Play's progress?

Locating play in the educationalisation of early childhood in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memories of

Alexander (Lex) Grey (1919-2007)

Who knew that 'understanding children means enjoying them'

And

My magnificent mother, Enid Elaine Harcleroad Stover (1921-2004)

Who recognised quality early childhood education when 'children's eyes are shining'.

Their mortality sparked this project.

E hara i te mea nō naianei te aroha. Nō ngā tūpuna I tuku iho, i tuku iho.

Attestation

Attestation of authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

……..

Abstract

Anchored in the democratic and humanistic traditions of the Progressive Educators, and before that, to the infant schools, nurseries and kindergartens of Western Europe, 'learning through play' is an enduring but enigmatic thread in the history of early childhood education (e.c.e.). Championed by New Zealand's playcentre movement, 'free play' was widely seen as the best way for children to learn; during four decades after World War II, systems developed for children's education through play.

Within a feminist oral history methodology, the study's original data was collected in interviews with 23 historic leaders of e.c.e. who were asked to remember play, free play, and learning through play. Their collective experiences cover over 60 years of 'the everyday' recalled in kindergarten, te kohanga reo, playcentre, childcare settings, as well as in academic and political contexts. Their stories indicate major shifts in understanding about how children grow, learn, and develop; shifts in how and why they play. In particular there were shifts in how adults (especially teachers) can choose to influence play and learning.

Through thematic analysis and use of the etymological and hermeneutic tools of the bricoleur-as-researcher (Kincheloe, 2001, 2005), three 'grand projects' for early childhood education are identified; each 'grand project' reflecting a different purpose. The first 'grand project' started around 1948 with the appointment of a preschool advisor within the Department of Education (Alcorn, 1999), and the formation of what became the New Zealand Playcentre Federation (Stover, 1998b) whose leaders helped define what 'free play' should look like and was intended to achieve. Starting from 1975, a second 'grand project' was focused on creating a unity of purpose amongst the diversity of 'pre-school' organisations. This enabled an educational sector for the early

years to be created within government, as well as alliances between broad social reform agendas and the neoliberal policy objectives (May, 2001, Te One, 2003, Scrivens, 2002). In this formative era, the voices from Maori communities and of feminists were particularly strong. Also important was the articulation of a curriculum 'myth' (Beeby, 1986) which enabled the e.c.e. sector to proceed at a policy level with multiple agendas: the education of children under five years old, workforce policy and cultural imperatives (Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group, 1988). From the mid 1990s, a grand 'education' project is identified which has been marked by the professionalisation of the sector, the foregrounding of compliance requirements and the rapid expansion of the sector itself. So what has happened to the ideas that children learn through play? and especially that they learn through 'free play'?

In this study, the 'container' construct of 'educationalisation' (Depaepe, Herman, Surmont, van Gorp, & Simon, 2008) is used to track 'free play' in its shaping of the classroom 'grammar' of both historic and contemporary early childhood settings; that is, the organisation of space, resources and equipment. Playcentre is recognised as pivotal in this process. Further, memories of those interviewed suggest a fundamental change in how children are seen and what is appropriate for them, for their parents and teachers. Using de Certeau's 'logic of practice' (1984) to consider play's 'progress' across the three 'grand projects', it is proposed that the systems for 'learning through play' and 'free play' have served as a technology that enabled a colonising process. This process is the movement from a bricolage ('make do') approach to rearing very young children through to the creation of professional services for their education and care.

The effect of tracing the historic thread of play in early childhood is to foreground children's experience within the complexity both of sector policy, and within the choices made by parents during their children's early years.

CHAPTER 1: Play as an arena of engagement

In his plea for dialogue across the divides that separate the international early childhood sectors, Peter Moss (2008) looked for "arenas of engagement" (p. 14) where opponents could meet. He named the opponents as being those who promote "modernist" developmentally appropriate approaches, and those that advocate "postfoundational" approaches to early childhood education. Looking for a site for "argumentative discourse", Moss suggested the field "evaluation" as an arena in which "hybrid understandings" could develop.

This study identifies another 'arena of encounter' in which agonistic opponents (Mouffe, 1999) can meet: the idea that children learn through play. This current study looks at how play, and especially 'free play', was remembered by 23 historic leaders of early childhood education (e.c.e.) in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand. Drawing on oral history interviews, it documents the remembered experiences of personal, social and educational change.

The methodology is a form of bricolage which, following Kincheloe (2001, 2005), includes a hybrid of methods reflecting 'what is to hand', including hermeneutic and etymological engagement with the research data. The metaphor of the 'arena of encounter' helps allow the complexity of meanings to remain evident.

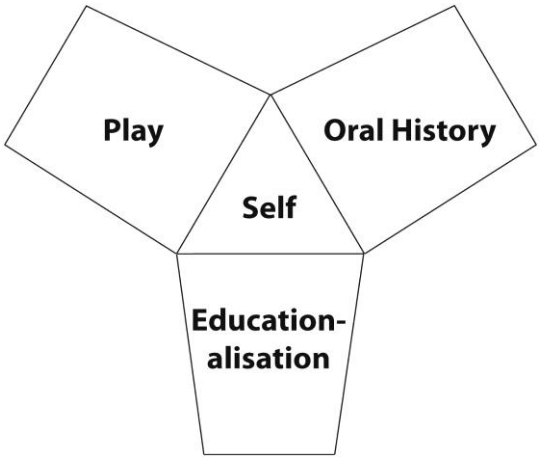
Ailwood (2003) recognised this complexity as a feature of studying play in early childhood contexts. Play, she wrote, is a "significant nodal point at which understandings and discourses of childhood, motherhood, education, family, psychology and citizenship coagulate and collide" (p. 188). Yet it can be argued: it is because play is problematic and without a fixed definition, that focusing on play enables hybrid understandings and discussions to be undertaken across Moss's (2008) paradigmatic divides.

The metaphor of the node remains relevant in other aspects of this study. The data has been generated through the techniques of oral history, a nodal discipline that can draw from across the social sciences to interpret the data generated (Friedlander, 1998; Gluck, 1999). A 'container' construct, 'educationalisation' as promoted by Depaepe (1998) and Depaepe and Smeyers (2008) is used to shape the analytical processes within this study. When educationalisation is considered historically, its focus is often on the origins of the 'grammar' of schools; that is: how educational settings were "conceived and pre-structured by adults as an educationally oriented space for children" (Depaepe, et al., 2008, p. 21). Educationalisation can also be visualised as a nodal construct, in the sense of being recognised in the interplay between education and society. As society changes, so education changes; thus educationalisation reflects a change process, with Depaepe and Smeyers (2008) positioning 'educationalisation' as paralleling modernisation and the professionalisation of teachers.

Arguably there is a fourth nodal construct also evident in the structure of this study, namely the self. The self is a visible participant in the research process, as an occasional provider of historic material and especially in the last chapter of this study, as reflective analyser. The self-as-writer has made choices what to include and exclude; what to privilege and what to let go; how to integrate ideas across the nodal constructs that shape the study.

Visually these three nodal constructs, plus the researcher-writer-analyst (as 'self') can be represented as a patchwork, or bricolage (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 A bricolage representing this study



This study's point of difference from existing historical accounts is the foregrounding of 'play' when considering recalled historic events. The effect of this foregrounding is to highlight the ways in which a 'science of play' has enabled the creation of educational systems for young children. The foregrounding also provides historic information which illustrates 'play' as a boundary-crossing term. Stories of play describe events occurring outside, as well as inside officially educational structures; play includes adults as well as young children; play is impulsive, and spontaneous; play is organised and intentional.

When viewed historically, the research data shows more than shifts in understandings about play. They illustrate how across half a century, children in Aotearoa New Zealand have become normalised in 'educational' settings where 'play-based learning' can occur. While this movement of children into institutional settings is already well documented (see, for example, Farquhar, 2008a; May, 2001; A. Smith & Swain, 1988; Stover, 1998b), what this study adds is a recognition that this process can be understood as exemplifying 'educationalisation' in multiple forms, including:

- how the science of education developed to create a professional e.c.e sector, which includes some understanding how and why young children 'play';
- how the physical spaces for e.c.e. have shaped a 'grammar' of provision (a 'normal' logic) which initially reflected 'free play' logic;
- how the drive for professional status amongst teachers has helped to shape contemporary forms of e.c.e.; and
- how very young children have become 'normalised' in educational settings during daylight hours.

1.1 The research questions

The primary research question was: How has play been experienced, and understood across, the past 60 years by those identified as historic leaders of the early childhood sector? Two secondary questions reflect firstly the importance of 'free play' in the formative years of early childhood education in this country, and secondly, the increasing emphasis on education and educational systems of funding and compliance: *How was 'play' (and especially 'free play') understood and codified in intentional 'play' settings? How did the e.c. sector become 'educational' and how has this process effected understandings about children's play?*

1.2 The author's position/s within the 'arena of engagement called play'

To make evident how I understand myself within the 'arena of engagement' called play, I begin with two personal statements:

(1) my personal experience is that children still thrive in sessional free play environments and those who participated as young children in free play environments do not seem to have been disadvantaged as adults; and

(2) the experience of becoming a mother was for me a transforming (generally positive) experience which required and enabled significant career shifts.

The combination of these experiences, plus existing cultural and religious openness to 'working things out as you go' (see section 3.1.2) illustrate a predisposition for working within the bricolage.

Academically: I see the major challenge in positioning play as 'educational' rests not with whether children learn through play, but rather whether teachers can justify their professional status when the emphasis is on play, and especially in the context of neoliberal delivery systems which require teachers to ensure learning outcomes are met (Dalli, 2010; Ministry of Education, 1998; Te One, 2003). Delivered alongside and evident within the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), the neoliberal systems of accountability (Ministry of Education, 1998) have shaped what it means to be a professional early childhood teacher (Duhn, 2010; Scrivens, 2002). Further, I recognise that emphasising play, and especially foregrounding 'free play', troubles both the professionalising of early childhood teaching, and the normalising of children in early childhood settings during daylight hours.

Like Moss (2010) who attempted to both support the goals of professional e.c. teachers and to, at the same time, query the relevance of e.c. teacher professionalism, I also am not seeking to devalue the shape of early childhood education in New Zealand. My position statement is offered here because it enables me to clearly position myself as both an insider and an outsider within the academic early childhood conversation. My goal is, like Moss's (2008), to expand the conversation. Perhaps if 'free play' and its associated groups and ways of provision were considered less as relics and more as a treasure trove of historic and current possibilities, some border crossings across the paradigmatic divides of early childhood education could occur.

1.3 Structure of this study

This study presents itself initially through its title. A truncated question, 'Play's progress?' is deliberately ambiguous. The subtitle offers a direction in which the answer can be found – in the educationalisation of early childhood. And indeed that is one direction which this study is headed. Less evident but of great relevance is the notion that play, especially children's play, is associated with, perhaps harnessed by, the grand notion of 'progress' towards some hoped for goal. This was not a known direction when I began this study. It was when I working through the analytical process that I became aware that although things are meant to be better now, and by many indicators they are, but these historic leaders of early childhood sector had more to say than just that things were better.

Chapter 2 is the literature review which briefly considers the contentious topics of trying to define 'play' and 'learning through play'. It then considers the development historically of systems to educate children using play and amusements, including the work of the English nursery schools and the German kindergartens, but also emphasising the origins of 'free play' within the critique of US kindergartens 100 years ago by the philosopher/educator John Dewey. The expansion of education to include play is considered alongside the rise of Progressive Educators into positions of authority in Aotearoa New Zealand. The major changes in the form and purposes of early childhood education are considered using both the construct of educationalisation (Depaepe, 1998; Depaepe, et al., 2008; Depaepe & Smeyers, 2008) and the 'practice of everyday life' (de Certeau, 1984). Of particular importance is the feminist critique of 'e.c.' services in the 1970s and 1980s, alongside major changes in social policy.

Chapter 3 covers the research design and process. The bricolage is introduced as a qualitative mixed methods approach to research (Denzin, 2010; Denzin &

Lincoln, 1998; Kincheloe, 2001, 2005). The presence of the self in the research is considered in the context of the bricolage, as well as in feminist oral history. The interview is the research method used in this study, and it is considered as a method of inquiry that crosses multiple domains of inquiry. Inductive theme analysis reflecting hermeneutic consideration of text was used to shape the three 'Grand Projects' in which the research data is presented in subsequent chapters.

The historical material is organised into three chapters, each covering a 'grand project' which demarcated a significant change occurring in 'early childhood education'. Chapter 4 covers the 'Grand Play Project' which was gaining momentum in the 1930s, and then became most evident from about 1948 through to about 1975. During this time, 'free play' was emphasised as a scientific and healthy way for children to learn in their early years. In chapter 5, the second 'grand project' is considered. It emphasised unity across the e.c. services and reflected prolonged and effective lobbying for a significant role for government in pursuit of quality e.c. provision (especially to improve the standards in childcare). It also addressed issues of social justice for the poor, for women (especially working women) and for Māori. In this 'grand project', 'free play' was not the focus but neither was it actively argued against. However, with the creation of the 'Grand Educational Project', starting from the mid 1990s with the gazetting of and them implementing of the new e.c.e. curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), the place of 'free play' was actively disputed by advocates for the potential curriculum benefits of focusing on sociocultural constructs which underpin the new curriculum (see, for example, Anning, Cullen, & Fleer, 2004).

Chapter 7 provides analysis of the research data, as well as a reconsideration of the methodology and the significance of this study. Using imminent and intrusive analysis, the research data is reconsidered with an emphasis on

educationalisation, and especially on the professionalisation of e.c.e. That a form of colonisation has occurred is also proposed.

1.4 Style

The writing style followed in this study is an amended form of APA (5th edition). The amendments include:

- Using traditional New Zealand spelling (e.g. 'realise' is used instead of 'realize'; however); however quotes with '-ize' words are used unchanged.
- Privileging as 'normal' New Zealand place names in the reference list. For example, Wellington and Auckland are used without identifying them as being in New Zealand. However, out of consideration for international readers, publications produced in smaller New Zealand cities are country-identified.

Although academic practice normally would privilege the timelessness of theoretical statements by using the present tense In discussion of the literature, in this study, I have chosen to use the past tense. In doing so, I am emphasising that even theory is articulated in a time and place and, given the nature of its generation, it is always in the past. Whether the theoretical statement speaks with authenticity and currency to the reader, is left for the reader to interpret for themselves.

A decision to frequently use 'e.c.e.' (meaning 'early childhood education') is a deliberate and considered one. The tidy rush of initials is, I suggest, easier to read than the cumbersome words they stand in place of. When 'e.c.e.' is used with quote marks, it is within timeframes before the existence of the early childhood education sector. By using the quote marks, I am emphasising that e.c.e. is a construct that developed during the 1970s and 1980s and became a political reality through the educational reforms of 1988 and 1989. Similarly, I have added single quotes to frame the term 'free play' when it refers to what I

suggest is an ideology, a system of provision with expected (even if broad) outcomes (Spodek & Saracho, 2003). The style of writing adopted for the research findings (chapters 4-6 and their discussion in chapter 7) is discussed in section 3.5.1.

There are Māori words used throughout this study. The use of the macron, such as in the word Māori, indicates an elongated vowel. In the context of early childhood research, 'Aotearoa' often precedes New Zealand to acknowledge the place of the indigenous people, the Māori, within the historic and current realities. This style is frequently used in this study. However, 'New Zealand' (without being preceded by Aotearoa) is used when referring to the government of this country, and is also the term used by many of the participants. The result is that there is not consistency as to how this country is referred to.

For international readers and those unfamiliar with 'e.c.e.' words and phrases, a glossary of terms is included as an appendix. Many Māori words, and colloquial New Zealand expressions are also included, as the research data includes local idiom.

Within in this study, brief quotes are often used to introduce a chapter, a section or subsection. These usually have the effect of introducing a theme which will become evident. Some of these quotes are 'research notes' that reflect my own processing of ideas (see section 3.1.3). They can be understood as a literary convention intended to help establish 'an arena of encounter' between the reader and author, and to hopefully smooth the transition into the topics to be covered. They also can be understood as being in keeping with the genre of the bricolage, in which the poetic and the fictive have a place (Kincheloe, 2005).

CHAPTER 2: Foregrounding play in education: Literature review

When considering the history of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand, foregrounding play has the effect of producing two distinct yet entwined themes which will be considered in this literature review. The first is how children's play became compatible with educational services and the 'systems' that characterised them. That there was a connection between play and learning has also arguably both established a professional (albeit disputed) basis for the status of those who taught the very young (Fromberg, 2003; May, 2005a; McCann, 1966; Prochner, 2009). This theme offers some continuity between what was happening for children and their teachers 200 years ago and what could be happening in contemporary early childhood education (e.c.e.) settings. The second recurring theme is the connection between interventions in the early years and the desire for social reform. This desire has taken different forms including to save souls, to overcome poverty, to create unrepressed expressive humans, or to create high-contributing low-cost public citizens (Duhn, 2006, 2009, 2010; Farquhar, 2008a; Prochner, 2009; Singer, 1992). The point of entwinement between these two themes rests in the purpose of both. The desire to transform society and address social ills has led from time to time, to increased interest in and intervention in the education of the very young.

The sources of information used in this literature review reflect both what was sought through professional inquiry and also what happened less deliberately. Library databases (including JSTOR, INNZ and Proquest) were searched using key words and phrases, such as 'history of play' and 'free play'. More specific searches were used to locate information about historic forms of early childhood education, such as 'playcentre', 'kindergarten' and 'infant schools'. Much of the historic material relevant to New Zealand is only available as books and reports.

As the research progressed, more focused searches of the literature were undertaken as key authors and key concepts (for example, 'educationalisation') became evident. Several participants opened their personal archives to me, and also directed me towards specific historic material, including in the National Archives, Wellington. Serendipitous sources found in second hand shops also produced useful historic material on education, early childhood education and particularly on this country's feminist movement. The Official Information Act was used to obtain information from the Ministry of Education about the research basis for the '20 hours free e.c.e.' (as it was known when it was introduced in 2007).

This literature review is organised into four sections. Section 2.1 focuses on defining play, and the contention that children's play and education are compatible. Section 2.2 looks historically at the development of influential organisations which demarcated systems and institutional settings in which very young children could learn through play. Section 2.3 introduces more fully the construct of 'educationalisation' and illustrates its relevance to ways in which the early childhood sector has taken shape in this country. Finally a brief section 2.4 draws together themes introduced in this literature proposing some 'locations' for play in the context of the educationalising of early childhood in Aotearoa New Zealand.

2.1 Play? Learning through play?

'Play' defies tidy definition. Although Sutton-Smith (1997) suggested that defining play was an exercise in "silliness", he also maintained that "we all know what it feels like" (p. 1). This assumption is not unproblematic as play is culturally specific (Fleer, 2009), and what is regarded as play in one context, may not be regarded as play in another. While Sutton-Smith (1997) positioned the capacity

to play as being innate to humans and basic to our ability to adapt to our contexts, he also said that children's play has to be allowed.

However, play is recognised as an activity of the young amongst mammals which Gregory Bateson (1972/2000) described as a frame of communication in which mammals meet each other, offering and recognising "signals standing for other events" (p. 181). Behaviours and attitudes, even rituals, are recognised as playful through metalinguistic exchange; another example of which is the ability to communicate and perceive threat. Seeing 'play' as a frame of metalinguistic communication positions it as not limited to humans, nor to children, nor to educational settings (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; Grondin, 2001).

In the context of international early childhood education (e.c.e.) literature, there appears to be a broad consensus that play is complex (Hewes, 2007; Hill, 2005; Jones & Cooper, 2006; Stover, White, Rockel, & Toso, 2010; Wood, 2010; Wood & Attfield, 2005), but there is some consensus about some key descriptors of play. Play can be described as:

- active, exploratory;
- intrinsically-motivated;
- carried out 'as if';
- more focused on process than on product; and
- relatively free of external rules yet reflecting experiences and contexts (Bruce, 1991; Monighan-Nourot, 1997; Nutbrown, Clough, & Selbie, 2008; Rogers & Sawyers, 1988; Wood & Attfield, 2005).

Describing children's play as "not the predominant form of activity, but is, in a certain sense, the leading source of development in preschool years" (p. 546), Vygotsky (1976), warned against over-intellectualising play. However, he theorised that through imaginary play, children develop abstract thought, such as

when a child can recognise and act of qualities of objects using unrelated objects (so a stick of wood can become a horse because some quality of the horse can be recognised in the stick). Thus play could be understood as providing "a conceptual space for the dialectical relations between everyday concept formation and scientific concept formation" (Fleer, 2009, p. 5).

However, play's relevance to educational settings is characterised historically as ambivalent by Nutbrown, et al. (2008) who described how learning through play has been alternately "heralded as the essential means through which children learn" and then "castigated and sidelined in favour of ensuring that young children should 'work' in school" (p. 154). This ambivalence is evident in contemporary literature. So while Pramling-Samuelssen and Johansson (2006, p. 62) maintained that play and learning are "indivisible" in the lived experiences of young children, a recent OECD report avoided the word 'play', advocating that e.c.e. providers respect "the child's agency and natural learning strategies" (OECD, 2006, p. 16).

One example of those who heralded the value of learning through play were Hartley and Goldensen (1963) who maintained that how someone feels affects what they do and how they learn. They wrote that "most lasting learning takes place when the learner is enjoying what he (sic) is doing" (p. 2). The "canny" teacher, they suggested, is able to capture the "magic" of play and to direct it towards "the serious tasks" because in play, a child is "more nearly whole, self-directed, open and creative" (p. 2). Thus the teacher can exercise professional judgments about what play to support; the child learns in part at least, because the teacher allows and directs aspects of the child's play. Guss (2005, p. 233) described this as "playing instrumentally" with the teacher encouraging children's play that aligned with learning outcomes.

Arguing against this capture of play for educational purposes, Hewes (2007) focused on the purpose of play. If children's play is not to be overwhelmed by educational activity, she suggested, play and learning need to be separated: "Play often produces learning, but this is rarely the purpose of play. Learning can be playful, but playful learning in and of itself, is not play" (p. 8).

Other authors have considered the purpose of play alongside the purpose of e.c.e. and its various forms. Ailwood (2003) critiqued the discourse of play in e.c.e. as being one of governance. Similarly Gibbons (2007) argued that play and its historic advocates as the creators of a monolithic discourse of conformity. In pursuit of social progress through the realisation of human potential, children are expected to play in prescribed ways in prescribed places as determined by experts on play. The Romantic philosophers and educationalists, including Rousseau and Froebel, Gibbons said, established a "currency of the natural child as a technology for realising social, economic and political progress" leading to "increased political attention to the young and in particular their education" (p. 28).

While young children's capacity to learn through play is not in dispute in the literature, the value of foregrounding play in contemporary educational settings is contested. This has also been the situation historically. The next section considers how the connection between play and education developed, especially in kindergartens and in the English infant schools which were at their most influential in the 19th century when New Zealand was first being colonised by the English (May, 2005a; Prochner, 2009).

2.2 Looking historically: Play and learning

The body of literature that privileges the history of e.c.e. in Aotearoa New Zealand is relatively small and much of the required archival work reflects the

expansion of e.c.e. into the tertiary sector during the past 20 years (Bethell, 2008; Duhn, 2009; Farquhar, 2008a; May, 1997, 2001, 2005a, 2009; Prochner, 2009). That archival work has made evident how the systems of e.c.e. developed, not only from the philosophical influences on education through the writings of Plato (1972) and Rousseau (1762/1972), for example, but also from social conditions of the early 19th century. In Switzerland, the well-funded and well-documented work of Johann Pestalozzi with young Swiss war orphans in the late 18th century showed that children could be educated in groups. However, the underpinning logic of his success was not strongly evident (Braun & Edwards, 1972; May, 2005a). Observations of Pestalozzi at work led his student, Frederick Froebel, to articulate that logic and to develop the activity-based approach he called 'kindergarten'. Froebel's writings position children as spirited beings able to encounter God's laws and principles through "prayerful" (Prochner, 2009, p. 105) playing with specific equipment, as well as through playing within the natural world (Braun & Edwards, 1972; Froebel, 1826/1999; Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2005; Prochner, 2009; E. Weber, 1984).

Froebel's theorising of play as "the self active representation of the inner life from inner impulse and necessity" was an understanding of 'learning by doing' which did "far more developing and cultivating than the merely verbal representation of ideas" (Froebel, 1826/1999, p. 116). A teacher's task is not to instruct, but to draw out what was innate; "the expression of his spirit" (Froebel, 1826/1999) was evident in the child's engagement with materials of construction. Progression of knowledge was evident in the aggregating of specific forms. For example, by working with wooden blocks first vertically and then horizontally and rectangularly, the child experiences and understands "equilibrium and symmetry" leading to more complex constructs (Froebel, 1826/1999, p. 116).

Kindergartens were starting to appear in the late 1830s and, according to Prochner (2009), would likely have remained of little international relevance, if it had not been for Froebel's capacity to gather around him a strong group of (mostly) women who could interpret his "cryptic", even "obtuse" writings (Prochner, 2009, p. 105). Froebel's carefully designed equipment built on the underlying assumption that children, while innocent, require order. While his 'gifts' were intended for the very young to experience in prescribed ways in the company of their mothers, and are remembered primarily for the many sets of blocks and balls, his 'occupations' were more focused on 'crafts' with tasks set for children involving paper, clay, sticks, and fabric. The ideas imbedded in the equipment needed to be made visible to the adult who was working with the child; equipment was distributed with instructions as to how the equipment was to be used by child and kindergarten teacher alike (Prochner, 2009). So although Froebel believed women, because of their maternal instinct, were particularly suited to being kindergarten teachers, that instinct needed to be channeled, developed and professionally refined (Singer, 1992).

The earliest English school for very young children predates Froebel's early kindergartens. Supported by his fellow Quakers in his concern for children of the poor in industrialising England, Joseph Lancaster opened Borough Street School in 1798 (Nutbrown, et al., 2008). Other initiatives soon followed, with entrepreneurial and pedagogical leadership especially from Samuel Wilderspin and James Buchanan. Described by McCann (1966, p. 190), as "inventive and original" thinkers, both men were followers of a mystical sect, the Swedenborgians, whose teachings about the presence of the heavenly within the earthly, helped position children, regardless of class or status, as free from sin. The worldviews of Wilderspin and Buchanan were evident in their systems for teaching very young children. For example, Buchanan's reason for gathering children in a circle was because that was how the angels visited earth (Prochner,

2009). The view of the child existing without sin ran contrary to the existing Christian dogma. However, a shared understanding with more mainstream groups like the London Missionary Society was the corrupting aspects of society, especially the ravages of poverty and parental neglect. The goal, according to May (2005) was “an educable and orderly child” which could be achieved through the infant school’s “ordered environment” which contrasted with “the perceived disorder of the child’s home” (p. 44).

The English infant schools were credited with demonstrating that young children as learners were different from older children and could learn in group settings which enabled “interest, amusement and exercise” (McCann, 1966, p. 202). The legacy of Lancaster’s work included the use of older children as ‘monitors’, and the use of sand with young children, especially in trays for shaping and re-shaping letters (May, 2005a). Wilderspoon’s subjects for infants included geometry, arithmetic, and geography, as well as exploring outdoor environments, and games that included chanting the alphabet and times tables, but his ‘system’ showed some sensitivity to children’s varying capacities for concentration, and therefore their ability to be instructed. It also showed an appreciation for playful teaching. The term ‘amusement’ is used to describe both the action and the spirit of some aspects of pedagogy (McCann, 1966). Children should enjoy learning although corporal punishment was not unusual (Prochner, 2009).

Prochner (2009) reported that in order to manage the very large groups in the infant schools, child monitors were used. These were older children, sometimes paid for their work, who enabled an educational system to develop that included children learning through activity. Children were encouraged to march, chant, sing (oftentimes outdoors); as well as to sit in large galleries to be instructed. The rhythm of physical activity followed by inactivity and instruction was in contrast to the rote learning characteristic of the dame schools of the same era in which young children, usually of parents who could pay. At dame schools, children were

taught in small groups within “homes or hovels, parlours, kitchens and even cellars” (May, 2005a, p. 44).

As advocates for new systems of education for very young children, leaders of both kindergartens and infant schools had to contend with ridicule. McCann (1966) described how Wilderspin had problems explaining why, in order to engage children, one had to “descend to their level”, and, in his early attempts to establish an infant school, he was “pelted with filth” by mothers who wanted their children to be taught “proper lessons” (p. 193). Less graphically, Froebel also had to argue his case. For those “inclined to consider” that his systems were “useless in the boyhood of their children”, he suggested that such critics look to the qualities of “energy, judgment, perseverance, prudence” and to guard against the terrible “poisons” of “idleness, ennui, ignorance, (and) brooding”(Froebel, 1826/1999, p. 116). Arguing for expertise to recognised, Froebel maintained that in the calm engaged perspective of one who knows how to interpret the signs, “spontaneous play of the child discloses the future inner life of the man. The plays of childhood are the germinal leaves of all later life”; the spontaneous play of child holds his “tenderest dispositions” and “his innermost tendencies” (Froebel, 1826/1999, p. 55).

Early New Zealand colonial activity included transplanted forms of the infant schools, and less directly, the kindergartens. The New Zealand Company recruited James Buchanan in the 1840s to come to New Zealand and it is a matter of historic accident that he abandoned his travels to this country, going to South Africa instead. However, his assistant did arrive in New Zealand to establish infant schools in Wellington (May, 2005a; Prochner, 2009). Kindergarten, in various forms, came to New Zealand in more diffuse forms. Froebel’s ideas regarding children’s activity came with the infant schools as the English Froebelian society had managed to introduce aspects of Froebel’s teaching there (Prochner, 2009). Kindergarten also came to New Zealand in the form of trained

kindergarteners (May, 1997) and in the familiarity with kindergarten which came with immigrants from Germany (May, 1997), as well as from the United States (Duncan, 2008) where kindergartens had become more firmly established than in England (Prochner, 2009). New Zealand's first successful free kindergarten opened in 1889 in Dunedin and the motivation of its early proponents was similar to that which led to the creation of infant schools decades earlier in England: the desire to counter the effects of widespread poverty amongst urban families (Hughes, 1989; May, 2005a; Prochner, 2009; A. Smith & Swain, 1988).

What spread to the colonies from England was a system with earnest intent. Systems of instructions were contained in manuals and while some of the equipment of infant schools (such as the use of blocks and singing) transitioned beyond England, learning by the mid 1850s, was "no longer by means of 'amusement'" (Prochner, 2009, p. 39). The philanthropic funding did not necessarily transfer to the colonies and in the 1850s funding for infant schools was drying up, not only in New Zealand, but elsewhere (Prochner, 2009). Those infant schools that did survive were focused on older children. Compulsory public education for children aged seven years and older further confused the status of infant schools, with some schools running kindergarten-inspired classrooms, and some having very young children (especially siblings of older school students) in classrooms. The 'infants' were of varying ages and were found in varying places (May, 2005a; Prochner, 2009).

However, the merits of learning through activity are evident in colonial reports, according to May (2005). School inspectors argued against the containing and controlling of very young children especially when teachers lacked understanding of how to teach them. In addition, the economic effort required to teach young children was seen as a waste of the "national purse" (cited by May, 2005, p. 180). However, learning through activity, or learning through play, does not necessarily mean learning through the efforts of a teacher. Sutton-Smith (1982), in his

history of children's play in colonial New Zealand, saw the "rural play life of the day" enabled "the development of children's natural interests, their initiative, and their independence" (pp. 98-99). However, Prochner (2009) also identified a mistrust of a loosening of standards if very young children were left to learn without instruction.

The next subsection focuses on the Progressive Education movement which is widely credited with foregrounding play within educational settings for very young children in Aotearoa New Zealand.

2.2.1 Progressive Education

> *Play is not to be identified with anything which the child externally does. It rather designates his mental attitude in its entirety and in its unity. It is the free play, the interplay of all the child's powers, thoughts, and physical movements, in embodying, in a satisfying form, his own images and interests…. (Dewey, 1909/1956, p. 118).*

When John Dewey wrote these words in 1909, he was challenging existing practices in U.S. kindergartens (E. Weber, 1984). Drawing on his experiences as a parent, as a progressive educator, and as a philosopher, Dewey maintained that the learning child problem solves through meaningful activity. Building on personal previous experience, the learning child moves to a higher plane of cognitive, as well as psychological, understanding. This was highly contentious as US Froebelians insisted that kindergartens were defined by the structured engagement with Froebel's 'gifts' (E. Weber, 1984).

Dewey's critique is relevant here for at least two reasons. One is his use of the phrase 'free play'. What Dewey was advocating for was children's interaction amidst and with resources that were simple enough to be manipulated, and complex enough that they could be interpreted in a variety of personal ways. Both the manipulating and the interpreting prompt the development of higher thought. His advocacy for resources that encouraged freely chosen activities

indicates the shape of ‘free play’ environments which were developed and publicised by Susan Isaacs (1929/1968) in England prior to World War II. Following the war, they were elaborated further by authors such as Hartley, Frank and Goldenson (1952) who foregrounded play as enabling creative expression and personality development. They itemised the desirable areas of play, including: dramatic play, blocks, water play, clay, graphic materials, fingerpaint and music and movement. These play areas are still recognised in this country as the traditional areas of play which remain evident in contemporary e.c. settings (Hill, 2005; May, 2001; Ministry of Education, 2011).

A second reason for considering the events of 1909 is that they illustrate the contested place of play within the contested purpose of e.c.e. Dewey’s status as a leading US philosopher helped to champion the cause of women kindergarten reformers and his work provides a reference point both in terms of the political nature of unifying discourses, but also in articulating underpinning theory of how children learn through ‘free play’ (E. Weber, 1984).

However, when play is historically theorised in Aotearoa New Zealand, Dewey has been given less significance. Authors tend to position ‘free play’ as part of developmental psychology supported by Piagetian theory (see, for example, Densem & Chapman, 2000; May, 2001; Penrose, 1998). Similarly, when discussed briefly by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2007), free play is positioned within developmental psychology as a dismissed construct of childhood that attempts to maintain children’s innocence “from the corrupt surrounding world” (p. 45). Yet Dewey is deferentially referred as having a “reflective and problematizing approach to pedagogical practice” (p. 145) which has influenced the pioneering work at Reggio Emilia.

As a philosopher, Dewey is identified with modernist and pragmatist schools of thought. The modernists are credited with that major shift in thinking away from

the metaphysical and towards the scientific. The pragmatists held that the value of anything would be evident in its practical effect (Bullock, Stallybrass, & Trombley, 1977; Gutek, 2005; Menand, 2001). As part of the Progressive Education movement, Dewey was aligned with the reformist 'progressives' who rallied communities and government to counter the power that corporations had over industries and workers' lives. According to Gutek (2004), the progressives were not themselves intent on taking power, in part because of their strong anti-bureaucratic thrust but also because of their 'romantic' faith in the workings of communities, neighbourhoods and families.

While Progressive Education was influential in US kindergartens, psychoanalytic ideas were more influential in the English pre-kindergarten 'nurseries' of the early 20th century (E. Weber, 1984). However, by the time New Zealand was encountering the new progressive ideas about early years education, these two major influences were effectively combined (Isaacs, 1929/1968; McDonald, Goldblatt, & Barlow, 2003; Somerset, 1987). Progressive ideas and practices came to New Zealand through the writings of international progressive proponents (for example, Dewey, 1910, 1938). They also developed here in response to international travel and study. An example of this is what led a cluster of Wellington kindergarteners (teachers, teacher educators and administrators) to introduce play-based learning in kindergartens even in the 1930s (Sewell & Bethell, 2009). Similarly Gwen Somerset's travels in Europe and the United States during the early 1930s galvanised her promotion of learning through activity in both adult and early years education (Somerset, 1972, 1988).

With the political support of the New Zealand's first Labour Government (especially of the then Minister of Education, Peter Fraser) and the organisational skill of Clarence (C.E.) Beeby, Susan Isaacs can take much of the credit for foregrounding learning through play. When she visited New Zealand in 1937 as part of delegation heading for the New Education Fellowship conference in

Australia, Susan Isaacs brought with her experience leading the experimental Malting House nursery (Alcorn, 1999; Gardner, 1969; Isaacs, 1929/1968; McDonald, et al., 2003). She was also a published author whose straightforward prose and practical suggestions were easily digested and popularised (Gardner, 1969; Isaacs, 1929/1968). Although she was psychoanalytically trained, Isaacs maintained she was more influenced in her nursery practices by Dewey than by Freud (Isaacs, 1929/1968; McDonald, et al., 2003). However, her interpretation of observations reflected her lifelong fascination with psychoanalysis (Gardner, 1969).

What Progressive Education meant pedagogically included that the curriculum would reflect children's interest and thus that curriculum arises out of experience, rather than out of predetermined activities (Grey, 1975; Gutek, 2004; May, 2001; Somerset, 1975, 1987). Susan Isaacs articulated systems to support these ideas, advocated for well-informed parents and illustrated how psychoanalytic insights could be used to analyse observations of children busy at their freely chosen play (Isaacs, 1929/1968). So within Progressive Education, the dynamic tools available to the adult (whether teacher, or parent) included the capacity to create environments with carefully considered equipment, as well as the capacity to observe and analyse the child at play.

This focus on observing children is important as it becomes a theme that runs throughout the history of 'e.c.e' provision in this country. Adults are expected to notice and consider. They are expected to draw conclusions, at least tentative conclusions, about what the child is interested in, is trying to achieve, is motivated to do; all based on what the child is seen to be doing (Curtis & Carter, 2000; Gibbons, 2007; Grey, 1975, 1993; Penrose, 1998). There is scope here for dueling tendencies: that the child is whole and complete and busy; and that the child can be understood in pieces, in terms of their social, physical, emotional and intellectual capacities (see Penrose, 1998, for example). There is also a

tension between teaching about the child (in the abstract) and encountering the child (a real one). Isaacs was clear which way of teaching about children had both the most value, but also the most pleasure. She wrote to a colleague that: "… it is a waste of time to have recourse to (play) theories that were put forward before adequate observations had been done" (Gardner, 1969, p. 155). Gwen Somerset followed a similar plan when she established the first nursery playcentres in Feilding, New Zealand. First, adults were to observe children at play, then came the discussion, and finally a consideration of 'why?', leading to possible theoretical explanations (Somerset, 1972; Stover, 2003).

Progressive Educators advocated for opening up to wider social classes and marginalised groups the opportunities held in education. In 1930s New Zealand that drive was headed by C.E. Beeby. Appointed Director of Education following the election of the first Labour government 1935, Beeby brought in sweeping changes, including making secondary school free and compulsory (Alcorn, 1999). Beeby's ideas for post-war education appeared as *Education today and tomorrow* (Mason, 1944). With its cover showing primary school children (without desks or evidence of a teacher) engaged in blocks, carpentry, dolls and water play, it outlined the new thrust of education which aimed to give free education; to broaden the content of education at each stage and to recognise individual difference.

With the optimism which followed World War II, Progressive ideas spread. According to May (2001), these were not limited to education but included "researchers, educators, welfare reformers and policy makers" who worked across sectors to bring new psychological understandings in pursuit of "socialised and happier children (in itself a new idea) and better-adjusted adults in a saner world" (p. 4). The 1947 Bailey Report (Consultative Committee on Pre-School Services, 1947) articulated a direction for government policy which was sympathetic to the voluntary organisations committed to early years learning

who were encouraged to also implement Beeby's commitment to progressive ideas. Although governments did not control pre-school provision, the appointment of Moira Gallagher in 1948 as the first Supervisor of Pre-school Services in the Department of Education was an opportunity to promote activity-based learning. In a manner reminiscent to what happened in the US fifty years earlier, New Zealand kindergarten teachers were encouraged to let the children 'be free' by giving them choices, minimising the routines and encouraging 'free play' (May, 2001; Middleton & May, 1997b).

The next subsection considers how 'free play' was understood and debated in the second half of the 20th century.

2.2.2 'Free play' as ideology

In the forms that developed in New Zealand, 'free play' can be described as an ideology in the sense that Spodek and Saracho (2003, p. 8), used the term to indicate prescriptions of education practice that reflect "what we want our children to be and become".

During the post war years, 'free play' characterised 'e.c.' settings (Begg, 1970; Calvert, 1968; Dakin, 1973; May, 2001) and arguably helped to shape a national identity: the "no. 8 wire attitude that kiwis are famous for", according to Morris (2007, p. 4). It is also associated with the articulation of children as rights holders as early as the 1970s. According to Calvert (1968), focusing on future achievements, was both "perilous and wrong" (p. 78), whereas 'free play' was equated with "freedom of choice of activity" because the child has a right to a "satisfying life now". But 'free play' was also debated and contested; it was associated with permissive parenting, liberal teaching approaches and with the activity-based learning known as the 'play way' (May, 2001; Middleton & May,

1997a). It was also debated and argued about by these two prominent authors and advocates for 'free play': Gwen Somerset and Lex Grey (Stover, 1998b).

Gwen Somerset was arguably the most prolific New Zealand-based writer about 'play' in early childhood contexts. She spent the last half of her very long life (she died in 1988 aged 94), dedicated to giving credibility to the notion that children learn through play (McDonald, 2006; Morris, 2003; Shallcrass, 1988; Somerset, 1972, 1975, 1987, 1988, 1990). Her focus was on how during the first seven years of life, parents (especially mothers) needed to confidently embrace the role of sensitive parenting, responsive to the playful capacities of the child. However, her influence was not limited to playcentre, where her texts are still in use. She also lectured at kindergarten college in Wellington, and her books (and many booklets) were used widely by parents and student teachers alike (McDonald, 2006)

Like Somerset, Lex Grey wrote extensively about play, although in a far less populist style. In the 1970s, he theorised elaborate stages of play within each of the learning areas (for example, blocks, water, sand), which would be evident to the thoughtful observer (Grey, 1974a, 1974b, 1975). As a young lecturer in early childhood teacher education in the 1970s, Margaret Carr described Grey's writings as "the bible" (Middleton & May, 1997b, p. 263). However, after his retirement, Grey acknowledged ambivalence about his rubric of play stages as they could be taken as gospel, rather than focusing on the child. His motivation, he reflected, had been to give status to those people, mostly mothers, who undertook playcentre training and those teachers in the compulsory sector who encouraged children's play in the classroom (Corson, 1992). He was dismissive of his own work, and others who attempted to create unifying views of children. He told student teachers in 1993 that they should learn from children rather than attempt to teach them (Grey, 1993).

Somerset maintained that children were always individuals, but play allowed their individuality to come through. Her understanding of play as being any self-motivated activity, sounds like Susan Isaacs' definition; and they both sound like Dewey (1909/1956), who described play in terms of attitude and motivation. Play would be evident in *how* a child is engaged, rather than in *what* a child is engaged in. Similarly Susan Isaacs wrote:

> I would suggest that play is any activity of a child which is freely chosen and entered into spontaneously for its own sake, without reference to any end beyond itself. It makes no difference what the material of play is, it is the attitude of mind that defines it (cited by Gardner, 1969, p. 101).

Gwen Somerset made much the same point:

> By the word 'play' we mean all the activity of a young child, the way he or she loves to handle, arrange and make things, and all the fun the child has while satisfying curiosity about what is seen, heard, tasted, smelt and felt. It is the way feelings are developed and the child makes friends (1990, p. 4).

This motivational definition enables the labeling as 'areas of play' the diverse activities found in New Zealand early childhood settings, including carpentry, books, music, puzzles, painting, and science, as well as sand, water, playdough and blocks. That these are understood as 'areas of play' reflects the attitude brought to those areas by a child. The same activity, if it were required of the child, would not be 'free play'.

In her booklets for playcentres and other pre-schools, Somerset theorised children's play using Piaget's stages of development, and threaded psychoanalytic ideas about repression countering creative expression (Somerset, 1975, 1987, 1990). She maintained that play was a normal part of children's lives both cross culturally and historically, if children are given opportunity to play (Somerset, 1987, 1988). Her writings also evoke a powerful imagery of the child learning and growing in New Zealand. While she anecdotally included the stories of children unable to play because of family and economic requirements (parents

are sometimes portrayed as problematic in their attitudes to children's play), her writings often create an image of child within an natural setting which stimulates the child, not only into playful activity but also to a keen sense of belonging in a country without the constraints of her class-bound repressed English heritage (Somerset, 1988).

In contrast to Grey's writings (for example, 1993, 1998), Somerset's writings show little interest about Māori culture. Even while she positioned play in the context of the landscape of New Zealand (Somerset, 1988), her ideas were closely aligned with English educationalists and paediatric psychoanalysts active before, during and after World War II, including Susan Isaacs, but also Melanie Klein and Anna Freud.

The influence of Piaget, however, was particularly important (Somerset, 1975, 1987). His theories resonated with Somerset's confident advocacy for the natural progression of the child through stages which can be explained to parents and observed in children's freely-chosen activity; that is, through play. Piaget (1966) explained that the physical acts of engagement required "co-ordinated actions" leading to cognitive function, allowing the establishment of "equilibration through self-regulation", which was maximised through self-invented activity. In general, he maintained, "the roots of logic are to be found not at the level of language but at the level of coordinating actions" (p. vi). This was compatible with children learning and growing through 'free play'.

Some ideas about 'free play' percolated beyond New Zealand. In the early 1960s, Beverley Morris, one of Gwen Somerset's early recruits, served as an advisor to the nascent Pre-school Playgroups Association in the U.K. In the handbook that she wrote for their playgroup supervisors, she discouraged instruction, and encouraged the supervisors to give children space to make choices because: "How little opportunity does the modern child" get to freely choose "without

direction from an adult". The adult, however, is not in the background, according to Morris. There are many points when "small stimulus" is needed and what the adult needs to judge is that fine balance "between interference and guidance" which comes from "experience and observation" (Morris, 1962, p. 3).

There also was apparently in the 1960s a visit to New Zealand from the consultants for new Headstart programme in the US. In an interview 30 years later, Lex Grey described the visitors as envious of what playcentres were then doing: "We were light years ahead", he said (Corson, 1992, p. 17). In 1970, visiting US academics, Jack W. and Jane R. Birch, wrote of flexibility in playcentres which included the unexpected presence of fathers and of infants and toddlers on sessions. They reported that play was understood to be a medium of "self realization, focusing on the present interests and abilities of the children and encouraging any emerging behavior, so long as it not destructive beyond reasonable and safe limits, as judged by the observing adults" (Birch & Birch, 1970, p. 11). They noted that amongst playcentre supervisors and assistants, "there was much watching and waiting to be asked by the child to help" (p.11).

According to May (2001), the freedoms associated with 1960s and 1970s provided an opportunity to re-theorise 'free play' as liberating children. During this era, Somerset (1975) was also countering the permissive perspective of the parent/teacher that encouraged 'free play'. She disputed that 'free play' means that children can do what they please, maintaining that "that would be license: Freedom means that one guards the freedom of others as well as one's own" (p. 10). And the role of the adult was more clearly being described in terms of responsibility beyond setting up the environment.

According to Somerset (1975, 1987), the prepared environment included prepared adults. Somerset also maintained that adults are pivotal in 'free play', as they fulfill the roles of "models, listeners, providers, mediators, facilitators and

co-learners" (Somerset, 1987, p. 27). However, by 1998 when Anne Smith's textbook *Understanding children's development* reached its fourth edition, 'free play' appeared to have little relevance. In a brief discussion of play theory, Smith suggested that 'free play' could be understood as the child discovering "the world alone" (A. Smith, 1998, p. 10).

The next subsection focuses on how 'free play' became problematised alongside the services that adhered to them. This led to new frameworks for e.c.e. which evolved during the 1980s and 1990s.

2.2.3 Shaking off the ideology of 'free play' in Aotearoa New Zealand

As a system of provision, and an ideology of education, 'free play' became problematic especially from the 1970s amidst calls for reform: for national planning and for social justice (May, 2001; McDonald, 1980; Meade, 1980; New Zealand State Services Commission Working Group on Early Childhood Care and Education, 1980). These focused on:

The equitable provision of pre-school education for Māori (McDonald, 1973), and for working class families (Barney, 1975), and
Greater flexibility of e.c. provision to cater for working and especially career-oriented women, an argument which aligned e.c. services with arguments for greater use of women's under-tapped contribution to the nation's economic potential (McDonald, 1980).

'Free play' was associated with voluntary organisations offering sessional programmes; primarily playcentre and kindergarten. These services were dependent on women to support not only those services, but also to 'look after' those children when those services finished their responsibilities, usually after 2½ hour sessions.

Research in 1977 indicated New Zealand's reliance on the voluntary sector was internationally unusual, and that women as consumers of 'e.c.' services were dissatisfied with traditional providers (Meade, 1980). This was particularly the case with playcentre, yet there was limited interest amongst its leadership (or other existing early childhood services, for that matter) to change the existing systems in order to offer more flexibility to match what families said they needed (Meade, 1980). This reflected how the traditional preschool services had, according to Barney (1975), grown "self-help topsy style" (p. 281), without any national plan or coherent framework for provision. Five years later, the report from the New Zealand State Services Commission Working Group on Early Childhood Education (1980) went further and directly challenged the existing providers to take responsibility for the dissatisfaction amongst parents and in some cases, their non-participation.

The activism of the 1970s led in the 1980s to major reforms of the education sector generally and e.c.e., more particularly. Māori focus was on the establishment of and widespread use of Te Kohanga Reo, with the goal being no less than the renaissance of the Māori culture through the immersion of very young children in the language and culture (May, 2001; Tawhiwhirangi, 2003). Childcare, which had previously been associated with absent or neglectful parenting (Cook, 1985) was reconceptualised, for example, by the Royal Commission on Social Policy, as providing a service to New Zealand families, especially mothers for many reasons, but especially for their economic and social wellbeing (Royal Commission on Social Policy, 1988). A year later, the Lange Government was ready to act on recommendations of the Meade Report and by regulation, to create an early childhood education sector from the diverse services which had previously existed (Department of Education, 1988; Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group, 1988; Meade, 1990).

Although new perspectives on 'free play' continued to evolve over the following decades (see, for example, Bruce, 1995), there was, according to May (2004), a major shift in thinking away from 'free play' during the years between first and fifth Early Childhood Conventions (1975 and 1991). She identified more emphasis on the teacher's role and responsibility towards ensuring all children were learning. The relevance of play within teacher education was identified as tenuous in 1993, by Lex Grey. Already in retirement, he told an audience of early childhood student teachers that he was worried about the institutionalisation of children within e.c.e. settings where they were "cooped up with adults who did not know how to play" (Grey, 1993, p. 43). Although 'play' is evident within *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), especially in the context of children's explorations, the structure of *Te Whāriki* is based on the Māori concept of 'mana', which can be understood as meaning 'empowerment' (Reedy, 1995). Play, free play, and learning through play; none are the focus.

From 2002 onwards, the 10 year strategic plan for e.c.e. (Ministry of Education, 2002) set in place a plan not only for a professional early childhood education sector, but also for reform of centre practice. This included meeting the compliance requirements of the 'Revised statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices' (the 'DOPs') (Ministry of Education, 1998), but also new possibilities in adapting the sociocultural frameworks for assessment and planning which reflected not only what was happening in e.c. teacher education, but also extensive interventions through professional development contracts (Blaiklock, 2010; Dalli, 2010). Commentary on that reform process suggested that it was slowed down by the sector's legacy of 'free play' and was evidence of entrenched developmentalist thinking (Anning, et al., 2004; Cullen, 2003; Nuttall, 2005b; Nuttall & Edwards, 2007).

2.2.4 Summary

This section has focused on 'free play' in the context of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. While it can be linked directly to the writings and influence of US philosopher John Dewey, it also reflected the optimism of educational possibilities that characterised post-war New Zealand and the rationale for it was well supported by Piaget's theories stages of growth through children's activities (Piaget, 1966; Somerset, 1975, 1987). The limitations of 'free play' were articulated during the 1960s and 1970s when social agendas, such as equitable education for Māori and the employment opportunities for women, were gaining visibility. These led to major policy changes during the 1980s.

The next section picks up these threads, but does so while also introducing the 'container construct' of educationalisation (Depaepe, et al., 2008) which foregrounds the social purposes served by educational provision.

2.3 Educationalisation

When the term 'educationalisation' is used by Kane (2008), in her Ministry of Education-funded research into the status of early childhood teachers, she defined it as an hierarchical approach to teaching and learning which "reinforces research-driven teaching propagating greater efficiencies within the school system by enhancing teacher qualifications, student assessments and curriculum guidelines in an effort to foster a competitive based system of supportive of capitalist agendas" (p. 11). She contrasted 'educationalisation' against the "counter-hegemonic" ideals (p. 11) imbedded in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996).

This definition suggests educational processes within a broader agenda, specifically within neoliberal approaches to education (Codd, 2008), and this parallels how the term 'educationalisation' is used by Depaepe and Smeyers

(2008), who describe educationalisation as including the layering of scientific processes upon those who teach and rear young children. But as defined by Depaepe et al. (2008), educationalisation is far broader. They describe it is a 'container' construct concerned with the normalisation of children, (and more recently, adults as well) as students (Depaepe, 1998; Depaepe & Smeyers, 2008). In this context, the continuing project of 'educationalisation' can be recognised contemporaneously when educational processes and professionalism expand to accommodate new domains of activity (Bridges, 2008; Hodgson, 2008). In fact, that is how Fendler (2008) defined educationalisation: as the "social tendency to behave as if education were responsible for solving social problems" (p. 15). But historians using the construct of educationalisation tend to focus on how educational 'grammar' (that is, its logic and underlying assumptions) became established and how it was understood within its historic context (Depaepe, 1998).

The term 'educationalisation' can be used interchangeably with the term 'pedagogisation' as both are imperfect translations of the German word *pädagogisierung* which was first used in the 1950s by a German sociologist, Janpeter Kob, to indicate a trend, similar to medicalisation or bureaucratisation, which pertained to the increasing attention "given to the educational aspects of many sectors of everyday life and (in relation to this) the increasing significance of professional assistance" (Depaepe, et al., 2008, p. 14).

While 'educationalisation' can be understood to broadly refer to the interplay between society and education, in this study the term 'educationalisation' more specifically refers to:

- the historic consideration of imminent theorising of the logic (the 'grammar') of classroom (Depaepe, et al., 2008);

- the normalisation of children within educational settings (Depaepe, 1998; Depaepe, et al., 2008; Depaepe & Smeyers, 2008);
- the use of educational services to address social problems (Hodgson, 2008; Labaree, 2008); and
- the drive for professional status amongst teachers (Bridges, 2008; Depaepe & Smeyers, 2008).

Through this subsection of the literature review, each of these four aspects of educationalisation is used to consider the literature relevant to the shifting purpose and forms of early childhood education, of which play and 'free play' are themes.

2.3.1 Towards understanding the 'grammar' of e.c.e.

A particular focus of those writing within the 'container' construct of educationalisation, has been to articulate the 'grammar' of schools; that is, to consider how classrooms are "controlled by a set of rules that are often not rendered explicit but are rooted in historical practice" (p. 17). The 'grammar' of schooling includes both its metaphoric and real (architectural), "pillars" (p. 19); and when considered historically, their origins help illustrate underpinning assumptions, as well as practical contexts. So, for example, according to Depaepe et al. (2008), the 'grammar' of the historic western European school classroom reflected secularised forms of the monastic commitments to obedience, "respect, submission, control and discipline" which were reinforced through "singing, reciting memorizing and repeating" (p. 21) within physical environments that encouraged order. From the end of the 19th century, the teacher was increasingly seen in pastoral terms with responsibility for a child finding his/her way in the world. This empathetic engagement with the child was reinforced with the rise of psychology in the mid 20th century, which Depaepe et al. (2008; similarly May, 2002) saw as giving rise to the importance of the child as a 'self' to

be developed in pursuit of self-fulfillment. This emphasis on the 'self' has helped usher in neoliberal educational 'grammar' which emphasises the consumer and choice, and in which the individual is constantly needing to "prove its market value" (Depaepe, et al., 2008, p. 25) by showing employability, adaptability, flexibility and trainability.

Yet relics and artifacts of practice and belief can remain evident. De Certeau (1984) described these as fragmented myths which remain imbedded in everyday activities and ways of thinking, even as 'investments' move from one "myth to another, from one ideology to another, from statement to statement" (p. 181). Similarly, there is in the contemporary early childhood setting, evidence of what Hill (2005, p. 24) described as the "tradition" of areas of play, acting as a 'grammar' for early childhood spaces. This reflects ideas from Progressive Education, such as that children learn best when they are self-motivated to make choices so that they can explore their interests (May, 2001). Minimal routines and open-ended resources were understood to enable children to follow their own line of thought rather than playing in pre-determined ways as prescribed by adult intervention, or by equipment with limited scope for improvising (Somerset, 1975, 1987, 1990).

However, the transition of the late 1980s from a diversity of pre-school and community services into a unified early childhood education sector can be argued to be constructed on a yet another set of 'grammar', an infrastructure of assumptions about purpose, which Beeby (1986, p. xiii) described as the 'educational myth'. The 'educational myth' which underlies curriculum, he wrote, has to reflect the wider society in order to offer an optimistic sense of congruence and educational purpose. So as society changes, so must the educational myths change too. Speaking personally, Beeby pointed to the movement between old and new myths, and how in his generation, the middle decades of the 20th century, the driving myth was that education could provide

‘equality of opportunity’. Critiqued and found lacking, this myth was replaced in the 1980s by the new educational myth that education should have measurable predetermined outcomes. Opportunity was not enough; measurable results were what mattered (Beeby, 1986).

The shift that Beeby described helps to explain the shift away from foregrounding play within ‘e.c.’ settings; offering play opportunities was not sufficient and other ‘educational myths’ reflecting educational outcomes took precedence. If such educational myths exist in early childhood, then arguably the e.c.e. as a sector was built around policy supported by the metaphoric pillars offered by the Meade Report of 1988 (Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group, 1988):

- early education benefits last lifetime of the individual;
- early childhood also benefits the wider society;
- cultural transmission is basic to early childhood education; and
- the care and education of very young children are inseparable.

These ideas shaped the major educational reforms of the late 1980s in this country, and were later reiterated in the 10-year strategic plan for e.c.e. (Ministry of Education, 2002). Although like the Meade Report, the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) emphasised the evolving child grounded within their family and cultural contexts, systems of accountability are also a pillar of the e.c. sector and compliance is an expectation of e.c. teachers (Ministry of Education, 1998; Ministry of Education and New Zealand Government, 2008). Systems of accountability have enabled the expanded provision of e.c.e. primarily through government-subsidised private sector investment (Duhn, 2006, 2010; Farquhar, 2008a; May, 2009; May & Mitchell, 2009). So although the ‘outcomes’ myth described by Beeby may not underlie *Te Whāriki* (Farquhar (2008a) described *Te Whāriki* as being based on a

philosophy that is “democratic, negotiated and non-prescriptive” (p. 53) , its existence and delivery into e.c. centres reflects the growth of neoliberal systems of accountability (Scrivens, 2002).

Internationally, the rise of government investment in e.c.e. reflects significant shifts in economic planning (Dahlberg, et al., 2007; Farquhar, 2008b; Hewes, 2007; Moss, 2008, 2010; OECD, 2006; Samuelsson-Pramling & Johansson, 2006). According to Goffin et al. (1997), at the core is the ‘romantic’ discourse: the child as innocent. Through the intervention of e.c.e., the child can be saved (from exploitation, bad parenting, a life of crime). The child can also be saviour (to ensure a desirable society of the future). Thus children embody ‘human capital’ awaiting development. While Bourdieu (1986) theorised ‘social’ and ‘human capital’ as being transmitted through inequitable social systems, according to Coleman (1988), human capital integrates “the economists’ principle of rational action” (p. S97) with social organisation. Human capital is created by “changes in persons that bring about skills and capabilities that make them able to act in new ways” (p. S100). So the capacity to develop a child’s human capital is shaped by the social capital of that child’s immediate influences, usually the family, but also by the institutions in which the child participates and which influence that child’s opportunities. Goffin et al. (1997) allied ‘human capital’ with economic growth and capitalism, a perspective shared by other critical commentators (Dahlberg, et al., 2007; Duhn, 2006; Farquhar, 2008a; Moss, 2008, 2010).

The next subsection moves away from the rationale for educating very young children. Using educational statistics, it illustrates how across half a century and especially in the last two decades, very young children have become increasingly present in educational institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand.

2.3.2 Towards understanding how and why children become students

In terms of positioning the child within educational institutions, educationalisation is understood to be evident in both quantitative and qualitative terms (Depaepe & Smeyers, 2008). The quantitative evidence exists in the educational statistics and in terms of e.c.e. in Aotearoa New Zealand, both long term and short term statistics point to children spending more time in educational settings. May (2001) reported that in the years immediately after World War II, 2% of four-year-olds were enrolled in educational services (e.g. kindergartens) prior to school. In 1979, 67% of three- and four-year-olds were reported to be enrolled in preschool services (New Zealand State Services Commission Working Group on Early Childhood Care and Education, 1980). In 2009 just over 54% of all children (aged under five years old) were enrolled in e.c.e. services with nearly 100% of four-year-olds enrolled (officially 99.7%) (Ministry of Education Data Management Unit, 2010c).

Although the overall number of infants remained significantly smaller (about 10% of one-year-olds are enrolled in e.c.e. services), those enrolled represent the largest increase in enrolments in the years between 2005 and 2009 (Ministry of Education Data Management Unit, 2010a). Intensity of participation has also increased. In the years between 2000 and 2009, the average number of hours per week a child under five years old attended an early childhood service increased to 19.5, an increase of nearly six hours per week (Ministry of Education Data Management Unit, 2010c). While these statistics include services where parents play an active role in their children's education, such as in te kohanga reo and in playcentre, over the past 20 years, participation in those services has declined significantly (Early Childhood Taskforce Secretariat, 2010b; Ministry of Education Data Management Unit, 2011). Commercial provision of childcare has, in

contrast, expanded significantly (Early Childhood Taskforce Secretariat, 2010b; May & Mitchell, 2009).

In the context of contemporary New Zealand where the government spent over $1 billion on early childhood education in 2009 (Early Childhood Taskforce Secretariat, 2010b), the rationale for policies which encourage children to be enrolled in e.c. services reflect multiple political, economic and educational agendas. There is a research base which indicated improved outcomes for children using e.c.e. and which also queried the educational value of children's full time enrollment in e.c.e. (Early Childhood Taskforce Secretariat, 2010c; Mitchell, Wylie, & Carr, 2008; Wylie, Hodgen, Hipkins, & Vaughan, 2008). However, the arguments in support of e.c. participation are also economic arguments. Parental participation in the workforce correlates with reduced government expenditure on social welfare benefits, and with parents' (especially working mothers') increased economic productivity (Early Childhood Taskforce Secretariat, 2010a). Compared with other countries in the OECD, New Zealand mothers are under-represented in the workforce, and they can be seen to represent an under-tapped source of economic activity (Early Childhood Taskforce Secretariat, 2010a; OECD: Social policy division, 2010). Thus non-employed parents and their un-enrolled young children can both be understood as economic "standing reserves" waiting to be deployed for "social and economic progress" (Gibbons, 2007, p. 136). The provision of e.c.e. is the means by which those 'standing reserves' can be realised in economic growth.

This brief statistical overview of both the movement of young children into education settings and the rationale for that movement, is now followed by a more in-depth consideration of the how educationalisation reflects how educational services are asked to address social problems.

2.3.3 Education to address social issues

The primary purpose of education, according to Labaree (2008) is to engender hope and thus act to stabilise society. Educationalisation, he explained, is the creation of educational responses to social problems in order to neutralise their disruptive potential. So while educationalisation of social problems may be ineffective to solve social, economic or environmental problems through teaching classes about them, it does illustrate the 'grammar' of how educationalisation functions in stabilising society (Labaree, 2008.

A similar 'grammar' exists in the purpose for widespread provision of early childhood education. From the late 1970s through the 1980s, the logic of government involvement in early childhood was promoted within a cluster of reform initiatives which reflected a concern for social justice, especially for women, for Māori and for the poor, but also a growing interest in social and economic forward planning. This was articulated in 1978 by Geraldine McDonald, an influential feminist educational researcher who was, at that time, a key member of the State Working Group on Early Childhood Care and Education (New Zealand State Services Commission Working Group on Early Childhood Care and Education, 1980). She told the OECD conference on e.c.e. held in Palmerston North that given the economic challenges confronting the nation, planners needed to look to women, including mothers, as "human resources" to increase the nation's productivity (McDonald, 1980, p. 91)

Coming out of that OECD conference and the report from the State Services Commission Working Group was political momentum to reconsider the role of played by government in early childhood services. In a report to the Muldoon-led National government outlining mechanisms for involvement in the early childhood services (New Zealand State Services Commission Working Group on Early Childhood Care and Education, 1980), existing services were described as

“fragmented” (p. 5) and expectations placed on parents (especially mothers) unrealistic, especially as regards their ability to run the voluntary organisations who had been the major providers of preschool programmes.

The Working Group itself had been established in 1977, not from concerns about children’s education, but as a direct result of recommendations passed in 1976 at the Conference on Women in Social and Economic Development which called on the State Services Commission to “take all necessary steps” to devise effective systems and policies with a “view to rationalising local provision of early childhood care and education with a national framework” (cited by New Zealand State Services Commission Working Group on Early Childhood Care and Education, 1980, p. 1). Because of the inquiry’s “sensitive and complex nature” (unpaginated), it took over three years, and a change in personnel (Geraldine McDonald was appointed in 1978) to complete the report. Part of its complexity was the diversity of attitudes to professional educational processes. Professional teaching standards were already in place for some services, particularly kindergartens (Department of Education, 1988; Duncan, 2008; L. Shaw, 2006). Yet there were no educational requirements of childcare services. The make up of the working group was significant; there were no representatives from any of the voluntary groups affected. Also significant was its articulation that children could have the right to equivalent state support, regardless of the service attended, and the acceptance that care and education were inseparable: “One cannot provide care for young children without their learning ideas, habits and attitudes; nor can one educate them without at the same time providing them with care” (p. 4). Also out of this report came recommendations for change which were later enacted by the Lange-led Labour government elected initially in 1984: the same teacher education could credentialise those intending to be kindergarten or childcare teachers; and that responsibility for childcare should be

transferred from the Department of Social Welfare to the Department of Education (May, 2001; L. Shaw, 2006).

Stating that women's "economic and personal wellbeing are inextricably linked" (p. 190), the Royal Commission on Social Policy (1988) drew policy connections between government- supported childcare and women's wellbeing (both social and economic). Although the 'educational' activity of young children was not a focus of the Royal Commission, the benefits to parents (especially mothers) were spelt out strongly. Childcare was described as "critical to women's lives" (p. 225). Without significantly more government support, childcare would remain prohibitively expensive for parents, especially if 'staff' were to be paid at equitable rates to kindergarten teachers, something that was suggested, along with government ownership of early childhood buildings in order to ensure responsiveness to "changes in local preferences" (Wylie, 1988, p. 135).

The status of Māori was also a major focus of the Royal Commission and its report gave recognition of the success of te kohanga reo as "irrefutable proof of the capacity" of the Māori people, and especially Māori women, to "initiate, develop, control and manage resources in the best interests of their own people" (Royal Commission on Social Policy, 1988, p. 176). It was the unexpected enthusiasm for te kohanga reo amongst Māori whānau that resulted in major budget problems for the government's childcare budget. This also further illustrated the need both for planning and for major reconsideration of the role of government (Cook, 1985).

Overarching ideas about quality experiences, regardless of provider, were also destabilising the primacy of the traditional providers. Anne Meade, a major player in policy development, was reinforcing ideas which tended to transcend historic differences between services. In a 1987 speech to a New Plymouth audience, she emphasised the notion of 'quality': something that could be

defined and which every child had a right to expect (Meade, 1987). If there was to be real movement in reform areas such as equitable learning opportunities for boys and girls, she emphasised the importance of intentional planning and evaluation, regardless of what service the child attended. Similarly Smith and Swain (1988), maintained that, led by the new e.c. tertiary sector, social problems (especially monoculturalism and sexism) could be addressed through a thoughtful and well educated early childhood teaching workforce. They added: "We do not regard 'academic' as a term of abuse" (p. xi), which suggests that those in academia had been seen as remote or irrelevant.

The e.c.e. sector, from its creation in the 1980s, was thus building on the hopes of multiple reform campaigns. However, the movement from campaign to institutional response, from advocates to professionals, can be problematic. According to journalist, feminist health campaigner and one-time New Zealand Green Party Member of Parliament, Phillida Bunkle, the successful progress of campaigns often involved marginalising the campaign's leaders (Bunkle, 1995). Pointing especially to health campaigns, but including education, Bunkle maintained women's advocacy has often set the foundations for the professional sector which succeeds it. However, the successful creation of the professional sector often involves the validation by, and even the co-option by other interests, especially, what Bunkle called "the dominant economic interests" (p. 143). The result was the focus of accountability shifts towards what can measured and assessed within "the validity of the knowledge claims of the new professionals" (p. 143). Further, she maintained that under the cloak of "economism", political agendas are given the status of being a neutral and "immutable force of scientific law of nature" (Bunkle 1995, p. 153).

This is a somewhat untidy image of change and of reform, where intent does not necessarily match outcome, and where expertise can exist outside of a profession. It also suggests that success can be at the cost of marginalising or

dismissing the relevance of what preceded the formation of a profession. There are parallels between what Bunkle (1995) described and the movement towards professionalised provision of e.c.e. This is discussed in the next section which focuses on the process of professionalising early childhood teaching, and how the quest for increasing professional status is particularly problematic.

2.3.4 The quest for professional status

According to Depaepe and Smeyers (2008), the educationalisation reflects "increased scientization" (p. 381) of pedagogical processes, as well as a professional expansion into the diverse social and political territories. Both of these situations are evident in the process of professionalisation of early childhood teachers. In this study, 'professionalisation' is used to describe how within e.c.e., teachers are set both aspirational and measurable standards to achieve. More specifically, in this study, professionalisation of e.c. teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand is evident in the movement towards:

acknowledged expertise, a high level of autonomy of practice and gatekeeping of entry to the profession (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007; Fromberg, 2003);
ethical practice reflecting deep knowledge base reflecting the 'science' of teaching very young children (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007; Fromberg, 2003); and
participation in wider issues beyond the classroom, including professional development, research and advocacy (Dalli, 2010; Moss, 2010).

What has happened over the past 20 years in New Zealand parallels international trends. Moss (2010) suggested that e.c.e. teachers collectively aspire to being a profession, while Fromberg (2003) described e.c.e. as professionally paradoxical and ambiguous. The transformation of early childhood from "cottage industry" to "professional center" has been driven, Fromberg (2003) said, by economics primarily. Significant aspects of what she described as the characteristics of a

profession were not evident in the expectations and status of e.c. teachers; for example, that professions should be paid at a “commensurate compensation” (p. 179) and that professionals work autonomously while belonging to a self-regulating organisation. In addition, the complexity of underpinning early childhood theory was difficult to convey to observers (such as parents). That, coupled with the fact that “most exemplary” teachers needed to appear playful made the professional status of e.c.e. teachers a “public relations nightmare” (p. 177).

According to Duhn (2010), ‘professionalism’ is itself part of the neoliberal “vocabulary” (p. 50) and Fromberg (2003) maintained that professionalism of e.c.e. ran counter to traditional adherence to social justice imperatives, including the inclusion of a diversity of teachers, who may or may meet professional standards or required qualifications. A key development in the creating the groundwork for a professional teaching e.c. workforce in New Zealand came in the distinction made between parent- and teacher-led services as part of the 10-year strategic plan (Dalli, 2010; Ministry of Education, 2002). This enabled the ambitious goal of having all e.c.e. teachers (in teacher-led centres) fully qualified by 2012, but the division between the services has particularly troubled the parent-led services because of the implied superiority of teacher-led professional provision (Bushouse, 2008) and perceived undervaluing of the role of parents in their children’s education (Dalli, 2010; Woodhams, 2007).

Although professionalisation of early childhood teachers offers greater status to what has been a low status occupation (Kane, 2008), in New Zealand this has been occurring alongside tighter regulation of teachers, with the expectation of teachers showing increased capacity to demonstrate accountability (Codd, 2008; Dalli, 2010; Jesson, 2001). A system of quality assurance, the *Revised statement of desirable objectives and practices* (‘the DOPs’) (Ministry of Education, 1998), laid down standards for e.c. teachers and centres which were virtually

compulsory as they were linked to funding. According to Dalli (2010), the DOPs signaled a significant new relationship between government and early childhood providers; the government became the purchaser of a service, rather than its funder. Accountability for funds received meant that teachers (whether qualified or unqualified) had to meet requirements for planning, assessment, and documentation of children's learning (Dalli, 2010; Ministry of Education, 1998, 2004/2007/2009). From 1992, professional development contracts have focused on implementing government policies of improving centre practices in line with policy initiatives (Perkins, 2006).

In the context of global recession and new policy directions under the Key-led National government which was elected in 2008 (Dalli, 2010), the professional status of e.c. has been further contested in two government documents. In the revised Licensing Criteria, (Ministry of Education and New Zealand Government, 2008) the term 'teacher' is hardly visible; instead the non-professional term "adult providing education and care" is used (see p. 5, for example). A national report charting a future for teaching as a profession did not include e.c.e. teachers (Education Workforce Advisory Group, 2010).

Most directly challenging the professionalism of e.c. teachers, however, has been the decision to remove financial incentives for centres to support staff in training, and to hire qualified staff (Ministry of Education, 2010b). According to the current Minister of Education, Anne Tolley, the strategic plan's ambitious goal of a fully professional e.c. teaching workforce by 2012 has been replaced by the goal of having teaching teams in which 80% of teachers are qualified (Tolley, interviewed by Gerritsen, 2011). At centre level this was interpreted as being the end of the government's commitment to the 10 year strategic plan (Stover, 2010a). It probably also reflected pragmatism because in 2009, the e.c. teaching workforce nationally was only 64% qualified (Early Childhood Taskforce Secretariat, 2010b). While that statistic was nearly double the percentage of

qualified teachers in 2002, the goal of 100% fully qualified e.c. teachers was unlikely to be reached by 2012.

The e.c.e.-focused academic, teacher education and research communities within New Zealand are guided by sociocultural approaches to teaching and learning of young children (Aitken & Kennedy, 2007; Nuttall & Edwards, 2007; White, et al., 2009). Thus the 'deep knowledge base' expected of early childhood professionals is sociocultural. Sociocultural approaches position pedagogy within interpersonal relationships that reflect culture and context and which are seen as a "progressive alternative" (Duhn & Craw, 2010, p. 59) to child development theories. However, the curriculum *Te Whāriki* is not fully sociocultural in its structure, with developmental theorists, Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson, named amongst its guiding 'kauri' by two of its authors (Carr & May, 1991). Further, although its authors may not have intended the document to be used as a governmental compliance document (Nuttall & Edwards, 2007), Te One (2003) suggested that the use of accountability language, especially the articulation of learning outcomes, was arguably why the document itself was acceptable to the then Minister of Education, Lockwood Smith, as part of the neoliberal reforms of the education sector during the 1990s. Further Scrivens (2002) maintained that as a profession, e.c.e. teaching was imbedded within neoliberal systems of provision. This illustrates another contested aspect of e.c. professionalism. While the work done in the 1990s on ethics in e.c.e. has emphasised problem solving processes around ethical dilemmas (NZEI Te Riu Roa Early Childhood Code of Ethics National Working Group, 1995), Moss (2008, p. 12) has positioned ethics as a political activity at the core of the professional teaching which runs counter to neoliberal market-driven forces which have dominated educational provision for a generation. Moss (2010) described those forces as founded on a "mythical belief in the self-regulating markets" which fuels a "novelty-driven turbo-consumerism which not only depletes the environment", but also "produces

more troubled populations" and undermines "old solidarities", making democratic processes "falter" in the face of "intensified competition at all levels" (p. 12).

Moss (2010) was identifying international issues, but they may explain what Dalli (2010, p. 67) described as an "unusual silence" among New Zealand's e.c. community in face of recent government policy shifts which in an earlier generation might have shown evidence of a "critical ecology" (p. 61) of engagement, debate and critique. Also relevant is Kane's (2008) finding that e.c. teachers were generally trusting of government, as well as the sense of success and perhaps complacency (Dalli, 2010) which flowed from the 10-year strategic plan (Ministry of Education, 2002) which mapped out the credentialisation of e.c. teachers. The re-direction of government policy away from a fully professional e.c. teaching workforce (Gerritsen, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2010b) was also a indication of taking advice other than from the e.c. research community, which had previously helped craft the direction for a professional e.c. teaching workforce (May, Smith, & Carr, 2010; A. Smith, 2006).

2.3.5 Summary

Educationalisation is broadly understood to focus on ways in which education functions in society, and in particular to consider the underpinning 'grammar' (and architectural 'pillars') that shape its provision, as well as the ways in which institutions called educational serve to address potentially disruptive social problems (Fendler, 2008; Labaree, 2008). In the lead up to the major educational reforms in New Zealand which created an educational sector called 'early childhood', arguably some key aspects of 'grammar' were articulated which show underlying assumptions about potential outcomes (Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group, 1988; New Zealand State Services Commission Working Group on Early Childhood Care and Education, 1980) and a commitment

to addressing issues of social justice through reform of early childhood services. The reform of a largely non-professional service has occurred from the 1990s with the revised DOPs (Ministry of Education, 1998) first through centre-based professional development to meet those requirements, followed by requirements and incentives (some now removed) for teacher qualifications (Dalli, 2010; Stover, 2010a). Professionalisation of e.c. teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand remains aspirational and perplexingly problematic.

2.4 So where does the literature 'locate' play in the educationalisation of early childhood?

In the public arena, children's free play is advocated by health professionals. For example, expressing concerns about psychosocial aspects of children's growth and development and in particular childhood obesity, the American Academy of Pediatrics (Ginsberg, 2006) recommended that pediatricians show parents and educators the values of 'free play': unstructured freely chosen activity; and that parents be encouraged to use 'real toys' (e.g. blocks, dolls) rather than entertainment equipment. In addition, parents were advised to choose e.c. centres which do not emphasise academic learning. Through its sports agency, and through its Ministry of Education-funded outreach to families of very young children, recent New Zealand government initiatives have promoted play-based learning for young children (SPARC, 2007; Te Mana / Ministry of Education, 2007).

However, the relevance of play to (professionally-delivered) education for young children, is contested. Local commentaries on *Te Whāriki* rarely foreground play as part of learning and teaching. For example, there is little discussion about 'play' in *Weaving Te Whāriki* (Nuttall, 2003). In its gazetted form, *Te Whāriki* (the form in which it has become the compulsory curriculum for all e.c.e. services) does not include the word 'play' (Ministry of Education, 2007a). In the 2008

licensing criteria for e.c. settings, play appears primarily in describing spaces (Ministry of Education and New Zealand Government, 2008). The association is thus between play and environments. This is also the observation of May (2001) when she described how within early childhood centres, the artifacts of 'free play' remain evident in play-based environments: "stories, puzzles, blocks, paints, dough, water, sand, junk and outdoor climbing equipment" (p. 8). Viewed philosophically, their presence can be understood as evidence of residual artifacts from an older social order. As Beeby (1986) described it, educational change reflects social myths about the future, and about the nature of teaching and learning. Within major social change, old myths and artifacts of past practices remain present in the "practice of the everyday" (de Certeau, 1984). So although 'free play' may be understood as evidence of a previous way of providing e.c.e., aspects of it remain present, especially in the ways in which early childhood spaces are organised.

When considered in terms of its purpose, play can be argued to be a tool for the governance of children (Ailwood, 2003; Gibbons, 2007). Yet play also has "revolutionary" qualities, according to Wood and Attfield (2005, p. 116). Play's emphasis on personal and collective meaning-making make it difficult to predict, and the "educational significance of different forms of play" (p. 116) requires critical interpretation.

However, recent literature on the complexity of play encourages teachers to keeping grappling with the challenges of noticing, recognising and responding to children's play; in other words that e.c. teachers can develop a pedagogy of play (Wood, 2010) which moves beyond the episodes of free choice, and beyond preparing an environment using open-ended resources. When play is foregrounded as a complex frame of engagement that has more than educational potentials, teachers can be encourage to navigate beyond pre-determined definitions of play and pre-determined roles for teachers (Stover, et al., 2010).

Nonetheless, play and 'free play' are problematic within contemporary e.c.e. in Aotearoa New Zealand. Because of the combination of neoliberal systems of accountability and the foregrounding of sociocultural approaches which argue the association between 'free play' and discredited 'developmentally appropriate practice' (Dahlberg, et al., 2007), contemporary e.c. teachers (or academics) who foreground a pedagogy of 'free play' risk being labeled as 'out of date', or at least 'out of step' with the e.c. academic and research communities (Anning, et al., 2004). It is worth noting that *The Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (the DOPs) required centre educators to "demonstrate current theory and principles of learning and development" (Ministry of Education, 1998, pp. fold-out, p. 1), which while focusing on staying abreast of developments, also problematises anyone adhering to 'old' theory and principles.

Further the professionalising status of sector is demarcated as clearly different from what was happening in earlier decades when as a sector, there were a range of standards and no overarching professional requirements of all services (May, 2001). If Bunkle's (1995) observations are accurate, then those who were active in the pre-professional sector may, especially if they express concern or criticism of the new sector, be seen as a threat to those who are committed to the professionalised sector which has adapted to fit in other purposes, often focused on economic outcomes and efficiencies.

While valuing diversity of provision can be argued to create space for a 'free play' curriculum as an acceptable approach to learning and teaching, the diversity of the e.c. sector in Aotearoa New Zealand was, according to Dalli (2010), threatened by implementation of "broad bush" policy (p. 66). In addition, the difference between what is diversity' of provision, and what is entrenched centre practices requiring a curriculum "lift" (Nuttall & Edwards, 2007, p. 13) is not always clear.

Also useful in locating play within this historical study is the work of Belgian-French philosopher Chantal Mouffe (1999, 2005). Her relevance lies in her theorising the nature of difference within democracy. The goal of democracy, she maintained, was not agreement but rather respect both for the adversary and for the democratic forums. In fact, Mouffe (1999, 2005) maintained that political adversaries need each other in order to shape their distinctive identities. She advocated for 'agonistic pluralism' in which the opponents recognise their interdependence and value both of the argumentative engagement in public forums (she used sporting opponents as an example of agonistic pluralism). Mouffe's work provides the underpinning metaphor of Moss's (2010) 'arena of encounter' between the divergent paradigms in early childhood education internationally. Of particular relevance here, however, is Mouffe's argument against consensus alongside Moss's (2010) proposal that neoliberalism has a "deep suspicion of democratic politics and anything public, with a strong preference for private business and property, with governance through markets, managers and technical experts". Within neoliberal systems, the "social and the political collapse into the economic and managerial", so that the economic perspective is privileged and "contentious issues are depoliticized and left to the market and management" (p. 12). For e.c. teachers in this country whose their collective professional identity arguably begins within the neoliberal initiatives of the 1980s and 1990s (Scrivens, 2002), this suggests that the 'grammar' of the sector's professional compliance requirements runs counter to the historic professional 'critical ecology' remembered by Dalli (2010).

One more area where Mouffe's understanding of democracy is helpful. Mouffe (2005) recognised political spaces as being inherently unstable. In contrast, what is understood as 'social' reflects what has been stabilised; that is, historic political debates have become "sedimented" (p. 804) within the social order. Drawing on

Mouffe's metaphor of layering, it is arguable that 'free play' in the context of e.c.e. in Aotearoa New Zealand is a 'sedimented' practice.

Finally, when considered philosophically and historically, ideas about how children learn through 'play' continue to be evident in e.c. environments, but also in the choice of words used to describe what children (and sometimes adults) are doing. In Dewey's 'principle of continuity' there is an acknowledgement of the shared construction of meaning through language: "Every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (Dewey, 1938, p. 35). Similarly Bakhtin (1981), maintained that language "lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's". There are "no 'neutral' words and forms" (p. 293). Language, he proposed, is "populated, perhaps even over populated, with the intentions of others" (p. 294).

Used for so many different purposes, the word 'play' and the phrase 'free play' are arguably 'overpopulated' with meaning and intention. For policy makers and future-creators, they are problematic words ladened with history that runs counter to centralised control, and predetermined outcomes. Yet if language carries history, then to choose not to use 'play' to describe how children learn, can minimise the legacy that rides with it. Separating play from learning is equally as political as Dewey's concerted efforts a century ago to recognise the learning that happens when children play (Dewey, 1909/1956).

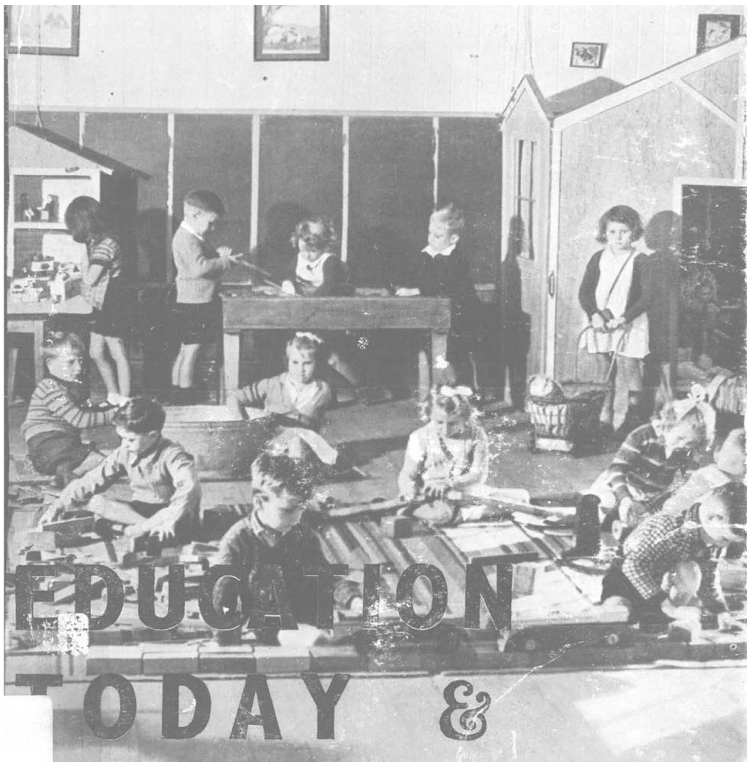
2.4.1 Summary

When considering the history of early childhood education, foregrounding 'play' (and in the New Zealand context, 'free play') provides a strong narrative that resonates with contemporary images of the child, including that the child has rights (Te One, 2008). However, when play and 'free play' are foregrounded

within the context of a professionalising teaching workforce within a neoliberal systems of compliance (Scrivens, 2002), the points of resonance diminish. The next chapter focuses on methodology, and in particular picks up the threads of the 'bricolage' and applies them to the researcher and this study's research methodology.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology: A bricolage approach to research design

Figure 3.1 'Education today and tomorrow' (cover of Mason, 1944)



I see the researcher-as-bricoleur operating in the same frame of contextual meaning making where children-as-players also operate. As the child-as-player can make a wooden block become a boat's oar, or an inanimate doll become a baby sister, so for the researcher-as-bricoleur a word can become an anchor, and a chance comment can become a bridge. This is more than evidence of the imagination in action; it is also evidence of rallying resilience and resources for making meaning within a context.

Research notes

What is the bricolage? It can be understood visually in the deliberate juxtapositioning of apparently unrelated ideas; textures and images. So the bricolage can be a real or a metaphoric patchwork (Kincheloe, 2005) and the effect is to suggest connections which may not initially be apparent. The bricolage is suggested above (Figure 3.1) in the captioning of a book cover of a policy document for education in post-war New Zealand (Mason, 1944) using a reflective note about making meaning with 'what is to hand'. The book cover illustrates what 'learning through play' might look like in a classroom setting. The caption suggests a connection between what a child does in such carefully prepared play contexts, and how the researcher-as-bricoleur navigates the proximal. What is produced by the researcher-as-bricoleur also pushes into the poetic and the fictive; fictive not in the sense of fiction, but in the sense of exploring "a kinetic epistemology of the possible" and, in the process, "the sophistication of knowledge work moves to a new cognitive level; the notion of rigor transmigrates to a new dimension" (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 346).

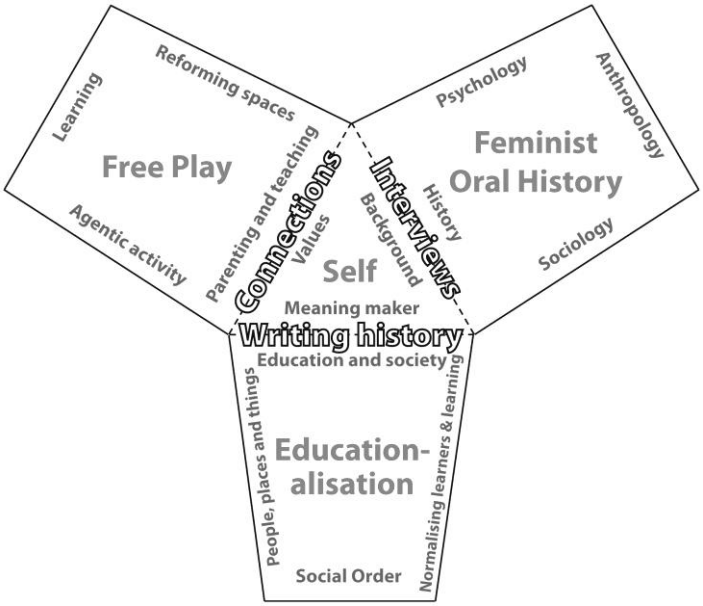
The research methodology for this study is broadly qualitative and was determined by the research questions which are about meaning making (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Hammersley, 2004; Kellehear, 1993; Patton, 2003). The research is positioned as oral history as it involves extensive recorded interviews of an historic nature (Bornat & Diamond, 2007; Fyfe, 2003; Green, 2004a; Leavy, 2007). That it is 'feminist oral history' reflects the topic, the self-conscious presence of the researcher and the interactive interview style (Anderson, Armitage, Jack, & Wittner, 1990; Bornat & Diamond, 2007; Hale, 1991; Leavy, 2007).

Picking up on the idea of nodal constructs (Ailwood, 2003), this chapter offers more metaphoric points of intersection in the form of 'patches' which connect with others; ideas which are stitched together to shape this study's research design. Providing an overview of major themes of this chapter, Figure 3.2 is the most 'embroidered' version of what was introduced in Figure 1.1. Its constituent 'patches' are considered individually in this chapter.

The study's research methodology within the broad construct of the bricolage approach to qualitative methodology as conceptualised by Kincheloe (2001, 2005) is introduced more fully in section 3.1, and the position of the researcher is foregrounded as a visible part of the study. The interview was the research method to gather data and its history, ethical issues and relevance to

feminist oral history are considered in section 3.2. The research process is considered in sections 3.3 and 3.4, with the former focused on the gathering of data and latter focusing on the analysis.

Figure 3.2 This study as bricolage: Stitching the 'patches'



3.1 The bricolage and the bricoleur

Bricoleur, as a descriptor of one who creates meaningful outcomes from what is to hand, has its roots in the writings of the 19th century social theorist Georg Simmel (Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991), and the 20th century anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966), who recognised that intelligence was evident in cultures regarded as primitive. De Certeau (1984) used the term 'bricolage' as embodying generalised capability; unselfconscious contextual knowledge. He positioned the bricolage as oppositional to conscious knowledge, which he saw in the interactions of consumers purchasing expertise. In addition, de Certeau saw the bricolage as representing undeveloped capital inviting disruption in pursuit of realised investment.

In social science qualitative research, the bricoleur is working within the "juxtaposition of divergent ideas and ways of seeing" (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 344). The work of the bricoleur is recognised as "a complex, dense, reflexive, collage-like creation that represents the researcher's images, understandings and interpretations of the world or phenomenon under analysis". The creation of a bricolage enables visibility of the parts, and connections between them within the

whole, “stressing the meaningful relationships that operate in the situations and the social worlds studied” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, pp. 4-5).

Within qualitative research design, the ‘bricolage’ sits, along with mixed methods approaches, as a metaphoric ‘other’ contrasting monodisciplinary approaches (Denzin, 2010; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Kincheloe, 2001, 2005). While Kincheloe (2001) suggested that bricolage could be seen as a life’s project to understand the connections between methods and disciplines, he described the bricolage as being a hazardous way to enter into the competitive world of academic qualitative research because the method can be conceputalised as lacking in-depth knowledge of any one discipline. A further challenge of the bricoleur is the suggestion of amateurism which threatens the boundaried credentialised education profession which Pinar (2001) described as defensive and under attack for being too elite in its provision, especially in the context of US teacher education. However, he suggested a bricolage approach to educational research could help in the “resuscitation of progressive education”, so that curriculum theorists can draw “promiscuously but critically from various academic disciplines and popular culture” in order to “create conceptual montages” which can include a greater “public space” for the work of the classroom teacher (p. 698).

3.1.1 The bricoleur and this study

To try to establish an organisational framework that relies on the leadings of the Holy Spirit (which Quakers have attempted to do) has its parallels with my attempting to build a thesis on the vaporous certainties of play using the shifting framework of the bricolage. All three notions – the Holy Spirit, the bricolage and play – touch at the core of the creative processes that pushes for meaning-making where the Enormous draws rings around the Everyday: ‘Notice! This matters. Pay attention.’

Research notes

As defined by Kincheloe (2005), the bricoleur works across disciplines in order to understand them fully within what he described the complex “web of reality” (p. 324). Amongst the tools of the bricoleur are the capacity to work with etymology and hermeneutics, while engaging with philosophical and epistemological questions that need to be answered again and again about the nature of a good and ethical life and the nature of knowing. The bricoleur-as-researcher uses

hermeneutic enquiry to draw out meaning and what Kincheloe (2001) called “the power of etymology” to consider how words as artifacts “shape our subjectivities” (p. 687). As a result: “Our conception of self, world, and our postionalities as researchers can only become complex and critical when we appreciate the historical aspect of its formation” (p. 687). The task of the bricoleur, he said, is to attack the complexity of interpreting historic events (inseparable from historic dynamics) while recognising theory as interpretative (“a cultural and linguistic artifact,” p. 324).

It is these aspects of the bricoleur that shape this study, especially the focusing in on the complexity of the influences that shape the history of an idea: that children learn through play. The interpreting of text, of transcripts as text, involves hermeneutic inquiry and moving across sources to consider especially the meanings of not only the word ‘play’, the concept of ‘learning through play’ and the ideology of ‘free play’ (Spodek & Saracho, 2003), but also the meaning of key words: ‘progress’, and ‘the everyday’.

The complexity of interpreting historic dynamics is further complicated by positioning this study as constructed across four nodal constructs (see Figure 3.3, and note the different detail on the ‘educationalisation’ patch, compared with Figure 3.2):

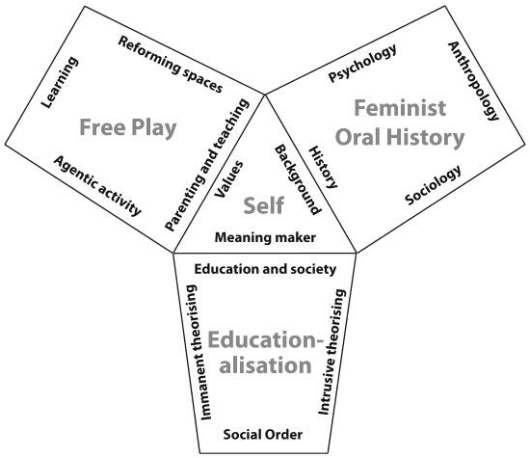
(1) In the context of early childhood education, **play** is a nodal construct where potentially conflicting discourses collide (Ailwood, 2003).

(2) The primary tool of inquiry is the **oral history** interview which is understood to also cross disciplines; while feminist oral history emphasises women’s experiences, the analysis of that experience is not fixed in any particular field of inquiry but is recognised as drawing, as needed, on psychology, anthropology, and sociology, in the process of creating an historic narrative (Leavy, 2007).

(3) **Educationalisation** is broadly concerned with the social purpose of education. In the study of classroom practices, and the movement of children into those educational spaces, Depaepe (1998) advocated for “immanent theorising” (p. 22), so that contextual understandings remain evident. He described as “intrusive” (p.22), using contemporary theory such as discourse theory (1979).

(4) The navigator through this collection of disciplines is the author, **the self**, the 'I' that claims ownership of the study. The visibility of the author adds complexity to the research and requires the author to clarify their position (2005). Reflexivity, the visibility of personal meaning making, is part of this. Relevant too is acknowledgement of personal 'screens' through which the researcher considers assumptions and interactions between those being studied and those who would receive the study, and the self as "qualitative inquirer" (2003, p. 66). The next subsection picks up on these themes. It is focuses on 'the self' and is autobiographical.

Figure 3.3 This study as bricolage: Details



3.1.2 Starting from where I am: Design as an expression of orientation

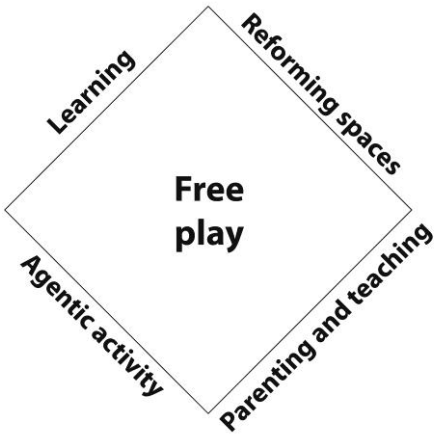
'Start from where you are' is an invitation from early feminist researchers (Anderson, et al., 1990). It is also a statement about motivation, identity and context. So the research process begins with the drive to find out. For me that drive arose from the realisation that I was out of step with academic approaches to early childhood education (e.c.e). I had had inklings about this when I read May's (2001, p. 24) undervaluing as "lightweight" playcentre training (my credentials), and several references to 'play' in e.c.e. as being a romantic notion; one example being Nuttall (2005b).

As I thumbed through the workshop options at New Zealand e.c.e. conferences and symposia, I also realised that 'play' rarely appeared in the titles of the presentations. Of approximately 180

workshops and papers presented at the 7th Early Childhood Education Convention in 2007, for example, I was the only person presenting on 'free play' and my presentation was largely about its historic relevance. As a word, 'play' appeared about a half dozen times in other titles, usually as an adjective or as a verb, rarely as a noun.

As an older mother with first one, and eventually three young sons (born 1984, 1986 and 1990), I had spent nearly 14 years through my 30s and 40s at playcentre. Playcentre is a parent co-operative early childhood service which emphasises the involvement of parents at all levels of the organisation, including as educators of children, tutors of parent education programmes and administrators / managers. If playcentre is considered as educational and for children, then its curriculum has been 'free play', but as an adult participant, I was drawn to what free play represented in terms of my own values and beliefs. I have experienced 'free play' as sustained self-chosen agentic activity. As a parent, adult educator and early childhood teacher, I have seen visible and significant learning in 'free play'. As an historian (Stover, 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 2010b), I have come to see 'free play' as a way to try to open families to recognising how capable not only children are, but their parents are as well. This is shown visually in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4 A 'patch' in a bricolage: 'Free play'



As an academic, I am grounded both in adult and early childhood education. Most of my postgraduate studies focused on adult education in which experiential and place-based learning was emphasised. Agendas of social justice and postmodernist critiques were evident in that postgraduate study; whenever possible I researched historic aspects of early childhood

education, because that was where my interests lay (Stover, 1997, 1998a). There was nothing that I experienced in that postgraduate study that positioned 'learning through play' as being irrelevant or obsolete. Rather it remained vibrant as a locally constructed, cultural artifact in which communities of practice (Wenger, 1999) found resonance across generations.

As a professional development (PD) facilitator for 11 years from 1992, I worked primarily with childcare management and staff. These were the years when *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) was introduced as the (then voluntary) national early childhood curriculum, followed by new funding requirements placed on centres by the quality assurance systems embedded in the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (the 'DOPs') (Ministry of Education, 1998). As a PD facilitator, I was helping introduce systems of accountability, transparency and compliance alongside building e.c.e. teaching teams who could navigate social, ethical and pedagogical complexities. As I understood my work, I was building professionalism alongside teachers in e.c.e. centres.

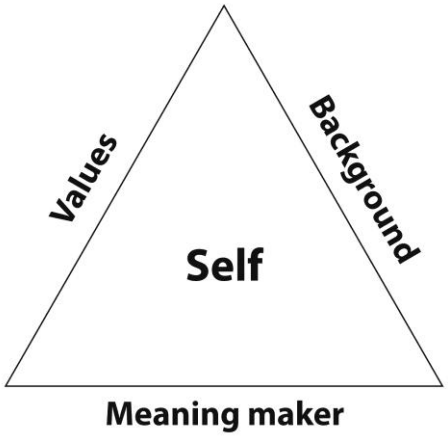
In late 2002 when I was appointed as a senior lecturer at AUT University and came into the realm of teacher education, I soon realised that play was usually a 'step on' concept for student teachers. As a lecturer on the history and philosophy of e.c.e., I regularly was challenged to make sense out of the ongoing changes that characterise the sector. Previous research and publishing projects undertaken outside university settings, had included extensive conversations with 'the old timers' of e.c.e., particularly those who had helped shape the playcentre movement (Stover, 1998b). So the intellectual starting place for a research question was both 'What has happened to play?' and also 'What do the historic leaders think about how the sector is evolving?'. I recognised what Farquhar (2008a) later wrote about; namely, that e.c.e. was moving from being a site of advocacy to being a site of institutionalisation and I also recognised that my work in professional development and teacher education was part of that process.

The research methodology for this study reflects my background, values and capacity for meaning making (see Figure 3.5). In the sense that a bricoleur is a skilled person without the status of accreditation, I recognise myself as a bricoleur in the domains of academic research. I have come into an academic position with a body of publications (for example, Stover, 1998b, 2001) which were produced from non-academic promptings. Even as an academic, I have a

range of reference points for research and inquiry, not all of which rest easily within academic settings. This subsection covers some of those reference points.

My formative years as a young adult were the mid-1970s and during this time I made three linked decisions. The first two decisions were to qualify as a journalist and to train as a counsellor for Youthline which offered telephone support primarily to young people. These two both involved learning how to interview people although for quite different purposes. The third decision of my 20s was to join the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). All three decisions impact on how I understand the process of research. The experience of being a counsellor is relevant here primarily because of the sensitivity required during what could be understood as an interview with the person seeking support. The experience of being a journalist is picked up in section 3.2 when the interview as a research method is considered in more depth. Below is a brief account of some aspects of being a Quaker which might explain my attraction to the bricolage as a research methodology.

Figure 3.5 A 'patch' in the bricolage: The presence of the self in the research



Having a Quaker background gives me a framework which validates the experiential, the subjective and incomplete truths as aspects of what Quakers call "continuing revelation"; we are always, one writer suggested, at crossroads seeking insight arising "out of love and humility, out of 'prayerful' in the widest sense, listening and consideration" (Gregory, 2011, p. 5).

There is a strong tradition amongst Quakers of personal agency; to 'speak truth to power', and to not hide behind the opinions of others: 'to let your life speak' (Britain Yearly Meeting, 1994;

Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa New Zealand Te Hahi Tuhauwiri, 2003). There is also a well articulated tension between valuing personal and collective experience above 'received wisdom', yet recognising that "we all warm our hands by fires we did not build, and drink from wells we did not dig" (R. L. Smith, 1998, p. xv). Collective decision-making among Friends tends to be slow, consensual, and if done well, is understood as 'spirit-led'. The word 'led' is key here as the individual is encouraged to notice what in their lives is evidence of being led. Epistemologically, the knowledge that is generated within a Quaker community tends to grow from this interplay of the personal and the community; between the experience and received wisdom. Of particular relevance to this study is the provocation to act faithfully without necessarily understanding the whole picture; to "Live up to the light thou hast, and more will be granted thee" (Britain Yearly Meeting, 1994, section 26.04) which is illustrated in the research note which opens this section.

3.1.3 Reflexivity and ethics: Self and others

In line with Mary Catherine Bateson (1994), the presence of the 'self' in this study is understood as both constructed and instrumental. The presence of the self is evident in this study wherever 'research notes' appear. Defining the self is problematic. Bateson (1994) maintained that, like the mathematical construct of 'zero', the construct of self is "pivotal for organising experience" (p. 66), but does not exist as a thing. As an "instrument of knowledge" (p. 65), the constructed self is learned and culturally shaped.

Disclosing the self who researches is a hallmark of feminist research theory (Anderson, et al., 1990; Bornat & Diamond, 2007; Hale, 1991; Hesse-Biber, 2007), characterises the researcher-as-bricoleur (Kincheloe, 2005), and has been used to shape research methodology. The rationale has at least two parallel but distinct historic influences: the religious and the political. Patton (2003) described the Christian mystic Buber's distinction between relationships that are 'I-It' and 'I-Thou' as contrasting perspectives within academic qualitative research:

> An I-It relationship regards other human beings from a distance, from a superior vantage point of authority, as objects or subjects, things in the environment to be examined and placed in abstract cause-effect chains. An I-Thou perspective, in contrast, acknowledges the humanity of both self and others and implies relation, mutuality, and genuine dialogue (p. 64).

The other influences, broadly political, represent the combined effects of self-criticism and consciousness-raising, which were key aspects of the feminist movement (1991). Drawing on the confidence that 'the personal is political', feminists were encouraged to challenge themselves and others to encounter and expose how the intrusions of patriarchy (or other forms of oppression) were evident in their thinking and actions (Bornat & Diamond, 2007; Gluck, 1999).

Within the reconsideration of feminist oral history which marked the rise of the third wave of oral history (Gluck, 1999), ethical issues were raised which suggested that 'the other' existed in far more forms than merely the man-woman continuum. While Patai (1991) maintained that truly ethical engagement was not possible within an unethical society, Benson and Nagar (2006) later proposed that collaboration embedded in research design had a greater possibility for the empowerment of marginalised groups. This included collaboration during the analysis of the data to mitigate against researchers "imposing their own meaning and organizations on to 'other' people or places, or events of the past" (p. 583).

Feminist critique was pivotal in creating a major shift in the landscape of New Zealand's institutional research. Two leading feminist writers of 1980s, Sandra Coney and Phillida Bunkle, publicised women's involuntary participation in the 'unfortunate experiment' at Auckland's National Women's Hospital where for several decades women with early signs of cervical cancer were not treated. The experiment was testing an hypothesis that no treatment was needed (Johnston, 29 Aug 2008). Dozens died. The flow-on effect from this has been the practice of requiring permission from institutional ethics committees prior to research commencing, especially on human subjects (Snook, 2003).

The ethics of oral history indicate quite varying attitudes to the risks involved. Whereas in some US universities with a longstanding record of oral history activity there is little interference from Institutional Research Boards, in other universities there are reports of oral history categorised as being as intrusive as medical interventions (i.e. they both use humans). In one notable case, a student was not allowed to interview his father for an oral history paper because "that involved power relations that could not be mitigated by informed consent" (Howard, 2006, Nov. 10, p. A14).

In research methodology, 'the other' can be used to problematise the entity being researched (see for example, Oakley, 1981; Stacey, 1991), yet within the domain of philosophy, 'the other' can be understood as the basis of friendship. According to Saul (2001), the encounter between the self and 'the other' is the ethical basis of understanding the self within society. Described as a muscle, ethics needs to be exercised frequently. Further, he proposed that it suits corporatist forces to marginalise ethics as primarily relevant to crisis situations, and to operate more pragmatically within situational ethics which epitomise "the new managerial, instrumental approaches to power" (p. 91). To consciously live ethically, he maintained, means living with uncertainty of outcome.

Within this study, reflexivity as a research tool became evident, rather than existing as part of an initial play. I found that I needed to write as a way to make meaning, even as the data was gathering and particularly when I was trying to determine what was significant. Writing notes to myself (what I recognised as 'research notes') helped to clarify intentions and directions. This process of reflexivity enabled me to create a little distance between myself and the research; in a sense, to use words to enable me to 'other' what would had been experienced. Having a Quaker background gives me a framework which validates the experiential, the subjective and incomplete truths, alongside what Belenky et al. (1996; 1986) described as 'received knowledge', as well as permission, even encouragement, to give voice to that incompleteness.

3.1.4 Summary

The bricolage serves as a motif for connections between apparently unrelated ideas, but within this study, the bricolage indicates contextual knowledge which stands in contrast to received knowledge (Belenky, et al., 1986) or 'civilised' knowledge (Lévi-Strauss, 1966). It also stands in contrast to the self-conscious modern 'consumer' (de Certeau, 1984). As a form of mixed methods qualitative research, the bricolage is seen as innovative and challenging (Denzin, 2010; Hammersley, 2004; Kincheloe, 2001, 2005). The presence of the self within the research design is regarded as basic to a bricolage approach (Kincheloe, 2001, 2005). This resonates with feminist research method (Hale, 1991; Weedon, 1987/2006) and with the author's background.

3.2 Interviewing as a method of inquiry

Attempting to dance within the academy of researchers, I find myself facing the door through which I came in; I was more capable outside this smoky frenetic regimented – but officially safe – dance hall. I am intuitively more of a circle dancer – moving with others.

Research notes

This next section focuses on the interview as a tool of inquiry from two perspectives: the social science researcher and the journalist. The inclusion of the journalist's perspective reflects the presence of the self in the research: I was trained as a journalist. Interviews cross over between professions and domains of knowledge. When I'm an academic doing social science interviews, how is my interview different than when I am a journalist?

3.2.1 'The interview': An interpersonal experience in information gathering

While the etymology of 'interview' derives from the French word entrevoir meaning to "glimpse the other" (Hoad, 1996, p. 1), within journalism training, the interview is seen in more functional terms: as "an intentional conversation" (Keeble, 2006, p. 74) and the "act of a reporter talking with a source" (Stovall, 2005, p. 143). The journalistic interview is about 150 years old. An interview between the Brigham Young of the Mormon Church and Horace Greeley is recognised as a modern interview because of its question and response structure (Keeble, 2006). For about 100 years, anthropologists have used interviews, often recorded verbatim longhand, as the basis for ethnographic inquiry. This could be seen as the origins of qualitative research and its use of the interview as the medium of inquiry (Patton, 2003).

My working definition of an interview is a purposeful conversation which generates information-based artefacts. In journalism the artefact is often a collection of quotes to be included in news stories and articles. In qualitative social science, the artefact usually exists first as a recording and then as a partial or complete transcript, leading into analysis around themes (Fontana & Frey, 2008).

The development of affordable and transportable recording technology has allowed authentic accounts of conversations, and has kept generations of social scientists busy transcribing interactions which in earlier generations had been roughly documented longhand, vapourised from memory or else committed as artifacts to personal, spatial or relational memory. While the qualitative social scientist is intent on recording the interview, for the 21st century journalist, the notepad is still the advised technology, so that the print media journalist can more quickly process the information and meet deadlines (Keeble, 2006).

The middle decades of the past century saw a huge growth in quantitative research based on interviews which, perhaps in an attempt to create something more scientific, framed the interview as a behaviourist activity (Fontana & Frey, 2008). The interviewer provided the stimulus (the question) and the interviewee provided the response (the answer). When Oakley (1981) offered her feminist critique of the research interview, she helped shift the interview out of the 'frame' of being an 'objective' process devoid of individuality or meaningful personal interaction, and to reposition it as 'constructed' process; both participants impact on the process and the outcome. Her critique was based on her extensive interviewing of women about their birthing experiences in which the interviewee frequently became the interviewer seeking information; effectively interviewing the interviewer. Oakley positioned herself and the birthing women within a community of shared support and inquiry.

The combined effect of feminist and queer theory has produced what Fontana and Frey (2008) described as the phenomenon of 'queering' the interview, whereby the interview, as a tool of research, is "inextricably and unavoidably historically, politically and contextually bound" (p. 115). According to Fontana and Fry (2008), interviews with gays and lesbians over decades show the assumptions of their times. Those being interviewed three decades ago were seen as mentally ill or deviant. In more recent interviews of gay and lesbian people, their sexuality is not pathologised (i.e. the interview was not conducted in a way that indicates that the interviewer considers their sexuality as evidence of illness). A similar shift has been noted amongst New Zealand researchers who have worked with Māori communities, with a growing acceptance of Māori as a lived culture rather that evidence of Māori being in deficit (Swain, 2003).

The interview is recognised in journalistic training as being both an essential and highly fallible tool of inquiry. Keeble (2006) listed ten complicating factors including that the interviewee may

be lying, confused, frightened of speaking truthfully or intimidated by the interviewer. The ability to find and maintain 'sources' is basic to the functioning journalist and as such, the journalist is to some extent dependent on the source (Keeble, 2006; Stovall, 2005; Tucker, 2004).

Social scientists, more particularly anthropologists working within another culture, have found themselves in similar dependent relationships (Stacey, 1991). Journalists also are advised to be wary because interviewees, including their sources, will have their own agendas. So while it can be easily argued that there is a power imbalance in favour of the researcher, it would be naïve to think that those who are being researched are passive participants; in particular they have capacity to co-operate or not co-operate; to offer or withhold information. The perpetual issue of 'who is in charge of the interview?' comes to a head in journalistic circles when questions are demanded in advance so the interviewee can prepare answers, with Keeble (2006, p. 80) suggesting that journalists run the risk of becoming "clerical poodles pandering to the whims of the famous".

Power balance between participants, and the complexity of insider-outsider relationships have strong parallels with the attempts to tease out the finer points of whether or not an interview (or qualitative research more generally) can be objective. In their insistence that they shared something tangible with other women, Oakley (1981) and other feminist researchers problematised the nature of insider-outsider positioning of the social scientist researcher. As women, the researched and the researcher were both cultural insiders. The 'other', the outsider, was men. However, the practice of researching women by women did not always reinforce this sense of shared 'insider-ness' amongst women, which became evident not only between the women-as-researched and the women-as-researchers (Anderson, 1998; Borland, 1998; Patai, 1991) but also between the women-as-researchers themselves. Those working within and defining the sector of feminist oral history fragmented during 1990s even while oral history was developing high visibility and credibility within popular public history (Bornat & Diamond, 2007; Gluck, 1999).

3.2.2 Objectivity, subjectivity, authenticity, empathy and purpose

Introducing qualitative research methodologies to the current generation of social science researchers, Patton (2003) framed the labels of 'objective' and 'subjective' as "ideological ammunition in the methodological paradigms debates" (p. 50). To claim objectivity is to be seen as "embarrassingly naïve". To rely on subjectivity is likely to undermine credibility "with audiences unsophisticated about phenomenological assumptions and nuance". Patton's pragmatic solution was "to avoid using either word and to stay out of futile debates about subjectivity versus objectivity. Qualitative research has moved toward preferring such language as 'trustworthiness and authenticity'" (p. 50).

The interview can be understood as an act of social construction in which the participants' 'intersubjectivity' indicates a transient contextualised joint attempt at meaning-making. As Fontana and Frey (2008) said: the interview is "a negotiated accomplishment" (p. 116) in which the meaning given is "at the intersection of the interaction of the interviewer and the respondent" (p. 145). Potentially, an interview can be understood as achieving what Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 109) described as hermeneutic: "equality among participants and ... mutual trust, listening, and caring for the experience described by the other". Grele (1994) maintained that a hermeneutic conversation occurs within an oral history interview; it is a conversation in which both the interviewer and interviewee experience altered horizons through "appropriation of each other's texts through a process of equal and active reciprocity" (p. 4).

Feminist researchers of the 1980s and 1990s, including feminist oral historians, can take much of the credit for theorizing how the interview can be understood to be worthy as a research tool, yet is understood as not being objective (Davidson & Tolich, 2003a; Patton, 2003). Writing from feminist perspectives, Belenky et al. (1986), maintained that objectivity is a metaphor that can be expanded to include an empathetic understanding of the 'other' while maintaining sufficient detachment to ensure that the researcher is not driven to rescue, reform, or to fix the persons being researched. This emphasis on empathetic engagement reflects the *Verstehen* tradition of qualitative research which Patton (2003) described as combining the "cognitive understanding with affective connection" (p. 52) necessary for in-depth interviewing. However, Patton also

positioned ‘neutrality’ as a serious issue for the qualitative researcher. Like Belenky et al. (1986), he complicated empathy with the need for distance, which he described as “empathetic neutrality” (p. 53). Neutrality, he suggested, “can actually facilitate rapport and help build a relationship that supports empathy by disciplining the researcher to be open to the other person and non-judgmental in that openness” (Patton, 2003, p. 53).

Amongst oral historians, the interview remains a defining method of inquiry, but debates about objectivity have been a creative and divisive tension. Gluck (1999) identified privileging (and then disputing) ‘objectivity’ as being one of the distinguishing changes in oral history. The first wave of oral historians focused on adding layers of complexity to known history, including factual information held by individuals which might otherwise be lost. However, what is factual is not always clear. Swain (2003) pointed out that “In the intergenerational transmission of non-material resources, it is what is believed rather than what ‘actually’ happened that matters” (p. 313). Thus in the ‘second wave’ of oral history, subjectivity was foregrounded and with it came “the emotionality, the fears and fantasies carried by the metaphors of memory” which allows for “the individuality of each life” (Samuel & Thompson, 1990, p. 2).

‘Recalled experience’ (i.e. remembering) is not unproblematic. Some authors emphasise the remembered as being less about details and more about feelings, nuance; a landscape seen from a distance rather than close up (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Green (2004b) offered a metaphor of memory as constructed: “Memories are partial and fragmented, and in the process of assembling them for others, we decide what to include or exclude. We also seek to make meaningful connections between the present and the past” (p. 11).

The third and fourth waves of oral history brought challenges from feminist writers such as Stacey (1991) who recognised power imbalances in the research process, and Hale (1991) who advocated for reflexivity in the ‘re-inventing’ of anthropology to demonstrate “greater social responsibility and an insistence that all knowledge is political” (p. 123). Challenges also have come from postmodern and critical thinking more generally as well as from new technologies. According to Gluck (1999), the oral narratives began to be understood as ‘representations’ or ‘cultural constructions’; reflecting memories that are also ‘constructed’ within “various and shifting positionalities”; the interview as a “linguistic and performative event”; and the resulting written version as “text” (p. 4) resulting in an ongoing interpretive process.

Gluck's succinct account of how oral history has evolved has its parallels in New Zealand. Preferring the term "oral information", Fyfe's (2003, p. 300) account of oral history sounds remarkably like 'first wave' oral history with the oral historian as a largely invisible conduit for recording history with limited recorded interaction; the goal being to record, not necessarily to analyse. In contrast, Green (2004a) maintained that personal and cultural myths become evident in the remembered story telling about the ordinary, allowing the "oral historian to explore the values and beliefs through which all experience is, and has been filtered and understood" (p. 19). Thus noticing the social currents evident in stories of the everyday is part of the oral historian's task in analysing transcripts.

Alongside this density of possibility, the journalistic interview appears prosaic and functional; its purpose being to locate and develop news stories which "inform, interpret and hold people's attention. We interview to get facts, opinions, interpretation, to give someone a right of reply and sometimes to get quotes that will beef up a story which would be dry without it" (Keeble, 2006, p. 84).

So the interview remains a research tool which, while involving at least two people and some exchange of information, can be undertaken differently, theorised differently, undertaken in numerous ways, with varying power relationships and for varying purposes. For the journalist, the interview remains a largely unproblematic activity with few changes in theory or practice over time. In contrast, the interview in social sciences, especially within oral history, has been contested. The role of interviewer has been particularly problematic. Thus the notion of reflexivity, the willingness to expose 'the self that researches', has become a research tool (Hammersley, 2004; Hesse-Biber, 2007).

3.2.3 Feminist oral history

If history takes a bird's eye view, oral history takes the perspective of the worm, the mosquito and the mole.

Research notes

Oral history and women's history are closely allied (Bornat & Diamond, 2007). In fact, Leavy (2007) defined oral history as "an intensive method of interview with anthropological roots that

is also frequently used by sociologists and historians and is often associated with feminists" (p. 153).

In oral history, there is also an overlay of 'story-telling' as performance and even political energy in taking into the public realm, an individual's personal story (Bjerg & Rasmussen, 2008). But feminist oral history is also "a tool for accessing silenced or excluded knowledge for unearthing and preserving the 'missing' knowledge" (Leavy, 2007, p. 154).

Underpinning feminist analysis of oral history is the work of Dorothy Smith (1979), one of the early feminist sociological theorists, who believed that the thought and the act were for women, not the same. What was observable was not what the woman was experiencing because a woman's mental processing and her visible actions were not aligned. This lack of integration between inner and outer 'selves' reflected the woman's past experiences which served to censure her thoughts and/or protect herself in order to fit into her social reality. Feminist approaches to oral history have built on the existing sociological approach of 'life histories' (or 'life stories', or 'life narratives') which have been used to identify social structures evident in the remembered lives of individuals. Focusing on the 'everyday' lives of women, feminist sociologists have had to generate new theory in order to analyse what had been outside the scope of existing approaches. Within this domain, the sociology of emotion offers up a rich vein of feminist inquiry as the nuance and intonation of language is recorded in confidence that it will reveal openings that allow the speaking of the 'unsaid' (Belenky, et al., 1986; Leavy, 2007). The sociology of emotion, evident in the oral histories of women, is also evident of boundary crossing as it scrutinises the normalising (and marginalising) effects of psychological analysis (Anderson, et al., 1990).

Figure 3.6 A 'patch' in the bricolage: Feminist oral history and multiple directions for interpretation

Standing in marked contrast with early forms of oral history, feminist oral historians drew on the sociological and psychological to construct histories that sprang from the interview focused on the ordinary rather than the heroic, seeking the nuance rather than the fact (Bornat, 1998; Gluck, 1999). (This is shown visually in Figure 3.6.) Feminist oral historians also were identified with interviews in which the interviewer was more clearly present in the interview, and even in the research data.

In traditional social science research, the interviewer is meant to not interfere with the interviewee's attempts at answering questions and providing data (Fontana & Frey, 2008; Patton, 2003) and the interviewer in grounded theory research, for example, is meant to be relatively passive (Glaser, 2003). But Minister (1991) described this as requiring the interviewee to perform, and in contrast, feminist oral history, she maintained, was "intersubjective oral history" (p. 36), meaning that women should be interviewed differently, with a more conversational style developing with the interviewee providing non-verbal and "verbal intersupport" in various forms including "short overlapping remarks" (p. 37) and even completing sentences.

What distinguishes a feminist approach to oral history interviewing, according to Hesse-Biber (2007), are "the types of questions feminists ask" (p. 117). These are questions that show an understanding of women's lives within the context of research that is promoting social justice; that are responsive to the sensitivities of the power relationship between researcher-

researched, which is evident in researcher reflexivity which “keeps the researcher mindful of his or her personal positionality and that of the respondent” (p. 117); and that concern is shown for how the researched are represented in the research findings.

Similarly Leavy (2007) saw an organic affinity between oral history and feminism which extends beyond the personal engagement between the researcher and the researched to a deeper understanding of how experience is understood. Guiding the feminist approach to women’s oral history accounts of the ‘everyday’ was assumption that the process would be empowering for both the interviewer and interviewee; a belief that Gluck (1999) suggested was by hindsight “naïve” (p. 4).

3.2.4 Feminist oral history and this study

The connections between feminist oral history and this study rest both in the way the research was conducted and in its interest in what was ‘everyday’ for the participants, who were with one exception, all women. Furthermore participants all self-identified as a parent, and in various ways reflected how the experience of parenting shifted personal directions; in many cases towards greater community involvement, leadership and advocacy for women and children. This has been an historic domain for feminist activity (Belenky, 1996; Belenky, et al., 1986; Browne, et al., 1978; Knox, 1995; Novitz, 1982; Singer, 1992).

Another connection is because of my own experience as an interviewer. I have a personal preference for the feminist oral history style of interview which has scope for intersubjective meaning making and an informal and inclusive style of conversation/interview (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Minister, 1991). As I wrote in a research note:

> Within ethical boundaries, my preferred style is to let the interview follow the thought lines of the interviewee. My style is to notice. To pick up on long silences, choice of words, unfinished stories. To be attentive to what is happening for me and the interviewee. This preference is probably one reason why I never really enjoyed hack journalism but also why, when time was on my side, I enjoyed the freedom of journalistic inquiry.

Feminist oral history also leaves open and undefined what academic domain is to be used to analyse the research data (Leavy, 2007). This dovetails with thematic analysis (Davidson & Tolich, 2003c). In this study, the goal of the interviews was not to understand the participants as

individuals, but to explore how ideas about play had changed in their experience. As oral history tends to do, this enabled the merging of the "the public and private, individual and social, illustrating the falseness of these dichotomous constructs, and the relationship between them in lived reality" (Leavy, 2007, p. 155). Visible in the analysis of the research data are aspects of anthropology (especially the descriptive aspects of ethnography; see section 3.3.5); and sociology (especially the nature of the modernist project, see section 7.1). Psychology is less visible although evident in how 'free play' has been analysed (see section 4.2.1). That this is a piece of history is imbedded in the retrospective nature of the topic, however, commentary on contemporary aspects is also present.

Foregrounding feminism is also a way to pay tribute to the era formative for many of the participants who identified as feminists. However, it has also been a troubling aspect because as feminist sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild (2003) has reflected, the feminist revolution has stalled because although women's career opportunities have improved in the last generation, other feminist aspirations have not materialised. Contemporary society, she said, has "neither rewired its notion of manhood to facilitate male work-sharing at home, nor restructured the workplace so as to allow more control over and flexibility at work" (p. 217).

Within this study, the research data includes feminist voices encouraging women to care for their children, and expressing the hope that that those in institutional settings would not discourage this from happening. In context of the policies that encourage mothers to return to, or remain in, the workforce (see section 2.3.2 above), their perspectives can be understood as in keeping with oral history's commitments to bringing out what does not want to be heard; of hearing the voices, in this case feminist voices, from 'the margins' (Leavy, 2007). Such voices run the risk of being associated with other conservative voices which could be described as encouraging women to 'de-liberate' themselves. Hochschild (2003), however, saw the feminist revolution as having enabled the expansion of capitalist activity into the domestic sphere, and this has come at a high emotional cost. Humans across cultures, "still need to care, and it takes vigorous emotional effort to repress the wish to care or to be care for", she wrote (p. 221). Against benchmarks about what is "practical, efficient and rational", Hochschild proposed that the "cold modern solution is to institutionalize all forms of human care" (p. 221). Arguably, the educationalisation of early childhood plays its part in this 'solution'.

3.2.5 Summary

This section has considered research methods, and especially the interview from multiple perspectives, and positions this research within oral history, and more particularly feminist oral history. Issues of accuracy and objectivity have been considered and, given that the data reflects personal memories (which are understood to be constructed in the context of an interview), the benchmarks for quality of research rest within the domain of authenticity and trustworthiness (Fetterman, 2009; Patton, 2003).

3.3 The research process

Starting with the determination of the research question and the sampling method, this section covers how the research happened. The interviews themselves are covered with some detail included about several which stood as significant, including the interview with the ailing Lex Grey. This is followed by the transcription process and a consideration of validity, reliability and confidentiality issues reflected in the research data generated.

3.3.1 Determining the question

Initially the focus of this research was to compare how distinctly different generations of early childhood teachers/educators theorised the purpose of some 'traditional' areas of play, such as sand, water, family play and carpentry. I anticipated that the older generation would have a theoretical frame which was psychoanalytically-based and that the recent graduates would have sociocultural frames of understanding.

However, this plan was discarded after the first interviews with those who would have been in the older generation, as there was little interest in the 'why?' of the areas of play, and rather more interest in talking about the 'who'. From the earliest interviews it was evident that even within the experiences of the participants, there had been changes in how play, and particularly 'free play', was understood. It became clear that these historic leaders of e.c.e. had, between the late 1940s and 1980s, witnessed the movement of children into settings where they could play and enabled the creation of an educational sector. Hence the research title became *Play's progress? Locating play in the educationalisation of early childhood in New Zealand,* with the

research question being: *How has play been experienced, and understood across, the past 60 years by those identified as historic leaders of the early childhood sector?* Within this overarching research question were two secondary questions: *How was 'play' (and especially 'free play') understood and codified in intentional 'play' settings?* and *How did the e.c. sector become 'educational' and how has this process affected understandings about children's play?*

3.3.2 Sampling

Initially my sample was to consist of life members of the three oldest national 'early childhood education' organisations in New Zealand:

> **Kindergartens:** the New Zealand Free Kindergarten Union was established in 1913 (May, 1997; New Zealand Kindergartens Inc., n.d.; Prochner, 2009);
> **Playcentre:** the New Zealand Playcentre Federation was formed in 1948 (Densem & Chapman, 2000; May, 2001; Stover, 1998b); and
> **Childcare**: the New Zealand Childcare Association was formed in 1963; it was later renamed Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa New Zealand Childcare Association (May, 2003). (Within this study, it is usually referred by its initials TTPOOA-NZCA.)

These services have each been built on voluntary effort using democratic systems of governance. Life membership is an honour given to members for sustained service and leadership across a range of possible roles including as administrators as well for the provision of (educational) services to families and their children.

I planned to write to each national organisation asking permission to interview any of their life members. This was easier said than done, because although playcentre and TTOPOANZ have maintained one national organisation, the kindergarten movement splintered in the late 1980s and there remain two kindergarten groupings which are neither completely regional nor national in their focus (Duncan, 2008; New Zealand Kindergartens Inc., n.d.). New Zealand Kindergarten Inc. (NZK) probably comes the closest to being a national organisation but it does not include the largest association, the Auckland Kindergarten Association (AKA).

NZK sent me a list of their life members and I sent them each a letter or an email. Only two replied: Wendy Logan in Nelson and Lynda Boyd in Christchurch, both of whom were still active in e.c.e., and had had high profile kindergarten leadership roles in the 1980s. That there are four kindergarten voices within this research reflects two serendipitous events when kindergarten-trained people were 'bonus participants' alongside the intended person in two interviews. Along with Val Burns came Mary Purdy who moved from kindergarten teaching to Wellington Teachers College and was nationally known for her daily radio programme 'Listen with mother' in the 1960s. Along with Wendy Logan came Trish Gargiulo who is a life member of the Nelson Kindergarten Association. The recent evolution of kindergartens was evident in the interview with Wendy and Trish as they talked about their shared responsibilities not only for the Nelson kindergartens, but also for administering several childcare services as well.

Given the historic importance of kindergartens, it could be argued that a stronger kindergarten voice should have been sought. However, in contrast to playcentre and childcare, the kindergarten movement's historic pioneers died several generations ago. The first kindergartens were established in New Zealand in Dunedin in 1889 by the activist Presbyterian minister, Rev. Rutherford Wardell and his parishioners who shared his concern for the children of the poor (Hughes, 1989; May, 1997; A. Smith & Swain, 1988). Their national presence grew over the next 50 years with a national training system established in the 1940s (May, 1997). However, establishment of national organisations for playcentre and for childcare are still living memories for an aging generation, and the reforms which began in the 1980s and continued through the 1990s have radically changed both services. While playcentre has drastically shrunk (both in terms of centres and children enrolled), childcare (officially known as 'education and care services') has grown exponentially (Ministry of Education, 2009; Ministry of Education Data Management Unit, 2010b).

In addition, at the time of the interviews, kindergartens had not been as drastically affected as have playcentre and childcare by the government-driven educational reforms of the 1980s and 1990s (see chapter 2). However, since the interviews in 2005 and 2006, significant changes to kindergartens have occurred as they adapt to changing policies, and especially to the '20 hours' funding initiative which encouraged longer kindergarten sessions and mixed aged groups (Ministry of Education, 2007b; New Zealand Kindergartens Inc., 2009).

Despite strong philosophical differences between the organisations, the histories of playcentre and the history of childcare are closely linked. I interviewed six of the life members of Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa New Zealand Childcare Association (TTPOOA-NZCA); five of them began their early childhood stories by taking their children to playcentre. Through office-holding and playcentre training, these five (Pat Hubbard, Mary Alice Bramwell, Joan Kennett, Alison Leonard, and Noreen Moorhouse) all developed a strong commitment for working with children and their families. The sixth life member, Kahuwaero Katene came into childcare through her involvement in the early days of te kohanga reo. Seeking professional training, she enrolled with, and as a result became deeply involved in, the childcare association. These six people contacted me directly as a result of a letter being sent through the head office of TTPOOA-NZCA to all their life members.

The Playcentre Federation gave me permission to directly approach all its life members and all six agreed to be interviewed: Beverley Morris, Lex Grey, Pam (Kennedy) Hanna, Margaret Wollerman, Robbie Burke and Barbara Chapman.

If I had decided to just interview life members, I would have had a sample of 14. However, in the process of contacting these people, in discussion with my supervisors and through following suggestions from my colleagues at AUT, a snowballing process began. Snowballing is an approach to locating "information-rich key informants" (Patton, 2003, p. 237) and then approaching others that they suggest. Snowballing's capacity to identify a sample reflects known status and social networks. Potential participants were suggested because of their contribution through their writings (Pat Penrose and Ailsa Densem), their input into government policy (Val Burns and Marie Bell), or for both reasons (Anne Meade and Geraldine McDonald).

Altogether, the research sample consisted of people whose experiences in 'early childhood education' span the 1940s through to 2006. While some have been involved for over half a century, all were involved for parts of at least two decades. Most were involved in the 1970s. All were involved in the 1980s. I was aware that there are no people who speak from a Pasifika perspective. But after 23 interviews, I had one Māori voice, one male voice and the rest (21) were Pākehā women, several of whom had emigrated from England as adults. What this sample suggests is that the generations of New Zealanders who have pioneered the early childhood sector consisted primarily of Pākehā women, with the occasional strong male, and with

significant presence of Māori, but not necessarily in large numbers. Based on my reading (for example, May, 2001), and my own experience, I believe this is not unrepresentative.

Table 3.1 The interviewees (the 'participants')

Bell, Marie	Kelly, Jo
Boyd, Lynda	Kennett, Joan
Bramwell, Mary Alice	Leonard, Alison
Burke, Robbie	Logan, Wendy
Burns, Val	McDonald, Geraldine
Chapman, Barbara	Meade, Anne
Densem, Ailsa	Moorhouse, Noreen
Gargiulo, Trish	Morris, Beverley
Grey, Lex	Penrose, Pat
Hanna, Pam	Purdy, Mary
Hubbard, Pat	Wollerman, Margaret
Katene, Kahuwaero (Kahu)	

(For more detail on the individual interviews, see Appendix 1.)

I had had contact with some participants prior to this study. While working on national playcentre projects in the 1990s, I had met or corresponded with Geraldine McDonald, Beverley Morris, Robbie Burke and Lex Grey. As an editor of books for Playcentre Publications, I had edited a book written by Pat Penrose in the mid 1990s. Marie Bell I met in 2005 at the Institute of Child Studies at Victoria University where we both were doing research.

Given that many participants shared, like me, years of active involvement with playcentre, in at least some interview situations, I could have been regarded having 'insider' status (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Two points contradict this, however. For most of those interviewed, if they had a playcentre connection, it was long past. Others had no strong connection to playcentre. More important, I believe, is the research topic itself which focused on children's play, learning through play and 'free play'. As this was known to potential participants, it is probable that those who were willing to be interviewed shared with me an interest in the topic. However, being an 'outsider' is not always a disadvantage because the interviewer can ask naïve questions, eliciting

what, between insiders, might be taken for granted as 'shared knowledge'; so "you might discover unique perspectives your participants have on a particular issue" (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 142).

3.3.3 Interviewing

In December 2005, I conducted my first interview with Pat Hubbard in Wellington. In April 2006 I undertook six interviews during an Easter road trip to Wellington, Palmerston North and Hamilton. I flew to the South Island in July 2006 and interviewed four Christchurch women before travelling to Nelson to interview Trish Gargiulo and Wendy Logan. The other interviews were undertaken in and around Auckland during 2006.

The interviews were semi-structured, covering a set range of questions. From my prior experience, I was aware that some aspects of a centre-based play environment were likely to be contentious and I encouraged the participants to consider how compliance/requirements were understood; for example, regarding regular water play and also how safety was understood in relation to carpentry and to tree climbing. (The interview questions as approved by AUT University Ethics Committee are given in Table 3.2.)

Table 3.2 Interview questions as approved by AUT University Ethics Committee

Personal histories

- What are your earliest memories of ece?
- When, how and why did you get involved as an adult?

What was happening in the ece setting?

- What activities were set up?
- What would you normally be doing?
- What parts of ece did you find most satisfying?
- What changes did you see in the range of what was available for children?
- Were any activities harder to maintain than others?

Personal perspectives on pedagogy

- How did you understand the place of play in early childhood education?
- How has your understanding changed with time?

Current point of observation

- How are you involved in early childhood education now?
- What aspects of ece do you maintain an interest in?

What areas do you feel concern about?

- If asked to advise a new centre what play opportunities to include within their centre, what would you suggest?

For the interview with Lex Grey, I opted to structure the questions primarily around the responses to date from other interviewees. This was because Lex was very elderly and frail, and because he had already shared his story extensively (see for example, Grey, 1993).

For all those interviewed, the interviews happened in a place they chose. For 22 participants this was done face to face with a tape recorder running. This was followed by the creation of a transcript which, once produced, was sent back to the participant for approval or alteration, and then inclusion in the study as research data. The exception to this process was the one phone interview which was with Margaret Wollerman. In contrast to the other interviews which

frequently lasted more than 90 minutes, this interview was complete in 30 minutes. 'The transcript' was typed by me while Margaret was talking. After the interview, it was quickly tidied and dispatched for approval. While this method was more efficient than the process used in the other interviews, the transcript for this telephone interview is quite different. There are few digressions, as well as less shared humour.

Other transcripts show frequent digressions, suggesting a need for the participants to give sufficient 'back story' in order to illustrate a point. To talk about their understanding of play, the participants often started with reflections on their parents as parents. With few exceptions, the participants self identified as grandparents and it was often through their grandchildren that the participants felt themselves linked into 'what's happening these days'. Some who were no longer deeply involved in the e.c.e. sector were interested in more recent events in e.c.e. so they looked to me for information. This bears similarities to Oakley's (1981) experience of interviewing women about childbirth when the interviewer was drawn upon as an information source by the interviewee.

There were three group interviews where two participants were involved. These were: Wendy Logan with Trish Gargiulo; Val Burns with Mary Purdy; and Pam Hanna with Jo Kelly. These small group interviews had the advantage of confirming shared understandings, most strikingly when, during a discussion about how early childhood was seen in the 1980s, Val and Mary both said unprompted and in unison: *"There's no such thing as a curriculum in early childhood!".* The digressive personal and family reflections were most common amongst the interviews with only one participant. When there were two participants interviewed together, the digressions tended to be about areas of shared interest and experience.

Several interviews are memorable not so much for what was on the tape but because of where they happened or how they happened. Anne Meade was interviewed in the international terminal at Auckland Airport. The transcript confirms that that the flow of ideas was not adversely affected by periodic boarding announcements.

The interview with Lex Grey was, in contrast, done in a very private place, his small unit in Orewa. Lex was quite ill with Parkinson's disease and he sat, still, small and dignified in a lazyboy chair through the interview. The only interruptions were the calls of local birds which sometimes

were more audible than Lex's voice. Although I was unaware of it at the time, Lex's voice got weaker and weaker during the course of the interview. The taperecorder's microphone could barely catch his voice; the sound of taperecorder itself sometimes overwhelmed his voice. I was equidistant from the microphone and by comparison, when I spoke, my voice boomed on the tape. What I learned from this was about the value of obtaining and afterwards consistently using a multidirectional 'sound-grabber' microphone rather than relying on the taperecorder's inbuilt microphone which had worked well in the earlier interviews but was clearly not adequate for someone whose voice was failing.

The interview itself became an intense experience for me. Initially I was not sure how to interpret his slow responses. However, there was a major shift in the interview when Lex made it clear (by shutting his eyes and raising his arm up and holding it up for the duration of his response) that he had something to say. This happened when I asked about children learning and the role of the adult and he said "*This is where we have to keep several factors in mind all at the same time"*. What came next was a very coherent statement about how children and adults learn together, but with long pauses, up to one minute in length. I waited while the tape recorder churned away recording itself and the sound of the birds until Lex spoke again and then again; all the while with his eyes closed. Having completed his reflection, Lex's eyes opened, his arm came down to rest on the lazyboy and he laughed:

> *And if you want to really get to grips with the processes, the most effective way still I'm sure is to roll your trousers up above the knee, get into the sandpit; bring a bucket of water. And go to town. (laughter)*
>
> *It's called play. And as long as you don't stretch the definitions too tightly and falsify them, all that fascinates – gives one fascination – runs through that play. So to me it's simple. Understanding young people means enjoying them.*

Sitting quietly with Lex felt like being in Quaker meetings; waiting in expectation. As I left, he said: "Thank you for including me". Lex moved into a rest home within weeks of our interview. When he died at the end of 2007, the interview became even more significant and extracts from it were used in several memorials to him.

3.3.4 Transcribing the interviews and approving the research data

The transcription process itself was a time-consuming project shared with my then 19-year old son, Thomas Watts. We established a pattern where, having copied and carefully stored a copied tape of the interview, I would listen to the whole interview, identifying which sections were needed for the data, using the numbers on the transcribing taperecorder to indicate where to start and finish. Thomas transcribed word for word the sections that I had identified. I then read through the transcripts, proofreading, and sometimes adding information such as when an interviewee used humour, especially irony, to make a point. I included laughter when it happened, which was quite often. The presence of (laughter) indicates points of shared humour and the intersubjective nature of the interviews; there were two people (at least) in the room and there were more than words in the air. There was also a degree of shared understanding and shared humour which often built in the course of the interview.

In line with my ethics approval, transcripts of the interview were returned to the interviewees for approval. This happened in several ways; 'hard copy' (by post) and electronically (to those participants who had email). This was to enable the participants to engage with whichever medium they preferred to use. As the interviews were up to 25 pages long, posting the hard copy meant that the cost of printing was covered by me rather than by the participants. They were supplied with a self-addressed envelope for returning the amended transcripts to me.

If Anna Green had been appointed as the second supervisor prior to ethics approval being received, the approval process would probably have been different. Her advice was that it was problematic to return transcripts to participants as they tend to alter the data. Transcribed, the spoken word often looks halting or awkward. Grammar is rarely perfect (Samuel, 1998). Anna Green's preferred methodology was to send interviewees a copy of the tape itself, rather than a transcript. I attempted to honour her advice and yet also honour the procedure which had had ethics approval. (See Appendix 2 for a copy of the approval given by AUT Ethics Committee). I requested that the participants read the transcripts to ensure facts were right, and to delete stories that they felt were not for public consumption; but please not to worry about changing grammar. However, some interviewees carefully went through and corrected their own

grammar. One transcript became a family project in re-writing the transcript and clarifying meaning. Another accepted my request not to edit, but cautioned me about taking the material out of context. For whatever reasons, the approval process proved to be very slow. It took up to a year for each transcript to be read, amended and returned.

That the transcripts were not exactly the same as the verbatim interview was quite acceptable to me. My perspective was that the data reflected what the participants wanted to present; I was not analysing their spoken language as such. This reflected in part the fact that they were participating without the cloak of anonymity around them. While the interview had been a relatively private interaction, usually consisting of only two (or at most three) people and a tape recorder, the audience of the written word as it would appear in this study was significantly wider.

3.3.5 Considering validity, reliability and confidentiality

The criteria that ensure quality research have traditionally been validity and reliability. Although Denzin (2010) identified oral history as being within a "new paradigm formation" in which scholars "seldom use terms like validity and reliability" (p. 424), validity can be recognised when the research method can "measure what it claims to measure" (Kellehear, 1993, p. 10). Within this study, the research data was generated and confirmed by interviewees who participated willingly in the study. The size and make-up of the research sample is a major variable in terms of this study's validity. It is a moot point whether or not a study such as this one can be fully reliable; that is, that another researcher following the same methodology would generate similar findings (Kellehear, 1993), because this study foregrounds the researcher and the researched. So even with the same questions for the same people, a different researcher would produce different conversations and transcripts; thus different research data.

The words "authentic" and "trustworthy" are suggested by Patton (2003, p. 50) as touchstones for research standards that transcend the protracted arguments about subjectivity/objectivity in social sciences. I would use those same words for consideration as to this study's reliability and validity. If those judging the value of this research find it reliable and valid, I suggest that in addition to the study's ethical processes, authentic voices from trustworthy sources will be recognised.

Offering confidentiality to interviewees helps minimise their risks; Davidson and Tolich (2003c) described confidentiality as being the normal approach in social sciences research. Within oral histories, the use of un-named sources has been contentious as early pioneers of oral history saw anonymous informants as being un-historic (Gluck, 1999). The rise of anonymous informants/narrators in the 1970s and 1980s reflected the influence of feminist theory and the new inquiry into the psychology of women (Anderson, et al., 1990).

I did not offer confidentiality to the interviewees. This was partly pragmatic. It would be difficult to disguise the identity of the individuals involved and they would be easily recognised by others in the early childhood community. However, in not offering confidentiality, I was also wanting keep the stories connected with the people who helped shape history. Their personal experiences, as remembered, adds to and sometimes runs counter to the published histories. The participants' safeguards lay in their own choices: to participate in the study; to disclose or withhold information; as well as how they chose to edit (or not) their interview transcript.

The data needs to be recognised as intersubjectively generated in a context. As recorded in my research notes:

> *These people are not masked by pseudonyms. These people are known. Their knowledge was shared within the formal construct of the interview but the interview itself can be in an informal social context. As such there was more disclosed than might have been done, say for example, within a court room under oath. There was hyperbole; asides; speculation; an example might be made to illustrate a point within a story but the example itself may or may not be current or factual. The data generated has to be understood in the context in which it was gathered.*

The interrogation of the data and development of themes out of that also has an ethnographic ethos because the goal was to find out 'what happened', and without passing judgment, to tell a "credible rigorous and authentic story" (Fetterman, 2009, p. 543). Within this study, the stories generated which, while not accepted uncritically, were accepted as being evidence of a way of interpreting the complexities of personal experience. This is in keeping with how Kincheloe (2005, p. 346) described the bricolage as having a "fictive" quality in allowing space for the possible, rather than only the empirically proven.

The determination of themes and the organisation of data within those themes required discernment and discrimination. The narrative created out the data is inherently the imposition of the researcher's logic (Kincheloe, 2005), even if the voices of the participants remain evident in what the researcher chooses to bring into visibility within the study.

3.3.5 Summary

This section has focused on the research process and has indicated how the research question evolved, how the sample was created by a mixture of canvassing potential participants alongside the process of 'snowballing'. The interviews were usually about 90 minutes in length; significant time was required to transcribe and then to return to participants for approval. The visibility of the participants in this study, one of its unusual characteristics, foregrounds that the research data is reflective and subjective, as well as being authentic and trustworthy.

3.4 Looking for meaning

Initially I planned to model the analysis of the research data on the work done by Sue Middleton and Helen May (1997b) in their book *Teachers talk teaching 1915-1995* whose informants gave the authors an even longer timeframe than is evident in this current study. Described by the authors as being both oral history and life history, *Teachers talking teaching* is characterised by juxtapositioning personal accounts of teachers alongside a literature-based narrative of the relevant events, trends and approaches. A similar pattern is evident in Sewell and Bethell (2009) which uses a collection of family photos as the prompt to explore how the innovative pedagogical practices of Miss Audrey Newton, a 1940s Progressive kindergarten teacher, were set within the context of a supportive kindergarten association in Wellington, highlighting how an influential community of practice can form and disperse. How teachers integrate and resist change is also a recurring theme that is also evident in Duncan's study of kindergarten teachers' experience during the 1980s and 1990s when early childhood sector was formed and when kindergarten teachers were required to adapt to new systems of accountability and teaching (Duncan, 2001).

However, in this study, the data generated from the early interviews showed that focusing on play meant that the participants were considering an idea (a concept) which extended their

reflections beyond their various roles as adults. The stories that were told were about families across several generations, in most cases, similar to Miss Audrey Newton (Sewell & Bethell, 2009), visibly part of networks of people who, for at least an episode, shared a common vision.

3.4.1 Inductive theme analysis

Within quantitative social sciences, Davidson and Tolich (2003c) maintained that by the time the researcher is analysing data, already 75% of the work is completed. This is because the analysis, how the data will be usefully interpreted, is determined within the design. Qualitative researchers, by contrast, are only 50% of the way through the research when they start to analyse. The research data itself can suggest to the researcher the patterns of analysis which might be used. The percentage could be even lower for the inductive researcher who arrives at the analysis stage with more questions about directions. Within inductive thematic analysis of qualitative research, the researcher may well have begun with issues to consider and a plan to follow, but these become negotiable as the data is collected and an iterative process of inductive analysis can begin simultaneously; a non-linear process (Davidson & Tolich, 2003c).

According to Davidson and Tolich (2003b), the purpose of inductive research is to generate theory; the goal of deductive research is to test it. Although inductive thematic analysis is "more demanding on the personal resources and intellectual art and craft of the individual researcher" (Kellehear, 1993, p. 38), for some researchers, the openness to theory generation is a necessary part of the research.

As with feminist oral history, inductive thematic analysis can be understood in terms of giving 'voice' to those who have participated in the research and whose stories are the data that has been generated. But the stories are also given a platform through the efforts and resources of the researcher. Denizen (1989, cited by Fontana & Frey, 2008, p. 135) urged the researcher to watch for epiphanies; "those interactional moments that leave marks on people's lives and have the potential for creating transformational experiences for the person". However, what is an epiphany for the researcher may not be appreciated by the researched. As Borland (1998) found out when her grandmother read what she had written, the story heard by the researcher is not always the story told by the researched. Borland recommended extending the oral history to include what meaning was made of the history (once written) by those originally interviewed.

Having offended her grandmother in her own research, Borland encouraged her feminist oral historian colleagues to allow paradigms to be critiqued rather than remain "safely ensconced in our university libraries" (p. 330). This also resonates with Depaepe's (1998) preference for immanent frameworks giving 'finer-meshed' historic pictures than "is the case with 'conceptual tools' borrowed from elsewhere" (p. 22). In this study, the research findings (see chapters 4-6) were sent to interested participants for their information. I was open to hearing that I had made mistakes (there was no such feedback). However, I recognise that my willingness to re-engage with the participants was limited by the complexity of creating the research data from the large amount of recorded material that came from the 19 interviews.

3.4.2 Identifying themes arising from the research data

Working through 19 transcripts of interviews with 23 historic leaders of the early childhood community took most of a month fulltime work. Four broad themes were identified:

1. 'Play' and …
2. Images of children and parents
3. Codifying systems
4. Change processes

These four themes are elaborated in Appendix 3.

Each broad thematic area was numbered and each development within that theme was given a progression of that number. There is overlap between the broad thematic areas; for example, between (1) and (2) where images of children overlap with experiences of play, and controversies can reflect how play is understood and how children are seen. Controversies about play also show up in how children and parents are seen, and become aspects of professionalisation, such as how risk and safety are managed. The combination of themes (3) and (4) point towards the process of 'educationalisation' (see subsection 3.4.3).

So the first step of the analytical process was to read all the transcribed interviews, and then to re-read and code sections according to the broad thematic areas. As subdivisions appeared, these were also coded. So the first wave of interrogation of the data produced marked-up

transcriptions; hand-written codes linked the content to the thematic areas. From this a template was created with the headings and subheadings.

The next step was the creation of a new WORD file for each interview with the template copied/pasted into that file. Sections from the interviews were reorganised using the themes; in addition, sub-themes became evident. For example, Ailsa Densem spoke at length about her work with Christchurch City Council on playgrounds, so 'playgrounds' became a subheading within the thematic template. However, although the issue of safety and risk, especially in outdoor play, was addressed by many participants, only one other participant, Trish Gargiulo, talked about public playgrounds. So while public playgrounds are included in Ailsa's and Trish's reflections about physical activity and playgrounds, this particular theme does not stand out in the data. In contrast, Joan Kennett and Beverley Morris spoke of childhood experiences of being different. Joan was raised as a pacifist; Beverley had formative years living in Samoa. This theme of 'being different' did cross several other participants' storylines, as well and it is offered as a theme in Chapter 4.

The next step was to organise the data under each heading. Another new WORD file was created for each theme and the data was organised chronologically within that theme. Throughout this process, I keep notes and threads of thinking relevant to the data. These helped to jump start the writing of the research findings chapters which were initially two chapters consisting of 70,000 words.

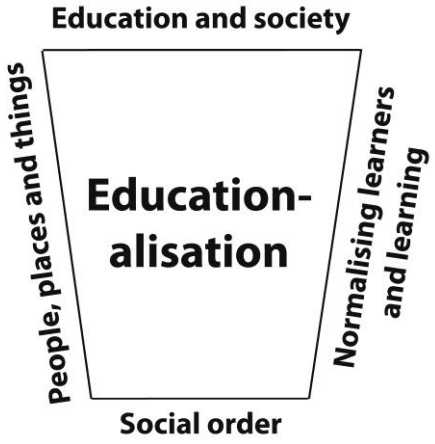
Two points to make here: one is that in the early drafts, these two chapters were in a sense being written for the study's participants (that is, the interviewees). There was a rich vein of social history coming from each individual, and the storytelling style and the vernacular used were difficult to limit. The second point is that the first drafts of the research data chapters were clearly divided between the years when Progressive Education was most influential (when 'free play' was being advocated for children, and innovative adult education was also developing) and the years when there was a major refocusing on education, especially the reforms of the late 1980s. While discussing these reforms with a colleague, I described e.c.e. as being a 'site of restless reform' which became an overarching theme for the study and helped to give more focus to the research data which was reconfigured into three chapters, each focused on a different reform project. Over several re-writings, the research findings also had to be cut back

by about half, and I had to limit what stories were included verbatim. Where there was no one story that appeared to be the best to illustrate a point, I tended to privilege the older participants. Where there were contrasting perspectives, I included these. I paraphrased to save space, but tried to use key words verbatim in order to keep a connection to the original spoken word.

3.4.3 Recognising colonisation and educationalisation

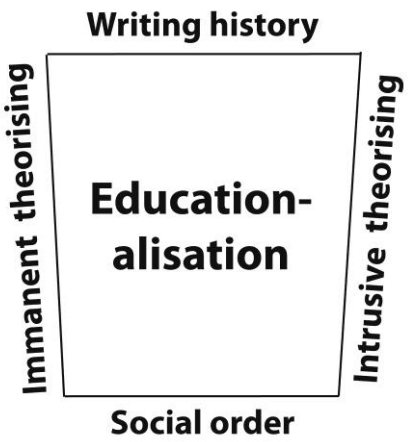
Two linked analytical frameworks became evident through the process of theme analysis. These were 'educationalisation' (Depaepe, 1998; Depaepe, et al., 2008; Depaepe & Smeyers, 2008) and 'colonisation of the bricolage' (de Certeau, 1984). By looking across themes (3) and (4), rudimentary aspects of the educationalisation (Depaepe, 1998; Depaepe & Smeyers, 2008) can be identified; that is, that across the 60 years described collectively by the participants in this study, there is an incremental change in both how raising children was understood to be an educational process alongside both the codifying of standards and pedagogical technologies (equipment and practices) of early childhood teachers. The professionalisation of the e.c. sector was evident in the research data, as was the (sometimes contested) existing professional status of kindergarten teachers. Major themes of 'educationalisation' are shown graphically in Figure 3.7.

Figure 3.7 Educationalisation: Patterns and purposes of education



Another visual account of 'educationalisation' is offered in Figure 3.8, which has more emphasis on both the historic contexts of educational (including classroom) activity and the patterns evident over time. I see this as looking at historic qualitative material in 'stereo': foregrounding both how events and ideas were understood by those who experienced them; as well as acknowledging long term trends and models of analysis which may only become visible when there is adequate distance from events that they can be 'othered' sufficiently to be written up as history (de Certeau, 1988).

Figure 3.8 Educationalisation: 'In stereo' – Foregrounding both immanent and intrusive analysis



Consideration of 'What is innovative?' as contrasting with 'What is everyday?' led to the French philosopher/anthropologist/historian, Michel de Certeau (1984) and to his theorising of the 'practice of the everyday'. This provided a theoretical framework for 'intrusive' interrogation of the research data, particularly in relation to (1) the notion of 'progress' and (2) the 'colonisation of the bricolage'.

While 'progress' exists clearly within the term 'Progressive Education', it is also evident in the thinking that education serves a wider social purpose (Dewey, 1909/1956, 1910, 1938; Gutek, 2005). What that wider social purpose is is central to the tensions that exist within contemporary early childhood education, especially its multiple agendas to educate children and to facilitate economic activity (Duhn, 2010; Farquhar, 2008a). One aspect of the complexity of this research project is captured in the linking between 'play' and 'progress'. In talking about 'play', there was an opening to also judge 'progress'. For some participants who strongly valued

effective support systems for working mothers, early childhood education in its current forms meets that important objective. However, for some others, early childhood education had come to serve different purposes than those they had worked towards; perhaps even that it had taken on the form of a 'mimesis', a term used by de Certeau (1988) to describe the perception of something valued and familiar but masking something else.

De Certeau's work is controversial. Clark (1986) described *The practice of everyday life* (de Certeau, 1984) as full of paradox and contradiction. For example, she said that de Certeau used a book to argue against the "violence of the written word", and analytically "disavows rationality" (p. 706). According to Clark (1986), de Certeau was challenging his contemporaries, seeking "what Foucault leaves out" (p. 706), and refusing to accept the "passivity of the Bourdieusian actor, more or less prisoner of his habitus" (p. 707). In a brief essay on mysticism, Shaw (2010) drew on de Certeau's work to describe the human body, as a holder of truths. "Far from being ruled by discourse," the body as understood by de Certeau, she wrote, is itself "… a symbolic language, and that in both psychoanalysis and mysticism, the body is perceived as responsible for a truth of which it is unaware" (p. 1). A more recent critic, Ahearne (2010) raised moral objections to de Certeau's romantic portrayal of deviant activity as 'tactics'. Regardless, interest in de Certeau's work continues. His metaphors of resistance masked as compliance have been used in classroom studies of children's behaviour (Williams, 2006). Others have developed his aesthetic of urban vantage point (Ciezaldo, 2009), while his 'practice of the everyday' provides a cross-cultural analytical tool suggesting links between the minutiae of personal decision-making and the social contexts of place (Zacher, 2009).

As well as a critical perspective that is grounded in a worldview which is not purely rational, what de Certeau's writings offer to this study are frameworks for understanding continuity and change. De Certeau's ideas resonate with the historic shifts evident in this study; his visualisation of everyday life as involving strategies of place often resisted by tactics of time resonate with the participants' accounts of everyday life in e.c. settings where what happened was often not exactly what was intended. However, his articulation of a colonisation process by which the bricolage becomes 'the consumers' is particularly relevant. Over the past half century in this country, the 'rearing' of children has been transformed from a (primarily) family and/or neighbourhood event into being (largely) a joint project with professional educators (Farquhar,

2008a). In addition, the analysis of the research findings builds on his metaphoric description of 'the bricolage' as being colonised through a series of strategies to maximise capital potential inherent in the body (collective and individual) (see Figure 3.9). This is explored in more depth in Chapter 7.

Figure 3.9 De Certeau's (1984) colonisation of the bricolage: Goals and strategies

Strategies of colonisation:	**In order to:**
Creating symbol systems	Create a language of detachment and distance from tradition
Taking tricks	Successfully maneuver through political variables
Transfers and metamorphosis	Enable passage between genres, using the following: - *Euphemism*: to mask contradictions - *Polythetism*: to combine variable symbols/properties - *Substitution*: to replace one symbol with another

3.4.4 Summary

The process of analysing the research data has built on themes arising from that research data. Thus the analysis has been an interpretive process and the frameworks for analysis have reflected the hermeneutic engagement with the research data, as well as the following of key words from the data into the literature. These processes led to the linked frameworks of 'educationalisation' (Depaepe, 1998; Depaepe, et al., 2008; Depaepe & Smeyers, 2008) and 'colonisation of the bricolage', (de Certeau, 1984) in which assumptions of 'progress' are problematised.

3.5 The research data: How it is presented

The research findings of this study are presented in chapters 4, 5 and 6. Answering the broad research question, How has play been experienced, and understood, across the past 60 years by those identified as historic leaders of the early childhood sector?, chapter 4 is also broad. It introduces how 23 historic leaders of the early childhood community experienced play as children and as parents, as teachers and as leaders within a range of contexts. With their reflections on the why and how of 'free play', a secondary research question is also addressed: How was 'play' (and especially 'free play') understood and codified in intentional 'play' settings? In chapter 5, the focus is more on the second research question: How did the e.c. sector become 'educational' and how has this process affected understandings about children's play? In chapter 6, the same secondary question is addressed in more depth.

What the participants in this study offer are personal stories and reflections about their experience of play and of 'free play'. Memories and storylines, roles and responsibilities, contexts and relationships; play seems to be highly associational; that is, it is understood within a context of people, places and things.

3.5.1 Some notes about the research data and style

Those interviewed for this study are referred to throughout as 'participant/s'. In chapters 4, 5 and 6, there is an informal style adopted for their personal names. Initially each is referred to by first and surname names. When they remain part of the subsequent discussion, they are referred by their first names. While there is significantly less verbatim material in chapter 7 where the research data is discussed, a similar style is continued. What the participants say is shown in *italics.* Short verbatim quotes preface sections and subsections; these act as markers for the reader as to what will be covered.

Within the research data, the dates, as remembered, are often approximations. Where I have been able to find an exact date, I have added this in. The participants told stories which moved along thematic lines; a story from the 1960s could illustrate a concern in the 2000s. So the lack of precision reflects the sources of information; the participants were talking without the aid of diaries or other date-specific materials.

In dividing the research data into three chapters, I have clustered the material around three reform projects, each identified as a 'grand' project. Chapter titles indicate approximate dates with the + sign used to indicate that the focus is on the themes which may be most evident in a particular era, but which were not tightly bounded within given dates.

I have tried to keep the names of organisations simple, so although some names have changed, I have tried to use only one name per organisation. For example, I refer (with a few exceptions) to Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa New Zealand Childcare Association as TTPOOA-NZCA, although it has had several iterations of its name (May, 2003). However, I have not changed how the organisation was referred to by the participants themselves.

Similarly, I have taken a pragmatic approach to the use of 'early childhood education' and 'e.c.e.' The quote marks around those terms are used to indicate their relative youth. Many of the participants 'went' to 'kindergarten' or 'playcentre' or 'childcare'. One, as a three-year-old, went to 'school'. So defining their experiences as being within 'early childhood education' is a retrospective construct; it reflects the storyteller's (and thesis writer's) prerogative to spin threads of continuity or alternatively to emphasis change by indicating how the services were understood by those involved at the time.

CHAPTER 4: Research findings: The Grand Play Project (1948-1975+)

In the years between 1948 and 1975, I am suggesting that there was a Grand Play Project evident in Aotearoa New Zealand. It was a reform project which reconceptualised children as being better educated when they were happy; where self-motivation and choice could produce good results, despite (as well as, because of) adult interventions and intentions; where physical activity was not separated from intellectual learning; where children could have preferences without parents or teachers losing status or control.

The Grand Play Project in Aotearoa New Zealand was preceded by other grand play projects. Particularly important was the play project that Susan Isaacs pioneered (and documented) at Malting House, England in the 1920s (Gardner, 1969; May, 1997). Predating hers is John Dewey's advocacy for child's meaningful activity in US kindergartens to be 'free play' which reflected their lives and interests (E. Weber, 1984). And before either, Friedrich Froebel's play project brought together Christian mysticism alongside the empowerment of educated women as teachers, while focusing on how to nurture the playful nature of children (Frost, et al., 2005; Gibbons, 2007; Singer, 1992).

A rather smaller play project was C.E. Beeby's experiment with children's play on the banks of the Ilam Creek in 1930s Christchurch during the Great Depression (Alcorn, 1999). This was a formative experience for Beeby, and an indicator of the dispositions and interests which he later brought into his role as Director of Education (Mason, 1944).

Like many projects, what was imagined at the beginning of the Grand Play Project was not exactly what was recognised at the end. Intention and probability may open a direction, but the project itself shapes destinations, arriving at places which may surprise those who guided its launching.

This chapter provides initial answers to both the primary research question: How has play been experienced, and understood across, the past 60 years by those identified as historic leaders of the early childhood sector?, and the first of the secondary questions: How was 'play' (and especially 'free play') understood and codified in intentional 'play' settings?

Section 4.1 starts with the participants' experiences of play as children, and positions the participants as they described themselves, as parents and as people who worked with parents and moves through to the beginnings of the participants' long term engagement with early childhood organisations. Many spoke of mentors and leaders; they spoke of being parts of groups which tweaked their curiosities, encouraged their engagement and within which they made their contribution. Section 4.2 picks up this theme of groups and individuals that promoted children learning through play, especially 'free play', and focuses both on two organisations which spread the message: the New Education Fellowship and playcentre.

The contested nature of 'free play' is the focus of Section 4.3 and includes how 'free play' impacted on adults; the same democratic impulses that gave rise to 'free play' also brought innovative systems of teacher education: workshops, discussion groups, role plays and observations.

4.1 People and playing

We had the most fantastic time, climbing trees, digging in the ground, wriggling on our tummies through long grass and all sorts of other things – and, as I say, we

were left for hours; no one paying much attention to us except perhaps when we were chasing the chooks….

Anne Meade

When asked to talk about their understandings of play and 'early childhood', many participants reached into childhood memories. For the oldest participants, these memories were 80 years old, and they were not always about playful activity. Raised by Scottish parents in post-World War I Miramar, Lex Grey observed old world hostilities between the English, Irish, French and Scots, and in his neighbourhood, he saw intergenerational antagonism as well as dogmatic reliance on religious authority:

> *Parents didn't have a satisfying childhood themselves so they're going to make bloody well sure that nobody else had a better life than they had There's an element of antagonism towards youngsters because they have it better than their parents had. 'Look at all the sacrifices I made for you …' I can hear it resounding around my neighbourhood. …*
>
> *It may have been worse because on both sides of us when I grew up they were families from the Salvation Army and the Sallies knew what's right and wrong. … What they thought was right, you thought was wrong. What you thought was right, they thought was wrong. It became very confusing. Because you ought to have a hierarchy telling you. And life doesn't provide these hierarchies. So you've got to take a risk or two.*

In contrast, several participants recalled with pleasure their childhoods in the 1920s, pointing to the interventions of their parents that encouraged play. Beverley Morris remembered a "*wonderful*!" sandpit her father had constructed, while Marie Bell described her father as "*very unusual"* as he not only built playhouses for his children, but he also *"left us to it, which I think is so important – he didn't direct it".*

Described as having a similar trust in children's play, Barbara Chapman's mother was *"just amazing"*:

She let us take a lot of risks, really. She only drew the line when my brother lit a fire on top of the hayshed under some pine trees. That was just about too much for her! (laughter).

A number of participants described how they moved around paddocks, backyards and neighbourhoods with siblings and friends, and with no apparent adult supervision. One example must suffice.

Growing up near Taupo as a bush contractor's daughter in a family of 14 children, Kahuwaero Katene's experience of childhood play was within the context of danger, adventure and creating playthings from what was available, such as at the local sawmill where her brother would ask for small blocks of wood for toy cars, and then:

… when my brother got smart, he used to do it himself when the chap wasn't there, you know, when he was having his smoko. He'd do it himself – dangerous, but you know, that's what kids do. 12 or 13, he'd do it himself – make fancy little cars out of blocks of wood, you know, and we'd go and get all these bottle tops for the lights, and different things, you know, to decorate our cars and our truck – we'd look around and use natural stuff for it; and because we had so much space to play, we had our own scenes, our own bush, you know, and we had our own valleys, and our roads and things like that….

Oh we had a ball, you know. And we played out there for hours until our mother called us in. … We were busy, we were busy playing, but our play's all these natural things and then every Saturday mornings we knew the drinkers would have had a big party, we go around picking up all their bottles and go and we'll sell them. We'd get about tuppence each for these bottles you know – so we were making money for ourselves.

And then sometimes they'd drop money and then we'd pick all those up so that was all to our advantage. But that was our play.

Their adventures involved real dangers, but she remembered no accidents: "*we had a respect for danger".*

For Pam Hanna, early memories of play are within the context of her West Coast family farm where children had responsibilities, and were "*involved in everything, the everyday life and the work and yet that was also play.*"

'Early childhood education' was not an option for many participants as children. Beverley Morris acknowledged that although there were kindergartens in 1920s Wellington, *"the ordinary mother didn't think of sending their child there*". Ailsa Densem said there wasn't one within "*cooee"* of where she lived in Christchurch. But several participants had faint memories of 'early childhood' settings. On Auckland's North Shore in the 1930s, Noreen Moorhouse remembered starting 'school' at three years old: "*Half day. To ease my grandmother's burden, I suppose – my mother wasn't well".*

Alison Leonard recalled:

> *Palmerston North, private kindergarten – used to ride my three-wheeled bike to kindergarten with mother walking alongside. I remember easel painting but I don't remember there being any other activities. It was wartime.*

A child of the 1950s, Lynda Boyd remembered crying when her mother left, and the sensation of her face pressed against a teacher's smock as the teacher "*gave up"* and carried her. She can remember sand and paint; *"being able to roam"* as well as sitting still at mat time, which seemed "*quite long"*. Although a kindergarten session only lasted three hours:

> *We all had to get down to our underpants and singlets and lie on these cots, on scratchy blankets and they would make you sleep; everybody had to sleep.*

The two people with the most detailed early memories of 'early childhood education' (e.c.e.) settings were Barbara Chapman and Joan Kennett. Barbara went to Fendalton Playcentre as a schoolgirl in Christchurch because her mother was the supervisor, starting in 1944, and she remembered being

impressed with the number of books which were *"pretty scarce through the war",* as well there being a *"sandpit and climbing things"*.

Despite her parents being Presbyterian, Joan's Catholic grandmother played a major role in her upbringing and paid for Joan to attend a Mosgiel convent school, starting as a four-year-old in a Montessori classroom:

> *… the only thing I can remember was … this blue puzzle and my grandmother standing over me and each day I wasn't allowed to do another puzzle. I had to do this puzzle and it sort of put me off puzzles for years and years. But I can remember the happiness of playing there; the little dolls' dishes, I think they were. Little china tea set and I loved the equipment….*

4.1.1 Active parenting

> *"Once you've had a baby, that's it. 'Til you die, you're a mother."*
>
> Noreen Moorhouse

Through their storytelling, every participant identified as being a parent. For many, parenting came before an interest in young children; their interest in young children grew with their own offspring. It was in many ways a watershed experience; a transformative process. For some it happened quickly; Beverley found her young children "*fascinating*." But Robbie Burke described how her "*parenting switch didn't go on"* when her first child was born. It took a lot of time, and support from others to learn how to enjoy children and to feel confident as a parent.

Although qualified as a kindergarten teacher prior to marriage and children, Lynda Boyd said that it was not until she became a parent that she understood fully the role of the 'e.c.e'. teacher. Similarly Trish Gargiulo said that she understood more about herself as a kindergarten teacher after she was a *"teeny bit more mature"* than she had been when she graduated.

Several participants spoke of parents in affective terms: Geraldine McDonald said she had "*respect for children and sympathy for parents*". Noreen Moorhouse spoke of "*empathy"*. Her personal parenting story illustrates the connection between personal experience and the capacity to understand the complexity of parenting. As a young married woman, she had been told that she could not have children, and so was delighted when Kathleen, her eldest, was born. She tried to limit the size of her family using "*anything that they manufactured*", but *"it didn't make any difference".* So she had seven babies, but only five lived to adulthood:

> *Kathleen died when she was 15. She had leukaemia – a very virulent type of leukaemia; so she was actually only sick for two days. And my son was six and he was drowned on the way home from school. And I've been very grateful ever since, that I've got children left, that I had extra children, because if I'd had two, I'd have none, and that would be a very barren life. So, you learn to be grateful.*
>
> *(But)… I can well remember being so tired …and you'd be doing napkins at two o'clock in the morning, not one morning, but every morning, because there just wasn't enough time in the day to do them. You'd peg them out in the moonlight and then go back to bed, live on 3-4 hours sleep and if the baby was teething, maybe you didn't get that.*
>
> *I can empathise with mothers very easily. And I believe it's the most important job you ever do, but it's the most rewarding. But, it's very very hard work. And it's lifelong. Once you've had a baby, that's it. 'Til you die, you're a mother'. It matters not….*

That some influential women were not mothers was noted, particularly by Marie Bell. According to Marie, spending extended time with one's own children is basic to creating connections with them and creating thereby a family. So for some participants there was a sense of belonging to a perpetual community of mothers.

4.1.2 Adults in transition

"Why didn't I go to playcentre and do some of their courses?"

Pat Penrose

When asked to talk about how they as adults encountered 'e.c.e.', the participants' stories focused on themselves as young adults. For the kindergarten-trained women, their entry into the profession happened before they had children. For Mary Purdy, it was *"very much a thing we girls did in those days – twin-set and pearl brigade, we were called"*. For Trish Gargiulo, ditching her nursing training to take up kindergarten training was deeply controversial ("*my mother was terribly disappointed*"), promoted by the desire to stay in Dunedin, as well as to have regular school holidays.

For Lynda Boyd, it was a decision that she had to argue for as the then principal of teachers college had decided that Lynda, as a high achieving student, should be a secondary school teacher, not a kindergarten teacher: *"He thought I was fascinated with babies or something."*

As a young mother Pat Penrose considered kindergarten training but "*they didn't take married women"* and in addition, Pat had left school without her school certificate. Her entry into 'e.c.e.' was an unusual, starting with daily involvement at her children's kindergarten in Christchurch, but:

> *I got quite depressed and spent all my time on the kindergarten verandah. And one day the kindergarten teacher said to me: Why didn't I go to playcentre and do some of their courses?*

At playcentre, Pat was seen as capable:

> *People were saying things like 'Oh, you're good at collage' and the next thing I was running a workshop on collage. I kind of got involved like that…. And as*

I got more involved I found that I could study and I wasn't a failure – a school failure – after all.

More typical were the stories of voluntary involvement in their children's 'e.c.e.' years of volunteering led to positions of responsibility and in some cases, training that enabled a change of professional options. However, sometimes the invitation to involvement came unexpectedly. As Kahuwaero Katene's family grew up, she got interested in counseling, but was diverted from that focus when she was asked, initially by one of her adult children, to set up a kohanga reo in Hamilton.

Similarly, Ailsa Densem's transition into a major leadership role in playcentre parent education, was not sought by her. It started as an impulsive response when a previous education committee convener was diagnosed with cancer:

When I said to her 'I can't really take it on', she said 'Oh no, that's all right'. And then you see … boom! I liked her very much and out of whatever, I took it on. And so – nothing linear… Just layers, isn't it?

Anne Meade's time in an English primary school in the 1960s piqued her interest in 'e.c.e.' because of collegial engagement with teachers teaching in the institution's nursery and nursery class.

International experience also transformed Marie Bell's perspective. In the aftermath of World War II, she was the sole New Zealander accepted into a course on training teachers at the Institute of Education, University of London. Travelling with her were her mother plus her four year old son. Arriving a few months early for the course, Marie was invited by Dorothy Gardener to take a voluntary position at Chelsea Nursery. A war widow, Marie had a small stipend which allowed her to survive without income for a few months. Her young son was also welcome in the classroom. As a result Marie was able to experience personally new ideas about early years learning:

When I look back – I think it was exploitation. I worked jolly hard – I even had students – but they just thought I was the bee's knees. …

Irene Groves who ran it was doing a research on children's friendships because the sort of theory at the time was that children under five didn't make friendships – you know, they were very egotistical and didn't make friendships.

Well, of course, we found these friendships everywhere and she was studying those – actually it never got published – which is a shame. But there were other people there studying and people from round the world. It was a great place to work.

Closer to home, Beverley Morris was introduced to 'e.c.e' through her friendship with Gwen Somerset. As well as moving in similar Wellington circles during World War II, they shared an interest in Feilding; Beverley because her fiancé, Peter, was at the army camp there; Gwen because she had established a nursery play centre there for high school girls to learn about children. When Gwen offered Beverley accommodation so she could visit Peter, Gwen also took Beverley to the nursery playcentre which Beverley described as being the first place where she had seen children being "*allowed to play"*. But it wasn't until she had her own children that Beverley developed her fascination for very young children.

By the time Beverley was establishing the Newtown Playcentre in 1951:

Yes, I had already done my masters thesis and I finished that in '46 and had the child in '47 and I knew what I was doing! I was watching my children play. And I couldn't get over the fact that I thought that everything that they did was so important. People were saying 'Just burp the baby; just do things with the baby. Just put them aside and feed them….'

But I was fascinated by the little things that they were actually getting up and pretending to know; trying to put themselves to bed and things like that. And I thought there's a bit more to it than this.

While those who chose to train as kindergarten teachers looked back on their transition into e.c.e. as being a deliberate decision, for many others, their years of involvement was the result of opportunities offered by others.

4.1.3 Being different

"They didn't know what to do with me…"

Pat Hubbard

One of the unexpected research findings was that many of the participants self-identified as being different. Two participants were expelled from kindergarten as very young children. Lex Grey's story of defying authority in order to meet the 'bogey man' in the basement of the kindergarten is told elsewhere (Grey, 1993). Robbie Burke's expulsion was more traumatic for her mother than it was for her. She doesn't remember it, but it fit a pattern: "…. *I was red haired so I was expected to challenge every rule."* Her rueful comment is one of the stronger statements about a predisposition to challenge authority. Some participants positioned themselves as mistrustful of (and unintimidated by) authority figures. For example, while describing how health authorities had been misinterpreted the campaign to allow parents to stay in hospital with their sick children (the 'rooming-in campaign'), Marie Bell expressed amazement at "*how childish people in authority can be"*. Similarly, Lex Grey expressed a critical attitude to power and authority which developed during World War II when he was navigating a bomber over Germany three nights per week:

> *… knowing how possibly you could be living your last day…. It's the fellow who sat next to you at breakfast – could be having his last meal. That kind of changes your orientation. So I found a lot of strength in that experience during the war and slid away from the undue influence of the older person over the younger person. That's how it seems to me. Take away stability. And put in instability. And you change the whole nature of the person.*

Several participants proposed that early cross-cultural experiences had altered their perceptions and making them observers of what was 'normal', which is line with what Daloz, Keen, Keen and Parks (1996) found was a common characteristic of community activists.

Beverley Morris's years in Samoa as a school girl were unusual for a palagi:

> *For me it wasn't very difficult to appreciate the Polynesian cultures because I had lived in Samoa for five years as a child. To other people – it was very strange. And there were no Māori living in Newtown – none, so we had no appreciation of their culture.*

When in the 1960s, Lynda Boyd went to Sweden as an exchange high school student, she discovered 'e.c.e.' and was "*blown away by multilingual children"*, something that she had not seen in New Zealand. It was "*fascinating"*.

But cross-cultural experiences happen in this country too. For Kahuwaeru Katene, being Māori with a Māori name was an immediate and continuing project in cross-cultural encounter with Pākehā:

> *… if we didn't give them a short abbreviation of our name, they'd call me 'Kay', you know, they'd give me an English name. And I didn't want that, so … I said 'I'm Kahu, not 'Kay''. You know, I thought that was insulting. And believe or not, it is still happening, too.*

Raised by pacifist parents, Joan Kennett was encouraged to view life as sacred, which set a high standard. She was taught:

> *…that pacifists love all people and that the women are strong and stand up for what they believe in.*
>
> *My mother rarely ate meat and we were taught very strongly that you only killed to eat. So strongly that I've got a younger brother who used to dig worms up and he killed a worm in front of my father and he was made to eat it. So he was quite tough, my father (laughter).*

Marriage between Māori and Pākehā was not common in the 1940s, yet two Pākehā participants, Marie Bell and Joan Kennett, married Māori men.

Marie Bell's husband, Peter Metekingi, was killed in World War II. Joan Kennett's first husband was the well-known musician, Ruru Karataitiana, who composed the classic 'Blue Smoke' while a soldier en route to the Middle East in 1940 (Spittle, 1997). After she married to Ruru in the early 1950s, Joan adopted her first child, who had African American heritage, and she became aware first-hand of racist attitudes:

> *… I can remember on the bus in Wellington, I had this little dark baby and a woman got up and moved away from me and said I was disgusting.*

When Ruru went on tour, Joan lived on his family marae in Dannevirke, where she was deeply impressed by "*those old Māori women"* who cared for the preschool children who as *"little wee three-year-olds could go back many generations and say their whakapapa"*. They were *"wonderful noble people"*:

> *… who really cared for each other; they cared for their women. When the young woman had a baby they looked after that baby – the old people – and let the mother rest; they'd take the baby when she'd finished breast feeding it and bring it back when it needed another feed.*

Later when she moved to Ashhurst with her second husband and eight children, all of Māori descent, "*people did look at me* (laughter)… *this white woman with so many children of all different colours".*

Points of difference were sometimes more subtle. An Englishwoman with newly earned qualification in early childhood from the Erikson Institute in Chicago, Pat Hubbard arrived in Dunedin the 1960s and found:

> *They didn't know what to do with me – the establishment in Dunedin… I assumed I would work here – I was all lit up about early childhood education. But when I made contact with the kindergarten association, they didn't want*

to know about someone with an American degree. In fact if you hadn't trained in Dunedin, you had almost no chance of getting a job in Dunedin.

Another immigrant, Mary Bramwell was startled by what was encouraged at a 1960s playcentre in Pokeno:

I was working class, I took my children to playcentre dressed in their best clothes which was a white fuzzy wuzzy sweater and a white pleated skirt with white knee-length socks for Alison and the boys with their white knee-length socks and their good machine knitted jerseys and trousers to match. I was very proud of how my children looked. That day Allison found the paint. … And it got on the fuzzy wuzzy jersey. Graham found the water and Andrew found the blocks and started to build.

So, I thought my kids were pretty smart. But, I wasn't very sure about the water. I didn't think children should be playing with water and I was pretty unhappy about the paint on the white sweater for obvious reasons.

4.1.4 Summary

Offering fleeting glimpses of children's activity in New Zealand crossing four decades from the 1920s, those interviewed talked about play within social and physical contexts. Looking around neighbourhoods, families were not necessarily seen as always happy. Religious differences percolated through some participants' early memories.

Several remembered 'going' for part days to somewhere that might be now called an 'e.c.' service. They described familiar features: sand, water, paint, puzzles, books; mat time and sleep time; and the puzzling role of the 'e.c.' teachers; sometimes nurturing and empathetic, sometimes insistent.

The participants' involvement as adults in e.c. was through two main routes; through kindergarten training; and through involvement in voluntary organisations, usually playcentre but also te kohanga reo. The status of kindergarten teaching, it is suggested, was relatively low in the eyes of teacher educators. Being prepared to take a leadership role within the sector is what

binds these participants together, and it is interesting that many had memories of themselves as 'being different' as children.

Those participants who as young adults lived through World War II described how it fundamentally changed how they understood themselves and how society operates. New theoretical insights about play and human development were travelling through new international connections that were being made during the post-war years.

4.2 Play by association: Influential people, influential networks

"… if you knew one, you knew the group…"

Val Burns

'Learning through play' was a contagious idea that spread through influential social networks; first through the New Education Fellowship (NEF), later through playcentre and through teacher education. However, this section starts with another less documented national network that encouraged play: through national radio.

Between 1959 and 1964, as the presenter of radio programme called '*Kindergarten of the air'* and later *'Listen with mother'*, Mary Purdy was broadcasting to the nation's very young children and their mothers. Initially twice weekly and later every weekday morning, each episode lasted 20 minutes during which Mary attempted to cover "*the whole curriculum"* with stories, fingerplays, plus hygiene advice along with suggestions of games to play, or things they might like to do out in the garden. It was, she said, *"a very interesting way of getting play into the minds of people, but not physically being able to do it".* There were difficulties, for example, in trying to teach children how to salute. There was also advice for mothers which Mary said was difficult

without sounding "*preachy"*. There were also regular "*battles"* over the programme's content: *"They thought I was mad sometimes"*. The scripts had to be approved in advance; the *"hokey tokey"* wasn't acceptable because it was "*like a beer party"*. Language had to be kept simple; Mary was forbidden from using the word '*stethoscope'*. The word was thought to be too advanced for young children.

4.2.1 New Education Fellowship, Susan Isaacs and the psychology of play

"Listen to people, respect them – they've got something to offer. And you're not going to influence them unless you can tap into where they're at…"

Marie Bell

As young adults in pre-World War II New Zealand, Ailsa Densem and Lex Grey were directly involved with the New Education Fellowship (NEF) an influential group in which play was being theorised and codified. Ailsa's earliest encounter with a member of the NEF happened at her dining room table because a boarder, Dorothy Baster, the infant mistress at Normal School in Christchurch also broadcast on the *"school's programme":* "*She was dead keen that I be an infant teacher, you see…"*. *Dorothy was part of the highly influential group NEF members in Christchurch who at that time included* Marian Saunders (who eventually supervised Ailsa's MA in speech therapy), as well as Beatrice and C.E. Beeby who were soon in Wellington where C.E. Beeby was appointed Director General of Education in 1940, and where Beatrice Beeby was a founding member of playcentre in 1941. Ailsa recalled: *"… it was like a networking and they knew each other. And they were really good days when education was liberalising"*.

The Christchurch NEF group also included Doreen Dolton who had trained with Susan Isaacs in England. She deeply influenced Ailsa, first as a sixth former

when she had Doreen as teacher of child development. Later Ailsa followed in Doreen's footsteps through different roles in Canterbury playcentre settings, as well as at Avonside Girls High School where Ailsa succeeded Doreen as a teacher in child development. It was within this setting that Ailsa recalled regularly borrowing an academic gown on special occasions to *"try and make child development of value".*

As a result of her years observing and documenting at the experimental Malting House Nursery in the 1920s, the president of the English branch of the NEF was Susan Isaacs who in the 1930s was gaining an international reputation as an authority children and play. Lex Grey met Susan Isaacs twice. The first meeting occurred in 1937 when he was a student putting out the chairs on the stage for her Wellington speech (Grey, 1993). The then Minister of Education, Peter Fraser, was deeply impressed by Susan Isaacs and had shut the country's schools for a week so that teachers could get to the main centres to hear her (May, 1997). Lex Grey was also impressed. When he had opportunity in the midst of World War II, he met her again in England, when she was in treatment for breast cancer (Gardner, 1969). Grey saw value in her work, but also saw evidence of how those who become experts create hierarchical and intellectual distance around themselves:

> *Susan Isaacs had her own views towards understanding young children. Which meant a large amount of understandings about yourself, first of all. But Susan Isaacs – I used to see a lot in society at that time – didn't realise it but she gained a lot of persistence and strength from her children. I don't want to label Susan, so if I say she was a matriarch, I don't mean that to be a label for her. So I use the term matriarch-ish. She was the authority.*

He also saw her as fitting in with English cultural habits which positioned the inquirer as inferior:

> *She thought that I had come to learn from her. And anyone who thinks that others have anything to learn from them, hasn't got it…*

Post-World War II, just after the death of Susan Isaacs, Marie Bell arrived in London and found "*Susan's spirit certainly hung over the place".* Marie's experiences are particularly significant. Her timing in London meant she was actively participating in an optimistic community of inquiry about how young children and adults learned. According to Marie, this approach meant:

> *Listen to people, respect them – they've got something to offer. And you're not going to influence them unless you can tap into where they're at…*

Her time in London sparkled with the great names of early childhood education and the psychoanalytic schools of thought that were dominant at the time. Where this happened was at Chelsea Nursery School and then later at St Leonard's Nursery where Susan Isaacs' devotee and protégé Dorothy Gardner was researching and documenting how children learned through play. Anna Freud's influence was also strong. Marie recalled a film showing how children could learn to eat "*beautifully"* without being taught, but this quickly clashed with "*the cultural thing"*.

Anna Freud's students were also in Marie's classroom, bringing with them a focus on fantasy play using "*dressing up stuff, building stuff, you know, the raw materials"*. For Marie, these people were highly influential, but also important were those involved in the influential Tavistock Institute which applied psychoanalytic theory to practice (Marie spoke of "*our Parents Centre boys*" who worked at Tavistock prior to returning to New Zealand). These relationships helped Marie explore the psychological importance of children's play: *"I became really fascinated with that – because I could see it in myself, I could see my own play and what it meant".* At Chelsea Nursery which ran a full day programme, Marie also began to recognise roles for adults/teachers within a free play environment:

Making sure there's good equipment, keeping it sort of ready … we weren't going around saying to kids 'you've got to clean it up after yourself' (because) there'd be a big clean-up at the end, but they felt really, that if you (keep expecting children to clean up) you killed the play…

I think approving the play, protecting the play, stimulation. Didn't do much in the way of outings at Chelsea. But of course, we had wonderful books and we read books to them, we talked to them, yeah, just generally positive attitude, I'd say – we didn't teach them how to play…

Her experiences in post-war London introduced Marie to the specifics of *"play environments"* and how they were theorised. It also introduced her to one of the major points of tension within the rationale for 'free play', which was that it could run counter to home expectations.

4.2.2 Playcentre as a network for learning through play

"… playcentre values came to the fore…"

Alison Leonard

The origins of playcentre are imbedded in the NEF, with key pioneers, especially Lex Grey, Ailsa Densem, Beatrice Beeby, Doreen Dolton and Gwen Somerset involved. Playcentre picked up on Susan Isaacs ideas about learning through play and how adult education could include progressive educational techniques, such as workshops, discussion groups and observations; all innovative educational methods.

The significance of playcentre is evident in the storylines of all but three of the participants. Val Burns made the broadest statement about playcentre's significance:

Playcentre has been hugely vital to New Zealand, it really has because it developed the importance of play and learning by doing; it taught adults about play, it did adult education. And the other great thing is so many

women were put on their feet and got the confidence. It gave women a place and a role to make decisions and run an organisation.

There is major crossover between playcentre experiences and life members of TTPOOA-NZCA who participated in this study. All but one (Kahuwaero Katene) had significant episodes in playcentre. One interesting outcome of this was that establishing a career in childcare often happened in late middle age. It also meant that their practices were playcentre-based, especially in terms of supporting children's play within areas of play, but also in terms of how parents were seen. For example, according to Noreen Moorhouse, playcentre philosophy stuck with her: *"… you get better results if you get the community on side".* But she also acknowledged that *"many parents wanted teachers to take over".*

In preparation for setting up a childcare centre in the 1970s, Pat Hubbard visited other centres in Dunedin. One experience in a church-based centre stood out:

The supervisor told me – it sent chills down my spine - she said, 'Well, you won't need to expect any of this playcentre nonsense about settling children in'. And I said 'How do you mean?' And she said 'Parents are going to work, they don't have time to settle children in'. Now we had already talked about settling in with our group before we ever started, and we were quite clear that parents would want to meet the people who were going to be looking after their children. How could they not want to settle in?

But I've always remembered that – she was prepared to accept that, and I have never accepted that anywhere I have worked. People are prepared to put up with children going through the most appalling experiences and I don't think that they can or should.

I've always felt you get what you expect from parents; just like you get what you expect from children.

Playcentre ideas and practices had to be tested in new contexts. Joan Kennett considered that her approach to childcare directly reflected her playcentre

experience, but given that playcentre was sessional and therefore part day, while childcare could be 'full day', it also had to reflect the rhythms and care routines of a home. Similarly, Mary Bramwell found that full day provision required a different attitude towards accessing equipment; for example, having "*everything out"* is neither desirable nor necessary.

Alison Leonard and Pat Hubbard described working with preschool children within structured school-like settings, and then allowing more choice because the tight structure did not work. For Alison, the initial impulse for a more structured programme within a childcare care setting reflected her background as a primary school teacher:

> *I brought a lot of "Hmmm – I'm going to do a lot of preparing children for school type stuff'. It took me about a month to find out that that was stupid. (Laughter). It's really interesting process I went through at that stage… playcentre values came to the fore and those were all the things I had learned about equipment… so we set up areas of play…*

However, attitudes within playcentre management could be oppositional to other services. In the 1970s, Pat Hubbard found herself offside with her employer, the Otago Playcentre Association, when she publicly supported the formation of a new childcare centre in Dunedin:

> *I walked into the playcentre office the next morning and somebody came up to me very seriously and she said 'Pat, you know you'll have to resign'. And I said 'What do you mean?' 'Well you spoke at the meeting about childcare and you're part of a committee that is going to set up a childcare centre. You can't be involved in childcare and be the Director of Playcentre Training.' And I said 'You'll have to fire me because I'm not going to resign'. And that gave them all a nasty shock! I did resign, of course, eventually because I became the director of a childcare centre.*

She described her playcentre years as being her introduction to the politics inherent within New Zealand society; through playcentre she learned what to: "*soft pedal on and who with"*.

4.2.3 Local 'play' luminaries: Gwen Somerset, Moira Gallagher, Marie Bell, Lex Grey, and Beverley Morris

"Well, I mean, she was so alive…"

Jo Kelly on Marie Bell

In this subsection, the focus is briefly on influential people referred to by (at least three) participants as being significant. The notion of 'cross-fertilising' is strong here. These 'luminaries' took ideas about play, and its associated ideas, across contexts.

The references to **Gwen Somerset** primarily came from people with strong links to Wellington, where Gwen's presence was felt right to the end of her long life in the late 1980s. In talking about her early relationship with Gwen, Beverley Morris used the languages of allies, which also suggests there were lines of possible opposition:

> *I think she realised that I was on her side with the philosophy. I really did believe that play was children's work.*

Explaining "*the value of play"* became the perpetual playcentre project with Gwen writing extensively about it. According to Beverley, there was "*antagonism towards play"*, so *"we had to convince them that play was a good thing".*

The legacy of Gwen Somerset's writings was also referred to by several. As a lecturer, Mary Purdy used *Work and play* (Somerset, 1975) as her "*Bible"*. Jo Kelly described Gwen's writings as *"a wonderful asset and gift"* having *"very little jargon – it's real, it's down to earth, it's practical".*

In 1948 **Moira Gallagher** was appointed by the Director General of Education, C.E. Beeby as advisor to pre-schools, although according to Beverley Morris, she was really the advisor to kindergartens:

> *I think Beeby would have liked her (Moira Gallagher) to have had free play in kindergartens and of course that was all he was in charge of in those days. And he was aware that the children were being sat down in rows and being given not enough freedom to do their own thing.*

Upon her return to New Zealand, Marie Bell was briefly enticed into kindergarten teaching by Moira:

> *Well, of course, kindergarten (teacher training) was for 17 year olds who were getting the box together in those days. The programme was organised in strict period of time. You know, you had 20 minutes blocked; 20 minutes this, 20 minutes that.*
>
> *So (Moira) got me Pahiatua where the worthy citizens on the kindergarten committee had built a brand new … kindergarten. They couldn't get a 'director' as they called them in those days for love, nor money. I mean, who wanted to go Pahiatua for God's sake?*

As her training was as a primary school teacher, Marie looked to Moira for instruction and was given two A4 pages on *"what you do"*:

> *… so I did it. You have play, okay – you put everything out and you play, don't you. You visit the parents. Right, so I've a bike lent, visited parents. Parents come as helpers. 'Okay, when are you coming, Mrs Brown?' It must have astounded them, and nobody said a thing. There had been no mother help; there had been no home visiting; there was no play. Everybody got in behind.*

For Mary Purdy, Moira's thoughtful response to a "*disastrous*" kindergarten inspection led to Mary re-engaging with training. Moira enabled Mary, who was not a parent and not in playcentre, to enrol in a playcentre course led by Lex Grey: *"… that probably was my turning point with play".*

Moira's presence amongst the luminaries is interesting from several perspectives; she was the first government servant appointed to advise on

preschool matters. Her roles, as described here, seem to be have sometimes been inspection, but also networking. She facilitated boundary crossing between services. Her perspective on the value of play, however, was not unique or out of place amongst her contemporaries, according to Geraldine McDonald, ideas about Progressive Education were *"floating everywhere"*, especially in the kindergarten colleges.

Marie Bell was recognised by Wellington-based participants as being an inspirational adult educator across multiple sites. Those who had Marie as a lecturer in child development remembered undertaking the long term child studies. And according to Jo Kelly, this experience and Marie's guidance to see "*children as people"*, has remained a constant. As a result*, "I really haven't had to adjust my thinking very much about how children learn at all."*

Marie, Jo explained, was "*so alive"* with *"seeing theory in practice"* and preparing to advocate for changing teaching processes because:

> *… we had to have strong belief and commitment to it, and then it would work in practice because you get that responsiveness.*

Pam Hanna and Jo Kelly concurred that both Gwen Somerset and Marie were "*pioneers"* who pushed boundaries and who encouraged *"the next generation"* so that they did not seek to conform, and were "*not be daunted"* by resistance.

As a student in the 1960s, Val Burns found that Marie was part of a network of people that worked through a range of organisations promoting the similar philosophy of *"letting children have a say in their lives and what they did, and respecting the child".* This was happening in kindergarten and primary teacher education, in playcentre, in Parents Centre, as well as in the Association for the Study of Childhood; an "*interesting"* organisation which consisted of Wellington academics including the Somersets that "*that talked education once a month"*.

It was at Parent Centre antenatal classes that Margaret Wollerman met Marie who was running them along with Helen Brew. Such classes were controversial and Margaret had to get permission from her gynecologist to enrol. Permission was granted, along with the advice that she not get *"fanatical like Helen Brew".*

From her own account, Marie's cross-fertilising of ideas happened not only in her voluntary and her academic roles, but also as a government servant. She described when, during the Department of Education's "*glory days" in 1975*, she took a leadership role in two conventions; one for early childhood education and the other for women. Through inviting diverse preschool providers to interact at teacher refresher courses, she also established conversations across the sometimes quarrelsome services.

Although **Lex Grey** wrote several texts of children's play, those participants that talked about him remembered him as an adult educator, and leader in Māori education through his work with the Māori Education Foundation.

Noreen Moorhouse remembered the playcentre training that he led in Whangarei in the 1960s, in particular a lecture on safety and tree climbing:

> *I remember him saying, providing it is well supervised and that's the important bit – so that you haven't got children going up behind them and giving them a push or giving them a pull or doing something like that – a child will only climb as far as they feel safe, and if they've got up, they'll be able to get down and I have never found that failed.*

Studying with Lex prompted Mary Purdy to push past the familiar. She recalled that he said:

> *'Mary, if you aim for the moon and only get halfway, it's great' and I've kept that in my mind a lot and I think he's dead right. If you don't aim for the moon, you'll never get anywhere.*

According to Geraldine McDonald, Lex's ideas deeply influenced the formative years of Te Kohanga Reo as the national trust's first general manager, Iritana Tawhiwhirangi was "*a great fan of Lex"*. However his legacy appears to be a complicated one. Geraldine said:

> *We must give Lex credit for this.... He thought Māori women should go it alone and they thought so too. They objected to what they thought of as being a number of the playcentre rules and regulations.*

Her comments suggest that she viewed some aspects of his legacy less highly. According to Geraldine, Lex's influence was felt in the north half of the North Island; in the rest of the country, the influence of Gwen Somerset held firm, through force of personality and her status as a writer/teacher educator.

For Geraldine McDonald**, Beverley Morris** stood out as one of the playcentre people who could see the bigger picture beyond playcentre. Val Burns credits Beverley with first use of the term 'early childhood education'. However, when I asked her about this, Beverley was not clear that was the case. But according to Val, when in the late 1960s or early 1970s Beverley entitled a University Extension course 'early childhood education', it was a new and unfamiliar term. When Birch and Birch visited New Zealand from the US, their subsequent report frequently uses the term 'preschool' and occasionally uses the term 'early childhood education' (see for example, Birch & Birch, 1970 at pages 4 and 9). When Geraldine was writing *Māori mothers and preschool education* (McDonald, 1973), the overarching terms she used were 'preschool' and 'preschool groups', which suggests that 'early childhood education' as a term was not widely or used or accepted at that stage. However in 1980, when the State Services Commission Working Group on Early Childhood Care and Education reported, its title suggested a new overarching term, and amongst its recommendations were that various positions and committees using the term 'preschool' be replaced by new positions and committees labeled as 'early

childhood' (New Zealand State Services Commission Working Group on Early Childhood Care and Education, 1980). So the movement towards using the term 'early childhood education' had several sources of momentum.

Beverley's influence extended beyond her home in Wellington in part because of her extensive writing for both Parents Centre and for playcentre, but also because she developed playcentre courses which were picked up by others, such as Ailsa Densem in Canterbury. She also travelled. When Beverley came to Westport, Pam Hanna was there:

> *I can still remember her talking about how each child is actually constructing their own map of the world in their thinking and therefore that as adults, parents, whatever – that the most important thing we could be doing was trying to find the match with what children were thinking about at any particular time. And she drew a diagram … that really got me going…*

4.2.4 Summary

The research data provides personal details from Lex Grey and Ailsa Densem of how from the 1930s, the notion that children 'learn through play' and especially through 'free play' was travelling in influential education networks, especially the New Education Fellowship. These ideas travelled with other progressive ideas, including democratic ideals and adult education. Drawing inspiration from international developments which were starting to codify intentional spaces for children's supervised and observed play, local initiatives were endorsed by people with considerable political and academic clout.

World War II had fundamentally changed the social landscape of New Zealand. Now those who had survived its brutalities were ready for more change; building from the interpersonal and the psychological, to reconceptualise a more humane society. Education was a key.

The creation and spread of playcentres provided a relatively easy step-on point for parents to engage with ideas that were both demanding and democratic, and which gave several generations of women experience in working collaboratively, and politically, while their children played. Children's play was seen by Marie Bell as vulnerable and needing to be protected from disruptive forces, including complications that arise when "*the cultural thing"* is foregrounded.

Those who were identified as influential illustrated interpersonally what ideas like respect for others looked like in practice while emphasising that personal awareness of one's own childhood helped in relating empathetically to young children. The willingness to focus on the experience of children (and other low status people) helped hone critical thinking and supported the arguments of those willing to challenge authority. There was also a message about the power of aiming high (even 'for the moon').

4.3 'Free play' and 'areas of play'

During the decades following World War II, 'free play' came to be understood by educators and policymakers as the preferred way for children to learn within 'early childhood settings'. Moira Gallagher, with the blessings of C.E. Beeby, had taken the free play message to kindergartens; Gwen Somerset and Lex Grey were working with playcentres, but also within other teacher education settings and were also writing influential books always promoting the benefits of children's play (see section 2.1.3).

The 'e.c.' settings themselves were almost always sessional; that is, part day. Infants and children under two years were only sometimes present in playcentres; not present in kindergartens except occasionally along with mother-helpers. Childcare for very young children was not widely available.

Playcentres were run by parents (usually mothers); kindergartens were run by teachers (usually women).

During this era, playcentres and kindergartens were generally regarded as being the only acceptable 'e.c.e.' options available to parents and although neither followed any set national curriculum, yet international observers wrote that kindergarten sessions were "remarkable" in their uniformity, while playcentre supervisors "utilized principles learned while in training" supported by a "substantial body of curriculum literature" (Birch & Birch, 1970, p. 13).

Although Geraldine McDonald could see many points of resonance between the services, there were major distinctions too:

> *Free play was really a challenge to the kindergarten practice of having children sitting on the mat. There was no sitting on the mat in playcentre.*

Although Beverley Morris effectively defined 'free play' as being what happened in playcentres, the term was controversial. Ailsa Densem (Densem, 1980; Densem & Chapman, 2000) did not like the term 'free play' because: "*We were always having to justify it"*. She preferred terms like *"self-choice"* and *"self-motivated"* play.

Birch and Birch (1970) noted that many childcare services were "conducted" by personnel trained through playcentre or kindergarten programmes, and that some preschool education was happening. Children in childcare, they wrote, were children were "safe and sound", and "occupied" (p.12).

4.3.1 What is 'free play'?

"What a tricky question!"

Barbara Chapman

There was general agreement amongst the participants that 'free play' involved children having choices' amongst responsive open-ended materials and resources organised into 'areas of play'. In a free play environment, there would be the movement of children around a classroom; there would be 'flow' inside and outside; and that there would be a minimum of routines.

There was also general agreement that as well as the 'areas of play', the teacher's tools within 'free play' included interpreted observations of children at play.

Beyond these points of commonality, there were major areas of disagreement, especially in regard to the expected roles for the adult/teacher in a free play setting. Lex Grey's thinking was that free play environments were "*forced"* on children "*by people who wanted to understand themselves*". This suggests that free play environments held a key to adult self-awareness, and that children were not necessarily given choices about being in those spaces. This emphasis on adult learning is historically supported by Gwen Somerset's first nursery play centre in Feilding which was understood as adult education; adults learned about children by watching them play, and then discussing what they had seen (Somerset, 1972).

However, for Trish Gargiulo and Anne Meade, the teacher's role within 'free play' was largely restricted to the appropriate set up of the equipment. Once that was completed, the teacher was to "*stand back"* from children's play except, as Anne said, to *"manage child behaviour".* As a result, conversation was lacking between adults and children.

Trish visualised a free play classroom as *"a supermarket"* within which children would find what they needed. Trish interpreted this approach as reflecting "*Susan Isaacs' influence"*, which she saw as requiring limited social interaction

between adults and children so as children could *"define their own pathways of learning".*

As a young kindergarten teacher, Trish remembered:

> *Standing and looking … lots of stories and things like that. But I don't think understanding at all on an individual basis where (the children) came from or where they were going.*

Similarly, for Wendy Logan as a kindergarten parent in the 1980s, 'free play' was remembered as happening within self-choice environments. The tables might be bare, but the resources were accessible for children to use. The effect on her son and other boys, she recalled, was to develop gross motor skills, but missing out on the finer motor activities. *"They didn't do writing"*, she recalled, "*they didn't have those skills. That's what I saw anyway".*

Marie Bell saw 'free play' as involving both adults and children:

> *I came to believe and I still do, that it's basic mental health – play – good play will help people to have good mental health…. We learn to be adults through playing. We have the models and I think that's the main stimulus, the models of the adults and the children play it out – and if they're allowed to play freely, you will see that happening.*

But she suggested that the value of play had been recognised as a resource to be exploited. As a result:

> *… there's too many people now, itching to get to fingers on the kids' play and direct it and direct it towards language and reading and you name it.*

As a young mother, Barbara Chapman's playcentre career began in Tokoroa Playcentre in the late 1970s, and then carried on at Fendalton Playcentre, Christchurch. There were marked differences in terms of what adults were encouraged to do, yet both were free play environments. At Tokoroa

Playcentre, Barbara remembered a somewhat laissez-faire approach in which adults were more responsive than proactive:

> *You could never suggest to a child that they do something, even if it appeared it was something that they might have been avoiding but which might have been very good for them to try…*

In contrast, at Fendalton Playcentre, Barbara found *"supervisor-encouraged play"* rather than *"supervisor-permitted"*. Yet there were strong similarities. In both 'free play' environments, there were:

> *… no requirement that children did particular things at any time…. They were both focused on the idea that children should be able to choose what they wanted to do and do it as long as they wanted.*

In addition, Barbara observed that at both playcentres, children were not allowed *"to damage each other",* so their freedom was framed within *"safety and other considerations".*

Ideas about 'free play' were tested and evolved. Pat Penrose remembered that when, inspired by 'free play', she enthusiastically provided her children with a sandpit at home, she discovered that the sand was itself not sufficient:

> *…children won't actually play in the sandpit if it's down the end of the yard and you're not around. So there was more to it then I first understood.*

As a young kindergarten-trained teacher newly employed in a highly structured childcare environment ("*it was horrible, and disempowering"*), Trish Gargiulo went against the wishes of the centre owner and introduced *"self-choice sessions"* into the afternoon sessions. The result was "*absolutely chaotic", leading Trish to see that knowing how to play in a 'free play' environment had to be learnt.*

Having re-considered and re-written her ideas on the topic of how children learn and develop (Morris, 1994), Beverley Morris can still see the threads of continuity and change in how play was understood. In the 1950s:

> *The ideas were that play was dependent on equipment. And then it was dependent on what adults do with the children and the equipment. Then in my (third edition of 'Understanding children'), I'm talking more and more about how important the brain is, because this was all the new stuff about the brain when I starting in 1992 about the revision. And what the intellectual content was of play.*

So the rationale and practices of 'free play' were not fixed. There was a difference in how 'free play' was described, for example, in textbooks, and what was experienced personally as 'free play'. Jo Kelly spoke most firmly about this:

> *I've had discussions with people that tell me that in the old days in early childhood the adults didn't really have a part…. They simply set up the environment and the children just played. And I say 'Well, were you there?' Because that was not my experience of working in a centre in the days that are being referred to.*
>
> *You know, I quite actively resent being told that when I was in early childhood with my children that we didn't understand and we didn't get engaged – because that was a load of rubbish.*

Even during this era when 'free play' was understood to be the best way for children to learn, there were major problems raised, especially about the perceived lack of discipline; that children were reputed to 'run wild' within a free play environment. According to Beverley Morris, beyond the boundaries of playcentre, the term 'free play' tended to be seen as "*pejorative"*. She recalled a derogatory story circulating during the 1960s about a child, a teacher and a worm within a free play environment. If the child expressed interest in eating the worm, the story went, the teacher would have to say *"go ahead"*: *"The teachers themselves were very edgy about it. They couldn't understand what free play was about*". Furthermore, Beverley recalled that 'free play':

> *… really gave people pictures of 'messy' and 'chaotic' play. Whereas we saw it as a proper understanding of what children were wanting and needing in their education. Kindergartens were at that stage grouping children very thoroughly and sending them inside for an hour and outside for an hour and so on. We thought children were supposed to flow in and out as they wished, and do their own play.*

The movement of children within a free play setting could itself indicate a lack of discipline. The expected cues of teacher control may not have been evident to outsiders. According to Pat Penrose, she rarely heard a child in a free play environment being told *"No, you can't do that".*

However, even within playcentre, which, as Beverley indicated, was committed to 'free play', there was not a consensus that it was the best term to describe what was happening in playcentre sessions. Barbara Chapman recalled debates in playcentre during the 1980s trying to shed the negative connotations.

However despite her dislike of the term 'free play', Ailsa Densem was clear that its opposite (namely trying excessively to control children) does not work either:

> *Only a fool forces them to do something that they haven't got the ability or the enjoyment to do… (Children) are self-motivated if they're happy with themselves and the situation they're in. They'll just do it. You don't have to put your thumb on them.*

Similarly, Barbara Chapman could see more value in "*that old form of free play"* in which the adult is *"there if needed",* than in "*telling children what to do all the time"*.

From several other participants came this notion that 'free play' stood in contrast to, or in opposition to, another way of interacting with young children. Several referred to 'free play' as being children learning life skills. As Noreen Moorhouse said:

My philosophy definitely is you're not teaching children the 3 Rs – you're teaching them for life … . Because all they get is 'Get outside! Don't go there! Get out of it!'. You know – and it isn't much to equip you for life…

For Marie Bell, Susan Isaacs' sensitive approach remained the standard to aspire to:

You've got to be so sensitive or they'll just go and do it somewhere where you're not around. That's where I think it's such a skill ….

We've got the three years of (teacher) training for God's sake… but are we making people more sensitive to children? …. I mean Vygotsky's all very well but not a patch on Susan Isaacs and you know they're not reading those books anymore. They're just goldmines.…

Drawing on 'activity theory', Geraldine McDonald suggested that free play environments are reliant on the designer of the environments: *"The teacher in free play is the person who designs the equipment"*. Because "*the teaching gets transferred to the tools",* the use of tools and artifacts (the equipment within the free play environment) represented the learning that was possible:

If you have free play then you've got to have tools. If you don't have free play, you have to have direction - you've got to have people.

Although the notion that the teacher is in the tools (that is, the equipment) was not discussed by other participants, the regime of codifying equipment into a prescribed list was discussed (at length in some cases), and can be seen as providing a professional environment in which non-professional adults could discover their appropriate role alongside the freely playing child.

I encouraged several participants to consider whether 'free play' was an aspirational goal, something so counterintuitive to adults that standing back and watching a child was largely impossible (especially if the child was slow or struggling). However a free play philosophy might encourage the adults to wait and watch, for at least a few moments. Geraldine McDonald's response was

that in the 1950s when she attended playcentre, supervisors ran the playcentre session with parents in support roles, so 'free play' was interpreted as letting children play. The confidence that free play was the right thing for children to be doing enabled playcentre mothers to get busy running playcentres. Asked what children were doing while mothers were talking and organising, Geraldine laughed: *"They were playing!".*

Another suggestion from me was that 'free play' was a more robust programme for a centre which offered only part time enrolments; in other words, that three half days at playcentre or five mornings at kindergarten was not the sum total of that child's daylight activity. 'Free play' could complement and counterbalance what was happening in the rest of a child's life. Geraldine McDonald thought there was merit in the last point I made; and several participants commented that 'free play' and 'long day' provision was a recipe for neglect if 'free play' was interpreted as an emotionally distant adult with limited social engagement with the child.

4.3.2 'Areas of play' and 'Observation': the tools of 'free play'

"I always came from the point of view of trying to draw attention to more than just the fact that a youngster was playing with blocks."

Lex Grey

Even while 'free play' was disputed and debated, conversations continued across the 'e.c.' sector. Equipment, the artifacts of free play philosophy, was a point of commonality between services. Beverley Morris remembered being on a national committee in the 1970s:

> *Playcentre was always trying to make it less formal an education – people felt it was easier to set children down in groups and so on. And our method was free play at that time. That was our message. …In common I think we*

had things like helping each other with equipment, so we had same kinds of equipment and making the programme for play.

Organisationally, the areas of play were important as they were becoming a tangible way to demarcate a quality centre from an inadequate one; to determine which ones should open and which ones should not.

Observation was a key part of training. Marie Bell's 'child studies' (which several participants remembered as lasting two years) are an example of an assessed observation within teacher education. At playcentres, formal observations were usually linked to episodes of training or times of crisis. Several playcentre participants talked about how things improved in their playcentres when someone was in training because of what became evident through their observations.

Regular observation of children for assessment purposes was a thing of the future. Participants referred to less formal processes of observation, and more to curiousity about how children think, their families, their ideas, their language. A number of participants talked about this; that freely chosen play provided a peephole to what is happening for children. The rationale was rarely linked to theory. The 'value' of play was often referred to, and it was self-evident in the child's processing of experience, and would be evident in sustained interest. For example, by watching children's play, especially in the family corner, Joan Kennett learned what the child was experiencing at home:

I used to always know what was happening in homes from (their) 'telephone conversations' (laughter). You learn a little bit now, but not so much. But that's the way the children show what's happen in their lives; they play it.

Similarly, when asked to describe the 'e.c.' environments that existed for children, many participants quickly contrasted eras within reflections about continuity and change. Drawing on her cross-generational memories of

Fendalton Playcentre in the 1980s which she attended as an adult along with her daughter, and in the 21st century when her grandchildren attended, Barbara Chapman saw that children enjoyed many of the same activities. What the adults were doing was the greatest change was what the adults were doing, including more emphasis on documentation.

Whether describing kindergartens, or playcentres or childcare centres, the participants remembered the 'areas of play' as defining how the physical spaces were organised. The participants remembered 18 (sometimes overlapping) areas. These are listed Table 4.1. The first seven play areas were the ones most frequently remembered when participants recalled their adult experiences in 'e.c.' centres:

Table 4.1 Play areas remembered (from adult experiences)

- Blocks
- Playdough
- Painting
- Books
- Water
- Sand
- Fantasy/dress ups
- Fingerpaint
- Puzzles / Manipulative
- Outdoors
- Climbing
- Clay
- Science
- Infant/heuristic play
- Music
- Carpentry
- Dolls / family corner
- Junk

That there should be a set number of areas of play was part of the codifying that was happening towards the end of this era. Robbie Burke remembered 16 required areas in playcentre in the 1980s. When Mary Bramwell was running the training provider Chrysalis in the 1990s, her students studied 22 areas of play.

Some more historic descriptions stand out because they indicate that significant shifts have occurred. What Marie Bell found in England in the late 1940s were well-equipped (and fenced) environments, especially within progressive schools and preschools:

> *Lots of stuff for building, you know, blocks and accessories for that and tons of paper and paint and raw materials like that. And outside, huge things they could climb on and nets ….*

Fences to hold in children had started appearing in Lex's boyhood; he thought in the 1920s or 1930. When Ailsa Densem started supervising at Risingholme Playcentre in the 1950s, there were no fences despite its position near a creek. The playcentre was in a community facility and other occupiers objected to having a fence, and besides, *"… we didn't have these rigid standards that sometimes we've got to have now".*

When describing a childcare centre which she helped open during the 1970s in response to the large number of families who came to Whangarei to work on the new oil refinery at Marsden Point, Noreen said that the centre was too small and the roll too large to create "*corners"* (that is, the areas of play). Several times she described that centre as being "*chaotic"*, suggesting that areas of play helped create order.

Underlying each area of play was a rationale. For example, as a young kindergarten teacher, Trish Gargiulo remembered that manipulative equipment

encouraged fine motor skills and counting; playdough was *"…about emotions and getting rid of emotions…"*

The matrix of 'equipment' (a carefully chosen word; these are not 'toys') has stayed remarkably stable across the decades (May, 2001). But the equipment was remembered within a dynamic social context in which equipment represents both possibilities and requirements; the pleasure of sustained play and the weariness of sustained clean up afterwards. 'Mess' was seen as a necessary feature of creative activity (for adults or children) by some participants.

To illustrate these themes, I am privileging Beverley Morris's memories of establishing Newtown Playcentre in 1951, who recalled:

> *I had to push my three children up through the shopping centre every Wednesday and Friday afternoon at 1 pm to set it up and be the supervisor. You know it was very early days in the playcentre movement.*
>
> *It wasn't really good. It was mentally tiring because it was hard to persuade parents that they were capable; that women were capable of running and administering and thinking about what the children were doing at the same time.*

Equipment was stored under the stage of the local church hall and personal effort was needed as "*we were striving to get the minimum equipment"*. She brought in a water bath, and Beverley's husband, Peter, built the sandpit. The "*scruffy"* books were "*mostly mine – Ping*!", she recalled. The areas of play were becoming evident:

> *We had various corners of play. We certainly had a sandpit, and… we had boxes that kids could climb on – crates. Water play.*
>
> *We were very keen on dress ups. I was interested to see that they had to bring the dress ups outside as well as inside. Peoples' clothes – we usually asked for dresses that a ten year old could wear – no more than a ten-year-old - because the gowns would go down to the floor and they would trip over*

> *them. I sometimes forbad high heels because they would trip on the steps going down outside. (Also) fireman's helmets and policeman's helmets and there might be a fairy dress and gloves and hats and shoes – to be mother and father. ….*
>
> *We had a very nice smoothed plank which they could put down over the crates. …Puppets perhaps…*

A unit block set had been donated by Gwen Somerset: "*very useful – really wonderful"*. But "*puzzles and counting things*", she felt less enthusiasm for: "*I always thought that manipulative materials were a bit limited".*

Carpentry was available right from the start, *and "some of my husband's best hammers disappeared"*, she recalled. But there was always resistance to carpentry from parents. Later on when Beverley worked across playcentres around the Hutt Valley, she remembered cajoling parents to give it a go because "*The kids really loved it when they did*." Using carpentry equipment meant that children "*could be like dad".*

The rationale for the equipment was articulated by the international text *Understanding children's play* (Hartley, et al., 1952) which Beverley described as her "*bible"*. It itemised and theorised the desirable areas of play: dramatic play, blocks, water play, clay, graphic materials, fingerpaint and music/movement.

In addition, Beverley's understanding of children's play drew on her prior academic studies, her years as a primary school teacher and but also on her observations of her own and others' children. This pragmatic testing of equipment is suggested by her use of the word "*worked"* as an indicator that a piece of equipment was suitable:

> *I knew that dress-ups worked with my children and they worked with the children I taught in standard 1 and standard 2. It would expand their horizons in every play so that they became somebody else, and they talk about other things.*

Beverley was also finding that her experiences were challenging existing theory:

> *At that time we thought the equipment was very important because that is what the children learned from. But it didn't take long before we realised that there was a social element – children were learning from each other. There was just the beginnings of an intellectual understanding that every kind of play also had a thinking content ….*

Seeing each area of play as discrete and important for every child's development shaped many teacher's attitudes and pedagogies. As the mother of a kindergarten child in the 1980s, Lynda Boyd described how her daughter caused concern amongst the kindergarten teachers for not spending enough time inside, based on the assumption that *"every child should do a painting…"*.

Although Beverley Morris remembered encouraging flexibility so that equipment could move between "*areas*", such movement was often discouraged, sometimes for pragmatic reasons, such as "*mess"*. Mary Bramwell remembered one day her young daughter Heather took some collage material to the water trough, which prompted another playcentre mother to intervene because the child was mixing up the areas of play. However Heather persisted:

> *… and I said 'well, just wait and see what she's doing' because I was interested… and she went and got a spoon and went to feed the mushy collage to the babies in the family corner, you know.*

Lynda Boyd spoke quite critically about how observations can be used to generate too strong a correlation with *"children's interests"* and subsequent teacher planning. Encouraging children to only follow their known interests can limit the child to the familiar. Picking up and enforcing yesterday's interest can be coercive and insensitive to the child's today thinking:

> *…I heard this teacher say to this child 'Come on, come on, we need to go on, we need to do some more things about worms today' and the child said 'I don't want to'. And the teacher said 'Well, yes, we have to do this thing*

about worms today, we started it yesterday and now we have…' You know - and dragged this child away and afterwards I said to her 'what was it about?'

She said 'Oh, I'm doing a thing about building on children's interests and yesterday, he found a worm and he was really interested in it'. And I said, 'well, he's not today is he?' And she said 'Oh, it's my job to keep him interested' and I said 'But why?' like yesterday he found a worm, he had a discussion about a worm, today he saw a rainbow, you know, why would you keep hammering on about worms?

While observations are a basic part of the role of the adult/teacher in a free play environment, only a few people spoke about them in any depth. Lex Grey suggested that observation was primarily a tool for allowing parents to glimpse "*all that fascinates"* the child:

I always came from the point of view of trying to draw attention to more than just the fact that a youngster was playing with blocks. At the same time, they were piecing together their own fragmented thinking about who they are and all of a sudden, they'd change - which was the nature of young people…

Emphasising the commonalities between parents and children, each entwined with the other, Lex said:

So I see a constant crisscrossing … I see parenting in the very young – and I see the very young in the parenting process. … And if you want to really get to grips with the processes, the most effective way still I'm sure is to roll your trousers up above the knee, get into the sandpit, bring a bucket of water. And go to town. (laughter)

It's called play. And as long as you don't stretch the definitions too tightly and falsify them, all that fascinates - gives one fascination - runs through that play. So to me it's simple. Understanding young people means enjoying them…

Captured in this clear statement is Lex Grey's strong critical voice, setting a high standard for adults to create empathetic relationships with children, built through sharing activity in the child's preferred space of engagement. His description of the opting into play, trousers rolled above the knee, bringing a

bucket of water, is a visual description of how play is not limited to the child. In promoting 'free play', he was also promoting a role for the adult which is more than setting up the environment, and then standing back.

But he also was highlighting the conundrum of setting systems in place for children across multiple settings. What he described is what parents might experience in a playcentre (or elsewhere); whether a professional e.c. teacher could regularly follow his advice to "*roll up"* their trousers and *"go to town"* in the sandpit, is debatable.

4.3.3 Adults in 'free play' spaces: Pragmatics and principles

"But the problem was not so much the free play; that was not such an issue.
It was water play (laughter)"

Geraldine McDonald

I asked participants about problematic areas of play. This raised a rich variety of responses illustrating how pragmatic realities clashed with theory; and how parental preferences and centre requirements can come to a head over 'simple' issues like laundry.

According to several participants, playcentre philosophy and practices were meant to influence parenting and home activities. As Geraldine McDonald, said:

> *Playcentre is professionalised mothering, as well. Because it wasn't just about what happened in the centre – it was what you do with your child.*

There were also some overarching areas of contention with parents; particularly the challenges of mess/cleanliness and risk/safety. For Kahuwaero Katene working within the setting of te kohanga reo, children's play was valued, although the mess created was not:

I remember some parents coming in the middle of the day and finding clothes all over the place, … and I thought 'What a mess'. I said that to myself and a mother said 'What a mess, Kui Kahu' and these two little ones say, 'Not a mess, that's our play!' (laughter). And I thought 'Good for you, mokopuna, good for you!' And the mother said 'Kui Kahu, it's a mess.' And I said 'If our mokopuna says it's play, leave it to them; just leave it to them, you're not going to be cleaning it up, are you?' 'Oh no, no, they can do it'. I said 'Then leave it to them, let them do it'. They enjoyed it.

And that's how it was, when the parents came and they didn't like it, I said 'Look,… if it was unhealthy, if it was bad for them, you could complain, but if it's good clean healthy play, leave it to the children. What you see as untidy, is quite normal to children, you know, so don't confer your thinking on to them, because they don't see it that way'.

So they learnt, they taught me a lot of things, those children …

Some messy areas, such as clay, were problematic because the adults were unconfident and, according to Margaret Wollerman, they *"didn't like the feel"*.

But there were also problems with "*fiddly"* areas that had small wandering pieces, such as the puzzles and peg boards, which as Beverley Morris said "*easily got spread"*. Scanning at the end of session for puzzle pieces and pegs was, for Joan Kennett, a basic requirement as a supervisor. However, Joan's observations have led her to a working theory that frames 'mess' as a learning process for very young children, especially toddlers:

I learnt that there were certain stages in their lives from experience where children can be taught to be tidy and if you don't catch that time … even here, it's the little ones I think who want to put things away and the little ones that aren't much older than two. The bigger ones, if they come into the centre and they haven't learned things before they're four, it's very hard to teach them.

A recurring theme was that the child was directly affected by the subject knowledge of the adults noticing the interests of the children. Some adults brought prior life experience which eased them into some areas of play; Jo Kelly's father was a builder and she didn't realise, until she ran a carpentry

workshop for playcentre parents, that not everyone knew how to use a hammer and saw.

According to Jo, areas of play became problematic not because there was anything fundamentally dangerous or messy about them but because uninformed adults would avoid putting out areas like water or carpentry. Whenever those areas were put out, she said, the children's responses were so excessive that it further reinforced the reasons for not putting out that resource.

From several participants came the importance of children accessing 'raw' and 'natural' materials. When asked to define *"a raw material"*, Pat Hubbard listed them as: *"Water, sand, playdough"*, and explained that they:

> *… don't intrinsically have any structure so you can't be right or wrong with them. You can learn about the nature of the way materials behave.*

Encountering raw materials, she said, enables children "to understand how the world works and what things are made of".

Some participants pointed to how some areas of play are relatively static and predictable (e.g. puzzles and books). Others have variable resources day-to-day (such as at the carpentry trolley or the collage table); some change with the weather (such as a sand pit, or outdoor climbing equipment).

Learning about the qualities of a material like wood or clay requires the child to understand the nature of that particular material in order to manipulate it effectively. In other words, the child's drive to create is channeled through the materials' properties. This often requires support from a more competent person, whether child or adult, to support the child and to show what is possible with persistence.

Illustrating how open-ended resources, especially carpentry, painting and clay, can extend the capabilities for adults, as well, as children, Jo Kelly recalled a four year old girl who, over her last six months at playcentre, constructed an elaborate doll's house complete with opening and shutting doors:

> *But the thing that challenged us most was the day she wanted to make a bed for her doll. And the bed had to have an absolutely flat base with no strips across or bumps because beds weren't like that. And we didn't have a piece of wood wide enough.*
>
> *So she worked for ages trying to join (wood) together … until one of the parents finally said 'I know, but you have to wait while I go home – I know how we can do it'. And she came back with some wiggly wire staples and they hammered in, and it was flat and smooth and it was perfect. Problem solved.*
>
> *But, you know, it extended the thinking of all the adults in the centre as well as the children and I guess that for me is what, hopefully, should be happening in early childhood centres.*

Encouraging children to experience the world (especially the 'real' world, and the 'natural' world) was a recurring theme. Anne Meade saw connections between the materials available to young children and national identity:

> *That's quite important for our centres to have lots of free form materials – natural materials. It is important for the social learning too. What we value as New Zealanders – the whole beach phenomenon and the great big sandpits and so on – is about the social stuff as well as the infinite possibilities for exploring the physical properties of those materials. I think that it's quite important for us in New Zealand – the beach culture and bush.*

Using natural resources was encouraged by her NZCA training, but Kahuwaero Katene was already familiar with them. Within the context of te kohanga reo where she taught, focusing on natural resources meant exploring the local area:

> *We very seldom bought things…. The parents started off saying 'We must get them some blocks, and we must get some trays for water play' and things like that, and we had a few of that. But mostly it was nature, it was natural, you know, we'd go for walks. We'd go for walks and look, we can be away for*

a hour, because they stop, they look under the rocks, they kick the stones, they look at the stones, they look at the different colours, then they'll see a snail or a worm, you know.

A particularly contentious area was water play. It was described by several participants as 'a perennial'; meaning: a predictable challenge to justify to parents (and sometimes colleagues) in terms of mess, wet clothes and laundry. As a basic area of play, water was expected to be available to children for every playcentre session but Margaret Wollerman remembered that was often not put out *"in the early days"*. Later, when there was a higher level of training amongst the parents it was more evident, but perhaps just as importantly, when automatic washing machines simplified domestic washday requirements.

Similarly Beverley Morris can remember making a movie about the value of water play, but even after it was widely circulated amongst parents, she found when visiting playcentres as a liaison officer, the water play often was set up after she arrived. The playcentre parents would say: "*We're just getting it out!"*, suggesting that without Beverley's presence on session, the value of water play was not sufficiently self-evident for parents to regularly set it up.

So what is the 'value of water play'? That it was soothing for children, especially younger children, was mentioned several times. Geraldine McDonald laughingly remembered that in the 1950s its attraction for young children was theorised as being evidence of the children's desire to play with their own urine.

The importance of children experiencing messy areas of play, including water, sometimes meant less than full honesty with parents. Several participants described washing a child's clothes rather than upset the parents with dirty laundry, or perhaps by the knowledge that the child had played in unapproved ways. The decision to encourage the child to play in ways that did not suit the parents reflected assumptions about what children should be doing.

Robbie Burke's story illustrated these themes. She recalled how a young girl was brought to playcentre while her mother, who was a widow, went to work. Looking "*beautiful"* in the library corner, the little girl was instructed to "*stay clean"* which Robbie and other playcentre parents felt *"wasn't natural"*. So once the mother left, the child was encouraged to change into *"playcentre clothes"* and be more active; and more messy. When her mother returned, the child had changed back into her clean clothes, and was back sitting in the library. Eventually the mother was informed: "*we were thinking 'Aw - she's going to try and take the child away" but no, she didn't …'.*

This raises the deeper issue of how parental preferences are understood. Those participants that offered opinions were more inclined to prioritise what they understood to be the child's needs, above the expectations, or demands of parents. For example, when she ran a childcare centre, Noreen Moorhouse made sure children had water play every day, regardless of what parents wanted:

> *We got a lot of complaints from mothers about the water play area. …They didn't want them playing in water because they'd get colds. I said colds are (caused by) germs, water doesn't make them. So, we just had that policy and …. that's what the children did in my centre.*

Alison Leonard described a range of ways in which children could engage with messy resources, including aprons for messy play and spare clothing, as well as using warm water inside when it was cold. She tried, she said, not to run "*roughshod"* over parents' preferences.

The differing expectations of parents is a problematic area, but Pat Hubbard was clear, that when parents are seen as clients purchasing a service, it can disadvantage children's experiences. She saw this happening particularly in private commercial centres.

Assessing whether or not an activity is dangerous was also vexed, and proved to be a major point of reflection amongst the participants. This is discussed more fully in Section 6.3. However, it is part of what was (and remains) challenging about working with children, especially other people's children, so the discussion about safety and risk begins here with a question to participants about tree climbing, which was met with a chorus of regret and anger. Many had seen tree climbing become less available to children, yet had not seen evidence that tree climbing was inherently dangerous, despite years of supervising children in trees. Joan Kennett's reflections were typical:

> *I love children climbing trees – that's a bone of contention. I've got lovely trees out there, and until 10 years ago the Ministry (of Education) allowed them to climb the trees, now they're not allowed to and to me that's sad…*

Pat Hubbard reflected:

> *We have been infected by the American obsession about safety and risk. The world is beginning to be seen as a totally dangerous place where awful things happen to people all the time.*
>
> *And my understanding of little children, is if you don't lift them into high places, you only let them go where they can climb, as long as you're watchful and attentive, they protect themselves. They are quite good at it. So I think we can probably let them do far more than a lot people think is safe.*

Beverley Morris suggested that fear of risk taking may reflect parents' own childhood experiences: "*Nowadays there would be a generation that never did climb trees"* which suggests that early experiences could impact a generation later on what is seen as appropriate for children.

4.3.4 Adults in 'free play' spaces: Training and understanding

> *"I always thought in terms of areas of play and I did when I tutored too, because I think if there aren't areas of play, then you get bored, discontented children".*

Adults are part of any early childhood community. They are parents and caregivers, teachers, administrators, cooks and gardeners. For adults and children alike, coming into any new community requires personal shifts in order to accommodate activity, nuance and shared culture.

It was the value of experiential education which Marie Bell brought back to New Zealand from her training in teacher education in post-war London. Methods such as discussion groups, role-playing and workshops were all examples of how adults could learn through their own responses to group experiences. Marie took these methods into her classroom for kindergarten teacher trainees where she said, she was "*given carte blanche"*, reflecting, she thought, the prestige inherent in her London training, and the residual respect held for Susan Isaacs. Even in the 1970s, Marie was using experiential classroom techniques with student teachers at kindergarten college:

> *I just remember it with such joy – we had a whole week where we ran a kindergarten and the students took turns being the supervisors and the students. And we had all the activities completely free play.*

The rationale for this extended roleplay reflected how Marie saw kindergarten student teachers:

> *They've just left secondary (school) which is extremely structured, and we want them to go back to being little children, and somehow open that inside themselves. And it was amazing how it did – and it was blocks and the fingerpainting basically.*
>
> *And you had a whole room absolutely cleared – they had lino on the floor – and the fingerpaint, well they ended up taking off their shoes, doing it with their feet and hilarious! Really, it was just revealing.*

Talking afterwards was an essential part of the learning experience: *"… sharing what it felt like and how it would be to be a kid and what they got out of it."*

Such discussion groups were a valued part of adult education, and according to Marie, provided opportunity for argument, and for experience to be "*digested"*.

Roleplaying was also happening amongst adult education circles in the 1970s, and even in the 1990s, Val Burns recalled organising a workshop which *"they're still talking about!"* in which ERO reviewers were encouraged to empathise with very small children in e.c. centres by lying on the floor, looking at the ceiling and crawling around, as well as doing the "*mother-attachment thing".*

The three kindergarten-trained participants had quite different experiences as students. As a kindergarten student teacher in 1950s Wellington, Mary Purdy described herself as *"… absolutely blown away by the way (Marie Bell) convinced us all, how important play was".*

Trish Gargiulo trained in Dunedin the early 1970s and her student memories were mostly of student pranks. In the mid 1970s when Lynda Boyd was a student teacher in Christchurch, she found the two year course repetitive and "*quite boring actually"*. Doing the kindergarten curriculum, she recalled, involved using *"playcentre books"*, being assessed for her ability to make playdough, knowing the *"importance of paint"* and how as a kindergarten teacher, *"you wrote the name in the right corner of the page (laughter)".* Kindergarten student teachers also had resources ready to take into the kindergarten classroom: including home-made puzzles and flannelgraphs about *"The very hungry caterpillar"*, and recipes for scones.

Within playcentre, there was an instructive orientation process which introduced new members to 'free play'. Margaret Wollerman remembered that three introductory talks were required in Wellington in the 1960s. Thus belonging to the playcentre was conditional on accepting the free play philosophy and practices.

Standing behind these requirements were the various playcentre books which itemised the 'value' of each of the areas of play and a child's probable progressions through them; from simple to very complex engagement. In the 1950s, the author of several of those books, Gwen Somerset, was actively visiting Wellington playcentres, such as Kelburn Playcentre where Geraldine McDonald attended:

> *We'd get word that Mrs Somerset was coming – that was enough (laughter) to make sure that every required bit of equipment had to be out. … Sandpit had to be open, uncovered. I mean, if it was raining of course, they'd come inside, but, short of that, the kids were out there… She wasn't really an ogre, but I just think that people were so used to school inspectors that they tended to interpret it that way, that's all.*

Led by advisors, parents met in discussion groups about how to best implement the guidelines in the booklets written by Gwen Somerset. But in urban areas like Wellington where there were options; those that didn't want to be part of the playcentre could leave. According to Geraldine, *"It wasn't a big issue really. If they didn't like the regime, they could go to kindergarten".*

Workshops were synonymous with playcentre training. Their value was clear to Val Burns who found that parents could be "*turned around"* by hands-on play workshops:

> *All parents need is simple explanations, not being talked down to. They need to experience playing with dough in their hands.*

In Jo Kelly's playcentre experience, the flow of ideas and underpinning theory and assumptions helped to shift parents' thinking:

> *… we were lucky enough to have a lot of people always in training – always learning. So that there were always people meeting and having workshops about the value of play and … so that even if I didn't particularly like my child getting wet – lots of people have told me about all the good things that are happening when my children play with water. … .*

What Robbie Burke described as playcentre training in the late 1970s indicated that while there were prescribed standards to be met, there was also scope for local interpretation. At Landsdowne Terrace a (then) new playcentre in Christchurch, she and the other parents were already well-educated. Many had teacher training already, so there was little interest in doing child development again. But under pressure from the playcentre association to get parent education going, the parents decided to organise what turned out to be a "*boring"* workshop on macramé. Although the association "*nearly went septic over the whole thing because (macramé) was not what they had in mind as parent education"*, the parents found common interests in topics like sibling rivalry and transitions to school. From this initial unorthodox parent workshop, playcentre training took off following a path which was both supported by parents and acceptable to the association.

Areas of play were often the basis for workshops. These included some hands-on engagement with the materials of that particular area of play, in order to understand both the properties of the resource, plus how a child might encounter it and learn through it. There was also discussion about what the child might be learning and how the adult could encourage first a child's involvement and then "*extension"* within that area of play. Using the right language, for example mathematical language when talking about blocks, was important, according to Robbie.

For Mary Bramwell, playcentre workshops were the manageable first step for her as a busy mother in the 1970s. But encountering a playcentre perspective on behaviour management was a challenge:

> *Where I come from we didn't talk nicely to children… and I was very sceptical of doing any other than what I'd done with my children, which was shout, scream, wave the wooden spoon around, slap it on their bum a couple of*

times. I had four little ones, had no family support, had post natal depression, you know; we survived basically.

And the children don't remember the wooden spoon, I mean I learnt not to use it through being in playcentre and they don't remember it. As adults they've got no memory of that. But my eldest certainly caught it a few times; he was quite a character.

For those participants involved in training within TTPOOA-NZCA in the 1970s, workshops were a feature, which perhaps reflected that many of the facilitators had started their experiences of adult education within playcentre. With their emphasis on practical aspects of setting up spaces for children to play, but also on exploring the adult's own experience and responses to immersion in an area of play, workshops provided experiential, rather than academic, insight. This enabled second (or third) chance adult learners whose motivation, according to Noreen Moorhouse, was their interest in children. In her early days as a TTPOOA-NZCA tutor, Noreen remembered having to work hard to bridge the gap between the students' prior experiences, and the expectations of the course:

Most of them hadn't even done School (Certificate), let alone anything else, let alone anything extra. I had one girl who'd never read a book. …

Academic achievement was not necessarily an advantage within experiential learning, and hands-on play workshops can be a social leveler amongst adult learners. When confronted with a child-sized carpentry trolley complete with saws, hammers, nails, drills and chunks of wood, someone with a PhD in education would not necessarily feel more confident than a young school leaver.

4.3.5 Summary

'Areas of play' were a key aspect of 'free play'. The areas of play defined specific equipment and resources amongst which the very young child can choose

activity. The choice suggests that this activity indicates a child's interest, perhaps even fascination. The term 'areas of play' included activities which are not necessarily associated with children's play, such as reading books, participating in adult-led music and exploring science.

Defining what should be in these free play spaces was one of the effects of pioneering work done by Susan Isaacs and others, but also by trial and error in centres in this country. Books were written by people like Beverley Morris, Lex Grey and Gwen Somerset, which itemised the what, the why, and the how of free play (for example, Grey, 1974a, 1974b, 1975; Morris, 1994; Somerset, 1975, 1987, 1990). These books were usually published by playcentre, but used in other organisations.

The rules and rationales of 'free play' shifted with time, experience, training, as well as changing technologies and pragmatic considerations. Allowing children to mix the areas of play was one small innovation. That children learned through social interaction was a major insight.

Travelling with 'children learning through play' came innovative methods of adult education, encouraging personal insight and group discussion. Parents and teachers were encouraged to 'look again' at a child's play in order to recognise the child's intent. Observation of self, and observation of child, were both used to generate the authentic material used for discussion.

Children's use of 'natural' resources was highlighted by participants like Kahuwaeru Katene, with Anne Meade suggesting that access to water, sand and the natural environment was part of what defined the New Zealand identity. Thus an argument can be made that 'free play' with open-ended local resources is culturally valued across generations; but this is problematised when parents

(and other key adults in the lives of children) have limited memory of exploring the natural world, and for example, climbing trees.

While Geraldine McDonald claimed that playcentre professionalised mothering, I suggest that this meant that self-consciousness developed amongst playcentre mothers. Drawing on new knowledge about parenting could also mean distancing the mother from the influence, for example, of the older generation.

Protecting play is a theme referred to several times by Marie Bell. While this protection can be understood as evident in the adult's sensitive decision-making regarding when to engage with the child (or even when to "*disturb"* the play), it can also be understood in terms of the purpose of that engagement. Using play for reading and writing, she felt, was evidence of people "*itching to get their fingers"* in and to direct the play towards academic, or even economic, outcomes.

In Chapter 5, the focus moves to the transitional years , The Grade Unity Project, in which the diverse services moved gradually towards an educational sector called 'early childhood'.

CHAPTER 5: Research findings: The Grand Unity Project (1975 – 1989+)

Before there was an educational sector called early childhood, I suggest that there were about 15 years from 1975 in which a Grand Unity Project was evident. The findings from this study indicate that during those years, the status of the major players of the previous era, playcentre and kindergartens, was disrupted by an array of challenges. Some of these challenges included the rise of a research community, the sector's first cross-service courses at Lopdell House, the United Women's conventions, the first early childhood education conventions, an international OECD conference on early childhood care and education in Wellington, and a steady political drive to create an overarching identity which emphasised their commonalities with other services. The culmination of this era were the *'Before 5'* reforms of the David Lange-led Fourth Labour Government in 1988 and 1989 (Department of Education, 1988),

It could be argued that the Grand Unity Project represented what May (2001) had identified as being the only successful basis for a governmental role in expanding the childcare sector: policy that focused on children's education. Yet many major developments during these years which propelled this Project were issues beyond pedagogy or classrooms, including the oil shock of the 1970s (King, 2003); the shift in gender earning power and the widespread use of the contraceptive pill (Else, 1996; Kedgley, 1996) which all impacted on families and on how parents, especially mothers, are regarded. They also affected the size of families and the number of women, and mothers in the workforce, especially amongst middle class families (Barney, 1975). These all affected early childhood (e.c.) services, but were not themselves educational in nature.

While Chapter 4 began the process of answering the primary research question, this next chapter picks up a secondary research question: *How did the e.c. sector become 'educational' and how has this process affected understandings about children's play?* The initial impact of this era on 'free play' was not significant, but what was significant was the inclusion of women's aspirations and social justice issues in the provision of early childhood education. Although childcare services were still often in the domain of churches and charities, in this era, childcare services were becoming more widely used, especially by career women (Barney, 1975).

Starting with the personal narratives, section 5.1 focuses on the participants as active members of organisations in which contagious ideas were circulating, particularly the feminist movement. The luminaries of this era are people who could see how to move beyond the two-service dominance of the previous era. The drive for unity is the focus for section 5.2 with an emphasis on cross-service projects (especially regarding equipment standards) that pre-dated the creation of a unified sector. In 1988 and 1989, many of the participants were deeply involved in the *'Before 5'* reforms and shaping of the regulations that created a new education sector called 'early childhood' (Department of Education, 1988). Several became life members of their voluntary organisations as a result. This is covered in Section 5.3.

5.1 Taking a lead

All participants had experienced moving into positions of responsibility within organisations which were part of what became the early childhood education sector.

5.1.1 Volunteers and personal change

"I learned a lot of good things. Learn to understand the position that I had and learn to understand other people's positions. And see the overall position, not just yours. Not just the Māori position and see how it fits in."

Kahuwaero Katene

A recurring theme amongst many of the participants was how staying home with children led to community involvement. Kindergarten committee was the vehicle for some; playcentre was the vehicle for others, as well as organisations like Parents Centre, and later many were deeply involved on a voluntary level with TTPOOA-NZCA.

Several stories illustrate this. For Joan Kennett, formative experiences as a new mother had left a lasting sense of confusion about herself. When asked what she had got out of her years at playcentre, her answer was "*good self esteem*". Although she had done well at school *("I still like the smell of chalk!"*), when she was a new mother, Joan said that she lost confidence following the sudden and unexpected judgement of a maternity ward matron, who observed Joan embroidering while her new baby was "*down on the end of the bed"*, and told her that she "*was going to be a terrible mother. And I think I took it to heart…*"

Having previously believed themselves to be incapable academically, Pat Penrose and Mary Bramwell both discovered in their early playcentre years that they could write well enough that they could both study and publish. From her years with TTPOOA-NZCA, Kahuwaero Katene described how she had learned "*patience and tolerance, patience and tolerance",* and recognised that she was willing to face risks, which meant being willing to "*be wrong"*. But she thought her biggest learning was working at a political level, and focusing on facts and controlling emotions:

I had to talk to myself before I went to a meeting. I have to present this, and in order to do that, I am not going to be emotional. I had to write it all up. Write up the facts – 1 2 3 4 5. And that's what I'll talk on. And I'll stay right away from the emotions, because I'd be lost if I went that way. That was a real learning curve for me.

Although Lynda Boyd had trained as a kindergarten teacher, it was her time as a parent volunteer, initially at her local kindergarten, then as an officeholder in the Canterbury-Westland Kindergarten Association, then finally as the national president, that cemented her long term interest in e.c.e.*: "If I hadn't got involved in the voluntary side, I would have been out of early childhood.*" Similarly, Wendy Logan moved from voluntary responsibilities on a kindergarten committee into association and national management roles in kindergarten.

Pat Penrose, Margaret Wollerman, and Alison Leonard all told the 'same' story of how their lives changed to accommodate the child who did not settle into an 'e.c.e.' setting. Because they were unwilling to leave an unhappy child, each woman decided to stay with the child, initially with the hope that the child would settle, but then they stayed because they got involved and interested in what was happening in the centre. For each of the women, this led to unexpected new levels of participation, and was referred to as the pivotal point that led to greater insight into their own capability.

5.1.2 Moving places in circles

"…it was a sort of dream to enable women to go out to work to be absolutely sure that the children who were going to be left in a childcare centre would benefit from what we had to offer…"

Pat Hubbard

During this era, the participants identified two major 'movements', bigger than e.c.e., which were deeply influential during these years. The creation of a research sector was mentioned only by Geraldine McDonald, who had a major

role within it, so this features in the 'luminaries' subsection below (section 5.1.4) in which Geraldine's significance is outlined. Although the women's movement (that is, feminism) was a major influence and mentioned by many, some chose not to be involved. Joan Kennett felt she was already a feminist before the movement offered the label.

Describing herself as a feminist, Beverley Morris felt that playcentre itself was a feminist organisation because of the opportunities for women's personal growth and leadership. Knox (1995) in her study of three women's organisations in post-war New Zealand came to a similar conclusion. Although motherhood was foregrounded in playcentre (which Knox saw as evidence of maternalist thinking), playcentre operated in ways which encouraged women to work collectively and to take responsibilities, which Knox saw as feminist. Geraldine McDonald maintained the playcentre "*professionalised mothering"*.

However, what Pat Hubbard found in Dunedin playcentres in the 1970s was not the feminism that she had encountered in her training in Chicago where:

> *…. everything was up for grabs and being questioned. And most of the people that I met through playcentre were not questioning anything very much.*

Feminist aspirations have come in waves and the rise of the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s is widely referred to as the 'second wave of feminism'; the original feminist movement usually refers to the suffragettes work in the early 1900s in gaining women the right to vote. There are also strong links between the kindergarten movement and that first wave of feminism, especially in the U.S., and northern Europe, in part because kindergartens were seen as an acceptable place for women work and as an acceptable topic to speak about publicly (Singer, 1992).

But in 1970s New Zealand, none of the "*early childhood movements"* according to Geraldine McDonald, identified as being feminist:

> *… so, if you simply pointed out of few facts to them that their fate actually depended on what women were going to do in the future … that opinion would tend to be interpreted as a boldly feminist move (laughter).*

With limited availability of childcare and the inequitable funding by government of different services, the situation was ripe for feminist analysis, and women's personal experiences were often the first step in this process of understanding how systems of privilege reflect an established sense of what is normal and acceptable. This was particularly true for childcare, and as Anne Meade recalled:

> *The patriarchs were really quite judgmental about parents who left the children in childcare and is this a good thing and are we going to damage children? They didn't want to go there…..*

The drive for childcare did not come out of the women's movement, according to Geraldine McDonald, but because there was women's movement, points of commonality became evident. So for example, during International Women's Year, 1975, Geraldine said:

> *… as a matter of justice, something needed to be done to put childcare on an equal footing with (kindergarten and playcentre).*

New Zealand feminist literature from the late 1970s and early 1980s suggests that public and community provision of childcare was one of many feminist causes (Novitz, 1982); others were women's unpaid domestic work, and "rape, domestic violence, the lack of control women have over their own bodies, and their minimal involvement in decision making" (p. 316). But the report on the 'Parents and early childhood education' workshop at the 1977 United Women's Convention starts with the suggestion that the workshop topic appeared "less obviously feminist than others discussed at the Convention" (Browne, et al.,

1978, p. 40). As a member of the Convention's five person action group on early childhood education, Anne Smith, wrote afterwards: "I guess I was a little disappointed with the group from my perspective because I wanted to get on more to what we *do* (emphasis in the original) about the problems" (p. 41). She referred to other groups where "there is a great knowledge and understanding of the issues and a lot of anger and impatience with the injustices and deficiencies in the present system, as well as a burning desire to get things changed somehow" (p. 41).

For Noreen Moorhouse, the women's movement provided the catalyst for moving beyond playcentre. An employment opportunity from the Whangarei NOW committee (National Organisation of Women), offering $50 a week wages, coincided with exasperation following a run-in with a young man thieving cigarettes. She was ready for a change, she said, so Noreen went into childcare. She recalled that the mantra was that women wanted choices: "*… that was the whole thing – they wanted choices."*

In Dunedin, Pat Hubbard and her colleagues were committed to creating a childcare service that resolved issues of guilt for working mothers:

> *…it was a sort of dream to enable women to go out to work to be absolutely sure that the children who were going to be left in a childcare centre would benefit from what we had to offer, that it wasn't like – these awful phrases that have been used about childcare in the past about 'dumping children'; and that we were going to do exciting things with children….*

Feminist politics, especially the drive to allow women to be both mothers and in the workforce, were going to have an impact on voluntary organisations in which many women had gathered skills and even a feminist identity. Val Burns, from her perspective as Director of Early Childhood within the Department of Education in the 1980s, remembered actively trying to convince playcentre leadership that the organisation would have to change:

> *So, you know, you could see the writing on the wall: women because they're part of the women's movement; women were going to get employment and going to go back to work, you couldn't entirely do the voluntary thing…*

According to Joan Kennett, mothers have a challenging and conflicted path as they are in demand as part of the workforce yet needed by their children. She suggested that mothers carry culture, something she learned from Māori: "*We forget we have a culture of our own and we do carry the culture and men aren't so interested, are they?*"

Guilt, what Marie Bell called "*The Great Controller"*, was seen by some as part of the glue that kept mothers deeply entrenched within families, rather than pursuing other interests or maintaining career paths. But while for many years Joan Kennett saw mothers' guilt when they enrolled their children in childcare, more recently what she has seen is anger:

> *I would think when I started this centre that most of the women who came here didn't have to work – they were working because they were strong women who really wanted to make a difference.*
>
> *But now a lot of these young women, because of finance and their circumstances, have to work and often resent it too….*

Even though "*working mothers have got a much better deal in childcare now then they had 15-20 years ago, I mean, there isn't the stigma"*, Mary Bramwell, saw that women struggle emotionally with conflicting expectations:

> *There's still guilt. I still have mums crying, you know, about the fact that they need to leave their child in childcare …. particularly babies…*

5.1.3 'Luminaries' of a sector uniting: Bill Renwick, Geraldine McDonald and Anne Meade

The participants spoke of three people who had provided leadership through key transitions in envisaging how an educational sector for early childhood might come into existence.

Bill Renwick, Director-General of Education (1975-1988) was well known to several of the participants, who spoke of him with warm regard. Marie Bell described him as "*supportive"*. Recalling how he had created space for women's issues within government policy development, Geraldine McDonald described him as *"very very sympathetic".* His position of influence helped to address a major problem identified by Val Burns:

> *The whole early childhood in the 80s, we were fighting for women, and we were fighting for recognition of early childhood; and government policy….was needed. It just wasn't there!*

A major transitional event came in 1978 when New Zealand hosted an international OECD conference on early childhood care and education. Geraldine McDonald and Anne Meade were both on the organising committee along with Bill Renwick. According to Anne, it involved: *"a lot of discussions around the philosophy and purpose and the role of the state in ECCE…."* According to Geraldine, it was Bill who, at the end of the OECD conference, said that the women should:

> *… tell the bureaucrats and politicians what they wanted. And it was at that meeting that he suggested that (early childhood education policy) should become a machinery of government exercise…*

According to Anne Meade the recommendations were unexpected because those at the conference "*… weren't supposed to do that, but we did". She recalled that a key development, "the argumentation around children's rights",*

was evident in the eventual report from the State Services Commission (SSC) working group which included major input from Geraldine McDonald (New Zealand State Services Commission Working Group on Early Childhood Care and Education, 1980).

According to Val Burns and Mary Purdy, Bill Renwick believed, along with the rest of the 'e.c.e.' community that there was *"No such thing as a curriculum in early childhood"*. The statement indicates the significant difference between where the services were in the 1980s and where the sector had developed to by the early 1990s when the contract was signed for the development of an early childhood curriculum (May & Carr, 1999; Nuttall, 2005a; Te One, 2003).

Geraldine McDonald stood out for several participants for what she achieved, but also what was denied to her. Anne Meade referred to Geraldine's work on policy committees in the 1970s and 1980s:

> *She is so good the way she frames her thinking. And, she changed the frame to talk more about children's rights and not about picking and choosing services. She argued that all children deserve a good quality early childhood education….*

Following the OECD conference in Wellington in 1978, Anne described how the machinery of government was gradually engaged to develop policy in early education. This was not an easy process and Anne recalled:

> *There were quite a lot of opposition reactionaries on the group…. I had enough contact with (Geraldine) to know it was a very hard working group to get closure and finish. But it came through with some key recommendations that were listened to by politicians.*

Several Wellington-based participants recalled that in the late 1970s, a regular cross-sector informal women's group, *"a little plotting group"*, according to Val Burns, met monthly prompted initially by the Department of Education's failure

to appoint Geraldine as director of Early Childhood Education. Geraldine recalled:

> *I was invited to apply for the new position and I did so. When it was known that I had been offered the job, a woman candidate from within the Department planned to appeal against it. I was advised that an appeal would be extremely unpleasant and degrading and because I had never worked in the public service, I was likely to lose. And so I withdrew.*

According to Val Burns:

> *When Geraldine didn't get that job, we started this Sunday morning group once a month. It was open who went – but it was anyone with just an interest in early childhood. It didn't have minutes or anything like that, but it was quite an influential group. And Marie was there, and she was in the Department, so she was making it happen. Joyce Mitchell was there, Helen Bernstone was there, Carol Garden, Marie, Geraldine…. That's quite a lot of people and that was quite a little plotting group if you like; probably more powerful than we thought.*

Among other achievements, the group was credited by Val Burns with getting early childhood out of the Department of Education's special needs unit where it was "*trapped*".

While heading up the new e.c.e. research division at the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) in the early 1970s, Geraldine startled both playcentre and kindergarten by insisting they were women's organisations. It was, she said, "*a fact of life*":

> *The reason I thought of them as women's groups was that it was so obviously the case, and whatever was the role of women, whether they had to go out to work, or whether they had to stay at home, whether they had any money or whether they had a car or not; all those things were things that happened to women and it affected of course, their participation in early childhood institutions; whether these were kindergartens or playcentres or childcare.*

Her ability to articulate commonalities above difference were important because:

… the playcentres and the kindergartens were very, very suspicious of each other…. There was a sort of feeling in each that they were far more superior than the other. Then of course there was childcare which was looked down and people thought that mothers shouldn't be leaving their children in childcare….

In her role within the SSC working group on early childhood care and education, was particularly important. Although the committee was set up without membership from any of the organisations which at that time shaped 'early childhood education,' it required significant intervention from them to keep the committee working towards the goals set for it. In its initial form, Geraldine remembered the SSC Committee was "*dopey":*

… Roz Noonan of NZEI organised a sort of complaint about the whole thing to government and said 'This won't do' and I think the members retired – I can't remember whether all of them did or not – and I got back on and there was a woman appointed chair – before that it had been a man, you see. So, we struggled along with this particular thing with the men on this committee not terribly sympathetic to the whole thing, but it was turned into what's called a machinery of government exercise – in other words, how do you get an organisation out of one government department and put it in another.

And, the childcare people didn't actually want to, they were cozy with childcare and they were sort of brought over kicking and screaming. But the man, Athol Mitchell, who was in charge of childcare - he transferred over to education, so it all went quite smoothly after that. But, people don't like change, not really. But in the long run, it brought all of them together.

And, I put together the report and I think it was on the first page, I said something along the lines that it is 'all education, you couldn't separate education and care' and that little idea sort of stuck.

Like Geraldine McDonald, **Anne Meade's** influence crossed the services, but unlike Geraldine, Anne did not come up through the ranks of any particular service. As a young solo mother whose use of e.c. services was driven by "straight pragmatics", she had developed an interest in the politics of e.c. provision. Her visibility beyond Wellington happened once she was taking

leadership roles in policy areas. Recalling her own election in the late 1980s as president of the

> *… this is going to sound really naïve now, but at the time, I can remember going into it and thinking 'oh my gosh, I might even have a chance to meet Anne Meade!'*

Geraldine McDonald saw Anne Meade as being one of the persistent people who, in the 1980s and beyond, believed that what was happening for children, particularly in childcare, needed to reach higher standards. And Val Burns, from her position as a past director of early childhood within the Department of Education identified Anne, plus Maris O'Rourke (who was the first secretary of the new Ministry of Education), as being the likely authors for the proposed early childhood curriculum. By her own account, Anne's input into the shape of the new educational sector has ensured that it is a complex process acknowledging multiple agendas and stakeholders. In two major e.c.e. policy documents, the Meade Report (Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group, 1988) and the 10-year strategic plan (Ministry of Education, 2002), Anne's input has ensured the inclusion of statements about:

> *Early childhood is in the interest of children, it's in the interest of parents and it's in the interest of society, and no one interest group shall be focused on to the detriment of the others.*

Anne also has had a major role in research; she followed Geraldine through NZCER. More recently she co-ordinated the Centres of Innovation Project (which finished in 2009).

5.1.4 Summary

During this transitional era, within voluntary organisations were still leadership opportunities, especially for mothers. However, major centralising shifts were

happening as a result of conferences, the creation of an e.c.-specific research unit within the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZARE), and the political drive to towards a united sector spearheaded by key people within the Department of Education. The idea that children have rights was strongly articulated during this time, as well as that early childhood education was closely integrated with the needs and aspirations of the children's mothers. Putting emphasis on children as rights holders helped to shift policy towards participation, and away from the traditional providers.

For the participants, being part of early childhood services was repeatedly pointed to as a source of personal growth. Networks of activism and friendship shaped individuals' life directions. For many, the feminist movement helped reconceptualise mothering and their possibilities, 'and choices'. Mothers also had rights. Positioning mothers as having the right to work and a contribution to make to the national economy helped foreground childcare services as neither of the traditional providers offered full-day education and care.

5.2 Creating a national early childhood educational sector

Several national projects began to build momentum during this period which led into and then accompanied the '*Before 5'* reforms (Department of Education, 1988). One such project was the creation of equipment standards initially within playcentres, then childcare, and eventually the new early childhood sector.

5.2.1 Politics

"Until you people get your act together, we're not listening…"

- Unnamed politician, quoted by Val Burns

In the mid 1970s Marie Bell was appointed to oversee the movement of kindergarten teacher training into teachers colleges, with playcentre and TTPOOA-NZCA still offering field-based training. National co-ordination or support was lacking however, and there were no early childhood programmes being offered through, for example, the Department of Education's residential Teacher Refresher Courses (TRC) at Lopdell House (Auckland) and Hogben House (Christchurch).

This reflected how the sector saw itself, but also how it was perceived. Kindergarten services knew that they were educational; their staff members were teachers, who had qualified through studies at kindergarten (later teachers) college. Other services were mindful that children were learning and developing, but not necessarily within educational models of training and delivery, and not necessarily in the company of teachers. Playcentre parents were not teachers, they were parents. Within childcare circles, according to Lynda Boyd, the word "*teacher"* was:

> *… a no-no. They weren't teachers, they were workers and they were proudly workers and that was their background and that was their labour roots etc.*

In her position in middle management within the Department of Education, Marie Bell rang the changes. According to Marie, she wanted to establish dialogue between the services and to show that they *"didn't have horns"*. In addition, both playcentre and kindergarten regarded childcare with "*negativity"*, although "*… tinged with a bit of envy because as you know a lot women came out of the home…."*

Remembering her appointment to the training committee at the Department of Education:

> *I'll never forget my first meeting. We were allocating Lopdell and Hogben and they did secondary, they did primary, then 'Oh well, we'll go to morning tea'.*

Then little me bleats 'What about early childhood?' 'Oh they don't have courses' 'Gosh.' 'Oh, because they can't agree, you know. You've got playcentre, kindergarten, someone would have to speak for them and they can't agree'. I said, 'Well, give me a week, they'll agree, I'm sure they will'.

So, of course, ring up the head of playcentre, head of kindergarten; within a week we got Val Burns and she came into the team to organise these courses and also the same thing happened on the Teachers Refresher Course committee, which was you know, by teachers for teachers. But they had links to the training team, of course and they were always in the holidays, so we started getting (women to attend).

And I'll never forget the first one, we had it at Massey … It was great, and we could do what we liked…

An innovation reflecting Marie's background was to include discussion groups as part of the teacher refresher courses. Remembering how Dorothy Gardner had researched the difference between what the teacher intended and what the student experienced, Marie believed that:

…. that's what the adults were getting from the lecturers – very strange messages. So, we set it up that they had permanent discussion groups over the three days with a leader as a way of including people and getting different points of view; and we always did a little training exercise too. This is early childhood.

Involving the e.c. services within education was clearly new territory, but the personal relationships were building across various services, particularly in the area of training helped by some major national gatherings, including in 1974 the first early childhood convention, which according to Marie:

…. was all organised by men in the Kindergarten Union and a lady called Laura Ingram, who was a very powerful sort of woman, quite admirable in a way but you know, pretty old fashioned and she was single and never had children … she organised it.

And at the United Women's Convention 1977, Marie ran several workshops on 'Assertiveness' which attracted, she said, 623 enrolments. Soon afterwards, she was approached by the organisers of the second early childhood convention:

I was in the Department at this time. So they rang me up and said 'Would you chair the convention?' And of course in my assertiveness training – one of the things we always said to women was, 'If you're offered something like that, just say yes'. So often women say - 'Oh, I couldn't do that, oh!'. I said 'Look, men say "'yes"; then they rush off and find their mates and get advice'. I said 'You've got to do the same', so of course I had to … practice what I preached, didn't I? So, I said 'Okay'.

Her suggestion to approach US sociologist Urie Bronfenbrenner to provide the keynote was an inspired one (May, 2004). Although he was not well known in New Zealand, he was one of Marie's *"big influences"*, and:

I sold the idea. So, what do we do? And I said, 'Well, I suppose we could try ringing him up'. So, we rang… as I say, it was like talking to God, he came to the phone (laughter) and I introduced myself and said what we're on about and he said, 'I'll go and look at my diary' and off he went and came back and said 'Yes, I've got nothing on then, and I've never been to New Zealand'.

So we flew him out…. He turned up with his lovely wife, Lise, and I was given time off to take them around the country …. And oh, he was very impressed and they were impressed with him – and he launched his book – 'The Ecology of Early Childhood' – at that convention.

According to Marie, the convention was a watershed in that it attracted "*Everybody who's anybody in early childhood".*

Bronfenbrenner's presence was important in expanding understandings about what happens for young children. According to Beverley Morris, his ecological approach "*brought us around with a strong turn"*:

… the child's life is not just the child, but also the family and the social edge and the world and so on…. I think people did know that, but I think they knew it in the back of their heads. They hadn't really thought about it – it had to be evoked in some way.

According to Geraldine McDonald, the integration of sociological thinking into education was new:

Bronfenbrenner, he opened up the idea that society made a difference. Any sociologist could have told you that, or an anthropologist. But education as a whole, not just early childhood but education as a whole, was interpreted very much in psychological terms, and it still is.

Geraldine and Beverley agreed that Bronfenbrenner's influence was felt mostly amongst academics. But when the early childhood curriculum took its gazetted form in 1996, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model is the one clearly identified piece of theory in it (Ministry of Education, 1996). Geraldine suggested that Anne Smith's influence was significant, as she *"promoted"* Bronfenbrenner in her writings and teachings. However, Geraldine suggested that while Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory helps to explain *"the process of becoming human",* however it *"doesn't tell you what to do"*.

Language was also changing, and being encouraged to change. From within the Department Education, Val Burns and colleagues started referring to children's play as being *"learning experiences"*, and they used the inclusive term 'early childhood centres', and "*not childcare centres and kindergartens or whatever".*

However, whatever 'early childhood education' was, it was still being defined. According to Val:

Oh, we didn't know about compliance in those days, we just had freedom (laughter). Now seriously - in the whole time I was Director of Early Childhood, I made it up, seriously, I did and I'd say to them, 'This is what you do in early childhood'. And because they were totally ignorant of it, I got away with blue murder.

It was however, developing within some foundations:

I had a knowledge base and the experience base. …. When I think back, we'd just get a group of people together and develop things. So, we weren't rule-bound to the extent you are now and accountability wasn't on the agenda; Bill Renwick was telling us accountability was going to come in, but that really didn't happen until the reforms. Accountability is the 90's.

One of the basic policy achievements of the mid 1980s was the movement of responsibility for childcare from the Department of Social Welfare to the Department of Education. According to Geraldine McDonald, there were other complicating factors for childcare organisations:

> *They liked working with Athol Mitchell in Social Welfare and he liked working with them – human things like that. But, apart from that, they saw themselves, I suppose, doing good. Whereas the others … saw themselves as doing teaching or education or something like that. …*

For Alison Leonard, who was working in childcare at the time, the shift to the Department of Education meant working with different government officials, and while those who had visited from Social Welfare were "*wonderful*", their attitude was she said *"just care"*. With childcare part of the Department of Education, Alison could reclaim her previous status as a teacher; input from government servants became *"wider in terms of the educational possibilities"*.

Commonalities were needed to progress national policies. According to Val Burns, the attitude of policymakers and politicians was: *"Until you people get your act together, we're not listening…"*. So Val and her colleagues "… *did an awful lot of diversity within unity in those days".* Particularly contentious was inclusion of the Early Childhood Council (E.C.C.) which was seen as representing the interests of commercial childcare services:

> *There was enormous amount of work. We had the Early Childhood Council at all our things at Lopdell and Hogben. And we were the first; we included everybody. And it was not popular (laughter). I wasn't popular with a lot of the early childhood area, because of including them.*

But there were positive outcomes:

> *I talked the Early Childhood Council into not opposing three year (e.c. teacher) training. We would never have got three year training if they had opposed it because, if one part of early childhood opposed it, the government*

wouldn't do it. …. I don't know what the trade off was. And they didn't oppose it. And that's how we got it.

Another point of commonality was trying to focus on the experience of children, rather than the services. As Val said:

I was there for the children. And if New Zealand didn't get its act together, we were getting nowhere fast. If anything, I think that is one of my greatest contributions is just getting people to walk together.

'Walking together' meant major adjustments in thinking and language. For some services, there were issues of distinctive identities being compromised by association with other services. Creating unity in structures did not necessarily produce unity in thinking. In her work at teachers college in Christchurch during the 1980s, Pat Penrose saw that the early childhood course still had quite distinct strands. Those students intent on working in childcare and those intent on working in kindergarten were evident in informal "*demarcations": "You could tell by the way they talk and the way they dress. I think that's still there."*

5.2.2 Improving childcare

"I've probably been in more childcare centres than other people have had hot dinners really. Wide, wide variety. … "

Mary Bramwell

Issues of social justice, especially children's poverty and poor health, have historically been major promptings in the creation of early childhood services (May, 1997; Singer, 1992; A. Smith & Swain, 1988; Stover, 2010b). This theme was evident amongst the participants' stories, especially those who worked in childcare in the 1970s. In her early days in childcare, Joan Kennett took a particular concern for including impoverished urban Māori children. For Pat Hubbard and Noreen Moorhouse, children "*playing in the gutters"* was a motivator for their involvement in childcare.

But the research data suggests that along with this (familiar) historical project, there were two other projects that fed into the raison d'être of the unifying early childhood sector in the 1970s and 1980s: one was to improve childcare, and the other was its companion project to support working mothers. As Pat Hubbard explained:

> *The two things went in parallel. Yes, we wanted to make it possible for women to do the things they wanted to do, but if we were going to help facilitate that for women, it had to be really good for children …*

A cross-services effort was raising the standard of what was materially available to children through the creation of an equipment list. Several participants active in the 1970s talked about this. For example, Margaret Wollerman was running the playcentre equipment shop in the Hutt Valley, plus serving on the committee of the New Zealand Childcare Association when it decided to create an equipment list. She recalled: *"The list was very similar to playcentre….(it) was an attempt to raise standards".*

The similarity was no accident. Mary Bramwell was a creator of both lists. The first equipment list, for playcentre, developed in the Waikato in the early 1970s when Mary was part of a dedicated group of playcentre women. They were, according to Mary, "*fanatical"* in their commitment to creating excellent free play environments for children: "*everything set up; every area of play available*". They produced a series of booklets, the 'Pipeline' series. Out of these booklets came the equipment list: *"We put this list together right down to how many buckets and mops and brushes…".* Setting an equipment standard for playcentres was highly controversial:

> *Yeah, it wasn't well received, all playcentres got the equipment list and they were all meant to stick to it and we were all meant to have the equipment out at all times – and that was the hard thing, when you were working like we did in a centre that packed away. But we thought if we can do it, then it's possible for everybody to do it.*

When Mary started working in childcare and got involved in the childcare association, she brought her interest in equipment, and was asked to write an equipment list. It was, she recalled, highly prescriptive, but the hope was that it might give the children "*a leg up*":

> *It was very important to get that out to childcare centres, because, by golly, they were pretty bad. They were pretty bad. A lot of places, old houses, a few plastic toys and nothing else much going on because you know, you had to feed them and they had to sleep and so on.*
>
> *And being president of the Association meant that I went to an enormous number of childcare centres across New Zealand. I've probably been in more childcare centres than other people have had hot dinners really. Wide, wide variety… and I was concerned in particular by the care for under twos.*

The equipment list did not stop there. According to Mary, it was on-sold to the Early Childhood Development Unit which was established in restructuring of education in 1989. The list remained prescriptive, something that Mary found unnecessarily limiting:

> *… it suddenly now becomes a stick to beat people with…. I still believe that we have to have areas of play …(But it's) sad really when a Montessori centre wants to offer something different for their babies and they're told they have to have, you know, plastic rings … all from the old list. I mean, it's sad. I've known people go out to the $2 shop and buy plastic things just to get through the licensing …*

Heuristic play for infants, "*the best thing since sliced bread*", has expanded the equipment as a result of Mary's work through her training programme Chrysalis; she "*discovered*" heuristic play during a trip to England.

An equipment standard that worked for a sessional service could not necessarily provide the benchmark for childcare environments where children could, according to Mary, be present for 50 hours per week. What was challenging but possible in a playcentre (for example, having to put out *"ten*

colours out every session"), was not desirable or practical in a childcare centre, she said.

Having initially helped to create a national standard, Mary Bramwell, described herself as "*legendary"* in regular arguments with the Education Review Office (ERO) reviewers. Rather than setting standards that consist of equipment lists, she reflected that what was needed for children in long-day childcare centres to have spaces (spaces shaped by building design, and including people and equipment) that enable the children to find: *"… the balance between stimulation and relaxation and recuperation…".*

5.2.3 Summary

As the unified early childhood education sector began to take shape, the research findings indicate that there were efforts within and across existing early childhood organisations to improve standards, especially in childcare. Through the creation of a list of required equipment, what had started as a way of setting the environment for children's choice within a free play environment, became a process for setting a standard for early childhood services more generally.

There was also a new positioning of government through its public servants as advocates 'for the children', picking up the language of rights to argue for quality early childhood experiences for children, regardless of provider. In contrast to earlier periods when leaders and their innovative ideas and practices were circulating through influential educational circles like New Education Foundation and playcentre, the research data indicates that those 'making up' the characteristics of the new sector were public servants, like Marie Bell and Val Burns. Their innovations reflected ideas and practices broadly compatible with feminist and Progressive Education: especially their

emphasis on collaboration. Participation in the events that characterised the unifying early childhood sector required some groups and individuals to step outside their usual circles.

5.3 The 'Before 5' reforms

In pursuit of children's rights and unified early childhood sector, the '*Before 5*' reforms of 1988-89 (Department of Education, 1988) was a massive project in creating cross-sector policies, and compliance requirements. Over the previous decade, momentum had been building to support major reform and major milestones had occurred in the machinery of government report of 1980 (New Zealand State Services Commission Working Group on Early Childhood Care and Education, 1980), and shifting childcare into Department of Education of 1985 (May, 2001). What was happening in 1988 and 1989 was 'huge' for the providers as they were propelled into the new sector: the creation of minimum standards that applied to all early childhood education services. What was happening more broadly was also huge as the '*Before 5*' reforms were happening against the backdrop of the last years of the David Lange-led fourth Labour Government which was facing internal divisions over the major neoliberal reforms undertaken (King, 2003). The reforms of the early childhood sector envisaged by the Meade Committee were never fully implemented as the political mandate of National Government elected in 1990 led to major funding cuts (May, 2001; Meade, 1990). But the basic shape of an early childhood sector was established, despite the change of government.

5.3.1 The battle of minimum standards

"…and so there was all that kafuffle – you know, we had 'Education to be more' ….It was huge. It was huge."

Lynda Boyd

New regulations were required which could apply to all early childhood services. No organisation was without major challenges from the reforms. Mary Bramwell remembered writing an editorial expressing concern that childcare would lose its identity: "*Were we all going to look like watered down kindergartens?"*

From the playcentre perspective, the drive to create national standards was for the purpose of improving standards in childcare, and in order to ease administrative challenges, to try to limit diversity of provision. As Barbara Chapman recalled:

> *There was quite a feeling amongst the powers that be, that they would have liked everybody to be the same….*

Pat Penrose remembered going back and forth to Wellington, but she couldn't at that point "*see early childhood as a whole"*. Because her interest was children "*learning alongside their parents"*, her commitment was to playcentre: *"It was always a fight for playcentre."*

According to several participants, there was nothing innately unsatisfactory with what playcentres and kindergartens were providing in terms of programmes for children and their families. Barbara Chapman indicated that 'free play', for example, was not questioned during negotiations. But in terms of standards for premises and training, it was playcentre that had most to lose.

Although for childcare and for playcentre, the reforms of the late 1980s marked an increased role for government in their services, for kindergartens the reforms meant diminished government involvement. As Wendy Logan explained*:*

> *Government was more involved in kindergarten prior to 1989. They built the buildings – everything came down on high from Wellington.*

In addition, kindergartens were challenged by the regulations about teacher:child ratios. At the time, according to both Barbara Chapman and Lynda Boyd, kindergartens were operating with a ratio of one teacher to 20 children. Barbara, who served on the working group for "*charters, licenses and minimum standards"*, remembered the decision to set the ratio at 1:15 was controversial: "*Nobody on that working party was going to say that 1:15 was a good ratio".*

According to several participants, there was a point when the stated intention was that every session in every service would be supervised by a qualified teacher and that within 4-5 years all teachers would have a diploma of teaching. If implemented, this would have been the end of parent-supervised sessions in playcentre and in te kohanga reo.

In addition, some of the proposed building standards were viewed with alarm, or even disbelief. Robbie Burke, who was Property Convenor of the Playcentre Federation during the 1989 reforms, was ready to challenge one of the proposed minimum standards requiring 18° centigrade temperature in all areas where children were, including toilets which had to vented to the outside, because:

> *… in the South Island, which is my background, in the winter time, you wouldn't have anything like 18°, so how were we going to get them to that temperature without horrific heating bills?*

She met with the responsible Ministry of Education officer. Having initially been informed that he had decided and that was that, she challenged to him spell out how that standard had been determined:

> *And eventually he said 'Well, we came to the decision because that was the temperature on our thermostat in our office and we thought it was quite comfortable'. That was as far as the thinking had gone.*

According to Robbie, that battle of the temperature was won. But other battles were lost. Barbara Chapman's summing up was that: *"Playcentre survived at a cost".* For other participants, such as Lynda Boyd, the cost included developing skepticism about *"… how far removed (policy makers) are from the children".*

Barbara Chapman remembered early on in the negotiations, sitting in a meeting with David Lange who was both Prime Minister and Minister of Education, when he said:

> *'Oh, this education business is going to be the death of me' and a few weeks later he had heart surgery. But, he had just discovered that there were some schools around the country that didn't have enough families to form a board of trustees unless all the parents went on the board of trustees and so he was sort of learning about some of these things.*

And Barbara also found that politicians were not always well advised. She recalled how an official claimed expertise on playcentre and fed inaccurate information to the then Prime Minister, Geoffrey Palmer, causing him to later apologise for accepting what was in his briefing paper. It was, Barbara Chapman said, *"fairly complex". Somewhere during the negotiations over minimum standards, the "common mould" was broken sufficiently to enable diversity of provision. If that had not happened, the non-conforming services would have had to be "tipped over".*

Although the setting of the standards themselves involved consultative working parties, Barbara could "*hardly recognise"* their work in the regulations which were eventually created. More worrying for her, however, was how minimum standards could be interpreted as being acceptable: *"… we had intended (the minimum standards) to be the absolute bottom line. You know, if you go below that, then you're terrible'.*

But there were some fundamental differences in the impact of the educational reforms. Playcentre managed to pull together as a national organisation. Barbara Chapman remembered vividly:

> *Let me say that they were heady times and the people I still see from that period agree that … Playcentre, as probably at no other time in its history, knew what it was about… We were probably riding on a bit of high, because of that total unity; there was no bickering, there were no dissenting voices. … It was I guess a privilege to have been part of all that, because I saw playcentre in a way that not many people have had a chance to.*

In contrast, the kindergarten union was ruptured in the aftermath of the educational reforms, with two large regional associations, but no one national group. Lynda Boyd had been the president of the NZKU-Free Kindergarten during the 'Before 5' reforms:

> *It was a tough time in early childhood, you know kindergartens were struggling for money, we upped the group size because that was the only way we could pay the staff and so there was issues with union and four largest associations broke away from the organisation and so there was all that kafuffle; it was huge. It was huge.*

5.3.2 Summary

For all those involved, the *'Before 5'* reforms were momentous. Early childhood education, the new sector, was emerging and it was clearly a negotiated project with input from providers, but not necessarily direct control over major developments. Skepticism was expressed about the government servants' knowledge base and competence to create effective policy in some areas. Debates about what is bad practice, and therefore to be regulated against, had to be balanced against what is 'quality practice' and therefore to be encouraged or required, alongside what was pragmatic.

Play, ‘free play’, and learning through play, were not to the fore in these negotiations. What was being focused on was the infrastructure of regulations that shaped the spaces where the education of children was to occur.

In the next chapter, the educationalisation process is followed through a new grand project in which educational processes and accountability systems become normalised within the widespread provision of early childhood education.

CHAPTER 6: Research findings: The Grand Education Project (1990-2006+)

In this the sixth chapter, the last of the research questions is again addressed, and in more depth: How did the early childhood sector become 'educational' and how has this process affected understandings about children's play?

While all the participants were involved in the Grand Play Project and most had some involvement in the transitional Grand Unity Project, only a handful remained engaged in influential positions during the Grand Education Project of 1990–2006+. While there are commonalities across the participants' stories, there are fewer specific events or milestones remembered, other than the introduction of the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). Some remembered, for example, the struggles to 'honour the Treaty' in different contexts. Older participants were moving into retirement, or semi-retirement, during these years. Others maintained a sector-wide perspective within the new professional development programmes; some continued their daily teaching within childcare centres; some were focused on teacher education; several were actively involved in policy development. Even those in retirement, however, had at least a peephole into early childhood through their ongoing responsibilities (e.g. as a life member of an e.c. organisation), through ongoing study and research, and also as grandparents.

Section 6.1 focuses on how the social justice concerns expressed in earlier 'grand projects' became part of regulation within a united early childhood sector. This was particularly evident in the context of new 'quality assurance systems' facilitating compliance and accountability (Adams, Vossler, & Scrivens, 2005; Ministry of Education, 1998) that required early childhood centres to recognise the significance of the Treaty of Waitangi. Section 6.2 focuses on how the participants

saw early childhood teacher education develop a greater emphasis on theory, moving away from experiential learning ('hands on' adult activity). In section 6.3 the participants' suggest that within early childhood communities, risk taking and physically active play have become marginalised in response, at least in part, to the anxiety levels of the parents. Nearly every participant spoke of living near their adult children and playing a significant role in the lives of their grandchildren. This is the starting place for the final section, 6.4: looking around now, where do the participants see play, and learning through play?

6.1 Setting standards

Especially in the early 1990s, what was preoccupying many of the participants was not 'learning through play' or 'free play' but rather the direction of 'their' organisations within the new early childhood education (e.c.e.) sector. While the focus of many of the participants was on navigating the challenges arising from greater government involvement, for some it also presented opportunities to progress personal and social concerns, including what Kahuwaeru Katene called *"this thing called biculturalism"*.

From its regulatory origins, the early childhood sector has been required to ensure that the Treaty of Waitangi/Te Tiriti o Waitangi informed policy and practice. Enabled by the Education Act of 1989, a Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices (DOPs) was gazetted in 1990 which identified 60 new requirements of early childhood settings, including that they honoured the Treaty of Waitangi (Ministry of Education, 1990). This was re-enforced by the Early Childhood Education Code of Ethics (NZEI Te Riu Roa Early Childhood Code of Ethics National Working Group, 1995) which positioned honouring the Treaty as an ethical expectation of e.c. centres.

From 1998, when the revised DOPs became compulsory for government bulk-funding, centres were required to consult local Māori iwi and hapu respectfully and to ensure that centre policies and practices "reflect the unique place of Māori as tangata whenua and the principles of partnership inherent in Te Tiriti o Waitangi" (Ministry of Education, 1998, p. fold out).

6.1.1 "This thing called biculturalism"

"Now I had the privilege of relating to Māori people at the time in their history when they treated us Pākehā as genuine."

Lex Grey

The impulse to understand cross-culturally runs strongly through stories from the participants, and for some, there was opportunity to encourage organisational change to reflect of Māori values and tikanga. Three Pākehā participants described what they experienced in the days before te kohanga reo began. In the 1960s Lex Grey was employed by the Māori Education Foundation as the preschool advisor. He travelled extensively in the northern North Island, working with the Māori Women's Welfare League (Grey, 1993; Stover, 2003). What he recalled about those days were the lessons he himself had learned from Māori who were open to Pākehā education. But:

> *If I accepted their criticism, then I passed the first test which is the Māori remains a Māori in the presence of a white person. The Māori have great strength to do that which is a very hard thing when you're outnumbered – without blame, without violence.*

Over time, that openness amongst Māori diminished because: "*Unfortunately they found that they had a made a mistake and the Pākehā was not as genuine as they thought".*

Based in Wellington, Geraldine McDonald was the first to publish research on Māori mothers and their preschool children, including in rural and provincial areas

(McDonald, 1973). Māori mothers, she found, often did not fit in with existing models of provision; *"kindergarten was posh",* she recalled, and in some communities "*racial issues reared their ugly head"*. Māori mothers felt invisible, *"under-funded in all things they needed"*. She chose to use her research as a "*mouthpiece"* for what Māori women said they needed. Geraldine included questions about the possibility of a Māori immersion preschool but only one Māori woman interviewed said that a Māori immersion service for young children was needed.

Joan Kennett's interest in Māori culture runs throughout her life. It is reflected in her marriage to Ruru Karaitiana, followed by her years of fostering and adopting Māori children, and in later years through establishing a Māori preschool during the 1970s. During her regular visits to jumble sales where she was looking for dress-ups (especially first Holy Communion dresses – *"They made beautiful bride's dresses!")*, she saw young Māori children "*outside the door"*. So Joan *"started sitting with these kids and giving them puzzles and reading books to them and I became Honky Nana (laughter)".*

Encouraged through her studies in early childhood education (e.c.e.), Joan started a Māori preschool with six children which swelled to 40 within a few months. Later when on the national executive of TTPOOA-NZCA and on its first training committee, Joan recalled there were no Māori people involved, *"so I often spoke up for the Māori people".* The preschool programme for Māori stopped in the early 1980s with the advent of te kohanga reo, which Joan helped to establish in Palmerston North: *"I formed the first committee and gave them their first equipment and hired the staff with them".*

Later in Hamilton, Mary Bramwell worked with others to set up Koha Tamariki, which she described as being *"one of the first bicultural centres".* The process was, a test of resilience:

> *… (we) spilt blood because we did things wrong, as you do. But anyway there's no mistakes in Māori, there's just learnings really. You just have to pick yourself up and not make the same mistake again.*

Out of her experiences within TTPOOA-NZCA, Noreen Moorhouse offered an unequivocal statement of why the struggle for biculturalism was worthwhile:

> *I know a lot of Pākehā New Zealanders won't agree with me, but they really have to look to the Tangata Whenua because that is the only thing that is unique in New Zealand. The rest is a hodgepodge of different cultures and they're equally important, and the Treaty allows us to be equally important.*

During the 1970s, Beverley Morris recalled that appreciation of things Māori within playcentre was raised by visiting marae. But when Lynda Boyd was training as a kindergarten teacher, there was nothing about the Treaty of Waitangi, nor Māori language. It was during her time on kindergarten committees in the 1980s, that the issue of being bicultural *"started to come through".*

In Playcentre, the 1990s were marked by major reviews of how the Treaty could be honoured, especially regarding regional associations' and the national federation's structure and decision-making. Robbie Burke described it as adding *"a layer of complexity to already pressurised"* process: 1989 was the year that Playcentre Conference agreed to work biculturally, and it was also the big year of the '*Before 5'* reforms.

The fundamental changes that were made to decision-making (e.g. separate Māori representation, and the decision to operate under consensus decision-making protocols), were prompted in part, Robbie believed, by "*a guilt trip"*, and without widespread understanding about consensus decision-making. After 17 years of Playcentre working biculturally, Robbie saw a complete circle "*and a lot of drama"*:

> *If you look at the history of 1990 when we had no Māori groups at all. And then … we got up to six regional groups recognised at Federation groups to now in 2006, we have nobody again. There is no separate Māori representation; no forum for Māori except for the national hui.*

As a tutor for TTPOOA-NZCA, Noreen Moorhouse recalled it was in 1990 that "*the whole association decided to become bicultural". For those enrolled in training, this meant that "whatever area (they) lived in, they had to learn about the Māori life in that area"*. As the thinking was that Māori knowledge should be taught by Māori, Noreen as a Pākehā was something of an anomaly, but with 14 Māori grandchildren, she had an "in" enabling her to work cross-culturally.

According to Kahuwaero Katene, it was her decision to enroll in childcare training which led the TTPOOA-NZCA to reconsider its *"Māori component under the Treaty of Waitangi"* because *"Māori are beginning to take advantage of our training"*. According to Kahuwaero, it was driven by Mary Bramwell: "*Mary just really went bicultural."*

Kahuwaero's involvement in the organisation's bicultural story grew in response to hui organised by Maureen Locke who proposed to set up a runanga; the goal was that the childcare association's *"council would be half Māori"*. Kahuwaero's motivation was both her commitment to the organisation: "*I really enjoyed, appreciated it"*; and curiosity: *"I was interested in that subject: biculturalism"*.

The runanga with five members was created for what Kahuwaero described as a "*painful journey":*

> *We had all these papers that we had to read – heaps of them! We all went out and bought these big suitcases – satchels to have all these papers, and we'd have to read all these papers and understand them before we went to council meeting.*
>
> *(But) that didn't last long. It failed. It failed, because we weren't prepared for it. It failed because it wasn't us. I believe it failed because we didn't get the spirit of it; someone else did, but we didn't.*
>
> *And we were set up to work biculturally – both Māori and Pākehā – didn't know what that was, you know. They carry on, they had all the skills, they have all the knowledge, they knew what to do; we were floundering.*

> *Absolutely, every one of us. We were floundering. And there was a lot of ill feelings.*

The organisation *itself "almost went bankrupt – went into debt"*. Resignations followed; and Kahuwaero was ready to resign as well but stayed on as a national advisor. Creating tikanga for the association evolved; "*we learnt by trial and error...."*

It was a challenge for bicultural models of governance and management to be both equitable and practical. Kahuwaero recognised how the turnover of people altered organisational capabilities suggesting that the people and relationships are at the core of the bicultural journey.

6.1.2 Along the educational road: Accountability systems

> *"The more money we got, the more requirements we had to meet…."*
>
> Margaret Wollerman

According to Geraldine McDonald, the drive to create a curriculum and systems of accountability for early childhood in New Zealand reflected international shifts in how the role of government within education was understood, and reflected "*government attempting to get a grip on things and particularly … blame it on the teachers – whatever 'it' is".*

For those involved in the process, the creation of the early childhood curriculum was complex and political. Val Burns suggested that she hoped it would be developed by Anne Meade and Maris O'Rourke. Mary Bramwell recalled that she, Helen May and Maureen Locke:

> *…were going to actually put a proposal in to write this curriculum, okay? And the university got wind of it, and of course it had to go through the university. So that's when Margaret Carr came into the equation.*

The working groups formed to develop aspects of the curriculum. Mary and Maureen worked on the curriculum for infants and toddlers, taking their drafts into centres for consideration:

> *Some of the drafts have been amazing. The document we've got now is very sterile and quite prescriptive. But if you look in some of the earlier drafts, they were rich – they were rich in information, and it got all edited out basically. And that's what happens when the government gets into the process.*

Radical as such a document was, the first national curriculum for early childhood education anywhere in the world (May & Carr, 1999; Nuttall, 2003), it was surprisingly well received when it finally appeared. Perhaps this was because it looked remarkably like what was already happening in many early childhood centres. For example, within playcentre, Robbie Burke observed a degree of "*arrogance"* that *"Te Whāriki is playcentre".*

Although Alison Leonard considered that on its own, *Te Whāriki* is limited as there is very little in the document about the "*how"* of early childhood teaching, Jo Kelly has seen that within childcare centres, *Te Whāriki* has been a major force for change, prompting major rethinking of teaching and learning.

According to Geraldine McDonald, *Te Whāriki* was setting a national standard, and was intended to hold centres to account: because "… *even though it isn't written like that, it's a document that makes people accountable".* Accountability systems for early childhood came powerfully with the Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices (DOPs), which became compulsory for bulk-funded centres in 1998 (Ministry of Education, 1998). As a result, systems of assessment and appraisal effectively became mandatory (as they were linked to funding), and documentation of children's learning took on new significance. In fact, several participants commented on documentation of children's activity as starting to define what it is that e.c. teachers do; they document. Joan described

documentation as "*always"* on the minds of e.c. teachers and that "*sitting writing"* gets in the way of interacting with children. Pam Hanna agreed: *"You can get carried away and not have time to actually be working with the children"*. Several participants suggested that time spent on documentation within early childhood services was "*over the top"* and Marie Bell described the need for *"form filling and bureaucracy"* as stifling "*women's contributions"*.

While documentation using learning stories (Carr, 2001) is envisaged as being more than evidence of teachers' accountability, Jo Kelly's observation was that it was only in the very best centres that parents were showing interest in documentation about their child. Other participants suggested that learning stories are too often done superficially. Usually prompted by a photograph, the learning stories can be used to document what was described by Joan Kennett as *"Oo that's interesting!"* moments, and by Pam Hanna as *"Wow!" or "Rah rah!".* According to Pam, a learning story:

> *… may have had no significance to the child really or their learning whatsoever – but it reads beautifully and we can all say 'How wonderful it was' and 'Mum added that and we put a few photos and the whole looks lovely'. (She bats her eyelids) (Laughter).*

Several participants used the term 'surveillance' to describe what was happening for children in early childhood settings. For Beverley Morris, it was "*almost fascist"* how children were measured and assessed, accommodated and set on trajectories:

> *Where I prefer a more democratic freedom. Let them come as they want, come as they will; take part, adjust to whatever comes for them. Too much documentation. Will they ever want to look at the documentation? The photos? …*
>
> *What I've seen in childcare centres is that children are regimented. Too often. Even little two-year olds. How do you stop that sort of thing by photographing them?*

Compliance requirements have increased the administrative workload for early childhood centres and organisations, while those available to pick up voluntary work have changed considerably. Several participants spoke of how voluntary organisations like playcentre have a smaller pool of support to draw on because of the larger number of mothers returning to work rather than staying home. But Margaret Wollerman and Marie Bell both were concerned about reduced support for voluntary organisations more generally. Margaret commented on how both the introduction of weekend shopping and later age for retirement affected who was available to support voluntary organisations.

However, for Robbie Burke, the health of playcentre, as a voluntary organisation, was particularly troubling with smaller families meaning decreased institutional knowledge as families moved through playcentre more quickly. Members had to pick up leadership roles with only a few years of playcentre experience and this was happening at the same time as administration and compliance requirements were also increasing. According to Robbie, too often this happened without the personal support of previous officeholders, which Robbie described as playcentre's "*oral tradition"*. As a result, she said that "*institutional knowledge"* was *"falling through the cracks".*

Looking back on her own experiences of learning on the job, Robbie recalled joining the Committee of Management for Canterbury Playcentre Association. There were people with 19 years of experience, she recalled, and their approach to Robbie as a new member was not unlike supporting a child in a play environment. They allowed her to *"play with whatever the task was"* while supporting her learning.

More recent versions of playcentre are different, according to Robbie. Those in authority within playcentre are caught between playcentre's traditional *"grassroots up"* approach where systems could be changed through democratic

process, and the top-down non-negotiable regulations and accountability requirements:

> *We've got some saying 'But you're not listening to us anymore!'. And we've got this side saying 'But we can't afford to listen because these are the rules'.*

Some playcentre regional associations have opted for paid management systems, leading to a concentration of power and knowledge in employees who:

> *… just don't know what the other people don't know. … They hang around for a while and because they're maybe paid to do a job, people give them more jobs to do because 'they're paid to do it and I'm not'... they build on their knowledge all the time, so they're becoming very powerful.*

In addition playcentre associations such as Canterbury have radically reduced the ways in which parents can get involved in association committees. In Robbie's opinion, association systems were starting to look less like support for centres, and more like inspection.

Perhaps because of the limited democratic participation in management at regional association level, the democratic impulse appeared erratic at federation level. Robbie reported that there were no remits brought for debate to the 2006 conference, which had occurred just prior to the interview. Within the federation itself, she also saw:

> *Not a lot of trust. … (Something) has happened to destroy the trust that the Fed Officers can get on and do what they were elected to do.*

6.1.3 Summary

The educationalising processes have applied to all e.c. providers, enabling conduits for ethical and social justice projects, such as honouring the Treaty, as well as the government's compliance requirements. What it meant in practice to 'honour the treaty' has exercised early childhood organisations and was an area of *"trial and*

error" within TTPOOA-NZCA, according to Kahuwaeru Katene, and a lot of "*drama"* within playcentre, according to Robbie Burke.

Accountability requirements and frequent pedagogical documentation troubled some participants, with Marie Bell suggesting that systems of bureaucracy were not women's ways of engaging with young children.

Voluntary organisations, particularly playcentre, have struggled to maintain their democratic focus. Contributing to this was the reduced capacities of volunteers (usually mothers) to take on the increasingly complex management requirements. Whereas Barbara Chapman, as a past Playcentre Federation president, spoke of its unity of purpose in the transition period of the '*Before 5'* reforms, Robbie Burke's description of playcentre in 2006 was of an organisation in trouble. So the organisation that advocated most consistently for 'free play' was struggling.

6.2 Theory and practice in e.c. teacher education

"Oh dear! She hasn't done Course 1 or 2.
She doesn't know what scaffolding is, as a term".

Ailsa Densem (imagining how Gwen Somerset might be 'welcomed' as a new playcentre parent in 2006)

This section focuses on what Shaw (2006, p. xii) described as the "constant challenge" of teacher education in attempting to strike "a balance between the theoretical and practical aspects of training". This section covers two areas of teacher education raised by participants: the decreasing use of experiential adult education methods; and observations that recent graduates have limited capacity to support learning through play.

6.2.1 Moving away from experiential learning for adults

"… the workshops were dropped – the practical workshops…"

Alison Leonard

Moving around e.c.e. centres as facilitators of professional development, Jo Kelly and Pam Hanna said that they saw less confidence about the teacher's role within the areas of play. Similarly, all those participants with recent experience of teacher education identified a major shift away from experiential education and towards theory and research. Lynda Boyd noted that this was evident in what appeared in New Zealand 'e.c.' journals. When she was a kindergarten teacher, she would read the *Playcentre Journal* and there was an emphasis on understanding the "*value of an area of play*", such as clay: "*Now we're talking about theorists and we're using words like pedagogy and it's different. It's different."* She wondered if those in e.c. teacher education have *"gone too far the other way"*:

> *And do teachers actually not know about play and how children learn?…. Sometimes I wonder, if we're so excited about the idea of the 'teacher as an academic' and a 'teacher as a professional' that we've put some postgraduate material in to an undergraduate qualification.*

Alison Leonard and Noreen Moorhouse concurred that compulsory play-based workshops were diminished, if not been eliminated, from TTPOOA-NZCA training with the move from certificate level training to the Diploma of Teaching Early Childhood. Noreen said that in Northland where playcentre influence was strong, workshops continued, but they were not happening in other parts of the country. Alison had retired from TTPOOA- NZCA before the diploma course was introduced, but she was aware that:

> *When we were doing the certificate, we always did the dough workshop and the block workshop, music workshops and the science workshops. …. But if you don't know about the varieties of doughs or fingerpaints – how do you work with children? And I think a lot of those things are just passed on from staff to staff and are diluted in doing so.*

According to Noreen Moorhouse, the shift away from experiential focus on 'areas of play' has also meant less emphasis on children having choices, and a more controlling attitude amongst the teachers.

Marie Bell was exasperated by the changes she saw in teacher education to eliminate "*messy"* areas like the child study, which she suggested reflected how teacher educators had become more conforming in their attitudes towards those in authority, alongside a tendency toward standardisation.

The closure of kindergarten colleges in the early 1970s and their integration into teachers colleges was commented at length by those participants affected by it. Marie Bell was brought into the Department of Education to oversee that process which:

> *… was a big job because the kindergarten teachers were paid much less and they didn't have degrees on the whole, and so of course, the colleges wanted to give (the jobs) to the primary lecturers, and they succeeded in lots of cases.*

In Wellington Mary Purdy and Val Burns were amongst those affected. According to Mary, the quality of the programme for e.c. teachers changed radically. They *"lost spontaneity"* as well as much less "*actually doing things"*.

Changes more recently in playcentre meant less emphasis on areas of play, and according to Robbie Burke, less responsive to parent/centre requests for workshops. According to Robbie Burke, whereas previously playcentre parents could request a workshop and the playcentre association would organise it for them:

> *Now it is: 'Are you up to Course 2 or Course 3?'*
>
> *'No'.*
>
> *'Well, you can't actually do that workshop until that point.'*
>
> *So it's actually blocking that responding to 'the needs of families' side of it. It's fitting into prescribed training and it's real pressure.*

Robbie described this as "*blocking"* playcentre's ability to respond to families' interests and needs and instead prioritising predetermined progressions through playcentre courses.

6.2.2 Shrinking play-based knowledge

"I'd be surprised if some students even noticed the blocks…"

Lynda Boyd

Without exception, all those participants still active in early childhood centres talked about the importance of being able to engage young children in extended meaningful conversation; knowing when to observe and when to intervene in children's play. They considered that recent graduates had less understanding about children's play and the learning potential within an area of play. The areas most frequently referred to were blocks and fantasy play.

Barbara Chapman described how during her years in teacher education and particularly with the introduction of the bachelor's degree in early childhood education, she saw the course become "*definitely… more theoretical"*, and the "*devolution"* of play:

> *… most of the curriculum area material went. So, I presume they were expected to learn all that on the job – in their teaching practice. But there was no more science and drama and you know, arts and crafts and all that kind of thing.*

Alison Leonard, who had taken a leadership role in early training programmes within TTPOOA-NZCA, acknowledged the practical skills learned in centre-based learning, but suggested there would be limitations as well. She reflected that much of what a student teacher learns in a busy centre would be its habits, and perhaps not so much *"the values and possibilities"*. Similarly, Jo Kelly observed that a new

generation of Associate Teachers supervising e.c. student teachers on practicum had limited practical experience themselves.

Both Joan Kennett and Mary Alice Bramwell, who were working daily in early childhood centres, said that amongst student teachers and even recent graduates, there was little understanding about the mathematical learning potential in unit blocks. Recent graduates showed little interest in, for example, ensuring the blocks are displayed in an orderly mathematical fashion. Joan described how, she had to keep "*quietly"* re-tidying the "*higgledy-piggledy"* blocks because:

> *… they're not mathematical if they're just piled back. I find it hard to teach (the younger teachers) that….*

Despite unit blocks being "*the best opportunity"* for children to learn maths and physics, Mary Bramwell said that *"when teachers do not know how and why to use the blocks, all you see is squabbles*". An understanding of 'schemas' can help the teacher theorise and facilitate children working in contested spaces such as with the blocks:

> *… if you get two children in the block area and one's got a linear or a horizontal trajectory schema, they want to put the blocks along the ground – round about three – give or take. But then you've got the four-year-olds who are actually into the vertical trajectory and they want it built up and of course there's a fight because you're going up and somebody wants to get the blocks from here and go there.*

Open-ended materials, like paint, clay and wood, are used by adult artists and artisans, yet Pam Hanna and Jo Kelly suggested that their potentials were truncated because e.c. teachers did not have the depth of knowledge needed to work with the resources.

As a result, Pam considered that there is tendency to direct four-year-olds towards "*pernickety"* activities, rather than "*encouraging that deeper and deeper use of*

(open-ended) materials". Pat Penrose agreed, describing the resourcing of many centres as limiting children's thinking, and asking:

> *Where's the continuous ongoing play and activity that children need in order to reflect and develop ideas? …. Where's the resources they can use, if they need them, like extra wood for carpentry? It's very platicised and protected and enclosed…*

Jo Kelly wondered if aesthetics played a part: open-ended resources *"… don't necessarily look to an adult eye so beautiful"*, while Pat Hubbard was more pragmatic. She suggested that limiting access to open ended resources perhaps reflected teachers desire to limit the amount of time spent "*putting things away*."

A related issue, related in that it is a basic to interacting with young children, was the importance the participants placed on knowing when and how to intervene in children's play. The participants raised two areas: conversations with children generally; and the adults' roles in children's fantasy play.

Meaningful conversations between children and adults have been a "*hobbyhorse*" of Anne Meade's for several decades. Her recent work with a Centre of Innovation was a cheering experience for her. She saw increased evidence of conversations that showed real enjoyment.

However, Lynda Boyd wondered whether there was sufficient emphasis in teacher education courses on language and interaction with children:

> *I'm probably biased, but I still say that where you see trained teachers and that's mostly in kindergarten … you do see a different level of conversation with children.*
>
> *But you know, I go into centres and if they talk to a child, it's about 'Have you remembered to go to the toilet?' Or 'Have you washed your hands? It's kai time.' That's not conversation…*

The role of the Associate Teacher, the centre-based teacher who has responsibility for the experience of students on teaching placement, was seen by some as pivotal in student teachers developing such capabilities. However this is problematic because their own practices, or centre norms, may not encourage it. As a visiting lecturer within early childhood centres, Lynda said that sometimes she was "*bored stiff*":

> *… I sit and watch what's happening for the children – Lordy, lordy – this is boring. And you (rarely hear) fascinating conversations ….*

The basic issue, several said, was sensitivity to the child and respect for the child's play. Several described the art of knowing 'when to step in' and when to 'butt out' as being basic for an e.c. teacher to grasp. According to Pam Hanna, this is particularly important when children spend full days in e.c. settings:

> *So people have to even be more tuned into children to recognise when the child really is absorbed in something and actually can be left to get on with it by themselves for quite a lot of time; and they don't have to be interrupted right now to come and do something else.*

This sensitivity is tested when children are absorbed fantasy play. Barbara Chapman described a successful episode of fantasy play as being one in which:

> *… the adult was not a key to it continuing. Where the children were as engaged with each other as they were with the adult. …. Where the ideas were coming from the children and being reinforced and encouraged by the adult – that would be the kind of thing that I'd be looking forward. You don't see much of it really (laughter).*

Several participants questioned the capacity of practicum centres to ensure that graduates had sufficient hands-on experience with children, but especially how well practicum centres worked as sites for learning the practical and theoretical aspects of children's play, with Pam Hanna indicating that training institutions were not necessarily able to access "*real quality services" for their student teaching placements.*

In addition, Lynda Boyd suggested that older teachers in centres can be "*anxious"* and "*fazed"* by the ability of younger teachers, and sometimes student teachers, *to "spout theory till the cows come home"*. The younger generation, she suggested, might need to be encouraged to recognise what they need to learn from established teachers who had different backgrounds and a depth of knowledge in areas, such as in play-based learning.

Field-based training was described by several as providing a richer experiential training ground than do campus-based teacher education. Noreen Moorhouse saw a significant difference: *"… between learning about a child crying and actually experiencing a nursery with a lot of crying babies in it…"* She also pointed out that a student on practicum is experiencing an environment where they are surplus to the normal teacher:child ratios.

Several participants observed that e.c. teachers appear to be getting younger as training requirements edge out unqualified teachers, including mature women. Trish Gargiulo described as *"bosomy mums"* those teachers whose ability to interact with children, especially infants and toddlers, existed without formal training:

> *What they have is responsiveness and an empathy to children. … They're talking to them, they're chuckling; they're tweaking, they're laughing, they're singing rhymes. They're doing everything. They're untrained; but they've got the X factor. And there's a lot of those people in centres who are going to be squeezed out. And they're very special people.*

Joan Kennett remembered that when she first opened a childcare centre, the staff were all mothers, mostly with playcentre backgrounds, who she described as "*more tolerant"*.

In addition, Anne Meade observed that the current *"churn rate"* in centres, (that is, the high turnover of staff), is in part a reflection of the playing out of policies

towards credentialising the e.c. teaching workforce. She expected that the churn rate would decrease as the workforce stabilises, but in the meantime *"Children can suffer with the high turnover"* as teachers need to focus on getting *"to know each other better"* after each staff change.

Through teacher education Lynda Boyd could see clear differences between what she was trained to do, which involved creating table-top activities ("*that every four-year-old needs"*) and what was asked of recent graduates who are more focused on understanding the individual child. Similarly, Trish Gargiulo described how kindergarten teaching has become more engaged with children through taking responsibility each for a group of children because:

> *… some kids are adroit at avoiding learning …. They don't learn across the board as we believe when we provide this supermarket of activities – they don't.*

However, in her recent visits to e.c. centres, Beverley Morris continued to see a lack of sensitivity, a lack of empathy for children's individuality, despite an increasing number of qualified teachers. The structure of the programme, she said, suited the adults. The child, she said, "*has to fit in to the pattern of the daily routine*." She queried whether teacher education can teach empathy.

Theorising excellent practice, according to Anne Meade, can be "*opaque"* to the reader, yet remaining clearly evident, even if inarticulatable, to the observer. In working with a Centre of Innovation, Anne found that although their *"pedagogical practice has become far more complex",* attempts by teachers to write up the changes read like *"a string of rhetoric".*

Such knowledge can be understood to be situated within a context, and as Anne described, easily lost in translation. Emphasising the abstract and theoretical alongside extensive compliance requirements that enable inspection and review can lead to a distancing from situated knowledge; what Jo Kelly termed "*grounded*

practice". She proposed that when theory is grounded in practical experience, it stands the tests of time, but that theory can be less about experience and more about keeping up with others in the field.

Several participants wondered whether the emphasis in teacher education on theory and compliance had the effect of squeezing out self-knowledge and personal philosophy. The *"academicisation of early childhood"*, according to Jo, is "*a little bit prone"* to "*leading people into fixed beliefs"*. She suggested that this reflected a tendency for *"everybody leaping for the new".*

An e.c. teacher education programme, according to Lynda Boyd, is *"a political beast"* and e.c. teacher graduates have to earn their status alongside other teachers, and to be "*as good, if not better, than primary and secondary teachers."*

Shifts in preferred theoretical frameworks were noted by several participants. Both Marie Bell and Geraldine McDonald suggested that any situation can be analysed by multiple theoretical frameworks. As Geraldine said: "*Most theories have a grain of truth and something that is wrong as well." Marie Bell went further; theories have to "chime in with the times" in order to be "taken up".*

Foregrounding family culture, as emphasised by Te Whāriki, (Ministry of Education, 1996) can position e.c.e. as a site for consumer activity privileging parental preferences and home culture. For Marie Bell, culture has been prioritised too highly within education circles, and ran the risk of becoming a fixed notion, but: "… culture is not static and what angers me about it is, you know, going back to some past era." As an example, she talked about female circumcision.

Several participants worried about parents' culturally appropriate expectations which ran counter to 'free play'; for example, for academic achievement or clean clothes, or limitation on physical risk taking. In the encounter between parents and early childhood teachers, some participants recognised potential for teachers

(especially those without a strong understanding of play theory) to be swayed by parental pressure.

Integrating aspects of the past with new insight is an ongoing process, but several participants still active in the early childhood community reported pressure to not only embrace sociocultural theorising, but also to effectively renounce other theories. Marie expressed amazement that Vygotsky's theories were being taught in preference to Susan Isaacs, and that psychoanalytic interpretations of children"s play were being written off as "*Freudian*". She dismissed such labeling as not grappling with substance, but rather representing "*a bland sort of wiping".*

Amongst those with decades of observation of children learning and playing, Pam Hanna reported that continuity is clearly evident, but change is emphasised. She has witnessed *"a lot of people being told"* that *"there has to be a discontinuity":*

> *That Piaget's wrong and Vygotsky's right, for example. And therefore what you understood or might have believed in, or worked with before is inherently therefore wrong, bad… And you have to change your thinking to get wherever this Holy Grail is ….*

There was no precise indication from the participants as to the source of the pressure to privilege Vygotsky's theories and sociocultural frameworks. However, government-funded professional development programmes for e.c. centres is one site where this has happened (Blaiklock, 2010). I also recognise this within my own experience as professional development (PD) facilitator (1992-2002) in which I was part of team directly challenging early childhood centre practices in several key ways. Particularly important from the late 1990s was the need for the sector, and individual centres, to show accountability for government funding through strong quality assurance systems that focused on planning for, and then assessing children's learning (Ministry of Education, 1998). We relied heavily on the PD kit (videos and support material) developed by Margaret Carr and colleagues (Carr, 1998) to illustrate how centres could assess and document children's learning

within a sociocultural framework, while also meeting the new accountability requirements. Further support for assessment through sociocultural frameworks was developed later in *Kei tua o te pae* (Ministry of Education, 2004/2007/2009), which was also delivered through government-contracted PD programmes (Perkins, 2006).

6.2.3 Summary

The research findings indicate not only a dynamic tension between theoretical and practical teaching/learning understandings of teaching young children, but also significant changes in which theoretical frameworks are privileged within both teacher education programmes and within government-supported professional development initiatives in e.c. centres. The participants described how, as part of the introduction of higher level tertiary qualifications for early childhood teachers, 'old' knowledge about children's learning, such as about 'free play', was replaced with more academic and theoretical studies. Those active in teacher education spoke of the struggle to raise the status of e.c.e. teacher education programmes within tertiary institutions. They also queried whether in-depth knowledge about play theory and practices resided in early childhood centres, in part because of the significant turnover of staff occurring as qualifications standards have incrementally raised for e.c. teachers since 2002. There was also, some participants suggested, more emphasis amongst recent graduates on thinking in terms of meeting compliance requirements, rather than emphasising a robust personal philosophy of teaching.

Multiple participants described how 'old' theorising and philosophies, within which play and 'free play' could be understood, had lost credibility. Marie Bell referred to psychoanalytic explanations; Pam Hanna referred to Piagetian ideas; Beverley Morris referred to democratic principles. Several referred to specific capacities, such as the ability to work mathematically with blocks, while Alison Leonard

pointed out a gap between the national curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996) and practical knowledge required, she felt, of early childhood teachers.

There was also a recurring theme that accountability systems, and in particular documentation of children, could be privileged above engagement with children and understanding their play. Pam Hanna spoke of the dominance of sociocultural theorising within early childhood circles. If support for home culture is foregrounded by early childhood teachers and if family culture does not support learning through play, then play becomes a negotiable, rather than a given in early childhood settings. There was concern expressed that when play-based learning is critiqued by parents (e.g. 'too messy'), recent graduates were seen as being less able to engage thoughtfully and to critically explore with parents why a contentious activity or area of is offered to children. As has happened with generations prior, this generation of parents is not necessarily convinced of the 'value of learning through play'.

6.3 A community ambivalent

This section focuses on how attitudes and ideas about children's play move between people who collectively share responsibility. Several key findings are emphasised. One is that parents were frequently seen as being anxious. The second area is related: how are children's safety and risk managed when adults are anxious?

6.3.1 A community that reflects anxiety? Restrictions?

"I've got to say that I err on the side of letting children go. (But) my mother would say 'Be careful!'. Now two children before me had died. (In accidents?) No, one had died prematurely… and the other one was about 15 months and she got pneumonia. But just the same, you see… she wanted to raise me to adulthood; and she did a marvellous job, but she couldn't help being scared…"

Ailsa Densem

Across the interviews, there was a consistent theme that children in contemporary New Zealand society were more restricted, and that parents appeared to be more anxious. As Ailsa Densem's reflection (above) indicates, anxiety is not restricted to modern parents. Yet the participants' observations suggest that children are seen as less capable of managing danger than the participants recall in earlier eras in their own lives. The two phenomena are closely related. Joan Kennett considered that when she was raising children, "*children were more trusted"*, and able to take on responsibilities that "*we don't expect of children nowadays"*. She described how her four-year-old daughter Tina could be trusted to "*go up to the shop and do the shopping for me"*. The shopkeeper reported how Tina would count the money, and when the shopkeeper would tease, Tina stood her ground: *"I've got the correct money and I'm not giving you any more!"*

Parents were described by participants as:

- "*tired, tired, tired*", "*working longer and longer hours"* (Trish Gargiulo);
- "needing training" (Ailsa Densem);
- fearful that children *"could miss out"* (Barbara Chapman)
- potentially becoming "*too dominant in their efforts to be a good parent"* (Val Burns);
- "*rushing rushing rushing"* and *"working far too hard"* (Joan Kennett);
- having "*an ambitious streak*" and worried about children being able to get "*a good job*", as well as having "*much more interest in getting academic qualifications" and "pressuring" early childhood teachers"* (Mary Purdy).

Adding to the anxiety can be expectations to keep parents informed about accidents. Lynda Boyd saw accidents becoming more significant because they were recorded, and wondered whether "*modern parents"* were being encouraged to see minor accidents as a *"big deal".* However, children's minor accidents are, Lynda was clear, a normal part of children's experiences.

Several stories were told by different participants to illustrate parental insecurity especially as regards their status as parents alongside the child's need to be educated. Joan described a mother who acted guilty because she kept her son away from childcare for a day at home:

> *I felt guilty myself that she felt like that because obviously he would have had a lovely day playing with his mother.*

Similarly Robbie Burke recalled talking with a young mother of a two-year old who had decided to leave playcentre and go back to her career as a *"checkout chick"*. This young mother, was according to Robbie, one example of many parents who were getting the message that, particularly if "*you're lacking confidence"* and not really prepared for parenting, that they are:

> *…'probably not much good at parenting' and 'better off in the workforce': I was thinking, 'How sad to miss out. They're only little for such a short time.*

Val Burns was outraged that the distinction was made in policy documents between 'parent-led' and 'teacher-led' services, which occurred in the 10 year strategic plan (Ministry of Education, 2002). While that distinction helped facilitate the credentialising of the teaching workforce, it not only suggested to Val that there was "*no one in the Ministry who fought for playcentre",* it also indicated a hierarchy of services which, according to Val, linked into parental worries:

> *… no parent goes to a parent-led centre really unless you're middle class and well educated and have got some deep beliefs. The ordinary person in the street thinks 'Ooh, teacher, I'll have to go to teacher-led' …*

Concerns about safety are not just higher amongst parents. As a grandparent, Pat Hubbard reflected that she would not allow her grandchildren to play in the "*little park up the lane by themselves without an adult"*, but she would have let her own children do so when they were young.

Noreen Moorhouse's experiences suggest that modern parents' anxiety may reflect an increased personal responsibility for parenting choices. Unlike earlier generations, the current generation of parents, she said, has had more choices regarding if and when they have babies. Often they start families later and are well informed about what can go wrong:

> *I think the good Lord meant us to have our children younger because we are not so involved in what might happen to them; we don't have that awareness of what might happen – so (the children) get a more normal, free-flowing upbringing……*

Similarly Beverley Morris suggested that the size of families could be relevant to the restrictions put on children. Smaller families can demarcate a shorter timeframe for parenting young children. In addition, each child can have greater significance. When parents have only one or two children, Beverley suggested, they have all their "*eggs in one basket".*

When she was parenting in the 1970s and 1980s, Barbara Chapman felt that there was more confidence that children would turn out okay. In contrast, she felt children were now not "*left to play for the sake of playing, not the way they used to be":*

> *We always knew they were learning through what they were doing... and I'm not wanting to say we were necessarily better or worse, but I don't think we were so hung up about (mock horror) 'what did he learn from stacking those milk bottles?!' (laughter).*

Similarly, Pat Hubbard saw that in her early days in childcare in Dunedin, there was less a sense of trying to see the experience as being educational, and more about sharing "*real life with the child"*:

> *…We used to take children everywhere with us, you know – the post office, the bank. … We didn't have a flash playground so we took children for walks and for picnics.*

But it was kind of living life with children instead of the feeling that we had to be constantly trying to educate children.

Children were observed as more hurried. Joan Kennett saw this particularly amongst the younger mothers, who *"don't have the patience to wait"* for their children. Jo Kelly saw speed and surveillance disempowering for children as *"they don't go anywhere without an adult organising it"*. Usually in cars, they do not have time to "*wander and wonder"*.

Similarly Margaret Wollerman, who was the only participant to raise the impending introduction of 20 'free' hours of education for 3-4 year olds, said the idea of three-year-olds *"bundled off en masse"* horrified her:

The time in an early childhood setting may not be 'preparing the child for school' but it may be institutionalising these children at a time when they could benefit more from being in a home situation….

Engagement with 'real life', that is, not cut off by a fence from adults and the rest of society, was similarly seen as important for young children. This was particularly problematic for children in long-day environments. Because extended time inside the fence means that children's lives have been shrunk to "*very circumscribed situations"*, Anne Meade, as a grandmother to four-year-old Isabel, had started taking her out of her childcare centre for two hour lunch breaks:

Yesterday, I took her out to a park for a while and she wanted to climb a tree in the garden. 'What are her parents going to say about this?' (Pretending to bite her nails). I was a bit anxious, but I let her have a go at climbing this tree… so she was wriggling out on the branch at my head height. …

I wanted her to have more risk, do something with a bit more risk to it than she would have got in the centre. It was her initiative, and I'd already worked out previously that she's wanting to get high – she talks about lookouts. It's part of her schema…

I don't think kids have enough opportunities to go and yak to the butcher, or engage with a much wider range of people and age groups. At the park yesterday we banged up against a woman with about 4 or 5 adults who quite

> *obviously had mental disabilities …. And Isobel had a batman t-shirt on, and the adults went 'Oh, batman!' and laughed at her, and she laughed with them. That sort of 'mixing it' is not so common…*

This theme, that early childhood settings position children in a parallel community, was raised with concern by several participants. While ICT in early childhood settings has the effect of expanding the *boundaries* of what can be accessed via the internet from within a centre environment, Beverley Morris saw it as being *"more healthy"* for children to be involved in *"community work, community effort"*.

Pointing out that trips into workplaces were increasingly difficult to organise because of health and safety restrictions, Trish Gargiulo recalled:

> *We used to head off to the milk factory – pig farm – all those places with children. The learning is phenomenal. Don't have that now. There's OSH; there's regs.*

Such forays represented to Trish the value of building up *"a file of experiences and associated language",* something which longitudinal studies indicate are the building blocks of learning. Perhaps the heightened concerns about safety reflected, Pat Hubbard suggested, that *"a lot of city people"* are scared of *"the outdoors".*

6.3.2 A community in which safety is dangerous?

> *"So there's this cleanliness and safety thing and we've sanitised growing up…"*
>
> Lynda Boyd

The participants stated strongly that children are seen as needing more protection. Several described children as being seen as overly 'precious', leading to what Pat Penrose called the *"Let's keep it safe"* mindset.

Several participants spoke passionately about how accidents, even a broken limb, should not be seen as reasons for curtailing children's activity. Accidents, they said, are 'inevitable'. Pat Hubbard expressed the conundrum well:

> *No matter how careful you are, you can't totally avoid accidents. So how hard should we try? Most ordinary accidents children easily recover from.*

Several said that safety was always contested, and that to say something was safe was only to give the illusion of safety because there was always scope for something to go wrong. Wendy Logan described in detail 'her' worst accident which involved a boy pushed backwards by another child during a kindergarten mat time. He hit the back of his head on the floor and went into seizures. How can that be prevented? she asked.

No one was promoting deliberate accidents. Some appreciated how safe fall surfaces in playgrounds had replaced the widespread use of concrete. But several spoke strongly about the power of an accident for children to viscerally understand fear and danger, which can be found, according to Noreen Moorhouse throughout the areas of play:

> *… from hammers to knives on dough tables, to saws, to climbing trees to swinging on other things or making a swing and finding it comes to bits - it's a vital part of learning.*

There was a broad agreement amongst the participants that young children require physical activity which has inherent risks, because:

> *… if you take all the risks away, then it isn't challenging. And then they don't extend themselves physically, they don't learn to balance and to make judgement… (Pat Hubbard)*

> *… if we inhibit our children from (ever having accidents) then we inhibit the skills they learn. Which makes them more accident prone. (Pat Penrose)*

….. They are never going to know what is too high if they haven't tried jumping off things of different heights. Just telling them is not going to convince them anyway. (Barbara Chapman)

Playground standards, which were being reviewed at the time of some interviews, were seen as too restrictive. Trish Gargiulo saw children's learning being diminished within overly safety-conscious playgrounds:

For me, there's not the challenge. There's not the experience. Children's aren't gaining spatial perception. They're not gaining upper body strength. They're not gaining a lot of social stuff and challenging stuff. And I think it's really damaging for children …. And the less children are exposed to those situations, the more vulnerable they are going to be and therefore become self-fulfilling. See? That's why we've got all these regulations.

This was particularly concerning for children who spent long days in institutional settings, and especially, Trish proposed, for boys:

They need more space; they need more physical experiences, they need drama - outside. They can learn socially and language – all those sort of things – they need a large space. Otherwise there's a lot of aggression; overcrowded. They need all the stuff and we simply don't cater for it.

What do children learn through accidents? According to Pat Penrose, accidents teach:

…. how to take care of yourself; how to make sure that you're safe; what do you do when you're in pain and in an emergency; caring for others who might have had an accident or be in pain. Because sooner or later in your life, that's going to happen; and again it's a set of skills you can learn quite early.

Accidents also teach about service to others and about healing. Kahuwaero Katene drew on her own experience as a young child experiencing her grandfather's gifts as a healer:

…. he always knew when to come to visit us, when someone's been hurt or someone's had a fall or something, he'd always come, he'd chant away. He'd rub our arms, you know. We'd all go and line up, you know 'Sore here, Koro – sore! There, ae! Sore!' and he'd rub it and he'd chant away there, he'd take

> *us down to the water and our mother said to him, 'You shouldn't be using the water, that's not good'. But grandfather said, 'Who do you think gave the water?' You know, so he always used the water as a source of healing with children.*

Allowing children to get dirty and even accepting that young children will get sick, was seen as basic to being healthy. For Barbara Chapman, this was received wisdom from her grandfather, a doctor who was:

> *… adamant that children had to be allowed to get dirty. He said they will never build up immunity to infection and things if they're kept in a sterile environment.*

Parents' anxieties were seen as restricting children's physical activity. Mary Bramwell observed that because of parents' hygiene concerns, babies were often in carseats, rather than on their backs on the floor, slowing children's physical development.

Institutional hygiene requirements were also marginalising some traditional play areas. Lynda Boyd felt that messy activities like fingerpainting were made more difficult, and therefore less likely to be set up, by hygiene-inspired restrictions on group handwashing. What had previously been acceptable (that children can all wash hands in a nearby bucket of water) was seen as unhygienic, she said, and extra supervision was often needed for children moving with painty hands to clean up individually in a sink using running water.

Three participants independently offered a 'allow it now, or regret it later' working theory about children and risk taking; namely that allowing young children to encounter (hopefully small) dangers will give them not only a visceral experience of managing fear and danger, but also experience of dealing with the aftermath. This, they each said, will have paybacks during adolescence when the drive to take risks is likely to increase and the dangers are higher stakes. Noreen Moorhouse illustrated this thinking:

> *… my own view is that the reason I - as a ordinary John Citizen these days, which is what I am – have to put up with silly idiots going and doing donuts on the road with fast cars when they are about 16, is because they haven't learned to master danger…*

While there is limited scope for legal actions against a supervising teacher or an e.c.e. centre in Aotearoa New Zealand, several participants referred to litigious ways of thinking. The accountability systems required by the government through DOPs (Ministry of Education, 1998) can be seen as the first steps in establishing systems of blame, and potentially liability for accidents. This was picked up by Val Burns, but with a different twist, when she pointed to New Zealand's system of accident compensation as being a buffer against litigation. Her experiences overseas, particularly in Australia and the US, indicated that insurance coverage was restricting what equipment was suitable for children to use.

Another suggestion was that parental attempts to limit children's activities can reflect the difficulties of being a reliable employee. A child's illness or accidents ripples beyond the child and his/her parents affecting a parent's workplace. Parental restrictions on their children may also reflect anxiety arising from violence in the media. Lynda Boyd identified a paradox about parents allowing children to watch violence on television, yet catastrophising small accidents.

Several participants expressed concerns that the combining of institutional efficiencies and concerns for safety means that early childhood settings are over-regimenting children; the restrictions on children's play being only one example. These lead, according to Pam Hanna, towards a "*mechanistic"* childhood arising from management decisions to group children in narrow age bands, within relatively small spaces and with limited access to the outdoors. For several participants, the existing standards for outside space were inadequate: Pat Hubbard described situating early childhood centres "*on top of a three story building"* as "*criminal"* in New Zealand because of how compromised the outdoor

space is. Pam Hanna was more circumspect, calling the minimum standard for outdoor space as "*questionable"*. Yet Barbara Chapman maintained that compared to some other countries, New Zealand's regulations require significant outdoor space: "*How lucky we are that government says you need that*!"

A recurring theme amongst the participants was the importance of giving children responsibilities. Val Burns suggested that:

> *… if you've brought your children up with a certain amount of self-responsibility, I think they're less likely to have accidents, because they've always been in charge of their own safety.*

Several suggested that safety standards in an e.c. setting had to be higher than in a home, but the conundrum was, according to Pat Hubbard, *"How much safer?".*

6.3.3 Summary

This section suggests anxiety and uncertainty reflecting, some participants thought, a heightened sense of responsibility and higher expectations for each child; that very young children should be educated and therefore require a teacher was seen by some participants as problematic. Parents could be seen as less important in a child's life, or alternatively feel uncomfortably responsible. The smaller size of New Zealand families was considered to be one possible explanation for parents' anxieties as there was less time to become confident, as well as having more emotion invested in each child.

Accidents and illness are disruptive, but predictable parts of children's early years, the participants suggested. Accidents have to be managed, but cannot be fully avoided. However focusing on accidents highlights how difficult it is for parents to be reliably available both to their children and to their place of employment.

Separating children from the wider community, and holding them in what Anne Meade called *"fairly circumscribed situations"* dedicated to their education, was

seen as unsatisfactory. Several participants described how trips and outings have become more difficult. Children with active grandparents have options that extend further into the community than may be possible for the children without support systems beyond the nuclear family and an e.c. centre.

6.4 Peepholes and vistas

"Today's children – what's happening to them, will be normal for them and we can analyse it all we like, but that's their normal life."

Noreen Moorhouse

All the participants have a long term perspective on children and families covering decades of family and professional relationships. They have all seen change happen; many have encouraged that change. Working theories – wonderings out loud – are included throughout this section. Some participants agreed with Noreen Moorhouse's confidence (above) about children's adaptability but others were troubled.

6.4.1 Change and continuity

"I'd love somebody to do a study on what happens to the child whose mother's got it in care at three weeks. How much bonding does it have with its mother? She picks it up, she's tired all ready, it resents the change…."

Marie Bell

Young children are still playing and participants recognised similarities with previous generations. Children like doing many of the same things that the participants remembered doing themselves, or remembered their children doing. A toddler's delight at dropping food, or pegs, or sand, is one example referred to. Early childhood environments are still encouraging children to play. In kindergartens, Trish Gargiulo and Wendy Logan agreed, there are still extended periods of freely chosen play; this could be understood as 'free play. But there are

major differences. Trish and Wendy agreed that kindergarten teachers understand children's activity in wider terms and are less likely to believe that freely chosen play is sufficient for the child's learning. They also pointed to professional expectations of teachers to document for assessment and accountability purposes, and that there is greater awareness of, and mitigation against, what can go wrong in terms of accidents.

Similarly, in playcentres and childcare services and in te kohanga reo, children are encouraged to play. And again there are differences. When asked what children were doing during her early days in playcentre during the 1950s, Joan Kennett was quickly contrasting her remembered experiences at playcentre 40 years earlier with what she was observing around her in a childcare setting in 2006. She recalled there was *"… lots more family play than we get nowadays".* The children had been, she thought, more helpful: *"they would clear up fairly well"*. In contrast, the children in her childcare centre used the dress-ups and family play very differently. The children, she said "*wreck the family area"*; that is, "*they put things all over the floor"*, and:

> *I never ever saw that in playcentre and yet we weren't teaching them to be orderly as such; they just seemed to manage to tidy up easier. And they played in not a structured way; they would have games going for days and they'd go back to it and the same child would be mum and the same child would be baby and they modelled on… probably on family life where I don't think these children see family life like that. …*
>
> *I think there is more hitting although we don't condone it, of course. But children are more inclined to be unkind to each other. I never ever saw that in playcentre… might have been country children – but that concerns me that children nowadays seem to be rushed too much…*

What Joan was describing suggests that '*family play'* might serve a different purpose in a setting such as at a playcentre when the child spent more time within a family setting, and less time in an e.c. setting. Noreen Moorhouse's observation of childcare complements Joan's, in that she described how children took their

usual activities and attempted to re-create them in their less usual setting. Noreen recalled that children who spent five days a week in childcare expected to continue those activities at home during the weekend, leading parents to complain:

> *… why didn't I open on Saturday and Sunday? so they could come in then and have play because at home they didn't know what to do.*

Moving with other professionals has required sensitivity to language, as it is an indicator of keeping up with current thinking. Sometimes this has meant trying to engage with (or reject) new terms. Lynda Boyd recalled attempts for the sector to be called '*educare'*, and recognised how the once discarded term '*preschool'* was starting to be used again. She also described the overarching term of *'early childhood education'* as masking the differences between the different e.c. services: "*They're quite different and purposely so".*

What is presented as new was sometimes recognised as familiar as well. With the widespread interest in the Reggio Emilia (RE) approach to early childhood education (Bayes, 2006; Project Zero and Reggio Children, 2001) has come new language for some familiar concepts. Several participants used the RE language of 'the environment as third teacher', which is not so different a concept, they thought, from what they had learned earlier in their careers about the importance of a prepared environment. RE has also brought renewed enthusiasm for children's collaborative sustained projects supported by adults which resonates with John Dewey's work (Dewey, 1909/1956, 1938), which also inspired the progressive educators in this country, including Beverley Morris and others (see for example, Sewell & Bethell, 2009).

However, the new emphasis on projects has made part-time attendance problematic which can feed *"a lack of faith in home"* developing amongst teachers, according to Pat Hubbard. She recalled how within her own teaching practice, a

project could be difficult to sustain. She suggested that a project might start with '*Mary'* on Monday and:

> *… then Mary who has got really interested in this, isn't going to be back until Thursday. Do we shelve it all on Tuesday and Wednesday? Or do we do it, and then she has to catch up?*
>
> *I would stop myself: 'I'm thinking it would be better for her if she were here all the time'. But actually she is probably doing really wonderful stuff with her mother at home.*

She also pointed to the administrative efficiencies of having only fulltime children in attendance at an e.c. centre that she helped establish:

> *When we first started, we took everybody (including part time children) but I never let it go less than two days – you have to come two days otherwise it is too difficult for the children. But after a while when we were full and had a waiting list, parents said 'Wouldn't it be easier if we only take children who come full time'. Fortunately there were parents on the committee who said, 'But we were setting up this to help women have choices. If they can find an employer who wants to employ them for three days a week, who are we to say we have to have their children everyday?!'*
>
> *And that has been a real question that has gone around in a lot of Wellington centres: Should the centre be deciding that it is better for children to be there all the time rather than being at home some of the time?*

Amongst those actively involved in the politics of childcare, there was a recurring theme of ambivalence about children under two years old in institutional settings. Pat said it most strongly:

> *I think we have oversold centre care for little children in New Zealand. … When it's very good it can be very good, but … I don't think there's much really good care for very little children in centres and I'm not sure that group care makes a lot of sense. I mean they are not really group animals, are they?*

Both Joan Kennett and Noreen Moorhouse emphasised the importance of parent and child spending extended time together. Although she thought some mothers "*have no basis for mothering and childcare helps that often"*, Noreen also believed

that: *"Nobody can look after their child better than the parent, and nobody knows them better than the parents".*

However, across her 30 years in childcare, Joan Kennett has resisted providing care for children under two years old, despite Sonja Davies (the founding president of TTPOOA-NZCA) telling her that parents needed that level of support. Joan felt that is was "*sad"* for mothers to be away from their babies, which reflected, she thought, how she had cared for other people's children for most of her life:

> *But to me… the bonding must go on until they're about 2. You can see it, some children at 2 ½ aren't ready to be in the centre, they're just babies.*

The quality of what is offered the very young varies. Noreen described some services as *"baby farming"* with "*minimum staff*" who are "*stretched right to their limits"*. But while Mary Bramwell summed up services for infants as "*patchy in places", she maintained that* perfection was not an option in a centre or at home: "*… we're never going to get it perfect because your mum, she's not perfect (either)."*

Amongst those who identified as feminists, several participants believed that their legacy was more complex than that mothers should have the option to work. The storylines of many of the participants included prolonged periods out of the workforce when their children were young, and how, through voluntary activity, they had developed leadership skills. When considering voluntary organisations at the time of the interview, Marie saw a leadership void:

> *… where are they? 60 of them in the Ministry (of Education); umpteen of them in the teachers colleges; umpteen of them getting PhDs and it's all fine. But where are the people at the grassroots?*

Having choices as women can be a fraught. Pat Penrose reflected that girls can "*do anything*", but:

... it's not necessarily served them in the best possible way … They often get overworked. They think because they can do, they have to do everything and they do do too many things sometimes.

Marie Bell stated the situation even more strongly, asking "*What have we done to motherhood?".* How policies developed which normalised the extensive use of childcare, she was not fully sure, but she recognised something like a coalition between officialdom and those that were advocating for a robust early childhood sector:

…we used to say, 'If we can't beat them join them', but I think they were saying '(Since) we can't beat them, we'll get them to join us and that will fix them' and I think they have.

As a feminist, she recognised only a partial success which delivered some "*stuff*" but not the feminist "*methods and processes*". The feminists, she said, did not want women to be *"screaming Amazons",* rather:

… we wanted what had been seen as more feminine virtues and I do think just biologically because we have the children and raise them, maybe there's something in us that is more responsible, helps us to live longer, does listen to the wisdom of the elderly….

You know, women having to go into the toilet and express their breast milk in the tea break - for God's sake – it just made it so jolly difficult. That's not what we wanted. … I just do not think you can replicate in a childcare centre, family life….

No, so I don't think you can blame the feminists. I just think it's gone awfully wrong.

But encouraging mothers into the workforce and layering bureaucratic activities on to e.c. teachers, according to Marie, has "*nothing to do with kids":*

To do with kids is listening to them, having time, being patient. Making them feel them feel they've got some good about them.

She looked to her mentor Bronfenbrenner who offered the model of a "*three-legged stool"* needed to satisfactorily raise a child. Two legs of the 'stool' are the mother and the child. The third leg is support from "*the wider community"* which could take many forms. Part of what she identified as having changed is diminishing community support for mothers. While she was clear that there are variations within "*constants"*, she said, *"basically we're mammals"* requiring bonding between parent and infant.

Unprompted, several participants raised concern about e.c. teachers over-emphasising deliberate instruction, for example, becoming overly focused on literacy and numeracy. Val Burns saw it as a perpetual site for parent education, so as to ensure that parents understood that within play situations, *"reading, maths, writing*" *could be meaningfully introduced.*

Several participants talked about how learning happens regardless of what is intended. Similarly there are multiple 'right ways' to learn and develop, both as adults and as children. This way of thinking encourages multiple lines of experimentation, but it does not necessarily fit in well within prescribed goals and processes.

In arguing for children to have strong experiences within small groups at kindergarten, Trish Gargiulo echoed the sentiments of other participants when she described children as:

> *… not naturally aware as group members; they are only aware of their individual rights and knowledge (so) we have to teach them that they are members of groups.*

Similarly, Jo Kelly and Pam Hanna considered the group experiences within e.c. settings as being how children learn to be part of a larger 'family'; something that may not be possible within their own (often small) biological families. Dramatic

play is necessary for the development of empathy and imagination, they said. Yet narrow age-banding make this less likely to happen.

For Joan Kennett, empathy grows in situations where children are encouraged to be responsible for each other; and where teachers step back and allow children to help each other. She described very young children as being *"very moral"*. She has observed this capacity appearing to diminish as children with age, reflecting perhaps adults' tendency to intervene rather than let children deal with an interpersonal crisis. In contrast, she felt *"it's natural for children to play and be together".* When she lived as part of a Māori community in the 1950s, she realised that from this sustained shared play, children can develop a shared "*empathy for each other".*

From her time in te kohanga reo, Kahuwaero Katene described how children of different ethnicities didn't see their racial differences; that awareness of difference did not come *"till later"*. While working in multicultural e.c. centres, Pat Hubbard found that children of all ages respond to kindness, and that their parents also will accept, she proposed, practices that they might initially dislike, such as messy play, if the teacher genuinely feels and shows affection for the child.

Several participants indicated they did not like being told how to think. This might explain why there was some resistance to being told to follow one theoretical framework, which is what Jo Kelly and Pam Hanna had encountered. Yet despite Piagetian educational theory being allied with discredited Developmentally Appropriate Practices (Dahlberg, et al., 2007), schema theory (Nutbrown, 2006) which is also draws on Piaget's theories, was spoken of enthusiastically by Anne Meade and Mary Bramwell who both spoke extensively about schema approaches to children's play and learning. Anne described schema as an approach which positions the adult/teacher as respectful of children's innate processes of meaning making. Schema theory has led Mary to advocate for separate play spaces for

children under two years old, especially in long day childcare, in which the "*basic play"* is available with adults who know *"what they're doing"* and "*understand the nature of the equipment and what it can teach children"*. Otherwise: *"you've got a recipe for chaos".*

Geraldine McDonald, said that Vygotsky's theories were more than '*scaffolding*' and his activity theory had "*not actually hit New Zealand in any large form"*. Play, as understood within activity theory, Geraldine said, would be understood in multiple ways: through meaningful engagement with equipment, as well as with through social interaction both directly through conversation, and indirectly through the child observing what is happening:

> *… you don't have to keep talking to your child, the child can overhear things that other people say. You don't need to always be there helping the child to do things…*

However, Val Burns said she loathed the term '*activities'*, preferring to talk in terms of "*learning experiences":*

> *Activities (are about) filling in time and that's not what children do, they don't fill in time; they use time and they use it to advance their time of curiosity ….*

Another recurring concern, sometimes stated quite strongly, was a mistrust of commercial childcare. *Noreen Moorhouse described community provision of childcare as "a lost battle", with commercial interests quicker to establish new centres, as well as buying up struggling owner-operator e.c. centres. The corporates tended, she said, to use professional marketing strategies: "very professional looking brochures, everything they say looks wonderful"*, but also to "*standardise centre philosophies"*.

Looking at national politics in 2006, Lynda Boyd described some "*fabulous"* government initiatives, and "*approachable, sympathetic"* Government ministers.

But the expansion of commercial operators, especially international chains, was leading, she said, to "*Kentucky Fried Children"*. In addition, Lynda said that market forces and corporate takeovers in early childhood led to "*corner cutting"* as well attempts to de-professionalise the teaching workforce by *"questioning the qualification".*

The push for participation in e.c.e. was problematic for several participants. Increased participation put pressure on centres to increase their group size, Jo Kelly suggested, and led to children having insufficient space and attention. It also was seen as undermining parents' confidence in themselves. Describing it as a perception that is "*alive and well out there"*, Robbie Burke said normalising children in e.c.e. centres and parents at work can suggest that: *"… unless you're trained as an early childhood educator, you are no good to educate your child".*

This situation troubled a number of the participants. Parenting for them was described by several as difficult, but also as worth both taking seriously and even enjoying. As grandparents, these participants described how parenting was a transforming experience for them; several spoke of still identifying with the parents of very young children, even though their own children were grown up.

The emotional experience of parenting perhaps explains why many of the participants used the affective language when talking about parents and children. Marie Bell wondered whether after a full day's work (for parent and child), the child and parent can "*listen better'? Is there 'more understanding?"* Is there the space to show the child that someone's "*passionate about them?":*

> *… it's all very well to be objective and weigh things up out in the world, but you need someone who thinks you're marvellous.*

For Geraldine McDonald, "*wellbeing"* was basic to assessing the quality of a child's experience, and suggested that people can usually recognise *"happy children"*.

Alison Leonard saw "*creativity"* and "*enjoyment"* as contagious qualities which children need to experience alongside adults:

> *If teachers don't have that love of life, they can't pass it on to children. So I desire teachers to be enthused about life and see its possibilities…. If teachers are enjoying their jobs and their children, they are going to pass that on.*

Her clarity about enjoyment resonates with Lex Grey's reflection that understanding children is impossible without enjoying them. This pleasure in their company is captured when Kahuwaero Katene described how her teacher education many years ago through TTPOOA-NZCA, was evident in her relationships with her grandchildren:

> *It has taught me to be observant of young children. It was taught me the value of allowing children … freedom to explore within reason. …*
>
> *I've got these two young ones at the present time. One is four and the other is 16 months. And ah, the little 16 month old… he comes outside and his eyes are just aglow with 'where can I go!?' Pick a flower here and push something there and seize a little trowel and digs away there and sees the road and off he goes (laughter). And he holds out his hand 'Let's go for a walk!'. Delightful.*

6.4.2 Opting in – to noticing and theorising about children, parents, e.c.e. and play

"I just don't think you can tread with heavy boots on early childhood.
And you can call it what you damn well like,
but a lot of what they're doing now is just that."

Marie Bell

Several participants referred confidently to research findings to support their reflections about why things happen the way they do. But most referred to their

own experiences, offering tentative explanations which I suggest are working theories based on inductive thinking.

As parents of children who grew to become adults, the participants each could provide the curious historian with detail about at least one human life observed closely: their own child. For Marie Bell, such intimate knowledge reinforced the psychological importance of children's early years. She recalled how her daughter loved kindergarten, but was like others in the family, clumsy and ambidextrous. This led to an accident in which she spilled red paint. Afterwards Marie noticed that her daughter had stopped painting and no one understood why. Years later, her daughter explained that when she spilt red paint at kindergarten, she had been smacked:

> *And she said as an adult – she's 47 – she still has feelings about the colour red. So, I just don't think you can tread with heavy boots on early childhood.*
>
> *And you can call it what you damn well like, but a lot of what they're doing now is just that. It's not respecting the importance of that time. It's imposing adult values on what is so precious.*

With only a few exceptions, the participants lived in close proximity to at least one adult child and had regular contact with grandchildren. This is a situation which facilitated ongoing inquiry about, and long-term perspective on, children, families and society. For those well past retirement, grandchildren meant that there were 'peepholes' into contemporary childhood. Looking out her living room window, Ailsa Densem commented that there were children living up and down the street, but "*I don't see as much play around about*".

Even for those still in the workforce, grandchildren could prompt reconsideration of ideas. In the 1980s, Pat Penrose had campaigned against war toys like 'transformers', but:

I've got the transformer king in my life now. He's seven and he knows transformers really well. Quite interesting. Don't know why we thought they were so bad at the time, but we did.

In addition, Pat has reconsidered how much importance to place on socialisation:

… we used to think that if you socialised girls and socialised boys in certain ways – then that's what made them male and female. I don't think that anymore, I think they're born that way. And I'm more in favour (of seeing how children grow and change as) being a dance between nature and nurture.

For many, encountering grandchildren meant revisiting memories of themselves as parents. Anne Meade saw a "*big change"* since her own children were young:

… we used to let them muck about for ages before we'd go check on them. Now you go and check on kids – yeah, there's surveillance over them.

They in turn … they're turning around to look and reference you an awful lot more. My grandchildren spend so much of their time when there is an adult close by and they're very conscious of them.

Similarly Barbara Chapman observed across generations, a tendency for children to look to adults, who may be feeling pressured to squeeze in worthy experiences:

Children lead pretty regimented lives really …. I do think there is pressure on parents to have these children as far on as they can be before school because that is going to advantage them the most. And they do that through the various things they choose to have their children involved in.

"*Pressure"* also appeared in Val Burns' description of parent-child interactions:

I think parents are putting too much pressure on children; children aren't being allowed to get outside and just go; children haven't got the freedom they used to have and there's a lot of reason, I'm not blaming the parents about that, it's just the times really and I think that's very sad that they're losing their freedom and I noticed my two grandchildren here – stayed inside!

For Kahuwaero Katene, 26 grandchildren provided her with connections around New Zealand and overseas. Particularly powerful for her has been the return of

first language speakers of Te Reo Maori as a result of involvement with te kohanga reo and kura kaupapa Māori:

> *It's really – you know, it's a wonderful feeling to be able to speak your language without people looking at you and saying 'you better explain what you're saying, you better translate that,' you know? And I worked through the stage and got enough confidence in myself to say things like 'I don't have to translate my language – you have the right to learn it and understand it; you also belong to this country of ours, and it's also an official language of this country – not for me to translate, it's for you to learn.' Took me a long time to reach that stage.*

Several participants regularly cared for grandchildren; Lynda Boyd had recently been "*nana help"* at her granddaughter's kindergarten. Still spending regular hours in her childcare centre, Joan Kennett was consciously slowing down children's activities, offering "*cuddles"* and "*more physical touching,*" which she described as "*the more natural way of handling children"*. And like her grandmother had done 75+ years ago:

> *… I'll tell them stories, rather than read stories to them; they love that, children love to be talking about when you were a little girl. They often say to me… they all call me Nanny now – and they'll say 'Will you tell me about when you were a naughty little girl, Nanny?' (laughter) And I do. So they're the natural things that nannies used to do. Because that's what my nanny used to do too.*

Very aware of their mortality, several seemed weary that their life's achievement was less than they'd hoped for. Ailsa Densem saw rising safety standards as undoing years of work in advocating for adventurous playground facilities, and she pulled a sad face when describing how parenting education is less available, she thought, to secondary school students. In discussing the photographing and documenting of children, Beverley Morris spoke passionately about children being constantly under a "*searchlight"* and "*the unending exposure to adult eyes".* Children, she said, needed to have private spaces, and time to "*blah"*. She saw children's life as increasingly restricted, enabling parents' greater involvement in

the workforce, and this was supported by government funding and policies. She said:

> *I can't really see the future. And it is not very far away as far as my demise would be concerned. I can't see where we're going.*

Anne Meade was more upbeat. New Zealanders, she said:

> *… value early childhood education highly …. When they think about it, they do think about play at kindergarten and playcentre in particular. In their minds, they would want to see an awful lot of free play and/or free flow play in centres. Certainly they'd be looking for a lot of that play being related to things like sand, and water.*

6.4.3 Summary

Change and continuity are closely entwined. Change in what is expected of parents; change in where to look for young children and their caregivers; change in what happens in neighbourhoods; change in the frameworks for analysis of children's activity; change in what teacher education emphasises. Continuity in what young children are likely to enjoy doing and their need for responsive intimacy. Continuity of the presence that a very young child brings; continuity of the emotional, the visceral, the affective.

The participants' images of children are collectively complex. Little children (under two year olds) are described as 'not herd animals', and as needing to learn how to be empathetic. They are also seen as 'very moral' and that this capacity diminishes with age while awareness of difference also increased. Children were also seen as needing to be individuals, and to have their initiatives and interests valued above routines, which were seen as the adults' agenda, for example. Yet some described children were seen as 'more precious' or even 'too precious' suggesting that parents could be overly anxious about how much their own efforts are required to ensure a child's potential is realised.

For some participants, their earlier enthusiasm for early childhood education has been tempered by shifts in its direction and form which make it less than, or different from, what was envisaged. While childcare, for example, was a significant aspect of the feminist movement, its widespread provision appears to have cut across the maternalist aspects of feminist thinking, such as valuing breastfeeding and women's unpaid contributions to society (Novitz, 1982).

Children's well-being – the pleasure of their company and enjoyment in shared activity – was emphasised above instructions and above children's preparation for school through early literacy and numeracy programmes. Giving children a sense of their ability to be helpful and take responsibilities was also seen as important in building empathy alongside a sense of belonging. Sensitivity towards, and curiosity about the child require time and mutually acceptable spaces in which adults/parents/teachers can engage. Having time to play with children seems to be desirable. But so too is having spaces and relationships where children are not the focus; where they are not under surveillance.

There was perhaps more confidence in the local and the authentic engagement, than in the distant, the corporate and the bureaucratic. Yet government, by insisting there be outdoor space and qualified teachers, for example, was seen as a bulwark against the excesses of the commercial sector.

Raising the importance of economic activity and establishing neoliberal systems of provision which foreground efficiency within e.c.e. runs counter to democratic principles, according to Moss (2010), and this may explain the diminished scope for voluntary activity observed by participants. Similarly, while commercially-driven expansion of the early childhood sector has helped ensure more e.c. spaces for more children (May & Mitchell, 2009; Ministry of Education Data Management Unit, 2011), it has also opened the sector up to the instabilities of the international marketplace (May, 2009).

CHAPTER 7: Play and education: Discussion and conclusions

Play is as essential as earth, fire, water, air; and as easily taken for granted …
until it is noticed by its scarcity, or by its absence.

Research notes

When the focus is on children and play, nothing is simple. Historically there are no set starting points as play crosses generations (Sutton-Smith, 1982, 1997). Biologically there are no fixed boundaries on play as it crosses species (G. Bateson, 1972/2000). Culturally there are differences, but also strong resonances; play crosses cultures and in the interplay between the individual and the group, takes forms that both reflect and trouble culture (Fleer, 2009). Play crosses the social sciences, the health sciences and health promotion (Ginsberg, 2006; SPARC, 2007). It also straddles the paradigmatic divides in international e.c.e between those that Moss (2008) called the foundationalists (who he observed exercised most influence for policy developers) and the post-foundationalists, (who he identified with the 'reconceptualising' movement). Children's capacity to play and to making meaning through their play is observable both in the foundationalists' articulation of developmentally appropriate activities for children (Bredekamp, 1993) and in the reconceptualists' focus on the complexity of children's agentic activity (Lubeck, Jessup, & Jewkes, 2001; Wood, 2007, 2010). Perhaps the diffuse nature of play is also what makes it problematic when processes and policies have taken shape during the educationalising of the early childhood sector.

Locating play and 'free play' over the long time span of the participants' memories also provides a narrative that highlights both change and continuity. In the past 60 years, those interviewed in this study have witnessed the shifting

of sites for childhood. A significant amount of time is now spent inside a state-sanctioned spaces, particularly for children over two years old. This was recognised as significantly changing the everyday lives of children and their families. Yet there was also continuity in the spaces designed for children's education. The artifacts of an earlier era, the artifacts of 'free play' (equipment and resources like sand, water, playdough, carpentry, blocks and puzzles) are still evident in those spaces along with newer technologies (Hill, 2005; May, 2009).

So what is this bygone yet still present thing called 'free play'? That it existed as kind of curriculum before there was a curriculum is one way to understand it. That it is associated with influential progressive academics and authors is another way to understand it. This is the more helpful perspective, I believe, because it suggests that 'free play' does not travel alone; it travels with other ideas. So to consider what it is associated with helps to understand 'free play'.

To change an idea, or to give it another name, is to change the ideas associated with it (Foucault, 1970/2001; Hacking, 1986; MacNaughton, 2005). To see children's play as developmental is different from seeing children's play as educational, and although the child, the player, may not recognise a distinction, those who observe (or notice, recognise, respond) will see the playing child differently. Developmental ideas travel more comfortably with ideas about natural progression; education travels more comfortably with ideas that encourage intervention, through 'nurturing', directing, suggesting, and labeling (Dahlberg et al, 2007). Ideas also travel with stories attached to contexts; they travel with feelings, assumptions. They also travel with hopes and reform agendas. In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, however, 'free play' has discredited associates, reflecting the prominence of free play in the formative years of the Grand Play Project.

Opposites also travel together. An unexpected insight from the interpretative stage of this research journey was the idea that 'free play' was an oppositional notion. It was defined not only in terms of its ascribed properties, practices and principles, but also in terms of what it was not; that is, what it was intent on reforming. More importantly, within its oppositional status was much of its vitality. I suggest that without an opposition, 'free play' is a relatively impotent idea. This oppositional definition became a keystone for a new construction of ideas alongside my ruminating about what was 'normal'? For it seemed that what is normal gives shape to what was innovative; what is normal (or everyday) provides the backdrop against which contrasting developments are given definition. However, the everyday-as-remembered is a shifting artifact; fragments of memory are used to create a logic within the political flux of today. What was everyday is never the same in its detail even while there are threads of resonance. What could be described as 'everyday' in the 1920s when Ailsa Densem, Lex Grey and Joan Kennett were children, was not the same person by person even while a sociologist can point to social norms. Similarly comparing the everyday in early childhood across decades offers glimpses of continuity but also differences. Whether to emphasise the continuity or to emphasise the difference is one of many strategic decisions that a researcher following emergent themes has to make. The hope here is to emphasise both.

In this the last chapter of this study, some answers to the research question are offered. While relevant literature is considered in sections 7.1 and 7.2, the focus is primarily on using 'imminent' frameworks, which would arguably be recognised by those who were participants in this study. This reflects Depaepe's (1998) expectation that historic accounts of educationalisation include "finer meshed" analysis (p. 22), thus enabling some insight into the origins of practices and predictable spaces which make up the 'grammar' of an educational setting. In section 7.1, some overarching themes are visited, including the shifting

definitions of 'free play', the contested notion of 'progress' as a modernist project (Dahlberg, et al., 2007), and conceptualisation of young children as human capital (Coleman, 1988; Dahlberg, et al., 2007; Gibbons, 2007; Goffin, et al., 1997). In section 7.2, some of these themes are considered in more depth as part of discussion about e.c. professionalism and educationalisation (Depaepe, et al., 2008). Section 7.3 focuses on more 'intrusive' analysis (Depaepe, 1998) and reconsiders the research data using de Certeau's 'logic of practice' (1984) to suggest that technologies associated with play and 'free play' have been colonised in order to create more efficient development of the human capital evident in the young child, as well as to increase the effectiveness of its technologies in pursuit of social and political goals. In Section 7.4 there is a brief reconsideration of the research methodology; the significance of this study is suggested in section 7.5. Some future directions for other studies are offered in section 7.6, and this is followed by some conclusions in section 7.7.

7.1 Play, free play, progress and human capital

With particular interest in the history of 'free play' in the context of 'early childhood education' (e.c.e.) in Aotearoa New Zealand, this study set out to answer the question: 'How has play been experienced, and understood across, the past 60 years by those identified as historic leaders of the early childhood sector?' The answers to that question have been diverse; the 23 people interviewed and whose stories are the research data of this study show how play has been understood as a thread of continuity across generations as an impulse to imagine, to explore, to connect with people, places and things. When the focus is more firmly on e.c. settings and on 'free play' as an underpinning ideology (Spodek & Saracho, 2003), the emphasis of the stories tends to be more about change. While, the free play environment, which developed and was codified within the experiences of the participants, was still evident in early childhood settings, the purpose of those contexts had

significantly changed. This reflects perhaps what Wood (2010, p. 16) has observed in the UK: that play was encouraged and tolerated to the extent in which it fitted in with systems of provision that supported social stability. So play can be "aligned with other technical practices such as target setting, teacher performance, inspection, appraisal and quality assurance." However, when considered critically, she maintained that:

> … such interventions beg contrasting interpretations: here we have the power of the state harnessing established (but selective) truths about the power of play, but in ways that may be circumscribed by technical and managerial approaches to education. Policy frameworks typically present a version of order, stability and agreed meanings within which certain forms of knowledge (and ways of knowing) are valued and reified in the curriculum. Thus it becomes challenging for educators to negotiate repressive and productive regimes of power, because play does not align easily with these techniques of organization (p. 16).

In decades before and after World War II, as an idea, 'free play', travelled with the hope of a democratic childhood and expectation that through sustained experience of 'free play', children would be happier and would grow to creative and fulfilled adults (May, 1992a, 2001; Somerset, 1975). Attempts to define 'free play' in terms of space (physical equipment) and attitude (the tolerant, observant adult/teacher/parent) were remembered by the older participants in this study. 'Free play' travelled in the company of the New Education Fellowship from the 1930s and in playcentres from the 1940s. During the following decades, 'free play' travelled in both playcentre and kindergarten as a sessional (that is, part-time) activity for children; and it situated the very young child outside the home for at least a few hours several times a week. It was against this part-time provision of 'e.c.' that a complex layering of political and social drives developed, recognising how e.c. could help meet economic aspirations of parents and of the wider society (Ministry of Education, 1998, 2002; Mitchell, et al., 2008; A. Smith, et al., 2000).

So what was this thing called 'free play'? I was not ready for some definitions, especially the idea that the spaces created for 'free play' were intended for the

education of the adults that shared that space. Lex Grey was particularly clear about this (see, for example, Grey, 1993). This perspective resonates with Maori understandings of ako (Pere, 1982) promotes the adaptable adult in children's lives. The oppositional nature of the definitions was also unexpected; that 'free play' was better than, healthier than, more educational than, the opposite; the opposite being both the instructive teacher and the demanding parent. I argue that the opposite of 'free play' were the social norms as understood during the Grand Play Project; it contrasted to spaces in which children worked, had responsibilities, and/or were required to comply. Arguably, when families' cultures were seen as having inherent value, the relevance of 'free play' diminished. This is more than the playing out of social history; it is evidence of a deeply philosophical paradox of democratic process which Mouffe (1999) described as 'agonistic pluralism'. Democracy, she maintained, is in a perpetual and desirable state of conflict in which the Other shares a space of common interest in, and is thus integrated with, the Self. So even while contesting for influence, the notion of agonistic pluralism foregrounds the interdependence of opponents.

Another example of oppositional identity relevant to this study arises within the ongoing critique of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Dahlberg, et al., 2007; Gibbons, 2007). A champion of DAP, Bredekamp (1993) described a US penchant for polarisation on complex issues with the attempts at middle ground being savaged from the extremes. DAP, she maintained, is one example of this. DAP developed she said in response to developments in 1970s when young children were seen as overly competent; that is, overly adaptive. Articulating DAP was an attempt to prioritise both context and development, but it was critiqued as metaphorically sticking children in pre-determined developmental (white, US, middle class) boxes. This is how Dahlberg et al. (2007) described DAP and in so doing, DAP provides the

oppositional identity which fuels the 'meaning making' discourse which they espoused. Caught up in the dismissing of DAP is also the dismissing of the value of ‘free play’ which has associations with DAP.

But ‘free play’ travelled with other ideas, as well. The participants, especially those active in the Grand Play Project (1948-1975+) and the Grand Unity Project (1975-1989+), identified networks of influence animated by charismatic people; people termed in this study as ‘luminaries’. The luminaries’ credibility and personal capacities to link practices and theories were keys to the creation of the Grand Play Project, not only within kindergartens and playcentres, but also more broadly in primary education and within adult education where progressive teaching/learning processes were influential.

Underpinning the widespread provision of contemporary e.c.e. are economic arguments which position children as human capital (Dahlberg, et al., 2007; Farquhar, 2008a; Goffin, et al., 1997; Moss, 2008, 2010). This image of the child contributes to the child being seen, as several participants said, as ‘precious’, perhaps even ‘too precious’, especially in the context of what role their parents play. If a child needs to have his/her human capital realised, how many parents are confident about how to do it? Several participants felt that the ‘nurturing’ side of what Pat Penrose called “*the nature-nurture dance”* was being over-emphasised and in the context of professional educational settings, could equate with an emphasis on instruction. Several participants expressed concern about this; Geraldine McDonald pointed out that children learn without being the focus of attention; they learn by “*overhearing”*; they learn without being compelled to comply through direct instruction. Or as Ailsa Densem said:

> *(Children) are self-motivated if they’re happy with themselves and the situation they’re in. They’ll just do it. You don’t have to put your thumb on them.*

Within sociocultural approaches to early childhood education, children can be understood to be capable and competent (Dahlberg, et al., 2007), yet some participants suggest that within their lifetimes, they have seen young children become less competent; less able to participate in community life; less capable of managing risk. Counterbalancing this, parents were seen as perplexingly competent; they are holders of culture, as well as being vitally important in economic activity. The then Prime Minister, Helen Clark, was clear about this in 2005 when she called for mothers to make their presence felt in the economy, with the confidence that 'dawn till dusk' support systems would be there to ensure that their children would not be disadvantaged (H. Clark, 2005). Perhaps this implied capability helps drive the anxiety that the participants say they see amongst many parents. But also relevant could be the observation by Sullivan (2009) that loss of security on "a deep existential level" (p.49) can lead to controlling the risks that children encounter. However, she also suggested that this can be self-reinforcing as children who are not physically active tend to be less capable physically, so therefore are seen as less able to manage physical risk.

De Certeau (1984) suggested significant change in thought and beliefs could be understood as the result of 'taking a trick' in which the success of the action reflected not only on the skill of the trickster (the actor) but also on what resources were to hand. The successful 'tricks' happened because of an opening which allowed them to happen. Gladwell (2008) made a similar point; that success is never the result of personal effort alone. Success also reflects wider influences which enabled efficacy for some people at some points in time, but limiting the efficacy of others. As Ahearn (2001) wrote, agency, defined provisionally as the "socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (p. 109), is a temporal capacity. Timing matters.

Such was the situation when Anne Meade, looking back at the *Before 5* reforms (Department of Education, 1988) that shaped the early childhood sector, described a temporary alignment of people and events which enabled women and children "to get a foot in the door" (Meade, 1990, p. 96). But the progression towards a professionalised credentialised e.c. teaching workforce, and greater incentives for participation, such as argued for by Mitchell (2007) and timetabled in the 10-year strategic plan (Ministry of Education, 2002), continue what can be understood as the modernist project.

What is the modernist project? Modernity's origins are within the observed transition away from a society's collective confidence in the religious, the mysterious and the preordination of life, and the movement towards the scientific and provable, and according to de Certeau (1984), towards a fascination with visibility and transparency. Modernity is linked to the rise of capitalism and was theorised by the sociologist Max Weber (Hochschild, 2003; M. Weber, 1904 / 1976). Within education, the modernist project is evident in the quest for certainty, in the "zest for order and mastery", and in the "unification, normalization and totalization; as well as in the confident arrival of parents as consumers and children as clients/students" (Dahlberg, et al., 2007, p. 87). The modernist focus on the individual child is in support of creating an adult whose foundations support reproduction "of the dominant value of today's capitalism, including individualism, competitiveness, flexibility and the importance of paid work and consumption" (p. 45). Early childhood institutions are "a necessary technology for progress" (Dahlberg, et al., 2007, p. 67) and contribute to economic growth.

As an ideology and as a system of provision, 'free play' can be understood as an early technology (Gibbons, 2007) which enabled popular experience of institutional settings for young children during the 'Grand Play Project'. This set

the scene for later technologies linking early childhood education with progress (section 2.3.4).

7.1.2 Summary

Themes of continuity and change are evident when play and 'free play' are considered. The participants' experiences indicate that children continue to play in e.c. settings. The spaces that enabled 'free play' remained evident in e.c. settings. However, significant changes in attitudes towards children, play, and parenting have been witnessed by the participants. These reflect not only changes in society, but also significant political movements as well. Arguably, the technologies of widespread contemporary provision of e.c.e. reflect an alignment of educational and economic policy in which "the power of play" (Wood, 2 010, p. 16) is used selectively and technically to promote order and stability.

7.2 Educationalisation and themes arising from the research data

Within Aotearoa New Zealand, early childhood education has grown significantly in the past 30 years, reflecting a growing acceptance not only of its desirability, but also what May (2001) identified as the the learning of the 1970s: that 'education' was the acceptable mantle for government involvement in childcare. Although longitudinal studies of children's educational achievement show more correlations with family income and parental education than with the quality of e.c.e. experience, e.c.e. continues as a vehicle for social reform and the actualisation of human capital. According to Mitchell et al. (2008), "countering the trend for income disparities to widen, or making a large shift in parental human capital, is a much harder policy and practical task" (p. 97) than improving the provision of good quality early

childhood education. What this suggests is that while e.c.e. is an area where government intervention can make a difference to the educational achievement of young children, there are more influential areas which are much harder to govern.

7.2.1 Normalising of very young children in educational settings

The foregrounding of memories of 'play' brought out stories of place and people, in many cases describing children who were either trusted to manage risk, or perhaps were given freedom out of necessity. Some parents did not have the resources to supervise their children, even if they had been so inclined; the size of families (up to 14 children in one family, for example) impacted on what was expected of children.

The participants' collective stories indicate that there was a steady momentum for children to spend some time, and then more time, within institutional settings. These settings are in the anomalous situation of trying to build children's sense of belonging to a community, while at the same time, usually accepting, if not encouraging, parents' separation from their children. It would be romantic to assume that before the widespread availability of e.c.e. services families had a stronger sense of community, what Nisbet (1966, p. 6) described as "emotional cohesion, depth, continuity and fullness". But it would also be romantic to assume that the provision of such services ensures children have a sense of community. Brennan (2005) suggested that the spaces created for children's education isolates children and accompanying adults in a somewhat stultified community in which, for example, strong emotions are denied and children are kept distant from the adult world which intrigues them.

Encouraging education for all young children can sidestep the thorny issue of how capable parents are (Caldwell, 1967/1999). Part of the rationale for government involvement in e.c.e. is the reality of poor parenting, and concerns about the societal consequences of this (A. Smith, et al., 2000). Inviting participation in an educational project that benefits everyone, parent, child, and society, makes the separation of parent from child less troublesome. Centralised systems for regulation (of spaces) and credentialisation (of teachers) also enable social reform projects alongside a role for academics (1988).

However, concerns about the impact of separation were evident in the research data. The ongoing importance of infant-parent bonding and breastfeeding were raised by several participants. Marie Bell wondered how well an infant bonds with its mother when they spend most days apart. Beverley Morris was troubled by parental busyness with insufficient time with very young children.

While there is in New Zealand no requirement that a parent must enroll children in early childhood education settings, there are major societal forces which privilege the parent in the workforce (or in training for the workforce). Joan Kennett's stories of angry pressured young parents illustrate this; as does Robbie Burke's reflection on mothers feeling more capable as workers than as mothers. While it may sound extreme to consider de Certeau's (1984) image of how during times of crisis, the colonising power is enforced on the bodies of the subordinates, there are storylines of coercion amongst the participants' stories. What was observed was at least the encouraged (but perhaps the forced) separation of parent from child.

The notion of the young child as highly competent, resilient and adaptable has helped make acceptable the early use of institutional care for infants and very young children. In critiquing Reggio Emilia's 'image' of the competent child,

Bredekamp (1993) saw the 'capable child' as giving license for major intrusions into children's lives, because "if infants are so competent, why is parental leave necessary? If preschoolers are so smart, why not start formal reading instruction at two?" (p. 14). In contrast, one story told by three different participants was how an unsettled child had changed the lives of mothers because the mothers were unwilling to force a child to go through an unwanted separation process. In each version of the story, the child was seen as having attachment preferences which could and should be accommodated. In these stories, the adults (the mothers) were the adaptable ones. As a result, each stayed with the child in an e.c. setting and this led to gradual career openings as the mothers developed a fascination with early childhood education.

Similarly, there were a number of stories indicating that the participants erred on the side of privileging the child's personal and emotional needs above what parents' expected. This included allowing, even encouraging children, to play in ways which parents did not approve of, such as Noreen Moorhouse's insistence that all children had access to water play, despite parental concerns about children catching colds.

There were also recurring concerns expressed about the containment of very young children in what Anne Meade described as "*very circumscribed situations".* Standards that restrict outings, for example, suggest there are more risks outside the fence than there are from keeping children separated from the wider community (Brennan, 2005). Several participants spoke strongly that the limited space and restrictions put on children, in the name of safety, had their own long term risks, in terms of limiting physical confidence and visceral understanding of danger. This is an area where the provision of e.c. itself, the separation of children into child-oriented spaces, warrants reconsideration, according to Brennan (2007).

That it is possible to create something dangerous out of over-emphasising safety is perhaps an example of what Bunkle (1995) described as ideological and pseudo-scientific thinking which claims to be “the only rational position” (p. 148). Arguably, the economic driver within early childhood education has a role in encouraging parents and teachers to believe that the child’s risk taking activity within a centre can compromise (through accident or illness) a parent’s other responsibilities. The low-risk child, it appears, works better for the available-for-work parent. Thus an emphasis on the efficient functioning of families (A. Smith, et al., 2000) alongside neoliberal accountability systems operating within e.c.e. centres can combine to suggest that accidents should not happen, or that e.c. teachers risk being seen as negligent, if they do happen. Similarly, allowing children to get dirty, and even accepting that young children will get sick, was seen as basic to a child’s health. Several participants said that a healthy child was one who had had sufficient illness when young to have a well developed immune system.

Why are children encouraged to ‘play it safe’? The participants came up with a range of reasons, including the institutional nature of early childhood settings; the assumption of negligence on the part of the teacher if there’s an accident. In addition, there was thought to be a connection between what parents had experienced in their own childhoods, leading to a reflection from Beverley Morris that parents who remembered their own risky play as children might allow their own children to take more risks in their play. Several participants wondered if the size of the family affected how much risk taking a parent can tolerate in their children. The larger the family, they suggested, the more tolerance; when there are only one or two children in a family, there could be more emotional investment in each one and that those parents have ‘all their eggs in one basket’.

7.2.2 Professionalisation: Towards a science of educating the very young

The 'grammar' of New Zealand early childhood education, that is, the processes and systems for the education of very young children, has its origins in the late 18th and early 19th century (see chapter 2). As 'free play' evolved in meaning across the decades of the Grand Play Project, it drew its structure from the Malting House project undertaken by Susan Isaacs in the 1920s (Gardner, 1969; May, 1997), its political visibility in this country from the status and support of C.E. Beeby as Director General of Education (Alcorn, 1999; Middleton & May, 1997b) and its vitality from both the chaotic aftereffects of World War II, and the (relatively) homogeneous nature of New Zealand society in the face of new ideas about children, families and mental health.

The research data includes memories of participating as young children in 'e.c.' services prior to and World War II which included activity-based equipment such as the sandpit, painting, puzzles and climbing equipment. What changed after World War II included increasing the range and quantity of (eventually required) equipment; the expansion of the role of government (initially in the form of the appointment of a preschool advisor), the spread of kindergartens, and the rise of playcentre with its emphasis on parent education.

The participants identified groups, as well as individuals (friends, mentors, authors) promoting 'learning through play' and offering underpinning theory and/or philosophy. Ailsa Densem spoke of "*networks"* of people changing education from the 1930s when she first met members of the New Education Fellowship. Those networks had powerful ideas, such as: "*Listen to people, respect them – they've got something to offer. And you're not going to influence them unless you can tap into where they're at…"*, as Marie Bell said. This suggests that teachers need to consider the experiences, dispositions and

interests of their students, thus making educating an on-going experimental process (Dewey, 1938).

During the first two 'grand projects', individuals were identified as having been particularly influential. That there was less emphasis on charismatic personalities during the Grand Education Project probably reflects the age of many of the participants and their distance from more recent cross-sector e.c.e. leaders. A second plausible explanation was the influence of me as a researcher whose questions were about play, learning through play, and 'free play'. Perhaps what we created in the interview was a space in which the connections were most strongly to the two first 'grand projects'. But a third explanation is also possible. It builds on what de Certeau (1984) has described as the rise of the technicians, who have more power than authority, and whose job is largely to maintain the systems. They are, he said, "preoccupied with extending and making more complex the mechanisms for maintenance and control" (p. 179). Perhaps luminaries are not necessary when systems of compliance hold sway.

If a 'golden era' demarcates a period of vigorous thrashing out of key ideas (Nisbet, 1966), then one indicator that the two first 'grand projects' were golden eras was how, across a range of interviews, there were 'making it up' stories (or its variant, the 'we did not know what we were doing' stories):

- Marie Bell in teacher education and professional development;
- Beverley Morris in theorising and publishing on the social learning in play;
- Val Burns in policy development and the language of 'early childhood education';
- Mary Bramwell in standardising equipment;
- Kahuwaero Katene in bicultural organisational structures and practices.

Also evident was the power of a timely succinct idea that shifted understandings and paradigms; Geraldine McDonald and Anne Meade brought forward such key concepts as that 'care and education' were inseparable; that children had rights; that e.c.e. benefited individuals, families and the broader society; and that quality standards transcended the distinct 'e.c.' services.

In saying 'we made it up', perhaps those participants were reinforcing the myth of the 'pioneering kiwi at work with #8 fencing wire': having a go; problem solving with what is to hand; demonstrating a form of bricolage in their attempts to draw theory and policy out of experience and relationships. This is something that Beverley Morris (2007) also referred to in her linking children's sustained meaningful play to national identity.

Alongside the improvisation, however, was the articulating of systems which became transferrable. Training for 'e.c.' teachers had existed in the form of kindergarten teachers colleges for most a century (Prochner, 2009), but participants experienced how its distinct nature was dulled by the amalgamation with teacher education for the compulsory school system. Within playcentre and childcare circles, the memories of the participants included creating adult education programmes to support their specific programmes. The codifying of systems about 'place' was also evident; in other words, the creation of standards for equipment needed to support 'areas of play'. The areas of play were understood to enable children's free play and the standards were initially (and unpopularly, according to Mary Bramwell) developed for playcentres. In the 1970s and 1980s when childcare was growing but was not well supported, the standards (which were referred to as 'the equipment list') were seen to be a significant step towards improving the standards in childcare services. Mary referred to these standards as an initial "*leg up"* for quality provision.

According to Geraldine McDonald, playcentre "*professionalised mothering"* through its parent education programmes. The production of publications was basic to this and from the 1950s, playcentre's books about play and child development were almost without competition in this country until the late 1980s when authors from outside playcentre became more evident. This development reflected that there was both a burgeoning e.c. research community and tertiary-based early childhood teacher education. This meant that there was a wider pool of people with the capacity to write, as well as a market for cross-sector text books (Stover, 2010b). Early childhood teacher education and their programmes had to carve their professional identities, according to Lynda Boyd, in the context of competition for status and credibility alongside programmes for primary and secondary teacher education programmes.

Observation of children, and the interpretation of those observations, can also been seen as a key part of the science of teaching very young children, building as it does on the importance of understanding someone in order to influence them. Within the experiences of the participants, there had been significant changes both in the purpose of the observation of children, as well as the interpretation of those observations. If the purpose is to understand the child, then observations can be done when there is a question to answer, perhaps about why a child was doing something of concern (or of interest). The early influence of Susan Isaacs, and her confidence in psychoanalytic theory, helps explain how observations of children could generate interpretations about the thinking, the motivations, and interests of children (Gardner, 1969). With increasing focus on education, observations by e.c. teachers have become more about assessment of the child while demonstrating accountability. Several participants spoke with concern about both superficiality of such observations,

and the supervisory "*surveillance"* on children. Beverley Morris referred to the "*searchlight"* being on children and *"the unending exposure to adult eyes".*

7.2.3 Professionalisation: Towards raising the status of teachers

The educationalisation of early childhood has paralleled the professionalisation of the teaching workforce reflecting aspects of academic-orientated teacher education and attempts to position early childhood teachers on a par with teachers throughout the compulsory sector (May, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2002). However, there is a tension, according to Fromberg (2003) between professionalisation and the democratic and inclusive traditions in early childhood education. Professionalisation is not itself a democratic process; setting standards for entry is a gatekeeping process, intended to exclude those who cannot demonstrate expertise. Further, Scrivens (2002) and Duhn (2010) both position e.c. professionalism within neoliberalism, and the status of e.c. teaching remains contested. In 2009, a national columnist suggested that looking after young children is not rocket science, and that academic qualifications are unnecessary to teach "fingerpainting or invent dress-up games on wet Friday afternoons" (Black, 2009, Jul 4, p. 94). After the subsequent flurry of letters, the columnist later suggested the topic was surrounded by an "environment of political correctness" in which makes "people reluctant to demur publicly" (Black, 2009, Jul 25, p. 94).

It is not a new idea that there is little status involved in working with children, or teaching about young children. Within the participants' stories, the low status of e.c. is evident in Ailsa Densem's judicious public use of an academic gown, to give status to "*child development"* and when Lynda Boyd's application to enrol in kindergarten training was initially refused because she had a strong academic background. This corresponds with Kane (2008) whose survey of 147

e.c.e. teachers found that while they felt themselves to be respected by those involved in e.c.e. (children, parents and colleagues), their professional status was not high in the wider community, and especially not amongst teachers in other sectors. The e.c. sector's association with (unpaid and unprofessional) mothering is one aspect of why it is difficult for e.c. teachers to be viewed professionally (Ailwood, 2008; Katz, 1980; May, 1992b, 2001), but Fromberg (2003) maintained that the need for professional e.c. teachers to be playful also problematised how they were seen.

All those participants involved with teacher education (both at centre and tertiary level) talked about inadequate preparation of students in terms of play theory and practice. They identified centre-based e.c. teachers themselves as being another site of reform through the professionalisation of the teaching workforce and the privileging of qualifications above experience. If the participants in these interviews are accurate in their observations, then new teachers come into the professional status with a variable (meaning: often very little) preparation for recognising the complexity of learning through play.

In charting how campaigns for reform transition into professional organisations and give rise to the creation of 'subjects' for study and credentialising, Bunkle (1995) suggested an alignment would appear between the campaign and economic drivers. The economic drivers facilitate the success of the transition, but they can also fundamentally change the purpose of the campaign itself. It can be argued that the creation of an e.c. educational sector is an example of such a transition. While the logic of 'economicist' thinking is not spelled out in *Te Whāriki,* (Ministry of Education, 1996) or in the DOPs (Ministry of Education, 1998), it is imbedded in documents which have influenced national policy; for example, *Education to be more* (Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group, 1988) and Mitchell et al. (2008). In Smith et al. (2000) economic outcomes are an expected outcome of early childhood, as part of social

cohesion. It was suggested by the then Minister of Education, Trevor Mallard, in his introduction to the 10-year strategic plan, in which he described e.c.e. as the "cornerstone of our education system" benefiting "our social, educational and economic health…." (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 2). But economics, particularly workforce policy, was dismissed as irrelevant by a subsequent a later Minister of Education, Steve Maharey, (2007) while foregrounding the educational benefits of the 20 hours free programme:

> This is not a labour market policy, it's an education policy. It's based on the conviction, and the evidence, that if we invest in starting to educate young people from the age of three, we get a real result for kids right throughout the education system and hopefully throughout their lives as a result (p.2).

The fact that the early childhood sector is an educational sector remains problematic for parents as educators (Manning, 2008; May, 2001; Woodhams, 2007), and while maternalist discourses remain problematic within the professionalised e.c.e., they were clearly evident in the perspectives of those who pioneered the sector (Knox, 1995) and amongst some of the participants. For example, amongst the strongest judgments about the contemporary forms of early childhood services was Marie Bell's reflection what she and other feminists were aspiring to:

> *… we wanted what had been seen as more feminine virtues and I do think just biologically because we have the children and raise them, maybe there's something in us that is more responsible, helps us to live longer, does listen to the wisdom of the elderly….*
>
> *You know, women having to go into the toilet and express their breast milk in the tea break - for God's sake – it just made it so jolly difficult. That's not what we wanted. … I just do not think you can replicate in a childcare centre, family life….*
>
> *No, so I don't think you can blame the feminists. I just think it's gone awfully wrong.*

Marie's statement is in line with New Zealand feminist literature of the 1970s and 1980s which upheld the importance of women as mothers, while expressing concerns about their vulnerabilities to and dependence, especially on their partners (Browne, et al., 1978; Knox, 1995; Novitz, 1982). However, of relevance here is Bunkle's (1995) observation that a new profession distances itself from the campaigners who preceded it; the passion of the activists becomes evidence of their irrationality and bias. What Marie drew together in her judgment of e.c.e. is a cluster of concerns (above), none of which are strictly about education of young children. Her judgment illustrates how some aspects of historic concerns have been educationalised but wider issues, relevant to a campaigner for childcare as Marie was, are not seen as being as important.

A key development during the Great Unity Project was distancing from previous providers and the ideas that their services were based on. This has been especially the case as regards playcentre which arguably was the public face of 'learning through play'. Certainly Beverley Morris offered an associational definition of 'free play': that 'free play' was whatever happened at playcentre. A discourse analysis of key New Zealand texts from the 1970s to 1990s would show that, even as playcentre was seen as encouraging several generations of women to find their critical voices and for their children to (usually) thrive at school (Knox, 1995; May, 1992a; Middleton & May, 1997b), playcentre was critiqued as predominantly for the middle class (Barney, 1975); as being relevant to Māori only within predominantly Māori communities (McDonald, 1973); unfriendly towards working families, especially working mothers (A. Smith & Swain, 1988); as well as bordering on the religious, while providing lightweight training (May, 2001).

Visiting US academics reported in 1970 that they had found limited interconnection between those offering early childhood education and those in academic circles. This was particularly the case particularly within playcentre

leaders who believed parents were “perfectly competent to help themselves” without drawing directly on academic expertise. Government “education leaders”, they wrote, described playcentre folk as “very nice people but they are also very much befuddled” (Birch & Birch, 1970, p. 9).

But more recently, perhaps because of its marginal status and shrinking rolls (Ministry of Education Data Management Unit, 2009), playcentre is no longer attracting public criticism from academics. Having used Foucault’s theories of governance and discipline to critique how children’s play has been captured for social agendas and the realisation of their social capital, Gibbons (2007), turned to playcentre to illustrate an alternative approach in which student teachers work “as a mentor with children, rather than learning about the theoretical nature of childhood” (p. 158). Ministry of Education research funding has brought non-playcentre researchers into playcentre to document and develop pedagogical practices (Mitchell, Tangaere, Mara, & Wylie, 2006; Podmore, et al., 2009; Wilton Playcentre members with Cubey & Mitchell, 2005). Te One’s recent study of children’s rights in e.c.e. troubles a contemporary playcentre’s adherence to the traditions of ‘free play’. However, she also drew on the writings of Gwen Somerset, who advocated for ‘free play’, and her own in-centre observations to judge that the playcentre provided a pedagogy upholding children as rights holders, and as enactors of their own sense of agency (Te One, 2010).

7.2.4 Professionalisation: Towards ethical practice from a deep knowledge base

One of the challenges of professionalisation is not only ensuring that teacher education enables student teachers to demonstrate knowledge of a deep knowledge base, but to decide which deep knowledge base is going to be privileged. That there has been a shift of knowledge bases was clear to many of

the participants, with some puzzlement expressed about how valued practices were to be supported by the new sociocultural frameworks. As Alison Leonard asked: "*If you don't know about the varieties of doughs or fingerpaints – how do you work with children?"*

This illustrates one of several conundrums which were raised by participants; not the least of which is whether there can be more than one theoretical framework foregrounded, as needed. Both Geraldine McDonald and Beverley Morris indicated that more than one theoretical framework could be used to interpret a situation, with Geraldine offering a theory of theories: *"Most theories have a grain of truth,"* she said, "*and something that is wrong as well.*" Such an attitude is one that invites dialogue on theoretical frameworks.

While culture was a point of personal fascination for many of the participants, there was little excitement about how sociocultural theorising within key circles in government, teacher education and professional development had become, in the opinions of several participants, almost a fundamentalist perspective. This may reflect the strength of the current educational myth (Beeby, 1986) which currently underpins the sector; namely that e.c. has benefits for the child, the family and society, including that it can be a site of cultural transmission (Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group, 1988). But relevant here is Lynda Boyd's querying whether cultural transmission is possible within e.c. settings other than for the privileged few whose culture is embedded in the centre structures and in the teacher's life experience. Marie Bell's concern that culture can become backward-looking and fixed, rather than being a dynamic and changing process, is also relevant. Her more fluid approach to culture gives scope for children to adapt to place and context, rather than conform to parent-set requirements.

Those active in teacher education (both in tertiary level and at centre) spoke of how practical knowledge of play-based learning, such as referred to by Alison Leonard above, as well as play theory, had become less evident in (and perhaps even absent from) teacher education. This shift in knowledge base troubled participants who spoke about it, not only because there was little understanding about how to use some of the areas of play ('blocks' were mentioned several times), but also because the tendency towards regular instruction of children, especially in pre-school reading, writing and maths programmes which were seen as easier for teachers to manage. Such programmes also looked more professional; they looked more like teaching and learning. Several participants queried whether a knowledge base about the role of teacher in children's play could be assumed to still exist in e.c.e. centres.

This raises questions not only about whether it is important for teachers to understand play in theory and in practice, but also about whether the diversity of provision which has characterised as a strength of the sector by Dalli (2010) is diminished in the interplay between policy requirements, and the rise of corporation-owned e.c. services (May, 2009). There are ethical issues in this situation, with a long-term reform of centre practice, such as referred to by Anning et al. (2004; 2007), and Nuttall and Edwards (2007), which can appropriately trouble existing centre teaching practice. However, Jo Kelly described a fascination with "*the new"* which can make it difficult to recognise what is of value in the old.

Amongst the participants there was concern that institutional systems were not good for children. 'Sensitivity' and 'empathy', both affective terms, were used by several participants to describe what teachers need to have in order to judge how to engage, not only with very young children but also with their parents. Being seen as responsible, was important, they suggested, especially for each other in order to learn empathy; that they are, as Trish Gargiulo said, "*members*

of groups". Further, mixed age groupings and opportunity for extended dramatic play in e.c. settings were needed in order for children to develop empathy, according to Jo Kelly and Pam Hanna.

Sensitivity to individual difference should be evident in teachers' empathetic interaction with children, but this can be complex within institutional settings where, according to Beverley Morris, each child *"has to fit into the pattern of the daily routine."* This indicates areas where ethical issues arise for teachers; not just in the dilemmas that appear from time to time, but also in the way e.c.e. is being organised.

7.2.5 Professionalisation: Towards research, social justice and advocacy

Researching early childhood education has been an important project for many of the participants; Geraldine McDonald, Lex Grey, Val Burns, Barbara Chapman, Pat Penrose, Ailsa Densem, Pat Hubbard, Pam Hanna, Beverley Morris and Anne Meade have all published significant contributions based on their own research and experience. So the importance of research is evident in the thinking, and in the back story, of many of the participants. However, the research projects themselves were only referred to in passing; such as Anne Meade's comments about the "*opaque"* nature of the writings from Centre of Innovation's attempt to theorise centre practices; or Geraldine McDonald's remembering her study of Māori mothers of preschool children; or Pat Hubbard acknowledging that her research into the quality of infant-toddler care and education was affected by her own beliefs about sector having "*oversold"* institutional provision for "*little children"*.

However, within the participants' storylines, there are strong accounts of advocacy, leadership, risk taking and 'making it up' at pivotal points, both

experienced and observed. These accounts were rarely about personal effort alone; there were groups of people sharing common ideals, especially about what was wanted for women and children. The politics of this was particularly strong amongst Wellington feminists in the 1980s where, according to Val Burns, regular "*plotting"* meetings about e.c.e. policy were occurring. The ripple of feminist initiatives prompted childcare provision in Whangarei, which drew Noreen Moorhouse into a new career. Social justice for Māori and concern for racism, especially as it impacted on children, was also evident; for example in Joan Kennett's account of travelling on a Wellington bus with a dark-skinned infant which provoked disgust from a fellow bus traveler; and in her willingness to be part of the Māori community as it developed te kohanga reo in Palmerston North. Defining "*this thing called biculturalism"* and its relevance to organisations like TTPOOA-NZCCA, was a major motivator for several participants, especially for Kahuwaeru Katene and Mary Bramwell.

These stories could reflect what Dalli (2010) described as a professional tradition in this country of professional "critical ecology" (p. 62) within e.c.e., which has helped shape national policies. A number of examples exist from achievements of the 1990s, including the creation of the sector's Code of Ethics, plus the campaign for pay parity between e.c. teachers (starting with kindergarten teachers) and teachers in the compulsory sector (May, 2001, 2005b; NZEI Te Riu Roa Early Childhood Code of Ethics National Working Group, 1995). However, a professional 'critical ecology' may not be a strong characteristic of the contemporary e.c.e in Aotearoa New Zealand. Several of the participants in this study expressed concern about complacency. Robbie Burke noted diminished democratic activity in playcentre; Marie Bell saw voluntary organisations struggling to maintain their membership and activities; Margaret Wollerman suggested that over the last 25 years, the diversity of working patterns plus expanded commercial activity had diminished shared

time for community activities, including within e.c. settings and services. Similarly, Dalli (2010) pointed to “unusual silence” (p. 67) in response to a sudden inclusion of private e.c. services in the ‘20 hours free e.c.e.’ programme in 2005 which raised questions for her about whether the sector was still willing to engage with ideological questions; or perhaps whether the 10 year strategic plan had lulled the sector into political complacency. Kane’s (2008) research indicated that amongst e.c.e. teachers, government interventions were seen in a more positive light compared to the perceptions of primary and secondary teachers. The relative youth of the e.c.e. teaching workforce combined with an alliance between government policy and the e.c. research community, might explain a predisposition to believe politic documents as articulating best practice in e.c. However, this may be changing. The 2010 removal of incentive funding for centres with over 80% fully qualified teachers (Ministry of Education, 2010b) was a strong indication in at least a fracture in the link between e.c. researchers and policy developers (May, et al., 2010; A. Smith, 2006).

Looking internationally at the attempts to professionalise the e.c.e. sector, Moss (2010 p. 9-10) was troubled by “hollowing out” of democratic politics and rising citizen disenchantment with democratic government: “Too many important areas – not least childhood – suffer from the near absence of a vibrant and engaged democratic politics”. Neoliberal economic policy empowers the self-regulating market to determine policy directions, which has also enabled what Moss (2010) described as “the irresponsibility, greed and short-sightedness” of neoliberalism’s “utopian vision” which has a “deep suspicion of democratic politics and anything public”. The result is that the social and the political sphere are diminished in importance and “collapsed into the economic and managerial” (p. 12).

While political advocacy can be understood as a short-hand for articulate and astute leadership, the purpose of that advocacy needs to include not only 'the professional' sector, but also include those it serves (Rodd, 1994). There are again ethical issues to navigate when, for example, promoting professional standards is not seen as being in the best interests of the clients; or as in the case of New Zealand, in the diversity of provision. Dalli (2010) acknowledged, for example, that equating quality provision with professionally credentialised e.c.e. services disadvantaged parent/whānau-led services like playcentre and te kohanga reo who disputed the link "between quality and qualifications" (p. 66).

In addition, for those who have made a career of early childhood education, advocating for the sector can look like professional self-interest. Fromberg (2003) recognised that the professionalisation of early childhood teachers was inherently an undemocratic process "because it limits entry into its ranks. As an exclusive expertise, professional practice separates the professional from ordinary life and action" (p. 179).

7.2.6 Summary

This section has considered imminent theories arising from the participants and offers some answers to the research question: *How has play been experienced, and understood across, the past 60 years by those identified as historic leaders of the early childhood sector?.*

Aspects of educationalisation which are evident in the imminent theorising arising from research data include the normalisation of young children in educational (early childhood) settings, the codification of systems to create a science of early childhood education and movement towards the professionalisation of the early childhood teaching workforce. The status of early childhood teachers has become further contested since the interviews

were conducted, as a result of government funding cuts which indicate policy supporting a mixed teaching workforce, rather than one in which all teachers are credentialised (Tolley, interviewed by Gerritsen, 2011).

So the professionalisation of early childhood is an ongoing and incomplete project. Within this context, play and especially 'free play' remain evident in environments that are recognised as early childhood settings, and in scheduling in of periods of free choice. But other valued aspects of 'free play' remain problematic, with the participants suggesting that the knowledge base to support play is diminishing amongst e.c. teachers, which reflects in part the prominence placed on sociocultural approaches to teaching and learning, as well as the neoliberal systems of accountability and delivery. Safety and risk-taking were also seen as ethical issues, and it was suggested that where safety was seen as overly emphasised, 'free play', with its association with free choice and risk taking, was difficult to encourage.

In the next section, the focus is on an 'intrusive' analysis of the research data which draws on de Certeau's (1984) 'logic of practice' suggesting how a colonisation of the early years has occurred alongside technologies of provision (Ailwood, 2003; Dahlberg, et al., 2007; Gibbons, 2007).

7.3 Intrusive theorising: The colonisation of early childhood through de Certeau's 'logic of practice'

Drawing on the research data and the relevant literature, this section offers an intrusive, 'coarse grained' framework for analysis which develops the work of de Certeau (1984). In particular, it draws on his description of how the bricolage is colonised to maximise capital and to develop the body (collective and individual) through the use of 'strategies' to create "proper places" (p. 47).

Drawing on and critiquing the work of Bourdieu, de Certeau (1984) sketched out how these 'strategies' create a "logic of practice" (p. 52).

The colonising project begins with the creation of 'scripture' about a place and a people. The ethnographer has this role: observing and recording as exotic that which is normal for those imbedded in it. The recognition of the self as 'other' destabilises the bricolage of making do; a self consciousness results. *'The cut'* is the metaphoric extraction of the normal for examination. In the *'turning over'* in pursuit of themes and patterns, the "metallic vocabulary of the knowledge" moves the "figures of an experimental knowledge" out of their context and into fixed authoritative "engravings and maps": the emblems of conquest (p. 14). A next step, 't*aking a trick'*, involves successful maneuvering within "different conditions" with strategic decisions determining which rules to follow and which to ignore (de Certeau, 1984, p. 53).

A further strategy involves the '*transfers and metamorphosis'.* Drawing on and critiquing Foucault, de Certeau (1984) considered how changes are made to symbol systems. He referred to the "constant passages from one genre to another" (p. 54) and identified three such passages:

- **Polythetism**: because a thing's properties and its uses vary depending on "arrangements into which it enters" (p. 54);
- **Substitutability:** because one thing can be removed and something different put in its place;
- **Euphemism:** because "one must hide the fact that actions conflict with the dichotomies and antinomies represented by the symbolic system" (1984, p. 54).

7.3.1 The 'logic of practice' of the Grand Play Project

Within the Grand Play Project in this country, there is evidence of what could be described as a colonising movement from make-do to consumer which starts with the introduction of symbol systems evident both in language and especially in spaces for play. These were developed, trialed, defined, and codified during this period. The expertise embodied in these symbols created gradual tension pulling against 'collective principles'. Arguably, the reform project of this Grand Play Project was the reform of families with young children. (See Figure 7.1.)

Figure 7.1 Reconceptualising the Grand Play Project: Using de Certeau's 'Logic of practice'

Goal: The reform of families enabling greater mental health for the youngest generation

Place of governance: Spaces created for observing children at play

Strategies of colonisation

Strategies of colonisation:	**Significant developments within the 'Grand play project'**
Symbol systems	**'Free play'** • Language of play • Spaces for play • Observations, and their analysis
Tricks	Progressive educators established authority about how children learn • Children could be understood by a well-trained

	adult within a carefully crafted play environment
Transfers and metamorphosis	**Passage between genres:** *Euphemism*: that 'free play' was free *Polythetism*: that play would expand its meaning and contexts to include this professionalised space of activity *Substitution*: that responsibility for children can be passed from the familiar and the familial to the professional in nursery spaces

There were also points where the colonising process can be understood to have 'taken a trick'; that is, to have successfully 'maneuvered' shifting political conditions. In Aoteaoa New Zealand's Grand Play Project, a major trick successfully turned was alignment between authority and publication opportunities which effectively meant that Progressive Educators, such as Gwen Somerset, were able to pioneer a market niche for playcentre writers to articulate the science of how to successfully work with very young children and to recognise their learning through their play. While international authors, (for example, Hartley, et al., 1952) were inspiring local author/educators like Beverley Morris, local publications were reflecting local experiences (Grey, 1974a, 1974b, 1975; Morris, 1994; Somerset, 1975, 1987). Geraldine McDonald referred to this happening particularly in playcentre which she described as both adaptable and able to theorise from practice.

However, perhaps the cleverest 'trick' was the creation of a science for 'understanding the child', and Susan Isaacs can take much of the credit for this. She and those who came after her (including Gwen Somerset) determined the

appropriate play spaces in which the child's inner thinking, drives, motivations, and emotions would become evident to the informed observer. Building on previous systems of provision, including the work of Froebel and Dewey, Susan Isaacs helped to conceputalise children as knowable, especially through analysed observations of their 'free play' (Gardner, 1969; McDonald, et al., 2003; Stover, 1998b).

Consideration of the Grand Play Project also reveals evidence of transference: the 'passages' between genres. An example of *polythetism* is the passage of the word 'play' from its loose generic meaning into a status of scientific specificity. Choosing to use the phrase 'free play' to describe the settings, what the child was understood to be doing, as well as the theoretical assumptions; these were building meanings into existing words and swelling their meaning. 'Free play' was not the same thing as playing with siblings in the barn on a Saturday afternoon. It happened in set places and at set times, and increasingly had to be done in approved ways. As Beverley Morris described the first nursery playcentre, it was the first place where she saw play being "*allowed*". Later as a playcentre supervisor and liaison officer, Beverley was testing ideas about what 'worked' in terms of the appropriate use of equipment and interaction with children. Through playcentre's networks and publications, she had opportunity to spread the word to others, such as to Pam Hanna who as a young mother on the West Coast found Beverley's ideas gripping. So the technology that developed within 'free play' was the analysed observation and what was extracted from this technology was the gradual articulation and dissemination of 'what worked' in encouraging the child's meaningful and revealing activity.

Calling it 'play' ensured that this activity was seen as natural; calling it 'play' gave associations to other animals, including human adults. Calling it 'free play' was a *euphemism* masking its contradictions as a space for understanding

children. Calling it ‘free play’ gave it a resonance with John Dewey’s goals of democracy in action.

There also began *substitutability* within the space defined for intimate knowledge of and responsibility for very young children. There is no suggestion here that parents ever held exclusive tenancy of that space. Within this study’s research data, there are examples of children spending significant time in the company of non-parents. What is being signaled is the normalising of teachers, and this includes trained ‘professional’ parents, who could bring their expertise to share that space with, or to substitute in that place for, the parent’s (probably unscientific) subjective and intimate knowledge.

The technology of the interpreted observation undermined the unthinking and the uninformed viewer of children. They were required to ‘look and listen’ (Grey, 1974b); and to ‘take another look’ (Penrose, 1998) in order to extract the information needed to know and influence the child. During the Grand Play Project, those that understood the process were also protecting it from its political or commercial exploitation. But as Marie Bell lamented, there were “*too many people itching to get their fingers on kids’ play*” in order to direct it.

As illustrated in the research data, during this Grand Play Project, there are numerous examples of the unnoticed deviance that de Certeau (1984) maintained characterised everyday life. He called these tactical acts of resistance ‘La Perruque’ (p.24) which means ‘the wig’, and which is illustrated by the example of an employee who can meet his own agendas without unsettling his employer’s requirements of him. Within this study there are recurring stories of how requirements of place were not met. There was in a sense an ongoing ruse between the high standards of what was expected, for example, in a playcentre day to day and the realities of what happened, as long as an inspection process was not imminent.

Looking ahead to the next projects and through to 2006 when the interviews were completed, it is possible to recognise 'artifacts' from the Grand Play Project:

- Normalising of the use of 'early childhood' settings by families for their very young children, as a mechanism for socialising children and preparing them for school;
- The value put on children's 'choice' and 'activity' for children for extended periods of time within those settings;
- The use of observation to understand children and the codifying of play spaces (the areas of play); and
- The importance of the involvement of parents in the education of their very young children.

The first of these is evident in the e.c. statistics (see section 2.3.2). The next three are all evident in the *Revised statement of desirable objectives and practice* (DOPs) (Ministry of Education, 1998), in the revised regulations and licensing criteria which are gradually replacing it (Ministry of Education and New Zealand Government, 2008) and equipment requirements (for example, Ministry of Education, 2011).

7.3.2 'The logic of practice' within the Grand Unity Project

Between 1975 and 1990, sufficient commonality was found amongst the 'early childhood' services that they could be governed as an educational sector within the machinery of central government. Within this Grand Unity Project, central government could be seen as a paternalistic force of reasonableness in the face of oppositional posturing by the existing services. I further propose that these years also indicate that there was continuing movement from 'make-do' to

'consume' in which de Certeau's 'logic of practice' is also evident. (See Figure 7.2.)

Figure 7.2 Reconceptualising the Grand Unity Project: Using de Certeau's 'Logic of practice'

Goals: *To reform the existing early childhood services and to create a method of national governance for e.c.-related services*

Place of governance: *In the political arena and in building consensus across the services that they collectively were a 'sector' with unmet social responsibilities*

Strategies of colonisation:	**Significant developments within the 'Grand unity project'**
Symbol systems	The personal is political • mother as oppressed • child as rights holder
Tricks	The e.c. services were a sector • Sector focus was to be on what 'is' rather than what 'could be' • Government was a reasonable moderator/governor between otherwise ungovernable organisational providers
Transfers and metamorphosis	Passage between genres: • *Euphemism*: that choice brought self-fulfilment for parent (mother) and child; and that unity would not change the basic values and 'programmes' of the services • *Polythetism*: that the early childhood services had responsibility for families who were not participating • *Substitution*: that e.c. centres could reconfigure themselves to absorb and deliver larger social agendas

The goal of this era was the 'buy in' by leaders across the various 'e.c.' services that they were part of a broad social agenda. The traditional services had, at the beginning of this era, almost a monopoly on the knowledge of how to work with very young children. This is evident in the way that various participants were able to 'make it up'. It is also suggested in the plea from David Barney in 1975 that the traditional services "could contribute a great deal of assistance from their own years of experience and pool of experts" (Barney, 1975, p. 281) in charting a course for the much-in-demand childcare. By the end of this era, the tertiary and research sectors were confident to speak with authority, using their own 'pool of experts' (Dalli, 2010; May, 2001).

In this era, two entwined and potent symbols were: (1) the restless mother of young children who had become self-conscious about her own oppression (May, 1992); and (2) the traditional services which symbolised social injustices because of their inability to adequately cater both for the growing communities of non-Pākehā families, but also the children with working parents. The sector showed lack of planning (Barney, 1975; McDonald, 1980; New Zealand State Services Commission Working Group on Early Childhood Care and Education, 1980).

There were several successful 'tricks' taken during this time. One was the redefinition of the reform project. At the first early childhood convention in 1975, Bill Renwick, the then Director of Education, called for a break from "our own convictions and attitudes", in order to think "constructively about finding solutions to situations as they are, not as we would like them to be" (cited by May, 2001, p. 235). The old reform project, the psychologically sound child, was not the focus. The authority to define the 'situations as they are' was moving away from the traditional providers and into the (new) early childhood research community with an enthusiasm for sociology (see, for example, McDonald,

1973, 1980). De Certeau (1984) recognised a similar process, with the arrival of sociology, "the hero changes":

> A passive and nocturnal actor is substituted for the sly multiplicity of strategies. The immobile stone figure is supposed to be the agent that produces the phenomena observed in a society. He is an essential character, in fact because he makes the circular movement of the theory possible… (p. 58).

'He' is also the basis of policy development; 'he' is also the basis of advocates 'for the children'. One of the tricks manoeuvred in this era was the shift from children being understood as needy and dependent (and requiring free play, if it was available) and into being 'rights bearers'. According to Anne Meade, this is in part Geraldine McDonald's legacy (see New Zealand State Services Commission Working Group on Early Childhood Care and Education, 1980). Women were seen as rights holders, especially as workers (Cook, 1985; May, 2003).

During the Grand Unity Project, the 'thing' with multiple meanings (*the polythetist*) was the identity of 'early childhood' services as a sector. In the context of this 'grand project', individual services were grouped together and collectively judged as inadequate for not taking more account of the families from which their children came, and for the non-attending children because the service did not cater for their needs, or for their parents' needs. New authorities stood in the place of old authorities. Into the space previously filled by psychologically-inclined play advocates came specialists in workforce management, the feminist movement, as well as the sociologists, followed by curriculum developers in tertiary education settings.

Central government was also 'a thing' which was being reconceptualised. Its place in e.c.e. and within greater social reform projects was increasingly hands-on (Royal Commission on Social Policy, 1988). Attitudes to education were changing from the late 1960s, and according to Renwick (1986) education was

no longer regarded as operating even-handedly for the good in society. While this criticism was playing out in education more generally, within early childhood circles that criticism was leveled at existing services. Central government took responsibility on itself for reforming the sector as a whole (Department of Education, 1988; New Zealand State Services Commission Working Group on Early Childhood Care and Education, 1980).

I propose that there were at least two *euphemisms* evident in this era. One was the mantra of 'choice' which was evident in the drive for self-actualisation of both mothers (in having choices to do more than mothering) and their children (still within environments which were largely governed by the traditional providers within systems of 'free play'). However, 'choice' masks the contradictions and compromises of shared spaces, shared resources and shared identities within e.c. settings and within families. 'Choice' is an example of a word which crosses discourses and movements. The feminist call for 'choice' was reinforced by the neoliberal faith in the marketplace with its emphasis on consumers having 'choice' including in the education of their children (Duhn, 2010; Jesson, 2001).

The second euphemism is 'unity'. Finding 'unity' within early childhood services may have been achieved during this era but that they are all 'education' is somewhat euphemistic, when considered against the backdrop of teaching more generally. Calling early childhood 'educational' is not necessarily welcomed by teachers in other sectors (Kane, 2008) and within this study, the research data includes several accounts of e.c.e.'s low status amongst other educators. In addition, the politics of education during this era include the confrontations between the government's neoliberal reformers and the teachers' unions. They clashed on multiple levels (Jesson, 2001). The creation of the early childhood sector was closely integrated within the contested

neoliberal frameworks for education, and could have acted as a blueprint for other sectors.

The artifacts of this era can be recognised in the modern version of the early childhood sector which was created from combining a diverse range of organisations with some degree of interest in the education of very young children. The sector's creation process indicated to affected participants that the capacity for 'making it up' left the various e.c. organisations, and moved into the realm of national policy making. While the sector could be consulted, governance was clearly no longer in the hands of the services themselves.

7.3.3 'The logic of practices' in The Grand Education Project

The years between 1990 and 2006 could be seen as a Grand Educational Project in which the professionally-run sector for the education of young children was established through major interventions by central government, particularly in the mid to late 1990s through the rolling out of two linked government-driven policies: the publication of and then professional development to implement the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996); and the imposition of neoliberal systems of governance and management which were articulated within the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (DOPs) (Ministry of Education, 1998).

While the impact of *Te Whāriki* has been widely and critically discussed (Brostrom, 2003; Carpenter, 2001; Gibbons, 2007; Hewes, 2007; Nuttall, 2003, 2005a; Te One, 2003), the impact of the DOPs has been largely accepted as being the cost of increased support from government. As Margaret Wollerman reflected in this study, '*The more money we got, the more requirements we had to meet… .'* Later initiatives, such as the 10 year strategic plan (Ministry of Education, 2002), have built on these two earlier policy initiatives. Arguably, the

colonising of early childhood continued through this era and was driven more from central government, as increasingly innovation, as well as compliance, reflected government initiative. (See Figure 7.3.)

Figure 7.3 Reconceptualising the Grand Education Project: Using de Certeau's 'Logic of practice'

Goal: The reform of e.c. teachers to maximise the potential for economic and educational achievement within e.c. centres

Place of governance: The (professional) e.c. teacher within e.c. centres

Strategies of colonisation:	**Significant developments within the 'Grand education project'**
Symbol systems	Child as human capital The language and technologies of education
Tricks	In the context of neoliberal systems of accountability creating: • Policies to address issues of social justice • The framework for the development of the professional e.c. teacher • A humanistic national e.c. curriculum • 20 hours of 'free' e.c.e. per week for 3-4 year olds
Transfers and metamorphosis	***Passage between genres:*** *Euphemism*: that children's education drives reform of e.c.e., masking economic issues and benefits *Polythetism*: that divergent personal and centre philosophies can exist within a highly regulated environment; and that education of young children is the same as caring for them *Substitution*: that (at least for daylight weekday hours) professionally-run e.c. institutions can replace, and (or perhaps

	even improve) families and neighbourhoods in the lives of very young children

Arguably, the goal of this era was the professionalisation of the e.c. teaching workforce in pursuit of greater capacity to animate the human capital embodied in young children (Farquhar, 2008a). The site of governance occurs primarily in the reforming standards set for the early childhood centre, and in the raised training requirements for e.c. teachers. These were articulated within the 10-year strategic plan for e.c.e. (Ministry of Education, 2002). However, existing centre practice was also being challenged through government-funded professional development (PD) programmes. These included identification and support for 'centres of innovation'(Ministry of Education, 2010a), and extensive support for building centre-based capacity in sociocultural planning and assessments, exemplified by *Kei tua o te pae* (Ministry of Education, 2004/2007/2009). (See for example, Perkins, 2006.)

A number of symbols of professionalisation have become evident during this Grand Education Project. Two are privileged here: the image of the child as investment opportunity requiring expert intervention; and the educationalisation of e.c. language. The image of the very young child as an investment opportunity embodies possibilities both of potential danger and benefits to the wider society (Gibbons, 2007; Goffin, et al., 1997); the young child has to have that potential turned towards what is valued in order to uphold social cohesion (A. Smith, et al., 2000). While this approach to education has been critiqued (for example, by Dahlberg, et al., 2007; Gibbons, 2007), it has provided economic arguments for improving standards and provision of e.c.e. in this country (May, 2009; Mitchell, 2007; Mitchell, et al., 2008).

The second symbol system to consider is the entrenchment of education-speak within e.c.e. Words like 'curriculum' have replaced words like 'programmes';

assessment is now a requirement, as is appraisal of staff and management. Planning is an expectation for educators (making spaces for play is not sufficient), observation-based documentation is required for engaging parents in the education of their children. These are all technologies of provision articulated in the 'DOPs' (Ministry of Education, 1998) and maintained in the current e.c. regulations and current licensing criteria (Ministry of Education and New Zealand Government, 2008). This came through research data, as well as being evident in the regulations and requirements for early childhood settings (Ministry of Education and New Zealand Government, 2008). A key event of this Grand Project was the acceptance of *Te Whāriki* by the wider early childhood community, which is an example of a carefully managed transformation from one paradigm into another. This was perhaps the biggest 'trick taken' in this project because *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) was broad enough and rich enough in mystique that nearly every early childhood service could interpret the document to include their own practices, even if the language was different. As Robbie Burke said there was a perception that *"we were doing it anyway"*; or as those participating in the consultation on the curriculum document told its authors: "This is us; this is what we do, this belongs to us" (cited by A. Smith, et al., 2000, p. 65).

But the change of language was also signaling a change of paradigm (Nuttall, 2005a). While the curriculum might have the appearance of being 'business as usual' in e.c. settings, the accountability systems that accompanied it, and which were made explicit in the DOPs (Ministry of Education, 1998), profoundly shifted the nature of who could take responsibility for the education of young children, and how services needed to be managed. Particularly evident is the deference now shown to documentation as evidence of good practice (what the participants referred to as 'the paper trail', and which de Certeau (1984) would describe as generating 'scripture').

The *substitution* of the expert teacher into the role of the child's intimate guide is made more fully evident in this era. Although the 'DOPs' require centre educators and managers to acknowledge the aspirations of parents (Ministry of Education, 1998), Ian Hassall, a former Commissioner for Children, has suggested that parents are being encouraged to believe that teachers and parents are interchangeable in the lives of young children. He described the widespread use of long hours of e.c.e. as, "an experiment" (Hassall, 2008, p. 1). The credentialised teacher also substitutes for the un-credentialised teacher. The substitution process is more than metaphoric. At the time of the interviews, several participants described how those without professional qualifications were being moved out of centres. While it may sound overly dramatic to talk in terms of the de Certeau's 'control of the body' being at the core of the colonising system, there is no doubt that that movement is the movement of people physically out of spaces. Anne Meade spoke of "*churn*" amongst e.c. staff; Trish Gargiulo saw the departure of "*bosomy moms*".

Another *substitution* is becoming evident during this transformative era. It is the substitution of compliance for beliefs. Asking students and teachers to act from a belief base suggests that a wide diversity of beliefs is welcome. Similarly, the requirement that centres articulate and publicise their centre philosophy (Ministry of Education and New Zealand Government, 2008) suggests that diversity is welcomed. However, this apparent encouragement of difference is one of the *euphemisms* of this era, as it masks the amount of conformity required to pass through the credentialising process (for student teachers) and the licensing and review processes (for centres). Beliefs are problematic, at best, when they position the believer outside the boundaries of compliance and academic discourses. This reflects perhaps what de Certeau wrote: "There are now too many things to be believed and not enough credibility to go around" (p. 171).

The '*tricks* '(non-specific) of this era were recognised in the changed purpose of early childhood education, as reflected in Marie Bell's rueful comment:

> *We used to say, 'If we can't beat them join them', but I think they were saying '(Since) we can't beat them, we'll get them to join us and that will fix them' and I think they have.*

Significant policy developments of this 'grand project' include the popular system of initially 'free' (and then later nearly free) e.c.e. for children aged three and four years from July 2007. Initially this was to be only in participating teacher-led services, however with the 2008 change of government, there was from 2010 a version of '20 hours' policy available to playcentre and kohanga reo (Tolley, 2009). Although Mitchell (2007) reported that part-time provision of e.c.e. was sufficient to improve children's educational achievements, the research basis for quantifying the desirable number of 'free hours' per week at 20, is not so clear. When the then Minister of Education announced that research supports the 20 free hours programme, (Maharey, 2007), the research he referred to was the *Competent Children* longitudinal study of the lasting effects of e.c.e. experience in which the intensity of e.c. experience (children's attendance measured in hours per week) is not a feature (Wylie, et al., 2008). However, regardless of its rationale, the '20 hours' policy sets a de facto desirable (minimum) attendance requirement at e.c. services for three- and four-year-olds which is more intensive provision than that offered by traditional providers. For example, kindergarten offered four-year-olds only about 15 hours per week, and three-year-olds about 12. Implied here is that, prior to the introduction of this programme, every child in Aotearoa New Zealand who had been in e.c. for less than 20 hours per week was missing out on realising their full potential.

Or perhaps they have been. Smith et al. (2000) concluded that New Zealand children were attending e.c.e. for a relatively "small number of hours" (p. 3)

reflecting both the (then) high cost of using the services, but also the preferences of parents who did not always act in the best interests of either the child or society to “maximize the potential returns” (p. 6). A *euphemism* embedded in the educational imperative of the 20 free hours of e.c.e. also masks, it can be argued, the “effective family functioning” (A. Smith, et al., 2000, p. 44). This suggests that the economic drivers are as important as any research that could quantify an optimal number of hours in an e.c. service for three- and four-year-olds.

The *polythetic* events of this era include the passage of rationale for observations from being an occasional event that facilitated the understanding of children, into an exercise in pedagogical documentation (Alcock, 2006; Curtis & Carter, 2000; Penrose, 1998; Podmore, 2006), which also provided evidence of meeting compliance requirements. This has expanded the emphasis on ‘scriptural’ evidence arising from teaching/learning situations. While the production of such documentation can be seen as having pedagogical properties, some participants saw it as distancing teachers from children. In addition, some participants suggested that documentation serves many purposes. It is worth considering whether pedagogical ‘scripture’ may have more meaning as a form of communication with parents and as a tool for accountability, than the events that they document have for the child.

What remains as artifacts from this era is, of course, a work in progress, as this era is not complete. As Farquhar (2008a) described, e.c.e. in this country is a paradoxical mix of humanistic education traditions alongside the normalising systems of managerialism. This is evident in the sociocultural emphasis within pedagogy and assessment systems, alongside the economic drivers of management and extended hours of subsidised provision. But I suggest that there are several artifacts likely to remain in evidence:

- The requirement for managerialist systems of accountability has developed into a culture of compliance and transparency which helps to define the sector as professional, even while limiting it to the boundaries of the neoliberal discourse and arguably dulling critical engagement (Adams, et al., 2005; Moss, 2010; Scrivens, 2002).
- Innovative forms of e.c. will struggle if they challenge minimum standards. Possibilities for 'forest kindergartens', (see, for example, Harward, 2009), are at best problematic because of licensing requirements such as fences (Ministry of Education and New Zealand Government, 2008).
- Parents will continue to use early childhood education services. Easier to establish than a personal neighbourhood or an extended family for every family with small children, the early childhood centre is present in (virtually) any town and city in Aotearoa New Zealand. Its availability enables interchangeable support systems and the mobility of families. *Te Whāriki's* child is a global child (Duhn, 2006).
- The modernist project will continue, with increasing visibility of economic returns from e.c.e. services expected through increased parental workforce participation. The place of parent-led services (playcentre and te kohanga reo) will be increasingly anomalous in terms of government funding. The recent report of the government's ECE Taskforce illustrates this direction (ECE Taskforce, 2011).
- The sociocultural frameworks of the curriculum and the ensuing assessment systems have prompted reflection about national cultural identity. The importance of place is further reinforced by te Ao Māori (Penetito, 2004). Within this focus on place and on identity, the relics of the Grand Play Project , the areas of play, take on new meanings as evidence of the world of sand, water, clay, wood and human artisans at work.
- More subtle is a shift in where knowledge is held. Within the Grand Play Project, there were authority figures and a slowly growing body of written

material. Birch and Birch (1970), for example, credited playcentre with providing a “substantial body of curriculum literature” (p. 13) which reflected voluntary support from professionals, but there was also, they said, an emphasis on informality and discussion which made little space for control or direction by professional or academic “circles” (p. 9). However, the growth of written materials has also created shared language, and reference points for understanding experiences with young children and their parents, as well as identifying key concepts by people with status: the basis of a professional discourse. During the Grand Unity Project, the tools of adult education were slowly morphing into the modes of teacher education. In the Grand Education Project, the tertiary and research sectors have more clearly defined themselves as the ‘pool of experts’. I recognised in my years of professional development particularly within childcare centres, a shift from ‘We can work this out’ to ‘Just tell us what we have to do’. The early childhood centres and services can see themselves as ‘consumers’ of knowledge held elsewhere: in the halls of the Ministry of Education, the lecture theatres of the tertiary sector, and in the publication databases of academic research. The whereabouts of practical knowledge about play, about free play, and the rationale for areas of play? According to the participants, it has not strongly present in either e.c. teacher education nor in e.c. centres.

- And even subtle is another tension within which e.c. teachers operate: between mystery and transparency. With its basis in Māori cosmology and its foregrounding of deeply spiritual and mysteriously unquantifiable outcomes such as ‘well-being’ and ‘belonging’, *Te Whāriki* charts a space of interpretation, which still requires the skill of a ‘Susan Isaacs’ to extract from the observed, to reconceptualise through analysis, and then to create ‘scripture’ to meet the standards of compliance. Yet the framework of management requirements, indicating a service delivered to government as much as to the child or the

family, is decidedly non-mysterious. The neoliberal drive for clarity of purpose, systems of policy, delivery and evaluation, are all about transparency.

7.3.4 Summary

This section has critically considered how a colonisation process can be argued to have occurred over the three 'grand projects' identified in this study. The early childhood sector is now demarcated by a cluster of interdependent consumers: children, parents and central government are all 'consumers' of education and care; teachers and student teachers as consumers of a relatively new tertiary level reservoir of approved knowledge. Money changes hands through many of these consumer transactions.

7.4 A brief review of research methodology

> I wanted a tidy theme-based history of an idea and its practice, but instead was confronted by narratives that carried with them the untidy, the nuanced, the sudden shifts of language, the hybridisation of ideas circulating and adhering to other ideas. I reached for 'learning through play' and pulled out the clash and engagement of modernity's aspirations for the realisation of children's social capital in the name of stability and civility within the company of the liberation of women from the constraints of moonlight nappies. An alliance between neoliberal forces and the feminists? Surely not! I pulled out 'free play' and got the entangling oppositional ideas about 'the image of the child' in post-war New Zealand. I pulled out the psychoanalyst and the democrat. I pulled out the conservative and the local. I pulled out the reformers with their banners of social justice and with them the metanarratives of centralised control. I pulled out the resilient frailty of mothering alongside the rabid confidence of education, and the many-headed hydra: economics. I wanted a tidy project: but found complexity.
>
> *Research notes*

The research design was focused initially on generating research data based on interviews about play, 'free play' and the changes that affected them. So there was intention and a plan. But beyond the plan to look for themes, the analytical process was not firmly fixed.

As was typical of this research process, the label 'bricoleur' came to me while reading about something else. This happened often; namely, that the connections to experience were recognised in the literature, rather than taken from the literature to guide the research. So this methodology became evident as illustrating a bricolage approach. Kincheloe (2001, 2005) articulated the researcher-as-bricoleur's tools as including etymological and hermeneutic inquiry. These helped to give shape to lines of questions during the analytical process, but they also encouraged tangential thinking and cross-discipline movements. This required recurring reconsideration of what academic disciplines claimed what words, what knowledge. As I wrote in exasperation during the analytic process:

> Play crosses domains of discourse, knowledge, activity. While it finds resonance and opens memories, play does not stick around to help with the analysis of the narratives of people, places and things. Trying to find play (through the processes that have led to what is now a highly regulatory educational sector for children under five years old in this country) has involved sifting through the gritty sands of stories, and finding the traces of the elemental narratives that cross the artificial divides of domain knowledge. Is this history? Philosophy? Psychology? Oh dear – this is sociology! Where is education?

When the bricolage is considered in its traditional sense as 'undisciplined' knowledge and activity that reflects 'what is to hand' (de Certeau, 1984; Lévi-Strauss, 1966), what is proximal determines the form of the bricolage. As well as my existing capabilities as a researcher and author, what was proximal in this study included continuous access to a university library and electronic databases. These sources enabled me to pursue questions but also produced what I thought of as 'rabbit holes': interesting lines of inquiry but which often produced at best a few lines of text and just as often, no text in this study at all. The use of nodal constructs (feminist oral history, play, educationalisation, plus the self-as-researcher) also added to the scope for digression. That there is a five year gap between the last interviews and the final writing up of this study speaks of inefficiency, but also reflects the part- time commitment to its

completion. This illustrates perhaps what Hammersley (2004) suggested was a defining characteristic of a bricolage approach to research: the tolerance of supervisors.

Clarifying the analytical framework earlier in the research process would have simplified the process, and as articulated above in a research note, the research findings could be understood across several domains of knowledge. It would have been simpler to have been undertaken the research outside the phd framework and written up the interviews as a piece of academic inquiry. Presenting the material for assessment by examiners has, however, added rigour to the analytical process. The research process would have been simpler if I had limited the size of the sample.

However, there is still a sense of incompleteness as there are some important people, especially from the 'Grand Unity Project' whose stories are not well known. The sample of informants could have been bigger to include them. Or more sensibly, the focus could have been limited to those who took leadership roles in that era.

7.5 The significance of this study

The significance of this research is broadly two-fold:

(1) It has brought out more detail about:

- the contested nature of 'free play' and its influence in the evolution of the early childhood education sector in Aotearoa New Zealand;
- the 'everyday' practices of historic e.c. settings and how from the perspectives of those involved, those practices were understood, debated, and evolved;
- the impact of initiatives to promote bicultural organisational practices

- the confluence in the 1980s between feminists, childcare activists and neoliberal policy initiatives.

(2) It has recognised and argued for the historic changes within e.c.e. to be understood as evidence of educationalisation, even as colonisation.

All the people interviewed had experienced something called 'free play'. Some of their stories are familiar, (for example, see May, 1992a; Middleton & May, 1997b; Stover, 1998b), and for those whose stories are told here for the first time, the patterns of their 'journeys' will be familiar to those familiar with New Zealand social history, and more particularly with e.c.e. history. This study adds more colour and detail to the 'landscapes' described; more lookouts to consider the 'why?' of those journeys. They also provided more insight into the maps, energy sources and travelling companions.

However, the significance of some Wellington-based groups has not been so visible; for example, the Association for the Study of Childhood and the 'plotting group' of feminist and early childhood activists in the 1970s, as described by Val Burns and Mary Purdy. The key role played by Bill Renwick in navigating the issues of childcare into government policy is illustrated with specificity. Geraldine McDonald's work in articulating a rights-based perspective on provision of e.c. for young children is also foregrounded in this study, and provides back story for the evolution of a rights-based approach to early childhood education (such as Nuttall & Edwards, 2007; Te One, 2008).

The creation of the early childhood sector in the late 1980s overlapped with the sesquicentennial celebration of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. There was major debate about the place of the Treaty in public policy (see for example, Royal Commission on Social Policy, 1988) and honouring the treaty was imbedded in foundational documents for the new e.c. sector (Ministry of

Education, 1990, 1996, 1998; NZEI Te Riu Roa Early Childhood Code of Ethics National Working Group, 1995). What this means in terms of teaching practices has prompted ongoing research (see, for example, Jenkin, 2009; Ritchie & Rau, 2006). However, there is much less documentation about early childhood organisations who have attempted to make themselves 'bicultural' (the exception being the story of TTPOOA-NZCA's journey in this area, evident in May, 2003). The personal perspectives given in this study offer some insights as to the complexities of the challenges that 'biculturalism' has raised.

Looking at the changes that have occurred in the personal experiences of the 23 New Zealanders interviewed for this study has meant encountering play in contexts within and beyond early childhood education settings. Children's play is always within a context, and that context is not necessarily one that is intended to educate them. So throughout this study, reflections from the participants about families, motherhood, neighbourhoods and parents have also remained visible. These experiences beyond the early childhood setting provide points of comparing and contrasting what remains the same and what appears to be different. Similarly, the opportunity to talk about areas of play enabled comparisons about how those areas had been understood, and how children used them. So, for example, when considering 'family play' in a 1950s rural playcentre, Joan Kennett considered as significant the differences she saw 50 years later in the 'same' area of play in an urban childcare centre. Similarly, tree climbing can be considered across generations and its apparent risks to children seen in the context of shifting assumptions about safety and culpability.

Comparisons also prompted judgments. For some participants, e.c.e., as they understood it, is serving significantly different purposes than what they aspired to. For others, it served good enough purposes and had enabled better support

for working women especially compared to what was possible in the years when ‘free play’ was the predominant system evident.

The codification of the areas of play into systems of compliance is covered in more depth than I have seen elsewhere, and when the changes are considered as ‘educationalisation’, the systems can be understood as enabling the sector to be both governed and to develop professional standards. According to Labaree (2008) the drive for professional status amongst teachers can run counter the ability of teachers to look critically at the sector. Considering that the e.c. has been ‘educationalised’, for example, can help to explain the diminished ‘critical ecology’ which Dalli (2010, p. 61) identified as evident previously, particularly during the years which are described in this study as ‘The Grand Unity Project’ and the early years of the ‘Grand Education Project’. If Moss (2008, 2010) is right that neoliberal underpinnings are sapping e.c.e. of its democratic impulses, then that could explain why it is difficult to critique e.c.e. in this country and neoliberal initiatives have effectively defined the professional (Scrivens, 2002). In addition, what was in the 1970s a policy void, according to several participants, is now highly regulated. Knowledge about the ‘how’ of educating very young children has increasingly become fixed within systems of compliance.

Calling the educationalisation of e.c.e. a ‘colonising’ process may be a different turn of phrase, but the idea is not a particularly new one. Brian Sutton-Smith was prepared to suggest the “zoo-ification” of children (Sutton-Smith, 1982, p. 296) in this country over the past century. Gibbons (2007) has argued that ‘free play’ served as a technology of the colonisation of young children, as it enabled governance of play by adults. While the motivations have been hopeful; the effect has been to codify those spaces, both physically and socially. What this study adds is more detail about how a colonisation process could have happened.

7.6 Stepping back and moving on

In process of creating this body of 'scripture', there are many more truncated lines of reflection than those that have successfully emerged into this last chapter. This section outlines areas where more reflection is warranted, but which are now beyond the scope of this study.

- Within this research data there are the germinating critiques of neoliberal accountability whose advocates are unaccountable for whatever societal (and even environmental) dysfunction may loom because of the policies so shaped. Moss (2010) suggested this should have urgency.
- Documentation, the fascination for creating 'scriptural' pedagogical information, warrants critique in terms of the teacher's classroom role, but also in terms of creating digital memories and identities. Does the photographed child become a self-conscious child?
- While participants' observations were that children in early childhood settings were playing less and being instructed more, there was no empirical evidence offered to substantiate this. There is scope to explore this.
- Equally relevant is the social construction of accidents and safety, not only within the daylight lives of young children in early childhood settings, but also in community parks and playgrounds. What is the history and present reality of the adventure playground?
- What future is there for e.c. services outside the boundaries of a regulated space: the e.c.e. centre? If centre management had free choice about equipment and resources, would they re-create environments with the 'traditional' areas of play?
- Understandings about play, areas of play and play theory have shifted over time, but this current study only hints at what these might mean in the experiences of recent e.c. graduates. There is scope to compare the findings of

this study with another generation of e.c. teachers, who would likely reflect a wider range of cultural backgrounds than those who participated in this study. Lex Grey (1993), along with Brian Sutton-Smith (1997), believed that children's play would not be understood as play by an adult unless that adult had played. What does children's play mean to those e.c. teachers who have not played as children themselves?

7.7 Conclusion: Locating play in the educationalisation of early childhood in Aotearoa New Zealand

This study has demonstrated that 'play's progress' across those 60+ years has been to serve as an early technology which laid down the 'grammar' of the early childhood classrooms that has helped codify the science of teaching young children, and enabled its governance. This in turn set the scene for the expansion of e.c. provision, as well as ongoing regulation and funding by central government. But 'free play' can also be understood to exist as a 'sedimented' practice (Mouffe, 2005); once a volatile and political issue, 'free play' is now stabilised, giving shape to the social order of e.c. settings.

While play can be recognised in children's activity, its value within a neoliberal-shaped education can be reduced to its ability to facilitate predetermined outcomes; to attract and engage children's interests (Wood, 2010; Curtis & Carter, 2008; Hewes, 2007). De Certeau (1984) maintained that while spaces can be controlled, there remain in the practice of everyday life 'tactics' about how time is used. So through ethical practice and personal agency within the early childhood classroom, the reflective e.c. teacher can navigate the unpredictable, even "revolutionary" (Wood & Attfield, 2005, p. 16) pathways of play alongside young children.

However, play and ‘free play’ are not fully captured by education, and at the conclusion of this study, the focus shifts briefly. If there is another ‘grand play project’ in Aotearoa New Zealand, it is unlikely to be driven from inside the early childhood education sector, in part because of the nature of e.c. professionalism in this country (Scrivens, 2002). If another ‘grand play project’ develops, it may even gain its vitality through opposing the institutionalising of young children in educational settings.

APPENDIX 1: The participants: Their status within e.c.e., and their interview details

(Note: for explanation of terms used, see 'key' at the end of this appendix.)

	Status	Decades of involve-ment * (approx.)	Date	Place	Other people present
Bell, Marie	Historic leader	1940s-1990s	17 April 2006	Marie's home, Wellington	Marie's son and grandson from time to time.
Boyd, Lynda	Life member, NZK	1970s-2000s	11 July 2006	Lynda's office, Christchurch	
Bramwell, Mary Alice	Life member, TTPOOA-NZCA	1960s-2000s	19 April 2006	Mary's home, Hamilton	
Burke, Robbie	Life member – NZPF	1970s-2000s	12 July 2006	Robbie's home, Christchurch	
Burns, Val	Historic leader	1970s-2000s	16 April 2006	Val's home, Lower Hutt	Mary Purdy was also part of the interview.
Chapman, Barbara	Life member – NZPF	1970s-2000s	11 July 2006	Barbara's home, Christchurch	
Densem, Ailsa	Life member – CPA	1950-1990s	13 July 2006	Ailsa's home, Christchurch	
Gargiulo, Trish	Life member – NFKA	1970s-2000s	14 July 2006	Trish's home, Nelson	Wendy Logan was also part of the interview.

	Status	Decades of involve-ment * (approx.)	Date	Place	Other people present
Grey, Lex	Life member – NZPF	1940s-1990s	3 April 2006	Lex's home, Orewa	Beverley Morris was also present.
Hanna, Pam	Life member - NZPF	1970s-2000s	15 April 2006	Pam's home, Petone	Jo Kelly was also part of the interview.
Hubbard, Pat	Life member, TTPOOA-NZCA	1970s-2000s	1 Dec-ember 2005	Pat's home, Wellington	
Katene, Kahuwaero (Kahu)	Life member, TTPOOA-NZCA	1980s-1990s	18April 2006	Kahu's office, Porirua	
Kelly, Jo	Historic leader	1970s-2000s	15 April 2006	Pam Hanna's home, Petone	Pam Hanna was also part of the interview.
Kennett, Joan	Life member, TTPOOA-NZCA	1950s-2000s	18 April 2006	Joan's childcare centre, Palmerston North	
Leonard, Alison	Life member, TTPOOA-NZCA	1970s-2000s	22 Dec 2005	Alison's son's home, Auckland	
Logan, Wendy	Life member, NZK	1980s-2000s	14 July 2006	Trish Gargiulo's home, Nelson	Trish Gargiulo was also part of the interview.
McDonald, Geraldine	Historic leader	1950s-2000s	14 April 2006	Geraldine's home, Wellington	

	Status	Decades of involve-ment * (approx.)	Date	Place	Other people present
Meade, Anne	Historic leader	1960s-2000s	8 April 2006	Auckland Airport	
Moorhouse, Noreen	Life member, TTPOOA-NZCA	1970s-1990s	22 March 2006	AUT staff meeting room, Auckland	Noreen's cousin was also present
Morris, Beverley	Life member – NZPF	1950s-2000s	12 March 2006	Beverley's home, Auckland	
Penrose, Pat	Historic leader	1970s-2000s	12 July 2006	Pat's office, Christchurch	
Purdy, Mary	Historic leader	1950s-2000s	17 April 2006	Val Burns', home, Lower Hutt	Val Burns was also part of the interview.
Wollerman, Margaret	Life member – NZPF	1960s-1980s	29 June 2006	Conducted over the telephone	

Key to acronyms:

- CPA: Canterbury Playcentre Association
- NFKA: Nelson Free Kindergarten Association
- NZK: New Zealand Kindergarten Inc.
- NZPF: New Zealand Playcentre Federation
- TTPOOA-NZCA: Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa New Zealand Childcare Association

'Involvement' included any one or more of the following:

- Working in an early childhood setting
- Working in e.c.e. professional development
- Researching and writing in e.c.e.
- Working as a consultant in e.c.e.
- Working in e.c.e. teacher education
- Working in the public sector in a position of responsibility for e.c.e.

APPENDIX 2: Approval from AUT Ethics Committee

MEMORANDUM

To: Claire McLachlan

From: Madeline Banda Executive Secretary, AUTEC

Date: 12 February 2010

Subject: Ethics Application Number 05/203 Locating a play-based curriculum within New Zealand early childhood education.

Dear Claire

I am pleased to advise that I have approved minor amendments to your ethics application, allowing a copy of their interview recording to be given to participants if requested. This delegated approval is made in accordance with section 5.3.2 of AUTEC's Applying for Ethics Approval: Guidelines and Procedures and is subject to endorsement at AUTEC's meeting on 8 March 2010.

I remind you that as part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTEC:

A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 10 November 2008;

A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 10 November 2008 or on completion of the project, whichever comes sooner;

It is a condition of approval that AUTEC is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEC approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are reminded that, as applicant, you are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

Please note that AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to make the arrangements necessary to obtain this. Also, if your research is undertaken within a jurisdiction outside New Zealand, you will need to make the arrangements necessary to meet the legal and ethical requirements that apply within that jurisdiction.

When communicating with us about this application, we ask that you use the application number and study title to enable us to provide you with prompt service. Should you have any further enquiries regarding this matter, you are welcome to contact Charles Grinter, Ethics Coordinator, by email at ethics@aut.ac.nz or by telephone on 921 9999 at extension 8860.

On behalf of the AUTEC and myself, I wish you success with your research and look forward to reading about it in your reports.

Yours sincerely

Madeline Banda

Executive Secretary

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: Sue Stover sue.stover@aut.ac.nz

APPENDIX 3: Thematic analysis of the research data

Appendix 3 - Table 1 Themes arising from 'Play and…'

Play – definitions, descriptions and purposes of • Play theory • Free play
Personal stories • Formative understandings of play
Contexts – play settings • Who was there? What were they doing? What were the adults/teachers doing? • Unstructured neighbourhood play • Structured environments for children • Structured playgrounds
Play and adults • Parental expectations • Adult learners • Teacher education • Experiential education • The role of the teacher/adult in 'free play'
Teacher/parent education systems • Credentialisation • Observation, planning
Areas of play • Underpinning theoretical frameworks? • What was controversial? • Fantasy play • Water play • Carpentry
Future dreaming • Where does play fit in to what is imagined for children?

Appendix 2 – Table 2 Themes arising from 'Images of children and parents'

Children: • What was normal? What did children do? • What was safe? What was risky? **Parents**: • What was normal? What were parents (mothers?) doing? • Why were they there?

Appendix 3 - Table 3 Themes arising from 'Codifying systems'

Systems • Equipment and equipment lists • Role for government • Accountability systems • Creation of, use of *Te Whāriki* • Documentation; assessment
Tertiary and research sectors • Delivery modes • Content knowledge • Student teaching practice • Status

Appendix 2 - Table 4 Themes arising from 'Change processes'

Change and the personal • Self-image: being different, self-efficacy • Turning points – epiphanies • Entry points into 'ece' • Have we got what we wanted?
'Prophets, mentors, bibles, demons and antagonists' **Creating networks** – creating an early childhood education sector (why?) **'Making it up as we went along'. –** Normalising the radical '**Beehives'** – contagious people and ideas • NEF • KTA • Playcentre • Childcare association • Conventions • Feminism • Teacher education – networks (Wellington teachers college)

APPENDIX 4: Glossary of terms, Te Reo Maori, and colloquialisms

'20 hours' or '20 hours free' e.c.e. programme	Policy to increase enrolment by three- and four-year olds in e.c.e. centres which began in 2007
A4	Standard paper size (210 × 297 mm)
Ako	Teaching and learning
Aotearoa	'Land of the long white cloud'; a Māori name for New Zealand
Biculturalism	In the NZ context, this means how individuals, but more often groups, set out to 'honour the Treaty of Waitangi' by privileging Māori tikanga, kaupapa and te reo (culture, processes and language).
'DOPs'	*The Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices,* gazetted in 1996 establishing quality standards for early childhood centres. The DOPs became compulsory in 1998 for government bulk-funded centres. From 2008, the DOPs have been gradually replaced by new 'Licensing criteria' which embody many of the same requirements but apply to all licensed e.c. centres, regardless of funding.
'E hara i te mea nō naianei te aroha. Nō ngā tūpuna I tuku iho, i tuku iho.'	'The love that we are sharing is not a thing of today alone. But was given to us by our ancestors and will always be, and will always be'. (These are the lyrics of a waiata; lyricist unknown.)
e.c.e./ e.c./ECCE	Early childhood / education Early childhood care and education
'Getting their box together'	Preparing to get married and organising what was needed to set up a home
Hui	A meeting or gathering
Kai	Food
Kaumātua	Elder (male)
Kauri	The tallest tree indigenous to Aotearoa New Zealand; used metaphorically to indicate significance
Kindergarten	Usually refers to 'public' kindergarten which is state supported sessional programmes with professional teachers for children aged three and four.
Kiwi	Flightless bird identified as the national symbol for New Zealanders

Kui / Kuia	Elder (female)
Kura kaupapa Māori	Māori immersion school
Marae	Meeting house
NZCER	New Zealand Council for Educational Research
OSH	Occupational Health and Safety
Pākehā /Palagi	People of European descent. Pākehā is a Māori word; Palagi is a Samoan word.
Playcentre	Parent-run and managed co-operative, unique to New Zealand. Earlier versions of its name include Nursery Play Centre.
Runanga	Group
'Regs'	The regulations governing early childhood centres
SSC	State Services Commission
Tangata whenua	'People of the land'. Usually referring to Māori people.
Te Ahi Kaa	'The keepers of the fire'; those tend the home while others leave
Te Ao Māori	The world of the Māori
Te Kohanga Reo	'The language nest': Māori immersion services for very young children and their whānau
Te Kura Kaupapa	Māori immersion school
Te Whāriki	New Zealand's national early childhood curriculum, published in 1996 by the Ministry of Education. The English translation of *Te Whāriki* is 'the mat'. Metaphorically 'the mat' suggests a woven foundation and a place where all can find a place.
Tikanga	The right of doing things; usually translated as Māori customs
'Till the cows come home'	A long time
Traditional providers/services	Playcentre and kindergarten
Treaty of Waitangi/Te Tiriti o Waitangi	Founding document of the nation of New Zealand (signed 1840) and giving special privileges to the indigenous Māori
TTPOOA-NZCA	Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa – New Zealand Childcare Association
UNCROC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children

Wairua	The spirit
Whaea	Older female family member (aunty or grandmother, perhaps)
Whānau	Family, including extended family

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