

**Understanding and Developing Early Literacy: Partnerships between
Parents and Teachers in Early Childhood Education.**

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ABSTRACT:

Research highlights the critical interrelationship between the literacy events, routines and practices parents embrace in their home settings, the literacy practices of the early childhood settings and the teaching of reading at schools. In this study, I explored the understandings that two teachers and two groups of parents of young children had about literacy, as it was interwoven into centre practice. In addition to this I reviewed the partnerships that existed between the home and centre settings, particularly the aspects that related to literacy learning and how this was linked with the centre-based programme for the children's learning outcomes.

This study highlights the complex issues of implementing a comprehensive curriculum base - Te Whaariki, as well as the untapped resource of the parents involved in the setting. This research work further highlights the non-specific nature of the Early Childhood Curriculum document, and the difficulties of translating the sociocultural underpinnings it contains.

The findings in this study led to suggestions that may enhance literacy learning and develop stronger partnerships for the future. Firstly, that the teachers consider being involved in further professional development in both the understanding of sociocultural theory, as well as how this may be implemented – ‘theory into practice’. Secondly, that there is further professional development needed in understanding and implementing ‘literacy whaariki’, in order to more effectively co-construct children’s varying literacy pathways as they move toward the formal reading programmes of the compulsory sector. Thirdly, that effective and meaningful communication of what the curriculum is offering to children is better understood by the parents, for clarification and for strengthening the links between the settings. The intent here is not to bring the school curriculum into the early childhood setting, but rather to establish seamless and effective means in which to assist children on their life-long journey of being literate citizens.



Toby and Donna sharing a literacy moment at kindy

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Inception of this Study

I inquisitively observed the beginnings of literacy acquisition through the experiences of my own child - my daughter Pieta. During her very first year of life she was fascinated with the various modes of literacy, including; recorded music, building blocks, the printed word embroiled in the free Treasure magazines that would arrive in the post, and the sound of her mother's melodies via old Irish lyrics and guitar-accompanied popular children's music. It staggered me that at the age of just 3 years old, Pieta was enquiring as to the purposes of the various punctuation marks on a page.

Yet at the same time there was another child in the house – my son Toby who would only engage with the written word on the condition of it being sung or chanted somehow. These two pathways intrigued and fascinated me – from the perspective of a parent who does not remember ever being read to as a child (due to a large family and my parent's busy work life).

However the other aspect to this study was a more sombre one - the experiences, as a parent, that I encountered as our family became involved in centre-based early childhood education. These experiences were not as 'inclusive' as I would have liked, nor did I feel consulted or included in any centre decisions when it came to teaching practice or centre policy writing, even though I was on the various management committees.

Our centre experiences began in 2002. This was almost six years past the introduction of Te Whaariki and its sociocultural approach to early childhood education, inclusive of parent partnerships, shared pedagogies, scaffolding and co-construction. This socially constructed curriculum base was not always my 'shared' experience at the various institutions. I wanted to investigate further - was this just my experience or was this a common scenario?

The critical nature and importance of literacy acquisition to an individual's overall wellbeing as a functioning member of society, is also an underpinning motivator of this enquiry.

Abstract

Research has highlighted the critical interrelationship between the literacy events, routines and practices parents embrace in their home settings, the literacy practices of the early childhood settings and the teaching of reading at schools. In this study, through the lens of an early childhood educator and as a parent, I explored the understandings that two teachers and two groups of parents of young children had about literacy, as it was interwoven into centre practice. In addition to this I reviewed the partnerships that existed between the home and centre settings, particularly the aspects that related to literacy learning and how this was linked with the centre-based programme for the children's learning outcomes.

This study highlights the complex issues of implementing a comprehensive curriculum base - Te Whaariki, as well as the untapped resource of the parents involved in the setting. This research work further highlights the non-specific nature of the Early Childhood Curriculum document, and the difficulties of translating it into practice. Nearly ten years after the Early Childhood Curriculum document was written, it appears that the sociocultural underpinnings, for the centres involved in this study, were still 'in the process' of being interwoven into their practice.

The findings in this study led to suggestions (offered by the parents, teachers and researcher) that may enhance literacy learning and develop stronger partnerships for the future. Firstly, that the teachers consider being involved in further professional development in both the understanding of sociocultural theory, as well as how this may be implemented - 'theory into practice'. Secondly, that there is further professional development needed in understanding and implementing 'literacy whaariki', in order to more effectively co-construct children's varying literacy pathways as they move toward the formal reading programmes of the compulsory sector. Thirdly, that effective and meaningful communication of what the curriculum is offering to children is better understood by the parents, for clarification and for strengthening the links between the settings. The intent here is not to bring the school curriculum into the early childhood setting, but rather to establish seamless and effective means in which to assist children on their life-long journey of being literate citizens.

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Please note: Any names used in the text are purely fictional. The term parents/parent, is an inclusive term (that is; parents, caregivers and family/whanau).

Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation explored the understandings of 'early literacy' and how these were implemented into practices at two kindergarten settings. These understandings were explored with two teachers and two groups of parents, and were considered within the parameters of each centres' current paradigm of parent / teacher partnerships.

As our understandings of how we construct meaning develops, and learning is seen as a social construct, our literate world and contexts for literacy learning continue to broaden. Hamer and Adams (2003), describe the term literacy to include "The experiences, practices, attitudes and knowledge encountered in the early years across a diverse range of settings which contribute to children understanding, enjoying, engaging with and using oral, visual and written language and symbols of their own and other cultures to express their individual identity and allow them to become active participants in a literate society" (p.13). This culturally determined understanding of literacy achievement is embraced in the underpinnings of the early childhood curriculum.

Throughout this dissertation's process, dual lenses were worn as expressed on the opening pages. Firstly the lens of an inquisitive and highly involved parent (at the early childhood centres where my children attended); secondly, with the lens of a reflective early childhood teacher educator, I was interested to find out how early childhood educators facilitate literacy learning. Had current knowledge been disseminated in order to support literacy learning in the early childhood settings, to ensure constructive learning outcomes for the children? After a review of current literature, the following set of research questions were formulated;

The Broad Question;

- **What are teachers and parents/caregivers understandings of literacy and literacy practices as they apply to kindergartens?**

Supplementary Questions;

- **How are literacy practices interwoven in the centre's teaching programme and curriculum delivery?**
- **To what extent do parents and teachers act as partners in literacy learning?**

- **How do we support, nurture and develop the partnerships with parents – could we do this better?**

Literacy as a curriculum goal, although interwoven throughout the official document, comes specifically under the communication strand in the Early Childhood Curriculum - Te Whaariki (Ministry of Education (MOE), 1996a). Te Whaariki heralded a momentous evolution for the early childhood sector, as it embraced the “holistic and diverse” (Cullen cited in Nuttall 2003, p.269) nature of early childhood education. The framework and underpinnings of the document are based upon a sociocultural perspective, encompassing learning outcomes that relate to “somewhat elusive notions of ‘learning dispositions’ and ‘working theories’” (Carr, Hatherly, Lee & Ramsay, (2003, p.188). The ‘elusive’ nature of this document was of particular interest. Is Te Whaariki too elusive for mainstream early childhood educators particularly when it relates to specific subject content knowledge, in this context literacy learning?

Wylie (1992, p.2) identifies that of all the “children attending an early childhood service 63% are 4 year olds”. Wylie’s study was published over 10 years ago. My own unpublished Christchurch based research project, in McAleer, (2003, p.15) supports this statistic stating “many (62%) of the children, made changes into a kindergarten setting before school entry”. Wylie (1996) claims, “Kindergartens benefit from having fully trained staff. They often have good equipment, buildings and room for outdoor play. But they also have the highest group size, they only have one teacher for every 15 children, this is much higher than the recommended overseas ratio, the poor staff: child ratios have negative effects and reduce the overall quality” (p.13).

In spite of the high children to staff ratio, kindergarten is still seen as the most usual pathway for nearly two-thirds of the children attending early childhood education settings. Wylie states that “rather more than other early childhood services, kindergarten is seen by many people as an integral part of the state provided national educational system” (1992, p.2). Do the ratios of low staff to children make it too difficult to implement effective early literacy learning?

This study explores some of the current notions of literacy held by parents and teachers and how these are played out within the early childhood education programme at two kindergartens in the Christchurch area. My professional interest is in developing high quality early literacy learning experiences, underpinned by sociocultural theory and therefore

inclusive of successful and workable parent teacher partnerships. My research involved interviews with teachers and parents, as well as the collection of field observations in two different settings.

This dissertation is organised around six chapters. Chapter 2 explores the large body of literature that has informed and guided this study. In this chapter the rationale for the focus on early childhood literacy is presented. Early literacy is defined, outlining the influences that have impacted upon its evolvment, which includes critical theory, sociocultural theory, phonics and emergent literacy. A range of relevant early childhood literacy related studies are presented highlighting the influence that professional development has had for literacy learning resulting in positive outcomes for young children. Finally the teacher parent partnership paradigm is explored and the available research is summarized.

In Chapter 3 the epistemological perspective the study is embedded in, theoretical orientations, methodology and methods used are clearly presented. A Belief's Framework is presented which was adapted from other research work to assist in analysing the large amount of data that emerged.

The results and analysis are presented in Chapter 4 and these have been organised into three key themes. The themes include;

- 1. Literacy Definitions of the Teachers and Parents**
- 2. Implementation of Literacy in the Curriculum**
- 3. Teacher Parent partnerships**

Chapter 5 summarises the key findings and presents implications that have emerged from the study in relation to the broader issues indicated in the literature review. It explores some of the recommendations offered by the parents and ideas for consideration for further enhancement of the early childhood programmes involved.

Finally Chapter 6 concludes by summarising the findings and highlighting the limitations of the study. It presents questions that have arisen from the study for further enquiry.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As education and learning theories continue to evolve, the influences of sociocultural theory have led us to comprehensive understandings of the contributions of social influence (Rogoff, 1990), and the impact that these have for literacy learning. Early literacy envelopes all areas of the early childhood curriculum, and should not be looked at in isolation. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, literacy will be referred to as a ‘literacy whaariki’¹ (Hamer & Adams, 2003) and will be viewed as an interwoven curriculum goal.

Key aspects that will be discussed in this chapter include;

2.1 Why Focus on Early Childhood Literacy?

2.2 Literacy in Early Childhood Education

- 2.2.1 Early Literacy Meanings in the Early Childhood Context
- 2.2.2 The Early Childhood Curriculum in Practice
- 2.2.3 Weaving Literacy ‘Whaariki’
- 2.2.4 Sociocultural Theory: Its Importance and Relevance upon Literacy Learning
- 2.2.5 ‘Learning Stories’ – a Valuable Assessment and Curriculum Planning Tool

2.3 Early Childhood Literacy Research

- 2.3.1 Early Literacy Research Findings
- 2.3.2 Research-based Evidence in Support of Professional Development in Literacy Learning

2.4 Parent Teacher Partnerships

- 2.4.1 Parent Partnership Definition and Framework
- 2.4.2 Parent Partnership Research and Links with Literacy

¹ ‘Whaariki’ – directly translated means ‘woven mat’. In the early childhood context its reference is to the curriculum. ‘Literacy whaariki’ in this context refers to a literacy curriculum that is interwoven throughout the early childhood programme.

2.1 Why Focus on Early Childhood Literacy?

Literacy has always been a major component of the educational programmes for young children in early childhood education. From identifying letters, to holding pencils, speaking clearly to others, sharing and taking an interest in books, painting a picture, building confidence in working in a group learning situation, designing, building and explaining a water-way made in the sandpit, interacting with others, through to the complex interchange of socio-dramatic play. Literacy learning is a critical life-source “without literacy in a modern society, individuals [can be] seriously disadvantaged when compared to their literate peers” (Raban, Ure & Smith 1999, p.1). In order for literacy not to be a barrier to children’s learning, early childhood educators need to ensure that they “continue to aim for children who [arrive at] school ‘open for learning’”, Wylie (cited in Hamer & Adams, 2003, p.11). Children need more than anything the will to want to learn, which is linked with their feelings of self-worth, and the understanding that reading assists them in becoming an active and contributing member of a literate society.

A stronger literacy emphasis in early childhood education has emerged from the development of the National Literacy Strategy, developed in 1998 as a governmental initiative “responding to public concerns” (Nicholson, 2002), about reading standards (including writing) in this country, ranging across all sectors from early childhood through to workplace education, in order to raise the literacy standards of children. The strategy saw the establishment of a Literacy Taskforce to address the governmental goal that “every child turning nine will be able to read, write and do maths for success by 2005” (MOE, 1999, p.5). This goal was later withdrawn, and was replaced with the aim “to develop a broad set of recommendations to improve reading literacy and written language, especially in under-achieving groups” (Nicholson, 2002, p.37), as there was a “widely expressed claim that 20 percent of children [were] failing in their literacy in New Zealand schools” (MOE, 1999, p.11) and were therefore falling further behind in the education system.

In 2000, the Literacy Taskforce “facilitated a number of major literacy initiatives that have impacted on early childhood education. For example campaigns such as ‘Feed the Mind’” (cited in Hamer & Adams, 2003, p.9) were launched. Through pamphlets and advertising the initiatives encouraged all parents of young children to refer to their local early childhood centre for further information regarding “establishing an interest in reading” (Hamer & Adams). The Literacy Taskforce campaign supported the notion that early childhood

education was a context for promoting and establishing early literacy skills. This placed a further emphasis and created a focus for literacy outcomes for the early childhood sector which resulted in “many early childhood settings facing a growing pressure to help young children acquire the prerequisite reading skills for school success” (Adams & Ryan, 2002, p.113).

The impact of the ‘Feed the Mind’ campaign created a “‘push down’ effect [placing] strains on early childhood staff, which now more than ever, [needed] to be able to justify why and how they incorporated literacy into their environments” (Hamer & Adams, 2002, p.113.). There was an increasing need for the early childhood sector to turn their attentions to the development of sound literacy practices for young children, “Attention to it in early childhood education is important because literacy is key to further learning and solid participation” (Mitchell & Cubey, 2003, p.44), and therefore provides a foundation for what literacy entailed for living in Aotearoa New Zealand in the new millennium.

2.2 Literacy in Early Childhood Education

2.2.1 Early Literacy Meanings in the Early Childhood Context

A contemporary understanding of early literacy, such as that outlined in the introduction reflects a conceptual approach which accentuates social and cultural contextual factors and variables. A literacy whaariki needs to be broad-based and holistic, meaningful, purposeful and reflective of family and community. It should also have an active relationship with people, places and things that is empowering for the children it is intended (Hamer & Adams, 2003). Hamer (2002) recommends that literacy in the early childhood setting should not be considered as a programme that is ‘bolted’ on to an existing curriculum but rather that “literacy learning and practices are holistically interwoven throughout the day, integrated, incorporated and infused into the whole setting” (p.132).

Another framework for the understanding of early literacy theory is one that views early literacy as a next stage beyond emergent literacy perspectives. Emergent literacy was developed on a stage-based conceptual framework emerging from Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Bredekamp, 1987), a theory of early childhood teaching predominant in Aotearoa New Zealand in the 1980’s and 1990’s.

Typically the emergent literacy in this view was seen largely as child-initiated in a play-based ambient. There was a crucial focus on providing a print-rich environment as an important medium through which to achieve literacy goals for early childhood centres (Cullen, 2002, p.66). The limitation of this approach was that the emphasis was on individual children's development, seeing the child as a discrete unit, rather than (and) including a focus on the cultural and historical aspects (Fleer, 2003). The literature suggests that the limitations of this approach are particularly relevant for children from diverse settings, "while obviously important, we also need to look at why it is that certain groups of children are at particular risk of low literacy Early childhood settings may need to change their practices in certain ways to make sure that all children find matches between their home and community experiences and their early childhood settings" (Makin & Whitehead, 2004, p.10).

During the 1990's a third conceptual framework for understanding the development and learning of literacy emerged. These were the influences of critical theory, a perspective that examined the "differential access to literacy [that] maintains discriminatory societal structures", and was influenced by writers like Freire (1990). These perspectives on pedagogical approaches "contrast with the decontextualised skills and prescribed curriculum content" claims Cullen (2002, p.67). These influences saw the emergence of terms like "empowerment", "develop reflective skills", and "theories about social relationships and social concepts" in the Early Childhood Curriculum (MOE, 1996a).

Alongside the progress of developmentally appropriate practice, critical and sociocultural theories of early literacy, a further set of concepts emerged as counterpoint to these, in the 1990's. The resurgence of phonics (phonemic or phonological awareness) for children's early literacy development saw, "the pendulum swing back towards integrating more explicitly decoding skills appropriately and effectively into New Zealand classrooms", (Nicholson, 2002, p.31). Phonics, broadly defined, is the ability to break down explicit sounds. In the early childhood sector it applies to an awareness that a spoken word can be broken into smaller units of sound, onset, rimes and individual phonemes (Hamer & Adams, 2003, p.45).

It is clear there have been several key contradicting ideas about early literacy that were in circulation in Aotearoa New Zealand over a period of 20 years or so. This has led to an era of uncertainty, "theoretical debate in relation to literacy learning is probably the least understood by many early childhood educators" (Hamer & Adams, 2003, p.40), and as a result practitioners had become unsure as to their role in establishing learning goals to enhance

‘literacy whaariki’. Complicating this was the fact that mid-way through this period Te Whaariki – The Early Childhood Curriculum (MOE, 1996) was disseminated and implemented, and this brought with it another language, another set of metaphors and new expectations about early childhood and early literacy learning to the frame.

2.2.2 The Early Childhood Curriculum in Practice

He Whaariki Matauranga mo nga Mokopuna o Aotearoa – The New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum (Te Whaariki) was written in its final form in 1996 (MOE, 1996a). The writers of the document describe their intent; “In summary, the conceptual framework that underlies Te Whaariki’s approach to learning is a metaphor of a weaving, development is a continuum of needs and capacities, curriculum is integrated social, cultural and developmental aims and goals” (Carr & May, 1996, p.1). The document clearly promotes a curriculum that is responsive and holistic, designed to capture the vast array of happenings that may eventuate when working with young children and their families, “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” (MOE; 1996a, p.10).

Te Whaariki is not prescriptive and does not contain detailed outcomes; it is a document that leads educators to collaboration and promotion of learning dispositions that encourage long-life learning with children. It is a document that is responsive to the wide variety of early childhood settings that operate in Aotearoa New Zealand. The document’s objective was a move away from, although inclusive of, the “developmental continuum” (Carr & May, 1996, p.103) that was the “predominant philosophy underpinning mainstream early childhood programmes” (Cullen, 1996, p.114) through to the late 1980’s and early 1990’s. Cullen argued, developmentalism was “likely to be maintained despite grounding the curriculum model in social and cultural contexts” (1996, p.114), because “the abstract concepts and sophisticated body of knowledge of Te Whaariki’s rationale and structure” weren’t yet a part of general teacher understanding. As such there were, according to Cullen, likely to be “major impediments to curriculum implementation” (1996, p.122).

It seemed as if Cullen’s predictions in some cases rang true. Research in 2003 conducted by Nuttall showed teachers difficulties in translating their theoretical knowledge-bases into practice. “The theoretical bases, ideological positions, curriculum models and other influences

that teachers have been exposed to during their training and ongoing professional development inevitably limit and shape [teachers] symbolic exchanges” (p.180) Nuttall argued. Because Te Whaariki is broadly based with several key theoretical frames contributing to it, it is perhaps not surprising that teachers abilities to move beyond their familiar reliance on developmentally appropriate practices has been inhibited.

Cullen writes that “By 2000 I was more confident about the ability of practitioners to cope with the complex theories underpinning Te Whaariki”, and claims that this was due to the growing research culture, inclusive of practitioner journals and postgraduate studies. “Nonetheless... it could be argued that the ideals of Te Whaariki have barely touched the surface, and that programmes today look remarkably like those of the 1980’s and early 1990’s” (Cullen, 2003, p.272).

In my experience as an Early Childhood Education educator ‘developmentally appropriate practices’ approach continues to underpin pedagogical practice in some early childhood programmes today. This may be due to the open nature of the curriculum document, resulting in some programmes remaining similar to what was in existence prior to the introduction of Te Whaariki. Whilst there are similarities to the practices of the 1980’s and early 1990’s, as suggested by Cullen, there has also been, I think, a mushrooming of didactic group sessions in centre programmes, (small groups of children are regularly withdrawn from large group programmes to participate in other structured interventions, for example; sensory motor programmes, phonics groups, music groups, project work [anecdotal evidence from professional contact with centres in Christchurch]). These bring with them assumptions about literacy, ideas of appropriate pedagogies and diverse practices which may not compliment the broader programme of Te Whaariki’s expectations. A lack of coherent understandings of theories means varying early literacy practices will evolve in early childhood programmes. There is a need for further research and professional development to assist teachers in their curriculum understanding.

2.2.3 Weaving Literacy ‘Whaariki’.

The literacy debates of the 1990’s and the potential ‘confusion’ for teachers (refer section 2.2.1), raises issues of the gaps in the literacy knowledge base of teachers, “One of the difficult aspects for educators when planning for literacy in early childhood settings is the

lack of specific detail and direction for literacy provided in the early childhood curriculum document.” (Hamer & Adams, 2003, p.23). Whilst literacy is specifically represented in the communication strand of Te Whaariki, and interwoven into aspects of the entire document, more guidance is necessary in order to facilitate this important process and assist in capturing the diverse range of children’s knowledge. “Not only do teachers need an understanding of sociocultural underpinnings of Te Whaariki, they also need a strong knowledge base about literacy learning” (Cullen, 2002, p.78).

Another way to help teachers build strong ‘literacy whaariki’ is to help them better understand the topic of literacy and early literacy learning. This can be achieved through focusing on literacy and early literacy learning in teacher preparation and professional development programmes. Proponents of subject content knowledge for teacher’s practice (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden & Bell, 2002; Cullen, 2003; Brostrom, 2003; Farquhar, 2003) suggest that the use of content knowledge, including subject-based and general knowledge is necessary “to build on children’s existing understandings and to foster new learning” (Farquhar, 2003, p.26). “Subject knowledge is the factual and conceptual knowledge required for teachers to accurately convey information or explanations, and general knowledge is the information needed for everyday living including social and cultural” (Farquhar, 2003, p.26). Whilst Farquhar (2003) states that Te Whaariki does not emphasise content knowledge, she also highlights that using content knowledge could be “inappropriate and at risk of creating a downward shift of the New Zealand Curriculum Framework for schools in to the early childhood years” (p.27). However Farquhar follows this citing from Haynes work, who reported that “gaining subject content knowledge ... and a greater understanding of these subjects facilitated their [teachers] ability to more effectively provide the holistic approach to children’s learning” (2003, p.28)

Whilst a prescriptive ‘literacy whaariki’ is not the desired outcome, it is my suggestion that for long term success of literacy learning, early childhood teachers need specific subject content knowledge in early literacy, which should include some knowledge of the school curriculum framework. “Teachers in early childhood centres and schools need to compliment these insights [sound literacy policies, reflection and inclusion of diverse centre and family cultures] with knowledge of component literacy skills and of ways to embed them in everyday social activities” (Cullen, 2002, chap.3).

2.2.4 Sociocultural Theory: its Importance and Relevance for Literacy Learning.

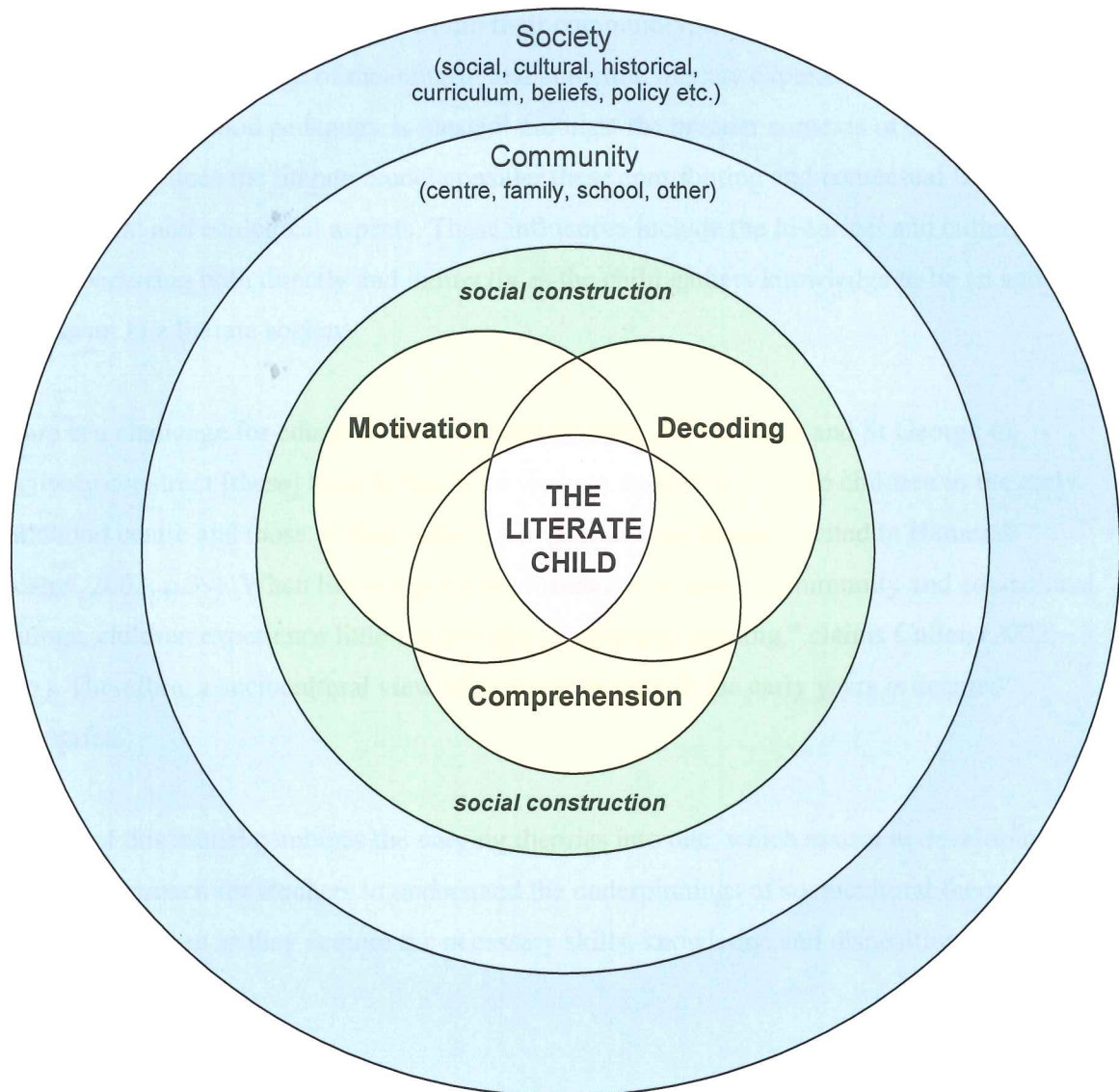
If teachers are to marry their subject content knowledge with early literacy pedagogy that is conceptual and consistent with the theoretical framework of the early childhood curriculum, teachers must develop comprehensive understandings of the curriculum. Principal among them is sociocultural theory. Sociocultural theory underpins the early childhood document and thus the pedagogical practices that occur each day in an early childhood setting, emphasising “the critical role of socially and culturally mediated learning and of reciprocal and responsive relationships for children, places and things” (MOE, 1996a, p.9).

Te Whaariki draws from Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model, where the learner is considered within their immediate setting, be it the family, the early childhood or other community setting. This layer considers the interaction that the learner has within a particular setting, and these are considered their microsystems. These microsystems are further impacted by and are “nested within enveloping ecological systems which include economic activity and support systems, which in turn are nested within broader institutional, ideological and cultural values” (Biddulph, Biddulph & Biddulph, 2003, p.11). Thus the child/learner is never considered in isolation but as part of a sociocultural and historical context.

Another key developer of sociocultural theory was Lev Vygotsky. His work centred on the “concept of social construction of knowledge [reflecting] the key place of shared consciousness... and the zone of proximal development - the distance between what a person can do alone and the level to which he or she can move with the assistance of an expert” (cited Cullen, 2001, p.53). ‘Post-Vygotskian’ work has developed the Vygotskian theories further and teaching strategies of apprenticeship (Bruner, 1999), in addition co-construction and guided participation (Rogoff, 1990) have emerged. These have greatly influenced curriculum development and theoretical underpinnings of the Early Childhood Curriculum, and in particular the practices that directly relate to literacy learning in the early years. “Social constructivism as it pertains specifically to the literacy whaariki in the early literacy arena involves core concepts that include zone of proximal development, scaffolding, the co-construction of learning, funds of knowledge, cultural tools and artefacts, literacy apprenticeships and guide participants via shared practices and meanings within a particular groups that involves multiple voices as opposed to a single voice” (Cullen, 2002, p.69.).

The sociocultural approach that supports a child's literacy learning is illustrated clearly in a model of a literate child (Hamer & Adams, 2003, refer Diagram 2.1), and frames the research work that I have completed. Hamer and Adams' model was developed to "reconcile three key areas: the broader sociocultural contexts (society), the more immediate contexts community; and the cognitive aspects of learning which support the individual" (2003, p.40). This model brings together a wide range of disciplines and theories that may "contradict each other" but Hamer and Adams believe can be grouped together into "broad, interactive and inseparable areas linked through social construction" (2003, p.41).

Diagram 2.1: Sociocultural Model of the Literate Child (Hamer & Adams, 2003, p.41)



The inner core of the diagram represents the fused parts of a child's literacy disciplines, necessary aspects for a child's ultimate success in learning about literacy. Hamer and Adams (2003) describe the literate child in the middle of this model (diagram 2.1) as an "active participant in society, and of knowing and engaging with the diverse range of knowledge that underpins our social literacy and cultural heritage" and describe the literate child as an "ongoing product of ongoing interaction" (p.43). They define comprehension, as it relates to literacy, as the ability to understand what is either spoken or written. Decoding, which they believe has a reciprocal relationship with comprehension, is defined as the ability to read print by attaching sounds to written letters and words. In the context of the early childhood setting, decoding relates to the areas of linguistic awareness (referred to as phonological or phonemic awareness), alphabetic principles, print principles and writing skills. Finally the third core area is that of motivation, this is seen as critical, and relates to the children's own self-perceptions, dispositions and beliefs about literacy in that "they need to see that literacy as being valued, useful and important within their community, as well [the need to] successfully engage the child in a range of meaningful and authentic literacy experiences" (2003, p.46). Just as early childhood pedagogy is 'nested' amongst the broader contexts of community and society, so too does the literate model consider these contributing and contextual layers of the sociocultural and ecological aspects. These influences include the historical and cultural factors occurring both directly and indirectly as the child gathers knowledge to be an active participant in a literate society.

There is a challenge for educators as suggested by McLachlan-Smith and St George to, "actively construct [these] links between the literacy experiences of the children in the early childhood centre and those of their other settings in the community" (cited in Hamer & Adams, 2003, p.39). When literacy practices match across home, community and educational settings, children experience little discontinuity in literacy learning," claims Cullen (2002, p.65). Therefore, a sociocultural view of literacy learning in the early years is deemed appropriate.

The use of this model combines the varying theories into one, which assists in developing a cohesive approach for teachers to understand the underpinnings of sociocultural theory as it applies to children as they acquire the necessary skills, knowledge and dispositions necessary in becoming literate.

2.2.5 'Learning Stories' – a Valuable Assessment and Curriculum Planning Tool

Up until the end of last century, literacy pathways and centre pedagogy were mostly shared verbally with the parents at most early childhood centres. The Learning Story (and other assessment tools) format offered opportunities for parents to be more involved in the planning and considerations for their child in centre-based settings. This could occur by the sharing of insights, happenings and feedback of the child's world with the use of the Learning Story or Parent Voice sheet which is not only a valuable resource but necessary to actively construct home and centre links.

After the writing of Te Whaariki was nearing completion, follow-on projects were initiated, with the objective of establishing "a range of assessment ideas and procedures that would be useful for work with young children" comment the writers Carr, May and Podmore (1998, p.3). Assessment practices evolved over the ensuing years and the development of 'learning stories' was one way to document learning, bringing with it an objective of describing "the contribution that early childhood experience makes to life-long learning ... including; packages of inclination, knowledge and skill to do with being a learner" (Carr et al, 1998, p.3). The premise of the learning story format was to produce a formative assessment for children, their families, practitioners, and community agencies which enhanced children's learning, giving both a voice for the child and an effective medium in which to share this with family.

The Learning Story framework is based upon the four principles embedded in Te Whaariki - holistic development, family and community, empowerment, and relationships. Central to the learning story format is that "children [acquire] robust dispositions to learn" (Carr et al, 1998, p.3), through finding an interest, being involved and attentive, tackling and persevering with difficulty and uncertainty, and learning how to express their ideas, as well as taking responsibility in joint and group endeavours. This is through a four-part assessment process of describing, documenting, discussing and deciding the experiences a child engages in during their time at an early childhood facility (Carr et al, 1998, p.3). This process is facilitated under the guidelines that practitioners make use of; "... a narrative genre; the use of multiple voices to establish validity; the foregrounding of learning dispositions as valued learning; the attention paid to children's strengths and interests; and making visible what teachers do in the teaching-learning context" (Carr, Hatherly, Lee & Ramsay, 2003, p.192).

However, this form of assessment was not without its problems as it was implemented into practice as Hatherly and Sands wrote, “despite availability of ... material, the essence of Learning Stories - what distinguishes the approach from other methods of assessment – is not always well understood” (2002, p.8). In general whilst pre-service (teacher trainees) were being taught the learning story format, “in-service and professional development accompanying this assessment and learning format was delayed, confusing and difficult for practitioners to implement” (J. Steer – Supervisor at a local early childhood centre (personal communication, October 2, 2005)).

I perceive that the confusion to which Hatherly and Sands refer, and/or the difficulty of introducing a form of ‘official assessment’ may have occurred because of two major contributing factors. Firstly, that reporting for the early childhood sector generally considered this to be “antithetical to the widely held notion of free play ... and to protect children from the excesses of assessment” (Te One, 2000, p.16). Assessment took the form of observations and checklists, which on reflection attended to a deficit model approach “for categorisation that [was] effectively a labelling process” (Smith as cited in Cubey & Dalli, 1996, p.15), if indeed it existed at all.

Secondly, the delay in official assessment and planning documentation - Kei Tua o te Pae Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars (MOE, 2004) and accompanying professional development, impacted on both the effectiveness and expediency of their implementation, and in many ways the significance and practice of sociocultural-based pedagogy. Te Whaariki’s underpinnings of sociocultural theory, as stated by Hatherly (2005), a co-facilitator of the Early Childhood Exemplar assessment, were made transparent through the use of learning stories. “In 1998 I thought I knew Te Whaariki well, but in hindsight it was a very superficial way of knowing because the old assumptions and agendas I held about learning, teaching and planning remained unchallenged. Learning Stories have changed that – giving me an ever-deepening understanding of the document and the sociocultural framework underpinning it...” (p.1). If this was the case for a co-facilitator of the assessment tool, it is not surprising that the practitioners at the ‘coal face’ were struggling.

A delay in introducing an alternative assessment approach was predicted and warranted as Cubey and Dalli (1996) pointed out “formulating assessment policies to accompany curricula is a complex task and will take time” (p.19) – however ten years from the beginning of the “Assessing Children’s Experiences” project is a long time for practitioners to wait for the

Ministry of Education's Exemplars, as Bredekamp and Rosegrant point out, "If we want to see real curriculum reform, we must simultaneously achieve reform of assessment practices" (cited in Carr et al, 1998).

2.3 Early Childhood Literacy Research

2.3.1 Early Literacy Research Findings

In New Zealand there has been one major study, which was completed over 10 years ago, that investigated "how teachers and parents believed children developed literacy" (McLachlan-Smith, St George, & Tunmer, 1995, p.128). McLachlan-Smith's doctoral thesis involved research in 12 New Zealand kindergartens including; interviewing the Head Teachers, collecting surveys from the parents and other teachers, and centre observations of the kindergartens. Results from this research indicated that not all children "receive the same exposure to literacy activities or to literacy-enriched environments, which is a factor of curriculum design, Kindergarten layout or resources available to the Kindergartens", and that "Parents were seen as important partners in children's learning, but often seen to be wanting" (McLachlan-Smith et al, 1995, p.137).

The kindergarten-based study, found that the teachers were still very influenced by the traditions and approaches of Piagetian free-play which are "consistent with teachers views of children as learners ... teachers appear to have a belief in constructivism, that children are active learners, who need to learn through interaction with the environment." (McLachlan-Smith et al, 1995). These findings could be considered valid approaches for the time as the only curriculum guidelines in circulation were in a draft format (1993) "based on development of the 'whole child' and the theories of Piaget and Erickson for guidelines for appropriate practice" (McLachlan-Smith & St George, 2000, p.2). In 1996, a year after the study was completed the Early Childhood Curriculum, Te Whaariki, was finalised and implemented, it was important to investigate whether the approaches and pedagogies of the early childhood teachers' implementation of literacy learning in the curriculum had evolved. In 2002 McLachlan-Smith and Shuker wrote, that "Early childhood teachers are considered as important in facilitating children's literacy development" though they still argue that "early childhood staff may be hindered in this role through lack of knowledge, confidence or the belief that this task is best fulfilled by school teachers" (cited in Adams & Ryan, 2002, p.97).

A study in Australia by Makin, Hayden and Diaz (2000) provided similar conclusions to those from the New Zealand research. They also presented additional findings regarding the cultural diversity considerations for literacy learning. Evidence was based on interviews with staff, focus group interviews with parents, and observations using a language and literacy scale. The researchers concluded that “teacher education [programmes] and professional development [programmes] need to ensure close links between theory and practice, offer assistance in developing a positive approach to diversity, and develop strategies for two-way communications with parents” (p.373).

Documenting aspects of capabilities linked with learning experiences for the children continues to be the objective of an ongoing longitudinal study – ‘Competent Children Project’ led by a Senior Researcher from the New Zealand Council of Education Research – Cathy Wylie and her team. These capabilities were measured through a range of ‘competency’ related areas particularly in varying literacy-related achievements. This project continues to track the competencies of (originally 307 children) - now 500 children, from when they were four and half years of age through to the completion of their formal schooling (funding permitted). “The main aims of the project are to describe children’s progress over time, and to chart the contributions to their progress that are made by some of the main experiences and elements in their lives: family resources, early childhood education, school experiences, children’s interests and activities in the home or outside school, and their relations with their peers” (Wylie, 2001, p.7).

The initial phase of the project (Wylie et al, 1996) began while the children were only a few months away from beginning school. Originally parents were sent questionnaires to ascertain the various home activities that may have contributed to competency outcomes. The activities listed by the parents where the researcher found a “difference in levels on our measures of literacy and numeracy” were activities like “counting, telling the child’s age, singing songs, using numbers for housework or cooking and telling the time”. However the activities that produced on average an even higher score on mathematics, literacy and logical reasoning were “board games, card games, solving puzzles, counting money, using the phone, writing numbers, and asking questions about people’s ages, the days in a week, or weeks in a year” (Wylie, 1996, p.18).

Wylie claims these findings raised some “ground breaking” spin-offs that highlight the type of “home activities [that] are important in children’s development of literacy and numeracy”

(1996, p.22), giving credence to the inclusion of these types of activities in the centre-based programme. It also supported the critical role parents have in the literacy learning of young children, as well as the inclusion of the activities not traditionally seen as literacy-related pursuits.

2.3.2 Research-based Evidence in Support of Professional Development in Literacy Learning

As discussed earlier in the curriculum and literacy whaariki sections (refer 2.2.2-2.2.3) the importance of a cohesive and well understood pedagogical approach to literacy learning is imperative for success of children's long-term literacy acquisition. In Mitchell and Cubey's (2003) review of professional development and the links to enhanced pedagogy and children's learning in early childhood settings, they summarize, "Early Childhood centres have the potential to make literacy resources, activities and interactions available to all children who attend. In New Zealand there is evidence that more could be done" (p.45) and "... there is evidence that some teachers/educators have limited understanding of literacy, mathematics and scientific learning, and of their role in extending learning in these areas" (p.x). Research that details specific outcomes for children through professional development in literacy learning in New Zealand is reasonably limited. I have selected two studies that researched the impact of teacher participation in content knowledge professional development programmes to further enhance outcomes for children.

Firstly, the New Zealand research project 'Picking up the Pace' by Phillips, McNaughton and McDonald (2002). Their research involved preschool and young school-aged children from 15 licensed early childhood centres, 12 primary schools and their teachers from the Otago and Mangere area, including predominantly Pacific Island and Maori children. The programme with "early childhood intervention, showed that by further focusing on literacy and language activities within the current practices in centres associated with decile 1 schools², school-related literacy and language could be enhanced." (p.7-8). This intervention was through a professional development programme that specifically looked at:

² A school's decile indicates the extent to which the school draws its students from low socio-economic communities. Decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities, whereas decile 10 schools are the 10% of schools with the lowest proportion of these students. A school's decile does not indicate the overall socio-economic mix of the school. They are set by the Ministry of Education. The data are drawn from census information and school ethnicity data are used to calculate the decile.

1. Developing teachers' ideas about literacy – ideas about teaching, learning and development and goals for child development.
2. Activities promoting literacy and language (from the school setting – reading to children, guided writing, telling or retelling stories).
3. Discussions regarding child development over the six months before starting school, with the objective of having shared understandings about the patterns of development that are possible.

(as cited in Mitchell & Cubey, 2003, p.48-51).

The study was deemed a success “at the time of the professional development and in the medium term” (p.47) as having a positive impact on the “children’s literacy development in low income communities” – the long term impact of this intervention is still unknown.

The second study was completed in Australia, entitled the ‘Pre-school Literacy Project’ (PLP) (Raban, Ure & Smith, 1999), was implemented in a three-staged project. Stage One was the gathering of information about teacher’s understandings of literacy development, stage two implemented professional development covering what literacy development might look like in practice, practical networking sessions, and a full day - full centre staff development of how the new knowledge was to be disseminated into the programme. Stage Three involved a canvass of the teacher’s understanding of early literacy development after their professional development experience. The authors Raban and Ure concluded that “access to prior knowledge through opportunities to access concept knowledge is a powerful predictor of success in early school years literacy programs ... the experiences provided for the PLP students were both relevant and successful ” (Raban et al, 1999). The researchers also summarised their study by stating the importance of preschool teachers needing to have high expectations of children irrespective of their background.

Both the ‘Picking up the Pace’ and the Australian PLP studies have had positive outcomes for children’s literacy learning by involving early childhood staff in further professional development, which covered specific literacy content knowledge. Mitchell and Cubey (2003) highlight the common elements that may lead to the success of these programmes including; unravelling teacher’s beliefs and knowledge about literacy development and then building understandings of literacy development, including what literacy development looks like in practice, creating opportunities for teachers to get together for critique of their own practices, and the need for all staff from the centre to participate in the professional development (p.53).

2.4 Parent / Teacher Partnerships

2.4.1 Parent Partnership Definitions and Framework

Central to this study is the significance of establishing effective links between the child's settings. Thus the need to establish workable teacher parent partnerships is critical to the success of a literacy whaariki. "One most important and unique feature of New Zealand early childhood education services is the degree of partnership that exists between the Government, parents and communities" (Garden, 1991, p.1). Trying to locate a definition for the term 'partnership' has not been a particularly easy task, due, I believe, to the long history of parent involvement in the New Zealand early childhood services. However what I believe it should entail is that "Partnership must mean more than adults talking and working together. It must also mean talking and working together about how to achieve a well-defined and focused task" (Timperley & Robinson, 2002, p.139).

Much is assumed by what is meant by the term 'partnership' as "early childhood education identifies partnerships with parents as a central tenet" (Hedges, 2001, p.21). This term is based on a framework well articulated by Garden (1991) at the Parents as Partners: Parents as Educators seminar in Wellington. Firstly the acknowledgement that parents are the first and prime educators of their children; that parents have initiated the establishment of most New Zealand early childhood services, from cleaning in them, through to training to work in them, after first establishing the training programmes; it is based on respect for the family and its strengths; on the reinforcement of both the family's and the community's role in the children's development and the partnership between parents, service providers and the state (p.5).

The Early Childhood Curriculum affirms that the "wider world of family and community is an integral part of the early childhood curriculum" (MOE, 1996a, p.14) as one of its core principles. A working partnership is clearly laid out in the curriculum document as a requirement of the Ministry of Education's Desirable Objectives and Practices in New Zealand Early Childhood Services (1996b). The curriculum highlights the importance of the links between home and early childhood education programme, and that "the environment, routines, people and happenings within and around a home provide opportunities for the spontaneous learning which should be a feature of all early childhood learning contexts" (MOE, 1996a, p.18).

The critical nature of a parent and family role as their child's primary educator during the early years is apparent (Farquhar, 2003; Cullen, 2002; Carr, 2001; Hamer & Adam, 2003; Biddulph et al, 2003; MOE, 1996b) as children "achieve more and are happier when early years educators work together with parents and share views on how to support and extend individual children's learning" (Whalley, 1999, p.2). The significance of how and indeed if we achieve these links with home settings for the optimum benefit of children is central to the investigation of this study.

Biddulph et al (2003, p.1) open their Best Evidence Synthesis with the statement that "The influences of families/whanau and communities are identified as key levers for high quality outcomes for diverse children. Outcomes include both social and academic achievement". These relationships (partnerships) between parents and teachers need to be real and tangible rather than imposed and tokenistic, [and] treat families "with dignity and respect." The writers recommend that the programmes need to add to "family practices (not undermine them)", pointing out that there is a need for structured, specific suggestions rather than general advice, and on supportive group opportunities as well as opportunities for one-to-one contact (especially informal contact)" (Biddulph et al, 2003, p.vi). For effective partnerships paradigms in education settings Edwards and Knight's model of a continuum of parent involvement could be considered. This model appreciates that parent contact and involvement will be variable, but still workable, "ranging from non-participation – support – participation – partnership – parent control" (cited in Jackson & Adams, 2002, p.168).

2.4.2 Parent Partnership Research and Links with Literacy

Achieving a shared meaning to enhance children's literacy learning should be an emphasis of every early childhood setting according to sociocultural theories. It is also important to research the benefits of what the outcomes are for children when this occurs. The purpose of Siraj-Blatchford et al's (2002) study in the United Kingdom was to investigate what constituted effective pedagogy in the early years. The study was based on 12 intensive case studies looking at what types of pedagogy led to increased "developmental progress" for children. The study has shed some light on the importance and effectiveness of partnerships when educational aims are developed with parents and pedagogic efforts are made at home. "The most effective settings shared child related information between parents and staff, and

parents were often involved in decision making about their child's learning programme" (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2002).

In Whalley's(1999) work at the Pen Green Centre in the United Kingdom with under five year olds and their families, the centre staff and participating parents have established a model of "co-operative working which respects both the learning and support needs of parents and children" (p.2). The intentions of the programme were multiple: one major focus was to establish interaction between the role of the professional's experience, seen as the 'public and generalised form" of theory about child development, and parents' everyday experience, a "personal theory" about a particular child, "to produce an enriched understanding as a basis for both [parents and teachers] to act in relation to the child." The programme named this the "Pen Green Information Loop" as it is information that could help to build a broad and accurate picture of a child's developmental progress" (p.12).

Whalley (1999) states that the work that they have done has lead them to; uncovering new questions to be researched; that their staff have deeper understandings of the need for improved play and provision for science and maths; as well the affirmation of the resourceful nature and ability of parents. In addition to these findings they developed a framework of effective pedagogic strategies for adults working with children in early childhood settings including both parents and teachers (Whalley, 1999, p.10).

Researching the benefits of "empowering and developing equitable relationships for parents and staff" (Mitchell, 2003) has been the focus of a joint venture with New Zealand and Australia to develop effective 'partnerships' in teacher-led services. Whilst the final research document is still in writing [Mitchell, e-mail communication, October 10, 2005], the action research project has revealed some worthy insights to the teacher / parent relationships, described in papers written by the researcher. The study included work at six centres, working with the staff, the parents, and a group of professional development advisors (one per centre, selected by centre staff). Mitchell wrote each centre was "unique and there [was] no single prescription for all", however from the work with the centres she was able to draw commonalities. The study highlighted the need for the centres to establish an environment where parents and teachers have a sense of belonging, and that individual diversity of families is responded to. There was a need to establish effective two-way communication with parents about children's learning that integrates action between home and early childhood centres (Mitchell, 2003; 2005).

Additional research being undertaken by the Ministry of Education 'Centres of Innovation' projects have been "established as part of the strategic plan for early childhood education to undertake action research" and to "showcase excellence and innovation in early childhood education" (Crown as cited in Mitchell, 2005, p.2). Wilton Playcentre (Mitchell, 2005) and New Beginnings Preschool (Ryder, Wright, Jones & Adams, 2004), are two centres which are currently researching "different approaches to working with parents in early childhood education" (Mitchell, 2005, p.2). Both centres have highlighted the benefits of including parents in the decision-making of teaching pedagogies and programmes for children by implementing "project-based learning" (Ryder et al, 2004), and "focusing on interactions between and among adults and children" (Mitchell, 2005) where parents now "view themselves as equal participants in their child's learning" (Ryder et al, 2004, p.11).

The "nature of a partnership in early childhood education is perhaps closer than that expected in other sectors" Hedges (2001), despite this "teachers report feeling unprepared and [experience] negative attitudes ... in interactions with parents" (p.21). Katz states that "the type of relationships developed with parents may be influenced by teachers' stages of professional development" (cited in Hedges, 2001, p.21) suggesting that much of what practitioners do is left to chance as Hedges claims "suggestions as to how this [preparing teachers to work with parents] should occur are rare." Mitchell and Cubey recommend in their synthesis that "further investigation of professional development approaches to strengthening partnerships" (2003, p.xv) is required. Certainly teachers need support for this very important yet sometimes fragile relationship.

As the Whalley (1999) and Siraj-Blatchford et al (2002) studies illustrate, there are benefits of involving parents in the teaching pedagogy of the centre to further enhance the literacy learning opportunities and outcomes for children. There is a need to achieve effective partnerships for "we know that children's level of exposure to literacy-related activities within their families, the attitudes or beliefs their parents hold about how children learn and the role that parents play in actively promoting and supporting their children's learning appear to be powerful factors in children's acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills in their pre-school years." (Parkhill, 2002, p.18). These powerful factors or 'funds of knowledge' need to be harnessed successfully. The principle for successful links with family and community emphasizes the need for a "strong connection and consistency among all aspects of the child's world" particularly, "with regard to literacy, educators should build upon the literacy practices

already occurring in families” (Hamer & Adams, 2002, p.128). According to Hamer and Adams “each setting has its own ‘funds of literacy knowledge’ which have an important part to play in the child’s literacy development” (2003, p.38). It is these ‘funds of knowledge’ and how if indeed they are being gathered, which is of interest to me as a researcher.

Summary

Literacy is primarily a social practice and should be embedded in the development of language and influenced by the mediation with others, thus no longer seen as just reading and writing from a teacher-directed activity but rather a way of thinking that is beyond the print-base mediums. The literature on early childhood literacy recommends the need for a more comprehensive understanding of sociocultural theory within pedagogical practice in the early childhood sector. The literature also presents a strong argument for the use of subject content knowledge for teachers to support and extend children’s learning, including the early literacy learning.

Early literacy practices, skills and knowledge begin from birth with the families and specifically the parents as the key initiators of long-term literacy outcomes. The relationship between early childhood settings and links with family practices are a ministerial requirement, but whether the implications of these are understood by practitioners remains questionable. These links are critical for outcomes of effective learning, particularly for diverse children (Biddulph et al, 2003). Effective links with homes via the various learning story formats and the Parent voice sheet have been available to practitioners, but supporting official documentation and suitable exemplars were not released until February, 2005. Te One (2000) suggests the move to alternative assessment has been slow and lagged behind curriculum development. When curriculum is developed it needs to be worked hand-in-hand with assessment.

The next chapter presents the research procedures and methodology in this investigation of literacy understandings within the existing teacher parent partnerships presented at two early childhood centres in Christchurch.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Sources of Data

Introduction

This chapter presents the methodologies and methods generated for the purposes of this research thesis, exploring and uncovering my personal theoretical orientations and the justifications for taking the journey that I travelled. It was a journey partly planned partly unplanned, the variations occurring due to the very essence of what qualitative research embodies, constructing knowledge that is contextual and 'lived'.

The study is embedded in a constructionist's perspective, the notion that we construct meaning through connections and interaction with people, places and things, exploring the understandings and practices of 'literacy and parent partnerships'. The study explores both the parents' and the teachers' understandings and modes of implementing literacy practices, in two early childhood centres. The findings are filtered through my interpretations and experiences as a parent and teacher.

I begin this journey with a mother's beliefs, and assumptions that literacy pathways, as curriculum strands, are generally not as well implemented in early childhood settings as they could be; and that teachers struggle to actively listen to parents' suggestions when it has anything to do with the cognitive curriculum.

3.1. Methodologies

Epistemologies

Epistemology deals with "the nature of knowledge – how we know what we know" (Crotty, 1998, p.8). As stated in the introduction this study is embedded in a social constructionism ideology, accepting that meaning is socially constructed in an 'inter'(between) and 'intra' (within) personal manner. I recognise that as a researcher and writer of an academic dissertation the knowledge and understanding of my research interest transforms daily, along with the understandings of the participants, which are dependent upon the personal constructions and interactions they adopt, "Between the extremes of absolute truth no truth is the lived reality of half-worked – through truths that shape our daily lives" (Ezzy, 2002, p.2). So in this context of qualitative research what were considered as 'truths' need to be explained and made transparent "truth is always historical, cultural and socially created" (Ezzy, 2002).

Theoretical Orientations

This study's theoretical perspectives were located within an interpretivist's phenomenological viewpoint. The interpretivist approach "looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998, p.8), however with a guarded and questioning eye that can sometimes be deceptive and send the participants along the wrong paths, "Phenomenology, however, treats culture with a good measure of caution and suspicion. Our culture may be enabling but, paradoxically, it is also crippling. While it offers us entrée to a comprehensive set of meanings, it shuts us off from an abundant font of untapped significance" explains Crotty (1998, p.6).

Interpretivism can be linked back to the work of Weber cited in Crotty (1998), who talked about 'verstehen' (understanding), but maintains that this understanding "has to be substantiated by empirical evidence ... there is a need for scientifically valid historical and social data" and recommends that researchers use "diagnostic tools that the social scientist assembles themselves" (Crotty, 1998, p.69). With importing the process of phenomenological research "the researcher's personal experience of the phenomenon is central to the research process" (Te One, 2000, p.33). Whilst bringing the researcher's own experiences into the study, phenomenology also acknowledges that as a researcher you are setting aside the "what is taken for granted orientation" and beginning "to bracket the life-world" (Holstein & Gubrium, cited in Holliday, 2002, p.18), to understand the social phenomena of how the research informants experience their world.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is many things at the same time, "It is multiparadigmatic in focus. Its practitioners are sensitive to the value of the multimethod approach. They are committed to the naturalistic perspective and to the interpretive understanding of human experience" claim Denzin and Lincoln (2003, p.11). In this research study I chose a qualitative research approach so that teachers and parents could be part of the research process, where they had involvement and a voice in what was analysed. Where representation was accurate as exactly as possible to what was recorded, where they were given the opportunity to identify any misinterpretations, and finally to have some input at the analysis stage. Qualitative research allowed for these approaches to occur.

Secondly, early childhood education is underpinned by sociocultural theory whereby the child is always viewed with the knowledge that "A child's learning environment extends far

beyond the immediate setting of the home or early childhood programmes outside the home” (MOE, 1996a, p.19). In the broad area of my research it was imperative that a discourse approach to the research was to be used as Cullen (2002, p.80) argues “literacy learning and literacy teaching need to be understood with a sociocultural perspective and that literacy learning for children is a collaborative process.” This required vis-à-vis communication between the co-educators, those being the parents and the teachers.

Thirdly, the data needed to be examined reliably and openly by the researcher. With the use of qualitative research methodology the element of ‘subjectivity’ could be accounted for. I was able to illustrate my involvement in the sector both as an early childhood teacher educator, and at the time of the research accessing early childhood education for my own child. The implications of this meant that when viewing the data I needed to have a creative, multi-faceted lens, yet proceed with rigour and lucidity so that the data and cross-referencing to my daily experiences at my child’s kindergarten were transparent when I examined the data. Denzin and Lincoln explain that whilst qualitative research is systematic, it still allows opportunity for “creativity in using participants’ experiences in a multi-faceted way, hoping always to get a deeper understanding of the subject matter at hand... and that each practice makes the world visible in a different way” (2003, p.5).

As a researcher I needed to construct meaning from the research question and research sites in a socially constructed manner – qualitative research was the only approach that seemed appropriate, and the only type that would do justice to some of the questions I wanted to pose.

3.2 Research Design

Case Study Approach

There remains some debate about the integrity and generalisability of case studies. As Stake (2003) suggests “the search for particularity competes with the search for generalizability[sic]”. Stake comments further that some qualitative methodologists “grant less than full regards to study of the particular”, mentioning Denzin, Glaser and Strauss, Herriott, Firestone and Yin as critics of this type of approach. Whilst ‘generalisability’ is considered a ‘dirty word’ for Denzin and others, the relevancy of possible themes that emerged could still be insightful. Case studies have become one of the most common ways to complete a qualitative inquiry (Stake, 2003) as the case is a “bounded system... with working parts, it is purposive, and often has a self. It is an integrated system” (p.135). Accessing local settings and using the case study method which offered me a “thick description” (Stake, 2003) was appealing, thus a case study approach for this project was implemented. It was the intention to gather indepth knowledge of literacy understandings and to observe and be part of the literacy practices in two early childhood centres.

Collective Case Study Method

At the proposal stage and during the data collection phase it was thought that a constant comparative case study approach was going to be used, as originally it was proposed that I would study three settings. However this was beyond the scope of the dissertation (Academic Committee recommendation to reduce to one case study). The settings were reduced to two, rather than limit the study to just one setting. Stake claims that the collective case study approach helps generate a more comprehensive understanding, believing “that understanding them [multiple sites] will lead to a better understanding, perhaps better theorizing[sic], about a still larger collection of cases” (p.138).

A collective case study method was thus employed, with the ability to engage in comparing and contrasting the data between the two sites, as well as within each site. As the research progressed it was evident that, due to the complexities of confidentiality issues for the respondents, comparisons became problematic. Thus a limited amount of contrast between the two case studies was generated.

Research settings

Selection of Centres

The selection of centres, for the purposes of the study, needed to meet the following criteria. Firstly for practical reasons I wanted the centre to be in close proximity to my residence (for practical reasons) for the data collection phase. Secondly, a personal interest, both my children had attended (and still attend) the Kidsfirst Kindergartens and I wanted to complete some research within this type of setting. Thirdly, I wanted to complete research in settings that comfortable with 'observers' in the programme and, as such, not intimidated by having a researcher present. Fourthly, I wanted to select from a centre drawing from a lower-socio economic community and one centre drawing from an upper-socio-economic community, this was due to my initial interest in exploring why there is a disparity between children from these different groups for long-term literacy outcomes. Finally, I wanted to work with centres that I had a limited working history, with the intention that as collective participants I would not feel ethically compromised.

The kindergartens in this study are part of a large regional association with the responsibility for 63 kindergartens in the Canterbury/ Westland district. These provide sessional care for children in both morning and afternoon sessions, for approximately three to four hours. The morning children are typically four years old, and there are approximately 45 children in attendance. The afternoon session includes children that are typically from three and half years old to four and a half years old, with 35-45 children at each session.

Description of the Settings.

Centre One was approached after having met the selection criteria. I reminded them that there had been some contact in a professional capacity as a 'Visiting Tutor' assessing trainee teaching students. Centre one, was located in a demographic that would feed into a variety of local schools with decile ratings, ranging from one to three. The ethnic backgrounds of the children were a mix of New Zealand European, Maori, Samoan, Asian, Arab, and other Polynesian ethnic groups. There were three qualified teachers permanently employed in the settings along with a Teacher Aide who attended for two and a half hours daily, and an itinerant teacher to work with a child needing additional learning support, attending for one and a half hours daily. 45 children attended in the morning session and 35 children attended in the afternoon session.

Centre Two was approached after it too was selected on the basis of having met the selection criteria. This time, I had no personal or professional history with the centre, which was situated near a school with a decile rating of ten. The head teacher described the setting as having limited diversity in regards to the ethnic background of the children, which I interpreted to mean that the children were of New Zealand European descent. The teaching staff included three qualified teachers; in addition to this was a teacher who worked with children needing additional learning support.

Participants

Initially contact was made by phone with the head teachers who agreed verbally to being part of a research project. All research information, ethical approval and participation forms were delivered to the centre to be read (refer Appendix 2), considered, shared with other staff members, who also needed to read and sign the consent forms. Only the head teachers were interviewed, however all the staff were involved in the study as they were part of the participant observations. The head teachers then approached parents to recruit participants for the 'parent group interview'. The parents verbally agreed to being part of the interview process. They then read the Parent Information letter (similar to centre letter) and signed the consent forms which were also returned with the other consent forms.

At Centre One, two parents who stated they would attend the interviews did not attend, without any reasons being given. In total there were four parents at the Centre One interview, one male and three females. For two of the females, the child currently attending the kindergarten this was their third and youngest child, and their other children were at primary school. For the other two parents the child attending the centre was their first and eldest child, with another sibling at home. There were three parents at the Centre Two interview, they were all female. For two of the three this was their first child attending the centre and they both had another sibling at home. For the other parent this was her third child (and their other children were all at school).

3.3 Data sources - collection and procedures

Data Sources

Collection of data from multiple sources was important so comprehensive and variable data source systems were employed. As a means of validating the data received, it was important that there was a variety of data obtained ensuring “that multiple sources of data are better than a single source of data collection”(Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p.46).

These methods included; a data gathering system of interviewing both individual teachers and groups of parents and non-participant observer notes written after /during attending each kindergarten session for three mornings. In addition to this I kept a reflective journal and engaged in ongoing analysis (informal, reflexive and thematic) throughout my time of data gathering. The following table features the data sources, procedure and timeframe in which the data gathering phase took place at both centres. Most of the data was collected at one centre before moving onto the next.

Table 3.3.1 Data Collection– illustrates the timeframe, data sources, data procedure from the fieldwork settings

Centre	Time period	Data Source
Centre 1	Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet Head Teacher – briefly • Provided documentation
	Week 2 & 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phone contact organising parent interviews/checking consent approval
	Week 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day 1 - Meet centre staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Centre observations ○ meet parents in preparation for parent interview • Day 2 - Parent Interview • Day 3 – Centre Observations • Day 4 – Centre Observations • Day 5 – Head Teacher Interview
	Week 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcript & Indepth interview questions sent to teacher
	Week 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indepth interview with teacher

Centre	Time period	Data Source
Centre 2	Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet Head Teacher • Provided documentation
	Week 2 & 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phone contact organising parent interviews/ checking consent approval
	Week 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day 1 - meet centre staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ centre observations ○ meet parents for interview ○ interview Head teacher • Day 2 – centre observations • Day 3 – centre observations • Day 4 – parent interviews
	Week 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcript & Indepth interview sent to teacher
	Week 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indepth interview with teacher
Both centres	9 months later	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis and discussion chapter sent for respondent validation.

Data techniques

First person account

As a fledgling researcher, compounded with the additional aspect of entering two settings that I had little knowledge of, I felt an enormous responsibility with this role, something that I had never felt before in previous research assignments. I was acutely aware of the definite craft involved in collecting data. Upon entering both settings, the depths of the responsibilities in my role as a researcher became transparent, I would need to elicit ‘inoffensive social interactions’, to ensure that the informants were put at ease. The data would need to be ‘collated strategically’ and I would need to be ‘unobtrusive’ as I collected written data on and at the setting (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Building rapport and breaking down the defences seemed to be a priority as I began. “Rapport comes slowly in most field research, even then it may be tentative and fragile” state Taylor and Bogdan, who then described the various elements that may need to be considered: empathy, penetrating people’s defences, having people ‘open-up’, breaking through the ‘fronts’ and the sharing of the informants symbolic world (1998, p.48).

It is important to share the type of relationship that I believe I had with the key informants – the head teachers as well as the parents and other teachers. Firstly the teachers (key informants), I

believe that the relationship was professional and slightly distanced to begin with, perhaps slightly threatened in one setting and the other open and honest right from the beginning. I continued, with a conscientious effort to build a rapport and to 'dig' a little deeper into the understandings. As rapport building continued, both became more comfortable and forthcoming with information, viewing me as a peer and highlighting where they might need confidentiality to be scrupulous. The other teachers in the setting appeared to be slightly aloof and potentially questioning of my role.

It is my perception that the parents were reasonably comfortable with the research process, and did not have anything to be concerned by (except their own peer group), once they were made to feel comfortable, in an off-site, setting they appeared reasonably relaxed.

The Interviews

A method of indepth qualitative interviewing (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998) was adapted. This "favoured digging tool" (Benney & Hughes, cited in Bogdan & Taylor, 1998) was utilised so that the interview could be dynamic and flexible, in the hope that it would engage in and capture an understanding of "informants' perspectives on their lives, experiences or situation as expressed in their own words" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p.88).

Two interview pathways were adopted - the teachers' perspectives and the parents' perspectives (see Appendix 1 for interview questions). To capture the teachers' perspectives, a semi-structured interview framework was required due to the nature of the research questions, the time restraints involved and the fact that two centres were involved. For the purposes of collecting meaningful data, two interviews were originally committed to by the teachers. The first interviews were conducted within the fieldwork period at the relevant centre (the first interview was repeated at one centre due to technical and rapport issues). The teacher interview transcripts were typed, initial researcher thoughts were presented, and some general questions for further discussion for the second interview were sent to the teachers (see Appendix 1, Indepth Interview). A second interview time was held approximately four-six weeks after the first interview.

The parents' interview, I perceived would be more conducive to a group setting with parents feeling more relaxed about sharing information that they may not normally share. It was also my intention that by accessing a group who were part of the learning community, the data would include a more informed understanding of the centre's practices and how the partnerships were

working. "Interviewing multiple informants lends itself to building general theories about the nature of social phenomena" recommends Taylor and Bogdan (1998, p.91). Two group interviews (one per centre) were conducted in a semi-structured approach, yet open-ended enough to explore notions that the parents presented. These were conducted off-site, and held during my fieldwork period at the applicable centre.

The interviews were all recorded and then transcribed by myself and an assistant, who transcribed three of the tapes. When assistance was given I went over the tapes again to ensure accuracy, clarity and to refamiliarise myself with the data.

Interview Questions

Asking the right questions without leading the informants in any way seemed a priority, so a semi-structured approach, with more questions than I would need was planned (refer Appendix 1). Kvale (1996) was referred to for support in writing the interview questions or "conversations". Neuman (2000) was additionally consulted for giving some structure to the interview format, including three types of questions – descriptive, structural and contrast questions.

I wrote some descriptive questions to explore the setting and learn about members; For example: *'Researcher: What are your understandings of the word literacy?'* (refer Appendix 1, Teacher & Parent Interview Questions)

I also wrote several structural questions in order to engage in verification of categories as my analysis began;

For example: *'Researcher: So I am trying to understand what you mean by 'osmosis' – is this a developmental process?'* (Teacher 1 transcript – interview 1)

Finally, some contrast questions allowed me to build on the analysis and to focus on the similarities or differences between categories I started forming as the interviews took place; For example: *"You also talked to your belief that "we" are losing the ability to just have an element of 'wonderment' in the curriculum. Why do you think that learning dispositions do not allow for those very opportunities to occur?'* (Teacher 2 transcript – interview 2)

Observation Notes

My time period in each centre was efficiently scheduled; I needed to systematically collect data as unobtrusively as possible. My observation notes were to be concise ensuring maximum clarity and written up daily as they were recorded. In the field there were the following types of

written notes; jotted notes, direct observation notes, researcher inference notes, personal notes and analytic memos (Neuman, 2000). When the notes were transferred into the raw data they were then organised into a more comprehensive form (refer Appendix 4, Literacy Learning Experiences). The environment was photographed so that the essence of the environment could be captured, and used as a prompt and verification when analysing the data at a later period. Some samples of work were given to me but these remain as personal treasures as they were not really relevant to the analysis of research work.

Reflective Journal

A research journal was written, as time allowed, around the fieldwork. Once the field work began and during the intensity of the fieldwork period, the journal was not accessed and more energy/priority was placed upon initial informal data analysis. The purpose of the journal was a form of reliability, taking into account anything that I noted throughout the time that I spent in the centre, any phone conversations or contact that I had from the informants. This reflexive tool included many of the assumptions that arose regarding the research questions and any other 'thinkings' that I experienced throughout the fieldwork period.

This journal provided a type of 'anchoring' for me, in recognising that sometimes my daily experiences and readings from other sources were influencing my analysis. The use of a journal was a strategy recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (1998) as a multi-method approach as discussed earlier, hoping to provide the rigour and validity that is required of any research work (refer Validity section).

3.4 Ethical Considerations

"Qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world ... their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict" recommends Denzin and Lincoln (2003), they add that the "lives and expressions portrayed ... [should be] - something of a contract, usually informal, but best not [to be] silent - a moral obligation."(p.154). During the proposal period many of the ethical issues were explored, addressed and presented to the Christchurch College of Education's Ethics Committee, who then gave their approval to proceed. The introductory letters and consent forms were sent to the appropriate parties; management, teachers and parents of the centre (refer Appendix 2). These were all signed and returned prior to the commencement of the fieldwork - ensuring informed consent was gained.

All information collected has been handled with strict confidentiality, with only an assigned centre number designated. At times, for the flow of the narrative, pseudonyms have been used. Anonymity has been maintained scrupulously throughout so that the centre, the teachers, and the parents could not be identified. I appreciate that the teachers (key informants) from this study will be able to self-identify. It was my hope, through sensitively accessing the data in a constructive format and through sending the key informants a copy of the analysis prior to completing the dissertation that they would gain in some way from the findings presented. As a teaching colleague I was humbled by their ability to open up to me and have great respect for their contributions. At the completion of the study I undertook to send a break-down of the research findings in a summary format for the centre teachers and parents to read.

The requirement to remain ethically accountable continued throughout my fieldwork phase and new elements of ethical viability presented. Upon entry into the field it was made clear that there were 'insider/outsider' notions perceived by the staff in the centres. For example, there were other informants involved in my research. This included the other teachers in the centres. Whilst they were not being formally interviewed, they were required to give consent as I would be collecting observations of centre literacy practices. It was important they were made to feel comfortable and that their confidentiality and their 'worlds' were not breached. The insider/outsider notions refer to the situation that as a researcher coming in to observe the environment I was seen as an 'outsider' who was potentially placing judgement on their professionalism and ability in a particular area, as illustrated in the following transcript from the centre observation notes (5/11/04);

'After the short whanau time, which was brought together in order to hand out the baking the children and teacher had made, another teacher (not interviewed) directly asked me;

"Are you finding much literacy happening?"(Other teacher).

To which I responded courteously "Yes truck loads" (researcher)

"Oh that's good isn't it?" (Other teacher).

I needed to address ethical issues as they arose.

3.5 Validity

Trustability and validity of data is complex and fraught with responsibilities. "It is not possible to achieve perfect reliability if we are to produce meaningful studies of the real world" claim

Taylor and Bogdan (1998, p.9). Janesick (2003) argues that the terms of reliability, generalisability and validity should be left in the psychometric world of quantitative studies and should not be aligned to the world of qualitative study. Therefore she recommends that the qualitative researchers work toward presenting their own forms of credibility, as qualitative interpreters, as there are more than one way of analysing an experience, “there is no one ‘correct’ interpretation” (Janesick, 2003, p.69). Ezzy (2002), in his discussions about grounded theory talks to the validity issues and recommends that we state them and work with them. “The first step towards dealing with the influence of preconceptions is not to deny or hide them, but to formally state them, ... [and] to actively work to prevent preconceptions from narrowing what is observed and theorised” (p.10).

Having acknowledged that there is much debate (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998; Janesick, 2003; Crotty, 1998; Holliday, 2002) around the plausibility of validity and reliability in qualitative research, there is still a general consent that measures of verification need to be put in place. It was my intention to be as accurate and systematic as possible with the use of the data. In order to achieve this I introduced some methods to ensure that the work completed was valid:

- The research questions written at the beginning were my **key objectives** to provide a clear focus on the area of exploration of the dissertation.
- Janesick does recommend that the researcher does a checking of the data through the tool of “member checks and audit trails” (2003, p.69). **Respondent validation** was achieved by handing back the first transcript to the teachers to read and report back on. In addition to this the teachers were given an ‘initial interpretations’ summary and questions emerging from the data to reflect on before the second in-depth interview. After all the findings were analysed and written, the ‘Results and Analysis’ Chapter 4 and the ‘Discussion and Implications’ Chapter 5 were sent back for further and final respondent validation for inclusion in the final written document.
- Another form of verification was to continue to “**show workings**” (Holliday, 2002, p.8). This is achieved, Holliday recommends, by implementing the following strategies: the researcher needs to state the reasons for the research; the choice of the social setting, the choice for the research activities, and finally their choice of themes and focuses. “Overall [there is a] need to articulate a judicious balance between opportunism and principle” (p.8).
- Collecting multiple sources of data supports the concept of **triangulation** “which involves the gathering of information from a number of sources to cross-check and to assess the authenticity of individual accounts” (Coll, 2002, p.6) contributing to the

validation of the research process. Collecting multiple data sources and data techniques included: teacher and parent interviews, centre observation notes, a research journal as well as collecting respondent validation data.

- The **stability** or **dependability** of the data which “is concerned with the stability of the data over time” (Coll, 2002, p.5) was considered for verification purposes. Often I would leave the data and my workings and move to other sections of my writing in order to come back to ensure that over a period of time I was arriving at the same answers. In addition, my supervisors viewed the data and my interpretations in order to confirm my findings.

3.6 Data Analysis

Thematic Approach

Once all my data were collated and scripted - the “discovery” phase began, or so I thought, but in reality the analysis began the moment of I walked in the gates of the early childhood centres. Analysis in this research study was both informal and formal. The informal phases occurred simultaneously with data collection, in an integrated manner. Whilst initially I worked with some early ‘hunches and insights’ that I fed back to the teacher informants for further discussions (see Appendix 1), the data was mostly processed after all the data was collated

The formal phases were inducted after extensive reading and re-reading. “In qualitative studies, researchers gradually make sense of what they are studying by combining insight and intuition with an intimate familiarity with the data” claim Taylor and Bogdan (1998, p.142) reinforcing that there is no easy formula and that data analysis is a difficult process. Using this thematic approach is a form of systematically coding the data “identifying themes or concepts that are in data. The researcher attempts to build a systematic account of what has been observed and recorded” (Ezzy, 2002, p.86). The thematic approach is seen as being more inductive than content analysis as the codes or categories in a thematic approach are not predetermined and are identified from within the data.

Data discipline

Data analysis is personal and when I interacted with my data, both alive and printed, the data became a group of ‘voices’ to me, sometimes one set of voices more dominant than the other. Thus, as I analysed the data I needed to employ some approaches that would ‘index’ my thinking. Whilst I accessed the analysis method of ‘open coding’, “the researcher locates themes and assigns initial codes or labels in a first attempt to condense the mass of data” (Neuman,

2000, p.421), I also needed some of the disciplines of 'grounded theory' methodology. This entailed examining all of the scripts over and over, every line was coded into categories and additional insights or phenomena were notated on memo notes and placed aside to be considered later.

Holliday (2002) talks to the need for 'reflexivity' and the impact that this has on our analysis phase. She uses the term to highlight that, as qualitative researcher we should not be disembodied from the data 'script', and that we need to be naturalistic in our functioning by accounting for "a way in which researchers think and act, and to come to terms with, and indeed capitalize [sic] on, the complexities of their presence within the research setting, in a methodical way" (p.146).

Belief Framework (refer Table 3.6.1)

After the initial open coding and grounded theory approaches were implemented it was still necessary to organise the large volumes of data that were generated from these case studies. Thus an analysis framework was developed in order to categorize, compare and illuminate the findings. The framework was worked and reworked, and then the participant responses and other data was interwoven for further analysis. It was a way in which to synthesis the information, validate codes and match it with current paradigms from the literature.

The tables (refer to Appendix 4 Tables 4.2.1 – 4.2.5) were adapted from the research work of McLachlan-Smith and St George (2000), "who investigated New Zealand kindergarten teachers' beliefs about children's cognitive and literacy development" (p.37). Further development of these tables included the multiparadigmatic work of Hamer and Adams (2003), who have developed a sociocultural model of the literate child (refer Chapter 2).

McLachlan-Smith and St George's work (2000) explored the teacher's implicit theories about learning, teaching and literacy development. The questions they pursued lead them to developing a framework that examined the teachers' beliefs within the following categories; curriculum types, literacy in the curriculum, how children learn, and the role of the teacher in children's learning. Due to the similarities of their study to my research questions, their framework was selected as an effective means of presenting the data. The fifth area of 'Parent partnerships' was added as this was of particular interest in this study as both teacher and parent voice would be included.

Including the Sociocultural Model of the Literate Child (Hamer & Adams, 2003, p.41) gave further definition to the categories (defined by McLachlan-Smith & St George, 2000). In Hamer and Adams work they clearly identify the knowledge and practices that early childhood educators should consider as the basis of sound learning for literacy whaariki. Finally Te Whaariki (MOE, 1996) was consulted to clearly define the terms and practices for the early childhood context.

Table 3.6.1 Belief Framework used for Data Analysis (developed from McLachlan-Smith and St George (2000) and Hamer and Adams' Sociocultural Model (2003).

Literacy Learning in Early Childhood Education	Themes emerging from Teacher & Parent data
<p><i>1. Kindergarten Curriculum</i></p> <p>Planning & resources –Provision of meaningful literacy experiences, environments & resources through guidance from official curriculum Te Whaariki & documentation with support from Kindergarten Assoc.</p> <p>Pedagogy & Philosophy – Articulation of ideologies inclusive of current education practices, with staff team & the community of learners.</p> <p>Facilitation - the sharing of literacy knowledge & expertise through literacy experiences, resources & interactions with and by children.</p> <p>Research (ECE & In-centre)- Ongoing, in-centre & professional development regularly occurring to enrich knowledge base & programme.</p>	
<p><i>2. Literacy in the curriculum</i></p> <p>Holistic & Weaving - Literacy is represented in all areas of the programme & interactions with children in a planned, spontaneous yet authentic manner.</p> <p>Diversity - Various repertoires of literacy experiences are experienced. Genuine attempts to include all of the children's background (if appropriate).</p> <p>Routines - Literacy experiences that are planned & followed consistently</p> <p>Relevant - The interaction is chosen with knowledge of the child & appropriateness of experience.</p> <p>Narratives - Variable types & inclusive of the creators (constructors) involved i.e. children, educators, parents, or visitors.</p> <p>Knowledge - A changing body of literacy knowledge, that is mutually & socially constructed.</p>	
<p><i>3. How children learn</i></p> <p>Co-constructors - by questioning & negotiating with knowledgeable others, teachers, adults & peers, accessing cultural tools, inclusion of funds of knowledge, via scaffolding & implementing the zone of proximal development (ZPD) technique.</p> <p>Empowerment - Where they are able to share in the decision-making about the learning</p>	

<p>process, enabling them to take an action or a role in the programme.</p> <p>Environment - Authentic, meaningful & print-rich environment that is accessed & verified to & by the children.</p> <p>Meaningful - Subject content & skills must be relevant & integrated for interest-based learning for individuals & groups involved.</p>	
<p><i>4. Teachers role in children's learning</i></p> <p>Authentic Assessment - To provide pertinent information to contribute to improving learning opportunities for children.</p> <p>Scaffolding & Apprenticeship - Opportunities planned & emergent where literacy expertise is shared & co-constructed with child.</p> <p>Balance & empathy - The art of understanding the need of the moment when working with children.</p> <p>Relationships & Interpersonal - Establishing & maintaining responsive reciprocal relationships.</p> <p>Professional & Quality - Competent & knowledgeable educator involved in ongoing teacher development & desire to present high quality learning experiences & opportunities.</p> <p>Mediation - To intervene & mentor the literacy experiences occurring in the centre.</p>	
<p><i>5. Parent Partnerships</i></p> <p>Consultation -Planned & established two-way collaboration and discussion with parents/caregivers.</p> <p>Partnership - Working together to gain valuable knowledge about children's ongoing learning in the centre/home environments.</p> <p>Funds of knowledge - The collective literacy experiences & understandings that are linked to the setting & the community that it serves.</p>	

Summary

“Digging necessarily disturbs the successive strata through which one passes to reach one’s goal” (MacDougall as cited in Holliday, 2002, p.65).

This chapter has presented the pathways used and the reasons why these pathways were chosen in order that the research work could be replicated. The chapter that follows will present the findings from the case studies using the variety of qualitative analytical methods described in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

This chapter presents the themes that illustrate and help to explain two groups of parents' and two teachers' understandings / beliefs and practices around literacy in early childhood education. The data collected includes the parent and teacher interviews, the centre observation notes and researcher journal entries taken from working with two centres, in order to understand their notions of literacy and how their understandings are implemented into the programme. Additionally the study explores how, as education partners, parents and teachers interact to foster and enhance their children's literacy pathways.

As discussed in the previous chapter, after the data was gathered, it was then analysed using a thematic approach. Multiple themes emerged, but for the scope of this dissertation three central areas will be explored. The first theme presents the **teachers' and the parents' definitions of literacy** in early childhood education (4.1). The second theme explores the **implementation of the literacy in the curriculum** (4.2), for the teachers, and how this was observed and understood by the parents. This theme is then divided into sections (4.2.1-4.2.4), which explore the curriculum from the various facets that determine it, as detailed in the table below. The third theme presents the findings related to **parent teacher partnerships**, and how these partnerships have essentially been working in the two centres, along with ideas that the parents recommended for enhancing these relationships further (4.3.1 – 4.3.2).

Thematic Area	Sub Sections
4.1 Literacy Definitions	4.1.1 Teachers Definitions 4.1.2 Parents Definitions
4.2 Implementation of Literacy in the Curriculum	4.2.1 Parents and Teachers Understanding of the Official Curriculum and Assessment Tools 4.2.2 Understandings about Literacy Learning and How the Practices are Enacted in the Curriculum 4.2.3 Understandings about How Children Learn Literacy 4.2.4 The Role of the Teacher in Children's Literacy Learning
4.3 Parent Teacher Partnerships	4.3.1 How the Partnerships have been Working 4.3.2 Enhancements for Supporting & Developing Partnerships

4.1 Literacy Learning Definitions

4.1.1 Teachers' Definitions

A teacher's understanding of the curriculum is pivotal to a child's learning. As Nuttall (2003) argues, it is a central expectation that early childhood teachers are able to articulate the meanings and aspirations of Te Whaariki to the community of learners, both the children and whanau, which they educate. This requires teachers to individually and collectively reflect upon and examine their own perspectives on what constitutes as literacy teaching and learning of literacy, and how knowledge about this is constructed, "Making clear an image of their shared beliefs, the purposes of early childhood education" (Nuttall, 2003, p.162).

The teachers, in these case studies, presented the following as their understandings of what literacy meant;

'I understand the word literacy to be anything that's connected with the subject of reading ... it's about children being exposed to the written word, the spoken word, that is both verbal and non verbal communication.'

Teacher 1 (T1)

and

'My understanding is quite broad, it encounters meanings, visual, production, the hearing of it, the seeing of it.' Teacher 2 (T2)

and then specifically in the context of an early childhood setting;

'I believe that literacy fits across all of those areas of a child's well-being or their holistic development, because within the kindergarten setting, I believe that they are exposed to literacy in all of the things that happen at kindergarten...Literacy is not a formal process' T1

and

'I think it should be all encompassing. It should be things that they can see all the time, talk about all the time, think all the time, even touch or feel all the time.' T2

These teachers presented a broad conceptual understanding of what literacy means in the context of an early childhood setting. Initially T1 presented a more traditional view when reflecting upon the definition of literacy, but once put into the early childhood context the

definition broadened to a more inclusive perspective. T2's definition was broad both for literacy in a general context, and for literacy in the early childhood context. These definitions align with Hamer and Adams' (2003) 'early literacy' definition (refer chap.2), which distinguishes itself from the narrow traditional approaches that focus on reading and writing achievement, to including the broader language and literacy approaches.

4.1.2 Parents' Definitions

Parents' notions of literacy are an important link to assist in developing their children's sound literacy foundations. This can be linked back to their own experiences as a child, their understandings of literacy, and their understandings of the various pathways that can assist a child in gaining the knowledge and experiences that will assist them in this journey. "Parents are children's first teachers, and so have a vital role in ensuring that their offspring become linguistically competent" (Baker, Sonnenschein, Serpell, Scher, Fernandez-Fein, Munsterman, Hill, Goddard-Truitl, & Danseco, 1998, p.265).

The parents' presented a range of understandings about literacy, from definitions with a more traditional view, as follows;

'I guess their ability to read and write, and understand what you are reading and writing. Understanding what's being said to [them], that the printed word is a message that can [be] read and [you] get some information from. I suppose it's even an interest in even wanting to know what it is really. Knowing your way around a book, and knowing [how] to turn the pages, and that words are words and pictures are pictures.' Parent 5 (P5)

as well as more cognitive views;

"The knowledge of letters, what they sound like, and the comprehension side of things..." P1

"If its fun you've got your enthusiasm, you've got your motivation [for reading]." P2

along with the broader language, literacy and e-literacy (including computer, information and network literacy) type perspectives;

"Written and verbal, communicating as a group. I think it encompasses everything."

P3

and

"Different types of literacy – computers and text messages" P2

"It's probably more the creative side of literacy rather than the dotting

of the i's" P7

The second and third broader groups of definitions aligned closely to Hamer and Adams' (2003, p.40) literacy definitions. These definitions include a reconciliation between the two approaches of the cognitive processes (from Piaget to metacognitive theories) of decoding, comprehension and motivation, along with the sociocultural traditions (building on work from Vygotskian theory), that include the broader contexts of the community and society's influences on literacy learning (refer chap 2 for a more comprehensive explanation). Parent Two in particular presented an understanding of the impact that current trends and the varying forms of communication have on a child growing up in a technologically literate society.

"Oh they can text okay! ... soon there will be a text dictionary... is that just the English language evolving?" P2

The parents and teachers presented a range of understandings about literacy. Their understandings included views of literacy from the more traditional meanings of being able to read and write, to broader views that included the oral, visual and the symbolic nature of language. Whilst the teacher's understandings of literacy were reasonably broad, what was not presented was a comprehensive understanding of how young children learn about literacy (refer Chapter 2 - literacy model). However, the parents collectively presented ideas that were very closely aligned to the 'inner core' of the sociocultural model, of "comprehension, decoding, and motivation", as well as the impact that advancing technology has and will have on literacy in the future.

4.2 Implementation of Literacy in the Curriculum.

4.2.1 Parents' and Teachers' Understanding of the Official Curriculum and Assessment Tools

Teachers' Responses

There was a general comfort with use of the official curriculum document Te Whaariki, "*we can virtually link anything with Te Whaariki*" T2. Both the teachers felt they catered well for the desirable outcomes as specified in the document "*In the provision of curriculum activities at our centre, literacy is evident throughout [by accessing] the strands of Te Whaariki*" T1, meeting the needs of the "*child's holistic development*" T1. However there was also specific discussion about the 'open' nature of the document and it was termed not very "*user friendly*" T2 for them as educators and that,

“When you look at Te Whaariki the strengths and weaknesses of it, is that, it’s so broad that it encompasses everything but in some ways it encompasses nothing...”, and “this makes it difficult for the parents to understand and accept... It’s hard enough, sometimes, for teachers.” T2

My interpretation of this comment is that this teacher does not think that Te Whaariki is very detailed in its orientation. The document is open-ended and this creates challenges for its implementation and particularly for interpretation of its understandings for teachers (*“in general” T2*) and parents. Cullen (1996) suggested that teachers may simply have insufficient knowledge of the theoretical and ideological bases of the document, to be able to use it effectively within their contexts. Sometimes even if they have the required knowledge - teachers “may not know how to translate the ideas into everyday practice” (Nuttall, 2003, p.178.).

“So there are all those things that aren’t recognised by the parents and that is where Te Whaariki makes it a little bit harder for us because they are things that have to be acknowledged [and] worked on.” T2

Te Whaariki’s strengths are that it was designed to be interpreted by professionals who have knowledge about child development. This was the original intention of the writers of the document, Carr and May (1996) “The final model was grounded in our own New Zealand social and cultural knowledge about child development and learning that has shaped the principles, processes and practices” (p.3). The teacher at Centre Two demonstrated understanding when talking about Te Whaariki;

“[Te Whaariki] empowered [the] teachers who have been educated... with in-depth knowledge of child development” T2.

However there was a strong belief with the existing staff that their current pedagogical approaches were about to be challenged. The catalyst for this uncertainty was due to the introduction of the ‘Learning and Teaching Stories’ assessment and planning tool, which was necessitating a *“shift in the power base - it should be handed over to the children and community but some teachers are challenged by that” (T2 respondent validation comment)*. Centre Two had been developing an assessment and planning procedure, based upon the learning story format, throughout the year the research was being completed. The whole team had entered into a professional development cluster contract (group of centres coming

together with a facilitator to develop understandings of a particular focus) and thus had begun to implement the tool into their centre programming.

“Now all of a sudden it’s being suggested that we use... learning stories - where we’re actually giving away a lot of that control to children - the control of the direction of the programme.

There is a general nervousness about learning stories on two levels. You’ve got teachers that are being cut from the past...[our old style of planning] [that] gives us a sense of security, sense of control... And if you go with the children [learning stories format] that’s empowering them.” T2

Researcher: *“How are you as a leader going to work with notions of change in the centre?”*

T2 *“Along a slow path I think, because of various reasons. The staff probably prefers the core curriculum and the teacher-directed [approach], they are a little more Piagetian, they were Piagetian taught. And come to think from a more behaviourist model, as a little bit I do, I think, because that was still the ‘thing’ as I went through College.”*

Centre One, at the time of the fieldwork phase, was still in the process of developing their learning stories planning and implementation process. The teacher stated that the team were being challenged by the learning stories approach;

“Learning Stories[are] moving away from skills based learning, it is quite sort of unknown what we are trying to do here. It seems like there’s not a lot of collaboration from the top down... I’m looking forward to[head teacher] ...hopefully [getting] some direction [on] where we need to go with our learning stories. I feel a wee bit stuck on that.” T1

This shift to a curriculum authentically underpinned by sociocultural theory implemented through the use of the Learning Story format was affecting their curriculum practice, and their sense of professionalism within the setting, they felt that the support that was available from their Association was limited.

“So that is probably about the unhappiness if you like of not quite knowing what we are meant to be doing..” T1

and

“... there’s been a number of years now that teachers have been in a constant state of change. They changed to Te Whaariki, they’ve changed to doing profiles, they’ve

changed now into learning stories, they've changed now into professional standards...none of these have been straight-forward in a way. [It has] involved an awful lot of professional development. We [did] learning stories at our last meeting, and our KPM (Kindergarten Practice Manager) said 'you know as much as I do'. And I think what has traditionally occurred is, there is a hierarchy - 'you tell us what to do and we will do it' [accessing] a top-down model and now..." T2

At the time of collecting this data, the 'Kei Tua o te Pae Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars' (MOE, 2004) had not been released (resource disseminated in February 2005), even though the Learning Stories format was originally introduced by Margaret Carr in 1998. However, many local centres, training institutions, and professional development programmes had been 'teaching' the assessment/programming tool from 1999 onwards. Why was there a delay for the kindergartens? Did these teachers need further support to integrate these approaches into their centre practice? Did they relate the Learning Story formats to their own understandings of Te Whaariki?

What the above highlights is that some teachers are required to take somewhat of a quantum leap into this next phase of curriculum development. Teachers trained prior to the 'Learning and Teaching Story' curriculum approach were trained in a teacher training programme with a strong child development knowledge emphasis (pre-1998 when the Learning Story format was introduced). These teachers are now being required to deconstruct their pedagogical interpretations of Te Whaariki, "While Te Whaariki also reflects perspectives on the early childhood curriculum which emphasises the importance of social and cultural contexts, its structure is essentially developmental" (Cullen, 1996, p.114).

The expectation is that teachers now have to combine the social and cultural aspects of Te Whaariki as they incorporate the Early Childhood Exemplar Assessment and Planning tool to move forward. Previously teachers have not necessarily had to move as far, ideologically, as they are being required to currently. As Nuttall points out "traditional reliance on free play as the cornerstone of early childhood programmes in New Zealand, versus the more active role of facilitating guided participation, may be creating a tension for New Zealand teachers" (2003, p.175).

Parents' Responses

Parents voiced no knowledge of the "official curriculum" (Kelly, 1999, p.3),

Te Whaariki or the assessment tool (Learning Stories), although both were self-evident at each centres {Observer notes}. The only comments regarding any reference to a curriculum were from two parents;

"I think that they probably get given a curriculum from head office and they have to follow it and it changes regularly." P7

"They have a sort of monthly thing don't they? – on the board by the office there, achievements and things like that?" P3

The parents used the term "*programme*" synonymously with the term curriculum, which was the traditional term that teachers used and still use. Their comments suggested that the curriculum or "*programming*" for them was focused on the activities that were presented, both child-initiated and teacher-initiated. Another important part of the "*programming*" for some parents was 'being part' of the 'happenings' of the centre and having the ability to observe their child's interactions within the context.

"I like the fact that you can just go down, sit down, have a coffee and a talk to the teachers, or just observe what's going on - and yeah we go on their trips." P4

"It's nice cos you get to see part of their world and where they are coming from and because they get caught up with [other] kids you can sit back and watch them interact without you." P2

For Centre One parents, part of this '*programme*' was also having access to the teachers for support in their parenting and as resources of ideas for ongoing learning in the home setting. A significantly important part of what this centre offered, is supported by the findings of the Best Evidence Synthesis "If the partnerships operate in collaborative ways that respect the integrity of families as thinking, feeling human beings ... by enabling them to add to their range of strategies for interacting with and encouraging their children ... the benefits for families and society of such programmes appear to be highly significant." (Biddulph et al, 2003, p.176)

"I like it also because I like to see how the teachers and staff deal with incidents that happen so I can use it. Add that to the parenting bucket." P3

The parents presented limited understandings of the purpose of the formal assessment documents, the children's profile books and learning stories. The discussion about the assessment tool was prompted by the researcher (me) after parents stated that they would like to have more feedback on their child's progress;

Researcher: *“So do you see the profile books?”*

“We can have a look at them anytime.” P3

“Looking at the profile books for my kids, I’ve never found anything in there that would lead me to suggest that I needed to work on... There’s lots of input from teachers ‘we did this today and this is how she expressed herself regarding this part of the book’. But there’s certainly nothing that says she should develop this further... I’ve only glanced at it once or twice – she’s showing me her pictures, and I haven’t realised the full weight of it - what the book is, what its purpose is or have been informed about it.” P2

“And seeing it at the end is probably no good if there’s an issue...” P2

This parent suggested there was limited information explaining the purpose of these living documents, and another (below) discussed the availability of these documents to parents who are unable to attend the centre;

“My husband starts early and doesn’t finish until five o’clock so he never gets to see those books until the end.” P1

In order to establish successful and meaningful assessment tools there is a need to have effective lines of communication with the parents, and a need for the parents to understand the purposes of the assessment documentation in use.

Whilst extensive programming and curriculum development occurs in both settings, there appears to be a need to articulate the curriculum more clearly to enhance parents’ understandings. As expressed in other sections of the study, Te Whaariki is a complex and comprehensive document. Whilst staff may be still be coming to terms with all the sociocultural underpinnings, there is still a need to articulate this to parents in a logical and clear format. Is this due to the current transition phase as teachers move to the implementation of learning stories and a curriculum that is facilitated by this format? Or is there insufficient time to share pedagogy with parents? Nuttall (2003) suggests that teachers in early childhood education “have typically few opportunities to meet together outside teaching times to discuss general pedagogical issues, including understanding their role in children’s learning” (p.166).

In summary, it would seem that the teachers shared a preference for their *“old style of planning”* using strands from Te Whaariki, as they could continue to use a core-curriculum

approach to planning; that is, where the teachers set the curriculum activities. Problematic for them has been the move to implementing the Learning Stories approach, where the curriculum direction is initiated by the children, and different approaches that empower the children for example, guided participation and apprenticeship, are required. They felt that the support from their association in this area had been inadequate.

T2 Respondent Validation comment:

“The potential of Learning Stories was emerging, [it] was exciting and the path to doing this was still unclear, therefore what was working was still used.”

Some parents expressed satisfaction that they believed they were part of the curriculum at the kindergarten, (for example; feeling part of the setting, getting ideas for home, being able to observe their children, accessing teachers about their child’s well-being). However, parents appear to have a limited knowledge of the ‘official’ curriculum – Te Whaariki, and the learning stories format as an assessment or planning tool, and raise issues of the need for further and appropriate ways in which to communicate their children’s progress in the setting.

4.2.2 Understandings about Literacy in the Curriculum

Hamer (2002) writes that in order for early childhood settings to be effective literacy facilitators we need to create literacy-enriched environments. The purpose of this is “to help educators to create as many purposeful and meaningful opportunities for children to engage in literacy as possible, so that all children develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to become active participants in a literate society” (p.132). She recommends that the literacy practices in early childhood settings should be broad-based, holistic, meaningful, purposeful and reflect family and community, based on active relationships with people, places and things, and that these practices need to empower the children. The ways educators facilitate opportunities for effective literacy development was a particular interest to me in this study.

Cullen (2002) recommends that the following list of ‘opportunities’ need to be included in centre-based practices: a wide variety of literacy resources, planned routines, planned experiences, accessing informal literacy opportunities, book reading interwoven throughout the programme, phonological awareness and letter-sound relationship and writing. An addition to Cullen’s list, is a contribution from McLachlan-Smith and Shuker (2002) that includes oral language skills and learning dispositions of motivation to, and an appreciation of literacy.

Teachers' Responses

Both teachers commented, as mentioned earlier about the “*all encompassing*” T2 and “*holistic*” T1 nature of literacy in the curriculum. Both commented on their “*strong-core curriculum*” that they offered in the centres. The teachers varied in their responses when asked about literacy in the curriculum, initially responding in a broad fashion that it was “*pretty much in every area*” and that it was “*informal*”.

The literacy practices included an array of activities that were resource-based child-initiated activities such as “*story books, painting, pre-writing skills such as drawing, gluing and cutting, name identification games, matching activities.*” In addition, a list of teacher-directed activities included the following, “*language games, story reading and telling (in all its various forms, rhymes, story books, magnetic stories, poems, puppets), and profile books [reference and working in]*” T1.

T2's list of literacy related curriculum referred to many of the above as well as “*sandpit and playdough – when we scribble in the sand and make playdough letters; library time – and taking the books home, music, talk at kai time, book writing, trips out, treasure maps, bringing parents into the centre that are authors*” and “*we do a lot of talking to the children. We ask a lot of questions. We try to get them to think about the processes of things*” T2. The list continued into many and almost all areas of the core curriculum and references to interactions between teacher and child. What was noticeable was that the teacher with more teaching experience was better able to articulate the wide variety of literacy-based activities woven throughout the centre than the more recently trained teacher. The teacher with more teaching experience was also more relaxed in the interview setting and possibly this assisted in being able to give fuller answers to specific questions. However, there was evidence that more activities than stated were present in both settings (refer Appendix 4).

The teachers' both spoke about some of the various routine practices that are planned for children's literacy learning. T2 talked about the “*library time*” where books are selected and then go home, the “*signing in procedure*”, as well as the morning tea and mat-time practices that are literacy-related routines. T1 mentioned the book reading and name-related activities practiced upon arrival, at mat time and are evident on all the “*belongings*” the children have in the centre.

Ethnic diversity was an area of the curriculum that T2 expressed as having to be *'imported'*, *'We are monocultural... so I think that diversity has to be brought out by the staff and the programme which we offer, and there lies a dilemma. Did we introduce [content that] is not coming from the children?'* The parents at the centre also expressed similar views regarding their beliefs about themselves *"the community's not particularly diverse"* P6. Even within what is perceived as a *"monocultural"* or homogenous group, a broad view of diversity should be inclusive of the diverse abilities, gender, family structures, religious, racial, and cultural considerations when working with children and their family groupings. Jackson and Adams contend that the development of genuine partnerships between home and educational institutions requires an acknowledgement of the enormous diversity present in the community literacy practices (2002, p.169).

At Centre One the teacher felt that they were at a loss in *'how to'* implement a diversified programme to be inclusive of the wide range of different ethnic families within their setting, but felt there was a sense of *"It's my perception that outside of Te Reo Maori there would not be much concession to those ethnic differences"* T1. Both teachers' responses appeared to reflect an uncertainty about their role in drawing on these diverse sociocultural influences that are relevant and could strengthen their programme, as currently it would appear that their interpretations are considering the influence of ethnic diversity only.

T2 Respondent Validation comment:

"My point here was one of control, I did not want the teachers driving through our values and beliefs of diversity in the programme, it needs to come from the community."

Researcher Observations of enactment of the curriculum

Literacy Practices

The literacy practices of both centres have been summarised in sets of tables (refer Appendix 4.1 and 4.2). Both centres offered a wide variety of literacy opportunities and experiences through the use of focus centres, literacy routines, planned and some emergent experiences, book reading (particularly at the end of session, and some dispersed), excellent centre resources (additional language games stored in office and storeroom), the environmental print (sometimes restrictions here due to minimal wall space (C1), at C2 the wall displays were in

the process of being re-planned), and writing opportunities. Also evident were child-child, adult-child, teacher-child and teacher-teacher interactions, by means of teacher-directed (both individual, small group and large group) and child-initiated activities. The only area where few observations were gathered was in the area of phonological awareness and letter-sound relationships, although more observations were collected at Centre One where more mat-time experiences were observed. This could possibly be due to the distance that I kept from the teachers being observed and/or those 'opportunities' did not present when collecting data.

Learning Interactions

Teacher and child interactions at times were difficult to collect, as discussed above, although some were collected particularly at mat-times, and at certain times throughout the field work. These interactions are extremely important in the early childhood setting and the knowledge and relevance to them is significant, "teaching practice and responsive interactions within the early childhood settings in turn influence outcomes for children" claim Podmore and Meade (2000, p.42). Dahlberg (as cited in Podmore & Meade, 2000) refers to the instances of the "pedagogy of listening". Educators need to be able to observe the informal learning opportunities to be able to "tailor their support to meet individual children's strengths, interests and current literacy understandings" (Hamer & Adams, 2003, p.82). Hamer and Adams recommend using a variety of strategies (scaffolding, co-construction, deconstruction, problematising, modelling and facilitating) and techniques to assist the social construction of the child's learning via demonstrating, suggesting, describing recalling, questioning and using humour. Both teachers were asked about the teacher-child interactions;

R: *"Teacher-child interactions, what are your understandings of this as a teaching tool?"*

T1 *"... trying to ask open-ended questions, trying to wait to give time for a child to respond... So teacher- child interactions hopefully I would get down to the child's level... Take time to wait if I have asked a question, take time to wait to hear what the child's response is going to be... having warm responsive interactions with children to demonstrate that I'm interested in what they are doing. The 40 questions can sometimes be off-putting for a child."*

and

T2 *"Well I think that we're talking to children, we're asking them questions but we're also telling them stories about our experiences. We are encouraging them to tell us their experiences. We're just talking, breathing it all the time. It's a process that I think comes a little bit like breathing, you don't think about it you just do it. But you*

sort of do it without really giving it a lot thought. It just occurs... Try to get them to think about the processes of different things... and then we try to extend that.” T2

Teachers demonstrated a partial understanding of the importance of these interactions with children. Te Whaariki states that “there should be plenty of opportunities for one-to-one communication between adults and children. Adults should encourage children to initiate conversation, listen to children attentively, and help develop interaction” (MOE, 1996, p.73). The curriculum guide does not give any strategies or techniques for this to be done. These interactions are crucially important, Wylie (2001) claims that even after five years, whilst there is no single factor that will guarantee every child becomes competent, what she believes matters is “how children interact with adults and others, and how they engage in activities particularly those that use symbols and language” (p.33) – important interpreters of these symbols are the early childhood educators.

Another formal literacy interaction is via the learning experience of ‘mat / whanau time’. Centre One offered two mat-times with a duration of sometimes up to thirty minutes and still engaging the children [Observation notes 8/11/04]. This included a teacher-directed activity, for example, a science experiment, handing out of baking, or story-time (generally at the end of the session). Centre Two offered one mat-time experience which was at the end of the session where a shared-story was read. When asked about the various learning outcomes for the children from these kinds of experiences, they replied;

“I do wonder about the learning outcomes for children within that mat[time], that large group setting, because it is so big...and every person sitting there has a different perspective.” T1

and

“I think it depends on the mat time...hopefully they’re learning to focus on something for an extended period of time and are going to be able to sit. I know those aren’t necessarily kindergarten things, but they are things they’re going to have to develop when they go through to school and I know I’m not preparing them for school...they were being asked questions about ‘I wonder what this means’. ... some of the children prefer to work in smaller groups or individuals. Sometimes even just being in that social setting can be a little bit [scary].” T2

Both teachers question the benefits of mat-times, this planned routine evokes an ‘age-old’ debate within the sector centred on the appropriateness and learning outcomes of mat-time.

Mat-time as a process is full of literacy experiences (as expressed by T2), as group times are sociocultural in their intent, but they are imposed upon the learners. Have teachers asked the children or do we regularly ask the children what they want? Can children choose to come and be given a choice at mat-time? Is it an organisational and management tool that needs to be in place so that children can be 'settled' at the end of a session and safely transitioned to their caregivers? Finally are the pedagogical reasons for the preservation of this routine revisited by the staff on a regular basis based on the group of children in attendance?

These understandings about the teacher-child interactions raise questions about the need for specific techniques and strategies in teacher-child interactions to be further developed within the settings. Again these are missing in the curriculum document. All teacher interactions should be reflected on and appraised. McNaughton (1995) points out when discussing a child's profile, both the child and the teacher's interaction should be audited as "An assessment of the actions of both educators and of children. Individual profiles of children's expertise are needed, but so too are profiles of joint actions ..." (p.76).

Parents' Responses

When asked about the literacy practices the centre offered their child, the understanding of literacy narrowed to a focus on the more traditional perspective of literacy at Centre Two;

"I guess they get read a lot of stories. They see the written word everywhere. Perhaps not a great deal? Maybe it's just sort of building up a foundation of confidence and they're not scared to take it on when they do get to school. It's all a start..., they're confident enough to think that's okay I'll just try again. They don't really do writing as such or anything structural at kindy." P7

and

"Perhaps just the sitting down and drawing and writing underneath.... She got quite interested in the alphabet." P5

At Centre One, the parents' understandings of literacy practices ranged from the traditional through to some of the broader understandings of the sociocultural underpinnings that impact upon a child's literacy learning;

"Its probably the access to the computer." P1

"I think that she is learning to adapt to people around her." P4

"Kindy's been good for the social interaction, in terms of literacy ... teaching to read, numbers, te reo maori." P2

"It's been the social things with other people and being on his own and dealing with other people, making decisions, communicating with people. It's been good for him."

P3

The parents were enthusiastic about what the programme offered their children in terms of their literacy learning from a broad perspective, and acknowledged the input and learning that the children gain from working alongside each other.

There were two parents that questioned whether enough was occurring in the centre that would assist their children's literacy learning, one parent from each of the centres;

Researcher: *What activities does your child do at the centre to assist them in becoming literate?*

Centre 1 *"So he's developing his computer skills, our one is in pieces at home... so um yeah I can't say that the kindy's assisting him."* P1

and

Centre 2 *"Perhaps not a great deal?"* (Full comment listed above P7)

Both of these parents were generally satisfied with the learning experiences that their children encountered at the kindergarten; however when specifically discussing literacy in the curriculum, the parents questioned whether enough was being done.

"They don't really do writing as such or anything structural at kindy. The difference at a paid preschool is that there's a lot more. You're allowed actual sessions where they sit down and do writing skills and reading skills and the alphabet and things like that. Because they have a lot higher teacher: child ratio." P7

It would appear that both of these parents see literacy learning in a reasonably traditional sense of reading and writing. These literacy related queries (is there enough in the curriculum for children in their reading and writing development?) are questions that staff should be able to answer or respond to, when and if they are asked. But are they able to answer them adequately? Have staff been given the opportunity to develop adequate and current understandings of literacy learning in the early years? And ultimately are they asked these questions by the parents directly? What was of interest was that the list that the parents articulated for literacy in the home, such as the *'drawing, writing, talking, music, board games, and puzzles'* were not listed as literacy practices within the centre context. Or were the parents simply listing aspects of the literacy curriculum that were different from those offered in the home? Is it possible that they do not understand the relevance that all the

activities, resources and teaching practices in developing and planning literacy pathways for their children's literacy learning?

In conclusion, the teachers described literacy in the curriculum as holistic and all encompassing, listing many activities, practices, routines, and resources that were available at the centres, which promote literacy learning. Both teachers state they believed they have a strong core-curriculum. It was evident that there were many more literacy related practices occurring in the curriculum than the teachers mentioned. Diversity in the curriculum appeared to be seen with a '*bicultural*' and '*monocultural*' lens considering ethnic diversity only. Teachers stated that they were struggling with how to implement diversity to accommodate the varying cultural lenses and for the other the perceived lack of cultural diversity.

The parents were generally satisfied with the curriculum delivery in regards to literacy learning, however there were two parents who questioned whether there was enough being done in the literacy area. The parents' views of literacy appeared to narrow when they expressed what they believed were literacy practices in the centre. In saying that sociocultural principles of interactions with others, and independence from parents were offered by two parents as having relevance in literacy opportunities available to their children in the settings.

As a researcher observer I noted that a wide range of literacy practices were interwoven throughout the centres through literacy resources, planned routines, planned experiences, informal literacy opportunities, book reading woven throughout the programme, as well as the availability of writing opportunities. Whilst numerous teacher-child interactions were observed, the pedagogical understandings and importance of these interactions appeared limited.

4.2.3 Understandings about how children learn literacy.

Teachers' Responses

The teachers presented their beliefs about how children learn in the early childhood setting. "The theoretical debate in relation to literacy is probably the least understood by many early childhood educators. Exactly how children learn the foundations of literacy and what is the best way to provide these foundations" is of huge relevance to the sector, claim Hamer and Adams (2002, p.123), who further state that educators need a strong base for understanding

the “how children learn” about literacy, and this is more important than “how the literacy should be taught”. Unpacking the teachers’ understandings of how children learn was important for the purposes of this investigation. T1 presented the following ideas on how a child learns in the setting;

T1 *“The learning outcomes for them appear to me sometimes to occur by osmosis really, because they’re exposed to it, their learning I mean. You can try to teach a child to write their name... but there are things that happen to that child in their home environment, for example, and then the child suddenly appears to be able to write their name. And it doesn’t appear that the influence, the input that I had made any huge contribution to their ability.”*

Researcher: *“Can you explain osmosis to me?”*

T1 *“So I actually think that it’s a combination of all those things, like developmental, metacognitive, the confidence to try things out in a familiar and comfortable setting. So it’s all those things working together to produce an outcome for the child”*

Teacher One, presents an understanding of both a constructivist view, influenced by affective factors that may impact the child’s interest and confidence to ‘learn’, and a developmental view – where naturally occurring development happens according to external influences, which can be assisted, enhanced and accelerated by their family context. As the teacher points out, there is a ‘little of everything’, a sociocultural perspective of literacy learning, “learning is socially constructed through interactions with others” (Cullen, 2002, p.67), a cognitive constructivists perspective, “literacy learning that highlights the idea that children are active in their own learning” (Cullen, 2002, p.66), as well as a developmental theory (developmentally appropriate practices), and lastly the motivational theory, “the development of positive attitudes and self-constructs” (Hamer & Adams, 2003, p.43).

Teacher Two expressed the literacy learning from a variety of perspectives; this first quote demonstrates a technical perspective;

T2 *“Literacy [learning includes] across the middle of line, starting in the left hand corner at the top or bottom. What’s top? What’s bottom? Understanding top, you know, when is top top? I mean top can change. You put something else on top of top, what’s top? So there’s all those concepts that children have to learn that are literacy orientated, or have a literacy beam to it or a need of knowledge that are important as starting to develop fine motor skills. Developing tracking with the eye.”*

and

T2 *“Well I think that we’re talking to children, we’re asking them questions but we’re also telling them stories about our experiences. We’re talking, breathing it all the time. It’s a process that I think comes a little bit like breathing, you don’t think about it you just do it”.*

The first paragraph from the transcript of T2 describes an understanding of some the concepts that need to be gathered on the journey of literacy learning. Cullen recommends that, “content knowledge is an integral part of authentic learning, and that attention can be given to content learning in ways that are consistent with Te Whaariki and socio-cultural principles” (2003, p.285).

After presenting a very strong skill-orientated approach of the writing process, T2 in the second paragraph of the transcript, reflected a seemingly relaxed approach that presented a more naturalistic view of a child’s learning processes, which could be seen as contrasting with the first paragraph. It reflected the importance that this teacher places on the relationship that oral language learning has for ongoing literacy learning. This quote could also be interpreted as a being informed from a sociocultural perspective, and as such a broad base of literacy and language is around us all the time, influencing and impacting on a child’s ability to learn and what the child learns.

As discussed earlier in Chapter 2, embedded in an early childhood programme should be the core principles from “Te Whaariki” (Holistic Development, Relationships, Family and Community, and Empowerment). One principle that presented as being contentious was that of ‘empowerment’ and was referred to by both teachers;

T2 *“You’ve got a situation where the children are driving the curriculum, the programme. I think that is frightening teachers – personally and professionally”*

and

T1 *“How some things are acceptable to us as a teaching team, but other things are not. This boy thing (buzz light year), might not be so acceptable as the girl thing – [that is] my little pony.”*

The teachers presented that at times implementing the empowerment strand of the curriculum in the day to day programming at the centres, was challenging and potentially ‘threatening’ for staff to consider. Both as an underlying principle (T2) and about the selection of what is deemed appropriate for staff to access as ‘curriculum’ (T1).

Parents' Responses

The parents were not asked directly for their understandings of how children learn. What has been filtered from the transcripts are some of their implicit understandings of how children learn. There was an eclectic range of understandings (as illustrated in the section on 'literacy definitions') of how learning occurs, including traditional readiness models of literacy learning;

"So it's more child-directed than teacher-directed as an activity. It's probably there if they're ready for it." P5

as well as the more traditional models of reading;

"I guess their ability to read and write, and understand what you are reading and writing." P6

There were some shared understandings about the learning and experiences being socially constructed;

"At home there was no way that she was going to do it, but she'd go to kindy and sees somebody else doing it and then she'd come home and would want to do it, so that peer influence was quite good in that respect." P5

and

"Its been the social things, although he's got two siblings... he relies on them a lot ... well at kindy he has to rely on himself to communicate with people." P3

and learning-based notions of gender;

"Yeah I think that's a boy / girl thing. Girls will just start doing it, whereas boys do need a bit of encouragement to start enjoying it. If they decide to do it themselves they will, but a lot of children won't do it themselves, but once you actually sit down and do it with them [they] will really get into it." P7

Throughout the interviews the parents continued to express other understandings of learning theories, this was evidenced in the following;

"Maori is the official language of New Zealand and it's firing up those bits of your brain that language does." P1

notions of popular and debatable brain development theory.

"Mary is four and there are two different learning styles, Mary's very visual and seems to pick up the language side of things really quickly. Robert on the other hand – he likes to do actions, so music is for him, and that involves dancing." P2

"Well that might just be a learning style thing." P3

Learning styles were referred to by two of the parents who described their children as being visual, kinaesthetic or auditory learners. There was a long discussion about what motivates a

child to learn, specifically, that if a child shows an interest in a subject or area, then they want to find out more. These thoughts I believe are based on broad understandings of motivational theories, which was captured in the following quote;

“If it’s fun you’ve got your enthusiasm, you’ve got your motivation.” P2

In conclusion teachers demonstrated an array of understandings of how children learn, including developmental, cognitive and some sociocultural theories that impact upon literacy learning. Both teachers expressed that at times they were pedagogically challenged with the implementation of the empowerment strand of the curriculum. From the data collected there were limited discussions of the influence of the social construction of knowledge and the influence of the environment on the child’s learning in the setting.

Parents have varying ‘popular’ learning theories that appear to be embedded in their understandings about literacy learning. They range from views of readiness theories through to motivational theories. These shared beliefs from the parents, along with specific statements about wanting to know more, indicate that parents have a genuine interest in understanding how their children learn in the early childhood setting.

4.2.4 The role of the teacher in children’s literacy learning

Teachers’ Responses

The role of teachers in promoting early childhood literacy is crucial, claim McLachlan-Smith and Shuker (2002). The manner in which the educators structure the environment, provide literacy resources and experiences, and the way in which they interact with the children, are all integral to providing an enriched literacy-based programme. McLachlan-Smith and Shuker caution however that “whilst integrating literacy aspects into the centre is relatively simple ... it requires commitment on the part of staff, specific knowledge and thorough planning” (p.103).

The teachers’ transcripts illustrate quite clearly the strong emphasis and reliance their teaching teams have had on “*teacher-directed, core-curriculum* (a wide selection of activities set out for children to experience)” when accessing Te Whaariki for curriculum implementation. The learning stories format and assessment tool that the teams are now expected to use for curriculum planning, has thrown their role as ‘teacher’ into a certain amount of disarray and uncertainty (as discussed in section 4.2.1);

“Te Whaariki - this would be the old planning model possibly and [we would] talk about what we perceive the child’s developmental need to be, where they need to go next and fit one of the goals of Te Whaariki around that... so it all feels up in the air at the moment!” T1

and when discussing the shift to implementing the learning story tool;

“Well what’s my role now? I’ve got this knowledge, I know all about child development... but I am supposed to take my direction from the children.” T2

As stated in the above quotes, these teachers believe they implemented a ‘teacher-initiated’ approach, rather than a curriculum that is determined by the children and co-constructed with the teachers. In my observations and throughout the interviews there were references made to the informal incidences of co-constructing knowledge with the children. T1 referred to situations where scaffolding of literacy opportunities with the children had occurred;

“When I am outside [writing] observations... they{the children} are very interested in what I am writing about and often will ask me “What are you doing?” and I explain to them I am writing some notes about how the children are playing...” T1

“When I help a child hang up their paintings, and they haven’t written their name I’ll ask them, ‘can you write your name?’ and if the child says no I will spell out the letters of the child’s name as I write them down.” T1

The following script from Centre Observation notes (Day 1), clearly demonstrates the scaffolding of knowledge delivered in a meaningful way that occurred through an informal literacy opportunity (from a ‘shop’ scenario in the dramatic play centre).

T2 “I don’t have to pay?”

OC (Other child) “I’ve got tree dollars”

C (Child) “Everything’s free”

OC “No! no! some for 9 and some for 6 “

C “No everything’s free”

T2 “How will I tell if it’s 9 or 6”

OC “See the ...”

C “They are 9, 6 dollars so you can have both of them”

T2 “ – Do you have a delivery truck?”

C “Yes it’s in a dumpyard!”

OC “\$300.00 that’s it!”

C “No \$200.00”

T2 “Holy Comoly”

C *"No you can [have] the butter and I'll give this to you."*

T2 *digs into own pocket and produces a real plastic card. The child swipes the card and returns it to the teacher. Another child comes into the area and asks the teacher what they are doing?*

Finally both teachers believed emphatically that their *"passion", "my drive" and "my love of books ... and [my] attitudes"* is what facilitates the literacy learning within the centre context and for the children they educate.

Parents' Responses

For the parents, the role of the teacher appeared to be all-inclusive and versatile, ranging from facilitating a richly resourced environment, to being positive role models, and providing support for them as parents;

"I think that ultimately the teachers have all of our children's interests at the top and that's what we [like], their beliefs are the same as ours, and their values, I think? They don't tolerate any kind of negative comments if they see them or hear them. They're certainly trying to foster respect." P7

"There are all the tools there. Everything's there if they're wanted, there's the alphabet books or the games. It's all there and they put it out for them." P6

"I like it also because I like to see how the staff deal with incidents that happen so I can use it." P3

"More activities and more messy activities." P1

"Kindy have been really good actually helping us as parents." P1

The parents valued the professionalism of the teaching teams, and thought that they were responsive to the children *"so they are obviously onto it pretty quickly if there's a change"* P7, referring to an incident of a child moving from the afternoon session time to the morning session, and the child began withdrawing from involvement in the programme. They valued the balance and empathy within the teacher / child relationships, believing that *"they [the staff] are consistent, you know that this is the way it is... and then it is explained to them [the children]"* P2 .

To summarise, it would seem the teacher's overriding emphasis was the belief that it is their personal commitment to literacy that drives its facilitation in the curriculum. Teachers believe they provide a programme that is teacher-directed and still fundamentally based upon the developmental appropriate practices, but evidence demonstrated that sociocultural approaches

were used within the curriculum delivery. Teachers felt their future role in curriculum delivery was uncertain, due to the current transitional implementation of the learning story format (discussed earlier in section 4.2.1). Parents appreciate the professionalism of the teaching team, and they believe that staff are ‘consistent’ and ‘onto it’ in their role as their children’s teachers.

4.3 Parent Teacher Partnerships

4.3.1 How the partnerships have been working in the two centres

If literacy practices match across the home, centre and other community-based settings, then children will experience continuity in their literacy learning. This will assist in their motivation to participate in literacy related practices. Effective home and centre links are crucial for the effectiveness of the literacy process, and “can have dramatic and positive impacts in children’s achievement” emphasise Biddulph et al (2003, p.vi). Without developing strong partnerships literacy policy can not be implemented successfully (Hamer & Adams, 2002). Partnerships and links were a focus in this study.

Formal links with home and centres.

When the children enrol at either centre the parents are requested to complete an enrolment form, including all the required information, family details, birth date, contacts, allergies, immunisation and so forth. Along with this form is another generic form asking for details of their child’s personal interests, abilities, relationships and experiences, entitled the ‘Consultation with Parents’ form (refer to Appendix 6).

Further to this, both centres have developed their own additional forms. Centre One has a form enquiring how the parents would like to be involved in the programme – suggesting committee work, parent help during the session, and parent help on centre excursions. At the time of the fieldwork, Centre One was working on establishing a formalised parent consultation system, initiated from feedback in their annual survey, where parents indicated they would like to ‘find out about their child’s progress’ – “...we are trying the formal interview to talk about the learning story observations we have made [around the child]” T1.

In addition to the generic form ‘Consultation with Parents’ Centre Two has developed the ‘Parent voice’ format for ongoing collaboration with the parents regarding their child’s assessment (adapted from the Parent Voice sheet from the Learning Story assessment tool). This form is given to the parents after their child has had a learning story written about their

learning experiences in the centre (approximately 3-4 times during their enrolment period). *“‘Parent Voice’ sheet sent out to parents approximately 3-4 times during their enrolment, when a Learning Story is completed on the child”* T2. This teacher was *“interested”* when as an interviewer I reported that parents wanted some more formalised time to talk to the parents about their children, *“I’ve not heard of it from parents so it is nice to hear, it’s worthwhile doing”* T2.

Informal links between home and centre.

These vital links between home and centre were operating in various traditions. Firstly, the parents thought that the staff’s interactions with the ‘chat and welcome/departure’ type were positive, relaxed and informative, as they shared information about their child in an informal manner. This is reflected in the parent’s comments that the staff are *“approachable”* and *“really helpful”* and they feel that they could ask *“anything”* of the staff. They appreciated the *“quick chats at the gate”*, and they *“seem to know whom they’ve [the child] been playing with, who their friends are and what they like playing on the most.”* P7

Secondly, the parents spoke of links of a more consultative /inquiry level, which the parents stated were reasonably robust and responsive;

“I share a lot of stuff and I am quite comfortable talking with them about anything that I have concerns about and have done” P3 (third child at centre).

Others highlighted the support aspect,

“Actually they have been really brilliant. They were the ones that picked up that he was a wee bit clever ... they have been really helpful and they’ve given us lots of information.” P1

“I feel comfortable sharing some things – you know – is that normal?” P4

There were also opportunities where the staff facilitated links with the wider community;

“If they’ve made a special friend, they’ll say this is {child’s} special friend and introduce you to the mum.” P5

“...even going down to the Old People’s home. It is something different for them and you get to go along on their outings.” P4

In contrast, for some parents the sharing and gaining of information about the home setting from parent to teacher presented a varied response from the parents. One parent felt uncomfortable about this process as she felt *“you’ve got to be careful otherwise people in the*

community think you are just skiting" P1. Others suggested that they would, but often chose not to for a variety of reasons; *"often don't get the opportunity"* P6, simply *"I just don't do it"* P5, and *"I wouldn't think of it"* P7.

However parents supported opportunities to share and link with the home by way of their children's interests. A successful link was exemplified when parents supported their children to bring and share resources and meaningful experiences from home with the staff. *"I remember taking pictures in for {teacher name} before, and they made a big fuss"*, P7 and *"My child takes bugs along and they get talked about and shared."* P6 Another example was when a parent shared a child's home interest with the staff, *"[Child] went through a stage of dress-ups and role playing..... and from that they had a dress-up day"* P2. *"What are we going take to whanau time?"* P2, this inclusive practice was another tradition that many parents support when assisting their children as they make important decisions about what 'treasure' they are going to take to 'show' at mat-time.

The above links indicate clearly that there are open channels for the literacy experiences to be shared with the centre staff. They are not always shared from parent to teacher for a variety of reasons, as expressed above. With the implementation and thorough explanation of the 'Parent Voice' sheet and other enhancements (refer later section 4.3.2) to the programme, this could assist parents in sharing meaningful literacy experiences to strengthen the vital links from home to centre.

Parent participation in the programme

Whilst parents are considered the child's first and main 'literacy facilitator', (Hamer & Adams 2003; Cullen 2002; Jackson & Adams 2002; Ryan 2002; McLachlan-Smith & Shuker 2002; McNaughton 2002), the challenge is to work out ways that support a 'family strengths' model where the social and cultural practices of the family are recognised as having much to offer young children's literacy learning, as opposed to a 'deficit' model where various weaknesses in the home are seen as the cause of children's poor literacy acquisition.

Accessing the 'parent resource' potential as parents return to the workforce and have busier lifestyles (discussed further in Chapter 5) needs constant reappraisal in the early childhood programme. "Where educators provide flexible curriculum that responds to the unique interests, strengths and experiences of children, early childhood educators not only validate children's home experiences but also provide opportunities to engage and involve parents in

the early childhood setting” recommends Hamer and Adams (2002, p.129). This experience is going to be variable in every setting and for individual family units within the settings.

Centre One

Teacher Response

There were very clear differences between how the parent / teacher ‘partnerships’ worked at the two centres. Since beginning teaching three years ago, T1 stated there had not been a system of ‘parent help’ in place at Centre One and commented that maybe it was time to implement more opportunities for parents to be more involved. T1 faced opposition to this occurring based on what appeared to be historical reasons, as well as a current low attendance at evening events and minimal support on the management committee;

“There was an... initiative for older women [in the centre-based setting] to read to children, so I brought this idea back to kindergarten and was told that ‘we have been there done that’ and that feels quite deflating sometimes, that kind of thing.” T1

and

“We did try to invite parents to a presentation that [we all] did about a particular aspect within the curriculum. We had about three people who attended ... so it can be quite discouraging. We had a committee meeting last night and there were the three office bearers and two teachers. It was a minimal turnout.” T1

“We would like parents to contribute more to our kindergarten, but maybe it is up to us to ask the parents as well? What is the reason we don’t have a parent help system as such? There are various approaches ... washing, Grandma’s reading stories. A parent had come down and helped with waiata but then her child went to school and that fell of.” T1

Parents’ Responses

At the same time the parents’ perspective on their involvement in the programme was;

“Just hanging out down there is kinda good... every now and again to spend two hours to see part of their world.” P2

and

“I like the fact that you can just go down and sit down and have a coffee and a talk to the teachers, or just observe what’s going on... and we go on their trips it’s something different for them.” P4

Maybe the existing 'open' nature of the setting and involvement of having parents feeling able to remain in the setting with no expectations placed upon them, is of more benefit to this group of parents than creating a feeling that they have to stay and perform particular tasks. In this setting there appeared to be a need as a teaching team to explore ideas of 'partnerships' as they exist with the current parent community and to continue to explore different ways the parents could be involved in the programme.

When the parents were asked what they believed their role was in the setting, the following list was suggested; *"our role is to support the authority, and the helping part of things"*, *"they [the children] see you following the rules so that it reaffirms what they are getting told and how they interact with authority"*, *"definitely a supportive thing"*, *"a comfort zone thing [if I am there]"*, *"[to allow your children to be] independent of you"* and *"they get to see you interacting with all the other children."*

What stands out from the above parent comments were the quotes discussing the 'authoritative' role of the teachers. This could indicate a notion of hierarchy that people adopt when in the context of 'teaching and learning', where it is believed that people in teaching positions, have more knowledge (which can equate to power), or simply that they want their children to understand the 'culture of learning' at educational institutions. 'Political processes' Freire (1990) are part of any institution and the nuances are both subtle and overt. These 'power relationships' appeared to be acknowledged by some of the parents. Are these acknowledged by the teachers?

Centre Two

Teacher Response

Different 'partnerships' were presented at Centre Two. There was a parent help system in place that was voluntary (on average, two duties per term are invited). Some parents shared their career related strengths, for example, a dog handler, an airline pilot and steward, and there was a well established management committee. However T2 presented the following challenges in establishing and maintaining their teacher parent partnerships:

"On the programme it impacts that they [the parents] have quite a high expectation of education. But in saying that, they're supportive. I'm fortunate here that if I want money, I can get money quite quickly. I sometimes find it hard to get 'hands'. If I want physical labour they'll just say to go and pay someone to do it. I see that as a bit

of a waste of money. Even if they are busy, that's two or three books that I could buy." T2

Researcher: *So in regards to expectations?*

"The expectation of the parents are ...skill based... I can't say all parents and I don't mean that, but often these are the parents that make themselves known." T2

Researcher: *How do they make themselves known?*

"At meetings, committee meetings... You will hear from time to time a parent say – have you heard that this is going on? They've heard a rumour from somewhere and they're just letting us know for whatever reason..." T2

[no specific details were shared]

So whilst community support was obviously given at this centre, in an established and traditional form – parent help, management committee, parents' careers accessed as a resource, it would appear that at times there were differences in perceived priorities for the teacher interviewed. *"I sometimes find it hard to get 'hands'. If I want physical labour they'll just say to go and pay someone to do it - I see that as a bit of a waste of money."* T2

The quotes above, I believe illustrate that there was a lack of openness in the communication between parents and teachers. This was unsettling for teachers and perhaps reflects the 'complexities' of groups of people working together. In contrast when discussing the parent help role during a session, T2 suggested that *"The parent help [are working like the] unpaid servant...we should give them meaningful work with the children, even if it means we go and cut up the apples."* It is this teacher's belief that there should be a shift in the *"power-base from teacher to community."*

Parents' Responses

The responses from the parents at Centre Two (where a 'parent help' system was in place) when asked about parent involvement were as follows; *"Well you can parent help whenever you like"*, with another adding, *"But all the parent help you do, its sort of doing the 'jobs'. You're not actually involved in the programme"*. This parent explains further *"You get a little list like, morning tea, so you're not encouraged as such to ... go over and run a little group."* The parents commented that *"A lot of parents do baking and things like that"*, and *"If there's a trip they'll want a parent helper"*. In addition this centre did access parents as a resource base or 'funds of knowledge' *"they bought in a whole lot of parents who have music strengths"* and *"We had a friend who has written a book ... If they think that it's beneficial for the children they'll jump at it."*

There was generally a level of acceptance that what was occurring was the established culture of taking a 'domestic help' role when parents were working in the setting. Possibly there is a marginalisation of a parent's resourcefulness in the programme by offering them these menial tasks. One parent clearly stated that she would like to be more involved in the 'programme'. Why has she not felt comfortable enough to get more involved or to talk to staff about being more involved? Again this raises Frierean ideas of the 'political process' that co-exist in institutions created potentially by tradition or / and the complexities of working with large groups of people and the perceived and possible difficulties involved in being collaborative.

At Centre Two the parents, when asked what their role was in this setting, responded as follows; "*It's the third part of the triangle*", "*A monitoring – a quality control thing*", "*a support to the child*" and "*of the programme*", as well as "[I do a great deal] *of explaining of the 'social learning' about relationships* [as the child relays what has happened at kindy each day regarding theirs and other children's interactions] *and how to deal with* [their] *own situation*", and finally "[This is the] *first sort of verging to independence ... so I really have to leave him to it at the centre*". This group of parents emphasised the support they provided for their child in assisting them to understand the social interactions that occur during a session, as they sometimes need further clarification, by a knowledgeable and trusted 'other'.

4.3.2 Enhancements for Supporting and Developing the Partnerships

Studying the collaborative relationships between families and the educational institutions was an objective of this study, recognising the importance of "[increasing] the awareness by each party of the other's literacy practices and needs" Cairney, (cited in Jackson & Adams, 2002, p.169). Whilst education settings desire effective parent teacher partnerships and parental involvement, this relationship needs to be clear about the balance of power within the relationship. Maintenance of the balance of power needs to lie with the educational professionals who ultimately bear the responsibility for the centre and maybe then "we [can] move beyond tokenism, [where] parents can truly become partners [with]... children's literacy development" recommends Cairney (cited in Jackson & Adams, 2002, p.169). Dialogue with parents, as well as the sharing of the initiation of this dialogue, acknowledgement of the enormous diversity in community literacy practices, use of community-based programmes, and the involvement of parents in the settings for literacy initiatives, are all recommendations of Cairney.

As stated previously, the parents were generally satisfied with the programmes at both centres. When asked by the researcher the parents made some suggestions they believed could enhance the communication and hence the partnership further;

“...it would be nice to get feedback on any areas of concern... and communication about up and coming events – maybe a calendar, a newsletter, maybe a spreadsheet for ideas at home.” P2

“maybe a newsletter every couple of weeks so that they can just say what they are doing.” P7

“One thing that would be really cool is to just every now and then have a sort of five minutes that’s just with you [and the teacher] saying this is how {child} is doing – a wee bit more focused time.” P5

“Structure [that’s what I would like to suggest]... and this time is allocated for play and then we do group time where we do learning stuff, mathematical or whatever it is. Then we have our kai time together... [this would be] a good thing [to do] with the lead up to school.” P3

“I guess your aim in a kindy is to prepare them for school. So whether or not it achieves that I’m not sure.” P7

Parents at both centres would like to see an improvement in the area of communication. Communication - by explaining the programme and its purpose, announcements of up-and-coming events in the programme, feedback about their child’s progress, while one parent expressed interest in making further links with the two settings (home and centre) by asking the centre for suggestions for activities to do in the home. The last two quotes, above, are from parents that have children at school already, recommending that there be more ‘school-like’ routines and experiences in place at the centres. However throughout the interviews there were varying references to the transition to school ‘concern’, initiated from the parents that already had children at school. The following quote depicts quite clearly the concern some of these parents had;

“Well (C) really knows that kindy and school are completely different because she has come along, I’ve spent a lot of time at (OC)’s school. She knows it’s not all play, you get to play sometimes but you actually have to sit there and do some things – she’s kinda alright with that I think! I hope – cos she’s off to school [soon]. Is she gonna be able to sit there for that long a period of time?” P4

To summarise, these centres have both formal and informal links, traditions and parent involvement in place. However both teachers believe that the centres do not utilise parents as

well as they could. The teachers articulated inhibitors that were impacting upon their ability to establish more effective partnerships. The parents listed some enhancers that they believe would support the 'partnership' particularly on improving the communication of the programme. But this raises concerns about why this dialogue had not occurred between the two groups. In some instances the parents stated that they had asked the teachers about these various areas – did these parents not feel heard? What are the varying forums available for parents to comfortably raise potentially sensitive issues or queries with staff?

This chapter has presented the analysed data of the work completed at the two centres in this study. As the results and appendices suggest, the programmes at both centres offer an extensive range of literacy opportunities, routines, resources and experiences in which to promote positive attitudes for literacy learning. It also highlights where with further enhancements the early literacy whaariki could be strengthened for the inclusion of sound and informed literacy practices.

The next chapter will discuss these results and explore the implications for literacy practices within the settings. Recommendations will be made, that include enhancements that the parents have suggested as well as enhancements I believe will extend the literacy learning for the two centres in the study, and may be considered for implementation in other early childhood settings.

Chapter 5: Implications for practice – enhancing literacy opportunities for early childhood settings.

The intentions of this research were to gather some understandings from two teachers and two groups of parents a propos their knowledge of ‘literacy’, and to view how literacy learning was implemented in two early childhood centres. Alongside this was the consideration of the ‘parent teacher partnerships’ which underpin the early childhood curriculum as it relates to literacy learning, “The home environment forms an integral part of the partnerships that early childhood settings and schools have with parents in the fostering of beginning reading in young children “ (Jackson & Adams, 2002, p.161). A multi-site case study approach was selected and data was gathered from two kindergartens. The first setting involved interviewing the Head Teacher and a small group of parents. The study was then replicated at a second kindergarten, again involving interviews with the Head Teacher and another group of parents. The researcher’s observations were also recorded at both kindergartens during attendance at three morning sessions.

The results of this study identify the untapped resources of the parents involved in these settings. It highlights the issues involved in implementing a comprehensive curriculum, “Te Whaariki is a complex document and has been difficult to interpret as a guide to practice” (Cullen, 2003, p.271). The work explores how the teachers perceive the utility of the document and the non-specific nature of the curriculum as it translates into learning outcomes for knowledge, skills and attitudes in the area of literacy. As Hamer and Adams argue, “One of the difficulties for educators when planning for literacy in early childhood settings is the lack of specific detail and direction for literacy provided in the early childhood curriculum document” (2002, p.116).

This chapter will summarise and discuss the key findings that emerged from the study. Various barriers and a range of enablers will be presented that I hope will have implications for further discussion within the early childhood community.

Key Findings and discussion

5.1 Literacy Learning Definitions (teachers and parents)

Nuttall (2003) states that a central expectation of Te Whaariki requires “teachers, parents and children to collaboratively explore their own perspectives on what counts as ‘teaching’, ‘learning’, and ‘knowledge’” (p.162) within their early childhood setting. She comments further that each centre needs to specifically illustrate “their images of children and childhood education and their understandings of the role of the teacher in children’s learning.” The extent to which this was happening was central to this study.

The definitions of literacy were broad from the teachers’ and parents’ perspectives. They ranged from the traditional ‘reading’ related understandings through to the varying types of communication contributions and to the inclusion of the technologically advancing ‘e-literacy’.

Whilst the teachers’ understandings of literacy were reasonably broad, what was not presented was a contemporary understanding of how young children learn about literacy (including comprehension, decoding, and motivation through social constructions with others, refer Chapter 2 – Sociocultural Literacy Model). There were limited references to the broader sociocultural contexts (society), with only some references to the more immediate contexts (family and community). Children have varying abilities in their literacy acquisition (for example, there was a child reading at Centre One), and many are on their way to reading. It is vital that teachers are given the opportunities to better understand literacy learning in order to support the wide and variable pathways through which children learn to be literate.

In contrast, the parents’ collectively demonstrated understandings about literacy learning that aligned more closely with the inner core of the sociocultural literacy model, (as above). The parents appeared to have a broader overview of what literacy learning was for the child - a possibility is that this is due to parents seeing literacy pathways as more seamless than the early childhood teachers. I suggest this may be due to an inherent understanding of some early childhood teachers who may not believe it is their role to prepare children for school. Consequently the ability to ‘read’ is exclusively for the formal reading programme in schools.

It is my recommendation that the teachers are given opportunities for further professional development. Professional development that includes the exploration of understandings of sociocultural theory and how this looks in practice in the early childhood setting. Secondly, professional development includes subject content of early literacy learning that is underpinned by sociocultural theory, both of which could and should be offered to the parents (discussed in detail later in this chapter).

5.2 Implementation of Literacy in the Curriculum.

Literacy Learning Practices

Literacy practices were evident and interwoven throughout the curriculum at both centres. These practices were implemented by means of a wide variety of literacy resources, planned routines, planned experiences, informal literacy opportunities, book reading (which was interwoven throughout the programme), as well as some writing opportunities. Both teachers also spoke about having a commitment to ‘driving’ the literacy learning and as such this was an important asset to its successful implementation. All these are literacy practices that facilitate literacy learning, in early childhood education.

Learning Interactions

Where further development of current practice could be enhanced is in the understanding of the significance of interactions with and between children in the setting. In Podmore and Meade’s review of aspects of quality, emphasis that “Teaching practice and responsive interactions within early childhood settings in turn influence outcomes for children” (2000, p.42). The teachers, when asked about literacy tools and practices (and indeed in any of the discussions held with the teachers), presented limited references to the vital importance of effective teacher-child interactions. These interactions are an important aspect to the socially constructed framework of literacy development through use of strategies such as scaffolding, co-construction, deconstruction, problematising, modelling and facilitating (explained in Chapter 4).

Parent Understandings of Literacy Interactions and Practices

Another important question this study posed was to examine what were the parents’ understandings of literacy practices occurring in the centre. Parents articulated a long list of literacy-related experiences that they facilitated in the home environment, but for many parents this list was not the same as the one listed for centre-based literacy related activities.

When the parents in the study were asked about literacy practices in the early childhood settings, their perspective shifted to a more traditional focus, closely related to the skill orientation of reading acquisition, although some parents did highlight the impact of peer influence on their child's learning.

It is interesting to consider why home literacy activities, such as drawing, writing, creating, puzzles, as well as talking and explaining, were not listed as part of the kindergarten literacy curriculum for the parents in this study. My interpretation of this finding was that whilst the parents' understandings of early childhood literacy development were broad ranging in the home-base, it was contrary to their understanding and expectations of institutionalised education which may move closer to the traditional formal reading acquisition of a school model. For parents whose stated home and kindergarten 'curriculum' activities were similar (two of these parents had other children at school), they still wanted some school-type routines replicated in the kindergarten setting for transitional reasons.

Literacy Learning Approaches

Farquhar (2003) in her summary of 'Quality Teaching' in the early childhood sector states that "Most programmes in early childhood centre settings have subscribed to the 'developmental play' curriculum approach. Teachers have tended to take a 'hands-off' approach to involvement in children's learning, apart from providing a well-planned and structured physical environment" (p.19), this approach has "reigned in New Zealand for over 50 years" (McLachlan-Smith & Shuker, 2002).

My findings were similar to the above research findings, that the 'developmental play' approach was still being accessed, as described by one of the teachers "*The staff probably prefers the core curriculum and teacher-directed [curriculum approach], they are a little more Piagetian*". Whilst Te Whaariki has been in place since 1996, the sociocultural underpinnings of the official curriculum have, for these settings, only surfaced now, due to the implementation of the 'Teaching and Learning Stories' assessment tool developed by Carr, May and Podmore (1999).

This paradigm change has required staff to reassess their 'role' in the programme, and requires the teachers to move from the traditions of Piagetian developmental learning theory - 'developmental stages', 'milestones', 'norms' and such other notions, which were "the dominant theory ... [that we] were raised on" (Meade 1999a, p.2). The transformation from

this developmental psychology to a sociocultural theory is requiring the teachers to disperse with “readiness, choice, needs, play and discovery” (Meade, 1999a, p.2) developmental guidelines, to an alternative base whereby learning drives the development. Meade suggests that this theoretical shift sounds simple; however, “it requires a profound shake-up in teachers’ belief systems and practices. It requires staff to adjust their role to becoming educators” (1999a, p.5).

I contend that a ‘hands-off’ approach has occurred for two reasons. Firstly, because of the Piagetian phenomena that has dominated curriculum discourse for a long period, making the transition to broader theories encompassing sociocultural principles difficult. Secondly, it has occurred because of the multitude of expectations that are placed on staff (curriculum development, professional development, welfare and care of children and families, domestic duties, resourcing of centres, community liaising, and the increased accountability) at these early childhood settings. If high quality programmes informed by current pedagogical practice are desired, then simply looking at a ‘curriculum panacea’ of professional development in sociocultural theory and early literacy learning (as discussed later), are not the only resolves, some of the kindergarten ‘systems’ need rethinking.

The above presents challenges for the teachers. In addition to these were other barriers that the teachers identified impeding the further development of a curriculum which is underpinned and informed by sociocultural theory. These included differing and individual teacher pedagogies, compromised staff dynamics, a varied commitment to professional development by all staff members, understandings/misunderstandings of sociocultural theories and the large amount of curriculum change over the last 10 years, all compounded by time restraints.

Professional Development

The most important inhibitor that this study highlights, is that the support to implement the underpinnings of sociocultural interwoven in the curriculum has been lacking, “... the support provided to help teachers and parents to understand and use Te Whaariki, has been inadequate, particularly compared with the huge programmes to support curriculum implementation in the compulsory sector over the last decade” (Nuttall, 2003, p.13). Here lies a crucial and immediate need for the teaching professionals to be given authentic support in order for them to move the ‘theory into practice’ (as discussed in section 5.1).

Professional development to further understandings of sociocultural theory (participation in authentic meaningful experiences, where learning is constructed through interactions with others), for the purpose of implementing sound literacy learning knowledge and practice in their settings, would benefit the teachers in this research. What this study reveals is that there is a need for a committed priority from the Ministry of Education, disseminated by the advisory and other support groups, as well as the teacher training programmes, to further support this area of literacy 'whaariki'. "As a first step towards this goal, the way Te Whaariki's 'woven mat' metaphor allows for the weaving of subject content and skills through interest-based learning, needs to be more explicitly acknowledged. A stronger response could be the emergence of specific literacy, mathematics or technology programmes and content standards ... [within the] teacher education and professional development programmes" (Cullen, 2003, p.285). Cullen further contends that this would be in accordance with current international trends, and contends that curriculum 'subject content' may be considered controversial in the early childhood sector.

I advocate an early literacy learning teaching programme, both for in-service and pre-service teachers, based upon sound literacy practices that could be interwoven and mediated by teachers, through interest-based learning opportunities. I believe teachers want and need specific guidance of the implementation of 'curriculum' regardless of the strand of the 'whaariki', as without specific detail of what is appropriate, then a seamless document like Te Whaariki is open for interpretation that is socially and culturally fitting. However it is also at risk of misinterpretation.

The staff at the two centres in this study identified that they would like further support in terms of appropriate and meaningful professional development in order to interweave the theoretical shifts (in order to understand and implement the learning story format) in their curriculum delivery. Whilst one centre felt that they wanted autonomy in their research and reflection / evaluation (Centre Two), the other (Centre One) felt that they wanted more support from their Association, as they did not feel that they had fully understood the Learning Story format. Cubey and Dalli recommend the "importance of early childhood staff being involved in evaluating their own programmes, to ensure that inappropriate evaluation methods are not externally imposed. They note that in order to build competence and confidence in teachers' abilities to self-evaluate, training and support need to be provided" (cited in Podmore & Meade, 2000, p.11). What was of overriding importance was that both

groups felt that some direction and support were required as “*it’s all a bit of a mess*” (Teacher).

5.3 Parent Teacher Partnerships

A clear underpinning of this dissertation was the critical role that parents have as their child’s primary educator “... young children achieve more and are happier when early years educators work together with parents and share views on how to support and extend individual children” (Whalley, 1999, p.2).

How the ‘Partnerships’ Are Working

The kindergarten culture has a tradition of parental involvement. This involvement has seen parents assisting in the following ways;

1. A voluntary ‘parent help’ system, assisting in involvement during a teaching session, extra adult numbers for excursions away from the kindergarten, completing additional domestic-orientated jobs, for example washing, pet care, maintenance work and general upkeep of the centre environment and resources.
2. Management committee, a group of office bearers (president, secretary, treasurer and committee, including subcommittees for fundraising purposes) all to assist in the day-to-day operation and management of the centre.
3. Parents invited to be involved in the educational programme through sharing any personal or professional skills they may have, for example, music talents, storytelling or career-orientated skills.
4. Financial contribution (voluntary donation) approximately \$1.50- \$2.50 per session per child.

As the data presented suggests, the parents were generally satisfied with the staff, their relationships with the staff, and the programme they offered at both centres. For Centre One the parent help system was not in place and their management committee struggled to gain the support necessary to adequately manage the centre. Centre Two had the parent help system in place but the teacher stated that sometimes felt that whilst the centre was well supported financially, additional assistance in terms of ‘hands-on’ maintenance tasks were not always readily available.

Te Whaariki (MOE, 1996) refers to the 'rapidly changing society' that we live in. Wylie (1999) identified that from the parent surveys collected for her research, the parents' responses indicated that there was almost a 50% decline in parent involvement in the school sector since 1990 (post the decentralisation reforms of 1989), and offers that the reasons may reflect "busier lives of parents" as they are involved in paid employment. In 1989 (June Quarterly, Statistics NZ) the work participation rate was at 52%, now the women's participation rate is nearly 61% (June 2005 Quarterly, Statistics NZ). This impacts on the 'parent teacher partnerships', parents' expectations of educational outcomes, the need to communicate effectively to staff on a day to day basis, the traditional 'parent help' system (which supported the high numbers and brought down the ratios), the management committee and fundraising campaigns.

The teachers presented issues related to support in terms of the operational management of the centre, in traditional 'partnership' terms. The parents presented another lens of what the 'partnership' term meant. For the parents the partnership matters were related to educational, care and support outcomes for their children. They demonstrated genuine interest in understanding the curriculum and the profile documents that were in use. They particularly wanted more and regular communication about upcoming events related to the programme. Some parents suggested the establishment of a forum to receive feedback about their child's progress in the setting. Finally, some parents wanted some more 'school-like' experiences included into the programme to assist their children's transition into school life.

Supporting 'Partnerships' for the Future

Whilst teachers should be given the professional development necessary to implement effective literacy practices based on current research and understandings, so too does there need to be an authentic undertaking to sharing this knowledge adequately and in a format that will reach the variable needs of the relevant parent community. Wylie et al (1996) recommend that "If we are to improve the quality of New Zealand Early Child Service's ... then we need to provide parents with a better understanding of what constitutes quality in early childhood education" (p.142). The aim is to create authentic and meaningful parent partnerships, including explanations about the curriculum that is offered in the early childhood settings and the research supporting the curriculum decisions. This takes time and effort on the behalf of the teaching team and cannot be 'squeezed' into the already over-committed two 'non-contact' afternoons that the teachers currently have. In saying that, I

believe that it is necessary if we are to develop stronger and more informed partnerships with parents.

Throughout both centre parent interviews was a pervasive recognition that the transition of their children into the school setting as one of the most pivotal immersions of their life, and their are implications that the transition is not as 'seamless' as families would like it to be. One of the teachers raised the rhetoric of their centre's role in relation to school preparation commenting that '*I know we are not preparing them for a school?*' which raises the questions of why there is the thought that the sector should not assist children in creating effective links to their contributing schools, it must be noted however this centre had a very sound relationship with the local school (Observation notes 22/11/04). Farquhar (2003, p.19) suggests that this phenomena has occurred due to the writing of two separate documents for school and early childhood, the former "accentuating the cognitively oriented approach of schooling" and the latter reconfirming the established "resistance ... to being seen to prepare children for school". It is both a legal requirement and an expectation that children will transition onto school, at least by six years of age. There is still a need to further develop and assist children with their transition into school life.

The schools and early childhood centres need to continue to commit to establishing effective links with each other, understanding and becoming familiar with each of the curriculum documents and centre practices for familiarity purposes to assist in this 'seamless' transition. In saying that, I refer to warnings issued by Mitchell and Cubey who place a caveat that "there should be no downward shift that compromises children's learning in the early childhood curriculum" (2003, p.xi).

Whilst both teachers acknowledged the importance of the relationship between parents and staff for the child's learning, the teachers identified certain barriers that impeded upon the programme affecting these partnerships. They discussed issues of; staff feeling comfortable with sociocultural underpinnings of education 'partnerships', the historically low rate of parent involvement at one centre, the low participation of parents at education seminars, the time in which to achieve and dedicate to stronger links, and the length of the children's enrolment. Some of these barriers could be 'worked' through appropriate professional development (as discussed below), others are larger issue relating to the kindergarten 'systems' and are not explored due to the scope of his study.

As the understandings of the importance of sociocultural underpinnings have grown, the emphasis to develop more effective 'parent teacher partnerships' have also grown. Adding to this milieu is that more parents have returned to work, and as a consequence parents are looking at the kindergarten as both a 'service' provider as well as an educational institution. This offers an impasse for an institution that traditionally offers an educational programme that has been heavily reliant upon high levels of support from the community it provides for. Whilst there are many organisational changes that could be addressed to support and 'free up' the teachers in their implementation of more effective partnerships with parents, these go beyond the scope of this dissertation. Therefore I will present some recommendations, including the suggestions from the parents, to further develop the literacy whaariki and parent teacher partnerships that will ultimately impact upon a child's learning.

5.4 Researched-based Recommendations

- 1) Professional development in both curriculum understandings and implementation, early 'literacy whaariki', and partnership pedagogy should be made available to teachers and parents (then information disseminated to all parents in formats that will benefit the readers).
- 2) The writing of a centre literacy policy, based on informed and sound literacy practices. The development of this policy needs to consider how to draw on members of the community that may not believe that they have the ability, confidence, time or understanding in which to be involved in an undertaking like this. Secondly, clear considerations must be made of the power relationships involved in the settings. As discussed in section 4.3.1, the power base must be identified and made transparent for all involved. Mitchell and Cubey recommend that "Involvement of families and community in the design, and implementation of professional development programmes offers an inclusive process that may encourage teachers /educators to take on board and learn from others' perspectives, and vice versa" (2003, p.79).
- 3) Parents have the capacity to understand early childhood pedagogy and the impact of sociocultural approaches in these settings. In this study they have suggested that they want to know more. Centre communication should be inclusive of discussion about the curriculum, for example; education-based newsletters, including current curricula activity and the sharing of group learning stories or learning events that have occurred

in the centre, along with the centre's explanation of Te Whaariki and how it is interwoven together.

- 4) I believe it is vital that some systems be put in place to formalise individual family time with a staff member for feedback about their child at least once or twice during the child's enrolment at kindergarten. In the Desirable Objectives and Practices (revised 1996) it states that "Educators should provide opportunities for parents to discuss both formally and informally their child's progress, interests, abilities and areas for development on a regular basis" (Education Review Office, 2000, p23).

- 5) Finally collecting information about the child's literacy experiences upon entry into the centre is a recommendation presented by McLachlan-Smith and Shuker (2002). There should be further encouragement of the parents to share more either verbally or through further use of a 'Parent Voice' sheet. This is to continue an open channel by parents sharing the child's various literacy experiences/development in the home and community settings, which are then added to the child's profile book. The parents need a full explanation of the purposes of these artefacts.

The next chapter concludes the study and presents a conceptual representation of my recommendations, which present pathways for 'literacy partnerships' to further enhance the early childhood education programmes. I highlight the limitations of the study and pose questions for further investigation in the area of literacy and parent teacher partnerships.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The significance of what a well planned literacy 'whaariki' can achieve is encapsulated in this quote from Adams and Ryan, "A critical aspect of sound reading theory is that of motivation. Self-worth and social support promote young children's motivation to achieve success and happiness. Literacy skills allow children to go beyond their physical bodies and to develop their cognitive potential" (2002, p.15). This has far-reaching implications for their successful immersion into the formalised reading programmes in the school environment from the day children turn five through to their worth as confident literate adults.

The evidence from these case studies found that the teachers operated with broad conceptual understandings of literacy learning, that they practised and implemented an array of literacy experiences, and that there were workable parent teacher partnerships in place. The parents presented variable understandings of what literacy meanings and practices involved (some presenting quite comprehensive understandings that paralleled with current sociocultural theory). However there was a disparity between what parents viewed as literacy practices in the home and what they viewed as literacy practices of the centre-based setting.

The key findings suggest that to enhance literacy learning at the centres involved in the study there were three dimensions to consider for professional development including: further understanding of curriculum pedagogy (putting sociocultural theory into practice), literacy whaariki development (based upon the sociocultural model of the literate child), and finally parent teacher partnership pedagogy (for further development and maintenance of authentic partnerships with parents).

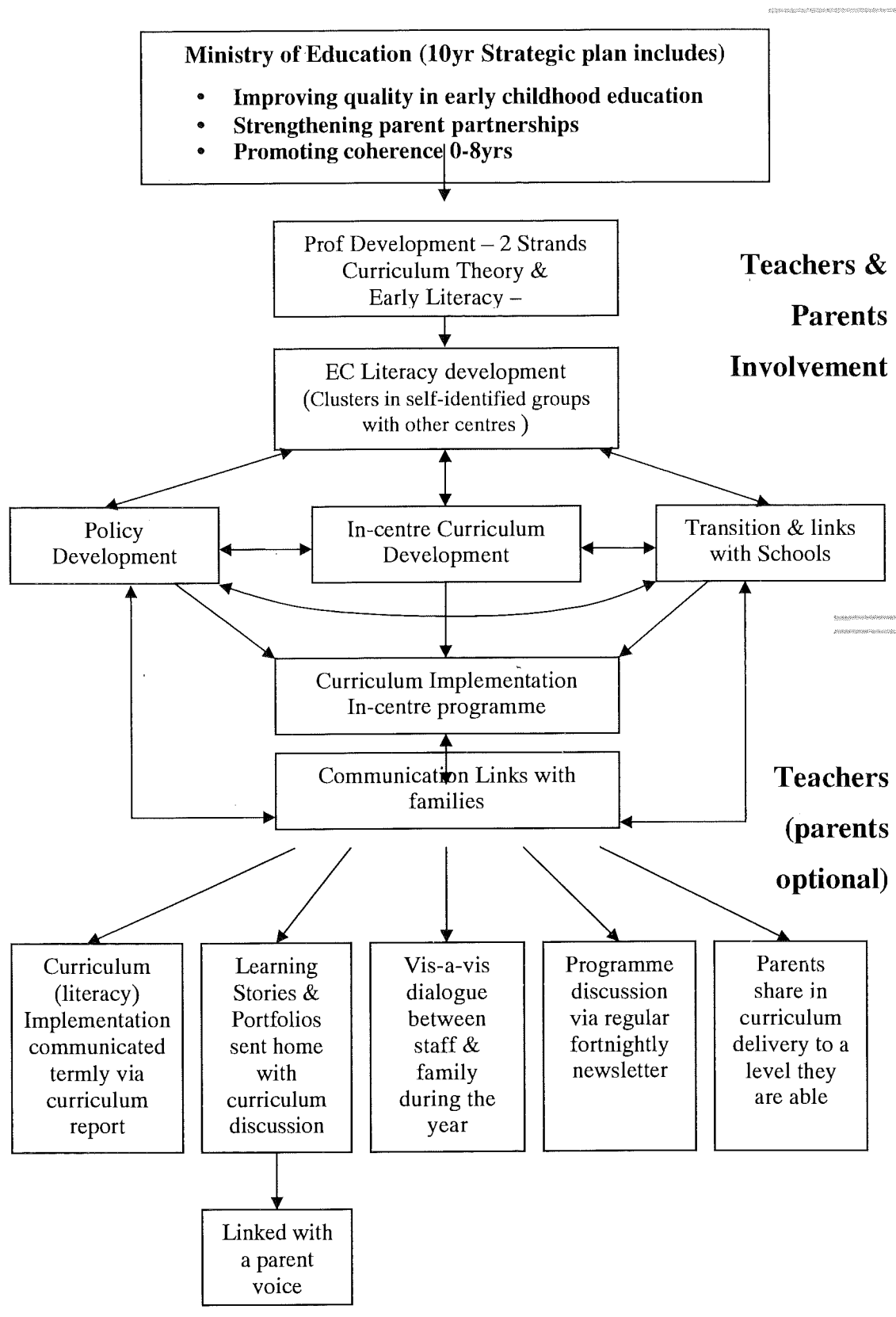
The teachers need further support in their interpretations and development of implementing sociocultural theory into practice. They need to see this work in action. The beginnings of this have been offered in the development of the Early Childhood Exemplars, published and disseminated in February 2005 (MOE, 2004), and the related professional development seminars and workshops being offered to early childhood teachers throughout 2005. The centre-based programmes in this study would benefit from further whole staff professional development of subject content knowledge in 'literacy whaariki' - which is based upon sociocultural theories for successful implementation.

The importance of professional development for the early childhood sector is a major finding of Mitchell and Cubey's (2003) work, "There is evidence that professional development can make significant contributions to enhancing pedagogy in early childhood settings in three key areas: challenging teachers/educators' beliefs and assumptions from a deficit view so that the knowledge and skills of families and children are acknowledged and built on; collecting and analysing data from the participants' own setting; and supporting change in participants' interactions with children and parents" (p.viii) - the parallels to this study are apparent.

Parent teacher partnership paradigms are in place at both of the centres that were studied. The parents view the staff as '*approachable*', '*onto it*' and '*really helpful*'. Both centres presented various barriers that impede the partnership process. It is the suggestion, from the research findings, that by opening up the communication channels and including parents in the pedagogical decisions of the centre, the current partnership paradigms could be strengthened. This, I believe, could occur in a process beginning with staff and interested parents having professional development in the understanding of sociocultural theory, and how it relates and interweaves with literacy learning, with the intention of writing a centre literacy policy. This literacy policy should include effective communication channels that could occur regularly through the teaching term, that are inclusive of pedagogic strategies and curriculum activities occurring in the centres and the explanation of these for the parents.

The flow chart (Diagram 6.1) suggests a plausible route that could be taken to enhance the literacy learning for positive outcomes for children and ultimately create sustainable links that are meaningful between teachers and parents for shared educational aims.

Diagram 6.1 Proposal for Development of Literacy Practices & Policies



Limitations

As a new researcher embarking on a substantial piece of academic work there were various limitations that I encountered along the way. Firstly the technical aspects of interviewing with the variety of ‘hitches’ that presented, interruptions from other staff, interviewees mentally tired and feeling unprepared for the interview, and working with dictaphones for the first time. Mostly these were resolvable, but certainly I learnt a great deal more about the need for ideal interview settings, effective research tools, expertise regarding the use of them, and optimum interview times for the participants.

Secondly, I learnt about the art of being an effective interviewer by following through important content threads of the interview. I think that I was overly sensitive in my attempts not to lead the interviewee, that at times instead of just asking what I wanted to know I ‘fumbled’ my way through parts of the interview. Interviewing is a craft!

Thirdly, I was not sure about the representative nature of the parent participants. The parents were approached by the various head teachers. Whilst they chose the parents they thought would be appropriate, my reflections throughout the analysis phase questioned how representative they were of the kindergarten population?

In addition it is important to mention that the case studies depicted in this research work were ‘situated’ studies and as such are not representative of all kindergartens or indeed other early childhood settings.

Finally, there was only a limited period of time in which to spend at each setting; it would have been beneficial and enlightening to interview all the staff and some of the children regarding their beliefs about literacy ‘whaariki’.

Despite these flaws and limitations I believe that the study has been generally informative. It availed an opportunity for me to consider my own practice and to gain some further insight in to the area of early literacy and parent teacher partnerships. Insights that I hope will be of value not only for myself, the teachers and centres involved, but for the wider early childhood community.

Further questions to be asked.

- Is the Learning Story assessment approach working effectively in the larger kindergarten settings? (Question prompted by teacher in research.)
- What are the long-term outcomes for children in using a social constructionism theoretical approach in early childhood education? There needs to be longitudinal collection of data (empirical or qualitative). Research endorsed by Nuthall, (2003) and Cullen (2001).
- What are the long-term effects of increasing the content knowledge base of literacy learning for early childhood educators for learning outcomes for children, using New Zealand-based research?
- Parent Partnerships research – what do parents want? More needs to be known about what is currently happening in centre-based situations to further support effective and workable parent teacher partnership.
- Early literacy strategies in the home-base, what is happening and what are the long-term outcomes? What is working and why? Are these practices appropriate and/or transferable to the early childhood centre setting?

The challenge for policymakers, academics and educators is to support the role of literacy educators in ensuring that literacy practices are appropriate and meaningful for young children “as opposed to ‘skill and drill’ or out-of-context ‘training’ sessions ... to ensure that early literacy experiences for young children are suitable, enjoyable, and relevant to their needs” (Adams & Ryan, 2002, p.306) for the long-term benefit of all children growing up in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is my hope that as educators we can continue to improve and reach all the children in our settings to further enhance their literacy learning opportunities so that they can become successful and active participants in our literate world.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

1.1 *Interview Questions for teachers*

- What are your first memories of reading/ writing/language?
- What are your understandings of the word literacy?
- Can you tell me about what literacy means in the context of your setting?
- What do you understand literacy to mean in terms of the early childhood curriculum/Te Whaariki?
- What about as it relates to learning outcomes i.e. knowledge, skills and attitudes?
- Could you describe how you as staff formally plan for literacy experiences in your centre?
- Could you describe some of your literacy practices and literacy tools? (These could include integrated approaches to all learning areas, literacy tools)
- Could you describe some of the types of emergent literacy learning that evolves in the centre?
- Could you describe a mat-time/whanau group time that you might have in the centre.
- What are the learning outcomes that you believe the children may experience?
- Could you describe the child/teacher interactions and your understandings of this as a teaching tool?
- Do you know the term “popular culture” e.g. the things the children are into i.e. Buzz Lightyear, Barbie, The Wiggles etc, how are these included in your programme?
- What information do you seek from your families as children are enrolled in the centre? What questions do the parents initially ask?
- How do you continue collecting information to link home literacy practises with the centre?
- How are parents inducted into life in the centre? How are they inducted to working with children when they are completing a parent help duty?
- What type of literacy activities do your families get involved in during session time at the centre?
- How do you meet the range of literacy needs from the diverse family groups that attend this centre?
- How do you explore and share current research or approaches in the area of literacy with the parents in your centre?
- What types of collaboration occurs with the schools that the children transition onto?
- What are your perceptions of parent’s roles in early childhood education, and how have these evolved over the years?
- How do you think we could encourage/include parents to be more involved in the education/development of their children in this setting?
- Would you like to know more about literacy in early childhood education? – how might you achieve this?
- Could you describe any professional development you or your centre has had in area related to literacy development?

1.2 Interview questions -Indepth interviews for teachers

Note: The following is a general overview of findings that was sent to both teachers, however teachers were asked different questions – following pages.

Sent: Dec - 2004

Emerging themes (from researcher):

- *Notions of literacy: checking definitions*
- *Learning Stories as tools for building socio-cultural pedagogy. This appears to be a tentative area, concerns regarding co-construction of the curriculum and how to utilise this assessment and planning tool!*
- *Taking teachers forward: professional development and evolving pedagogies. How can we support all teachers/ teaching teams to adopt the ever evolving socially constructed curriculum? Are appraisal systems in place, along with teacher or team goal setting strategies or professional development policies?*
- *Emergent curriculum and socio-cultural possibilities. Does our core curriculum presentation impede upon what socio-cultural theory is trying to create? Do we need to reformat and re-present our core curriculum so that everyone involved has a better ownership and understanding of the aspirations of Te Whaariki?*
“The sound teaching of literacy, based on socio-cultural theory, recognises that:
 - *Children’s literacy learning needs to be understood as occurring across a range of broader social and cultural contexts;*
 - *Children experience little discontinuity in their literacy learning when practices match across home and community and educational contexts;*
 - *Literacy learning for children is a collaborative process of co-constructions, scaffolding and guided participation with ‘experts’; and that*
 - *Literacy learning occurs best through meaningful and authentic experiences.”*
Hamer & Adams (2003. pg 39)
- *Teacher parent relationships: pedagogical partnerships?*
There appears to be dual needs in the community, firstly that of early childhood education settings as being service providers and a second need of education and support of the varying communities of learners (parents, children and whanau), the latter embracing the socio-cultural ideology of pedagogical partners. Who is it that imposes the parameters - parents or do we as teachers hold some of that responsibility?

1.3 Additional questions

Centre 1 Teacher

1. Attached is the transcript of your thoughts of what literacy means in the context of early childhood education - is this an accurate interpretation of your understandings?
2. Now that you have your teaching team back are you able to expand further on how socio-cultural practices impact on the use of learning stories and learning dispositions in your centre - with or without your adapted learning story format?
3. My perception from our interview was that you have concerns that as our early childhood curriculum evolves and theoretical approaches are reviewed, some staff can find it hard to move on. What are your thoughts about assisting this evolutionary process to be facilitated effectively, and sensitively, for all practitioners?
4. Can you please expand further on your understandings of emergent curriculum, and how this is implemented on a day to day basis in your centre? Could you please give some examples?
5. You spoke about involving the parents a little more and giving them more opportunities to be involved in the programme but sometimes you feel unheard. Are you able to expand on this a little further?
6. Parents' appreciate that teachers are very busy, I'm wondering about the forums/channels/opportunities to feed back to parents. Are there any other ideas that you have in this area?
7. Are there any other relevant comments that you would like to make regarding this research question or any other matters that this whole process has evoked for you, or about the emerging themes that I have presented?

1.4 Additional questions

Centre 2 Teacher

1. Attached is the transcript of your thoughts of what literacy means in the context of early childhood education - is this an accurate interpretation of your understanding?
2. You spoke to me about the uncertainty for the staff about some of aspects of socio-cultural practices i.e. the children driving the curriculum. How as an educational leader are you going to work with the notions of change in your centre?
3. You also talked to your belief that “we” are losing the ability to just have an element of ‘wonderment’ in the curriculum. Why do you think that learning dispositions do not allow for those very opportunities to occur? I know that I have asked you this earlier; however, I am intrigued as to your perspective on this point and wonder if you could give any further clarification?
4. You also spoke about feeling comfortable about partnerships with parents and having them involved in the programming and facilitating this. You also spoke about personal disharmony with some parents in this community. How do you resolve the disparity that this may cause you?
5. My perception from our interview was that you have concerns that as our early childhood curriculum evolves and theoretical approaches are reviewed, some staff can find it hard to move on. What are your thoughts about trying to assist this evolutionary process to be facilitated effectively and appropriately for all practitioners?
6. Parents’ appreciate that teachers are very busy I’m wondering about the forums/channels/opportunities to feed back to parents. Are there any other ideas that you have in this area?
7. Are there any other relevant comments that you would like to make regarding this research question. Are there any other matters that this whole process has evoked for you or any additional comments on the emerging themes?

1.5 Interview questions for parents;

- What are your own personal early memories of reading/writing/language?
- These days we hear a great deal about the word literacy what do you think this word means?
- Can you tell me about the activities that you do at home with your child that might contribute to their literacy development?
- What activities does your child do at the centre to assist them in becoming literate
- What information were you asked about your child when you first entered the centre?
- How do staff interact with you and gain information about what happens for your child in the home?
- Do children take along resources/toys/personal belongings 'things' from home 'to share' with the others/staff?
- What opportunities are offered by the centre for your family to be involved in the programme?
- What are some of the literacy-type activities your child does at home that you would feel comfortable sharing with the staff? (ideas or examples)
- When/if you share ideas about the programme or your child are these discussed and somehow included in the programme?
- If you were unhappy with some of the programming at the centre would you speak to the staff about this? Please expand.
- On average how long(time wise) would you spend in the centre over a week?
- Do you believe that you have a role in the education/development of your child in this setting? If so what is it? (inclusion, security, belonging etc)
- Do you think that the centre offers similar activities/ beliefs that you offer your child in your home environment?
- Do you have any ideas about how you as parents (should you chose to be) could be more involved in the development of the programme and education of your child in this setting?

Appendix 2

2.1 Information Letter to participants.

Note: General Information letter sent to Kindergarten Association, Teachers, Management Committee, and parent (these varied slightly dependant upon the focus group).

Donna McAleer
CHRISTCHURCH

Attention: Head Teacher
Christchurch

Date

Kia Ora/Greetings

Regarding our phone conversation, I am writing to inform you of the research work which I would like to complete in your centre, with yourself, your centre and a small group of parents from the centre community.

Currently I am studying at the Christchurch College of Education, completing my Master of Teaching and Learning. I am completing my final thesis and my research question is as follows;

**“Literacy practices in early childhood education:
Parents and teachers perceptions – how are these understood?”**

Before I can begin I need consent from yourself, the centre management committee, your association (they have all the documentation and will send this to me separately, but will notify you directly) so that I can conduct my fieldwork at your centre.

My fieldwork would involve an array of data collection. I would like interview you as Head Teacher and then conduct a group interview with a cluster of three to four parents. I would also like to write some fieldwork notes’ observing what is occurring in the ‘literacy’ area and collect some artefacts, for example photos of the environment and the work that is being done, not identifying children or staff. In addition I would like to collect any other samples that children may offer me while I am there, or that I could photocopy if the children are agreeable.

I do not expect to spend a great deal of time in the centres; however it will probably include a total of about 7-8 different visits.

1. Initial contact and introduction, meet with staff and parents that have agreed to participate and discussions of procedures for further clarification. Familiarisation of the centre, and observation writing(full morning)
2. Introduction and interview of the 3-4 parents that have agreed to be part of a focus group interview (morning). On the same day (if possible) I would like to interview you as Head Teacher of the centre (afternoon or evening).
3. Observation of centre 2-3 minimum (full morning).
4. Return 1month later to submit the interview transcripts for reading and additional clarification of any points from the parents and yourself.
5. 3-4 months later (after the interview) return to speak you for respondent validation of analysis of your transcript.

I would like to ensure that everyone, staff and families, experiences the research as a valuable process. "The influences of families /whanau and communities are identified as key levers for high quality outcomes for diverse children. Outcomes include both social and academic achievement." MOE (2003). My research methodology utilises a qualitative data collection approach which supports inclusive practice. The focus is literacy, and it is my hope that this investigation, analysis and process will further enhance both the centre programmes as well as home literacy practices.

I would appreciate that this research proposal be discussed at your next management committee meeting, and if your organisation is in agreement then could you please sign the consent form and return it to me (self-addressed envelope enclosed), or telephone me, which ever is more convenient. It is my intention to begin fieldwork in the first few weeks of November 2004.

The next step would be to advertise the research at the centre so that families can consider their involvement. I am expecting that individual families may need to be personally approached by someone that knows them, for example, staff members.

This research is part of a Masters thesis, and a copy of the thesis will be disseminated and placed in the Christchurch College of Education library. Confidentiality of the research will be maintained at all times, and the data will be stored at the researchers home but will be stored for at least five years (according to college regulations). Participation in the research is entirely voluntary and a participant or whole centre can withdraw from the project at any time without any discussion. No findings that could identify any individual participant will be published.

Should you wish to speak to me about any of the above please call me at home Donna McAleer ph 332 1653 or email: donnamc@datacom.co.nz , and/or I would be delighted to come to any meetings so that I could talk to the management committee - if you felt that was useful.

My Supervisors at the College ph 343 7780 are Faye Parkhill ext 8291 or email: faye.parkhill@cce.ac.nz or Gillian Tasker Ext 8461 or email: gillian.tasker@cce.ac.nz – they would be happy to discuss this with you.

The Christchurch College of Education Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

Complaints Procedure

The College requires that all participants be informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to:

The Chair
Ethical Clearance Committee
Christchurch College of Education
P O Box 31-065
Christchurch
Phone: (03) 348 2059

Thank you for your consideration of this research work, I look forward to your response.

Regards,

Donna McAleer

2.2 Consent Form sample

Declaration of Consent

We consent tocentre participating in the project, *Literacy practices in early childhood education: Parents and teachers perceptions - how are these understood?*, by researcher Donna McAleer.

We have read and understood the information provided to the organisation concerning the research project and what will be required of the centre in the project.

We understand that the information provided to the researcher will be treated as confidential and that no findings that could identify any participants or the centre will be published.

We understand that participation in the project is voluntary and that participants may withdraw from the project at any time without incurring any penalty.

Centre involved: _____

Association: _____

Date: _____

Position: _____

Name of representative: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix 3

3.1 Centre One - summarised literacy learning experiences.

Table 3.1.1 Explicit teacher-led literacy experiences/activities observed (one session sample)

Date	Teacher	Activity
5 Nov	Teacher 2	Chd identifying ltr beg of name in order to leave mat-time.
	Teacher 1	Profile bks outside for chd's contribution
	Teacher 2	Baking activity with discussion re ingredients and recipe
	Teacher 1	Reading a story book To individual child
	Teacher 2	Disc & handing out of baking, tchg of "Who stole the cookie?"
	Teachers (facilitated by teacher aide)	At art table assisting chd with finishing their Christmas present for the parents (a paper mache bowl)
	Teacher 1 & 3	End of session story-time – 2 grps T1 mag story, & T2 familiar rhymes in one book, then adding to familiar song at end with onset rhyming words as a grp.

Table 3.1.2 Planned literacy-based tools/activities for child self-choice.

Date	Activity
5 Nov	Magnetic board with letters and numbers
	Science table and various equip labelled,
	Language games
	Profile books set up for chd to add to with pens and paper
	Books outside for children
	Baking 1 big fish shaped choc chip cookie
	Letter box in dramatic play area
	Revisited magnetic puzzle and textured puzzle introduced at whanau time put n table for chd
NOTE:	All resources(except for language games) in the centre can be accessed by the children at any time, these are items that are sitting waiting for chd to self select if required the above is a list of activities that have been place on tables in the various centres of activity for that vary from day to day to engage chd's interests

Table 3.1.3 Various activity centres

Learning Centres/Areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whanau / group area (which converts to big space inside) for • Block/construction/cars etc area and... • Music area • Writing centre near collage area and painting areas • Art area easels and tabled area. • Indoor and outdoor reading area • Family play/dress-up dramatic centre • Puzzle parallel and using same table for exploration as... • Science area • Water/messy play area(inside and outside) • Kai table + baking/cooking area • Computer suite • Natural science distributed around the centre eg fish tank, frog tank, bird cages, vege areas inside tyres outside • Environmental print – Learning Story displays

Table 3.1.4 Whanau time experience (sample)

Date	Teacher	Large Group Experience Teacher-led
9 Nov Day 3	T1	Whanau 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chd encouraged to mat via taped song, Full grp of chd • Excursion prep happening intermittently as whanau time occurring • 'Belonging' time • Chd toileted and safety stickers put on them to identify them when they are out • Reflection of previous days experiment • Science experiment • Chd released as a child is hurt towards the end of experiment
	T1	Whanau 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chd encouraged to mat via taped song, this occurred as tchers forgot to count the chd a daily ritual for emergency purposes.
	T2	Whanau 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full lge grp • 5th birthday celebration child up front • Birthday crown, profile book to show to others (a favourite page), playdough cake & birthday song, chose the types of claps they want (a selection in te reo Maoris) • Good-bye song started by birthday child • 2nd chd invited up although celebrated birthday another time it is official last day today • Gingerbread treasure hunt reflected upon & chd told to say goodbyes and collect treats as they go

3.2 Centre Two – Summarised literacy learning experiences

Table 3.2.1 Explicit teacher-led literacy experiences/activities observed (one session sample)

Date	Teacher	Activity
22 Nov	T3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playdough
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family corner furniture moved around
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction on floor
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Floor puzzles
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mosaic on pegboard
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marble painting
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sea creatures on felt
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christmas trees template on paper on writing desk
	T1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Magnetic sticks and miniballs
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 books on sofa outside
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large cloths for huts distributed around with various construction, road/vehicles, writing desk
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pastels and paper
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural clay and implements
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water measuring

Table 3.2.2 Planned literacy-based tools/activities for child self-choice

Date	Activity
15 Nov	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police badges and ID's
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marble runs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sea life on felt boards
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shaving foam on mirrors presented in circles
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing centre pens and paper
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Battery centre
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manipulative play x2(outdrs)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linseeds filtering/sieving
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playdough modelling and coloured matchsticks
NOTE:	<p>Many resources in the centre can be accessed by the children at any time, these are items that are sitting on shelves for chd to self select if required the above is a list of activities that have been place on tables in the various centres of activity for that vary from day to day to engage chd's interests. There are also stores of language, maths and construction activities, additional books stored in the staff room, and a storage cupboard. Approx 40 games, 100 books, posters, puzzles, construction</p>

Table 3.2.3 Activity Centres

Learning Centres/Areas
<p>INDOOR AREA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing centre • Puzzle area • Block/construction/vehicles on mat area • Area for Itinerant teacher to work with chd with spec needs • Science area • Library centre/posters/information/puppets • Play dough and cooking area • Computer area • Collage area • Paint areas easel and flat table • Messy play area • Kai table(near kitchen • Music area doubles as extra are for other activities • Family corner • Environmental print – Learning Story displays <p>OUTDOOR CENTRES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wood/carpentry area • Sandpit and shingle pit area • Solid multilevel platformed construction • Water play • Goal post/ Shooting ring area • Play hut • Reading sofa • Mats positioned everywhere for additional activities to be taken into the outdoor programme.

Table 3.2.4 Mat time experiences held at 11.15am (end of am session) (Sample)

Date	Teacher	Large Group Experience – Teacher-led
Day 2	T1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All chd are sitting on mat • All chd are encouraged and directed to sit in a certain way, on their bottoms and facing the T at front & quiet listening. • A thank you to the parent help • Quick chat about the morning • T2 interrupts to tell a child that mother is going to be late • Book time and intro “The Little Scared Bear” & discussed • Most of the 45 chd engaged (with a small picture book) • T2 puts out new activities for afternoon while chd attentively listen to story • T moves chd into better spot for chd to see story • Parents begin to arrive • Using nonverbal cues to bring everyone’s attention back T. • Ka Kite & chd allowed to go as parents arrive.

Appendix 4

Beliefs Framework for analysis.

Table 4.2.1 Teachers' and Parents' understandings about aspects of the Kindergarten Curriculum as it relates to literacy in early childhood education.

Kindergarten Curriculum	Themes emerging from teacher data	Themes emerging from parent data
<p>Planning & resources – Provision of meaningful literacy experiences, environments & resources through guidance from official curriculum Te Whaariki & from documentation & support from Kindergarten Assoc (K.A.) & other external agencies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * General confidence expressed in accessing & using Te Whaariki by “fitting it in” * Centres both felt they had relevant & useful resources * Both centres believed they offered a strong core-curriculum (set activities) * ‘Learning story’ approach for curriculum planning still new, teachers & their teams still coming to terms with this approach. * Feeling of hierarchical approach to input from Kindergarten Assoc. & Ministry of Education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * No spoken knowledge of the official curriculum Te Whaariki (both settings) * Some had knowledge that programming exists “its on the wall outside the office” & “maybe sent from Head Office?”
<p>Pedagogy & Philosophy – Articulation of ideologies & practice within staff team & to the community of learners, inclusive of current education practices</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * A great deal of ‘curriculum development’ has been occurring lately – reasonably unsettling for teachers * Traditional practices versus ability to move forward is determined by teams & specific centre practices / culture e.g. children with ‘special needs’, specific community needs * Differing individual & team ideologies within centres * Limited time made to discuss these differences & approaches * Both teachers equate socio-cultural theory with the learning stories format, not to their day-to-day interactions of the centre. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Centre practices not always understood by parents. * Parents would like more teacher-directed ‘structure-orientated’ practices, as they get closer to school age. Structure defined as children moving from activity to activity as & when directed by teacher

<p>Facilitation</p> <p>- The sharing of literacy knowledge & expertise via literacy experiences, resources & interactions with children.</p>	<p>* Large groups of children & availability of time problematic for implementation of sociocultural theory & other 'new' assessment tools.</p> <p>* Facilitation of activity base curriculum being teacher-led (Centre Two (C2))</p>	<p>* Understanding that large numbers of children impede frequency of teacher interaction.</p> <p>* Implicit understandings of teacher co-construction, scaffolding, mediation, extension ideas</p>
<p>Research (ECE & centre –based)</p> <p>Ongoing, in-centre & PD regularly occurring to enrich knowledge base & program</p>	<p>* Need for centre-based research not MOE lead research – “<i>there’s not a lot of ownership?</i>”</p> <p>* Both centres stated interest in research regarding how children learn.</p>	<p>(but not articulated in these terms)</p>

Adapted from MacLachlan-Smith & St George, (2000), and Hamer and Adams (2003)

Table 4.2.2 Teachers’ and Parents’ understandings about key aspects of the Literacy Curriculum as it relates to early childhood education.

<p>Literacy in the curriculum</p>	<p>Major themes emerging From teacher data</p>	<p>Major themes emerging From parent data</p>
<p>Holistic & Weaving</p> <p>Literacy is represented in all areas of the programme & interactions with children in a planned, spontaneous yet authentic manner</p>	<p>* Literacy is occurring in every area of the setting</p> <p>* Involves both formal & informal literacy experiences (teacher-led and child-initiated)</p> <p>* Part of a strong core curriculum</p> <p>* Literacy experiences are offered in learning centres throughout environment</p>	<p>* Implicit understandings of the benefits of all areas of a child’s development assisting a children’s literacy, particularly their emotional and social well-being</p>
<p>Diversity</p> <p>Various repertoires of literacy experiences are experienced. Genuine attempts to include all children’s background (if appropriate).</p>	<p>* Diversity has a limited in understanding – generally extends to only bicultural curriculum-base</p> <p>* Questioning who should introduce diversity if not already existing in centre?</p>	<p>* Identify the benefits of te reo maori, whanau time, computer skills, peer interactions on literacy knowledge</p> <p>* Parents see themselves as mono-cultural (Centre2)</p>

<p>Routines</p> <p>Literacy experiences are planned & followed consistently.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Individual & large /small group-based activities ongoing & woven into programme * Whanau time – teacher-directed formalised literacy experiences * One centre offering ‘books in homes’ system * Arrival name identification system * Departure routine of children individually released to parents/caregivers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Desires to have some aspects of the programme aligned to the routines of school setting for transition purposes e.g. eating patterns, extended mat-times.
<p>Relevant</p> <p>The interaction is chosen with knowledge of the child & appropriateness of experience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Emergent curriculum complexities for teachers, i.e. scaffolding, movement of activity resources from specified areas, access to popular culture * Children are in the programme for very short periods of time, with holidays & absenteeism & late entry. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Concepts of ‘readiness’ of literacy acquisition – children will learn when they are ready. “Unless they are ready, its too hard. They are not interested”
<p>Narratives</p> <p>Variable types & inclusive of the creators (constructors) involved i.e. children, educators, parents, or visitors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Teacher states that sometimes narratives that present spontaneously are sometimes are difficult to capture the child’s ongoing interest. * kai time used as a chat-time * many opportunities to tell & listen to stories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Parents given opportunities to share their ‘stories’ via occupation interest (C2)
<p>Knowledge</p> <p>A changing body of literacy knowledge, which is mutually & socially constructed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Skills –based orientation, acknowledgement of learning dispositions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Expectations of one parent to have more formalised alphabetic/writing experiences in programme.

Adapted from MacLachlan-Smith & St George, (2000), and Hamer and Adams (2003)

Table 4.2.3 Teachers' and Parents' understandings about key aspects of *how children learn* as it relates to literacy in early childhood education.

How children learn	Major themes emerging From teacher data	Major themes emerging From parent data
<p>Co-construction – a negotiation of meanings , understandings and perspectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • by questioning & negotiating with knowledgeable others, teachers, adults & peers • accessing cultural tools • inclusion of funds of knowledge • via scaffolding & utilising the zone of proximal development (ZPD) technique • Apprenticeship – a concept of working alongside someone more skilled. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * There is exposure to many /different forms of literacy tools and pathways offered at centres * Skill-based orientations but acknowledgment of socially constructed via interactions with teachers, adults, visitors and other children * Predominately normative maturational perspectives of child development * Chd learn by being exposed to literacy “Osmosis” learning - explained by access to a social constructivism pedagogy * Still an unknown area needs more research. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Some explicit & implicit understandings of how children learn * Children learn when motivated, they can understand and interpret meaning *Self-directed learning with input by a knowledgeable other teacher or parent. * Via peer influence & accessing teacher interaction * Readiness model presented by teacher with teaching background
<p>Empowerment</p> <p>Where they are able to share in the decision-making about the learning process, enabling them to take an action or a role in the programme</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Popular culture opportunities under-accessed – sometimes seen as ‘inappropriate’. * Teachers feeling a little uncomfortable about the children driving the curriculum via the learning story format. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * dressing-up day initiated by narratives expressed from the home setting. * whanau time (sharing home resources) very empowering & motivation source
<p>Environment</p> <p>Authentic, meaningful & print-rich environment that is accessed & verified to & by the children.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Access to some meaningful environmental print available * Great deal of writing /learning stories for adult reading. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Importance of the centre being the child’s zone where they are empowered & included
<p>Meaningful</p> <p>Subject content & skills must be relevant & integrated for interest-based learning for individuals & groups involved.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Attempts to extend children via their initiated interest sometimes was not succesful, * emergent curriculum limited to what is deemed appropriate by teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * General enthusiasm for the programme that the kindergartens offer.

Adapted from MacLachlan-Smith & St George, (2000), and Hamer and Adams (2003)

Table 4.2.4. Teachers' and Parents' understandings about key aspects of *the teachers' role in children's literacy learning as it relates to early childhood education.*

Teacher's role	Major themes emerging from teacher data	Major themes emerging From parent data
<p>Authentic Assessment To provide pertinent information to contribute to improving learning opportunities for children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Issues implementing 'learning stories' format. It is different & some teachers feel disempowered by its socio-cultural approaches which include handing the curriculum over to the chd. * Preference of traditional Te Whaariki planning & profile books. * Resistance to becoming a profile-driven curriculum base. Pen-pusher or actively involved teacher? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Profiles not seen as an assessment tool more as a showcase & keepsake * No shared knowledge of learning stories and their importance in the programme
<p>Scaffolding Opportunities planned & emergent where literacy expertise is shared with child, allowing for 'apprenticeships' to develop.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Belief that the teacher is an informal educator * Enthusiasm for literacy vital in implementation of any area of the curriculum * preference for teacher-directed approach to set activities when scaffolding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Perceive this is of vital importance * Value of being an observer of scaffolding processes. * Parents understand that the teacher 'teachable moment' where teacher extends a child/ren's experience/interest
<p>Balance & empathy The art of understanding the need of the moment when working with children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Emergent curriculum opportunities can be challenging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Value the ability of staff to be consistent in their interactions (particularly behaviour management)
<p>Relationships & Interpersonal Establishing & maintaining responsive reciprocal relationships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Sometimes impeded by high number of children, & variable attendance rates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Believe staff are different from each other but all consistent * State that staff have similar values that reflect the community's values * Equality, fairness and respect Considered important and practised by staff.

<p>Professional & Quality</p> <p>Competent & knowledgeable educator involved in ongoing teacher development & desire to present high quality learning experiences & opportunities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Resistance to becoming profile driven * Personal attitudes towards literacy extremely important. *Historically top-down approach to educational change, move to staff having ownerships of programme decisions C2 * Lately support structures have not assisted.C1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Parents think staff are very approachable and supportive * Teachers understand the ‘culture of the community’
<p>Mediation</p> <p>To intervene & mentor the literacy experiences occurring in the centre.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Ongoing mediation at a certain level of effectiveness. * Teacher-led mediation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Teachers mediate through children’s experiences & try to extend them. * State teachers assist with home activity ideas when asked to support the parents.

Adapted from MacLachlan-Smith & St George, (2000), and Hamer and Adams (2003)

Table 4.2.5 Teachers’ and Parents’ understandings about key aspects of *Parent Partnerships* as they relate to literacy in early childhood education.

<p>Parent Partnerships</p>	<p>Major themes emerging From teacher data</p>	<p>Major themes emerging from parent data</p>
<p>Consultation</p> <p>Planned & established two-way collaboration and discussion with parents/caregivers</p>	<p>Parent consultation & feedback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a face to face style conference – using learning story & informal feedback with parents C1 • Consultation sheet when morning kindy starts & learning story/parent feedback sheet. C2 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Parents want more uninterrupted time to discuss child’s progress. * Parents state that staff are very approachable (parents don’t always approach to discuss curriculum issues)
<p>Partnership</p> <p>Working together to gain valuable knowledge about children’s ongoing learning in the centre/home environments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Assumptions about parent beliefs in the literacy area based on vocal parents * Untapped under-utilised resource-base * Parent Partnerships are challenging - “What parents want and what we want: I think it can be quite different things” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Not involved in the programming directly * Generally given tasks to complete e.g.morning tea duty *Parents act as “Quality control” * Supportive of programme, seeing themselves as the third part to the triangle * Support of “authority figure” of teacher

<p>Funds of knowledge</p> <p>The collective literacy experiences & understandings that are linked to the setting & the community that it serves</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Teachers have child development knowledge that parents may not have * Extensive support for interweaving parents careers /employment situations with children at C2 * Teachers assumptions about home contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Parents used as a resource base if “something worth sharing”C2. * Believe teachers understand the “culture of the community” * Genuine concerns for transition to school
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Adapted from MacLachlan-Smith & St George, (2000), and Hamer and Adams (2003)

Appendix 5

Consultation with Parents Form.

Welcome to Kidsfirst Kindergartens

We want to make sure, when planning our programme, that we include enjoyable activities and experiences for your child that will best meet their needs.

We value the knowledge and experience you have of your child. We hope you will share this information with us and it will remain confidential to the teachers.

Your child will enjoy helping you answer the following questions about himself/herself.

Things I like...

Things I do not like...

Things I like to play (inside and outside)...

Special things about me are...

members of my family are: _____

my grandparents are called: _____

my friends are: _____

my pets are: _____

Things I do well are...

Things I can do by myself are...

Interesting places I have visited...

Groups I belong to...

I have had experience at using...
(e.g. hammers, paint, scissors)


my favourite...

stories _____

toys _____

songs _____

food _____







Here are some questions for you as a parent that will help us care for your child. It may be helpful to discuss these questions with your partner or extended family/whanau.

My child can use the toilet...

- alone
- with help
- sometimes has accidents

My child can dress...

- independently
- needs help with shoes and socks
- needs help with coats

In a new situation, my child...

What will comfort my child when he/she is upset...



What do I/we want from kindergarten for my/our child?

What do I/we want from kindergarten for melus?

What cultural or religious considerations do the teachers need to be aware of?

What language is spoken at home?

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. In recognition of the partnership between parents and kindergartens, our teachers are available for informal discussions about your child. If you would like a more formal discussion, please see staff to arrange this at a mutually agreeable time.

You are always welcome to participate in the sessions, spend time playing with your child and join in with kindergarten activities.

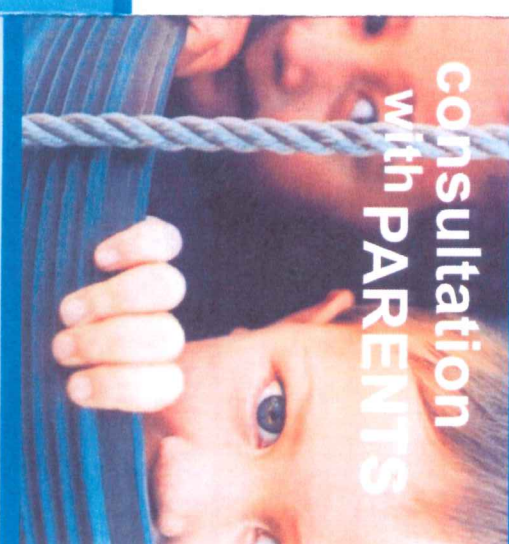
For additional general information you can contact us at



Kidsfirst Kindergarten Head Office,
Phone 03 3798872, Fax 03 3798871

All the colours of childhood!

consultation
with PARENTS



My name is



All the colours of childhood!