Intrinsic and extrinsic pressures that affect children, parents and teachers**

The parents and head teacher mentioned various intrinsic and extrinsic pressures that they felt personally and were aware of within a wider

societal context. These identified pressures could be the same pressures that were affecting Te Ra ECE service prior to the change and pressures that affect ECE in general. They included parents' study and work commitments, National Standards and pressure from peers.

Parental work and study commitments required children's attendance in ECE to be matched with working hours. In addition, both work and study commitments lessened parents' ability to participate in voluntary positions. Ray (head teacher) stated that a large portion of the attending families have parents that work:

A lot of our parents are actually working parents, they're about sixty five to seventy percent of our parents are working part time.

Whereas Kate stated that the days Jess (Kate's daughter) attends Te Ra are the days that she studies. Anna (parent) further mentioned the effect of working parents on ECE services that require voluntary positions. Anna said:

...with more and more mums going to work, and less and less mums prepared to help carry the load, you don't have the people there to help and to volunteer and to, I mean you have to have a secretary, a president and a treasurer to make the centre run and you can't get people to put their hands up for those jobs, so yeah. So, I think it's really sad but I think those kind of things are going to fade away.

Jane (parent) added another perspective. She identified the pressure she felt from her peers and extended family to return to work. She felt pressured to socialise her children and enrol her children in childcare of any description. Jane stated:

We got that with the whole day care thing, you know, before my kids were even one, I felt like I was being hassled about going back to work and [people saying] don't you want to socialise your children? And it's like 'well no actually they're



fine.' We did playgroups and you know they got socialised when we went grocery shopping they conversed with adults and they, you know this whole thing about 'Oh you've got to socialise' It's like... they're not dogs.

Although Jane decided not to return to work, she acceded to the growing peer pressure and found a day care option for her child. Jane further said:

Everyone else has told me that because I've got a new baby and two other children I need to have a break, whereas in fact we were actually fine... [they said] 'You've got three kids now and you know you'll need to put J [her oldest child] in to do something.' And we tried that for about a month and it just wasn't working, he didn't like it at all.

Anna (parent) further commented:

People are choosing daycares in preference to being with their children.

At the teacher presentation of data the teaching staff reflected on the subtle changes they had observed within society and stated:

Twenty years ago it was frowned upon if a mother went back to work. Now it is the total opposite, it's all about when are you going back to work. (Research field notes)

An additional example of the pressure discussed was evident when the part-time teacher at Te Ra, who at the time had a nine month old son, mentioned she felt the same pressure from peers and society. She stated that she experienced constant enquires as to when she would be returning to work and peers pointed out the important responsibility she had for socialising her baby (Research field notes). These findings are consistent with those noted by Taylor (2014), who discusses the exploitation of resources, namely women and children, within a neo-liberal society that seems intent on the institutionalisation of ECE and childhood.

The pressure in regards to children's academic learning was another aspect identified by Ray, the head teacher, where she mentioned parents' awareness of National Standards. The National Standards, as stated by the Ministry of Education (2009), were established to support national expectations of student progress. This led to the development of a four point assessment scale to assist teachers to make judgements about students in years one to eight of their schooling. The scale is intended to be used to monitor progress in the curriculum areas of reading, writing and mathematics. The four point scale includes teachers judging whether a student as being above, at, below or well below the national standard.

Thrupp and White (2013) studied the enactment of the National Standards policy within six primary and intermediate schools. This study revealed problems with the narrowing of the curriculum, and the positioning and labelling of children, all of which were found to be damaging. Ray (head teacher) seemed to be aware of the parents' growing concern with the National Standards. Ray stated:

They've got all this pressure on them for National Standards.  
[As a result of this pressure]...we are finding there's some  
people keeping their children back for a term...that's  
happening [now] much more than it ever did before.

Ray links the pressure of National Standards with children remaining at Te Ra for an additional term where she reflects:

I wonder if it is something to do with National Standards that  
they know the pressure's going to be on their children and  
they know they're not quite ready and so they would rather  
that they are not subjected to that pressure until they're a little  
bit older and able to cope with it.

The concerns that Ray identified are similar to those expressed by Moss (2010), who warns that ECE is at growing risk of schoolification and of being taken for granted and subsumed into school. Moss further states that ECE is viewed by some as a seedbed for later growth and a place for

children to get ready for school. Ray, however, endeavours to be hope-filled and believes that the parents at Te Ra think more about their child's holistic learning than academics. Ray commented:

They realise that the be all and end all of life is not knowing your ABCs when you're five. You know that it's about actually having some confidence in yourself and your abilities and being able to cope with social change and to be able to look after yourself... that those things are actually really highly important.

The pressures felt by the parents and the head teacher continue to be real for the community of Te Ra, as they choose what is right for their child and their family. When reflecting further on the pressures Jane (parent) pondered:

It just makes me wonder how many, if that's happened to me, ... how many other parents are doing it [placing their child in day care] because they feel like [someone's] told them to?

### **Leadership of the ECE service throughout the process of change**

The change at Te Ra was led by the head teacher (Ray) of the teaching team. Ray led the procedure of moving forward to explore new ways of operating. The team began by researching various ECE options, then spent time reflecting, discussing, revising and consolidating their professional philosophy, values and beliefs (Te Ra, 2014, p.1, confidential document). Ray stated:

...we did a bit of research and as a team we talked about what we were prepared to do to keep within our philosophy and what our values are.

The detail of this planned investigation included research in the local community where the teachers from Te Ra visited and questioned other ECE services that were in "similar circumstances" (Te Ra, 2014, p.1, confidential document), inquiring into their strategies in maintaining a

viable position within the current marketplace. In addition, the Te Ra staff consulted with the attending parents of Te Ra through a questionnaire. The questionnaire inquired into the parents' needs regarding the times they required their child to attend Te Ra and the age they required attendance to begin (Te Ra, 2014, p.1, confidential document).

Prepared with the detail from their investigation, the teaching team then approached the Management Committee, operated by a volunteer parent body, with the news of the pending situation for Te Ra. A special committee meeting was held to formulate a strategic plan and to revise Te Ra's philosophy and vision (Te Ra, 2013, p.2, confidential document). Within this process, the teaching team had to decide what values they would negotiate, what values they would forfeit and what values they would hold onto no matter what the outcome.

For example, the team agreed that Te Ra should be an ECE service for children over the age of two and a half years old and agreed not to have children attend under this age. The team also agreed on the value of changing from a sessional service to a longer day service that was available for six and a half hours, thereby providing more flexibility for the families. Additionally, the team valued the introduction of the mixed aged sessions rather than having separate aged groupings. The team members all strongly appreciated the professional non-child contact time for planning and assessment work and term breaks. Ray stated:

...we're also only open term time which we still hold as being really important because children need a rest and a break. We don't expect school aged children to go to school 52 weeks of the year and yet some children are in early childhood education for 50 to 52 weeks per year, some of them [other ECE services] are open 52 weeks of the year.

The teaching team also highly valued the time children spent at home with their families. Ray stated:

... it fits with what our beliefs ... that you know it's great for children to be at home with their families and [be] doing family things when they're of a young age.

Q:

What do you mean by family things?

Ray:

Hanging out with mum and going to the supermarket, and hanging out the washing, and doing some baking, and helping mum do the housework, and going visiting friends and going to mainly music or you know, tumble time or whatever those extracurricular things that they want to do. Or, just actually chilling out at home and not ... having the full-on pressure every day of having to get up and get out the door and go somewhere where you know the business of life is that most kids that's actually what they're doing, those pre-school days of being carefree and easy and going to the park with mum for a play just, or the library.

These findings are comparable with findings from studies by Branson (2007), and George (2003), who argue that it is the clarification and alignment of core values that provide the foundation and the moral compass within an organisation. Without a clear purpose and direction, Te Ra would have struggled to change effectively.

Ray identified that her preference for each child's attendance would be "probably up to 20 [hours per week]". The figure of 20 hours per week aligns with the 20 ECE hours provided in funding by the government. Ray then stated:

... my personal values and beliefs is that children have best experiences, what's best for children is short quality early childhood education, short spurts of it, not huge big long [amounts of time]. You know, the research that I've looked at supports that.

Ray then discussed the teaching team's philosophy:

Our own philosophy as a teaching team [is] to ... try and keep true to what we feel is best for children but still being able to provide what the community at large and families want, to find that balance.

At this point, Ray indicated that both she and her team had reservations and fears as they had resisted the change. However, collectively they remained within the process as they could all clearly see the reality of their predicament, which was, unless they changed the operating hours they would no longer be able to provide a sustainable service. This is evident in Ray's comment:

But really it came down to the fact that if we didn't meet the needs of the community no matter what my belief systems are and my teams we would end up with no centre so ... we kind of feel like we've got the best ... of both worlds.

The special committee meeting resulted in a "new proposal" being created to assist Te Ra in their move forward to once again become viable within a competitive market place (Te Ra, 2013, p.2; Te Ra, 2014, p.1, confidential documents). The intent of the "new proposal" included maintaining the sessional nature of Te Ra while including more flexibility and longer options for families. Specific changes were to introduce a minimum attendance time for children of two, four and a quarter hour sessions per week up to a maximum of 28 hours per week. Te Ra increased flexibility to parents by changing from segregated age groupings, with the older children attending in the morning and the younger three year old children attending in the afternoon, to blended age groupings attending in the morning and or the afternoon. Te Ra reduced the age of entry from three years to two years and seven months. The teaching team also increased the frequency of walks and visits to the community and highlighted the purpose of the walks as raising the profile of Te Ra and strengthening the relationship with the neighbouring school (Te Ra, 2013; Te Ra, 2014, confidential documents), as discussed previously in marketisation section.

Ray thought long and hard throughout the change process, both independently and collectively with her team members. Reflective practice is supported by Begley (2006), who states, leaders need to be consciously reflective within their practice. Senge (1990) further states that reflection allows time to turn the metaphoric mirror inward to reveal the internal pictures and expose thinking. Reflection was evident several times within the interview that took place with Ray, approximately nine months after the changes were introduced.

Within the reflections, Ray identified the struggle she and the teaching team initially had in contemplating any change to Te Ra. Ray stated:

you know we had resistance to change as much as anybody else, that once we got in to the flow of it, we actually, well from straight away we actually quite enjoyed it.

These findings align with views expressed by Bruno (2012), who states that although resistance to change is inevitable, this resistance can be transformed into acceptance and eventually into constructive action. Ray further reflected and said:

We've reflected on it and said actually, you know, our reservations and our fears about it really ... ended up being unfounded they were fine, it was fine., I think it was... yeah ...just that hesitation to change what you already have.

A parent, Vinny, who had an attending child at the time of the changes commented:

I think that the pre-school made those changes in response to what ... the community wanted and they thought long and hard about it because of the philosophy of the pre-school and they didn't want to compromise any of those values. And I don't think that they have, I think they've managed that transition really well.

Throughout the change process, there was only one full time teaching staff member, Ray, the head teacher. As the leader of Te Ra, Ray guided the process, finding a clear view within the ever changing and unpredictable ECE marketplace. In collaborating with, and listening purposefully to, the teaching team, Ray found the shared values of all of those involved within the process. These values included personal and professional values and those values of the families attending Te Ra. For example, the teachers saw the value of children attending no younger than two years and seven months, both teachers and the families valued the flexibility of hours, the choice of session times and the community aspect of the Te Ra. Ray realised that adaptability to change and upholding the shared values of the teaching team was required, for without this taking place there was a possibility that Te Ra would no longer be sustainable as an ECE service. These findings align with research by Branson (2007) that emphasises the need for the leader to nurture and skilfully manage the change process ensuring all involved can maintain their sense of meaningfulness and personal purpose within their work.

### **Changes to the structure of the ECE service: effects of changes for children, parents and teachers**

Te Ra made changes to the hours of attendance, the structure of sessions, the ages of attending children and introduced the flexibility to accommodate parent's needs. Although these changes began with the introduction of the all day licence in late 2008, and the all day sessions beginning soon after in 2009, Te Ra still had structured sessions where Te Ra dictated the age groupings and the session times within the day. For example, a three year old child could only attend three afternoons per week. There was no option for the three year old to attend all day or in the morning session. The all day session was only available to the older children. In 2012, Te Ra increased the full day session from six hours to six and a half hours; however, the roll continued to drop. In term three of 2013, changes were introduced that included blended age groupings, reduction in the starting age to two years and seven months, and a flexibility that allowed parents to "pick and choose the sessions they want"



(Te Ra, 2013, confidential document). It is these changes to the hours and structure that have seen an increase in the roll at Te Ra.

The need for change was clearly evident in Kate's (parent) comments:

We would have had to shift [pre-schools] if they hadn't changed their hours.

Kate's pending shift was so close that Te Ra just about lost this family as they seriously considered services with longer hours to better meet their family needs. Unfortunately, Te Ra did lose some families prior to the changes. These departures were noticed by the parents that remained. The related concern is evident in Anna's interview where she stated:

They had to reduce the number of staff and, yeah, you could tell that the staff are a little bit nervous about what was going on, and yeah, you'd go in and there would be only a couple of kids ... things were looking pretty dicey there for a while, so making that change was a great choice, I think, for them. And I mean, I guess you have to be realistic about what life is like today, and mums working and the fact that you've got a lot of other kindys and pre-schools to choose from.

Ray spoke about the detail of the changes to the structure of Te Ra:

We made our days longer so that children could come both morning and afternoon session because initially they could either come in the mornings or they... started at three [years of age] and they came three afternoons, sort of on the old kindergarten model, and then they rolled over when they got to around four and came to five mornings. And there was no flexibility within that, so our first thing was we opened up the days so that some children could come the longer days and... then it sort of progressed, and then we made the leap, really that we would take any ages across the sessions and that they could pick and choose whether they came all day or whether they came in the afternoons, whether they came in

the mornings, we just opened that up to have complete flexibility.

After the changes took place, Anna spoke about the new choice she had in designing the hours for her child to suit her needs, rather than following what had previously been decided by Te Ra. Anna reflected:

Initially I was like, I was like 'Oh no!' Now it puts me in a position of, I actually have choice, and for me at the start, because my life was so busy with three preschool kids, it was actually easier for me to have the choice made for me so that that was just the way it was, and you didn't have to think about it and that's just what you did. And then, all of a sudden, when you had this choice open up, you were like 'Oh well! What do I do now? I have to think about this.' But as time has gone on and I've adjusted to that, yeah! I think it's fantastic, I think it's, and I mean you can see from kindy it boosted their numbers.

As a result of the change process, Te Ra now admits children who are five months younger than they would have been prior to the change. Parents commented on the introduction of the younger children into what was a closed session for the older children. Two parents spoke about their child "loving" the addition of the younger children. Princess, a child, selected a photo of a younger child as her favourite saying "He's cute". Vinny commented:

...she [her daughter] loves the smaller children, gives her a chance to nurture and..... help them. [Vinny also remarked on] the value of having siblings attend together...[we] would have loved this opportunity but it wasn't previously available.

Ray added that the new structure is now:

...more in line with what happens naturally in life, which is true with that age, you know the different ages coming together and the older ones nurturing and mentoring the younger ones.

This changed structure also aligns with the Māori concept of tuakana /teina that refers to the relationship between the older child (tuakana) and the younger (teina) and the approach to natural learning that occurs within this relationship (Bird & Drewery, 2001; Ministry of Education, 1996).

All of the parents spoke about the long day for their child and how tired their child was when they came home. Kate stated:

She does get tired but it's convenience for me that she goes for those two full sessions rather than five mornings a week or ... afternoon kindy.

Her daughter, Jess, stated that she attends pre-school for "20 hours". When probed further to clarify if this was a short time or a long time, Jess replied "a short time". However, Princess stated that she attends Te Ra for "heaps of weeks" and clarified when probed that this is a "long time". Anna mentioned:

he does come home pretty tired from the long days you know it is long day for a four year old.

Anna's son, Batman, shrugged when asked how long he attends Te Ra and then stated "four to 40 years". When he was probed further as to whether this was a short time or a long time, Batman replied "a long time". Anna further discussed her child's changed hours and stated:

He does three long days, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and I've probably, I've probably done that more to suit me rather than to suit him because when I started that we were renting over in [other part of town] and I was finding it really quite time-consuming, expensive on petrol and just annoying really coming backwards and forwards across town three times a day to do kindy pickup and then school pickup. So I've changed him to long days.

Two of the parents clearly stated their child felt tired from the additional time spent at Te Ra. Anna further commented that:

especially towards the end of the week [he] will get quite tired, when he gets tired he gets very short tempered, he forgets to talk about things and it turns in to tantrums and that's when it turns bad.

Both parents indicated that their child attending only a half day or the morning sessions only would best suit their child needs. However, the parents had intentionally extended their child's hours of attendance at Te Ra from three or four hours a day to six and a half hours on the days of attendance, to suit their personal needs and perhaps the needs of the family. Within the interview, the parents seemed to articulate what was right for their child and accurately interpreted their child's non-verbal communication. However, they had continued with the process of extending their child's hours of attendance, not seemingly listening deeply to the messages they had heard from their child and considering their perspective within the decision-making process. These findings are similar to the views of Brennan (2007), Clark et al. (2005), and Grille (2005), who all state that ECE is becoming increasingly institutionalised and younger children are now attending for longer periods of time. Clark et al. further add that time needs to be created to listen to and understand the unspoken word of the child in order to understand the child's perspective.

When the children were asked why they came to pre-school, they responded with a variety of answers. Batman said he did not know, Princess did not answer but looked from side to side, possibly indicating that she needed more time to think of her response to the question. This interview scenario revealed the difficulty of listening to the long periods of silence while the child has time to listen to their interior thoughts (Rinaldi, 2006). Georgia, however, stated that she came to Te Ra:

Coz I like it

Whereas Jess stated:

Umm, because I'm cool and that's because my Nana, um that's because my Mummy told me to...after I went to dance class.

Ray commented that it is the flexibility with the hours of child attendance that has become Te Ra's "point of difference" with the other local ECE services. For example, in listening to her daughter's needs, Vinny has selected for Georgia to attend only the morning sessions, although she did try the six and a half hour sessions. Vinny states:

I think the mornings are definitely better for her... she enjoys the morning, the afternoons, when she was at afternoon kindy she used to get quite tired and we'd do other activities so she was a bit more resistant with coming in the afternoons.

In a separate interview from her mother, Georgia, Vinny's daughter, was asked how long she spends at Te Ra. She smiled and said a "short time".

Anna is utilising the flexibility of hours to prepare her son for his commencement of school in six months' time. Anna stated:

...as it leads up to time to start school, I gradually, every term, will increase them an extra session so that by the time they start school, they're doing full kindy sessions. So next term I'll add in a Wednesday morning, and then the final term I'll add in a Friday morning so that next year he's... you know... used of [sic] doing those kind of hours.

Anna's conscientious preparations for her son's pending start to school with the increase of his weekly attendance to 28 hours, perhaps links to Moss's (2010) insights. Moss warns of schoolification and the pressure parents feel to not only have their child prepared academically for school, but physically and mentally prepared to endure the school hours.

Within Te Ra's change process, Ray continues to look realistically to the future. She can see that more changes could be required at Te Ra to

further accommodate the ever changing needs of their community and attending families. Ray stated:

At the moment, we're fine ... but it just depends as ... time goes on ... will we still have that option or will there be less and less people in the community that can work those hours or want to work those hours?

### **Curriculum experiences for the children, parents and teachers as a result of the changes**

The ECE curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, describes a curriculum as being “the sum total of the experiences, activities and events whether direct or indirect, which occur within an environment designed to foster children’s learning and development” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p.10). The following section links data to curriculum areas of the sub-sections of programme, people, places, and things. This section also uses the data collected with the four children, Princess, Georgia, Batman and Jess. When the children were asked to take photographs of what you see at pre-school (Appendix E), they collectively took 203 photographs. The photographs incorporated 115 photographs of people including children, friends, teachers and visitors to Te Ra, 43 photographs of places and 45 of things at Te Ra. Based on this frequency analysis of the photographic data, the children seemed to be most interested in the people at Te Ra. The analysis of the children’s photography is presented in a pie graph in Figure 4.2.

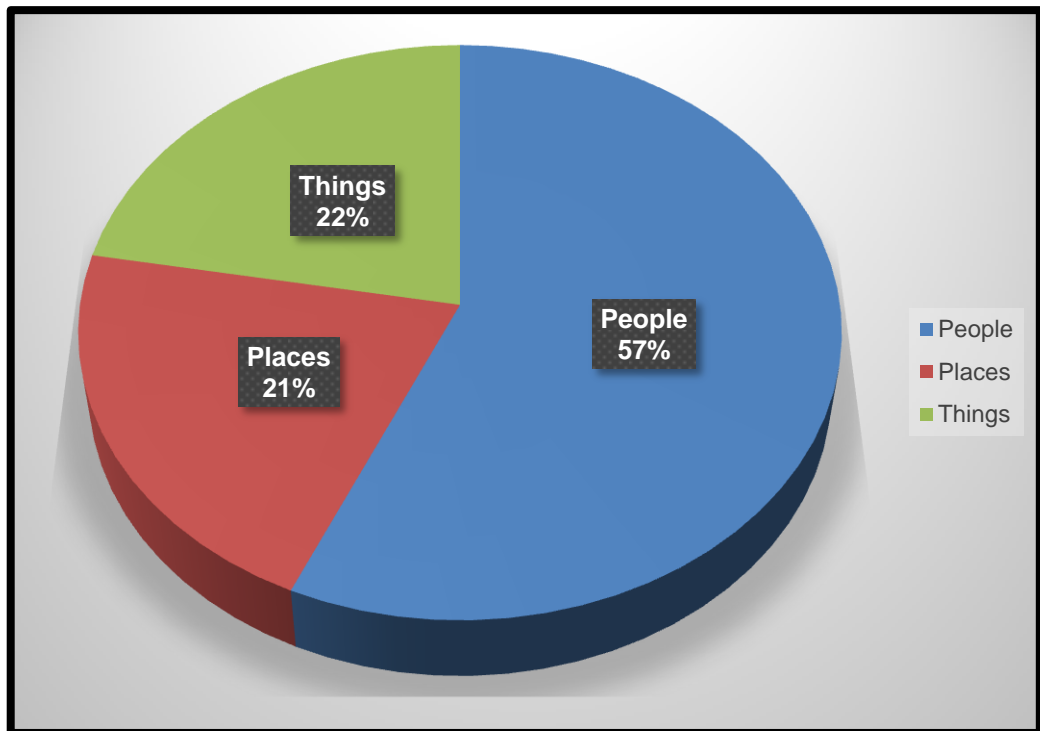


Figure 4.2: Analysis of children's photographs.

The curriculum at Te Ra changed after the new proposal to include points that have been mentioned in prior sections: the introduction of younger children to the programme; the extended hours of session times; the increased frequency of walks, visits and excursions into the community to raise the profile; and the strengthening of the relationship with the neighbouring school (Te Ra, 2014, confidential document).

### **Programme**

In this section, the programme refers to the planned and spontaneous experiences, activities and events that occur at Te Ra. Ray, the head teacher, spoke of the changes to the programme as a result of the new proposal. Ray stated:

So it's meant changes in the way we go about our programme. Because we were so specific to having our three year olds in the afternoons and our four year olds in the morning we were able to do, you know, a lot of project work and things with our four year olds in the morning which has got a bit more blurred. We still do a little bit of that, but we

can't do it to the same intensity because we've got to be looking after the needs of our younger children too.

However, Anna (parent) had a differing view of the programme. Anna assumed:

A lot more happens in a full day and the afternoons are quieter so, I mean, I've never stayed to see what goes on in that, but they probably get a little more individual time.

The findings revealed by the head teacher are consistent with those identified by Duncan (2005), who states that it is now common for two year old children to attend ECE services that were established for three and four year olds. Duncan continues, that with teacher support and the support of the older children, the two year olds within a programme that has been designed for three and four year old children, very quickly adjust and adapt to the extended expectations. The purposeful support of the two year olds could possibly see the return of the more intense project work that Ray mentioned and the individual attention that Anna assumed was taking place.

Ray spoke about the value of taking children outside of Te Ra, into the community as part of the programme. This was, however, in contrast to the marketisation terminology identified in data within the section on marketisation. Ray said the outings were important due to, some children being in "an early childhood centre every day, all day". Ray further said these children could be:

missing out on opportunities... like going to the library and down to the supermarket and walks down to the park.

At the children and parent presentation Jane mentioned that when she takes her child to the local park after a short day at pre-school:

We are the only ones there. [She then asked the group] Where is everyone? Where are all the children? (Research field notes).



Also concerned about the diminishing presence of children in local public spaces, Ray added:

...we try to do them [excursions] when we can, just so children get a variety in their learning and that they're out, they're visible in the community.

However, Kate spoke about her daughter, Jess, already having enough experiences in the local community. The list of activities that Kate identified was planned extra curricula activities rather than spontaneous events or outings. These included dance, swimming, mainly music and playcentre as additional experiences to Jess's attendance at Te Ra. Kate therefore, did not see the need for any more experiences within her daughter's busy schedule. Prout (2005) argues that such leisure time activities organised by and under the gaze of adults are assisting in the progressive removal of children from public spaces. In addition, at the parent presentation, Jane stated that:

Children are now over stimulated [and] constantly entertained [and that] Childhood is becoming institutionalised. (Research field notes)

Vinny and Jane also spoke of the value of taking children on outings outside of Te Ra. Vinny said:

I think that [Te Ra have] got it right.

Jane also said:

It's a pretty good balance [in the current format].

Whereas Anna stated:

I recommend more, I think the more the better... it's good for them to be aware of, you know, and I think there's a lot of kids that don't get out a lot, and so it's good for them to have the opportunity to actually see what's going on, and to actually see the inside of garden centres, and see what's down the

road, cause I think there would be a certain proportion of kids that wouldn't know any of that.

Anna further added:

I'm in to the outdoors a lot, I'm probably not a very fearful mum, I let them get in the mud, I let them go through, you know, climb and go bush and climb trees and do all that kind of stuff...I think kids probably know TV very well, but might have lost the art of climbing a tree or, you know, playing in the bush... and all that kind of thing.

These research findings are similar to opinions expressed by Louv (2006), who states, that unlike television, nature amplifies time and provides a place for children that allows freedom, healing, creativity, fantasy and peace. However, Louv also states, current educational trends, such as the restriction of outdoor space, are marginalising children's direct experience with nature (2006; 2014).

The children's desire to connect with the wider environment is possibly visible in Batman's seven favourite photos of a visiting father's racing motorbike (see Figure 4.3) and his desire to share this experience with his mother. Batman stated:

All of [my photographs] are my favourite. I want to take them all home to show mum.



Figure 4.3: Batman: One of his seven favourite photographs of the motorbike

Georgia's visual interest in the community was also expressed through her photography. Georgia took two photographs looking through the fence at Te Ra. Figure 4.4 showed the neighbouring school class room, fence and play area. In taking this photograph, Georgia climbed into a hedge of trees and poked the camera through the fence. Georgia's siblings attend this school, as does the friend whose name Georgia selected as a pseudonym (Research field notes). Figure 4.5 looked through the fence out over the road into the wider community. These findings are possibly aligned with Brennan (2007), who states that children within institutionalised settings are becoming increasingly segregated and divorced from adult socio-cultural communities through the organisation of both the physical and social space. Brennan continues, saying, it is time to connect children and teachers within ECE to the wider community. In addition, the ECE curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, encourages the development of connections links between the ECE service, the local community and the wider world (Ministry of Education, 1996).



Figure 4.4: Georgia. Looking through the fence into the school grounds and beyond



Figure 4.5: Georgia. Looking through the fence of Te Ra

In further reflecting on the programme provided at Te Ra, Kate referred to the value she places on multiple aspects of the curriculum and stated:

I really like the preschool, the environment and the sense of like, play is child's work and it's valued.

Ray stated that the programme from the child's perspective had remained the same during the time of change. Ray stated:

I think for them it probably not much has changed for the children that ... went through the change.

### **People**

This section on people is divided into four sub-sections that represent the interwoven relationships of the children, parents and teachers and the community from past and present perspectives. The sub-sections are historical relationships, teachers, friendships and community.

Pere (2003) argues it is relationships that provide the sense of inter-relation, value, security and a real sense of belonging within family, community and the world. One of the four central principles within the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, is relationships, in particular the responsive and reciprocal relationship that children learn with people, places and things (Ministry of Education, 1996). Te Ra, as an educational place for children, has been part of this community for close to 50 years

(Research field notes). It is, therefore, of no surprise that relationships featured strongly throughout the data of the adults and the children.

Within the children's photography there were a total of 115 photographs of people. These photographs showed children, teachers, visiting adults and the researcher. This, perhaps, indicates the children's strongest interest at Te Ra is with the people.

### ***Historical relationships***

The adults interviewed spoke of the historical relationship they have with Te Ra, the place and the teachers. The four parents referred to their older children attending the pre-school and that the current attending child came along to visit while when they were younger. Anna said:

He's been popping in and out of there right from when he was little... so yeah, so he was excited when he got to go.

Jane said:

He'd been coming here ever since he was born pretty ... much so and it was the same with Princess ... she was the baby ... so it was just so familiar.

Kate commented:

She was raring to go because of her brothers had been there so had a real, that sense of belonging was strong for her.

Jess, Kate's daughter, clearly identified her sense of belonging at Te Ra when she selected her favourite learning story of herself visiting as a new born baby with her mother and brother. This learning story was a direct copy of her brother's learning story dated December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010. Jess was three days old in the story, the day of her first visit to Te Ra. Jess's mother had returned a copy of this learning story to Te Ra to insert in Jess's learning journal as Jess loved it so much (Research field notes). This story is the first in Jess' learning journal. The research findings are consistent with the views of Bruno et al. (2013), who state that relationships with children, families and the community are at the heart of the teaching

profession and that these relationships are the very heartbeat of learning. It was evident that relationships at Te Ra were highly valued, whether or not the child was currently attending, about to attend, or had completed their attendance at Te Ra. Ray (head teacher) commented on the relationship she had with the families and said that she:

already had that relationship with those families' previous children ... they're coming back to what they know.

### ***Teachers***

All parents spoke positively about the teachers at Te Ra. They made comments about the "respect" (Anna) they have for the teachers, the variety of different attributes evident within the teachers such as, "their flexibility" (Vinny), "support" (Vinny), and "friendliness" (Anna). Characteristics of the teachers as a team were highlighted by the parents stating its "stability" (Jane), and that the team were "qualified" (Kate) as being important. Jane and Vinny also identified them as a "good team". An overall appreciation of the teachers and the environment was identified, Anna stated:

it's a big job they do... I think they do an awesome job.

Kate identified the feeling she got from the teachers and the environment at Te Ra:

I like the feeling there.. [and further that her family felt] a good sense of belonging [at Te Ra].

Jane spoke of the connection that her family had with the teachers at Te Ra, the stability of the staff, and the importance of the same teachers teaching at Te Ra over a seven year period while her three children attended. Jane said:

I do like the fact that I've been here seven years and it's all still the same staff ...they've just got such a good... you know, when we went round the corner [to a neighbouring day care] and probably the month that we were there, they must have

had two or three changes to staff and I just think that's really unsettling for the kids. And so the fact that ...my boys can come back here and pick up Princess and ...the teachers know them and they'll be like 'oh wow! You've grown up!' and you know there's that real kind of connection because it's all... you know they haven't [left] ...they've got such a good team.

The stability of the teaching staff was also identified by Vinny, a parent. Vinny stated:

these core ones [teachers] have been there the whole time for my kids as well, which is amazing, which is also a reflection of the workplace that they're happy and not wanting to leave.

These research findings link to literature on the stability of the staff and the relationship between the staff, stating that these are both recognised as hallmarks of quality in an ECE service (Podmore, 2008; Smith, 1996; Wylie & Hodgen, 2007). These stable relationships are important for the maintenance of children's secure attachments.

Ray (head teacher) spoke about the team all liking each other, all respecting each other and all helping each other. Ray further stated:

I think people feel that when they come into our centre, we work really well as a team.

Jane (parent) also stated:

Obviously they are a good team [and] children pick up on that.

Princess and Georgia (children) both selected photos of their teachers as their favourite photographs. When asked why the photograph was her favourite, Georgia said:

Coz I like her.

### ***Friendships***

Children's friendships were spoken about by all participants in various ways. The curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, states that the young child is in a period

of time where they are developing social skills for establishing and maintaining friendships (Ministry of Education, 1996). Moss and Petrie (2002) state that:

Children's friendships are relationships, chosen and developed by the children themselves for their own purposes and with greater equality than is to be found in child-adult relationships. They represent one way in which children enter and become active in the wider community, outside the family, co-constructing with other children their own cultural forms and increasing their sphere of social agency. (p.104)

Parents spoke of the importance of their child making friendships that would move with them to school. Anna mentioned her concern at the reduction in number of attending children prior to the change. She said:

Sessions were getting tiny, like there were so few kids there [and] ...they've [the children] got limited choice for friendships. [Anna later stated] ...so making that change was a great choice...

Anna's son, Batman, identified the value he placed on friendships when he selected his favourite learning story of himself and his friend, entitled "The T Team". This learning story focuses on Batman's friendship with another child. The teacher wrote:

Trent and Batman you have a special friendship.

The story continues to explain the art activity they did together. Batman selected both the learning story and the resulting painting as his favourite. Batman stated:

I like Trent, we made a picture.

Batman's marble painting is in Figure 4.6. These findings are consistent with arguments made by Dent (2005), who argues that children need to be encouraged to build firm friendships that are caring and supportive.





Figure 4.6: Batman's marble painting

Ray spoke about the benefit and opportunity, after the changes, for new friendships to be established between different children attending on different days. Ray stated:

... we found that it was quite nice not to have the same group of children every single day, it was quite nice to have some different children coming on different days and the relationships between different children, you know, they had opportunities to make different friends [rather] than having the same people. You know, for some children that was a little bit of a challenge because, you know, if they've got one special friend, they might not be there every day, so on certain days they'd have to make other friendships and some children did struggle with that a little bit. But they seem to have... everybody's come and [adapted].

In further discussion with parents, three stated that a bad day for their child while attending Te Ra constituted a friend "being mean" (Jane) to their child, saying that they "did not want to be their friend anymore" (Kate) or "a little fallout with another little friend" (Vinny). However, parents seemed to brush this aside saying it is more of a "bad moment" (Kate) than a bad day. It is essential that children have the opportunity to learn and develop their personal theories of social relationships and social concepts such as friendships and social rules associated with friendship (Ministry of Education, 1996).

Princess (child) took a total of 62 photographs of people at Te Ra. All of her five selected favourite photographs were of people, four of children and one of a teacher. The photograph selection indicates the importance Princess places on the relationships she has with her friends and the teachers at Te Ra. The importance of Princess's socially constructed learning within these relationships and the process of re-enacting these relationships through role play were highlighted within her mother's interview. Jane stated:

She loves playing in... the family room you know with the babies and the, it's just that whole role play thing, and in fact the last couple of weeks I've seen her at home reading to her toys. You know, she'll have the book and she'll be pretending to be [the teacher], so she's actually emulating what they do at mat time, so she has her own little mat time and she's got her book and, I mean, obviously, she can't read it, but she's looking at the pictures and she's showing her teddies and, yeah, that's been really quite sweet.

### ***Community***

An aspect of the change and the "new proposal" was that Te Ra increased its profile in the community and strengthened the relationship with the neighbouring school. Ray (head teacher) spoke about persevering with the development of the relationship with the school whereby she met with the principal in the hope of strengthening this relationship. Ray said:

... we were finding it was dying off a little bit because we didn't have all that constant contact all the time. So by being in the school, more and more visible to the school, they tend to remember us a little bit more as well, so we get to know what's going on. And they also email their newsletter to us.

Developing a stronger relationship with the school and the principal, has seen a strengthening in the transition to school for the children attending both Te Ra and the primary school. Te Ra's teachers and children are now invited to the school to take part in regular and various events. For

example, they now have a scheduled time in the school library every Monday morning and attend Jump Jam on Friday morning (Research field notes). In addition Ray mentioned:

...they have a dress-up day and they will have a parade or they do little flower gardens once a year and then they're on display and everyone, we will go and have a look at that. And at Christmas time when ...they have cool bananas at the end of the year and then they have their little concert that they were putting on for the parents, we went over for that.

The relationship between Te Ra and the wider community was evident in the head teacher's diary of visits outside of Te Ra during the month of data collection. There were a total of 11 visits outside of Te Ra, including the school jump jam sessions and library visits, a walk to a local horse and equine dentist and a walk around the school playground. These outings were attended by either all of the children at Te Ra or those who chose to attend. Additionally, there was a bus trip to the town library and art gallery; however, this excursion was only offered to the small group of oldest children at Te Ra. Ray (head teacher) also recorded six visitors to the centre from community members: the landscape gardener, the rubbish collector, educational resource sales person, DVD creators and a father with his racing motor bike. These findings exemplify engagement between the wider community and Te Ra. They also link to views expressed by Brennan (2007) who emphasises the importance of creating opportunities for the children to connect and participate in the wider community, witnessing adult work, rituals and tasks.

### **Places**

This section on places includes the environmental aspects of Te Ra service that the children liked and disliked. The data includes both children's and adults' perspectives. The children took a total of 40 photographs of places at Te Ra: the art area, resource cupboard, wall display area, swings, climbing frame area, sandpit, cubby house and play dough area.

The data from the children and the adults frequently aligned but sometimes they did not. The following scenarios illustrate the areas that did and did not align: on the walking interview Princess (child) identified the outdoor swing and climbing area as her favourite place at Te Ra. Princess's mother correspondingly stated:

She loves the swings, that's usually her little settling in thing is having a swing.

Georgia (child) chose a photograph of the monkey bars as a favourite (Figure 4.7), but when asked she did not offer an explanation as to why this was a favourite photograph. However, within Georgia's mother's interview, Vinny stated how proud Georgia had been with herself in her recent achievement of mastering swinging the entire length of the bars without dropping off. The process of interpretation and analysis was consistent with research conducted by Clark (2005). Clark states that additional dialogue with the teachers, parents and the children is required to create a deeper understanding of the child's experiences. This understanding would have not have been constructed without the opportunity of shared dialogue.



Figure 4.7: Georgia. The monkey bars

On the walking interview, Georgia took me to her favourite place at Te Ra, the cubby house (Figure 4.8). Although Georgia took three photos of the cubby house and five photos from the cubby house, she selected none of these as her favourite photographs, this information was not revealed until

the walking interview. However, Georgia did not tell me why the cubby house was her favourite place.



Figure 4.8: Georgia. The cubby house

On the walking interview, Georgia then took me to the area she does not like, this being the area between the shed and the hedge (Figure 4.9).

Georgia stated:

I don't like the bees.

Within the teacher presentation, the teachers were surprised at the places Georgia had selected as areas she liked and disliked at Te Ra. They were unsure about the bees, but on reflection, thought that while the hedge was in flower, perhaps the bees were present at a particular time of year. There was no recollection of Georgia or any other children being stung by a bee in this area (Research field notes). At the parent and children's presentation, Georgia's father had no recollection or any idea as to why this area would not be liked by Georgia or of her concern of the bees (Research field notes). The findings from Georgia's experience are consistent with insights from Rinaldi (2006). Rinaldi states that although opportunity for dialogue and reflection are created, the answer may still not be revealed to the adults who endeavour to understand the child's perspective and find meaning in the situation.



Figure 4.9: Georgia. The place behind the shed

In direct contrast with Georgia's favourite place at Te Ra, was Princess's favourite place. Within her walking interview, Princess quickly pointed to the cubby house as being the place she did not like at Te Ra. Princess did not verbally tell me why she did not like the cubby house. However, she screwed up her nose, scrunched up her face in dislike, and physically twisted her body in the opposite direction, away from the cubby house. I received a strong feeling of her dislike for the cubby house. The teachers were again surprised about Princess's revelation. But reflecting for a moment, one of the teachers noted that:

    this could be because children shut the door and she  
    [Princess] may not have been able to get out, some children  
    take charge when playing in the cubby house and shut  
    children in or out. (Research field notes)

Princess's mother, Jane, had no idea that this was an area of Te Ra that Princess did not like. Additionally, Jane mentioned that she did not know that Princess disliked any area at Te Ra. At the parent and children's presentation, Princess once again screwed up her face in dislike at the mention of the cubby house. She shook her head, reconfirming that she did not like this area. These findings are consistent with those of Clark et al. (2005) who state that listening is the ethic and method at the heart of the idea of education. They further state that "doing justice to thought means trying to hear that which cannot be said and that which tries to make itself heard" (p.6). Rinaldi (2006) states that understanding and meaning are revealed in the ways in which children think and interpret

their personal reality. Listening to the long pauses and a time filled with silence is often required to gain deep understanding.

Jess took a total of seven photographs of the Lego area at Te Ra (Figure 4.10). Jess stated this was her favourite area saying “It is cool”. Jess then said that the area she did not like was the art area. I queried her selection as this was contradictory to my personal observations of Jess’s play, the teachers at Te Ra and the interview with her mother “...she gets through a lot of paper and paint” (Kate, parent). In response Jess firmly stated, “Well sometimes I do like it and sometimes I just DON’T.” It seems that Jess was responding from within the very moment that she was asked. The Lego was what Jess valued in that moment of time and not what the adult observers had assumed.



Figure 4.10: Jess. The Lego

### **Things**

This section on things relates to the various things at the ECE service that the children liked and disliked. The children took a total of 48 photographs of things. These photographs included puzzles, balls, books, boat and Lego.

Jess selected the photograph of the book *I can't find you, Mum* as another favourite photograph (Figure 4.11). Jess took five separate photographs of the book and was then photographed by another child holding the book behind her back while looking at the visiting racing motorbike, exemplifying her current attachment to the book in the recorded space of time.

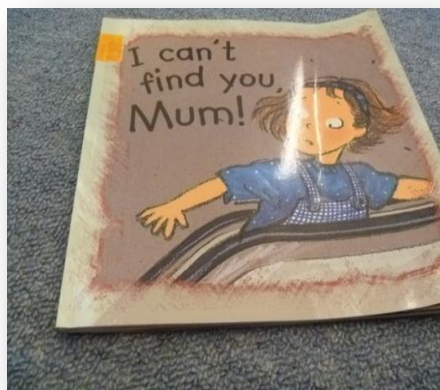


Figure 4.11: Jess. Book, *I can't find you, Mum!*

The children's photography was particularly helpful in illuminating areas of significance at Te Ra for the children, revealing the children's experiences at Te Ra and the unexpected creation of new learning for the adults.

Within both the teacher and, parent and children presentations, the adults frequently revealed aspects of the children that lay beyond the adults' perceived understanding of the children.

## Summary

This chapter synthesised findings from the research in order to establish aspects which affected the experiences of children, parents and teachers at Te Ra. Participant data revealed five themes: the effect of marketisation on the ECE service, the children and the parents; the intrinsic and extrinsic pressures that affect the children, parents and teachers; the leadership of Te Ra throughout the process of change; the change to the structure of Te Ra and the effects of these changes for the children, parent and teachers; and the curriculum experiences with direct links to the programme, people, places and things. The analysis of participant data contributed to the process of triangulation, and showed the multiple experiences and perspectives of the participants throughout the change process at Te Ra. The theories generated from the research data were often consistent with literature.

The next chapter summarises the thesis arguments. In providing suggestions for the future, layers of advocacy are explored. These layers are represented within an ideal framework of spheres of influence that



could assist within effective change processes in ECE services. The framework creates space to listen to the perspectives and voices of all of those involved within the change. These voices include the voice of the teachers within an ECE service and the market in which it is located, the family and the child.

## **CHAPTER FIVE - CONCLUSION**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the study was to explore children's, parents' and teachers' experiences of a changing early childhood education service. By examining the multiple experiences and perspectives within the change process, the study aimed to provide a greater awareness of the effects of the change that have taken place within ECE in New Zealand throughout the past 20 years. Particular attention was focused on the effects of the change for the children, parents and teachers.

### **Summary of thesis arguments.**

The changes made at Te Ra ECE service are summarised within the five main themes of this study and the literature reviewed: the effect of marketisation on the ECE service, the children and the parents; the intrinsic and extrinsic pressures that affect the children, parents and teachers; the leadership of Te Ra throughout the process of change; the changes to the structure of Te Ra and the effects of these changes for the children, parent and teachers; and the curriculum experiences with direct links to the programme, people, places and things.

The literature identified that the increased marketisation of ECE in New Zealand has been motivated by neo-liberal policy dating back to the late 1980s. The market approach has led to fierce competition between services for the government funded dollar for each attending child. The findings from this study show the local competition experienced within the community surrounding Te Ra and the real daily effects of this competition: the increase in local ECE services, the reduction in attending children at Te Ra, leading to the drop in the government bulk funding to Te Ra; and the introduction of a strategic plan.

The literature then highlights the effects of the competition between ECE services and the potential for institutionalising children and childhood; that is, the organising of children into an environment that ensures safe,

secure, ordered, routine, education and care of children while their parents are working, or in some cases, not working (Grille, 2005; Moss & Petrie, 2002). The data further reinforces the effects of marketisation on the discourse at Te Ra and demonstrates how subtly market discourse has crept into the everyday language of the ECE service. Marketisation could now be considered the driver of decision-making within ECE, perhaps emphasising the need for teachers to be conscious and intentional in their pedagogical purpose.

The study identifies the various intrinsic and extrinsic pressures felt by families within society today. These pressures included parents' commitment to work or study, pressure from their peers, and the pending pressure of National Standards. In order to alleviate some of these pressures felt by families, flexible enrolment options were introduced at Te Ra. The findings also identified that although the teachers resisted the change to a flexible model, they accepted the change and then found they enjoyed the change. The flexible enrolment option also seemed to provide the key to reversing the declining roll at Te Ra and an opportunity to introduce mixed-age groupings of children. The new flexibility of Te Ra is upheld as a current point of difference with other local ECE services, and is positively received by the parents as well as the teachers.

The literature acknowledges that society is changing along with the needs of families. This means children will probably need to spend longer periods of time within ECE. The parents were very aware of their child's needs, with some parents identifying that their child had a long day at Te Ra and was often tired at the end of the day. The parents were also clear in identifying their own needs and what suited their personal needs in regards to their child's attendance at Te Ra.

These changing conditions pose challenges for ECE, and all involved within the process, to create an ECE service that is responsive to the best interests of the child. The literature provides a window of hope in connecting children to their local community and encourages authentic learning opportunities with regular excursions and outings. Parents in the

study generally supported Te Ra going on more excursions and connecting with the wider community. Additionally, the children's data seemed to highlight their curiosity with what was on the other side of the fence from Te Ra within their local community.

The literature supports the rights of the child and the importance of creating opportunities to listen to children and giving value to their perspectives. The Mosaic approach to data collection upheld the rights of the child, providing visible evidence of each child's perspective and a method to listen to the child's views and opinions. Article 12 of the United Nations Rights of the Child (1989) states it is the child's right to be listened to. The Mosaic approach provided multiple methods: interviews, the children's photography, viewing of the children's learning journals, walking interviews with the children, and researcher field notes. The multiple methods of data collection allowed for each child's personal communication preference and preference for particular methodological tools, ensuring their perspective was listened to and included within the study. The data collected on the children frequently revealed that what adults assume on behalf of children is not necessarily correct.

A consistent finding was the interwoven thread of strong relationships held by the teachers at Te Ra with the children, families and the local community. The depth of relationships with the older siblings of attending children seemed to create a link to the familiar space that is Te Ra. Some of the attending children had been visiting Te Ra since they were new born. They therefore expected that they would one day be attending Te Ra. The parents of these children had been part of Te Ra's extended community for many years, remaining loyal to the service they believed in even through the times of recent change. This was evident from parents' comments regarding the culture of Te Ra, the stability of the staff, and the welcoming and friendly feel of Te Ra.

## **Limitations**

The limitations of this study are related to the small size of the sample. The experiences and perspectives of four children, their four parents and

the head teacher have enabled an in-depth study, but with a limited number of experiences and perspectives. A larger number of participants including the entire teaching team, administrator, an increased number of children and parents, and the experiences from a wider range of ECE services including the private for profit sector, would have provided a greater opportunity to explore and compare the experiences and perspectives within the ECE sector. However, this was beyond the scope of this thesis.

The gender imbalance within the study is limiting: one four year old boy, one three year old girl, two four year old girls, four mothers and one female teacher. Experiences and perspectives from a balanced gender perspective from both the children and the parents could have added more depth to the study. Ethnicity of the participants was also unbalanced, as all of the participants identified as New Zealand European. The experiences of Māori, Pasifika and other ethnicities could have added another perspective to the study. However, the volunteers for the study were selected by the staff at Te Ra in order to meet the selection criteria for this thesis.

Researching with children also proved to have some limitations. Time was required to establish a relationship with the children prior to any interviews occurring. In addition, time was required to familiarise the children with the cameras prior to data collection. On occasion, the children's responses to interview questions were limited with answers such as "Coz I like it" and "I don't know." There was also the added requirement of interpreting body language, particularly on the walking interviews with the children.

Despite the limitations of this research, the study has provided a small window into the perspectives of those experiencing change within an ECE service in New Zealand. It is hoped that the perspectives and experiences of the participants within this study will have inspired interested readers to think, reflect and ask critical questions of their personal and professional contexts. It is also hoped that the experiences recorded within this study

will challenge leaders to allow time to listen deeply to all of those affected by decisions made within the contexts of ECE.

## **Suggestions moving forward**

ECE continues to be affected by the social, economic and cultural changes that have taken place over the past 20 years. The challenge for ECE services now is to balance the perspectives of all within the change-making process, ensuring all perspectives are equitably heard and represented.

One way to assist ECE services going through similar change experiences is to consider the themes, issues and tensions that have been illuminated within this research. Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach to social systems (1986) could be helpful in this consideration. In doing so, it is hoped that space can be created within the process of change to listen equitably to the voices represented: the voices of the government, and those of the ECE service represented by the teachers and the managers, the families and the children.

### **Ecological approach**

Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach to the interlinking social systems that surround each child emphasises the influence of relationships, culture and society on the child's development. This approach further highlights the effect of a particular society with particular political policy at a particular time in history on the child's development. Four systems surround each child: the micro-system, meso-system, exo-system and the macro-system (Bird & Drewery, 2001).

#### ***Micro-system***

The child is at the centre of the system. This central layer refers to the interactions children have with their immediate environment, including members of their family and the ECE service they attend. Rogoff (2003) argues that this central system represents the child's place for initially learning about the world. As the child's most intimate learning system, it offers him or her, a reference point for the world. The micro-system may

provide the nurturing centrepiece for the child or become a haunting set of memories.

Within the micro-system, the rights of the child need to be upheld and space needs to be created to listen to the voice of the child within the context of both the home and the ECE service. The child's views and perspectives need to be taken into account when planning the child's ECE experience. This thesis has demonstrated some multimodal methods identifying these perspectives and experiences that are worth consideration by teachers and researchers. For example, teachers at the ECE service where the study was completed later shared with me that, as a result of the study, the children now frequently ask to use the cameras and take photographs. The service has now purchased cameras for the children to use.

### ***Meso-system***

The meso-system refers to the connections that link the different micro-systems together; for example, the connection and relationship between a parent and a teacher at the ECE service. It is within this system that children, parents and teachers can share their views and perspectives on all matters. Space needs to be created to ensure such sharing of views and perspectives can take place and that this sharing is listened to and is valued by all within the conversation. For example, strategies, such as those used within this study, which could assist when enquiring into the child's perspective, i.e. the child's photography with supporting dialogue, walking interviews and the child's past experiences shared within the child's learning journal. Within this process, the rights of the child need to be equally considered alongside those of the family and those of the ECE service.

### ***Exo-system***

The exo-system is the larger social system that includes public media, the wider community and neighbourhoods (Bird & Drewery, 2001). Although the child does not necessarily engage directly within this system, the system still affects the child. For example, if the child's parents are feeling pressure from their social peers, work or study this has a flow on effect for

the child and could result in the child being placed in an ECE service for longer periods of time. However, with the growing rate of institutionalisation of children, opportunities can be arranged by the ECE service to regularly take the children on outings and excursions into the local community (Ministry of Education, 1996).

### ***Macro-system***

The macro-system includes the cultural patterns of the country and the political system (Bird & Drewery, 2001). Although this system is the outermost layer for the child, political decisions made within this system greatly affect the child. For example, the introduction of neo-liberal policy in the late 1980s led to social and economic change, this led to parents' need to work and the growing demand for ECE. The growth in ECE services led to the marketisation of ECE and, in turn, has led to children spending longer periods of time within ECE services. With the growing rate of institutionalisation of children within New Zealand, it would be beneficial to children if a political space was created to listen to the perspectives and views of children to assist in formulating New Zealand ECE policy. This could take place by firstly, enquiring into the child's views and perspectives on all matters affecting them, using similar methodological tools to those used within this study. The children's views and perspectives could then be represented by an advocate for children within the political sphere. Such a political space could assist in bringing balance to the system that seems to be tipping over in favour of the market, rather than the child, within the macro-system.

A diagrammatic form of my idealised framework is represented in Figure 5.1. Within the diagram, the child is central to the surrounding spheres, surrounded by the family, the ECE service and the management and teachers, then the political sphere where the political child advocate is represented. The outer layer represents the universe and the experiences and opportunities available within an education that has no boundaries (Pere, 2003). The arrows within the diagram are double ended, indicating that the child's perspective and views need to be considered equitably in all matters affecting them. Each of the spheres has a perforated line rather



than a solid line. The perforation further signifies the inter-connection of relationships and clear communication between all of the spheres.

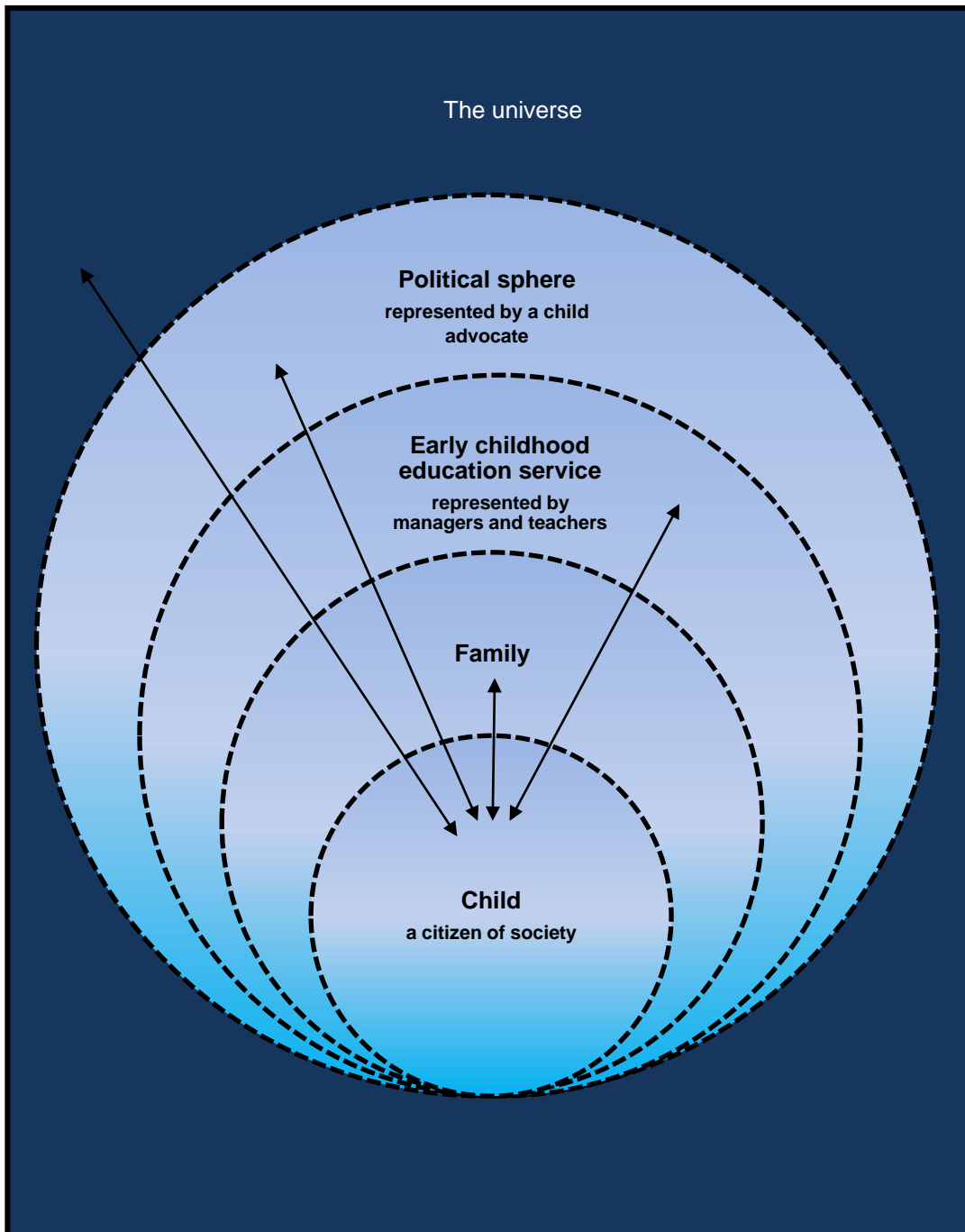


Figure 5.1: A personal idealised and interpretative framework of the spheres of influence on the child.

Source: Based on the concepts of Bronfenbrenner (Bird & Drewery, 2001) and Pere (2003).

In times of change within ECE, my idealised framework requires strong and clear leadership that upholds and values the rights of everyone represented within the framework, ensuring that all perspectives are gained and listened to in a manner that is appropriate, equitable and respectful. Branson (2007) emphasises the need for the leader to nurture and skilfully manage the change process, ensuring all involved can maintain their sense of meaningfulness and personal purpose.

### **Further Study**

Whilst this study may present a range of experiences and perspectives of children, parents and teachers within one changing ECE service, it would be arrogant to propose these same perspectives and experiences would represent those of another ECE service.

Additional research is, therefore, required to investigate a wider range of experiences both within the community-based sector and the for profit sector and the sessional based ECE services, that is the three hour sessions; the school day ECE services, that is the six hour days; and the long day ECE services, that is ECE services that provide over six hours per day. Such research could provide a broader picture of experiences for children, parents and teachers who have experienced change within a variety of ECE services. The resulting findings may provide further insight into how to maintain balance while advocating for the ECE service, for families and for children.

### **Conclusion**

Before embarking on this study, I had become increasingly aware that children were disappearing from public spaces such as the local shops, supermarkets and parks and frequently found myself wondering – where have all the children gone? As an experienced ECE teacher, I was aware of the effects of educational policy, increased competition between ECE services, and the growing need for parents to work. However, as an inexperienced researcher, I had a sincere interest in the topic and a desire to explore my concerns.

The literature identified similar concerns to mine and further warned me of the effects of neo-liberal policies, marketisation and the institutionalisation of children. I realised very quickly that the effects of neo-liberal policy were widespread within the globalised Western world. The field work raised similar concerns as the parents and teachers identified pressures and tensions that they had experienced. However, the flexibility offered to parents provided a beacon of hope.

There are two challenges for the early childhood sector. The first is the inclusion of balanced voices and perspectives within the processes that affect children: the voices of the child, the family, the teacher, the ECE service within the market place, and the ECE policy creators. The second challenge is for the early childhood sector to avoid further institutionalisation of children by following the guidelines within the ECE curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (1996) and include authentic outings into the “wider world” (p.57) and local community as part of the regular programme for children.

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# Appendices

## APPENDIX A - Information Sheet

Kia ora,

My name is Kathryn Hart<sup>3</sup> and I am currently a student at the University of Waikato. This year I am undertaking a research study for my Master of Educational Leadership thesis. The research study is entitled “*Where have all the children gone? Experiences and perspectives within a changing early childhood education service.*” My focus in this study will be on the changes that have recently occurred at Te Ra Pre-school in regards to the hours, times and ages of children attending preschool. I would like to find out how the children, parents and teachers experience and perceive these changes.

My interest in the topic was inspired several years ago when I noticed that during the week children were disappearing from public spaces such as the local shops, supermarkets and parks. I found myself wondering, where had all the children gone? I was aware of government policy to encourage participation in early childhood education (ECE), the growing parental need to return to work, the increased number of children spending longer periods of time in ECE from a younger age and increased competition amongst ECE service. I therefore consider it timely to seek the perspectives of all involved within these changes, that is, the children, parents and teachers working in the ECE service.

The study will address the following question:

How do children, parents and teachers experience a changing early childhood education service?

I will use a range of methods to find out about the views and experiences of children including interviews, discussion of photographs taken by the

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<sup>3</sup> While writing this thesis the author reverted to her birth name.

child in the preschool and stories within the child's learning journal. I will *interview teachers and parents about their views and experiences.*

I intend to undertake case studies of four children and their parents and interview the head teacher. The following data will be gathered.

- Each child will be provided with a digital camera to take photographs of "*What you see at pre-school.*" Photographs will be developed in a booklet format and discussed with the child and researcher through an informal interview.
- The child's learning journal will be viewed by the child and the researcher, and a conversation held about past experiences the child had at preschool.
- The child will be invited to lead the researcher around the preschool showing the researcher favourite places at preschool.
- The child's parents will be asked to take part in an interview about their perceptions of their child's attendance at pre-school and their views of changes to the operation at pre-school.
- The head teacher will be asked to take part in an interview about the process of making changes to the operations at pre-school and her views of these changes.
- The head teacher will be asked to keep a daily diary of visits outside the preschool.

Interviews and conversations will be audio recorded and transcribed. The information gathered will be used to analyse how children, parents and teachers experience and perceive the changes within their pre-school. The analysis will be published within my MEd thesis, relevant academic journals, and may be presented at conferences and seminars.

The pre-school will not be named and participants' real names will not be used.

The study has been approved by the University of Waikato's Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns about the study that cannot

be answered by the researcher, please contact Associate Professor Linda Mitchell from the University of Waikato, the researcher's supervisor.  
Contact details: Associate Professor Linda Mitchell ph 07 838 4466 Ext 7734 or email [lindamit@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:lindamit@waikato.ac.nz)

I am excited about this research study and would like to invite you to participate. If you and your children are interested, I will discuss the research project further with you and will invite you to sign the informed consent form. If at any time you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me on 027 4122035 or email [Kathryn.hart@taurangakindergartens.org.nz](mailto:Kathryn.hart@taurangakindergartens.org.nz)

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely

Kathryn Hart

## APPENDIX B - Parent consent form

A research study investigating: *“Where have all the children gone? Experiences and perspectives within a changing early childhood education service.”*

I (please print your name) \_\_\_\_\_ have read the information letter accompanying this consent form. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and fully understand what it means to be involved in this research study.

I understand that:

- I have the right NOT to have my child participate in this research;
- A separate consent form will be provided for and explained to my child;
- Participation in this research is voluntary and I may withdraw my child and their data at any time, up until the time I have viewed and amended their interview transcript. I can do this by contacting the researcher on the contact details provided;
- Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained in the writing and use of photographs throughout the study;
- My child’s real name will not be used and my child can choose a pseudonym.

I give permission for my child’s involvement in this research, as follows.

Please circle YES or NO in the section below:

YES/NO	Taking of photographs at preschool. Photographs to then be discussed with child and researcher in a three question interview.
YES/NO	Showing researcher their personal learning journal and discussing a story within the journal with researcher.



YES/NO	Leading the researcher around the preschool on a guided walk while being asked questions.
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I accept that information generated during this research study will belong to Kathryn Hart as researcher and will be retained securely and anonymously after the research is completed and archived for at least five years.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's name: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C - Adult consent form

A research study investigating: *“Where have all the children gone? Experiences and perspectives within a changing early childhood education service.”*

I (please print your name) \_\_\_\_\_ have read the information letter accompanying this consent form. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and fully understand what it means to be involved in this research study.

I understand that:

- Participation in this research is voluntary and I may withdraw myself and my data at any time, up until the time I have viewed and amended my interview transcript. I can do this by contacting the researcher on the provided contact details.
- Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained in the writing and use of photographs throughout the study. Although no photographs of people will be utilised, it is possible that some photographs of the preschool environment may make it identifiable.
- My real name will not be used within the study and I can choose a pseudonym.

I accept that information generated during this research study will belong to Kathryn Hart as researcher, and will be retained securely and anonymously after the research is completed and archived for at least five years.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Adult's name: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D - Child's consent form





To be read with children by the teacher, parent or researcher after parental consent has been gained.



This is a photo of Kathryn Hart.

Kathryn is interested in finding out what you do while you are at Te Ra preschool and what it is like for you here. Kathryn is writing a book and would like to share your stories with people that read her book.

Please put a mark in the boxes below if you agree to help Kathryn by:

	 <p>Taking photos of what you see at preschool and answering some questions.</p>
	 <p>Showing her your learning journal and answering a few questions.</p>
	 <p>Showing her around your preschool and answering some questions</p>
	 <p>Letting Kathryn write things down and talk about what you tell her and show her at preschool</p>

I know that I can change my mind about being part of Kathryn's book and sharing my stories with her. I can do this by saying "No" at any time to my parents, teachers or Kathryn.

I know my real name cannot be used.

My pretend name is: \_\_\_\_\_ and I agree to this  
being used when I am being discussed in the study

Name or mark: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you very much,

Kathryn Hart

## **APPENDIX E - Guiding questions for semi-structured interview with child**

### **Child's photography**

The children will be provided with digital cameras to take photographs of "*What you see at pre-school.*" Photographs will be developed in a booklet format. Children will be asked to select five photographs to show the researcher. These photographs will be discussed with the child and researcher. The following guiding questions will be asked to gain the child's visual and verbal perspective of pre-school:

1. Can you tell me about these photographs?
2. Why did you choose these photographs?
3. What were you thinking when you took these photos?

### **Child's portfolio**

The child's learning journal will be viewed by the child and the researcher, and a conversation held about past important experiences the child had at pre-school. The child and researcher will select a story to discuss and the following guiding questions will be asked to gain the child's retrospective view:

1. Can you please tell me about this story?
2. What was happening here?
3. What were you thinking in this picture?

### **Walking interview within the pre-school environment**

The child will be invited to lead the researcher around the pre-school showing the researcher important places at pre-school. The following guiding questions will be asked to gain the child's current verbal perspective.

1. Can you please take me to the place you like the best at pre-school?
2. Can you tell me why you like this place the best?
3. Is there any place you don't like at pre-school?
  - a. Can you take me there?
4. Why don't you like this place?
5. Can you tell me why you come to pre-school?
6. How long do you spend at pre-school?

## **APPENDIX F - Guiding questions for semi-structured interview with parents**

1. What other ECE services are in this local community that you know about?
2. What was it that inspired you to choose Te Ra pre-school for your child?
3. What do you think your child feels/ thinks about attending pre-school?
4. What are your child's favourite things to do at pre-school?
5. What do you think would be a good day at pre-school?
6. What would be a bad day?
7. What do you think about the length of time your child spends at pre-school?
  - a. Is it about right?
  - b. Why have you chosen this amount of time for your child to attend pre-school?
8. Your child attended pre-school when the changes to session structure and ages of attending children occurred last year. What do you think about the changes?
  - a. Can you tell me why?
9. What community experiences and outings does your child have while at pre-school?
  - a. What is the value of these experiences for your child?
  - b. Would you recommend more or less of these experiences?
10. Is there anything else that you would like to say?

## **APPENDIX G - Guiding questions for semi-structured interview with teacher**

1. Can you explain to me how you came about making the recent changes to session times and the ages of attending children at Te Ra pre-school?
2. How did you undertake this process of change?
3. What have been the challenges within this process?
4. What are your values and beliefs in regards to children's attendance at preschool?
5. In what way, if any, have your values been challenged within this change process?
6. How would you describe the children's experiences through this change?
7. How would you describe the parent's experiences through this change?
8. How would you describe your experiences through this change?
9. Over the last few years you have seen children's time at preschool being extended. What is your opinion about children attending pre-school for 30 hours per week?
  - a. Can you tell me what you think about children attending pre-school for 15 hours per week?
10. Do you foresee further change ahead?
  - a. If so, what does this look like?
11. Can you tell me what you think about taking the children on outings into the local community?
  - a. Do you have the opportunity for community people to visit the pre-school?
  - b. If so how often does this occur?
12. Is there anything else that you would like to say?



## APPENDIX H - Diary of visits outside of preschool

To be completed by head teacher each day of the week for four consecutive weeks.

Beginning date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date & time.	Where did you go?	How long did you go out for?	Who went? (Please include names and ages of children)

## **APPENDIX I - Children photographing here today**

This notice is to let you know that some children will be using digital cameras to photograph the pre-school environment today. The photographs will be used in a research project by Kathryn Hart, a student at the University of Waikato. The research is about children's, parents' and teachers' experiences in a changing early childhood education service. No photographs of children or teachers will be used within the research study.

Kathryn.

