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**Self-review as practical philosophy: A case study in early
childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand**

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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.”

Name:

Signature:

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Abstract:

This study examines self-review, the process whereby early childhood teachers review their teaching practice in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Self-review can be interpreted in one of two ways – as a technical form of quality assurance to measure teachers and teaching against prescribed criteria or as a process whereby teachers reflect on their practice, not only in terms of teaching strategies, but also of the values that underpin teaching. This second approach can be viewed as “practical philosophy”. The theoretical basis of the research was social constructionism (Burr, 2003) that contends that knowledge is constructed through the daily lived experiences of people as they interact within a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 2002; Wenger, 1998). In order to explore self-review as practical philosophy, the action research approach of living values as articulated by McNiff and Whitehead (2005) was chosen. This approach contends that we are all living contradictions who do not always practice the values we espouse. Because of this, McNiff and Whitehead believe that if we wish to improve our practice, we should first examine our values and then see how these are reflected in practice. These authors believe that engaging in dialogue with others about values and practice lends rigour and validity to the process.

To explore self-review as an approach of practical philosophy and living values, I planned three spheres of action research to be completed concurrently. In the first sphere I reviewed my own practice. For the second sphere I selected one early childhood centre where I facilitated a process to support early childhood teachers to review their teaching philosophy through reflection and dialogue. Each teacher wrote their individual philosophy statements, which were discussed as a group so that a collective philosophy could be formed. Each teacher also had their practice videoed and each video was then discussed by the team. Both the teachers and I reflected on the process in terms of how it has affirmed, altered or caused us to modify our practice. For the third sphere, I reviewed the documents pertaining to self-review in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. At the completion of the research I reflected that both a technical approach and an approach based on practical philosophy are useful for reviewing teaching practice in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Self-review is the term used by the early childhood sector for a review undertaken from within an early childhood service by those directly involved in that service, as opposed to one undertaken by an external agency (Ministry of Education, 2006). The concept of self-review first appeared on the early childhood landscape in 1999 with the publication by the Ministry of Education of *The quality journey: He haerenga whai hua* (Ministry of Education, 1999), a document that outlined a framework for introducing quality improvement systems into early childhood education in New Zealand. Since that time the sector has grappled with the notion of self-review so as to build a shared understanding of the process and its impact for early childhood teaching practice (White, 2007).

A recent survey of 531 early childhood services in New Zealand reports that 90 per cent of services regularly review and evaluate their service (Mitchell & Brooking, 2007). Although the survey states that most services regarded self-review as “useful” (p. 119), little other information was included on the self-review process that had been conducted. In addition, at a symposium hosted by the Ministry of Education (2007), self-review was included under the general heading of “Improving quality” (p. 8). The only detail reported on was that the document, *Nga Arohaehae whai hua: Self-review guidelines for early childhood education* (Ministry of Education, 2006) had been distributed to all early

childhood services. No details of how early childhood centres had implemented the process, or whether self-review was considered useful were included. It is hoped that this research, by providing details of the implementation of a review of practice by an early childhood centre, will assist other early childhood education centres to engage in self-review processes.

This qualitative study seeks to provide information about the self-review process by describing rich, thick data gathered in a single context (Merriam, 1998) of one early childhood centre that undertakes self-review. It examines self-review as a form of “practical philosophy” (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007; Malaguzzi, 1998) whereby the philosophical values that underpin the practice of both the individuals and the teaching team as a collective are examined through a process of reflection and dialogue (McNiff and Whitehead, 2005). This approach contends that evaluation or self-review should consist of a process of meaning-making, rather than just the managerial assessment of practice (Moss, 2006b), whereby external behaviour is modified by first examining the underlying values on which it is based (McNiff, McGeady, & Elliot, 2001). This form of action research is a methodology that is developed from within practice to reflect on I-theories by producing descriptions and explanations by individuals to account for their educational practices (McNiff, 2002b).

Action research methodology was used in a single early childhood centre to enable myself, as researcher, and the teachers, as participants, to reflect on key aspects of pedagogical philosophy and practice through participation in reflection and group discussions. It was thought that the new knowledge and insights

generated through this process of dialogue would benefit the teaching team as a whole and so would improve teaching (McNiff, 2002a). The group process of discussions and reflections that constituted the self-review lasted a year with discussions taking place once a month. A segment of the practice of each teacher was videoed to form the basis for each month's discussion. At the completion of the year, the participants were asked to reflect on the process individually and as a group, so that their perceptions of this approach to examining self-review could provide a basis for further reflection.

The view throughout this study is that knowledge is socially constructed by individuals and groups in different ways at different times, and so is always subject to interpretation and change (Cannella, 1997), and thus needs to be constantly scrutinised. In completing this research, I do not wish to form any fixed generalizations about self-review, but instead seek to problematize and discuss an approach to self-review that was completed in a specific context to make visible the understandings and interpretations of those immediately involved in the process.

Background

The key focus of this research is to explore, examine and debate my own and early childhood teachers' perceptions of self-review through reflection and group dialogue. This is in keeping with my view that teaching practice, as one form of knowledge, is socially constructed (Cannella, 1997) and so needs to be problematised, contextualised, debated, interpreted and examined so that tentative solutions to any concerns can be found (Smyth, 1989). As early

childhood teachers, we both shape our practice and are shaped by our practice (MacNaughton, 2003), and it is through this shaping process that I became interested in the notion of self-review.

Prior to becoming a teacher educator in a university, I was the supervisor of a community based early childhood education centre. Part of my role was to develop a suitable standard of practice amongst the teaching team. Ensuring this was often difficult as the teaching team usually held different values and approaches to teaching young children, and as is common in early childhood education, we all taught in the same open plan space, so there was sometimes an undercurrent of tension caused by conflicting practice. This was often exacerbated by the fact that there was seldom an opportunity to discuss the values underpinning our practice that were often the root of the discontent. I frequently pondered on ways to both raise the standards of practice and reduce the negative impact that a clash of different teaching beliefs and strategies can cause.

Throughout this time, like many other early childhood teachers, I was reading about the preschools in Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy and was impressed by the amazing artefacts of learning constructed by the children there. In 1991 one of these preschools, the Diana preschool, was voted the best preschool of the year by a panel of international experts convened by *Newsweek* magazine (Rinaldi, 2006). When Carlina Rinaldi, the directress of the preschool, was asked how she achieved such standards she replied “We discuss, we discuss, we discuss!” (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007). I have since read that Rinaldi

describes such dialogue as transformational as it changes relationships, understandings and interpretations between people (Rinaldi, 2006).

While studying for the Masters of Education qualification, I became interested in the debate about quality in early childhood education (Moss, 1994). I learnt through reading that although government legislation can improve standards, it can only ever guarantee a minimum standard (Morgan, 1996). To extend this viewpoint, outside evaluators would only ever be able to assess against the external criteria of the legislations, not how they have been interpreted and implemented within an organisation. I formed the belief at the time that to achieve more than a minimum standard those directly involved in the context need to be discussing the values that they hold for the children and families they work with to form a collective vision and to reflect on how these values are being implemented (Grey, 1999). When this process is undertaken centres are able to construct their own standards of practice. To then evaluate how a centre has implemented these values, centres would need to review their own practice so the process becomes more meaningful for those involved. I believed that through the development of such a process, the centre would become self-evaluating. The process I was articulating was a self-review process. In the course of my study at this time, I also gained the belief that

Quality in early childhood is a relative concept. As such, quality in early childhood services is a constructed concept, subjective in nature and based on values, beliefs and interests, rather than on objective and universal reality. Quality childcare is, to a large extent, in the eye of the beholder...
(Moss, 1994. p. 172).

In 2000 I was responsible for implementing a pilot study of the government document *The quality journey: He haerenga whai hua* (Ministry of Education, 1999) in 72 early childhood centres throughout the North Island of New Zealand. This document was designed to “assist early childhood management and educators to establish “*quality improvement systems*” (p. 5). A tool for measuring teaching, learning and development indicators was included. Although this document introduced early childhood teachers to the notion of reviewing their own practice, the indicators suggested that universal criteria that had been externally developed should form the basis for reviewing teaching practice. This created a tension for me as I considered that the term *self-review* implied autonomy and I pondered whether or not reviewing one’s practice according to externally formed criteria was an oxymoron, and could be rightfully called self-review. In addition, the process did not necessarily emphasise the reflection on values that I had previously envisaged. To be fair, neither the document nor the performance indicators were mandatory.

The experience of being involved with the pilot study on *The quality journey: He haerenga whai hua* (Ministry of Education, 1999) together with my previous study on quality provoked my curiosity about an alternative form of self-review. This alternative method would examine practical philosophy (Malaguzzi, 1998) and the living values that underpin practice (Whitehead, 1989). What form could such a process take and would reflection on values result in an improvement of practice? How could a process that involved an entire teaching team be facilitated? That curiosity led to this research study. I believe that the significance of this study is that although there is evidence that 90 per cent of

services complete some form of self-review (Mitchell & Brooking, 2007), there is little evidence of the process followed. This qualitative case study will hopefully provide evidence of the process from one early childhood education centre that may prompt other early childhood education centres to instigate a similar process. I feel it is also significant as it is a form of self-review based on the philosophy and values of those directly involved in the service, and so reviews the implementation of philosophy, rather than measuring behaviour against a set of externally defined criteria.

In summary, this study seeks to explore the process of self-review using an approach of practical philosophy in an early childhood centre in Aotearoa New Zealand. The two overarching questions for this research were:

- How does an early childhood education centre review practice using an approach of practical philosophy?
- Does involvement in this self-review process improve practice?

However, in order to answer these two overarching questions, sub-sets of questions, as set out in Chapter 3, were formed for each sphere of the action research. For example, the research questions that were linked to the teachers' sphere were:

- How does an individual teacher review practice by investigating how philosophy is applied?
- How do the staff members of an early childhood centre review practice by investigating how a collective philosophy is applied?
- Is the self-review approach of practical philosophy a useful approach for early childhood services in Aotearoa New Zealand?

- Does the self-review process improve practice?

The broad context of Early Childhood Education in Aotearoa New Zealand

In order to contextualise self-review, a brief overview of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand is given. This is done by briefly discussing the documents that have been released by the New Zealand Ministry of Education, as these documents act as signposts for the route travelled by the early childhood education sector in Aotearoa New Zealand in recent years. The early childhood education sector in Aotearoa New Zealand comprises a diverse range of services that include teacher-led private and community education and care centres, public and private kindergartens, parent-led Playcentres and language nests, such as Kohanga Reo. Since the 1980s great changes have been made to the education sector, including early childhood, in Aotearoa New Zealand (Smith, 1992). For early childhood education the first change was in 1986 when the administration of childcare was moved to the Department of Education. The Labour Government of the time regarded early childhood education as an investment in the future and in instigating this initiative the way was paved for public kindergartens and childcare centres to receive equal funding (May, 2001). It also resulted in a philosophical change that saw that there was no distinction between the care of young children and the education of young children (Moss, 2006a).

In 1988 a working party chaired by Dr Anne Meade produced the report *Education to be more* (Meade, 1988) which outlined the future directions of early

childhood education. This report placed importance on equitable participation for all and the benefits of early childhood education for parents and families. As the diverse range of services (Playcentre, Kindergarten, private childcare centres, Kohanga Reo, and Pacific Island language nests) existed, the need to acknowledge cultural and philosophical differences was recognised. The report outlined objective structural indicators of quality such as staff qualifications, group size and ratios of staff to children, while also recognising the importance of cultural transmission, as well as the rights of women and children. This document was seen as a genuine attempt to improve standards and conditions in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand (Smith & Farquhar, 1994).

Subsequent governments through the 1990s continued to fund initiatives designed to raise standards in early childhood education. Many of these initiatives consisted of documents aimed to improve the quality of early childhood education. In 1996, the national early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996a) was introduced and was lauded internationally as being progressive (May, 1999) because rather than confining children's learning to prescribed outcomes, it advocated holistic learning and development using a framework derived from traditional Māori pedagogical aspirations for children.

Other documents followed. *The Revised Desirable Objectives and Practices* (Ministry of Education, 1996b), commonly known as 'the DOPs', further revised requirements for early childhood education services. *Quality in action: Te mahi whai hua* (Ministry of Education, 1998) outlined guidance for achieving a higher

standard in early childhood education services, while *The quality journey: He haerenga whai hua* (Ministry of Education, 1999) outlined a process for early childhood education centres to ascertain whether their goals and objectives had been met by establishing a quality improvement system. The process outlined in this publication combined an action research cycle with performance indicators to measure teaching behaviour and actions according to a set of externally formed criteria.

At the end of 2002, the Ministry of Education launched *Pathways to the future: Nga huarahi arataki*, the strategic plan for early childhood education, (Ministry of Education, 2002). Like *Education to be More*, this was developed by Dr Anne Meade, who consulted widely with the sector throughout the country before the final writing. The plan reiterated the need for all early childhood teachers to be fully qualified and registered teachers by the year 2012, as well as pay parity for kindergarten teachers (Farquhar, 2008). The plan stressed the importance of quality improvement and stated that one strategy for improvement in early childhood education is to “*establish and reflect on the practices in teaching and learning*” (p. 3). In the stepped approach that the document took to improving quality, step 3 is the development of self-review processes, step 4 is the piloting of self-review processes, and step 5 is the implementation of these processes.

In 2005 a further document, *Draft self-review guidelines for early childhood education* (Ministry of Education, 2005) was published. Although this document outlines a process, it is a process that is linked to Te Whāriki, the national

curriculum guidelines and indicates that practice should be reviewed by asking “*how well we are achieving our shared vision for our tamariki (children)?*”

(p.9). This approach asks teachers to reflect on their values as well as their behaviour, and so indicates a change in emphasis from the earlier document, *The quality journey: He haerenga whai hua* (Ministry of Education, 1999).

Consultation throughout the early childhood education sector resulted in a revision of these guidelines. *Nga Arohaehae whai hua: Self-review guidelines for early childhood education* (Ministry of Education, 2006), the revised document, was distributed to all early childhood services in 2006. This revised document stated that the purpose of self-review was to evaluate practice, and the two main reasons for doing this are improvement and accountability. A process for implementing self-review was outlined, and, although the values that underpin teaching practice were not mentioned, it was suggested that an effective self-review combines the wisdom of all involved. By describing the self-review process as a means to evaluate practice, once again a change in direction had been made from *The quality journey: He haerenga whai hua* (Ministry of Education, 1999) which stated that its purpose was to establish a quality improvement system.

While some see these documents as genuine initiatives on the part of the government to support improved quality (Grey, 2002; Grey, Haynes, & McLachlan, 2000; Wansbrough, 2004; White, 2004), others describe them as the government articulating “*the rhetoric of quality*” (May 1999, p. 21) that has resulted in more government control over standards in programmes and

operations accompanied by poorly implemented processes and greater accountability requirements. Hence, the succession of documents resulted in the jargon of managerialism and accountability becoming part of the discourse of the early childhood education sector.

Although this viewpoint should be taken into consideration, it is important to acknowledge that, apart from DOPs (Ministry of Education, 1996b), it is not mandatory to base teaching practise in an early childhood service on any of these documents. For example, centres are required, according to legislation, to review practice, but it is for the centre to decide how this should be done. So, although the documents were distributed to all centres, it is at the discretion of the centre whether they are put into use or not. It is my belief that although Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996a) has generally been embraced by the early childhood education community and *Quality in action: Te mahi whai hua* (Ministry of Education, 1998) has been found to be quite useful, *The quality journey: He haerenga whai hua* (Ministry of Education, 1999) has languished unopened on many centre shelves. It is yet to be seen what impact the *Self-review guidelines for Early Childhood Education* will have on the sector.

Throughout the decade of the nineties, the early childhood education sector has undergone a process of professionalization resulting in better qualified staff, increased career opportunities for early childhood education teachers, and more early childhood education teachers undertaking post-graduate study and research (May, 1999). Early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand now has a good reputation amongst OECD countries for progressive policies and

curriculum initiatives (Farquhar, 2008). In 2007, the sector was lauded by Peter Moss (Moss, 2007) as an outstanding example of how complex and diverse early childhood education services can become part of a cohesive system that he regarded as one of the three major early childhood education experiences in the world today. At this symposium Moss challenged the early childhood sector to encourage innovative and diverse pedagogical perspectives and to resist the hegemonic influence of the positivist Anglo-American approach to early childhood education. This would suggest that professional dialogue in local contexts should be encouraged as a way to maintain diverse pedagogical perspectives.

It is against this broad backdrop that this research into self-review was completed.

The micro context of the early childhood centre

The early childhood education centre that provided the context of the research and the data collection was a community-based early childhood education centre in the greater Auckland area. Like most early childhood centres in the Auckland area, the children are from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In addition, there are several children with additional needs or “special rights” (Smith, 1998). Four teachers are present at each session. At the time the research was conducted, all four were fully qualified and registered teachers and it was these teachers who participated in the research. These teachers were aged from late twenties to early fifties and their teaching experience varied from newly qualified to over twenty years. All teachers were from a Pakeha European background.

I considered the choice of a centre was crucial to the success of the research study. I reflected carefully and formed a criterion for choosing the centre prior to beginning the research. The features I considered important were that the centre should have a high standard of professionalism and that professional learning should be part of the centre culture. This purposive sampling provided an assurance that the participants already understood the purpose of self-review and would be professionally confident enough to engage in an alternative approach. I also realised that participation in a research study is never to be taken for granted (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000), so a centre that had already built a prior relationship with me would be more likely to agree to participate. However, I carefully avoided using this prior relationship to coerce the centre to participate by writing a letter to the management committee, rather than the teachers in the centre, outlining the research and inviting the centre to participate. This allowed the invitation to be discussed openly as an agenda item by the management committee and to respond formally to my request.

The research process

On deciding to research self-review using an approach of practical philosophy, I envisioned a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 2002) where teachers collaboratively construct their philosophy of pedagogy through a process of reflection and dialogue, so that the taken-for-granted of everyday practice is examined to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange in a way that creates new understandings (Bolton, 2006). The social constructionist approach that underpins this research contends that knowledge is constructed by social groups as they interact on a daily basis (Burr, 2003). Social constructionism also states that knowledge is formed as a result of negotiations and relationships and

is always dependent on language as it is through language that knowledge is created. Hence, knowledge is formed in specific contexts, and is articulated by those directly involved in the context, rather than by an expert from outside the context. In addition, it assumes that knowledge can take many forms, can articulate various solutions and therefore, results in many courses of action.

I decided that action research was most appropriate to social constructionist epistemology, as this research method has been defined as a form of

collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which they are carried out. (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988, p. 5).

It is suitable for this research study as the data is collected with the research participants involved in the research process (MacDonald, MacNaughton, & Reese, 2001). It is characterised by an emphasis on collaboration amongst participants as they define and redefine the assumptions that form and inform their practice, as well as the values that underpin their practice. As the participants are involved in the research process, as well as in generating and analysing data, it has been considered the very essence of professional learning (McNiff, 2002a; McNiff, 2007) where the process of the research is as important as the end result.

Action research, however, is a rich and varied field where many models have evolved (Rue, 2006). After consideration of the various approaches that action research could take, the choice of the living values approach was made (McNiff and Whitehead, 2005), where reflection and discussion was made deliberate (Dewar & Sharp, 2006). As stated previously, the overarching questions

explored in this research study are *How does an early childhood education centre review teaching practice using an approach of practical philosophy? And Does involvement in this self-review improve practice?* In order to answer these overarching questions regarding the notion of self-review, I decided on three spheres of action research occurring concurrently. This necessitated sub-sets of the overarching research question for each of these three spheres of action research.

The first sphere comprises of my reflections on the process as a valid form of self-review. The research questions that relate to this sphere are:

- How can I design and facilitate a process of self-review that uses an approach of practical philosophy?
- How does this process assist me to form an I-theory of self-review?

The second spheres comprises of the teachers who would be reflecting on self-review as it links to their teaching. The research questions that relate to this sphere are:

- How does an individual teacher review practice by investigating how philosophy is applied?
- How does participating in the self-review process assist a teacher to form I-theories of their own practice and of self-review?
- Is the self-review process perceived by the individual teachers as beneficial for the development of individual I-theories?
- Do the individual teachers perceive that participation in the self-review process assists teachers to improve practice?

The third sphere comprises the notion of self-review itself as it evolves as an aspect of practice within the broader context of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. The questions that relate to this sphere are:

- How do staff members of an early childhood centre review practice by investigating how a collective philosophy is applied?
- Is the self-review approach of practical philosophy perceived by the teaching team as beneficial for development of educational I-theories?
- Do the teaching team feel that a self-review process that involves practical philosophy improves practice?

When I considered the process of teachers reflecting on their philosophy, I decided that the process should be a simple cohesive process, as an open-ended process would make the feasibility of the project difficult for a single researcher (Edwards, 2001), as well as being difficult for participants to commit to as there would be no set time frame. I was aware that the teachers' time was precious and that superfluous encroachment on their time should be avoided.

I decided to meet the teachers on a monthly basis throughout the year. At the first meeting, the research project was outlined and housekeeping tasks, such as filling out the consent forms, were completed. The second month was spent in discussing and reflecting on philosophy. Months three to six were spent in viewing the videos of the teachers' practice and the last two meetings were spent in looking back on the process and revisiting the philosophy statement. The data collection from the teachers consisted of written pieces from the teachers' individual reflective journals, audiotapes of the discussions, a meaning map that

was made of the collective philosophy, and DVDs of the teachers' individual teaching practice. I also had a reflective journal and the entries from this form part of the data collection.

The structure of the thesis

One of the challenges of research is to make sense of the many fragments of data that are gathered and to give clarity to the many overlapping facets of the research process. It is the careful way that the research is written to convey the details of the process so that the research questions are answered that provides rigour to the study (Holliday, 2007). The challenge is to find a balance between representing the lived experiences of the researcher and the participants while developing the discussion that underpins the thesis – too much detail of the lived experiences may muddle the line of argument, while too simplistic a line of argument formed by sparse detail may create the impression that the research process lacked depth.

The tension created by this challenge is compounded by the fact that action research methodology does not easily fit into an orderly linear progression (Davis, 2007) so the lived experiences that the researcher may wish to encompass in the final write-up do not fit neatly into the traditional writing model. An example of such difficulty in this study is the three spheres of action research that overlap and intersect each other. Although I have described them as spheres a metaphor that is equally applicable would be a tangled ball of wool where there are many knots that need to be unravelled, while the woollen thread is made up of several strands combining together to form the whole ball that appears to be of indeterminate length. To avoid too many tangles, when planning

the process, I had consciously confined the research process to monthly meetings with the participants that took place throughout one year. At the end of that year, the data collection process for one sphere of the action research, that of the participants, stopped. This made the technical task of structuring the writing for that sphere slightly more manageable. The sphere that involved me as a researcher, however, continued throughout the writing process, as did the sphere that involved reflecting on self-review itself, because I continued to read, reflect and write on the research questions and to form tentative answers to these questions. So although I planned a linear process for the participants to follow, the three spheres of the action research overlap. In addition, as the data collection was a social process, it was often difficult to determine what arose from my thinking and what arose from the participants' thinking.

In order to maintain rigour and to form the clear, concise and cogent argument that is one of the hallmarks of a quality thesis (Zuber-Skerrit & Fletcher, 2007), I maintained the traditional structure of a doctoral thesis as far as possible, by commencing the thesis with an introduction, the literature review, and the methodology I employed for the research study. I then artificially separated the three spheres of the action research into three chapters that each provided a discussion and analysis of the teachers'/participants' sphere, a discussion and analysis of my sphere as a researcher, and a discussion and analysis of self-review in general. The final two chapters summarise the discussion, outline the implications and the limitations of the study, as well as suggesting future directions and possibilities, for self-review in early childhood education.

Summary

The premise for doing action research has been described by McNiff and Whitehead as arising out of a concern that a particular situation or experience does not reflect the educational values one espouses. The next premise is caring enough about the concern to want to take a course of action to improve a situation in a way that will make a positive difference (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005b). From my own experience I felt that if teachers reviewed their practice by a process that they owned in a way that was meaningful to them it would not only give them greater job-satisfaction and a sense of professional worth, but would also improve teaching and learning practice so that children would benefit. My concern was that if self-review within the early childhood sector was perceived as a technical exercise in accountability, it would become an onerous chore that was resented by early childhood education teachers and hence would make little positive difference to children's learning. In this way, a valuable opportunity for personal and professional empowerment would be lost. In this research study, to counter this concern, I facilitated an alternative process that I have termed practical philosophy.

In summary, in this introductory chapter, I have described how I developed my interest in self-review in early childhood education and why I chose to explore this topic further using living values action research methodology. I have explained my particular interest was to facilitate a process whereby early childhood teachers' discussed the philosophy and values underpinning their practice and then explored whether the values were demonstrated in practice. I have also briefly outlined the research process and commented on the theoretical

perspective that the process is based on. Now that a broad overview for the research has been given, the next chapter outlines the literature to provide a detailed backdrop for the research study.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Self-review is a fuzzy concept. Within the early childhood sector evidence suggests confusion exists as to what the term means (Wansbrough, 2004). In the literature reviewed, the term is used interchangeably with other terms such as self-study (Taylor, 2002), self-evaluation (Stoll & Fink, 1997), self-assessment (Sallis, 1996), internal review (Ministry of Education, 1998), evaluation (Dahlberg & Åsen, 1994; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007; Goodard & Leask, 1992), and monitoring (Goodard & Leask, 1992; Sallis, 1996). The differing terminology makes the concept of self-review difficult to define, and hence, difficult to form a common understanding within the early childhood education sector. At the same time, this differing terminology indicates that the process is complex, is open to interpretation, and cannot be taken at face value, or reduced to a single process. Each term denotes a slightly different emphasis and suggests that the process of self-review can be used for different purposes. Throughout this literature review, differing terminology may be used by the authors depending on the context that is being referred to. However, it is hoped that all the differing perspectives outlined in this literature review contribute to an understanding of the self-review process in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The purpose of this literature review is twofold – to outline from the literature the evolving context of the education sector that has provided a rationale for the introduction of self-review, and within that context, to survey the current literature on self-review in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In doing this, I recognise that educational knowledge needs to be contextualised, debated and interpreted, and that as a researcher, I have a subjective view of self-review while I am simultaneously attempting to make sense of the topic by viewing it through multiple perspectives (Cannella, 1997).

Background to the study

Prior to the late 1980s, early childhood education centres were regarded as places that children attended for a few hours a week to learn to interact with other children in readiness for school. Since the 1990s this perception of early childhood education has changed considerably. There are a number of factors that have contributed to this change. The first of these is the increased number of women who have entered the workforce, and who require full time childcare for their preschoolers. This means that children enter early childhood education at a much younger age, and attend for a much longer time each week (Dahlberg & Åsen, 1994; Taylor, 2002).

In addition to the social changes that have taken place, evidence from research into the effects of early childhood education indicates that the quality of early childhood education that a child receives has a lasting impact on the child's life. Longitudinal research has found that children living in poverty who attend a high quality early childhood education service demonstrate greater academic success and fewer social problems, such as welfare dependence and involvement in crime, than those children who do not attend an early childhood education service (Weikart & Schweinhart, 2000). Additional research on early brain development has indicated that, during the early years, appropriate experiences are important for forming synapses in a young child's brain. This research

suggests that whereas high quality early childhood education supports the appropriate hard wiring of the brain, low quality or inadequate early childhood education can actually be harmful to early brain development (Shore, 1997).

The changing social factors discussed above that have resulted in a greater number of children attending early childhood education for longer periods of time, have also highlighted the need for greater provision of quality childcare facilities. The information gathered from research emphasised that early childhood services must be of high quality in order for children, families and, ultimately, society to benefit. An awareness of the importance of quality resulted in a concern for the implementation of quality assurance systems that would ensure the well-being of the children who attended early childhood education centres.

The quest for quality

Like self-review, quality has been described as a fuzzy concept (Phillips & Howes, 1987). Perceptions of quality have evolved as the early childhood education sector has grappled with the concept, and understandings formed about quality have become more complex as a consequence of this process.

Quality was at first thought to be objective and researchable. Early research on quality in early childhood education often described the early childhood education centres in the United States that were attached to universities as high quality, as opposed to other centres that were considered low quality (Phillips & Howes, 1987). Here quality was judged through an overall impression that best practice was present at a centre. This has been described as a global assessment

of quality, and at first it was thought that, if researched, the factors that contributed to high quality early childhood education could be universally replicated in any setting to result in equivalent standards of quality being present.

Hence research studies in the 1980s focused on identifying and defining variables that contributed to quality early childhood education, so that standards of quality could be regulated. For instance, studies on caregiver behaviour (Howes, 1983) and daycare environments (Dragonas, Tsiantis, & Lambidi, 1995; King & McKinnon, 1988) researched variables from which quality indicators could be formed. These indicators are now often referred to as structural indicators of quality. Structural indicators, such as ratio, group-size and caregiver training, became associated with quality early childhood education. Structural indicators are the concrete features that can be regulated for and in Aotearoa New Zealand structural indicators formed the basis of the Education (early childhood centres) regulations of 1990. In Aotearoa New Zealand these regulations outlined the minimum standard for operating an early childhood education centre. In the United States and Australia such indicators also formed the basis of accreditation systems, and quality assurance systems. So this dimension of quality became useful in forming national standards.

However, it became evident to those researching quality in early childhood education that a dynamic dimension to quality also exists (Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog, 1997). Aspects of practice such as sensitivity, involvement and conversations with children became indicators of quality interactions between teacher and child resulting in greater gains in cognitive, language and socio-emotional development for children. It was also recognised that quality

interactions were more likely to take place in a setting where structural quality indicators were also present.

The final aspect to be researched from an objective standpoint was the contextual factors that impacted on a service (Phillips & Howes, 1987). Such contextual factors included the type of service (for example, whether it was a childcare service, or a home-based programme), as well as factors such as staff stability.

Throughout the decade spanning the late 1980s to the 1990s, the view that quality in early childhood education could be objectively defined and then applied to multiple settings began to be questioned. In New Zealand, research (Farquhar, 1989) found that, while the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (Harms & Clifford, 1984) was a valuable formative assessment tool for use in New Zealand centres, it could not be readily used to measure centre quality because it had been designed for a different context. In the United Kingdom, when the same rating scale was similarly critiqued (Brophy & Statham, 1994), it was found that while purporting to be a universal measure of quality, the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale was based on a particular set of values, those of a group of expert observers in North American settings, and did not necessarily reflect other perspectives. Another research study, conducted in four countries using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (Calder, 1996), found that while it was a useful tool for professionals to make some comparisons of some aspects of early care and education, because it was focussed on static aspects of the learning environment such as resources, it could not pick up other aspects of care and education that might affect children. Calder also stated that the ECER tool was focussed on values that were not always explicit, but that

these values probably reflected developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp, 1987). Calder believed that further tools were needed to explore the values and theoretical perspectives of early childhood education.

Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, the philosophical and curriculum base of early childhood education was similarly being questioned. In the United States, the assumption that there could be a universal view of optimal child development was challenged (Holloway, 1991). It was asserted that developmentally appropriate practice, the dominant theoretical base for early childhood education in the United States and therefore a framework for quality in early childhood education, reflected a positivist view of knowledge that was culturally biased (Spodek, 1991). Spodek believed these guidelines focused on how to teach but provided no guidance on the content of the curriculum. In addition, no attention was given to the cultural dimension of the curriculum. Spodek concluded that there could not be a single universal curriculum for all children, and that dialogue should take place so that different perspectives could be heard.

Similarly, it was felt by many that there could no longer be a set of established teaching practices that could be termed “best practice”. The term “wise practice” was coined by one writer as more appropriate as it could be used to describe the changing nature of relationships and the impact of context on early childhood practice (Goodfellow, 2001). Goodfellow (2003) defines wise practice as deriving from practical wisdom, a combination of expert knowledge with sound judgement and thoughtful action. Such wisdom is developed from teachers being able to use their intuition to read a situation from implicit messages gleaned from

interactions within the context where one works, and to learn from these interactions. Goodfellow considers that practical wisdom refers to that part of the early childhood education teacher's role that is often invisible.

Further challenges to the universal concept came from exploring cultural differences in early childhood education. For example, although it was thought in the United States that a small group size, and a low adult-child ratio was an indicator of quality, in Japan it was thought that teachers should have between 18-24 children to each teacher, as it was believed that Japanese children need to have experience in large groups in order to develop the social skills they need to function in Japanese society (Tsuda, 1994).

Other writers believed many of the taken-for-granted assumptions in early childhood education, such as developmentally appropriate curriculum and child development milestones, were a consequence of taking a narrow perspective which led to the tendency of universalisation of child development and learning that, in turn, had resulted in the marginalisation of many children by privileging a 'normalized' view of childhood (Cannella, 1997). This meant that the many children who did not fit this normalised view were seen in deficit. For this reason, Cannella has suggested a reconceptualisation of the field of early childhood education so that it is critiqued from multiple perspectives to create "new insights grounded in our own work and our own words" (p. 161). It was accepted that any reconceptualisation would be based on values, either explicit or implicit, as Cannella thought that it was vital that such values were always open to scrutiny. She explained the process in this way:

reconceptualisation would involve sharing our beliefs and biases openly, respecting and valuing multiple realities and possibilities, and constructing a collective vision for action. This vision would be continually critiqued and revised. This type of reconceptualisation requires collective dialogue in which we openly share our values, our aspirations, and our visions for a new beginning. (Cannella, 1997, p. 161)

The awareness of the complexity of quality and the fading belief in the validity of a universal approach to early childhood education led to new ways of articulating and approaching the concept of quality. The new approach to defining quality in early childhood education provided a voice for stakeholders who were not usually heard. Research in Denmark asked children for their views of quality in early childhood education (Langsted, 1994); parents' views were also sought (Larner & Philips, 1994). From yet another viewpoint, it was argued that any early childhood service that did not guarantee equality by washing out the “*historical stain of racism*” (p. 106) could not claim to be a quality service (Joseph, Lane, & Sharma, 1994).

In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, quality similarly began to be viewed from the bicultural context of *Te Ao Māori* (the Māori worldview). Royal-Tangaere (1996) wrote that in Kohanga Reo (Māori language immersion early childhood education centres) there is a clear quality framework that sets the goals and outcomes for children and their families. It is Te Reo Māori (the language), Tikanga Māori (Māori customs), and Ahuatanga Māori (interrelationships and interactions). These must be seen as inseparable and interconnected from one to the other. Royal-Tangaere states that Māori people have an understanding that the standard for these things have been set by their ancestors and it is the expectation of all that the elders will pass on the required standards. To

compromise or lower these standards would be unacceptable from a Māori perspective as it is believed that the ancestors “*live on in each of us*” (p. 12).

Viewed from yet another perspective, writers in Australia thought that quality should be viewed as a continuum where goals are continuously being set, evaluated and reset, so that quality should always be considered unfinished business (Fleer & Kennedy, 2006); it is something that is never achieved.

Recognising the need for multiple perspectives, Katz (1994) suggested that quality needed to be examined from five main perspectives: the top-down perspective (according to the licensing regulations), the bottom-up perspective (what the child actually experiences), the inside-out perspective (what families actually experience), the inside perspective (what staff experience), and the ultimate perspective (how the community and society at large are served by the early childhood service). Katz believed that each of these perspectives was an important contribution to an assessment of quality.

In the United Kingdom, Moss (1994, p. 1) stated that

definitions of quality reflect the values and beliefs, needs and agendas, influence and empowerment of various stakeholder groups having an interest in these services. Quality is also a dynamic concept; definitions evolve over time. The process of defining quality involves stakeholder groups, and is not only a means to an end, but is important in its own right

Penn (1994) working in Strathclyde, Scotland, supported this view by arguing that quality is a process that is formed by the values and beliefs of those involved in the service. Penn believed that if there was conflict in these values “*the differences can only be resolved by informed debate*” (p. 25).

This perception of quality became known as the relativist view of quality in early childhood education. It has been summarised by Moss (1994, p. 172):

Quality in early childhood is a relative concept. As such, quality in early childhood services is a constructed concept, subjective in nature and based on beliefs and interests, rather than an objective and universal reality. Quality childcare is, to a large extent, in the eye of the beholder...

Although a relativist approach is seen to cater for the multiple values that exist in early childhood education, it has been rejected by others because it is feared that, if widely adopted, a relativist approach would lack standards and would result in a fragmented “*anything goes*” approach to the care and education of young children (Fleer & Kennedy, 2006; Smith, 1996).

In conclusion, Dahlberg, Moss & Pence (2007) believe that quality and evaluation should be viewed as a problem to be questioned, rather than a goal to be achieved. The understanding now exists that quality is a contested word, so defining and providing quality in early childhood education is a complex task. The challenge exists to provide a framework for evaluating early childhood education that reflects the values of all of the stakeholders within each early childhood centre, while meeting the generally accepted standard of the regulatory framework.

Evaluation

The changing perceptions of quality resulted in the notion of evaluation similarly being contested. Just as the concept of quality as an objective reality came to be questioned, the concept of an evaluation approach that could be universally applied was also challenged.

Moss (1994) made the point that there are two different meanings for quality; one is descriptive and one is evaluative. While at first the focus of discussions about quality had been descriptive, educational organisations later began to implement evaluation measures as a means of assessing quality.

Morgan (1996), writing about early childhood education in the United States, contended that there were four levels of quality: Harmful, unacceptable quality; good enough quality, good quality; and excellent quality. Morgan believed that external legislation was needed to protect children from harmful unacceptable quality, but legislation can only ever guarantee that quality is *good enough*. Moreover, Morgan believed that merely seeing quality in terms of legislated standards may actually inhibit excellent quality from being formed, as the regulations could be perceived as the highest standard that it was possible to achieve, rather than the lowest acceptable standard.

While an objective standards-based dimension of quality can be evaluated by an external body, an understanding that to improve quality above the minimum legislated standard was the task of those directly involved in an early childhood education service gave impetus to the notion that evaluation of a service should be conducted from within the service. Thus the notion of accountability was incorporated into the quality debate. While it is accepted that accountability and evaluation are concepts that cannot be argued with in principle (Goodard & Leask, 1992), the methods used to demonstrate accountability and evaluation are often problematic. These writers viewed appropriate accountability as a means to improve quality, which they considered the end-point. However, they believed

that often the means and the end become muddled, resulting in accountability becoming an end in itself. Goodard & Leask contended that

pursuing a crude, simplistic and coercive form of accountability will result in the demotivation and deskilling of teachers, and thus result in a failure to achieve the goal of improved quality. (p. 155).

These writers believed that true accountability involves a feeling of responsibility that arises from “*committed understanding*” (p. 63) and professional learning that results in improvement at an individual and an institutional level. They believe, therefore, that true accountability must take place on three levels – moral accountability to students and parents, professional accountability to oneself and one’s colleagues, and contractual accountability to one’s employees. Goodard & Leask do not believe that improvement can result from evaluation that is not linked to understanding and learning. They state that

confidence and quality is more likely to be achieved when contractual accountability is the safety net, professional accountability the infrastructure of specialist responsibility and moral accountability the driving force. Together they make a full and workable structure. (p. 158).

In summary, these writers consider internal evaluation, or self-review, to be a tool to support the learning and developmental processes of both the individual and the institution, and that improvement results from this professional learning.

Other writers supported this view. Sallis (1996) writes that

each and every institution must find its own route to quality and that externally prescribed approaches are usually the least effective (p. 122).

Sallis argues that although quality improvement systems are important, they often only fulfil accountability requirements, without resulting in improving

quality. Sallis believes that improved quality comes only from “*the creation of a culture of continuous enhancement and institutional self-assessment*” (p. 123).

Sallis believes that effective teamwork, leadership and vision result in transformation and quality improvement.

Turning now to look at evaluation in particular, Dahlberg & Åsen (1994), writing about the early childhood services in Denmark, state that evaluation is defined as the correspondence of goals and outcomes. However, these writers contend that it is often quite difficult to link the outcomes to the goals. They believe, because of this, evaluation often becomes a values free, technical exercise in developing objective measuring techniques. These objective measuring techniques can then have an effect on what is being measured.

Hence, evaluation will have a great impact on how ideas and definitions of knowledge, as well as how social relations, are manifested into pedagogical practice. (p. 160).

They believe, therefore, that the evaluation process defines early childhood education services, regardless of the values and the culture of the service.

Dahlberg & Åsen believe this could result, for instance, in very young children only being exposed to limited learning experiences that can be successfully evaluated in the short term, but that do not result in developing children’s thinking abilities and learning dispositions that are important for life-long learning. In other words, short term gains for the institution may have lasting detrimental effects for the children who attend it.

Elfer & Wedge (1996) writing about early childhood services in the United Kingdom, maintained that while it is important to have clear standards and quality frameworks, it is also important to realise that a crucial aspect of the care

of young children is the interactions and relationships that a young child experiences. They caution that these relationships can be undermined if too much attention is given to the quality framework and the evaluation of it. In addition, these writers pointed out that even if a quality framework has articulated objective standards and requirements, these will always be interpreted differently by different individuals, so consistency of standards will always be an issue. They state that evaluation should take place on three levels: within the individual, class or group; within each service; and, across each sector. They conclude that practice improves when teachers feel valued and are supported to reflect on their practice (Elfer & Wedge, 1996).

Dahlberg, Moss & Pence (2007) state that when questions are asked about desirable outcomes in early childhood education, usually a technical and managerial viewpoint is expressed about the quality that early childhood education services can achieve that

aspire to methods that can reduce the world to a set of objective statements of fact, independent of statements of value and the need to make judgements (p. 2).

These writers consider it problematic to approach evaluation from a technical perspective of “*expert knowledge and measurement*” (p. 6) when it is really a matter of interpreting philosophical values by “*questioning dialogue, reflection and meaning-making*” (p. 16). They suggest that evaluations should be conceptualised as being “*practical philosophy*” (p. 112) that should involve reflective practice, and individuals taking responsibility for their judgements, rather than hiding behind the façade of objectivity.

Schwandt (1996) similarly refutes the notion of objective criteria as the only method of evaluation. He too advocates for evaluation that takes the form of practical philosophy, which he defines as a better understanding of practice consisting of the habits and modes of thought that determine our actions. Practical philosophy, rather than measuring actions according to set criteria, instigates social inquiry amongst those immediately involved that includes dialogue about practice to inform decision-making. Practical philosophy aims to encourage the participants to improve practice by critically reflecting on the values that underpin it. Practical philosophy is a review of practice that takes the form of “*a conversation about deliberate, conflicting opinions, and choice of the values or internal aims of a particular practice*” (Schwandt, 1996, p. 64). Schwandt insists there can be no externally formed criteria for a review of practice based on practical philosophy. Instead practical philosophy results in the construction of guiding ideals and conditions that enable the ideals to be realised. He states that the value that underpins the notion of practical philosophy is the ideal of democracy that itself requires constant critique and evaluation.

In a further article Schwandt (1997) considers that human action is shaped by context but is guided by reflection, self-awareness and practical philosophy developed through dialogue with others. However, he emphasises that the success of the dialogue depends on tolerance, patience, openness to differences of opinion and a willingness to admit that one might be wrong. Hence a review of practice involving practical philosophy requires all involved to engage in dialogue to question and exchange views. Additionally, this approach requires that those involved are willing to listen to others’ viewpoints with an open mind, without needing to dominate or be confrontational. Practical philosophy requires

a thinking style that appreciates imagination, alternative opinions and possibilities, and so supports strategic thinking. This approach can lead to change and development, or an examination of values and aims of an organisation. Schwandt (1996, 1997) considers a review based on practical philosophy to be successful if it has fostered greater critical thinking and understanding, especially understanding of each other.

Fetterman (1996) views evaluation as a process to help people help themselves to improve what they are doing by combining self-evaluation with reflective practice. He uses the term self-evaluation, and describes it as not a process to inspect, but *“the use of evaluation concepts, techniques and findings to foster improvement and self-determination”* (p. 4). Fetterman makes the point that it must be a group process, rather than an individual activity, that liberates participants to achieve self-determination. It is worth noting that accountability is not included in this definition as Fetterman states that accountability implies looking back to judge, whereas the function of empowerment evaluation is gaining understanding in order to guide the future.

McNiff, writing about the wider education sector in the United Kingdom, states that evaluation should not merely be seen as something that is completed retrospectively, but rather it is embodied as part of teaching practice – *“an organizing principle that transforms the work into a moral praxis”* (McNiff, 2003, p. 222). McNiff states that differences exist over what should be evaluated, how and why the evaluation should be conducted and how the completed evaluation should be used. She believes these differences are all matters that should be discussed and debated and that

the form of evaluation most useful for understanding and improving personal and social contexts is a process of collective enquiry, in which the individual comes to make judgements about their work, through self-study, in the interests of contributing to good social orders. (p. 223).

In summary, during the 1990s, perceptions of evaluation evolved from being an objective, technical measuring system that could be universally applied, to a contextualised discourse of dialogue, reflection and meaning-making. My study sets out to explore self-review or evaluation that has been conceptualised as values-based (Dahlberg & Åsen, 1994), empowerment evaluation (Fetterman, 1996), practical philosophy (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007; Schwandt, 1996, 1997), in which individuals make judgements about their work through a process of living values action research (McNiff, 2002b).

Managerialism

In Aotearoa New Zealand, neo-liberalism was introduced to the early childhood education sector throughout the 1990s as a consequence of the educational reforms of 1989. One result of this was the establishment of many privately owned early childhood education centres operating on a profit-driven business model. Another result was increased accountability which made the educational leadership role more complex, while increasing the workload of teachers (Fasoli, Scrivens, & Woodrow, 2007). Thus it was that managerialism crept into the early childhood education sector.

Managerialism has been defined as the application of the techniques of managing a commercial business to the running of other organizations, such as

schools and early childhood education centres (Codd, 2008). This implies that the skills and techniques of management are generic and can, therefore, be applied to any context irrespective of the beliefs and values of the stakeholders from within each context.

Since the 1980s managerialism has played a significant role in shaping educational administrative theory (Boston, Martin, Pallot, & Walsh, 1996). In contrast to the reflective practical philosophy approach referred to above, throughout the 1990s the “*rhetoric of quality*” (May, 1999, p. 21) stemming from the viewpoint of managerialism entered into the lexicon of education in New Zealand. Teachers were encouraged to engage in *continuous improvement* so as to be *effective*, and *school improvement* and *school effectiveness* where *key teacher behaviours* were identified, improved and then self-evaluated (Gray, Hopkins, Reynolds, Wilcox, Farrell & Jesson, 1999). Although few would disagree that to improve a centre is a worthwhile undertaking, like the word quality, these words are elusive terms and give teachers no clear direction. Moreover such terms ignored that educational practices take place in a defined context and so *improvement* cannot be presented as a one-size-fits-all commodity that can be outlined as a recipe for guaranteed success (Thrupp & Willmot, 2003). In fact, Thrupp and Willmot contend that although there has been a proliferation of books written from a managerialist perspective, it has been detrimental to the education sector as a whole because such literature has had the insidious effect of suggesting that education can be viewed in isolation from the wider social and political context in which it exists. These writers believe that education should be viewed as existing for the public good, but that public good can only be achieved if the philosophical, political, and social values that form

the moral foundation of education are examined and debated. To disregard this philosophical foundation is to entrench the dominance of privileged groups, while suppressing issues of social justice. In early childhood education for example, from a managerialist viewpoint, reviewing issues such as caring and child-centeredness may be considered less important than reviewing the implementation of business strategies. Codd (2008) similarly takes issue with managerialism and suggests that, by reducing education to that which can be observed and managed, the less tangible values are often neglected. Evaluation, or self-review, from a managerialist perspective, often takes a deficit stance and focuses on what a service has not achieved. Codd (1999) believes this results in a culture of mistrust as teachers feel they are constantly under surveillance to identify what they are not doing in an effort to prompt them to make improvements. Elliot (1991) takes a similar stance in opposing managerialism by stating that evaluation, or self-review, based on managerialism becomes a technocratic system of surveillance and control over practice that overemphasises routines at the expense of reflection.

Curtis and Carter (2008), writing about the early childhood sector in the United States, concur with the stance outlined above. They state that from a managerialist viewpoint, teachers become technicians who are conditioned to view accountability and compliance to regulations and standards as the endpoint of education. Dahlberg and Åsen (1994), writing specifically about the early childhood education sector in Sweden, say that using a business model for early childhood education is not appropriate as early childhood education is concerned

with basic human and societal processes whose aim is to integrate children into society and build some basic skills and competence among the coming generation (p.162).

In general, evaluation, or self-review, from a managerialist perspective becomes an exercise in measuring efficiency and productivity to the extent that these terms become dominant and taken-for-granted, and little regard is given to the moral dimension of teaching (Codd, 2008). This stance creates a tension with those that believe that reviewing practice should be an exercise in reflecting on the philosophical values that underpin practice and should challenge the aspirations of education within a social and political context (Curtis & Carter, 2008). By implementing a self-review that is based on “*practical philosophy*” (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999, p.112) my study is demonstrating an alternative approach to the managerialist, technicist method of reviewing practice.

Values based self-review

This section outlines two existing approaches to self-review that stand in contrast to the technicist approach. The first approach, the reflective dialogic process of the pre-schools of Reggio Emilia (Malaguzzi, 1998), is discussed because of the huge influence the approach has had in recent years on early childhood education internationally, including in Aotearoa New Zealand. The second approach, the living values action research (McNiff, 2002a, 2003; McNiff, McGeedy, & Elliot, 2001; McNiff & Whitehead, 2005), comes from the wider field of educational research. It is discussed because of the caring methodology (McNiff, 1999) that aims to uncover the lived reality of the experiences of teachers in their attempts to improve their teaching practice through reflection and dialogue with each

other. Although both approaches have evolved in isolation from each other, both involve a reflective attitude to reviewing practice that contrasts to a technicist approach to evaluation.

McNiff (2003) explains that evaluation approaches have different methodological, epistemological and political bases. The two approaches outlined in this section have some commonalities. The methodology of each is broadly based on reflection and discussion. The epistemology of each assumes that knowledge on practice will be created by the teachers directly involved in that practice. In each the political stance taken is that the aim of the process is to enhance teachers' professional and personal learning so that they are able to take responsibility for that practice, rather than to provide accountability to an external agency for that practice.

The first approach is from the preschools of Reggio Emilia which are municipal childcare and early childhood services that serve 40 per cent of the population of children from 4 months to 6 years in the Northern Italian province of Reggio Emilia. There are 14 infant-toddler centres (*asili nido*) and 23 pre-primary schools (*scuola dell'infanzia*). The first centre was established at the end of the Second World War through the collaborative efforts of the townspeople of Reggio Emilia. The establishment of the preschools was strongly influenced by the vision of Loris Malaguzzi. Malaguzzi (1998) believed that children were rich in potential, strong, powerful and competent (Fraser, 2000; Malaguzzi, 1998; Millikan, 2003; Rinaldi, 1998). Learning and teaching was articulated as a series of relationships (Malaguzzi, 1998) and fostering these relationships was the central role of the teachers. For this reason, Malaguzzi believed that the principle

of participation was central to everything else (Rinaldi, 1998) as it is by participating that teachers, families and children develop a sense of belonging that results in meanings being constructed and shared. Malaguzzi believed that things about children and for children are best learnt from the children themselves and their families. He also stated that links between home and school were fundamental, but complex. In order to understand these, Malaguzzi felt that teachers must also consider themselves as learners:

Teachers must possess a habit of questioning their certainties, a growth of sensitivity, awareness, and availability, the assuming of a critical style of research and continually updated knowledge of children, an enriched evaluation of parental roles, and skills to talk, listen, and learn from the parents (Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 69)

Rinaldi (1998), a teacher in the Reggio schools, states that it is important that teachers not only engage in the reflective, dialogic process but that the process also includes parents and children so that all can share meanings. Rinaldi states that the teachers in Reggio Emilia believe that all knowledge is formed through the construction of self and social processes. It is felt, therefore, that the relationship of theory and practice that places practice as subservient to, and derivative of, theory must be reconceptualised. Rinaldi believes that teachers who base their practice too strongly on theory are relieved of the responsibility *“to reflect, reason and create for themselves”* (p. 120). She (2001) explains that the teachers at Reggio Emilia believe that any theory of education can only be provisional, and needs to be continually reworked by collaborative discussion with others, so that uncertainties are resolved. Rinaldi (2001) believes that it is through the creation of *“a context for multiple listening”* (p. 82) that learning and teaching takes place. For this reason, Rinaldi (2006) makes the point that in this context, dissent or conflict is seen as yet another valuable opportunity for

listening and learning, rather than as something to be avoided. She states it is important to accept conflict as part of the dialogue, and that participation means dealing with conflict, error and forgiveness in ways that do not “*sew the seeds of enmity*” (p. 156).

The teachers at Reggio are required to observe, document, photograph and video the children’s conversations while working, and then discuss the significance of these. The documentation provides a “*form of listening*” to children, and a means of detecting when children have not been listened to:

This is what a school should be: first and foremost, a context for multiple listening. This context of multiple listening, involving the teachers but also the group of children and each child, all of whom can listen to others and listen to themselves, overturns the teaching-learning relationship. This overturning shifts the focus to learning; that is, to the children’s self-learning and the learning achieved by the group of children and the adults together (Rinaldi, 2001, p.82).

Gambetti (2001) writes that in the preschools of Reggio Emilia, teachers view themselves as constant pedagogical researchers. The teachers relate that the documentation and collaborative discussions give them confidence in their practice. It also made teachers aware that they could not document to find solutions to their uncertainties, but that this process provided a deeper understanding of practice (Gambetti, 2001). One teacher reflected that she often felt like a floating soul:

I think these reflections are an important part of self assessment and of the ability to review what you do and why you do it in a metacognitive way... Perhaps that’s just how you are when you are researching. You approach everything with different levels of awareness and then go back to it with practical reflections. In my view, daily practice and reflections are definitely essential: they allow me to internalize the things I do... (Gambetti, 2001, p. 120)

The collaborative discussion is considered essential (Filipini, 1998) to create a shared understanding of learning where teachers do not remain isolated and stuck in their own perspective in a way that dissipates the cohesiveness of the organisation. The teachers in preschools of Reggio Emilia regard themselves as being in a constant state of research (Gambetti, 2001). This demonstrates a collaborative social constructionist approach in contrast to the technical hierarchical approach of managerialism. The example of Reggio Emilia is used in this study to provide a basis for reflection, rather than a model for replication. A culture of listening, reflective practice and research in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand will appear very different to that being created in Reggio Emilia.

The second approach is the living values approach to action research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005; Whitehead, 1989). This form of action research contends that teachers are creators of educational theories of practice that are underpinned by values. McNiff and Whitehead felt that teachers, not an external agency, should review teaching practice. McNiff (2003) has clearly stated her views:

I believe that the form of evaluation most useful for understanding and improving personal and social contexts is a process of collective enquiry, in which the individual comes to make judgements about their own work, through self-study, in the interests of good social orders (p. 223)

McNiff explains that what may be considered good may differ between individuals. For this reason, it would appear that evaluation that uses normative criteria would not necessarily result in improvement; teachers need to develop their own approaches to self-review or “self-evaluation” (p, 226) so they can assess their own work. McNiff and Whitehead believe that teachers can improve their practices through an action research process where each teacher reflects on

their work individually and then discusses it with others. By asking “*How do I improve what I am doing?*” teachers are placed at the centre of the review process (Whitehead, 2000) and are able to make professional judgements about their own teaching. Whitehead (2003) said in a conference address that, in forming an action research approach based on living values he wanted

to avoid the crippling mutilation that can be imposed on educational values and standards through the imposition of inappropriate conceptual analysis (p. 22).

McNiff and Whitehead believe that while teaching, teachers form understandings of practice based on their own experience and values. They have termed such theories “*I-theories*” (McNiff, 2002a), or theories that are based on the teachers’ values. However, our individual practice does not always reflect the values we espouse, so we are sometimes “*living contradictions.*” (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005). Through a process of reflection on teaching practice, teachers can identify these living contradictions and take steps to adjust their teaching practice to more closely reflect their values. McNiff (2002a) believes that action research for teacher improvement has sometimes been ineffective because it has focussed on the behaviour of teachers, without scrutinising the underlying values that shape their practice. Participation in action research should be collaborative, dialogic and dialectic (Mc Niff & Whitehead, 2005), so the action research approach of McNiff and Whitehead can be seen to be congruent to the practical philosophy approach of Reggio Emilia.

The context of Aotearoa New Zealand

This section looks at the context of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand through the documents that have been published in New Zealand on self-review, and by examining the New Zealand literature on self-review in early childhood education.

As noted above throughout the 1990s the impact of the quiet revolution (Smith, 1992) and government's introduction of neoliberalism, also known as managerialism, resulted in changes that impacted on the early childhood sector (Fasoli, Scrivens & Woodrow, 2007). It was argued that the thrust of these changes was to give consumers more control and choice over governance in education, by forming boards of trustees and by writing charters, so there was a move to a devolved administrative structure (Picot, 1988, April). At the same time, the Education Review Office, an external review agency, was formed to establish accountability, by checking that schools had met the goals set out in the charter (Smith, 1992). It was intended that by requiring a charter, the values and aspirations of each local early childhood service would be written into the charter. The document directed to early childhood education, *Education to be more* (Meade, 1988) was a genuine attempt to improve the standard of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, critics considered that the charter process and the reforms enforced managerialism and accountability with no educational vision by using the rhetoric of partnership and community involvement, while in reality, increasing the control of the state (Smith & Farquhar, 1994). The values-based aspects of quality in early childhood education were never explored, and the potential benefits of writing a charter were not understood, so the process became a bureaucratic exercise rather than

an opportunity for inclusive debate and dialogue that would articulate each service's view of excellence.

Grieshaber (2000), writing about the Australian context, contends that documents regulate staff, children and curricula in certain ways, and ensure a top-down approach because they are based on the values and agenda of the state and are couched in managerialist terms. Grieshaber's viewpoint emphasises the need for critiquing such documents. In Aotearoa New Zealand, it is important to acknowledge that apart from adhering to the regulations, it is not mandatory to base practice on any of these documents. Whether mandatory or not, such documents do have the potential to influence, shape and govern practice.

In 1999 the first document on self-review, *The quality journey: He haerenga whai hua* (Ministry of Education, 1999) was distributed to all early childhood centres, for the purpose of establishing quality improvement systems. This was the final one of a series of early childhood education documents produced by the Ministry of Education over a three year period. The first in the series was the *Desirable Objectives and Practices* (Ministry of Education, 1996b) that set out broad aims for centres to follow. The second document, *Quality in Action: Te mahi whai hua* (Ministry of Education, 1998), provided guidance for early childhood centres to provide quality practice. The third, *The quality journey: He haerenga whai hua* (Ministry of Education, 1999), outlined a process for ascertaining whether goals had been met by asking questions, such as “*Are we doing the right things?*” “*Are we getting the right results?*” This document also states that what the right things are will vary from context to context, but it does not mention that the values and beliefs that underpin ‘*the right things*’ may vary

enormously from context to context, and individual to individual. The metaphor to explain this model is a journey because “*the search for high quality is a journey, not an arrival, so it is always a continuing challenge*” (Ministry of Education, 1999 p.5). To represent its continuous nature, a circle is used to outline the process. The process is explained as PDSA (plan, do, study and act). The process indicates that the cycle needs only to be completed once for each issue, but would be repeated other issues. The metaphor of the journey presents the process as open ended, but technical control is still incorporated in the use of terms such as *setting standards*, and *improving outcomes*. In addition, *The quality journey: He haerenga whai hua* contains a set of Teaching, Learning and Development indicators for measuring teachers’ performance whereby each aspect of the teachers’ performance is judged to be mainly high quality, medium quality, mainly low quality or consistently low quality. The point is made that early childhood educators can form their own indicators, but no advice is offered as to how these can be constructed (Edwards, 2000). There is also no information contained in the document as to how the scorer should arrive at the score.

To alleviate the confusion, I published two hypothetical case studies that attempted to explain aspects of the review process such as forming the topic, setting standards and the use of performance indicators. I tried to emphasise in both articles that self-review would result in empowerment (Grey, Haynes, & McLachlan, 2000) and in extending and enhancing professionalism (Grey, 2002). However, Edwards (2000) suggests that *He haerenga whai hua: The quality journey* emphasises the role of management processes, at the expense of leadership, to enhance quality resulting in a “*pervasive and restrictive influence of systems and management*” (p. 25).

It has been reported that when *He haerenga whai hua: The quality journey* was first released it was viewed with suspicion because it was perceived as taking a top-down stance that stressed accountability and because the terminology led to confusion (Wansbrough, 2004). Wansbrough claims that the Ministry of Education did not take enough care to explain the document, so that the early childhood sector was confused by the terminology and the process, and, in general, the document met with resistance (Wansbrough, 2003). To be fair, although many aspects of *The quality journey: He Haerenga whai hua* did reflect managerialism, the publication did not insist that centres take a package tour to quality improvement, as flexibility and differences were allowed for (Grey, 2002).

It is suggested in *The quality journey: He Haerenga whai hua* that a model for reflection included in the publication is used concurrently with the indicators. The model titled “Looking at practice through a child’s eyes” poses five questions based on the strands of Te Whāriki (the New Zealand early childhood education curriculum document) such as “*Do you meet my daily needs with care and sensitive consideration?*” This model was designed to complement *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), but has met with little enthusiasm by the early childhood sector (Wansbrough, 2003). However, there is one example of this approach being used as part of an action research trial. In this example, teachers collected several examples of a child being excluded from play situations by other children. The teachers reflected on the question “*Is this place fair for us?*” to plan and evaluate how to construct an understanding of fairness with the children (Podmore, 2009).

Research that has been done on the introduction of self-review in Aotearoa New Zealand is now examined. Despite the resistance of the early childhood sector, two professional development projects were conducted that introduced *The quality journey: He Haerenga whai hua* to early childhood centres. AUT University ran a pilot study over two years and introduced self-review into 72 centres throughout the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. I co-ordinated this project and did the field work. Another project was implemented in Christchurch with ten centres. In 2002, an account of these two separate professional development projects was published (Meade, Grey, with Depree, & Hayward, 2002). As well as understanding the resource, and being exposed to the literature, the Auckland project considered it important for services to gain confidence in using appropriate tools for gathering data to review each area of their practice. The Christchurch project stressed an examination of each service's policies and then an examination of how the policies had been put into practice. Once practice had been reviewed a decision was made on the basis of the data collected to affirm, change or abandon the practice. The Christchurch participants reported difficulty in defining standards for quality. Both these studies reflect a predominantly technicist approach to self-review, the one emphasising tools, or techniques for reviewing, while the other emphasised checking practice against compliance issues. Neither groups examined or discussed the philosophical values that underpinned practice that would reflect an approach of practical philosophy.

In 2002, a follow-up study to the Christchurch project was conducted (Depree & Hayward, 2004). This identified eight barriers (teacher turnover, insufficient time, limitations of space, limited resources, lack of money, limited access to

technology, lack of confidence by teachers and differing philosophies within a team) to implementing self-review and four factors that supported successful self-review (inclusion of all stakeholders in the process, strong stable leadership, effective management systems, and access to professional development). It is interesting that this study viewed differing philosophies within a team as hindering self-review. When viewed from the stance of practical philosophy such differences would be considered an advantage as they serve to promote reflection and discussion (Malaguzzi, 1998; Rinaldi, 2001). It is also worth noting that neither study considered the influence, either negative or positive, of the professional development facilitator in the process.

A further study was conducted within a family day-care service in the Wellington region using *The quality journey: He haerenga whai hua* as a basis (White, 2004). This study saw the self-review process as an opportunity to form a collective construction of quality indicators through a process of the participants listening to each other's perspectives. The co-ordinators focused on accountability requirements, while the carers focused on the reciprocal nature of their relationships. This approach to self-review emphasised a more interactive process of reflection and dialogue by acknowledging the hitherto unheard perspectives of the caregivers. Here the self-review process became closer to an exercise in practical philosophy (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999) that was more than a technicist exercise in measurement and compliance. It is interesting to note, however, that the reflection on values arose from discussing a technicist strategy of using performance indicators.

In the early childhood services that did complete a self-review using *The quality journey: He haerenga whai hua*, the importance of organisational culture and leadership was noted. In his comment on the resource itself, Edwards (2000) makes the point that while it contains several references to management there are none to leadership. He suggested, rather than emphasising systems and management that “*leadership might be of much greater importance in being proactive in the business of enhancing quality?*” (p. 24). Depree and Hayward (2004) emphasised the importance of strong leadership in maintaining any changes that were made as a result of self-review. I completed a project consisting of two case studies that explored the role of the leader in self-review (Grey, 2004). I concluded that it was not only the professional traits of these leaders, such as encouraging professional learning and managing change, that enabled early childhood services to successfully complete a self-review, but also the personal traits, such as respect for staff, a positive attitude and fairness, were found to be just as important. The leadership style resulted in a learning-enriched organisational culture where new initiatives could be explored.

In 2002 the Education Review Office changed its method of external review from only evaluating compliance to an approach of external review that complements self-review. A self-audit checklist is sent to early childhood services prior to the external review. It is suggested that teachers observe children’s learning and record their findings in two columns – observable behaviour, and the beliefs and practice of the early childhood service (Education Review Office, 2007). The Education Review Office states that the indicators in the self-audit checklist assist early childhood services to focus on the effectiveness of teaching practice in their particular context, while being mindful

of the overall purpose of early childhood education (Education Review Office, 2004). As part of the self-review process, early childhood services are expected to submit evidence of the self-review processes that they have implemented in each early childhood service.

Documents discussing self-review have usually been published by the Ministry of Education. But one, *The cultural self-review* written by Jill Bevan-Brown (2003), has been independently published. This was written to guide the education sector to support Māori learners, especially those with additional learning needs. This book includes a general model that provides a framework to assess aspects of the learning environment, such as culture, that can either enable learning or form a barrier to the success of Māori students. The author acknowledges that biculturalism incorporates a continuum of goals and structural initiatives to incorporate Māori culture into each educational context. Bicultural developments can range from total immersion contexts to contexts with minimal evidence of Māori input. The framework presented in this book is designed to support schools and early childhood education centres to assess internally where they presently sit on the bicultural continuum and to give guidance to set goals for future developments. Because the book is confined to one particular area of self-review the model is more specific and includes more details than was possible for more general publications. The cultural self-review emphasises an audit process to identify the gaps in biculturalism, but little emphasis is placed on the professional learning needed to implement any goals in a way that was more than tokenistic. It might be the case that in using the model outlined in this book, it would be possible for early childhood education centres to show on paper that they have moved forward along the continuum towards biculturalism, without

having embraced a real commitment to the values of social justice or any depth of understanding about Te Ao Māori that true biculturalism implies.

In 2003 Ministry of Education appointed a project officer to develop new self-review guidelines. An advisory working group, of which I was a member, was formed as part of this process. In May 2005 the *Draft self-review guidelines for early childhood education* were released for consultation (Ministry of Education, 2005). These guidelines were described as “*a catalyst for critically reflecting on the quality of teaching and learning*” by building on the framework of *The quality journey: He haerenga whai hua*. These guidelines use the metaphor of weaving to describe practice so that it was aligned more closely with Te Whāriki (which translates as a woven mat), the early childhood curriculum. Leadership capability was discussed as a necessary component of the self-review process. Although many aspects of the review process were outlined, there was no clear process that early childhood services could follow. It appears consultation resulted in a major rewrite.

In 2006 *Ngā Arohaehae whai hua: Self-review guidelines for early childhood education* (Ministry of Education, 2006), the final version, was distributed to all early childhood services. Although the metaphor of weaving has still been used, a clearer process has been outlined for services to follow. The process is described as Preparing, Gathering, Making sense, and Deciding which could be interpreted as an action research process with more user-friendly terms than the terminology used in *The quality journey: He haerenga whai hua*.

White (2007), contracted by the Ministry of Education to develop the self-review guidelines, refutes that the approach to self-review should be confined to action

research. She contends that self-review is a form of systematic professional inquiry that determines what is valued and how its worth is measured. She suggests that self-review should be seen as a process of meaning-making where the process is more important than the outcomes. An important part of this process, for White, is for the centre to discuss beliefs underpinning self-review itself. White indicates that self-review should examine practice in order to ascertain that the realities of practice reflect the rhetoric of practice. She states that “*the focus of effective review is on improving practice through collectively constructed values, not proving (or justifying) worth.*” (p. 29). This quote indicates that this document shifts away from the top-down approach that was one criticism of *The quality journey: He Haerenga whai hua*.

Two surveys have been completed nationally on self-review in early childhood education. The New Zealand Council for Educational Research conducted the first of these in late 2003 and early 2004. A total of 531 early childhood services including kindergartens, home-based care services, and child-care centres throughout the country responded. Nga Kohanga Reo (Māori total immersion language nests) were not included. This survey reported that 90 per cent of managers said that regular self-reviews of the implementation of the DOPs were completed in their service; however, only 78 per cent of teachers were aware that this happened. This pattern also occurred in specific areas that had been reviewed – thus 84 per cent of managers had reviewed teaching and learning, but only 72 per cent of teachers, 68 per cent of managers had reviewed communication and consultation, but only 65 per cent of teachers, and 67 per cent of managers had reviewed operation and administration, but only 57 per cent of teachers had. Does this indicate that self-review is often a paper exercise conducted by

managers to meet compliance, and does not involve teachers? The survey reported that the topics that had been reviewed by managers were the philosophy of the organisation (64 per cent), assessment, planning and evaluation (80 per cent), policies related to children's learning (68 per cent), and workplace health and safety (67 per cent). The topics that the teachers had reviewed were assessment, planning and evaluation processes (67 per cent), workplace health and safety (61 per cent), communication and evaluation with parents and whanau (56 per cent), policies relating to children's learning (53 per cent), interactions of teachers/educators with children (51 per cent), children's physical environment (50 per cent), and the service's philosophy (50 per cent). The areas that were reviewed the least, according to both managers and teachers, were communication and collaboration with the community (35 per cent), meeting the needs of Māori (28 per cent), and meeting the needs of Pasifika (9 per cent). The areas least reviewed were those that the same early childhood services reported that they were the least confident in. The respondents noted that the form that the review mostly took was to use the reflective questions that are included in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996a), and *Quality in Action: Te mahi whai hua* (Ministry of Education, 1998). Although most of the early childhood services that responded to the survey reported they found self-review useful and that it had resulted in positive changes being made, five percent of managers and six percent of teachers reported that they found self-review a waste of time, while four per cent of teachers reported there had been no changes made as a result of self-review (Mitchell & Brooking, 2007).

The Education Review Office conducted the second national survey on self-review. It undertook an evaluation of self-review in 397 services in Terms 1, 2,

and 3 of 2008. The evaluation focused on how well early childhood education services understood and implemented self-review, and whether the implementation of self-review resulted in improved teaching and learning, and management practices. It found a varying level of understanding about self-review across all the different early childhood education services, so the report concludes that the early childhood sector generally still needs to build understanding about self-review. The report stated that 14 per cent of early childhood services in the study had a sound understanding of self-review. These services considered that self-review was an important, integral part of their service, the self-review processes were well understood, the information gathered was meaningful, the perspectives of all the stakeholders were included, and the services were committed to on-going improvement. The Education Review Office identified that the factors that enabled self-review to be successful were strong leadership to promote self-review, relevant professional development, stable staffing and collaborative team work, and sound systems for self-review and the resources to support this. This study found, however, that over one-third of the services in the study had little understanding of self-review, and that managers and educators had little commitment to improving quality. Moreover, many services understood neither the purpose nor the processes of self-review, despite the fact that it is a mandatory requirement to complete a self-review annually. The Education Review Office recommended that many early childhood education services need to develop greater capacity in self-review by undertaking professional learning in the area and by reading the Ministry of Education publications on the topic. They also suggested that self-review is aligned to strategic planning, and that time is allocated for review (Education Review

Office, 2009, January). These two national surveys suggest that while some early childhood services have integrated self-review into their practice, many others in the sector are struggling with the concept.

Throughout the early childhood sector there are other initiatives that, although not called self-review, do closely follow the self-review process. One of the goals of the strategic plan for early childhood education, *Pathways to the future: Nga Huaraki Arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002), is the formation of the Centres of Innovation (COI). Centres of Innovation are early childhood education services that have been chosen and funded by the Ministry of Education to complete an action research project that is later disseminated to the wider early childhood education sector. Each Centre of Innovation has a researcher to assist with the project. The centres have been chosen because they have an innovative vision encompassing a different pedagogical approach to reflect their values and philosophy, rather than trying to get better and better at the same thing (Meade, 2005). Meade (2007), the instigator of the Centres of Innovation, writes that “*there is much in common between self-review in ECE services and the action research undertaken in COIs.*” (p. 3). For example, one centre, the A’oga Fa’a Samoa, incorporated a self-review process from *The quality journey: He Haerenga whai hua* to evaluate whether the innovations had been successful. The results of this became the basis of further strategic planning. There has been considerable interest throughout the early childhood sector in the Centres of Innovation and information has been disseminated from the resulting research. As these research projects may be seen as exemplars of practice for the early childhood education sector, one spin-off from the Centres of Innovation could be an increased interest in teacher-led research and self-review.

It is now twenty years since the quiet revolution in early childhood education, and nearly a decade since the *The quality journey: He haerenga whai hua* (Ministry of Education, 1999) was released into early childhood centres throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. In this period the early childhood landscape has changed. Since 2008 the government requirement is that all early childhood education centres employ a minimum of fifty percent qualified staff (Ministry of Education, 2002). One result of this is that a foundation of professional knowledge exists throughout the sector. It is through teaching qualifications that many teachers become familiar with reflective practice, the basis of self-review (O'Connor & Diggins, 2002). It could be supposed that teachers who reflect on practice in an individual way are more likely to have the confidence to participate in dialogue with their colleagues. Future research is needed to verify this.

Summary

This literature review outlined the gradual inclusion of self-review as a part of quality practice in the early childhood education sector. The review discussed how the notion of self-review moved from the emphasis on quality, both quality assurance and quality improvement, and the evaluation of these to now being a part of the landscape of early childhood education. The use of self-review was also influenced by the quiet revolution of 1989 (Smith, 1992) that took place in the education sector in Aotearoa New Zealand. Changes resulted in the introduction of managerialist systems and the accompanying rhetoric to the language of early childhood education. The emphasis on managerialism that accompanied the educational changes stressed evaluation of each early childhood education centre's practice. Self-review is now a requirement of the regulations,

and evidence of a centre's self-review processes form part of the external evaluation of a centre by the Education Review Office.

In general, the literature reviewed explained how self-review or evaluation can take one of two forms – it can be a technical exercise of measuring outcomes against goals, or it can be a reflection of philosophy where participants engage in critical inquiry that results in meaning-making and shared understanding for those involved. The examples cited of this reflection of philosophy approach in the literature review were examples from Reggio Emilia pre-schools and the living values action research approach of Jean McNiff and Jack Whitehead. Both these examples, explore the values that underpin professional practice and through a blend of collaborative dialogue, reflection, inquiry and professional learning, seek to improve practice, rather than to measure goals and outcomes.

The literature review concluded by outlining the context of early childhood education and the research on self-review in Aotearoa New Zealand. It was argued that although there was initial resistance to self-review, the early childhood sector has gradually developed an understanding of self-review processes. Although initially self-reviews followed the action research process outlined in *The quality journey: He haerenga whai hua* (Ministry of Education, 1999), more recent understandings of self-review outline how it can be used for exploring values and the link between philosophy and practice. These perceptions of self-review are more akin to the reflective processes used in Reggio Emilia and the living values approach of Jean McNiff and Jack Whitehead.

This present study will focus on self-review as practical philosophy and emphasise the living educational values of the participants as they engage in collaborative and dialogic reflection on their practice. In this way, it challenges managerialism and the technicist approach to self-review by demonstrating an alternative approach based on meaning-making and practical philosophy.

Chapter 3: Research paradigm and design

In this chapter I outline the research design and the ontological and epistemological positions that underpin it. Self-review, quality, and improvement are not neutral or values free concepts, but are based on methodological, epistemological and political assumptions (McNiff, 2003; Moss, 2005). Clarifying and making explicit the values and beliefs that underpin self-review in this study will clarify and make explicit the purpose of the research itself.

Social Constructionism

This research study is situated in the broad paradigm of social constructionism. Associated with this approach are ontological and epistemological perspectives, as well as methodological approaches. These have informed both the purpose and the processes of this research, and my choice of an approach to self-review. Social constructionism is concerned with how groups of individuals communicate and negotiate their views and perspectives regarding their shared understandings of reality. Lock and Strong (2010) state that social constructionism comes “in a number of guises” (p. xiii) and there is “no one school of social constructionism. Rather, it is a broad church” (p.6) that is held together by several broad tenets. Lock and Strong (2010) propose that the broad tenets of social constructionism include the following views: meaning and language underpin all human activity; meaning and understanding have their beginnings in social understanding; and because the process of meaning-making arises out of social interaction, the resulting meanings are specific to time and place. They also consider that social constructionism rejects an essentialist view

of people, in favour of the view that people “are self-defining and socially-constructed participants in their own lives” (p.7) and that involves the adoption of a critical stance on the world that uncovers the way the world and the power inherent in it operates, with a view to changing the world.

Burr (2003), drawing on Gergen (1999), similarly dismisses the notion that there can be a clear, concise definition of social constructionism. This writer states “there is no single description, which would be adequate for all the different kinds of writers whom I shall refer to as social constructionist” (p. 2). Burr believes that social constructionists bear a “family resemblance” (p2) as there is no set characteristic that they all have in common, but there are enough features in common to categorize them as belonging to the same family. Burr views social constructionism as any approach that has the following key assumptions as a foundation: a critical stance should be adopted toward taken- for- granted knowledge; understandings of the world have historical and cultural specificity; knowledge is constructed and sustained by social processes; and that knowledge constructions sustain some social actions and exclude others and are therefore influenced by power relations. Other features identified by Burr are anti-essentialism, questioning of realist ontology, and the view that language is a precondition for thought, and should be considered a form of social action, so social constructionism focuses on the interactions and the social practices and processes that people engage in.

Gergen (1999) sets out four working assumptions that underpin social constructionism: the terms by which we understand our world and ourselves are neither required nor demanded by “*what there is*” (meaning that the world is not independent to our construction of it); our modes of description, explanation

and/or representation are derived from relationship; as we describe, explain or otherwise represent, so do we fashion our future; and, reflection on our forms of understanding is vital to our future well-being (pp. 47-48).

This perspective implies that there can be no meaning in an absolute sense, but meaning should be perceived as contributing to on-going understanding of the world. Inherent in this viewpoint is the additional perception that an individual cannot be seen as separate from the social interactions in which they take part, so each individual is involved in a constant process of construction and reconstruction. This can result in individuals experiencing themselves as contradictions, as new interactions reconstruct individuals in ways that contradict old beliefs. However, if individuals continue to adhere to old beliefs they forego the opportunities for new learning that collaboration and interaction with others brings. “Being an individual is a culturally complex matter where one often takes part in multiple social contexts, each of which influences particular performances and understandings of the self” (Lock & Strong, 2010, p.303). As the emphasis of this form of social constructionism is on relationships and interactions, it provides a foundation for an approach to organizational and cultural change which involves people engaging in reflective and resourceful dialogues as a basis for negotiation of their futures.

An historical perspective on social constructionism – Vico

The paradigm of social constructionism is not a recent ‘construction’. Its origins can be traced to the writings of Grammaticus Vico (1668-1744), who was the first known scholar to challenge the notion that knowledge was timeless (Schotter, 1981). Vico recognised that, as participants in our own lives, we have a deep understanding and knowledge of aspects of our lives that those on the

outside do not have. In other words, when we are participants, we know why something is as it is, not merely that it exists. Vico argued that there is no fixed view of the world, but that people seek to understand themselves and the world in which they exist, and in so doing, transform the world to suit their needs while they simultaneously transform themselves. It therefore follows that the world that is external to our own experience is understood in a different way to the world in which we directly participate. Vico believed that individual actions are often unconscious and therefore the least accountable, but when individuals act in a group they become more accountable as there is a wish to remain in favour of the group, while being part of a culture implies being governed by the rules of wider society that are often felt to be external to us. Hence, Vico contended that each society, or group in society, is governed by rules that pervade both individual expression and interactions that regularly occur, as well as the social institutions that form a part of its organisation. In modern society, these laws or “*ways of doing things*” can be termed culture. Vico concluded that people’s actions should be understood and evaluated in terms of the purpose of the action in the specific historical time and place in which it occurred. Vico believed that as people shape their culture, and in doing so, unconsciously shape themselves, they do so in a way that gives meaning to their lives. Through this autonomous process individuals regulate themselves, according to “common sense” in order to conform to the unwritten rules of society. By doing this, autonomy, self-expression and accountability become linked (Schotter, 1981).

My understanding of, and position within, social constructionism.

Ontology: As this study is situated in the paradigm of social constructionism, it reflects an ontological view that the world is largely of our making. Hence, social constructionism emphasises the process of knowledge construction, and in particular, the “world of intersubjectively-shared, social construction of meaning and knowledge” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 127). This view of ontology (relativism) suggests that because reality, what is knowable, is socially constructed, it is therefore relative and derives directly from individuals’ experiences and contexts (Patton, 2002). This view contrasts with a realist ontology which holds that the external world exists independently of being, thought or perception (Burr, 2003).

Epistemology: Social constructionists believe that reality is constructed from specific experiences and situations and is therefore connected to a specific time and place. Hence, knowledge is constructed amongst people as part of their daily interactions (Burr, 2003). Burr states that much knowledge is

taken for granted as given, fixed and immutable, whether in ourselves or in the phenomena we experience, (but) can upon inspection be found to be socially derived and socially maintained... created and perpetuated by human beings who share meanings through being members of the same society or culture. (p. 45).

The above statement by Burr implies that a critical stance should be taken where no

assumption is left unchallenged.

In other writing it is contended that social constructionism focuses on meaning-making, and is both epistemology, a theory about how knowledge is formed, and

a theory about how language functions to frame human action (Bird & Drewery, 2003):

Constructionism presumes that humans are active participants in creating the cultural, social and personal meanings within which lives are played out. Emphasis on processes of meaning production reflects our position that we are interested in understanding the contributions of the actors involved, as we are in finding, reaching or objectively describing stable states. Language in this approach is the frame within which we constitute ourselves (Bird & Drewery, 2003, p.6)

In the preschools of Reggio Emilia, where a social constructionist perspective has been deliberately adopted, knowledge is considered to be constructed in the context of the pre-schools through a process of meaning-making that occurs through regular encounters with others and the world. The view that knowledge is an objective representation of the world has been contested in favour of the view that knowledge is continually evolving through a process of construction and reconstruction by each individual in relation with others.

The learning process is certainly individual, but because the reasons, explanations, interpretations, and meanings of others are indispensable for our knowledge building, it is also a process of relations – a process of social construction. We thus consider knowledge to be a process of construction by the individual in relation with others, a true act of co-construction (Rinaldi, 2006, p.125)

Rinaldi (2006) believes that by engaging in discussions that focus on meaning-making, a dialogue is formed that changes our relationships with others, as well as changing the way we view ourselves. Gergen (1999) has named such dialogue transformational. In Reggio Emilia it has changed both professional and group identities:

Instead of adopting a ‘ top-down’ approach, with a prior definition of identical rules, ethics and practices for everyone involved, we managed to move into a sphere of action in which the children and adults alike

struggled successfully, it seems, with the problem of learning in a multiple and conflictual context (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 76).

The pre-schools of Reggio Emilia have demonstrated that pedagogical documentation can be the basis for evaluation “where evaluation is understood as a democratic process of meaning making, rather than the managerial assessment of quality” (Moss, 2006b, p. 108) that gives ethical transparency to each pre-school. This was termed the *politics of epistemology* by Malaguzzi, the founder of the Reggio Emilia pre-schools:

Malaguzzi's pedagogy is complex: 'it allows itself' subjective, divergent and independent interpretations of the world in contrast with linear and accumulative progress. It takes a sceptical position on the past, present and future certainties...Its credo is that the subject constructs with others and in democracy – her or his own epistemology, her or his own way of seeing the world: in the conviction that this represents only a partial vision with an expectation of other possible ways of seeing. (Hoyuelos, cited in Moss, 2006b).

Moss (2006b) believes that technical practices smother *the politics of epistemology*.

It is proposed that the epistemological process of constructing understanding and knowledge occurs in three separate but intertwining threads of constructivism, social constructionism and cultural discourses (Quay, 2003). Each of these needs explanation. The first thread is constructivism, which is the individual knowledge formation that we each engage in as we seek to understand the world in which we live, in a way that makes sense to us. The second thread in the knowledge creation process, social construction, is the group engaged in joint knowledge construction that transcends the understandings and perceptions of a single individual and encompasses the immediate social world in which the group exists on a daily basis. Social constructionism stresses the importance of the group, and individuals as a part of the group, as opposed to individuals constructing

knowledge in isolation, because the dynamic process of group interaction is fundamental to knowledge construction. Each resulting social construct becomes a lens through which reality can be viewed, analysed, interpreted and reinterpreted by members of a group (Bullock & Trombley, 1999). The framework of social constructionism suggests that without such shared constructions of meaning and language, there can be no pattern of social practice (in this case, teaching practice), and that institutions (in this case, an early childhood centre) depend on shared constructs and languages of description and explanation for their existence (Gergen, 1999). The third thread in the knowledge construction process comprises of the cultural discourses that are derived from the world that is external to us. A discourse can be either instances of situated language use that can take the form of conversations, written or spoken texts or be a systematic, coherent set of images and metaphors that construct an object in a certain way. The latter may extend beyond an immediate context and shape not only thinking but practices through the use of externally derived power (Burr, 2003). Examples of such cultural discourses in early childhood education that are relevant to this research are Te Whāriki, the national curriculum guidelines for early childhood education, and the discourse of the Education Review Office that has stated that evidence of self-review in early childhood education is an important area of interest for external review in an early childhood education centre.

Social constructionism stresses the importance of language as it is through language that humans construct knowledge and their view of the world, and it is language that allows them to communicate this knowledge to others, while forming meaningful relationships with others. As this reconstructive process is

negotiated through dialogue, it can be assumed that the knowledge that is constructed as a result of this dialogic process is not constructed individually, but is a shared construction and the resulting knowledge is distributed throughout the group. (Gergen, 1999).

Language has been described as an interpretive repertoire (Burr, 2003), a social resource or tool kit used by a particular cultural group, that enables them to construct dialogue and description. Interpretive repertoires can be used by an individual without that individual realising the hidden assumptions or messages that are conveyed. Nevertheless, it is believed (Burr, 2003) that even if interpretive repertoires are used unintentionally, they still influence actions, especially the way others are treated. Elsewhere these interpretive repertoires are known as I-theories (McNiff, 2002a), or personal theories (Malaguzzi, 1998).

Although language has the power to create greater awareness and form connections amongst people, it also has the power to accentuate differences. However, Gergen (1999) has suggested a strategy termed linguistic shading, as a tool to move toward mutuality of language in dialogue, as linguistic shading has the potential to alter meanings, and so facilitate new dialogue and meanings. Linguistic shading accepts that any word has infinite possibilities for meaning, so by examining these and by substituting a word with an equivalent word, tension and hostility within a group can be avoided. For example, the phrase “not appropriate” is often used instead of “not suitable” or “out of line”, or “wrong”.

From a social constructionist perspective, knowledge is always connected to power relations, as it is the enforcement of power that sustains certain knowledge, while other forms of knowledge are abandoned or lost. Social

constructionism takes the view that inherent in writing, talking and social interactions are power struggles.

While these general tenets of social constructionism reflect my own positioning, I am also aware of a distinction made within the social constructionist community between micro (light) and macro (dark) social constructionism. The distinction concerns views about agency in people's lives and the power of prevailing and dominant discourses. In a macro constructionist context, dominant discourses are perceived as powerful external forces as they are presented systematically and coherently throughout society, and therefore, shape not just meanings but also govern the practice and the people that they describe. In this way, institutions and cultures exercise power through macro discourses that act to govern and discipline individuals and groups within society.

In contrast, micro social constructionism focuses on constructions of knowledge amongst individuals as they go about their daily lives. Communities of practice are perceived as being capable of constructing meanings that are relevant to their situations, and that multiple meanings will arise with none being able to be claimed as more real or true. Micro constructionism affords personal agency (Burr, 2003), as well as affording opportunities for personal and professional transformation (Gergen, 1999; Rinaldi, 2006). Hence discourses formed in a light social constructionist context are often viewed as discourses of hope (Burr, 2003), as the individuals involved realise that they are able to exercise power and agency over their immediate context. In this research, I adopt the micro social-constructionist position.

In summary, this research is situated within the theoretical framework of social constructionism. It mainly takes a micro or light social constructionist perspective that focuses on the situated interaction of the individual within a community of practice and considers language to be integral to social constructionism. I have taken the perspective, as outlined by Gergen (1999), that interpersonal dialogue within a group (early childhood education teachers) that has been established to review practice can prompt critical reflections, build understanding and respect, and strengthen relationships. Moreover, by engaging in reflection and dialogue and defining their own practical philosophy or discourse of practice, members of the group are able to recognise their personal agency. From this, moral accountability is formed where individuals and groups govern their own standards. Hence micro social constructionism is hopeful and optimistic. However, it is ingenuous not to acknowledge the impact of dominant cultural discourses, such as government policies and documents, in shaping teaching practices and professional identities of early childhood teachers. Such dominant cultural discourses can be affirmed or resisted by teachers and influence whether the practice of self-review of teaching (which itself is a social construction) is affirmed or resisted.

Methodology: Social constructionism provides a paradigm foundation for a range of methodologies, including narrative inquiry, participatory action research, grounded theory and autoethnography. Data gathering methods associated with these methodologies are likely to involve such options as interviewing, focus groups, recording conversations and narratives. Data analysis involves such approaches as content analysis, conversation analysis, discourse or textual analysis, and analysis of interpretive repertoires.

Social constructionism and the self-review process

Several premises of social constructionism are present in my conceptualization of a self-review process. Firstly, the self-review process allowed for individual and group (social) exploration, construction and negotiation of meanings, leading to the development of I-theories and we-theories. Secondly, the self-review process encouraged and supported the participants' reflection on the language that they used when referring to, reflecting on, and discussing their teaching practices. Several forms of language were reflected on in the self review process: the spoken language of audio recordings, the written language of reflective journals and transcripts, and the visual language of video recordings. Thirdly, the adoption of a micro social constructionist stance emphasized giving voice to the participants (Burr, 2003) and supporting their relational responsibility (Gergen, 1999; Rinaldi, 2006). For this reason, ground rules were set so that no one person dominated and no one remained silent or failed to contribute. Moreover, by having each person take turns to read their philosophy statements and by establishing ground rules for myself as well as the participants, I endeavoured to ensure that power was more evenly distributed than it might otherwise have been.

The self review process involved an action research process proposed by McNiff and Whitehead (2005) that aligned with a micro social constructionist position as well as the concept of practical philosophy. Thus, teachers were encouraged and able to construct their own theories of practice specific to their values, context and time. Because such theories have been generated from within practice, they are referred to as living theories (McNiff, 2002a; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). I-theories that reflect a social-constructionist epistemology are in direct contrast to

theories that are formed externally, as externally formed theories are abstract, generalised and not placed in a specific place and time. In this study, the construction of “we-theories” was also a possibility, as an early childhood education teaching team does not work in isolation, but is always a team involved in the social construct of knowledge, so it is appropriate that teaching values and practice are discussed as a team to allow we-theories to develop.

Finally, the approach recognized that it was not possible for any discussion and dialogue that took place in the self-review process to be devoid of influences from the wider social, political and cultural context. Therefore, any discussion reflected cultural discourses to some extent. Additionally, the discussions reflect the specific time and place in which they took place.

Social constructionism and my research

From a social constructionist perspective my research investigated (a) meanings of self review (the discourse of self review) in early childhood education contexts as represented in policy documents, (b) processes of teacher meaning-construction during their engagement in a self review process, and (c) the researcher’s construction of meanings about self-review

The living values research methodology of action research which was based on an approach developed by McNiff and Whitehead (2005) was compatible with a micro social constructionist paradigm as well as the purposes of the research, including the researcher’s development of an I-theory of self-review. This methodology ensured that the research was contextualized, as action research is inextricably linked to relationships, practice and constructed knowledge specific to the context (McNiff, 1999). The primary data that was gathered was language

data and the analysis used inductive and deductive processes that focused on the meaning in the data. Within the action research process as applied to my own sphere, I used a variant of a grounded theory process for the inductive analyses and associated theorizing. Dick (2003) has observed that it is appropriate and possible to use grounded theory as a theory development process within an action research methodology.

As the model of self-review was founded on social constructionism tenets, those tenets provided one lens for my deductive analyses. For example, when reading transcripts of teachers' discussions, I looked out for examples of teachers democratically negotiating meanings leading to knowledge. The data analysis (meaning-making) process involved the teachers who had the opportunity to check the accuracy of records and to comment on the researchers' interpretations in relation to their sphere of data.

Appreciating that my own views about self review and response to the teachers' views would be influenced by discourses that I had been exposed to, as well as my positioning in the social constructionist paradigm and other theories, I have stated my own values and views in this report, reflected on my own teaching practices in my own teaching contexts, and endeavoured to remain reflexive through the research.

Situated learning

A fundamental principle of social constructionism is that knowledge is formed in context through a process of social participation. This has become known as situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 2002), a concept that involves more than the view that learning takes place in a specific context or in a specific place and

time. It is also more complex than active learning by doing. It incorporates the view that learning is an integral part of social participation. Hence, each individual in society learns through a dynamic process of participation in their social world. This participation can be either peripheral or full, but roles and interchanges mean that the roles are never fixed, but are always fluid. For example, I am a peripheral participant in the chosen early childhood education centre in relation to the day to day activities, but I was a full participant of the research process in that same context while, to begin with, the teachers were peripheral.

Becoming a peripheral participant allows access to the learning that can be gained from the social context. It is a holistic form of learning as it involves the whole person becoming involved in their social world, and is more than a cognitive process as it also involves the identity of the person. Situated learning takes place within the community of practice where the participants are actively engaged in similar work or activity. Usually this work includes the use of artefacts that are also specific to the context, and understanding their importance forms part of the learning process (Engestrom, 1999). In this study the artefacts that became part of the learning were the teachers' individual philosophy statements and profile sheets, the meaning-map the teachers created, the teacher's reflective journals, as well as the videos filmed as part of the research, and the transcripts of the follow-up discussions. Situated learning in a community of practice emphasises language and practice as the basis for learning. In a community of practice, knowledge does not reside in any one individual but in the community as a whole. The members of the community are able to make sense of the learning because it is part of their lived experience.

Critical thinking

The cultural discourse on self-review from managerialist literature (Edwards, 2000) and government documents (Ministry of Education, 1999; 2006) assumes that reviewing practice is a quality assurance process whereby teachers endeavour to improve their practice. Here improvement is usually interpreted as a linear process where teachers strive to reach a pre-determined end-point of quality. From this perspective, improvement is achieved by analysing a situation and then applying a logical solution with respect to how quality criteria and standards can best be fulfilled. A self-review approach based on practical philosophy constructs a different interpretation of improvement. Self-review may take the perspective of critical thinking (Burbules & Berk, 1999). Critical thinking requires individuals to be sceptical of generalizations, faulty logic and to carefully examine assumptions so as to make independent judgements and be free of claims that have no justification. Dialogue is useful to this process, as the multiple perspectives of other participants are revealed, which may encourage critical reflection on existing assumptions and generalizations. Dialogue in the self-review process may involve critical thinking of this kind.

However, an alternative criticality has been proposed (Burbules & Berk, 1999). This criticality suggests thinking anew or thinking of alternatives. This form of criticality considers that views and assumptions are constructs of particular cultural and historical situations. For this reason, it is difficult to imagine a universal or final solution to any problem in education. Alternative criticality may similarly be supported when we engage in dialogue with others, especially those unlike ourselves. Here criticality depends on individual traits, such as respect, tolerance and caring, as criticality is mainly a social process whereby

theories are constructed or reinterpreted through social interactions with others. From this perspective, “improvements” or changes to practice are achieved through striving for greater understanding, inclusion of alternative viewpoints and by encouraging participation through improving social relations with others (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005). This is criticality achieved through social constructionism and I- theories are formed from a social process that arises directly from the teachers’ practice, as opposed to appropriation of externally derived theories.

Case study

To research self-review as practical philosophy in early childhood education, the approach of a single case study has been chosen. While case study is a catch-all phrase that is often used and is difficult to confine to one definition (Merriam, 1998), it may be broadly defined as the attempt to describe, understand and explain a situation in depth (Yin, 1994). To do this, multiple sources of data about a specific context and phenomenon are gathered and analysed (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998).

This study on self-review lends itself to the case study approach as the study focuses on the particular (examining a certain aspect), descriptive (the end product is rich thick description) and heuristic (the research develops a framework for understanding) of a single bounded unit — in this instance, an early childhood education centre (Merriam, 1998). The case study methodology does not allow the researcher to gather data that can be generalised, but as the data is concrete and contextualised, it yields insight from a closer view than would otherwise be possible to obtain, and so allows the subtle nuances of the

research topic to be examined (Flyvberg, 2006). This type of research has been referred to as intrinsic case study (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998), as the information gathered is reported from the voices of those directly involved to form “rich information about locally embedded ways of understanding and acting in the world” (Edwards, 2001, p. 120).

Action research

I decided that the research methodology that was most suitable to a social constructionist epistemology was action research. This is because action research lends itself to knowledge being socially constructed by participants through collective reflective practice in specific social situations in order to improve practice based on their understanding of practice in the situation in which it occurs (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). As Grundy and Kemmis (1988) explained “*Action research is research into practice, by practitioners, for practitioners*” (p. 87).

Like the term case study, action research has become a catch-all term that describes a rich and varied field where many models have evolved (Rue, 2006). Although definitions for action research vary (Costello, 2003), all definitions emphasise the involvement and participation of practitioners who inquire into and reflect on their own practice with the intention of improving it (Borgia & Schuler, 1996; Brown & Jones, 2001; Calhoun, 2002; Cardno, 2003; Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Costello, 2003; Elliot, 1991; Hill & Capper, 1999; MacNaughton, 2001; McNiff, 2002b; Melrose, 2001; Parsons & Brown, 2002; Sagor, 2005; Tomal, 2003; Zuber-Skerrit, 1996).

That so many definitions exist emphasises the complexity of action research and denotes that it cannot be considered as a single taken-for-granted methodology that can be applied without thought. All the definitions emphasise that action research is characterised by collaboration amongst participants who become a part of the process of defining and redefining the assumptions that form and inform practice, and it is stressed that the process is considered as important as the end result (MacNaughton, 2001). Often models of action research stress the importance of participants reflecting, but do not clarify how this should be done (Dewar & Sharp, 2006). However, McNiff and Whitehead (2005) state that action research should begin with practical questions such as: “*What is my concern? Why am I concerned?*” (p.1) and then proceed to gather evidence on which to base appropriate action.

In addition, McNiff and Whitehead (2005) view action research as a practical process that improves practice while constructing new theories. McNiff (1999) believes that reality is subjective and is constructed through relationships with others so, in order to improve our practice, it is the quality of those relationships that must be examined and improved. The intention of reviewing practice from this perspective is not greater effectiveness in a managerial sense, but involves the more moral intention of improving practice by building better relationships from which all can benefit. This emphasises a personal ethical accountability of the sort Vico (Schotter, 1981) and Wenger (1998) described.

After extensive reading on all the various approaches to action research, I chose the approach of action research as living theory (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006) because it was the approach that best reflected my own values and aspirations for

self-review, as well as being the approach most congruent to the concept of practical philosophy. McNiff has criticised other approaches to action research for focusing on changing behaviour while ignoring the values that underpin practice. From this perspective, improving practice implies examining the values that underpin practice and by improving the personal and collective relationships that are built as part of the practice. By examining the values they espouse and considering whether these are acted on, teachers transform practice into praxis, or ethical practice. This reflective process must be collaborative, rather than an isolated individual activity, so that the rigour of dialogue avoids the result being one of self-justification (Collins & McNiff, 1999). In this approach to action research improvement emphasises the quality of practice rather than the processes of practice. Teachers have been described as living contradictions (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005), as they often espouse values that their practice does not reflect, so this form of action research contends that improvement comes from striving to eliminate the contradictions between values and practice. Participation in such an approach to action research is viewed as dialogic and dialectic.

To summarise, this methodology views knowledge as something that people generate for themselves as they work out dilemmas and issues concerning their practice within a community (Lave & Wenger, 2002) with a view to forming better social relationships (McNiff, 1999). This form of action research produces descriptions and explanations (I-theories) which allow individuals to account for their educational practices (McNiff, 2002a). Action research methodology has been chosen as the basis for this study as it is congruent with the concept of practical philosophy which is the focus of this study.

Research design

The present study seeks to explore the process of self-review using practical philosophy from three perspectives: my perspective as facilitator of the process, the perspective of the teachers in the early childhood service, and the perspective of self-review as a process. Overall I conceptualised the research design as involving three separate but overlapping spheres. The spheres are my sphere as a researcher and facilitator of the action research process and how I felt about self-review, the sphere of the early childhood service and the perceptions of the teaching team towards self-review, and the sphere of the notion of self-review as outlined in government documents.

The key research questions were stated firstly in a general sense, and then they were stated from the three perspectives described above:

- How do teachers within an early childhood education centre review practice using an approach of practical philosophy?
- What I-theories are formed as a result of the self-review process?
- Does involvement in this self-review process improve practice?

The key questions for my role as facilitator of the process were:

- How can I design and facilitate a process of self-review that uses an approach of practical philosophy?
- How does this process assist me to form an I-theory of self-review?

The key questions from the perspective of the individual teachers were:

- How does an individual teacher review practice by investigating how philosophy is applied?
- How do the staff members of an early childhood education centre review practice by investigating how a collective philosophy is applied?
- Is the self-review approach of practical philosophy a useful approach for early childhood education centres in Aotearoa New Zealand?
- Does this self-review process improve practice?

In my research proposal, for the third sphere of the action research, the questions I outlined were as follows:

- How do staff members of an early childhood education centre review practice by investigating how a collective philosophy is applied?
- Is the self-review approach of practical philosophy perceived by the teaching team as beneficial for the development of educational I-theories?
- Does the teaching team feel that a self-review process that involves practical philosophy improves practice?

When initially conceiving the research study, action research methodology was chosen to investigate the dynamic nature of philosophy and practice in a natural context. However, it was not possible to formulate in advance a finite set of specific research questions for a study. Rather, action research provided a methodology where the exploration and refinement of research questions became part of the investigative process, and there was flexibility for changes in the research design. After commencing the research process, I reflected on the questions for the third sphere of the action research and concluded that they were

very similar to the questions asked in the second sphere of the project. I no longer considered them relevant so refined them to:

- Does self-review improve practice?
- Is the self-review approach of practical philosophy beneficial for the development of living educational theories?
- Is the practical philosophy approach to self-review a valid approach?

The research design allowed for all three spheres of action research to be implemented concurrently.

The action research process

The research process and its planning is crucial to the success of any study as a poorly defined process and a haphazard collection of data may not be effective in addressing the research question, and could result in a frustrating waste of the participants' time and compromise the trustworthiness of the research endeavour. It was important that a specific process be outlined from the start so that all the participants had a clear idea of the time frame. Conversely it was essential that the planning did not become so inflexible that it became controlling. Thus the process was open to negotiation on minor points.

The overall process I conceptualised involved monthly meetings. For each meeting, set tasks were planned. The meetings and tasks were as follows:

- Phase one: A meeting where the research was outlined and details of the research were explained. Profile sheets and reflective journals were distributed.

- Phase two: A meeting where ground rules were set and personal philosophies shared. Individual philosophies and reflections were mapped to form a collective map of values. One central value was chosen to explore further.
- Phase three: Meetings three to six involved watching and discussing videos of the teacher's practice and discussing journal entries. The focus was to identify how the values were demonstrated in practice.
- Phase four: Participants again wrote a reflective piece and revisited the map of the collective philosophy.

At the completion of phase four, there was a break of two months. I then returned to the centre to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the research process with the participants. This two-month period allowed the participants' time to reflect on how the process had impacted on their teaching practice. The time also allowed me, as the facilitator of the process, a space to compile a documented account of the research process to form a completed self-review for the centre. I considered that giving the centre this completed review for reflection and as evidence of their self-review for any external reviewers, was reciprocal practice.

I tentatively planned this timetable before beginning the research, but found I needed to make minor changes as the research unfolded, and negotiations took place with the participants.

Data collection

Data collection has been described as falling into three broad categories of pen-and-paper techniques, live techniques and ostensive techniques in the form of artefacts (Mc Niff, 2002b). All three types of data were collected.

The participants, the teachers of the early childhood service that formed the research context, collected the following data with pen and paper:

- Individual reflective writing: At the first and last meeting, I planned for each participant to write a reflective piece on their individual philosophy of teaching. I planned to collect and analyse these pieces to ascertain shifts of thinking between the two (hooks, 1994). I also planned for each teacher to complete a personal profile that required them to reflect on the people and experiences that influenced their teaching practice.
- Map of the collective philosophy: This map developed at the second meeting was an important part of the data collection. It formed a point of reference for the entire study, as it was reflected on and discussed as part of the group conversation (MacNaughton, 2005).
- Reflective Journals: These journals were planned for the participants and were intended to be a way to reflect on changes of thinking or practice, and hopefully to be used in the period between meetings in order to promote criticality (Mc Niff, 2002a).
- Teaching and Learning Stories: Teaching and learning stories are pedagogical documentation completed as part of the process of assessing the children's learning (Carr, 2001), and not specifically for the research process. However, it was thought initially that they might be relevant to the aspect of practice being researched and so might be included. This possible inclusion was something for the participants to decide. If included, a comment on the relevance of each story to the study was to be added. After discussion, the teachers decided that they should not be included as artefacts as they belonged to the child's family, but they were mentioned in discussions.

Live data: The data collected from the participants in this category was:

- Audiotapes of group discussions. It was planned that these would be transcribed and analysed.
- Videotapes of the teachers' practice. These were to be used in the group discussions to demonstrate how the philosophy recorded in the meaning-map had been demonstrated. It was intended that participants would analyse how values were evident or contradicted by practice.
- The transcripts of the dialogue that took place in the discussion of the groups.

At each stage of the research process, the data collection, transcriptions, interpretations and analysis were sent back to the participants for validation purposes.

For my sphere of the action research, I collected the following data:

- Field notes that were significant to the study. These were reflected on as part of the process.
- A reflective journal in which I documented my thoughts and reflections throughout the process.
- My comments which were recorded on the audiotapes of the group discussions.

For the sphere that involved my scrutiny of discourse on self-review, the main data were the documents from the Ministry of Education that outline expectations of the self-review process.

Data Analysis

My purpose for data analysis was to describe and theorise about meanings in the data that were directly linked to the research questions. The nature of the data was mainly spoken and written language (“language data”: Polkinghorne, 2005, p.137), supplemented by the visual text of the videos. I recognise that the data was a representation or textual reconstruction of the lived reality of the teachers and myself, including our knowledge constructions. As such, it was one or more steps removed from that reality and those constructions. The data also included the cultural discourse of others that was contained in the policy documents that I analysed.

The main steps involved in the data analysis process included:

- Identifying portions of text for which I could ‘induce’ or ‘deduce’ meanings that related to the research questions
- Looking for patterns in the meanings, using a range of strategies
- Theorizing why these meanings and their patterns were present
- Relating these theories to other researchers theories and findings about self-review, and to other early childhood contexts.

Morse (1994) summarizes these steps as follows: comprehending the phenomena under study; synthesising a portrait of the phenomenon that accounts for relations and linkages within its aspects; theorising about how and why these relations appear as they do, and, recontextualising, or putting the new knowledge about phenomena and relations back into the context of how others have articulated the evolving knowledge. I recognized, as Ryan (2006) states, that while this begins with description on which further analysis, description and discussion can build, as a researcher I needed to scrutinise the data for “ *evidence of discourses*,

paradigms, meaning repertoires, values and attitudes which construct knowledge, talk and practices” (p. 100) in a process that involves theorising.

Inductive and deductive analyses: The function of data analysis is to examine and interpret the research data in order to gain meaning and understanding with a view to constructing new knowledge (Corbin and Stauss, 2008). For this research study, a bricolage of both deductive and inductive approaches was adopted. Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007) state that there is a need to use more than one type of data analysis for a qualitative research study. Deductive analysis involved looking for instances of existing or pre-conceived meanings in the data. Those meanings were associated with particular theories that informed the research. In contrast, inductive analysis involved noticing and analysing features of meanings that emerged from the data that had relevance to the research questions.

It has been stated that deductive analysis is appropriate when the researcher has a set of well-defined concepts to describe a context with which the researcher is familiar, while inductive data analysis is most useful when the research context is unfamiliar and complex, and the intention is description and exploration (Huberman and Miles, 1994). Both approaches are relevant to this research study.

The deductive approach has been adapted from the positivist paradigm of quantitative research from the scientific and social science disciplines (Bitektine, 2008), but has been adapted to suit qualitative research. In qualitative research studies such as this one, the data is analysed in relation to an existing theory or hypothesis. For this reason it is termed theory-driven analysis. In this case, the

theories used for the deductive theory-driven analysis were, for example, McNiff and Whitehead's (2005) theory of living contradictions that explains that teachers often espouse theories that they do not practice, I-theories (McNiff, 2002a), the concept of a community of learners (Lave and Wenger, 2002) and my hypothesis that a self-review based on practical philosophy would be more useful for teachers than a self-review based on a technical approach.

An inductive approach to data analysis requires the researcher to complete multiple 'readings' of the data in order to identify the topics or concepts or themes that repeatedly emerge, and to recognise the significance of them to the research questions. (Thomas, 2003).

The analysis process in detail

In this section, I elaborate on the steps in my analysis process. The analysis process occurred as I listened to the teachers' discussion and their reading of their reflective journals, when transcribing the audio tapes and reading transcripts, when writing and reviewing my own reflections, and when reading the documents relating to self-review. While the analysis involved specific steps, it was a cyclic rather than linear process. There were two decisions that I made concerning the analysis process. Firstly, rather than having someone else do this, I transcribed all the audio-tapes. This allowed me to begin the analysis process at this point. By transcribing myself, I could also reconstruct the non-verbal data that complemented the verbal reconstruction. This helped me interpret the nuances and sub-texts of the language (Polkinghorne, 2005). Secondly, I decided not to use computer soft-ware for storing and further analysing the meanings of the data, as I felt that this would distance me further from the original data.

The specific steps that I followed are now outlined in detail. These steps include a number of the tactics that Miles and Huberman (1994) identified for “generating meaning from qualitative data” (p. 245).

Spotting the relevant text: When I identified a portion of text that represented either an emergent meaning (inductive analysis) or represented an instance of a preconceived meaning (deductive analysis), I wrote that text in my journal. I also made notes on my thoughts about a possible emergent meaning category, or the link to an existing theoretical construct. I added further examples when I came across them.

For example, anxiety and risk-taking were two potentially interrelated constructs that emerged from the inductive analysis. Below are examples of how the constructs were identified in successive meetings:

I am too scared to talk. Someone else may want to say something
(Teacher 1, Meeting 14th May 2007).

I guess this research was about taking a risk, as sharing your personal philosophy is a risk in itself. Sharing our DVDs with our colleagues was another risk (Teacher 1, Meeting 5th September 2007)

This involved taking a risk with my peers but it was a risk worth taking
(Teacher 2, Meeting 5th September 2007).

While being filmed I was also aware that others would closely scrutinise my practice and that how others may see and interpret these interactions would impact on their view of me and how I saw myself in the role I took as a teacher. (Teacher 3, Meeting 5th September 2007).

Sharing this with colleagues involved taking a risk, opening oneself to critique and judgement. (Teacher 4, Meeting 5th September 2007)

I found that I was nervous with my practice being filmed, perhaps this was because of the fear of being judged, particularly from having the roles of both educator and supervisor. (Teacher 1, Meeting 5th September 2007)

I guess seeing myself on the DVD and putting myself out there – it is not really me (Teacher 1, Final Interview)

I must say the first time, I thought it was a bit daunting (Teacher 2, Final Interview)

Daunting to start off with because of expectations (Teacher 3, Final Interview)

Risk of sharing philosophy with others was also listed as a negative in the PMI feedback

Dey (1993, p.102) summarized this process as follows: “The qualitative analyst’s effort at uncovering patterns, themes and categories is a creative process that requires making carefully considered judgements about what is really significant and meaningful in the data”. He also noted the need to be “both attentive and tentative – attentive to the data, and tentative in our conceptualizations of them” (p. 102) and that influences on initial category inferences may include “initial or emergent research questions, substantive, policy or theoretical issues, and imagination, intuition and previous knowledge” (p.102).

In using deductive data analysis, I looked for examples of a theoretical construct within the data. An example of this was the I-theories (McNiff, 2002a) or personal theories concerning time that shape the teachers’ practice (Malaguzzi, 1998) that were formed throughout the discussions:

Teacher 3: *Time to explore, time, time, time to formulate questions and time to think, time to even develop their passions, so it is just so rushed today that a lot of children just do not get time to stop and watch something, like the men put up a fence, or whatever, because someone is always going “ C’mon, c’mon, c’mon!”* (Transcription of meeting. 15th March 2007)

Teacher 4: *Yeah! That is what I said. Philosophically, I value time, time to reflect and even out the pace to become deeply involved, but practice is governed by factors such as session time, and with professional development and with family time and... so that is why I didn’t put it in even though philosophically I value time.* (Transcription of meeting. 15th March 2007)

Teacher 2: And I realised that I gave the children time, whereas if I had had to run all over the place.... But because I was in one place....

Me: Things that I noticed that you did that did show the child they were competent was that every child wrote their name at the top and every child put their paper up on the hangar and it would actually have been ten times easier for any of you just to stand up and put it up there for them, because at one stage it took Teacher 2 a good ten minutes for this little child to get up there and peg their own thing up – it was amazing hand-eye co-ordination and balancing and you just stood there until they did it. You know, it would have been so easy just to do it.

Teacher 3: It is just time.

Teacher 2: Yeah! The time to do it.

(Transcription of meeting 14th May 2007)

You know, about giving my definition of enable, you didn't say it like that, but you know, someone's perception of that's what I meant, and for me it was interpreting that "enable" is giving time, and that is what I put back here (Teacher 1, Transcription of Meeting 6th August 2007)

The discovery I made through this research and watching myself on the DVD, which I noted in my journal, that I felt time, respect, building relationships were all very important aspects of the word competence. (Teacher 1, Transcription of Meeting 5th September 2007)

Once I had noted an instance of an I-theory (McNiff, 2002a) or a personal theory (Malaguzzi, 1998), I looked for instances where a teacher demonstrated that they recognized they were a living contradiction to that personal theory. For example, Teacher 1 was the teacher who emphasised most often the importance of giving children time in order to feel competent. Later she showed recognition of contradiction when she said:

I think I allow more time for children to do things for themselves and for others. But when time is a factor... I think there is even more time when they could do things. Sometimes when I have 12 nappies to change, I get the bag rather than saying, "C'mon, let's find your bag!" But now I am aware. (Teacher 1, Transcription of final interview).

At another meeting, Teacher 2, who had previously stated that she felt it was important to acknowledge the quiet children who sometimes do not receive a lot of attention, revealed her own contradictions:

“I was drawn into teaching to help the quiet average children who often get overlooked, but often this doesn’t happen because you are so grateful for them you just get on with dealing with the noisy children or problem children”

(Notes in my reflective journal 15th March 2007)

Looking for patterns: Following a variant of a constant comparative process (Glaser, 1998), I looked for patterns or trends in the categories. These included categories that were recurrent over time or across the teachers. I also clustered, partitioned and subsumed some categories. For example, when anxiety emerged as a theme, I also differentiated different reasons for anxiety, and the latter included, being judged by colleagues, using words that colleagues misinterpreted, confronting a video of oneself teaching, and, for the supervisor, being put in a position where she may appear to be less competent than the staff she was managing. Anxiety represented one of several teacher factors that influenced their thoughts about and response to the self review process. Other categories of teacher factors included having the time to reflect and discuss teaching practice, and the importance of trusting relationships. As well as making notes in my journal on such patterns, I noted that how my personal background and professional experience might be influencing the data analysis.

Theorising: As I continued to reflect on the patterns in the data, engaged in on-going discussions about them and read further, I reviewed and revised my I-theory of self-review. For example, I affirmed to myself the importance of alternative criticality (Burbules & Berk, 1999) and that caring for anxious

participants was a prerequisite for enabling teachers to engage in a self-review that involved practical philosophy. I recorded such theorizing in my journal. For example, I wrote:

“While I was videoing I thought that it is not only the teachers practice that enables good teaching to take place, but also the organizational culture of the centre. It is well set-out, learning is valued and honoured (for example in the documentation) and in the organisation of the centre. Most of that reflects back to educational leadership. Teacher 4 has empowered the staff and values them for what they bring to the centre. It is a great centre in every aspect, so obviously the practice is good. I guess the question is, would these teachers be as good in another context? Most of them have been employed as they have finished their qualification – it is their first full time job as a qualified early childhood teacher. Would they be as good if they had not had such a good mentor and such a committed role model? I don’t think so!”

(Notes from my reflective journal 26th March 2007).

In contrast, my original hypothesis that technical review was not effective in supporting reflective practice was abandoned. I also searched for theoretical constructs and propositions other than those that initially informed my study that could help me to account for patterns. An example of this is the notion of agency and conversations of hope (Gergen, 1999). Further examples are referred to in Chapter Seven when I discuss the results of the data analyses.

Recontextualising: The underlying purpose of qualitative research is meaning-making. In this case, new meaning was generated on the purpose and processes that a self-review of teaching practice can take. The final stage in the analysis was considering the conditions that may be required for a successful self-review to take place in other contexts. To what extent were unique, situationally specific factors present that were unlikely to be reproduced in other early childhood education centres? It also involved determining the contribution

that this research has made to understanding self-review, and to current professional knowledge in early childhood education.

Trustworthiness

Currently there is a debate as to the relevance of validity, reliability and generalisability to qualitative action research, as it is thought that these are more applicable to the positivist paradigm than to qualitative research which is based on other paradigms, including social constructionism. This debate suggests that the key criteria to consider is trustworthiness (Costello, 2003; Melrose, 2001; Schwalbach, 2003) and four related criteria that are commonly considered relevant are credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Guba, 1981)). This section outlines the steps that I took to ensure that these criteria were addressed, drawing on an elaboration of these criteria by Shenton (2004).

Credibility: This criteria concerns demonstrating congruence between the findings with the reality of the context in which the research was undertaken. The steps that I took to ensure credibility included adopting well-established research methods, as outlined in the research design and data analysis sections and that aligned with the research questions. An additional step was to develop a familiarity with the culture of the participating organisation. This was assisted by the prior relationships that I had with the centre and with the individual participants, and, by the fact, that I had worked in a very similar situation several years previously.

Triangulation, or the collection of data from multiple sources, is one of the most important ways to ensure rigour and soundness in a qualitative research study such as this one (Costello, 2003; Edwards, 2001; Melrose, 2001; Schwalbach,

2003). It is described as a strategy for “*getting to the heart of the matter*” (McNiff, 1988, p. 81) by seeking a variety of viewpoints on the research topic. In this study, I ensured that triangulation was provided by the multiple sources of data, as outlined above, as well as by gathering data over an extended period of time. In addition, discussions involved many participants’ viewpoints, not just the views of one person.

Honesty is another aspect of credibility. As measures to increase the likelihood of honesty, the teachers’ participation was on the basis of informed consent and they were informed that they were free to withdraw at any time.

Reflectivity by the researcher was an additional measure to ensure credibility. As a researcher, I continually reflected on my own background, views and experiences and how they might influence the research processes and my analyses the data. (Shenton, 2004).

I also demonstrated trustworthiness by clearly outlining the process to be followed prior to the commencement of the research, and by adhering to this process throughout the meetings. This gave transparency to the data collection process, as well as providing an audit trail. (Schwalbach, 2003). Throughout the research, credibility was maintained by giving each participant a transcript of the discussion in the previous meeting, prior to the next meeting taking place. This enabled each participant to check each transcript for accuracy and to add further ‘reflections’ that were prompted by the transcript. These reflections were shared at the subsequent meeting. I also provided them with a draft copy of the section of this report on The Teachers’ Sphere. This was intended to provide the participants with an opportunity to provide feedback on my interpretations of

their data. These forms of participant scrutiny were intended to increase the credibility of the research and as a final measure to demonstrate the centre will be given a bound copy of the thesis on completion of the research. In relation to the report I also considered that it would be important that I did not oversimplify the findings, especially in reporting the conclusion as if it were an ending. It is unlikely in a study such as this that any final solution would be found or even that the research would reach a point of closure, as in this case, there are multiple interpretations, and therefore, multiple truths and solutions (Grundy, 1996; McNiff, 1988).

Transferability: This refers to the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to other contexts (Shenton, 2004). In a small qualitative study such as this where the findings relate to a specific context, it was never expected that the findings would be applicable to other situations. However, although the findings cannot be directly applied to other contexts, they can relate indirectly to other contexts and can inform those contexts. For this reason, there must be enough information included in the research, for a reader to decide whether or not the findings could be applicable to their situation. To help readers make that decision, I have provided a detailed description of the early childhood centre in which the research took place; the background, roles and qualifications of the teachers, the data collection methods employed, the number and length of the data collection sessions, and the time period over which the data was collected. I have also noted where there may be differences in features of early childhood centres.

Dependability: Dependability concerns the researcher's need to provide a detailed description of the way the research was undertaken, including changes that were made as the research was underway. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) explain this as allowing '*you to walk people through your work, from beginning to end, so that they can understand the path you took and judge the trustworthiness of your outcomes*' (p. 146). This may also allow another researcher to repeat the research, but with no expectation that they would have the same findings. To ensure dependability, I have outlined enough detail of the process and the findings to enable the reader to thoroughly understand the research processes that have been followed. In particular, these details included details of the research design and its implementation, how the data was gathered and analysed, and the reflective appraisal of the participants, including the researcher, at the end of the process.

Confirmability: Although the influences of the researcher's biases are inevitable, the research must demonstrate that the findings reflect the participants' views, rather than the biases of the researcher. To help readers assess confirmability, I have stated my position as a teacher and researcher and described steps that I took to reduce potential bias. For example, I constructed ground rules for myself to follow, as I did not wish to dominate or intrude on the teachers' discussion. The transcripts demonstrate that I adhered to these ground rules. I have also provided examples of my reflections on my role as a researcher during the study. I present many instances of the original or primary research data that I gathered in my presentation of findings and have included, as

appendices, a selection of transcripts. A detailed outline of the research processes that I used when gathering and analysing this data is provided.

The research context

The starting point of the research study was the location of an early childhood education centre service that was willing to participate in the study. On the basis of the knowledge that I had of early childhood education centres within the local area, I decided to invite centres to participate which I deemed to be complying with the early childhood education regulations and had demonstrated a high standard of teaching practice according to reviews from the Education Review Office, as well as demonstrating a commitment to on-going professional learning as a teaching team. An additional consideration was that there was more than the minimum number of qualified staff in the centre, but that there would be at least four staff willing to participate so that a community of practice would be formed (Lave & Wenger, 2002). The qualifications were considered important because it is from undertaking a degree or a diploma course that the importance of reflection on practice is learnt and understood. A final consideration was that management were supportive of the involvement in the research process, as I acknowledged that, at times, participating in the research would be an intrusion, and an additional burden, in an already busy context. By forming specific criteria to determine my choice of research context, I chose purposive sampling as my approach to choosing the research context (Davidson & Tolich, 1999).

The role of the researcher

Just as it was important to clarify the criteria in selecting a research site, it was also important to clarify my role as researcher. This was particularly important as

it was considered that action research is *with* others, as distinct from being on or about others. I also recognised that the interests of the researcher and the participants are not the same, so there is potential for tension and conflict (Weiskopf & Laske, 1996). The researcher always stands to gain more from the study than the participants, and is able to demonstrate greater power throughout the research process (Melrose, 2001). For this reason, I felt it was important to be aware and to critically reflect on my behaviour throughout the research process (Cardno, 2003) to ensure that it was ethical and respectful of others, especially of the opinions they contributed (Mc Niff, 2002a). I felt it was important that trustworthiness and credibility were evident in my conduct at all times.

The sensitivities involved in the research situation were complicated by the fact that action research is inherently political as change is often involved. This usually necessitates the researcher taking on different roles that shift and change throughout the research process (Carspeckon & MacGillivray, 1998). These shifts in role mean that sometimes the researcher takes the position of an outsider, and sometimes that of an insider (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Wellington, 2000). In order to complete the research, it was necessary to become familiar with the situation that was being researched (Cardno, 2003); that is, to be able to take an insider stance. This insider stance was further emphasised as the research progressed. However, leadership is needed to complete the research process, and this leadership role falls to the researcher. In some instances, effective leadership necessitated an outsider stance being temporarily adopted. Similarly, an outsider position was needed to facilitate the dialogue and give a different perspective to provide impetus for dialogue to become more critical (Annan, Lai, & Robinson, 2003). It has also been noted by other researchers that

while early childhood education teachers value intellectual engagement about their work, they often experience difficulty in resourcing such engagement (MacNaughton, 2005). I considered one of my roles would be to provide any resources, such as relevant literature, to inform participants of any issues that arose as part of the discussion.

The relationship between the researcher and the participants must be viewed as a co-operative agreement that is clearly defined but open to negotiation as events unfold. This reduces the likelihood of destructive conflict. Because of my greater gain from the research process, I felt there was a greater moral obligation for me, as researcher, to respect the viewpoint of the participants in any renegotiations (Ryan & Campbell, 2001).

In order to further counterbalance this position of privilege, I felt it important to develop reflexivity, or self-awareness of the researcher's role and influence in the study, as well as responsiveness to methods of gathering and interpreting the data throughout the research process (Edwards, 2001; Hall, 1996). Reflexivity involved realising that action research is always political, and that knowledge construction within a group can be a risky business for the participants. For me, being reflexive meant to be transparent in my intentions and responsible in carrying those out.

I also planned for reflexivity by constantly seeking feedback from the participants on the research process. In any group dialogue, I acted as scribe and took the notes, so that my influence on the discussion was limited. If the discussion involved everyone in the group contributing, I was careful to take the last turn. I was also aware that constant reflection on my role was crucial. As the

person conducting the research, I also bring values to the research (Hall, 1996; McNiff, 2002b) and am also a living contradiction, so I may not practice the values I espouse.

Finally, as the researcher, I realised I had responsibility for the practical aspects of the research. I had the responsibility to be knowledgeable about the research study and the methods chosen to research the topic so as to be able to articulate this clearly to the participants. I had the responsibility to provide a research design that was clear and achievable, and that any written material, such as the information sheets, used language that was easily understood by all (Coady, 2001). I had the responsibility to provide food for the participants who volunteered to give up their personal time after a day's work. It was my responsibility to bear all the financial costs of the research, and to complete the photocopying and word-processing associated with the meetings. I had the additional responsibility of ensuring that the monthly meetings took place in a timely fashion and that the data collection was managed effectively. I felt that fulfilling these responsibilities was one way to demonstrate trustworthiness while maintaining credibility. Strongly linked to the notion of trustworthiness was the essential attention that was given to ethical considerations.

Ethical considerations

Research is a complicated, messy and ever-changing political process. Research...is a social activity and when people come together in classrooms and educational settings, challenges and tensions are inevitable (Ryan & Campbell, 2001, p. 620).

As has been previously stated, research privileges the researcher over the participants (Cannella, 1997), and it is the researcher who stands to gain the most

from the research process. These factors highlight the importance of ethical considerations.

Before choosing an early childhood service in which to commence the data collection, it was essential to seek ethical approval from the AUT Ethics Committee. The application outlined the research process, but also pledged to do no harm to the research participants. Conditions for ethical approval are that the participants must give informed consent to the research study. Informed consent must be based on information that outlines the nature of the project, what will be required of the participants, any possible risks involved in the research, and that clearly states that the participants are free to withdraw if need be (Coady, 2001). I felt it was important that the information was an honest account that involved no deception concerning the time commitment involved. Ethical approval guaranteed the right of participants to remain anonymous and that confidentiality would be maintained. It also guaranteed participants the right to verify transcripts before the research was finalised. The ethical approval stated that the participants would receive a copy of the final research report. Obtaining ethical consent was solely my responsibility.

However, to behave ethically throughout the research process is more than complying with the ethics consent form. Throughout the course of any research project, situations are likely to arise that do not fit the parameters of the ethics proposal. It is therefore imperative that ethical judgements are made with integrity. Here ethics can be viewed as linked to the trustworthiness of the researcher as discussed earlier. Ethics are considered to be a balance between the rights and responsibilities of those involved and the agreement that has been

made on the task and the expectations of completing the task (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). This point further emphasises the importance of being self-reflexive at all times; that is to say, to be open about the biases and philosophical viewpoints that may affect the research, while recognising that there is a need to demonstrate concern for those who have agreed to participate in the process (Edwards, 2001).

No matter how much careful consideration is given to the research design it was recognised that ethical dilemmas could be faced throughout the course of the research. These can come about from within the teaching team that participated, from management and the teaching team, or from discussing practice with an outsider, such as me. Difficulties in discussions can arise from personal and cultural differences, differences in values, or the anxiety that can arise from an individual feeling isolated, defensive or marginalised. These differences, if they arise, form part of the data. However, in such situations, I considered it my responsibility as researcher, to maintain an atmosphere that allowed differences to be discussed in a respectful way so as to allow the participants to maintain their dignity. This was partly achieved by the group setting ground rules before discussions commenced. I felt it was also important for me to be mindful of personal matters, such as thanking participants for their contribution to the discussions at the end of the meeting (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000), so that they were assured of their worth in the research process.

Prior to beginning the research, the greatest ethical dilemma that I anticipated was that the teaching team that agreed to participate would become overburdened through staff shortages and staff illness throughout the research process. In this case, I decided that a decision would be made, after taking all the factors into

consideration, whether or not to postpone any meetings. I also decided, in order to alleviate over-commitment on the participants, that all meetings would be held at the time most convenient to them, and that I would organise my time to fit in with their schedule. Although it is always important to keep the research moving, this cannot be done at the cost of the well-being of the participants. Despite a busy year, with the centre premises being extended and the centre staff having committed their time to another long term professional development opportunity, luckily all meetings went ahead as planned. Only one staff member was unable to attend one meeting due to an unexpected family crisis.

Although it could be considered that being overly concerned with the sensitivities of the research could impede the progress and completion of the study, this concern also affirmed my trustworthiness as the researcher. Such trustworthiness ultimately must add to the depth of discussion and to the quality of the relationships that are built as a consequence.

Summary

The living values approach to action research has been described as a methodology of care (McNiff, 1999). I interpreted this in two ways. Firstly, I cared about self-review in early childhood education, so I wanted to examine an alternative to the managerialist approach that could easily come to dominate the early childhood education sector. Secondly, I interpreted my methodology of care as being a methodology that places the participants at the centre of the research so that ethical care and consideration is taken to ensure and support their well being.

In conclusion, this chapter outlined the theoretical paradigm that provides the broad framework for the research. This was the paradigm of social constructionism, chosen because it explains how each community of practice constructs their knowledge base in a way that has meaning for them according to the values and beliefs that the individuals who belong to that community espouse. Hence to review practice it follows that the values underpinning the practice must first be examined. To do this the living values approach to action research was chosen as the most appropriate methodology. In outlining the research design, the ethical considerations and the role of the researcher, the point has been made that caring for the participants was an important consideration. In outlining the details of the research design, there has been recognition that the research design reflects social constructionism as it is a social activity that both shapes and is shaped by the people involved.

Chapter 4: My sphere

The focus of this chapter is to document and discuss the first sphere of the action research; that is how I, in my role as facilitator, implemented an action research process in an early childhood education centre using the approach of practical philosophy to review teaching practice. The questions that I explored for this sphere are:

- How can I design and facilitate a process of self-review that uses an approach of practical philosophy?
- How does this process assist me to form an I-theory of self-review?

To answer these questions I examined two separate aspects of my role in the research. The first was to document and discuss the process that I facilitated, while the second was to examine the shift in my thinking about improving my own practice that occurred as a result of undertaking this research. Hence this chapter was a self-review that took the approach of practical philosophy of my practice as a teacher educator interacting with early childhood education students and qualified early childhood teachers on a daily basis, as well as interacting with colleagues within a teacher education institute. As part of this self-review, I articulated the values that I aspire to and I have reflected on the areas where I too am a living contradiction (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006).

My values for self-review

My values and hopes for self-review had developed and evolved from my experiences as a teacher of young children, a supervisor of a community early childhood centre and my involvement in the pilot study of *The quality journey*:

He Haerenga whai hua (Ministry of Education, 1999). Although as a teacher educator, I was not involved in undertaking self-review of the institution where I work, I do teach the principles of self-review to pre-service early childhood education teachers and this has also impacted on my thinking.

I believe that teaching is good work (Kincheloe, 2003) that makes a positive contribution to individuals and the contexts in which they exist. I also believe that the status and worth of teachers should not be linked to the age group that is being taught. I believe that the person who teaches a six-month old baby should be held in the same regard as a tertiary teacher who teaches adults. However, I am aware that this is not the perception of society at large, where early childhood education teachers are often considered as the Cinderellas of the education sector. Whilst working as an early childhood teacher, I have been referred to as a ‘child minder’, a ‘childcare worker’, a ‘substitute mother’, an ‘educator’, sometimes a ‘practitioner’, but seldom a ‘teacher’. It was as if I was not worthy of the term because the children I taught were in the zero to five age group. Now in Aotearoa New Zealand early childhood education teachers have equivalent qualifications to, and have achieved pay parity with, primary school teachers. In addition early childhood education teachers must be registered with the Teachers Council, as must all other teachers. By 2012 all teachers working with children in this age group must be both fully qualified and registered (Ministry of Education, 2002). This is a world first for early childhood teachers (Moss, 2006). For that reason, throughout this study, I have deliberately used the term teacher, and not practitioner, as a term of respect to the research participants.

I am very conscious of the learning I gain from social situations. As a teacher I have been shaped by the concept of ako (Pere, 1991) that views learning as a dynamic life-long process where teaching and learning are perceived as complementary and indistinguishable from each other. Both teaching and learning are seen to take place in the context of relationships, often of tuakana-teina (peer support). Such relationships should be based on aroha (in this context meaning caring, safe relationships), but are defined by strong responsibilities and reciprocity by all involved. One tauwiwi (non-Māori) equivalent of this view of learning is the concept of the community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 2002) that similarly views learning as a social process.

I subscribe to certain values about early childhood education. I was mindful of these when I planned the process for this research study. I have long believed that early childhood education teachers are capable of being agents of change in the context where they work if they have a vision to work towards (Grey, 1999). I feel that it is valid for each early childhood service to self-review practice by reflecting on how their practice has met or failed to meet their vision, and that this should form an ethical accountability measure. I have a strong belief that reviewing practice in this way would be an empowering process, so I always referred to it as empowerment evaluation (Fetterman, 1996; Grey, 2000; Grey, 2002). I believe that because it was meaningful and specific to the context, an empowering form of self-review would foster improvement through self-determination. I felt it was important that the self-review process did not become a threatening name-blame- and shame exercise. For that reason I have always stressed that self-review should nurture a culture of responsibility, not blame

(Greenman & Stonehouse 1996). I believe that while one of the purposes of self-review is to discover and reduce the blind spots that we all have with regards to our own practice, I believe that this could be a positive process if it is seen as a method to gain fresh insights into practice that result in a different level of collaboration amongst those involved in an early childhood service. I believe that the learning that can arise from this process would extend the professional horizons of early childhood education teachers (Grey, 2002). I think that these values emphasise the need for respectful interactions when completing a self-review.

I still subscribe to all these values but there are two values that I feel I did not emphasise enough; one is the importance of professional dialogue and the other is the importance of listening. In 2000, I wrote of the importance of *walking the talk* by reviewing practice through observing actions, not by discussion of intentions (Grey, 2000, p.31). In other words, I thought then that professional practice equated to behaviour, and was based on the old adage, *actions speak louder than words*, and so it was the actions that must be examined. I now understand language and values to be powerful tools in shaping practice and it is imperative that they be discussed and reflected on. I currently feel that the behaviour of teachers is determined by their thinking and the theories they subscribe to. This professional knowledge is a combination of academic theory and practical theories (Wood & Bennett, 2000), or I-theories (McNiff, 2002), gained from experience so changes to practice come about from examining this knowledge base. By doing this, teachers are able to amass practical wisdom, a combination of intuition and the ability to learn from the teaching context, so that

actions and decision-making are responsive to the specific context in which they are made (Goodfellow, 2003). I believe this deep understanding of practice and the ability to articulate personal philosophy and epistemology comes about from dialogue within a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 2002). I visualised this research study as a community of practice where thinking about practice was communicated to form a self-review that, rather than being judged from without, examined teaching practice from within to empower those involved. Hence the importance of dialogue and communication is emphasised and made explicit in this study.

Just as I had failed to recognise and value the importance of professional dialogue, I also failed to recognise and value the importance of listening. Listening is integral to dialogue, as one cannot exist without the other. I believe that listening in most contexts is undervalued by many, just as it was by me. I have observed that in public meetings often an articulate speaker receives recognition while an attentive listener is usually overlooked. Currently in the early childhood education sector, it is common to talk about building a *culture of listening* through the influence that the pre-schools of Reggio Emilia have had in our practice (Rinaldi, 2006). In a culture of listening, listening is seen as a metaphor for respect...

for listening reciprocally, and becoming sensitive to the idea of others to enrich their own ideas and to generate group ideas.
(Rinaldi, 2006. p.117).

Listening involves giving meaning to what has been said, forming yet more questions, and recognising the theories that have been formed as a result of the complementary processes of dialogue and listening. Hence, listening forms

pedagogy in its own right. Unfortunately, although we are learning to “listen” to children in this metaphorical sense, I believe we often do not extend this value to the adult world, so usually emphasise the importance of speaking, often to justify our own position, and neglect to listen. I am reminded of the words of Parker Palmer who said:

Listening is what the human self yearns for: to be received, to be heard, to be known, and in the process to be honoured. And listening, deep listening, is what gives rise to the impulse toward personal and social change.

(Palmer, 2002, p.xix)

I also now believe that listening is a metaphor for inclusion, especially our ability to accept and incorporate diverse viewpoints into our dialogue:

Even those who want to hear multiple voices become so committed to our constructions of how to listen and what to hear, that we silence both younger human beings and those in their lives that do not speak our language. These voices of silent knowing would teach us to examine what we think we know and lead us to explore and respect multiple world views. (Cannella, 1997, p.12).

Listening in this metaphorical sense not only indicates that individuals are valued; it also indicates that differences and diversity are valued. Listening in this sense can be seen as a gift and a form of caring for others.

Throughout this research study, I came to view listening, and in particular, my listening to the teachers, as an important part of the research process. I am now continually reflecting on how I listen and accept others viewpoints as an important way to improve my own practice.

The context

When ethical consent was obtained in September 2006 I sent out an invitation, along with an information sheet, to an early childhood education centre that fitted the criteria outlined in the previous chapter. This centre was my first choice, but I

was aware that participation in a research study is never to be taken for granted (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). As I already had a prior relationship with the centre, I had already demonstrated trustworthiness and credibility with the centre staff. I had been part of the committee that established the centre in 1998, and I had previously worked as an early childhood teacher with the current supervisor (who is Teacher 4 in this study). Another of the teachers (Teacher 1 in the study) I had taught at undergraduate level. I knew the other teachers through my professional networks. In addition, in 2000-2001 when I facilitated the professional development contract to pilot the document of *The quality journey: He harenga whai hua* (Ministry of Education, 1999) this centre was one of the centres involved. I have stayed in touch with the centre as an evaluative lecturer when visiting students. I know the centre has a high standard of teaching practice and a strong involvement in professional learning. My concern, however, was that I might be perceived as an expert or an authority figure, and so I sought to clarify both the aim of the research and the requirements asked of the participants.

Shortly after contacting the centre the supervisor called to say she did not think they could accept the invitation to do the research as the teachers were concerned with the time needed to participate in the discussions. A month later just as I was considering sending out an invitation to another centre, I received call from Teacher 4 to say that the teaching team had discussed the research further at a subsequent meeting and agreed for me to visit the centre to explain in greater detail what was involved in the research. At a meeting in November 2006 I explained the purpose, the process and the time required of the participants, and

gave each teacher a copy of the research methodology and some background reading material. The staff had further discussion about the impact on their personal and professional lives of committing to a study that would take a year. I was told shortly after that the teaching team, including the supervisor, decided to accept the invitation to participate in this research study with me, and each signed an individual consent form. One of the reasons they gave for agreeing to participate was they felt it was important to support post-graduate study as this supported the growth of professionalism in the early childhood education sector. They also wanted to support me in my study for a doctorate. Later, I read in one of the reflective journals that the prior relationships I had with the teachers in the centre also influenced their decision:

Anne has earned my respect as a practitioner, lecturer and researcher and I have confidence in her ethical and professional capabilities. This, therefore, made my decision to participate much easier. (Teacher 4, transcription of meeting 5th September 2007).

My choice of an early childhood education centre to participate in the research was very deliberate. It was based on three things - my positive experience of having taught in a similar situation when I was an early childhood education teacher, my prior relationship with the centre, and the high regard I had of the practice within the centre. As I told the participants in meeting five:

Well, I am biased too, because I think that I have a background that is quite similar, so it is hard for me to separate, but I think the way this place is set up, the routines, the curriculum that is offered is exactly right for a sessional (centre) where (the children) are not coming everyday and where the age of the children is basically toddlers – there are not many older children, not many younger children or really young infants, they are walking toddlers, in the toddler age group, and I think it is pitched at exactly the right level. (Anne, Meeting 5, 5th July 2007).

My role as facilitator

An important feature of any qualitative research is the relationship of the researcher to the participants and how this affects the research site (Edwards, 2001). I did not want to become so enmeshed in the daily dynamics and organizational baggage of the centre (Stark, 2006) that I could not maintain a perspective that would assist the participants to look in-depth at their practice. I felt it was necessary to maintain some distance in order to protect the rigour of the process. Thus I decided that my role needed a responsiveness and sensitivity to the context, but that a certain objectivity and distance must be maintained to allow participants to make an honest reconceptualisation of their practice.

In order to facilitate the group discussions, I felt it was important to set ground rules. I broadly outlined these at the beginning of the first meeting. After transcribing the tape of this meeting, I restated them more strongly, as parts of that tape had been impossible to transcribe because the teachers had interrupted and talked over each other. These ground rules helped to create a climate of respect and to reduce dominance as they meant everyone had a chance to express their ideas without feeling pressured.

Just as I set ground rules for the teachers in the discussion, I also set ground rules for myself. I had a prior relationship with the centre and the four teachers who were the research participants. Before beginning the research process I reflected on these relationships in order to redefine some aspects of them so that my role could shift from that of friend to facilitator/researcher. As a facilitator/researcher, I did not want to take the position of expert that judged the practice of the

teachers or imposed my views and values on them. The data collection that I planned allowed the teachers the independence to reflect on their philosophy and practice individually and as a team without intervention from me. This was especially so for the videos. In planning for the videos to be a central part of the research I was influenced by Soncini, the psychologist in charge of the children with special rights from the Reggio Emilia preschools, who describes the use of videos like this:

When I go to a centre and see some practice that does not seem to be in the best interest of the child, I videotape the situation. Later on, at a staff meeting, I encourage the teachers to reflect on what they see themselves doing in the videotape. I especially get them to reflect on how they see the child reacting. Then I ask all the staff to talk about what they have noticed, and people's various insights are compared. From there we will re-elaborate the various insights that have emerged. Thus we co-construct and problem-solve together. (Smith, 1998, p. 205).

The ground rules I set for myself reflected the considerations outlined above. The practical aspects were that I would provide a special afternoon tea for each meeting; that meetings would occur on the day and time that best suited the participants, even if it did not particularly suit me; and that each meeting would start and end on time. In addition, the ground rules for myself whilst participating in the discussions were that it was inappropriate for me to take part in the discussion about the centre's philosophy as I am not a part of the everyday life of the centre, and I am no longer an early childhood teacher. I adhered to this ground rule throughout the process. The transcriptions of the discussion on philosophy, for example, demonstrate that apart from beginning and ending the discussion, I made only three brief comments. I considered I should only join in the discussion if I could link the discussion to relevant literature that added extra depth to the dialogue. The transcripts demonstrate that throughout the meetings I

only lapsed into relating one anecdote, while other comments I made were prompts to extend the discussion.

I also reflected on the appropriateness of a researcher coming into a centre to facilitate a self-review process whereby teachers reviewed their practice. Surely this is an oxymoron? The term self-review implies that teachers review their own practice without any outside influence. I felt slightly anxious about this throughout the research process. Although I asked no specific question about my role in the final interviews, it was commented on by the teachers:

If we were just doing it, and you hadn't come in, I am not sure if it would have had the same effect... I think because we know you (well, I know you!), it made it quite comfortable to say whatever (Teacher 1, final interview).

It was good also to have the outside perspective and support...I think it could be a teambuilding exercise, because the outside person coming in mediates the process (Teacher 3, final interview).

I think it is really valuable for an outsider — more objective view, rather than one of the staff members doing it. But it was someone that understands the dynamics of the centre — that we have 150 children a week for example ...Having an outsider recording discussion, and us reading from the reflective journal, put value on what we thought. That wouldn't be the same if it was an insider. A total outsider... that wouldn't work! It is important that the person coming in does have a rapport, and an understanding of the operations and the background of the staff — for example, the pressures that the staff are under, that it is a mixed age centre with 150 children a week (Teacher 4, final interview).

Throughout the research process, the teachers commented that they found the opportunity to discuss their pedagogical beliefs to be very valuable:

I think it was good to have another time to discuss — not the day to day matters — the deep reflections. (Teacher 2, final interview).

The teachers could also appreciate the insights that could be gained from being videoed:

I found that being observed or filmed while being engaged with the children makes you mentally and emotionally aware of every action, reaction and interaction that you engage in. I would not say that during everyday practice I am unaware, but it is amazing how the intensity enables you to really examine and think about your actions and the effect they have on others. (Teacher 3, meeting 5th September 2007).

However, from the teachers' point of view, reviewing teaching in this way was often an intimidating experience. Teacher 4 revealed that initially she found it difficult to voice an opinion in the discussions, but later found it more natural; Teacher 1 reported that at one stage she felt too scared to talk (transcription of meeting three, 14th May 2007). Teacher 2 also felt some unease:

I must say I felt the first time was a bit daunting — reading out my philosophy. I felt that everyone looked at the words — it was the whole word 'need' that people looked at. I wrote what I believed at the time. I was a bit careful after that.

Similarly, being videoed was another nerve-wracking experience for the teachers:

Being watched by a camera for an hour and a half in order to view and critique our practice was intense...While being filmed I was also aware that others would closely scrutinise my practice and that how others may see and interpret these interactions would impact on their view of me and how I saw myself in the role I took as a teacher. I was asking myself would they see me as competent as we viewed the DVD. (Teacher 3, 5th September 2007).

This outlined an ethical question for me as the researcher: How much should I challenge and critique the dialogue? After the third meeting, I became anxious that the process I planned was not effective or challenging the participants' thinking enough to result in a change of practice or a shift in thinking. This perception resulted from my own insecurity as a novice researcher. I was very

aware that action research was based on a critical dialogue that uncovered unwelcome truths (Kemmis, 2006). Although the value of critical dialogue and the usefulness of having one's blind spots uncovered by unwelcome truths can be easily justified in theory, in practice action research and critical dialogue is often threatening to participants (Meyer, Ashburner & Holman, 2006). Forming a community that critically reflects and interprets teachers' understandings of the world can be an uncomfortable practice because it involves subjecting one's thoughts and beliefs to scrutiny by others who do not always hold the same thoughts and values (MacNaughton, 2003). Some researchers have questioned the wisdom of deconstructing and challenging the knowledge base of early childhood teachers because the uncertainty and despair this may bring is detrimental to the health and well-being of the teachers involved (MacNaughton, 2001). If I as a facilitator of the process, for example, had emphasised change in every meeting, I might have given an unspoken message that the practice of the teachers had been found wanting (Meyer, Ashburner & Holman, 2006). Hence, being critical can become counterproductive and cause participants to become defensive or render them silent (Stark, 2006). I decided that the approach to criticality that would be the most appropriate was to support the teachers to think anew or to reflect on alternatives (Burbules & Berk, 1999). I also considered it was not ethical to impose my own agenda and intentions on the teachers, but to trust them to form their own interpretations in a way that was meaningful to them so that they could control and own any shift of thinking (Dewar, 2006).

I decided I needed to trust the participants own competence to contribute to the discussions if they wished to and to critically challenge their own thinking

without needing me to prompt them into it. My reflection on this was an example of me being a living contradiction — my intention was to facilitate an empowering process, but instead I subconsciously wanted to control the process to prioritise my own intentions in a way that may not contribute to the teachers' learning. Although anxious, I decided not to challenge the teachers' dialogue and to wait and see where the process led.

At a later stage of the process, I realised that dialogue on the research topic was not occurring solely during the meetings. The teachers reported having conversations about the action research topic at different times throughout the week. I once arrived at the centre for a scheduled meeting to find two of the participants were engaged in a conversation about the research. I realised that it was my own nervousness that would have liked the security of a defined outcome and evidence of change at every meeting, whereas reflective learning occurs at a slower pace, but is none the less significant. I made the judgement that in this early childhood education context, a caring attitude was the most appropriate way to support the critical thinking that would naturally evolve from the process (Meyer, Ashburner & Holman, 2006). The final interviews indicated that this was the case...

I think what was highlighted for me was that it doesn't stop. You have triggers that make you discuss with staff about competence and practice. An example of this was when I gave a presentation at a hui in Auckland. It was the powerful images of the children and their competence, and the image of the teachers supporting this that made the presentation...It helped that when we edited the videos of children with special rights, it allowed greater discrimination and scrutiny, because we had a lens of competency, we had our awareness sharpened, so we edited more critically, and provided very powerful images of children with special rights being competent. (Teacher 4, Final interview).

When planning the process, I had outlined a broad process, but I also realised that this process might require some changes and was open to negotiation with the teachers. I had originally thought that I would video one participant and then view and discuss this video. Then I would repeat this process with the other three teachers. As we discussed this as a group, we could see that the first person would be at a disadvantage as they would be analysed before the others were videoed. This would have too much effect on the other teachers so the videos would not be authentic. For this reason, we decided to film all four participants in a short time frame, and then we would proceed with the meetings so that no one would feel disadvantaged. Because of this negotiation, I filmed all four teachers in one week – one teacher each morning.

In summary, the relationships between the teachers and me as facilitator were vital to the research process. Social constructionism contends that knowledge is created through daily interactions, not by an individual in isolation (Burr, 2003). Although my role was facilitator/researcher, it was impossible to initiate the research without the teachers' involvement. It was their ability to articulate and reflect on their philosophy that enabled me to complete the research study. It was my responsibility to neither abuse nor exploit the relationships, and at all times to act with integrity.

Reciprocity

To facilitate a process of self-review based on practical philosophy I felt it was important to demonstrate reciprocity to the participants in the study. For example I was asked by the teachers if they could use the profile sheets and their

philosophy sheets (see Appendix 2) for their teacher registration folders. I readily agreed to this as I wanted the teachers to feel that they had gained something tangible from the research process. I was still sensitive to the fact that I would gain more from this research than it was possible for them to gain. I later organised copies of the video to be made so that each teacher had a copy to reflect further on their teaching, and to use for teacher registration purposes. At the end of the research process I collated a synopsis of the data collection that could be used as documentation of self-review for the Educational Review Office.

In addition to this material, I printed a copy of the transcription of each meeting for each teacher so that by the end of the process each teacher had a complete account of each discussion. I found relevant journal articles and gave a copy to each teacher. I felt that this supported their professional learning as well as contributing depth to the reflections. As I am able to access such readings more easily than the teachers, it was a tangible way for me to reciprocate for the teachers giving their time.

I also demonstrated care for the teachers in a practical sense. I kept to time and closed each meeting promptly at six o'clock, even though, in my own interest, I would often have liked to extend the conversation to record further interesting discussion. I began each meeting thanking the participants for making the time to attend, and closed each meeting by acknowledging their input to the research process so they left assured that they had made a valued contribution (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). In addition I brought afternoon tea for each meeting. As the last meeting was short, to celebrate the completion of the meetings, I took

the teachers to a restaurant for dinner. These personal matters, although small in themselves, were important to me because, when complete, the research process privileges the researcher over the participants (Cannella, 1997), and it is the researcher who stands to gain the most from the completed research (Ryan & Campbell, 2001).

The process

Before the first meeting I reflected carefully on how I would proceed because it is suggested that the role of the facilitator at the beginning of an action research project is crucial to its success as this meeting builds “*cohesiveness, confidence and commitment*” to the research project (Stark, 2006, p.27). With this in mind, I carefully outlined expectations to the participants at the initial meeting in November 2006 that was held to inform the participants of the research and to gain their informed consent.

At this meeting I was careful to explain that the research process would take an extended amount of time. It has been suggested that early childhood teachers need extended time for shifts in thinking to occur. For example, a similar study in Australia took twelve months to complete (Fleer & Richardson, 2009). Before the research began, I had commented in my reflective journal that I thought the extended amount of time would be the greatest stumbling block in the process. One of the teachers also mentioned the time commitment as a negative aspect in their reflective journal. Although a year is a long time to commit to, the teachers also commented on the value of participating in an extended process.

Other self-reviews have been short term and one-off, but this one, because of the process set up over time, once a month, it reinforced and supported the change. (Teacher 3, final interview).

Having the time between meetings was great to reflect ... having that time between meetings gave us a chance to have discussion between colleagues. (Teacher 1, final interview).

Although the teachers appreciated the time between each meeting to reflect and consolidate their thinking, I felt it was important that I keep the intervals between meetings quite short to keep up the momentum so participants did not lose interest. Similarly, if the process had lasted any longer, it could have been counterproductive as the teachers found it harder to concentrate on the videos that were viewed later in the process. This conversation was recorded at the last video viewing:

Teacher 4: *"You said you found yours a bit boring because you had already analysed it!"*

Teacher 1: *Yeah!*

Teacher 4: *That is probably because you had already analysed it.*

Teacher 1: *I don't find this very exciting either... No offence, you know!*

Teacher 4: *Yeah! I know!*

Teacher 1: *You know, but.... What do you feel?*

Teacher 4: *But I actually find this a bit more interesting because I know from the expressions on the children's faces that it was meaningful for them, because, like that whole dialogue with the three...*

Teacher 2: *I coped with them all, but I actually found the first two, which was actually Teacher 3's and mine more interesting, but I think it was because I was fresher.*

This conversation indicates that extending the process any longer would not have made it any more meaningful. The fact that there were four teachers and four meetings to view the videos determined the length of the process. In view of the above feedback, it was probably fortunate that the number of teachers was not more.

The information sheet handed to the participants at the preliminary meeting (see Appendix 1) outlined the task for each meeting, so the participants knew that before our first meeting they needed to write a page on their personal philosophy of teaching. The participants were also aware that they would be required to read their philosophy statement aloud to the group. I deliberately chose to do this as I had read that this was a strategy that reduced the dominance that can sometimes occur in such discussions (hooks, 1994), as reading aloud gave the participants a voice from the beginning, as well as a platform to critically reflect on each other's perspective. I also thought that by writing their personal philosophy, filling in profile sheets, and being encouraged to write reflections between meetings, participants would be more mindful of the responses that they gave, so "off the cuff" comments would be minimised. To encourage the writing, before the process I bought a variety of attractive journals and left them at the early childhood centre for the participants to choose the one they liked. I later received feedback that "*this helped with the process*" (Teacher 4, Reflective Journal).

In February 2007 two weeks before the first meeting, I gave each teacher a profile sheet to fill in. The teachers later said that filling out this profile sheet was very thought provoking, and they felt that describing the centre that they worked in was challenging. This profile sheet documented the individual beliefs, values and experiences that each of the teachers brought to the project (Anning, 2009). The profile sheet was based on a similar one devised in Australia for early childhood teachers to create an awareness of who they are as professionals (Raban, Nolan, Waniganayake, Ure, Brown, & Deans, 2007). As well as asking for qualifications and years of experience, participants listed their role models,

mentors and experiences that had influenced their practice as early childhood teachers. Interestingly, two mentioned lecturers from their undergraduate qualification and one mentioned their current supervisor as a mentor. The profile sheet also gave participants the opportunity to link their personal experiences to their pedagogical practice. For example, Teacher 4 wrote about one of the three most important influences on her practice as an early childhood teacher:

At high school, student in wheelchair left outside – no one to help her up the stairs — the realization of my belief in the right to participate. (Teacher 4, Profile sheet).

Teacher 4 said that she previously did not realise how powerful this experience had been and how it has shaped her practice. Apparently the teacher could not be bothered helping the student in the wheelchair to climb the stairs to class. Teacher 4 had become so angry she excused herself from class, went back down stairs and helped the student into the classroom. As a teacher, and certainly as a supervisor of an early childhood centre, she has always made a deliberate point of supporting inclusive practices so that children with disabilities are welcomed. Throughout the subsequent discussions she, more than any of the other teachers, brought the inclusive perspective into the discussion and used the term “children with special rights” to describe these children.

The first meeting to gather the data was held on the 15th February 2007. It was held in the early childhood centre at the low round table that children sit at to eat. I asked the teachers if they wanted to be known by their own names, or by pseudonyms. They replied that they were happy to be given a number. There were four teachers involved so I numbered them from 1-4 in a clockwise

direction around the table, starting from my left. Hence there is no hierarchical meaning behind the numbers.

I wrote in my reflective journal how nervous I was at this first meeting. I wrote about how I needed to slow down, relax and listen. I had worked all day and driven nervously to the centre arriving five minutes before the meeting was to begin. As I do not feel confident using any form of technology, I worried about the tape recorder not working, and did not give my full attention to what was being said. It was thinking about this meeting later that jolted me into reflecting on the importance of active listening. Although it may have appeared I was listening, I was worrying about the tape recorder and the details that I had not been able to complete before I left work. From this reflective journal entry I decided that to listen attentively at a meeting needed as much preparation as speaking at a meeting. To improve my practice in this respect, I drew up strategies so that I could listen calmly, reflect and extend the conversation. One of these strategies was to use “wait time” before making a comment to move the discussion on. I found in subsequent meetings that some of the most perceptive comments and the best stories were recounted after quite a long period of silence.

Data collection

Data collection is an important aspect of any research process. As social constructionism contends realities are constructed rather than discovered, I anticipated that throughout the research process the daily reality of practice within the centre would be documented and recorded to form the data collection. For me this raised an ethical issue. It was important for me to be aware that the

data collection is a representation or snapshot of the reality of practice in an early childhood centre — it is not the daily lived reality itself (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007). This even applies to the videos, because although they are a visual record of each teacher's practice in context, the camera can only record what is in the view of the lens, not what is outside it. In addition, the teachers reported that while they were being videoed, there were many duties that they usually do that other teachers performed for them as the teaching team were aware that they were being filmed (Final interview, Teacher 2).

Throughout the research process, other snapshots of practice were documented by writing in reflective journals, dialogue and videos. Each snapshot constructed an independent meaning, but each is dependent on the others to construct meaningful understanding of practice in the research context. Each piece of data collection forms a research artefact that represents a point in time. This point in time, by being recorded, becomes frozen, to create a distance between the participants so that critical reflection on practice can take place (Brown & Jones, 2001). For this reason, I felt it was important to have a variety of data sources — reflective writing, videos and discussions. The variety of data sources also allowed preference for different media to be expressed by the teachers:

Holistic is an overused word – but it is a rounded way of developing professionally. It did become in-depth on an emotional level, we did collect background information – readings, dictionary – and the whole issue of having to express thoughts. Some people felt more confident in verbal expression, others felt more confident in discussions, and the videos gave the kinetic visualisation of body language. If someone hadn't articulated themselves verbally, they still showed that they were powerful teachers. It provided a more equitable ground for participation between myself, as supervisor, and the rest of the team (Teacher 4, Final interview, December 2007).

Each piece of data formed a piece in the larger mosaic construction. I was aware that the pieces collected can become privileged through the process of being recorded, read, reread and discussed many times that may result in that particular data/snapshot taking on an importance beyond itself (MacNaughton, 2001). As I realised this, I also realised that many significant incidents that reflect practice will be silenced as they were not recorded and discussed. For example, I had originally thought that Learning Stories (pedagogical documentation that are narratives of formative assessment of children) could form an important piece of data for the teachers to reflect on. The teachers, however, did not feel comfortable including these in the data as they felt that ethically they belonged to the children and their families. Hence I was aware that any conclusions drawn from any one piece of data collection, or even the collection as a whole, must remain tentative (Stark, 2006). The following comments demonstrate that the teachers were also of this opinion:

I don't think it could have been done any other way...because we all showed competence at the art table – but do we do it in the sandpit? (Teacher 2, final interview, December 2007).

it does involve a high level of risk viewing it in detail, because while your practice during the day is contextual, but in a way, you are looking at it in detail when you are looking at a selected segment (Teacher 4, meeting 6th September 2007).

The variety of data that I planned for was important as each teacher found at least one medium that suited them. However, I also felt it was important to use the entire range of data, and to not privilege one form over another. There was a month between each meeting, and in this time, I transcribed each discussion and gave each teacher a copy of the transcription at least ten days before the next

meeting. I felt to revisit what was said in the previous meeting during the interval was helpful to provide continuity and more depth to the process, as well as to move the process along. These transcriptions, along with the reflective journals, provided continuity between the meetings.

Reflections on the research questions

The questions I set myself to answer for my sphere of the action research were:

- How can I design and facilitate a process of self-review that uses an approach of practical philosophy?
- How does this process assist me to form an I-theory of self-review?

When I first conceived these questions I interpreted them to mean that I would reflect on my competence about designing a self-review for participants to review their philosophy of teaching. I believed that I needed to facilitate a process that would support the teachers to reflect without my judging or blaming them in any way, and without imposing my views on the process. As the concept of competence became central to the teachers' discussions, this led me to reflect on my own competence, as well as to ask myself how I supported the teachers' competence.

From a practical stance, researcher competence means being knowledgeable about the research study and the chosen methods, and to be able to clearly articulate the intentions of the research using language that is accessible to the research participants (Coady, 2001). I felt quite competent in this aspect of the research, but was not so confident or competent in managing the technical

equipment used to record the discussions and video the practice. At times the recording was blurred when I tried to transcribe it. One teacher had to be videoed twice because I discovered the tape was blank at the end of the session. One of the soundtracks of the videos was difficult to hear when we replayed them at the meeting. The teachers commented that this impeded their discussion of that teaching practice. In this sense, competence requires rehearsal or practise. As the researcher it was my responsibility to practice using the equipment until I was competent.

However, in the context of all of us participating in a process (that is, as a community of learners), and because of the previous relationships that I had with the participants, I did not feel completely incompetent. Throughout the discussions, the teachers commented in several meetings that developing competence depended on “*time, relationships and trust*” and that each of us has different competencies. I think this attitude allowed me to feel generally competent as a researcher within this context:

Throughout the process, Anne has been supportive of the environment created by being put under the spotlight. Throughout the discussion she has asked relevant, pertinent questions that kept us on focus and initiated in-depth, enlightening and thought-provoking discussions. I have grown as a person and a professional through the discussions and process of this investigation into how my philosophy fits my practice (Teacher 3, Reflective Journal).

As I was aware that the participants had made me feel competent as a researcher, it became important to me that I reflect their competency back to the participants. I feel I did this at different times to them as teachers through giving them feedback on their practice during the discussions:

I thought as we were filming it, that I liked the way you organised the areas. You knew what you specifically had to do – you each had your area. Because you could stay in that area and did not have to multi-task so much you were able to interact – and it was calm. The children knew that here we do that, here we do that, and here we do that (Anne, meeting 14th May 2007.)

I have to say that children at this centre gain a lot of confidence just by doing carpentry, because it is one of the few centres that make the effort...There are not many centres where the staff consistently keep the wood there and consistently keep the tools organised and consistently have nails available so that children are building skills (Anne, meeting 5th July 2007.)

And just listening to you, there is another level of competence that you are probably not aware of, but I am very aware of... this research would have been much much harder for me if you (the teachers) hadn't been as articulate and as literate as you are... so that is something that you are all very competent in... just being able to express yourself in a really nice way. (Anne, meeting 5th September 2007).

However, it would be simplistic for me to believe that teachers only felt competence because of the feedback I gave to them. Competence can also come from within the individual:

My feeling of competence is intrinsic as it arises with the relationships. It is a mixture of teacher child competence.
(Teacher 4, meeting 11th June 2007).

The discussions on competence allowed me to form my own I-theory of competence. I had often referred to self-review as *empowerment evaluation* (Fetterman, 1996). I began to ponder whether an empowering process implied that the facilitator had all the knowledge and the power to hand it over or withhold it. An empowering process may be similar to the teachers only feeling competent because of my comments rather than because of any intrinsic feeling. As part of the research process, the teachers and I became aware that competence is not static (Rinaldi, 2006), and is not a characteristic that can be seen in

isolation from context and relationships —*we cannot know ourselves and our experiences independently* (Bolton, 2006).

It could be argued that improvement in professional practice requires a sense of competence, and to change or improve practice requires a sense of control, as well as critique. Just as it is presumed in the early childhood sector that competent children are more likely to develop strong dispositions for learning (a basic premise of Te Whāriki), so it could be presumed that teachers who feel competent and in control of their learning and practice, are more likely to extend and change their thinking and practice. From this perspective, competence could be construed as a willingness to participate, to work with others, to take a risk, but that risk must not be so overwhelming as to destroy the general feeling of competence (Meyer, Ashburner, & Holman, 2006). Competence when viewed like this, I believe, is not an aspect of professionalism that can be measured in a quantitative way; though a review from a technicist stance may attempt to do this.

I feel from my experience of exploring the notion of self-review as practical philosophy that in this study I competently facilitated a process that enabled the teachers to examine their practice in great depth and complexity. However, this would not necessarily be the case in other contexts. I carefully chose an early childhood centre that I knew had fully qualified staff who were articulate and thoughtful. I knew the centre had a strong commitment to professional learning. I had built a relationship with the centre over many years so that mutual trust and credibility existed that could be built on as the research process unfolded. I think

because the teachers had a general sense of competence they were not overly threatened by the research but viewed it as a chance to come closer as a teaching team and to create a shared understanding of their philosophy and practice. I think that the success of the research process rested on the participants' willingness to write reflections, engage in dialogue and to commit time to attend the meetings. Their contributions to this research can never be underestimated.

So while self-review based on an approach of practical philosophy was successful in this instance, in another context the process may have been very different. I ponder what it would have been like in a context where the teachers were not fully qualified, or a context where the teachers all had greatly differing philosophies, or in a context where the centre had a set philosophy, such as in a Steiner or Montessori centre? Most of all I wonder whether I would have been able to facilitate the process as competently in a context where I did not have prior relationships with the participants.

My shifts of thinking

Unlike the action research sphere of the teachers, my own action research sphere had no set process, and therefore no set time limit. It began when I started to research self-review and it continued as I wrote up this account. Throughout that time for me there have been shifts of thinking about the research process and the notion of self-review. This section discusses these shifts.

I began by researching a topic. I did the fieldwork for the pilot study of *The quality journey: He Haerenga whai hua* (Ministry of Education, 1999) and recognised that the teachers in most early childhood services were reluctant to

engage in self-review or use the document. I was also aware of the resistance by many academics to the document as they criticised it as being managerial. I became intrigued by the values-based model for evaluation as outlined by Dahlberg and Åsen (1994) and was motivated to put this into practice in a local context. In general, my thinking was focused on self-review as a topic “out there” as it related to early childhood teachers in their place of work interacting with young children and their families. At this stage my review focus did not extend to reviewing my own practice.

Two unrelated incidents jolted me out of this naïveté. One was a comment in a research seminar by a colleague who said that he began his research thinking it would change the world, but, in the end, what changed most was himself. This led me to mull over in what ways I had changed since embarking on this research journey. The second incident was in one of the meetings in the research process. The teachers were talking about how uncomfortable they felt being videoed while they taught. I was challenged by one of the teachers who said she felt uncomfortable “*putting herself out there*” and having her practice scrutinised.

you are really out there by letting yourself be videoed, and then people watching... it is so... you are out there. I just think it is such a hard thing to do really. (Teacher 2, Meeting 5, 5th July 2007).

Another later commented:

I guess seeing myself on the DVD and putting myself out there – it is not really me (Teacher 1, final interview).

I suddenly realised I was asking the participants to do something that I would have found very difficult to undertake. Nobody was filming me while I was

teaching students, and yet I was asking that of the teachers! It was a powerful moment when I realised how uncomfortable I was as a living contradiction! I had often said in workshops on self-review, that reviewing practice was a way to make us aware of our blind spots. I had failed to make myself aware of my own blind spots. Again I was compelled to reflect on my own practice. Thus the focus of my research shifted from researching what was “*out there*” to researching “*in here*” – to review my own practical philosophy, to examine my own values and to reflect on how I can improve my practice.

Throughout my professional life I have worked either in community-based early childhood services that have been governed by committees and where I worked as part of a team, or in a large tertiary institution where attending meetings are part of each individual’s job responsibility. I have therefore been working in groups for many years. I was made aware several years ago that generally individuals who work in groups can be divided into two main categories – those who are task oriented and those who support the individual needs of the people who are members of the group (Conran-Liew, 2001). To sustain a healthy group requires maintaining a balance between achieving the required task, and nurturing the individual needs of the members of the group. I have long been aware that, in general, I am task oriented. In meetings, for example, I am often more focussed on getting to the end of the agenda than on ensuring that everyone has been listened to. However, I also like to think of myself as supporting the professional learning and growth of others, as being a collaborative colleague, and a teacher-educator who takes time to nurture students’ self-efficacy. I began to reflect on my own philosophy and whether in practice I really do this.

As a result I have consciously worked to improve my practice by shifting my focus from completing the task at hand to slowing down so that I make listening and dialogue with others a priority. When I am responsible for chairing a meeting, although I organise the agenda, I am very aware of the importance of allowing others to speak to agenda items while I listen. I have revised some of my lectures to build in reflective questions that students discuss in small groups for part of the lecture, rather than taking all the allocated time to impart information. I have also become more conscious of the importance of nurturing practical wisdom in students to complement the knowledge base that is built from an understanding of education theories. I believe this is a practical way of respectfully acknowledging the competence of my colleagues and my students. I think that this approach demonstrates respect for the notion of *ako*. I also think that by listening to others I acknowledge the social constructionist epistemology that I espouse where learning occurs through relationships with others. For learning to happen in this way, I need to be continually mindful of supporting a culture of listening (Rinaldi, 2006) by making the time to listen (McNiff, 2001). I am now aware that listening is an essential ingredient for dialogue, as it transforms an individual monologue into an inter-subjective discussion. From this perspective, I now see that it is a prerequisite to any form of learning in a social constructionist sense. Understandings and I-theories cannot be constructed in isolation; in order for a theory to exist and be legitimised it needs to be articulated and then listened to by others (Rinaldi, 2006).

I now value listening as being of paramount importance to this process. I am aware that listening occurs on several levels; the concrete act of listening so that what has been said by another can be heard and answered; listening to one's inner voice in the form of a thought or reflection; and listening to others to denote sensitivity and openness to ideas other than one's own (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007; Rinaldi, 2006). The success of my research depended on all these forms of listening being present, while my practice and my relationships with others is enhanced by continually reflecting on how well I am listening.

Listening in the first sense is a straightforward technical exercise where one person's speech is transmitted to another's mind through the ear (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). This form of listening was structured into the research process with the ground rule of only talking one at a time, and by having the participants take turns to read their philosophies. By ensuring that listening at a concrete level was occurring, a foundation for the other two levels of listening was made possible. Listening in the other senses is complex and has many dimensions. To listen to oneself requires a conscious effort to make the time to reflect in-depth and to articulate these reflections in a journal or a discussion. To improve my own practice in this way I must deliberately put aside time to reflect. Finally I must always remember that listening to others, to their ideas and opinions, is a sign of respect and willingness to cooperate, as well as an outward recognition by me that others have a right to hold views that contradict my own. If I listen in this way I am demonstrating that I value others as individuals, as well as indicating that differences and diversity are valued. To listen in this way is a form of caring

for others. I now see how important it is to create a culture of listening that paves an important way to improve relationships with others:

It means 'listening' to the differences (what we refer to as the pedagogy of listening) but also listening to and accepting the changes that take place within us, which are generated by our relationships, or better, by our interactions with others. It means letting go of any truths we consider to be absolute, being open to doubt and giving value to negotiation as a strategy of the possible. All of this means – or more precisely, can mean – greater possibilities for us to change, but without making us feel displaced or that we have lost something. (Rinaldi, 2006, p.140)

As I reflect back on my spectator position that I believed was legitimate at the beginning of the research process I am slightly embarrassed at how superficial my understanding of the process was. Now that the process is ended I have a much deeper understanding of the living values approach of action research; that improvement comes from scrutinising our values so that our relationships with others become more respectful and caring, and by doing so we construct, in relationship with others, new educational theories.

Summary

In this chapter I have documented and discussed my sphere of action research. I posed a question for myself to design and facilitate a process of self-review using an approach of practical philosophy. I reflected on how the research process assisted me to form an I-theory of self-review. I reflected on how my stance has changed from viewing myself as a researcher who was external to the main action research process of reviewing practice to a stance where I now accept I have a moral obligation to scrutinise my own values and beliefs with a view to improving my relationships with those whom I encounter on a daily basis. Hence I have formed a tentative I-theory of self-review that sustainable improvement

comes first from self-reflection and then from building shared understanding through respectful, caring group discussions. It is a process that is ethical and moral, as well as professional. I also think that scrutinising our practice in this way demonstrates accountability in the way Vico and Wenger described; that is, by building relationships within a group, one gains a heightened awareness and so becomes accountable to the group by wanting to remain in favour with it. I now believe that, if practised with integrity, such a process of scrutinising ones values and holding oneself accountable to them surpasses any externally imposed accountability measures.

Chapter 5: The teachers' sphere

This chapter examines and discusses the teachers' sphere in the action research process whereby the four teachers who participated in the project reviewed their philosophies and practice of teaching. The research questions posed to form the basis of this sphere were:

- How does an individual teacher review practice by investigating how philosophy is applied?
- How do the staff members of an early childhood service review practice by investigating how a collective philosophy is applied?
- Is the self-review approach of practical philosophy a useful approach for early childhood services in Aotearoa New Zealand?
- Does this self-review process improve learning and teaching?

To investigate these questions the findings from the research process that are relevant to the teachers both individually and collectively, as well as a discussion on these findings, are considered.

The background and context

The early childhood education centre that was chosen for the research was set up to support families in the community with the care and education of their children, rather than as a child care centre for working parents. The attendance fees are kept as low as possible and the centre operates on a non-profit making basis as it is considered a community asset for the use of all families, not a

business enterprise. While many early childhood centres separate children into different age groups, the children in this centre remain in a mixed-age grouping. The centre is licensed for 25 children at each session, and during the time I was videoing in the centre, I estimated the majority of children to be aged between one and three and a half. In her profile, Teacher 2 described the early childhood centre as “*a non-profit sessional mixed-age centre with qualified teachers supporting children and their families so they feel valued, confident and competent*” (Teacher 2, Profile sheet). Teacher 4 described the centre as “*a learning community that gives awahi*” (Teacher 4, Profile sheet), awahi being a Māori word that means to embrace, care for or benefit (Williams, 1971).

Teacher 4’s description of a “learning community” alludes to the concept of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 2002; Wenger, 1998) whereby learning and practice are seen as an inseparable part of the working life, so that both implicit and explicit learning occurs. Hence practice is seen as making meaning from everyday experiences, but as experiences and daily living change continuously, meaningful practice needs to be constantly negotiated by the members of the community. Wenger (1998) believes that negotiation stems from the complementary processes of participation and reification. That is to say, negotiation depends on members of the community actively participating in a process on a personal and a social level through the reification of artefacts that mirror practice. Reification by pedagogical documentation enables teachers to objectify and make concrete the abstract notion of practice so that it can be reflected on, discussed and refined (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007). This process of continually negotiating and renegotiating meaningful practice is

viewed as learning, so *“from this perspective, communities of practice can be thought of as shared histories of learning”* (Wenger, 1998, p. 86).

One of the most important influences on her development as an early childhood teacher mentioned by Teacher 4 was learning about early childhood education in Reggio Emilia. The pre-schools of Reggio Emilia have long been known for teacher discussions and negotiation of meaning. Teachers in Reggio Emilia argue that concepts of practice and theory are inseparable, so in Reggio Emilia teachers are valued as researchers of their teaching practice. Malaguzzi, the founder and inspirational leader of these schools, believed that while teaching practice must be linked to objectives or values and while professional learning can stem from individual effort, greater enrichment is gained through discussion with colleagues, parents, and experts. Malaguzzi stated that whether teachers realise it or not *“they all think and act according to personal theories”* (Malaguzzi, 1998, p.86). Malaguzzi referred to these theories and how they are enacted as practical philosophy. Malaguzzi’s term “personal theories” can be viewed as similar to McNiff’s term “I-theories”. How such personal theories impact on the education of children, on relationships within the educational institution and on practice is important, so Malaguzzi stressed the importance of teachers discussing and negotiating the meaning of these personal theories in order to achieve a closer alignment of theories and behaviour. For this reason Malaguzzi, like Wenger, believed that participation was central to everything else. He also stressed the importance of teachers completing pedagogical documentation (what Wenger terms reification) to form a platform for discussion.

The perspectives outlined above reflect the view of both Malaguzzi (1998) and McNiff (2002a) that teachers are researchers, that theory and practice are inseparable and that teachers' practical knowledge and I-theories should be recognised as a form of accountability where teachers can articulate their values while demonstrating how these values have benefited those with whom they work. Goodfellow (2003) stresses, however, that teaching practice is like an iceberg where only one-third of practice, namely the actions and behaviour, is ever visible. It is the two-thirds that is not visible that drives what we see and do as teachers, as it is this part of the iceberg that represents the deeper elements of values, attitudes, judgement and reflection. The profile sheets and the philosophy statements in this research were envisaged as a way to make visible the unseen two-thirds of the iceberg.

In early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand the current regulatory framework is provided by the Revised Desirable Objectives of Practice (Ministry of Education, 1996b). This outlines the requirement for self-review by stating that every centre must plan, implement and evaluate a curriculum that is consistent with any prescribed curriculum framework. Although documents are available to give some guidance on how to evaluate practice, it is not mandatory to follow these. Centres are free to devise their own approach.

This study is based on the notion of practical philosophy that reflects the fundamental belief that teachers are capable of generating their own epistemological theories that are specific and relevant to the context in which they practice (Malaguzzi, 1998; McNiff & Whitehead, 2005; Wenger, 1998).

This is appropriate because meaning and action, from a social constructionist stance, is formed within specific cultural and societal contexts by a process of constant negotiation that results in the creation of both theory and practice. Briefly this viewpoint contends that as teachers practice they form theories to make meaning of their actions, so there is no separation of theory and practice, as practice is already theoretical (Lenz Taguchi, 2007) because it is imbued with each teachers “I-theories” (McNiff, McGeady, & Elliot, 2001).

In reality, however, evidence suggests that early childhood teachers experience difficulty in finding the time to reflect on their practice because their job requires constant multi-tasking and is physically-demanding. This leaves little time for teaching teams to reflect or discuss their pedagogy (Nuttall, 2003), and while they may enjoy the intellectual challenge that such reflection brings them, early childhood teachers often lack the resources to facilitate the process (MacNaughton, 2003). In an early childhood context, it is thought that knowledge is often implicit in the actions of those involved, but difficult to articulate, so teachers may be unaware of the personal and professional knowledge that they can contribute (Anning, 2009). There is evidence to suggest, however, that forming shared understandings of philosophy and practice can reduce tensions that may arise amongst teachers, as well as contribute to professional knowledge and improvement of practice (Cullen, 2009). These views are supported by the participants in this research as Teachers 1 and 2 described the process of articulating their philosophies as “daunting”, whereas Teacher 4 reported that while she had gained a deeper understanding of her own philosophy from participating in the research process, she still had “to work on a

better articulation of it” (Final interviews, Teachers 1, 2 and 4). Similarly, Teacher 1 wrote in her Reflective Journal that she found it difficult to express her own philosophy:

I had a whole lot of words in my head but didn't know where to start. I really had to think about what I do believe in and what I do value! (Teacher 1, Reflective Journal)

However, Teacher 1 was also nervous when the group discussed philosophies, as she feared she may hurt her colleagues' feelings:

I remember going home from this meeting and hoping what I said – nobody had taken it personally, as what we did was pull apart each other's philosophies (which are very personal) questioning, challenging etc. (Teacher 1, Reflective Journal)

In this research project the reification of practice is encompassed in the videos of teaching practice, the statements of philosophy, and the reflective journals, as well as the profile sheets from which this discussion of the participants is taken. Participation was gained by the four teachers interacting while teaching together on a daily basis, but also by attending each monthly meeting throughout the year to engage in discussion and reflection.

It is within this centre and this background that the research took place. The following account describes the process and the content of the discussions and reflections of the four teachers as they grappled with their personal I-theories of practice to engage in a discussion amongst the teaching team to construct a shared understanding of practice. It is a self-review of practice that takes the form of practical philosophy.

The Participants

At the time of the data collection, four fully qualified, registered teachers were employed at the centre. It was these teachers who participated in the research. Although all had a three-year qualification in early childhood education and could be considered to be of the same ethnic background (Pakeha New Zealanders of European descent), the teachers came from varied professional backgrounds, as well as diverse social backgrounds. Teacher 1 had ten years' experience as an early childhood teacher, all of which had been spent in the current centre. In addition, she had also qualified as a Nanny. Teacher 2 had six months experience as an early childhood teacher, and had both primary and early childhood education teaching qualifications. Teacher 3 had five years experience as an early childhood teacher, and an additional five years experience as a parent at Playcentre (a parent-led early childhood education co-operative) and two years experience as a respite carer for foster families under stress. Teacher 4 had 17 years experience as an early childhood teacher, as well as six years as a Playcentre parent, two years as a family day care worker, and two years as an educational worker of children with special rights. Although the teachers were all teaching in the same setting, there was some diversity in their backgrounds as they worked to form a shared understanding of their philosophies and practice.

The profile sheet that the teachers completed at the beginning of the study asked the teachers to outline the three most important individual experiences that had impacted on their teaching experience. This question acknowledged that it was not only professional qualifications and experiences that shaped teachers'

philosophies and practice, but also teachers' personal experiences and narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1995). By recognising these at the outset of the research process a glimpse was given into both the personal histories that Malaguzzi (1998) refers to, as well as the values that underpin them. Although the question did not specifically ask for personal experiences, each teacher mentioned these as being influential. Teacher 1 wrote "Recognising the struggle many immigrant families have settling into New Zealand's society and culture" had influenced her teaching, while Teacher 2 mentioned that visiting schools and kindergartens in Africa and seeing how few resources they had had impacted on her practice. Teacher 3 mentioned that she had been influenced by the trust that parents had shown in her. As mentioned previously Teacher 4 wrote about a student who was left in a wheelchair at the bottom of stairs when she was at high school. All teachers said that they had been influenced by mentors – two mentioned lecturers they had been taught by while completing their teaching qualifications, one mentioned that the current supervisor had been very influential on her practice, and one teacher mentioned she had mentors, but did not mention specifically who they were.

One of the questions on the profile sheet asked what had motivated the participants to become early childhood teachers. Teacher 1 wrote that it was because she enjoyed working with children and their families, whereas Teacher 2 stated that it was because she had developed a fascination with the way younger children learnt. Teacher 3 reported that "*I found a passion within myself for providing a positive environment in which children were nurtured, valued and inspired*" and Teacher 4 wrote that she became an early childhood teacher "*to*

learn more about children's learning and a deep satisfaction with "magical moments" when connections and relationships are strengthened". It is interesting that all four were intrinsically motivated by the relational aspects of teaching, rather than any external rewards that might be gained from the job.

In the question about their future professional goals, Teacher 1 stated that hers was to be able to articulate practice and give reasons that link the policies and theorists, Teacher 3 stated she would like to gain a better understanding and working knowledge of children and their families, while Teacher 4 stated that she would like to be better able to articulate her philosophy, as well as being able to use ICT in a meaningful way to make learning visible. These goals are similar in that they indicate the teachers wish to continue to reflect on their philosophies and practice in some way; they are not goals based on ambition or career progression. Teacher 2 had a different goal as she would like to study for a Masters of Education.

In summary, the teachers were asked to complete the profile sheet prior to the start of the research process in the hope that they would articulate the values that stood behind their own philosophies and practice. By doing so, it was intended that teachers would be eased into the difficulties of articulating and reflecting on their practice. Additionally, self-awareness of the values that shape their practice is a necessary first step for a teacher to take in order to review their practice using the approach of practical philosophy.

Philosophies of practice

Prior to the Meeting 1, not only did the teachers complete the profile sheet discussed above but they were also asked to write their personal philosophies of practice, and they were told that these would be read out one by one to the group. In order to explain why a clear understanding of each other's personal philosophies was so important, the following quote was used:

Action research begins with values. As a self-reflective practitioner you need to be aware of what drives your life and work, so you can be clear about what you are doing and why you are doing it. You might need to spend time clarifying for yourself the kinds of values and commitments you hold. This would be a firm starting point for your action enquiry.(McNiff, 2002b, p. 12)

Although all the teachers reported finding it difficult to express their implicit philosophies, all were able to do so. Teacher 1 used the metaphor of a toolbox:

Everyone has their own toolbox which enables them to become competent and becoming competent is utilising those tools and if need be, getting more tools for your tool box and as an example, language is a child's tools, being able to utilise the language to ask for help is part of being a competent learner ... a baby might not have many tools in their tool box but we will all utilise what we have in our tool box. For example, the ability to achieve what we want to achieve in order to be competent, to source and find food, and it is said that being competent is part of being an on-going learner and it is not for us to judge their competence but to support them and each tool should be sitting in the tool box waiting for children to access. (Teacher 1, Philosophy statement)

Here Teacher 1 was able to emphasize an image of the child as competent and independent, but with diverse capabilities and intelligence. The child was central to this philosophy, and the teacher played a supportive role.

Teacher 2 wrote:

*I believe in the fundamental right of the child to a childhood where there is a time to dream, learn, and grow in a nurturing place surrounded by warm caring people.
I recognise that children are competent learners and that the curriculum arises naturally from child/children and child/adult*

interactions as well as their interests and those of parents, staff, and the surrounding environment. (Teacher 2, Philosophy statement)

Teacher 2 also placed the child at the centre of her philosophy and emphasised the adult's role as that of nurturer. As with Teacher 1, the child was portrayed as competent, while the curriculum was viewed as emerging naturally from the child's relationships with other children and adults.

Teacher 3 wrote:

I value the importance of the home environment, family and culture and believe that by working in partnership with parents and families each child will grow in their emotional, physical (ability) with the skills and strategies to take the next step in their learning, and social development. Learning begins at home and by extending the learning in early childhood the foundations will be laid for successful future learning. I believe my role is to provide a child with the skills and strategies to take the next step in their learning so that these experiences will carry them through into their lives as adults (Teacher 3, Philosophy statement).

Teacher 3 highlighted the importance of the family and culture to the child's learning and development, and emphasised the partnership between parents and teachers. She viewed teachers as playing a part in the child's learning, but did not outline the teacher's role as central.

Like Teacher 1, Teacher 4 used a metaphor to express her philosophy.

My individual philosophy of teaching is represented by the "Milky Way" where each star has its own luminescence and together past, present and future, they light up the universe.

I believe that each child is a unique individual with the right to participation- to participate in an environment where children's ability to play, curiosity, ideas and wonder are listened to, respected and valued. I also believe in the value of participation, a sense of belonging, for families and teachers.

I believe teaching and learning are woven together, with trust, respect and hope. I value learning as an active life-long process where experience, reflection and social participation give meaning to living, being and learning.

I believe learning is strengthened when relationships are valued, interconnecting children, families and teachers building social community and cultural identity.

The metaphor of the Milky Way highlighted the uniqueness of each child, whilst being part of a community in which each child has the right to respect and participation. She stressed the importance of relationships, and viewed learning and teaching as being complementary. The role of the teacher was not specifically mentioned but from her statement, it can be deduced that she would see the role of the teacher as guarding the child's right to participate, and ensuring that the child was listened to and treated with respect.

Worth noting is that none of the above philosophies portray the teacher as a technician who must comply with a recognised set of externally prescribed standards. Neither is the child discussed as having to be shaped and processed, and learning is not described as a process of achieving learning outcomes or knowledge transmission. When the teachers used the term competence it was used as a general term and not in the technical sense of a prescribed set of competencies based on specific learning outcomes (Moss, 2006a). In general the philosophies of these four teachers reflect a holistic view of the child, the teacher and pedagogy.

Once each of the philosophies had been read out and listened to, a meaning map was formed. Teacher 1 chose to be the scribe. The teachers discussed their philosophies and debated the commonalities and the differences. It was accepted that there would be differences of opinion and these should be viewed as opportunities to learn from each other (Lenz Taguchi, 2007). However, I felt that these differences should be sidestepped at the beginning of the process. My concern was that to confront them at the outset would exacerbate the nervousness

that the teachers were feeling. As the aim of the discussion was to build a shared understanding of values, we agreed that the differences should be titled “Things to think about” to emphasise the collegiality and collaboration of the teachers, rather than to overemphasise the individuality and differences that existed amongst the group. The process also gave the teachers the chance to clarify some of the points in their philosophies, and to discuss the deeper meanings behind the words they had chosen. The points of clarification that were considered pertinent were listed under the title of “Comments”. An example of this discussion is outlined below:

Teacher 4: I think this was here about making choices – the curriculum arises naturally from the child-children/child-adult interactions, but could this be only if, you know, naturally... I mean does it just happen naturally with nothing?

Teacher 1: Well, no! It can't just happen! It depends if their needs are met first really.

Teacher 3: No it depends on the way the environment is set up!

Teacher 4: Well that is why I like reading that really! Because then it made me think about ... well, does this happen like that or does it have to be open, responsive and sensitive, and it is about making choices because the child responds.... Makes a choice about responding to other children, the teachers make a choice about responding to the child.

Teacher 1: Or to another teacher, or to the environment

Teacher 3: I agree with you because I do agree that children do not respond in a natural way to the environment until they feel like they belong within it... they have that sense of being able to... though some children take longer than others to feel like that.

Teacher 1: To feel comfortable.

Teacher 3: To feel comfortable and to know what resources are there ... to say can we get out the such and such and to ask for different things.

Teacher 4: Like, you know, boundaries and conforming to society is like viewing uniqueness and flexibility versus sameness.

Teacher 3: It is giving them time too, isn't it, to think outside the square and not just giving them the answers.

(Transcription of meeting 2 held on 15th March 2007)

Whitehead (1989) explains that teachers can be living contradictions as they often hold values that they negate in practice. In the discussion the teachers also recognised the possibility of articulating values that did not become living practice:

Teacher 3: Here look! That my last statement is 'an environment that shows respect for the ideas, thoughts and ways of doing, listening and a natural response to the environment which supports the building of positive relationships creating a culture of respect'.

Teacher 4: Because I mean we could, in our philosophy of teaching, value things but it doesn't mean that you are going to do anything about it.

(Transcription of meeting 2 held on 15th March 2007)

The teachers were able to uncover some areas where they demonstrated that they were living contradictions:

Teacher 3: But I did find it difficult to take something off (name of child) that he was obviously enjoying and he was using different things to do that with... it was quite difficult really for me because I felt he had that right... it is a really difficult one.

Teacher 4: It is like freedom of choice

Teacher 3: Choices would be a good one for me to go in there

Teacher 1: Well, you can have that, but you can't have choices all the time. I mean, we weren't giving (name of child) a choice today...or in the last few days

Teacher 3: Although choices, behaviour and actions mean sometimes not giving a choice.

Teacher 1: Today I just said "C'mon (name of child), it is time for music". I wasn't giving him a choice.

Teacher 3: It is safety for me, if he is out there by himself... you know, we can't be watching him.

Teacher 1: Yes, you can justify that and I am agreeing with what you are saying, but I am just saying

Teacher 2: It is very hard, because that is what you think - the philosophy is that you want?

Teacher 1: Yes, that is what I would like

Teacher 4: So that is why we are thinking about it because in practice there are times when you just can't do it all the time.

Teacher 3: And (the name of the child) does make a choice to rebel at that time, and it is very effective.

Teacher 1: Oh today he had the greatest music time of all when he finally got there... he had a great time.

Teacher 3: That is what I am saying... he makes a choice of the time that he picks to be as non-compliant as possible.

(Transcription of meeting 2 held on 15th March 2007)

At the end of the two hours of discussion, the teachers had identified and grouped the main values expressed in the philosophy statements into a meaning-map. When planning the research process I had envisaged that the meaning-map would be free flowing with comments written randomly on every space of a large piece of cardboard. However, the teacher transcribing chose instead to write the points in neat lists. Thus I have kept the meaning-map in this format as outlined below:

Similarities	Things to think about	Comments
Respect	Sameness	Competence is affected by experience, expectations, interpretations, culture, environment, self-efficacy and personality
Unique	responsive	
Individual	sensitive	
Environment-safe, positive, trusting	Responsibility	
Socially constructed	flexibility	
Links to the wider community	listening	
Partnerships/relationships with parents	choice	Everyone has different competencies
Culture	boundaries	
Competent child	routines	
On-going learning for all	care	Enable – part of the process of becoming competent
Play	consistency	
Relationships	familiarity	
Rights	Independence/interdependence	Everyone has their own tool box to become competent
Interactions	Resilience – being competent despite difficulties and barriers	
Communication		

Holistic		
Time		
Value learning		

The liveliest discussion was about the concepts of time, relationships, listening and competence. Looking first at what the teachers said about time. Time was a concept that was articulated as important in the philosophy discussion and it was mentioned several times in the later meetings. It was generally felt that young children are often not allowed enough time:

Teacher 3: It is giving them time too, isn't it, to think outside the square and not just giving them the answers.

Teacher 2: Shall we write that through yours?

Teacher 3: Time, time, time, yeah, I have got it all the way through, because it does for me

Teacher 2: I have got "time for reflecting" ... it is very interesting.

Teacher 4: And I have ... I said that I wanted to put time in but I knew that it wasn't...

Teacher 2: Yes, it is right through

Teacher 3: Time to explore, time, time, time to formulate questions and time to think, time to even develop their passions, so it is just so rushed today that a lot of children just do not get time to stop and watch something, like the men put up a fence, or whatever, because someone is always going "C'mon, c'mon, c'mon!"

Teacher 1: And the same thing with teacher 2...a time... "time to dream, learn and grow!"

(Transcription of meeting 2 held on 15th March 2007)

The teachers mentioned that even though they valued time philosophically, time was often governed by so many external factors, such as the time the session began and finished that it was often difficult to spend extended time with individual children. Teacher 4 reflected on time: *"We do value it. So when we get a precious minute to spend with someone..."* Teacher 1 finished this sentence for her by saying *"You just do it!"*

The second concept that concerned the teachers was that of relationships.

Relationships were described by one teacher as follows:

Teacher 3: But that to me talks about building communities and relationships, and we have got the individual, but we have also got the culture and the partnerships and the relationships, which is the interdependence.

(transcription of meeting 2 held on 15th March 2007)

But later the teachers reflected in greater depth on the relationships:

Teacher 4: And then the family and community came through, and then the relationships came through - you know, partnerships and relationships, you know because you can have relationships without it being a partnership.

(transcription of meeting 2 held on 15th March 2007)

Talk of relationships, especially the teacher-child relationship, was returned to in later meetings. In discussions of other points, although the actual topic was not relationships, it was the relationships that the teachers had with the children that determined the stance they took with each child. An example of this is when the teachers are discussing the third concept which is listening. The teachers are acknowledging the influence of learning about the preschools of Reggio Emilia on their own practice.

Teacher 4: Well, we didn't actually have listening. Well, we did, it was sort of throughout - that whole concept of listening and respect... you know, like I have been quite influenced by the Reggio sort of thing of listening.

Teacher 1: Listening to children!

Teacher 3: I had thought of that in here... listening and responsive.

Teacher 2: And I have covered it myself a bit.

Teacher 1: Yes, you said that

Teacher 2: I always want to be, but it doesn't necessarily ... But, it is the same sort of thing. You do want to be a listener, but... that is my philosophy, but sometimes I know that...

Teacher 4: But sometimes you do just...

Teacher 4: You don't cross them off, but you only really acknowledge...

Teacher 2: A lot of the crying that we had this afternoon, well I listened to that, but I didn't ...

Teacher 4: respond?

Teacher 2: respond to one particular child, you know what I mean.

Teacher 3: I agree with you!

Teacher 2: I listened to what she was doing

Teacher 3: And you were aware of what she is doing and where she is at, but we know...

Teacher 4: If you know her you know that

Teacher 2: It is just a noise to get attention.

Teacher 4: And that is like the other day like listening to a child... I was putting a child to sleep, and there was another child in here with a bucket, and he waited patiently and he was just walking around and he caught my eye and he caught someone else's eye, and he was waiting for bucket to be filled up and he didn't say any words and he waited for ten minutes, waiting for someone to respond to him... but, you know what I mean, listening was actually just observing him, watching and seeing that and, like you say, it can be busy, so when I came out I said something to him to show that I had been aware of what he was trying to do.

(transcription of meeting 2 held on 15th March 2007)

Here the teachers have integrated listening into their practice in a metaphorical way that indicates they understand it implies more than just actively listening to what children are saying, and must extend to having respect for each child and acknowledging the right of children to be seen as people in their own right, not as powerless children who should “be seen and not heard”. Teacher 4 described listening as the “*spiritual awareness or the empathy link*” with children (Teacher 4, transcription of the Meeting 2, 5th March 2006) that allows teachers to respect what children are doing and to acknowledge that it is important for them to do it. Teacher 4 explained that “*listening can be with your eyes, ears or your heart.... I think all of it!*”

The fourth concept discussed in-depth was competence. From the beginning it was apparent that competence was a value that featured in all the philosophy statements. Wenger (1998) believes that each community of practice creates boundary objects. These are objects that are specific to each community but not shared by other communities. Boundary objects allow participants in each

community to form connections within the community, while building an identity that is distinct from other communities. In early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand, Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996a) can be regarded as a boundary object. Several phrases have entered into the everyday discourse of early childhood education to form professional jargon amongst early childhood teachers. The “competent child” is one such phrase. Te Whāriki declares the following aspirations for children:

to grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society (p. 9)

The teachers pondered the meaning of the word ‘competence’ and the implications it conjured up for practice.

Teacher 2: That competence one....it is quite interesting, like with art, if you have six children and all the paint is wet, I don't think I am encouraging the children to be competent to put their things out on the deck... do you know what I mean?

Teacher 1: Because...

Teacher 3: No, but we all have moments like that. It's like how do we reflect competence? That is where choice comes into it.

Teacher 2: It would be quite challenging. It would be quite hard

Me: Do you mean “How do we support competence?” Is it?

Teacher 3: Yeah! I suppose so! Well I don't know!

Me: How do you support it because it is focusing on the child?

Teacher 3: How do we show the child that we think...

Teacher 2: That they are competent! Yeah!

Me: So it is how do you reflect it... so how do you give messages to the child?

Teacher 3: I don't know – how would you word that!

Teacher 3: that they can do it for themselves.

Teacher 4: In what ways do we value...

Teacher 1: show them that we value independence

Teacher 4: Yes, you see like, I just straightaway, with that independence versus interdependence we need to set about valuing competence as a... what are the words?

Teacher 1: valuing independence

Teacher 4: Yes, valuing independence. Then, like in practice, when you ask someone to look after their brother, you could actually argue that you are acknowledging the competent child because you value

interdependence, and you see the competency of looking after their brother, as opposed to valuing the brother's independence.

Teacher 3: Yes, because that is competence. Competence is not independence necessarily, competence is actually to me being able to ask for help, acknowledge that you actually need help.

Teacher 1: I can see this is a good one to look at.

(transcription of meeting 2 held on 15th March 2007)

As part of the task for the group was to negotiate one value of practice to examine in greater depth and to explore how it was reflected in their practice, the teachers chose to look at competence and did this by framing the question: *How do we enable children to feel competent?*

The process

Having agreed that the value of competence would be explored in depth, it remained to video each teacher in turn, then to view the videos and discuss each teacher's practice. It was decided that each teacher would read what they had written in their reflective journals at the beginning of each meeting before viewing the videos. I completed the videoing of each teacher's practice during the morning sessions of one week. I then had two DVDs made of each video. I kept one copy for the data collection, and gave one copy back to each teacher. The teachers took their videos home so they could view them alone before we looked at each video together in a meeting. It was thought that this would reduce the anxiety of having teaching practice scrutinised. The video provided the pedagogical documentation that was the basis for the discussions, but it was the review of practice captured in the discussion that was the central focus of the research.

By framing the question: *How do we enable children to feel competent?* the teachers chose to scrutinise their own teaching practice instead of focusing on the

children's learning. Furthermore they took a social constructionist perspective that suggests that teachers and other children play a role in the child's competence, rather than viewing the child as an individual in isolation who develops competence through the manipulation of concrete materials, a view that is more indicative of a developmental perspective, such as Piaget's theory would suggest (Fleer, 2003).

In the month between meetings I found that the teachers had individually explored the different meanings and perceptions of competence. A discussion of these preceded the viewing of the video. Teacher 4 began the discussion by saying that she had located some articles about competence. She had looked up a dictionary and had found the word *competent* defined as able, endowed, and having adequate abilities and knowledge, but the definition prompted her to think more deeply about children's competence. She questioned whether children with disabilities are ever seen as competent –

Are children who are blind or immobile or autistic still viewed as competent? So then that might be a different way to view competence... As competence is the ability to be human and to think, to feel, emotions, to act, (be) physical, to express yourself, (to be) social. (Teacher 4, transcription of meeting 14th May 2007).

This resulted in Teacher 4 linking the notion of competence to Gardiner's theory of multiple intelligences (Berk, 2004) in that competence could be like intelligence and take various forms that could change over time. She spoke about an article she had read that discussed a new image of the competent child that had emerged in the post-modern era which contended that children's competency could not be measured against a prescribed set of objective competencies. This

led Teacher 4 to think about resilience as being competence in adverse circumstances.

Teacher 3 continued the discussion. She related that in an earlier discussion with Teacher 1, they decided that competence could not be considered a static characteristic, as not everyone is competent in everything they do:

Teacher 3: We are not necessarily competent in everything that we do, which is true, when I think of myself, and, um, we are influenced by experiences that we have, and expectations of others, and expectations of culture and environment, self-efficacy and personality are all influences of what we are competent in.

Anne: So again competence is...

Teacher 3: Everyone has different competencies that are influenced by experience, expectations, interpretations, culture, environment, self-efficacy and personality, and expectations of others. By personality I just mean that we all have certain things that we like to do and other things that we don't like to do. (Teacher 3, transcription of meeting 14th May 2007).

This prompted the teachers to conclude that resilience came from a variety of factors, such as individual dispositions, as well as environmental and social influences.

Although Teacher 1 at first said that “*she was too scared to talk*”, she was able to contribute to the conversation. Teacher 1 related that she had also looked in the dictionary for the meaning of the word *competence*, and then looked in the curriculum document, Te Whāriki, and was surprised to find that *competence* was not included in the glossary:

But they had enable – and I thought that was interesting because I see “enable” as part of the focus to becoming competent, because Te Whāriki’s definition of enable was to supply people with the means to carry out an action or perform a role. (Teacher 1, transcription of meeting 14th May 2007).

After having the conversation with Teacher 3 about the relativity of competence,

Teacher 1 was motivated to write in her reflective journal:

And the next time I wrote I said ‘ Is part of competence having the confidence to give it a go in learning, and knowing that they don’t always have to succeed, learning through trial and error but being able to say ‘Hey! I did it! I didn’t get it right, but this is what I did!’ So the child doesn’t get upset, but sees what they can get out of an experience, rather than seeing themselves as a failure. (Teacher 1, transcription of meeting 14th May 2007).

Teacher 2 took her turn in the discussion:

Mine is a bit different actually. What I said was that I felt when I was looking at competency that while I was being videoed that time I felt very competent....but I also went on to say why I felt competent, as well, and that was because I spent a whole hour in the art area with children and that impacted on why I felt competent. But that is the reality of early childhood (teaching) — that we can’t often do that (Teacher 2, transcription of meeting 14th May 2007).

Teacher 4 had an additional comment:

I was just going to say after thinking about competence... because if social competence is culturally defined then it is limited to my own culture, so there is a responsibility to know and understand not just my own culture, but others as well, because you can make assumptions about your own and while you understand the culture of the centre that you are in.... (Teacher 4, transcription of meeting 14th May 2007).

The teachers then looked at the video of Teacher 3’s practice. They noted that children’s competence was affirmed by being spoken to with a respect that acknowledged each child as a person in their own right and by the teacher’s attitude that regarded them as being competent of forming their own ideas while creating something at the art table. At one point in the video, Teacher 3 left the art area to fetch some more equipment from the store. The other teachers felt this indicated that Teacher 3 accepted that as the children were competent, they didn’t need her to stay there the whole time.

As each monthly meeting took place the teachers read and reflected more about competence and shared the conversations they had had with each other regarding competence in the time between meetings as well as before and during the video viewing. When Teacher 1 viewed the video of her teaching practice at home, she prepared a list of the ways she felt she had supported children to feel competent and had reflected a child's competency back to them. She had also problematised her teaching and the notion of competence in her reflective journal. She explained that by doing this she realised that "*teaching art was not just about teaching art*". She was able to notice the children who were at the art table, but not making anything, were actually participating by watching and handing other children the equipment they needed, so were showing competence. One girl in the video who did not participate in art or interact with any of the other children was seen as mirroring every action that Teacher 1 made; the teachers could see that she was demonstrating competence in her own way. Teacher 1 also reflected on the dilemma of deciding when to allow a young child to do something for themselves, and when to assist them. She also asked herself if she regarded some children as more competent than others and if this was justifiable, or should we regard all children as being equally competent. The list of teaching strategies she felt she had demonstrated as a teacher to reflect children's competency back to them was as follows:

Letting them explore

Giving choices

Children asking for things and expecting to be acknowledged and assisted.

Adults respecting children's opinions.

Listening to the children.

Allowing for natural flow and rhythm within the early childhood centre.

Allowing children the time and space to be competent.
Making sure the environment is safe rather than surveilling it.
Not attempting to put the “finishing touches” on the art work.
Giving children time on an individual basis (joint attention).
Giving children a positive sense of self
Making meaningful links with the child’s home context.
Children follow instructions – it is implied that the children will comply.
Linking what they are doing to previous experiences.
Revisiting learning to demonstrate competence.
Never patronising the children
Understanding the unspoken connections between what the children are doing and what has proceeded to provoke the current learning.
 (Teacher 1, transcription of meeting 11th June 2007).

Teacher 4 demonstrated awareness of the importance of viewing the video with others:

I watched my DVD. The thoughts that came up — teachers have to be competent in acknowledging competence. The importance in reviewing this with others — I was nervous. My feeling of competence as a teacher is intrinsic as it arises with the relationships. It is a mixture of teacher-child competence. It is difficult to review practice as we look to justify our practice and ignore what does not fit our picture of ourselves. That is why it is so important to view the video with others.” (Teacher 4, transcription of meeting held on the 11th June 2007).

In this extract Teacher 4 recognises that living contradictions do exist in teaching and that other people are often needed to uncover these blind spots, but she also takes the view that practice and competence are woven into our relationships, and do not exist in isolation from them.

In Meeting 5, Teacher 4 questioned again why there was not more written about competence in Te Whāriki, when the term *competent children* is included as an aspiration of the document. Whilst reading other literature, she had found a reference to children’s competence defined as “*dispositions, strategies, social*

roles and culturally defined literacies” (Teacher 4, transcription of meeting held on 5th July 2007). This definition gave the teachers a lens with more depth and breadth through which to view children’s competencies.

It is recognised that teachers’ practice is a blend of personal experiences and attributes, in addition to any professional qualifications they may have (Curtis & Carter, 2008; Goodfellow, 2003; Malaguzzi, 1998). In this centre there is a carpentry table, and younger children are encouraged to use real tools such as the cordless electric drill and the hot glue gun. When discussing carpentry, the participating teachers debated how their personal histories impacted on their teaching practice:

Teacher 4: I remember when we first started doing learning stories, I did my first learning story on carpentry because you could see all the learning dispositions like persistence and perseverance, and taking an interest and wanting to try out new tools and so the first lot of learning stories that most of us did were actually about carpentry.

Teacher 3: But I think we are quite lucky here that there are people that are quite confident themselves using the tools, so that encourages the children to use them... I think the qualification in some ways does not have a lot to do with it. I think it is your disposition as a teacher as well... whether you know, often using...

Anne: I don’t know what to think about that because I think you get the understanding of children’s learning through the qualifications and then your disposition is separate... so either you are timid or confident or ... your disposition is a passive thing, but your qualifications ensures that you should understand children’s learning...

Teacher 3: I think you can understand children’s learning though, but that does not necessarily mean that you are confident in using a hammer yourself.

This conversation reflects that the teachers were aware that they brought themselves to the teaching context, and to support the children’s competency, they also needed a sense of competency and an awareness of their own personal

skills and abilities that could be shared with the children. The conversation also touches on two different aspects of early childhood teaching practice. The first, expressed by Teacher 1, is the view that children learn “by doing” a theory which has been espoused by for example Piaget, Montessori and Froebel. The second, expressed by Teacher 3, is the socio-cultural perspective of theorists such as Vygotsky, which is that children learn from those who are more experienced, often by modelling (Fleer, 2003). These two perspectives in early childhood education are indicative of the paradigm shift from developmental-constructivism to socio-culturalism that has occurred in early childhood education in recent years (Edwards, 2007). The teachers could see the socio-cultural implications of their interest in carpentry. Their interests stemmed from their own background in Playcentre, or from growing up in a large family that encouraged practical skills. They also recognised that if they had been from a cultural background where specific roles for women were emphasised they may have been reluctant to participate in carpentry, thus denying the children the opportunity to develop competence in this area.

At meeting 6, Teacher 2 also pondered the multiple meanings that the word *competence* may have and the issues that may arise from the differing interpretations:

I said, just using the word could be problematic sometimes. Problems could appear depending on the image of the child (that) a parent and teacher might hold, a teacher might see a six- day old as powerful and wanting to learn, but a parent might see them as needy... it depends on your interest and the image of the child, and whether it is stimulated by Reggio and sociocultural theory. My perception of seeing children as competent and capable may be at odds with parents if they believe that “training” should be around developmental needs or if parents wish children to learn literacy and numeracy and don’t see the value of play. This is where

learning and teaching through play would perhaps need to be explained and defined, so it is known what and how children are learning through play. That is it really! (Teacher 2, transcription of the meeting held on 6th August 2007).

Teacher 2 admitted that the discussions around the word competent had led to a shift in her thinking about the learning and teaching of young children:

Actually I have put something here that I shared with Teacher 1 just earlier, it wasn't read out before. By exploring the word competent, for me I feel there has been an enormous shift away from me acknowledging "needs", as I stated in my first philosophy, to seeing children as having diverse abilities which can be celebrated, because by focusing on needs, I wasn't really acknowledging that children could be competent at that stage. (Teacher 2, meeting 5th August 2007).

Teacher 2 was also able to recognise the challenge of consistently putting her personal philosophy into practice, and the times when she was a living contradiction:

The last three weeks have been very busy at the centre with one staff member away and her position being covered by relievers. On top of this it has been very humid and hot and there have been some new children starting at the centre as well as other children who required settling after our seven week break over Christmas. This has meant there has been a lot of noise and crying at the centre. I have found it interesting that humidity (and) noise make some of the things in my philosophy hard to achieve. For example, if a child is hot and thirsty and missing their mum it is not possible for both of us to have a meaningful and satisfying day while exploring our options, capabilities and interests!" (Teacher 2, Reflective Journal).

By the time all the videos had been viewed and the teachers had spent more than six months reflecting on the notion of competence, the teachers understood that the meaning of the word competence cannot be taken for granted, as complex multiple perceptions and understandings of the word can be formed (Fleer, 2003; Lenz Taguchi, 2007; Urban, 2008). Reflecting on how children's competency can be supported led the teachers to reflect on their own teaching competency.

Competency when defined in this way is not an aspect of professionalism that can be measured in a static way. Teacher 4 articulated her view of competency in teachers:

Competence can be a feeling that you create. So what I mean is, staff might have done some training, may have done professional development, may have some skills, but may not project the atmosphere of competence. They may have read the theory, but they may not have the feeling inside them, so they don't project this to the children. It comes from a sense of being, it becomes an atmosphere (Teacher 4, Final interview).

Teacher 1 was also aware of an atmosphere of competence:

I noted in my journal that time, respect and building relationships were all very important aspects of the word competence (Teacher 1, meeting 5th September 2007).

This view of competence is more akin to the definition of competence espoused by the teachers in Reggio Emilia:

Competence is first and foremost an open process of professional development and self-development, of mutual enrichment, and a human willingness to work co-operatively and to take joint responsibility (Rinaldi, 2006).

Interestingly, Teacher 3 summarised it in a similar way:

Competency is intrinsic, embedded within ourselves and the centre culture. We all have different experiences, skills and knowledge that we willingly share so that together we can grow and develop and learn together. Valuing people for who they are, what they bring with them to the centre and building relationships of trust and knowledge about each other provides opportunities for all to gain knowledge in many aspects, whether it be social, physical or mental and creates a culture of competent, motivated learners experiencing and learning from what they encounter (Teacher 3, meeting 5th September 2007).

At the final meeting, the teachers revisited the meaning-map that had been formed in the second meeting. They looked at the list of items they had agreed on. They still agreed on these items, but mentioned that they now viewed them differently. They spent most time looking at the list titled “*things to think about*”

and discussed the items listed and decided that if each item were to be discussed in as much depth as the notion of competence had been, the teachers would probably find common ground in each. The teachers stated that what had initially been perceived as a difference in practice could have been a difference in semantics and interpretation of the words, rather than a deep philosophical difference in the way practice should be implemented.

In summary the action research cycle above shows how the teachers, individually and collectively, reviewed their practice in terms of their practical philosophy.

The research questions asked were:

- How does an individual teacher review practice by investigating how philosophy is applied?
- And how do staff members of an early childhood service review practice by investigating how a collective philosophy is applied?

These were both achieved through a process of articulating and reflecting on practice both individually and as a group, of videoing teaching practice and discussing the videos, and the reflections as a teaching team. It remains to discuss the last two questions, which are whether this process was a useful form of self-review for the teachers, and whether the teachers felt the process improved practice.

Practical philosophy as a form of self-review

The final two research questions ask whether a self-review approach of practical philosophy is a useful approach for early childhood centres in Aotearoa New

Zealand, and whether this approach to self-review does improve practice. Self-review is the term used in the early childhood sector in Aotearoa New Zealand to describe what is elsewhere known as evaluation, which in turn, stems from the drive for quality improvement (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007). In discussing the two questions outlined above, the teachers' perceptions of the process are included, as well as a discussion of the specific factors that existed in the context to enable the completion of the process.

At Meeting 6, the teachers read the reflections from their journal for the last time and then anonymously filled out a PMI (Plus, minus, and interesting) sheet. This PMI sheet gave the teachers an opportunity to provide feedback that they may not feel comfortable voicing in the group. There was then a break of two months before I contacted the teachers. This allowed them time to reflect on whether the discussions on practical philosophy formed a useful self-review approach, and whether the process had improved their teaching practice. At this time I interviewed each teacher individually over a one week period. Data from the PMI sheets and these individual interviews was used to answer the last two research questions.

When asked if it was a useful form of self-review, Teacher 1 said “*Well, I think it was very worthwhile, great to be able to reflect so deeply and to look at our own practice and philosophy and work with the team*”. Teacher 2 had only reviewed policies before this review, so she described the experience as “*daunting*”, but also reported that “*I am just so pleased I was involved in it*”. Teacher 3 gave a fuller answer in her interview:

I would recommend it – what you put down in words, you don't always enact. What you put down in words is an ideal, but with this form, I realised that it is often hard to enact. The changes in practice to improve are often subtle. It was good also to have the outside perspective and support. It was very supportive doing this in a team – our philosophies were all so similar. We practice in a slightly different way, but we all want the same outcome. I think it could be a team building exercise, because the outside person coming in mediates the process. (Teacher 3, Final interview)

Teacher 4 commented on the value of the self-review process from her perspective as the supervisor in the centre:

It was meaningful on a personal and centre level. Sometimes self-reviews are done on the regulations and are more procedural, whereas this was a very deep undertaking. All the staff commented in their performance appraisal that being involved in this research was a highlight of their year. They could use it for teacher registration and it gave them a deeper sense of self as a teacher. The journal was evidence of this. (Teacher 4, Final interview).

When asked if she thought the practical philosophy approach to self-review would be as useful in other early childhood centres, Teacher 4 answered:

Absolutely – because it is about the people involved- the stakeholders- because it is in your setting, about you as an individual, the team, the centre, with the added value of having clarification from an outsider. It was also about taking ownership because you made it clear that the participants would drive the process. The guidelines clarified the process, you had time for reflection in between, but there were deadlines to meet. There was no definite result at the end, but it has developed understanding and it has motivated us to keep exploring. We have now become interested in tuakana-teina interdependence (Teacher 4, Final interview).

It is clear from the material quoted above that the four teachers involved in the process believe that a self-review approach based on practical philosophy was useful for them to be involved in. All the teachers felt they had grown personally

and professionally through the process. They also gave insights on how the experience had improved their practice. Teacher 1 pondered:

I think I have given more thought to the word competent and how I view the word competent. I think I allow children more time to do things for themselves and do more for others. But when time is a factor... I think there is even more time when they could do things. Sometimes when I have 12 nappies to change, I get the bag rather than saying "C'mon, let's find your bag!" But now I am aware. Watching the video, I was aware of what I was doing to view the children as competent and what I wasn't doing to view the children as competent. (Teacher 1, Final interview).

Teacher 2 revealed that she had gained more awareness of her practice:

I am now very aware of words and their meaning – for competence. I became conscious of the words I used with children. In the video I often used the phrase "Let's do that together!", whereas children can often do it themselves, or children can do it with each other's help. Maybe it just shows how important professional development is and the power of being videoed – not just for 10 minutes, but for a whole hour. (Teacher 2, Final interview)

Teacher 3 expressed that she had adjusted her practice as a result of the self-review process:

Yeah! Because I take that step back and socially, I give more opportunity for children to work it out for themselves. As a person, I have grown as well. The children really know I am there if they need me. Need is a horrible word but if they require me to do something, I am there. (Teacher 3, Final interview).

These comments indicate that the process created a deeper awareness of the impact of philosophy and the words chosen to articulate that philosophy, and this awareness had, in turn, resulted in changes of behaviour. However, these changes are often subtle. Teacher 4 said:

It has not changed it to a huge degree, but it has changed it. I guess it is more attuned to finding ways to work with children's competencies, in terms of thinking and social relationships with each other. (Teacher 4, Final interview)

It has been recognised elsewhere that as a result of similar processes of group dialogue and reflection there are often unanticipated outcomes (Dahlberg, Moss

& Pence, 2007). Unanticipated outcomes in this centre were a perception amongst the teachers of “team building, forging stronger relationships and better understandings of each other” (PMI feedback). In their final interviews the teachers reported that although there were still differences in their teaching practice, because they now had insights into each other’s philosophies, they also had a better understanding of where others were coming from.

To summarise, from the teachers’ perspective, all four teachers found that an approach to self-review based on practical philosophy was useful and had improved their teaching practice. This improvement took the form of a heightened awareness of how their philosophy and the words they chose to express it impacted on their behaviour while interacting with children. They were able, as a result of the self-review process, to readjust their behaviour so it aligned more closely with their philosophy. By engaging in group discussions, the teachers were able to form an alternative construct of the child, from the image of a child whose needs should be catered for, to one that viewed the child as more competent. This new construct gave them a new pedagogical basis for interacting with the children they teach. Finally, it improved teaching as a team because it strengthened relationships and understandings.

Discussion

It is pertinent to reflect on the factors in this context that enabled the research process to be successful. It is noteworthy that the context was described by Teacher 4 at the outset of the research process as “*a learning community with awhi*”. The centre had already built professional learning into its organisational culture, so that teachers have been supported to attend national and local

conferences, attend local study groups, and have participated in study tours to Australia. At the time of the videoing the centre building was being extended, while throughout the year that this research was taking place, the centre staff had also committed themselves to a professional development contract that was funded by the Ministry of Education and for which they needed to produce reports that documented the specific measurable outcomes. That the teachers attended all the meetings to complete this research demonstrates their commitment to on-going learning. By being continuously involved in learning, the teaching staff maintained a fresh approach to their work and avoided stagnation. The teachers discussed this as part of their philosophy:

Teacher 3: I think what we are saying is that we see ourselves as learners that are involved... rather than just the teacher and the learner. We are actually learning from the child... That is why I put reciprocal learners... “ a culture of reciprocal learning experiences”, there we are!

Teacher 4: Is that what we meant by a community of learners. No but I mean learning for life and life long learning is a wee bit different, well. I don't know if it is different but... learning is integral to life isn't it?

Teacher 1: That is really good!

Teacher 4: Like from what I can see everybody's values, I mean that is why we are here...Like as humans, one of the things that we value as humans is having a brain to think, isn't it? Is thinking... thinking and learning.

Teacher 3 commented on how learning enriches their teaching: “You could not stop learning and just stick at a job day in and day out” (Teacher 3, Meeting 2, Monday 15th March 2007).

A teaching team less committed to professional learning would probably not have participated so wholeheartedly.

Another feature of the culture of the centre that contributed to the successful implementation of this form of self-review was the respect that underpinned relationships within the centre — the *awhi* that Teacher 4 referred to. This

included not only respect for all the children, regardless of gender, ethnicity and ability as was evidenced in the videos, but also respect for the parents and each other. Teacher 1 commented: *“Having the videos, everyone commented on the positives in our practice, and no-one else criticised”*. Teacher 3, although initially nervous, similarly regarded being videoed as a positive experience. She commented in her reflective journal that although she often found self-review difficult, it was because she was *“her own worst critic”*. By having others view her practice on video and give her feedback on the positive ways she was affirming children’s competence, she felt affirmed in her own competence.

Teacher 4 described the experience in this way:

I found that I was nervous with my practice being filmed. Perhaps this was because of a fear of being “judged” particularly in having the roles of both educator and supervisor. Risk taking is part of the process and “feeling uncomfortable” is far outweighed by the benefits of learning that arises as a result of the process. Watching my video gave the opportunity to explore “competence” in practice. This included competence of children, me as an educator, other staff, researcher and the role of the environment in supporting competence. Watching videos of others, affirmed to me their competence. (Teacher 4, Reflective Journal).

Teacher 1, on the other hand, expressed disappointment that the other teachers did not offer more constructive criticism of her practice:

I just wrote about sharing the DVD... I said that I felt fine about sharing the DVD as I had already outlined in my journal what I thought I can do and not do in relation to viewing children as competent, and shared these at the previous meeting... However, I was still thinking a little bit of ...well you could have done this, or you didn’t do that etc. But nobody said it at all, maybe it was because I had already acknowledged what I did and did not do. (Teacher 1, Transcription of Meeting 4 of the 6th July 2006.)

Each community of practice has new members who are on the periphery of the community (Lave & Wenger, 2002). Teacher 2, as a newly graduated teacher,

could be perceived as a peripheral member. Peripheral members either gain a valid place in the community of practice, or are denied entry to full participation depending on how they behave and whether they are accepted or not. In this centre it can be seen the respect that was evident ensured Teacher 2's entry to full participation. At times, Teacher 2 appeared to be vulnerable. In one meeting it was suggested that the time for video viewing be shortened because a longer than usual time had been spent in discussion. Teacher 2 responded: "*The only thing I would say about that is that I feel I had to put myself out there by being watched for a whole hour!*" Despite this apprehension, Teacher 2 reported in the final interview that the video process had made her feel competent, as did the positive comments from her colleagues.

Engaging in the critical reflection and dialogue was an essential aspect of the research as these discussions provided diverse and alternative views of practice in a way that would not have otherwise been possible. However, this research suggests the social atmosphere must be trusting and caring, as it is unlikely if teachers would take the risk to expose their practice to scrutiny if their confidence and self-esteem were to be bruised (Margetts & Nolan, 2007).

Although having my practice viewed was really "putting myself out there" and there is always a risk sharing viewpoints/beliefs... the people involved in this project were non judgmental, and non-threatening which lead to encouragement, participation, respect and a shared vision." (PMI feedback).

This reinforces the notion that to become critical thinkers it is important to firstly feel cared for (Meyer, Ashburner, & Holman, 2006).

Reflecting on why the culture of the centre was so conducive to this dialogic approach to self-review, leadership must be acknowledged as playing a significant role. It has been recognised that self-review is very difficult to undertake if there is no effective leadership (Grey, 2004; Wansbrough, 2003). It has also been identified that the leader has a huge influence on the culture of any organisation as it is the leader who sets the tone for the way things are done. Sometimes improvement can be achieved by directing staff in what to do, but it is usually more effective to bring about change by supporting their participation in a negotiated process that provokes them to see things differently (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003). Teacher 4, as supervisor, was the leader of this centre. She was mentioned as a mentor on the profile sheet by one of the teachers, because the teacher felt she had learnt professionalism, as well as a dedication to ongoing learning, from her. Throughout the process she demonstrated that her leadership was relational and democratic, rather than hierarchical. In many of the meeting transcripts it is not obvious from the reading alone that she is the leader. Although she never imposed her views on the teachers, she always added depth to their discussion by talking about the articles she had read, or by adding another dimension to their thinking. She was also sensitive to the feelings of the less confident staff members and was careful to “*awhi*” staff with positive comments about their practice:

But also with Teacher 2 taking the photos of that wedding, you know, she was listening not with just her ears, but she could see that this was an important thing that was being acted out, so she went and got the photos so that then she could share it and then writing up the learning story, then she sort of re-lived those emotions of the moment because you were actually engaged in what was going on. (Teacher 4, Transcription of the meeting held on the 15th March 2007).

I feel that her leadership style played an important part in the success of the self-review process.

The last aspect that was important to the success of this research process was that each day the teachers sat and ate lunch together between the morning and afternoon sessions. This time was child free. It gave them an interlude in the day where they could sit and talk together for a while. This is rare in early childhood education centres as the centres that are open for a full day, often from 7.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. require staff to work in overlapping shifts. Opportunities for regular conversations in these centres are rare. Many of the conversations that sustained these four teachers' interest between meetings occurred in the lunch breaks. This daily chance to share reflections about practice gave more continuity to the process than only isolated monthly meetings could have done. The value of this time was also recognised by the teachers

Teacher 4: ... that is a communication thing right from the word go.

Teacher 2: I think a lot of it here and in primary schools is that we all have lunch together, so you can actually discuss things in the lunch hour.

Teacher 3: Connect with each other!

Teacher 2: So you know what is going on, what happened in the morning and what could happen in the afternoon. I find that a big thing.

Teacher 4: I do too, because that is feed back I get from friends is that they never have meetings and they never connect, communicate

Teacher 2: So I don't know if that has a bearing on...

Anne: It does! It is a good point.

Teacher 4: It has a bearing on relationships; I think and therefore has an influence on the communication... (Transcription of meeting held on 5th July 2007)

As lack of time has been mentioned in the past as a huge barrier to self-review (Grey, 2004), I feel the lunch breaks and also that the working day finished at

4.00pm so staff meetings could be held from 4.00-6.00pm were a huge contribution to the success of this research.

While all the above factors enabled the successful completion of the research process, I feel compelled to reflect on one factor that could have made the process very difficult — that is the impact of staff changes that are common throughout the early childhood sector. Luckily the four teachers were very committed to the process, and only one meeting was missed by one teacher due to unforeseen circumstances. However, as I write this chapter two years after the completion of the data collection, only Teacher 4 remains at the centre. Teachers 2 and 3 have resigned, while Teacher 1 is on extended maternity leave.

To reap lasting benefits from self-review based on an approach of practical philosophy continuous dialogue is required over a long period of time by teachers who are motivated to engage in deep reflection and articulation of their personal theories and practice. It is a daunting experience. It was important for the success of this process that trusting relationships existed so that the participants felt safe to take risks, and such relationships take time to build. In Reggio Emilia, the teachers have been engaging in a dialogue of practical philosophy for 30 years, with some teachers remaining in the same centre for more than ten years. In Stockholm where a similar process of critical dialogue and communication has been instigated, it has been reported that a four year project is much too short to sustain lasting change. This indicates that the frequent staff changes that characterise the early childhood education sector in

Aotearoa New Zealand, especially in the greater Auckland region, create a difficult barrier to the widespread adoption of this approach.

Summary

This chapter described and discussed the teachers' sphere of the action research. Four teachers participated in the research to reflect on, discuss and review their teaching practice by an approach of practical philosophy. The documented findings suggest in this context practical philosophy as a self-review approach is worthwhile. The findings of the research process indicate that in this centre individual teachers were able to review their practice by investigating their practical philosophy and that by engaging in dialogue with each other were able to form a collective philosophy based on shared understanding. The teachers involved in this process considered that self-review based on an approach of practical philosophy would be a useful approach for other early childhood centres in Aotearoa New Zealand to engage in. Finally and most importantly, the four teachers who participated in this project felt that this self-review process had improved their teaching practice by refocusing the lens through which they viewed children, resulting in children being viewed as more competent, and by strengthening their relationships with each other.

Chapter 6: The self-review sphere

In this chapter the notion of self-review is discussed. The research questions that formed the basis for this sphere of the action research are:

- Does self-review improve practice?
- Is the self-review approach of practical philosophy beneficial for the development of living educational theories?
- Is the practical philosophy approach to self-review a valid approach?

In answering these questions, relevant literature on self-review and evaluation in early childhood education, as well as the documents on self-review in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand, are examined and discussed. Excerpts from the findings of this research process are included. I also reflect on my thinking about self-review as it changed through the research process.

Background to self-review

Since 2000 early childhood education centres have been encouraged to undertake self-review as it is set out in government documents and through professional development courses funded by the Ministry of Education. But the term *self-review* was not clearly defined in any of the documents. Both the term and the process were not well understood by most early childhood teachers when the first document, *The quality journey: He haerenga whai hua* (Ministry of Education, 1999) was distributed to centres in 1999 (Wansbrough, 2004). To add to the confusion, the term was used interchangeably with a variety of other terms, such as audit, internal review, evaluation and reflective practice. It was not until 2005 when the *Draft self-review guidelines for early childhood education*

were distributed to all early childhood centres that a definition of the term self-review was provided (Ministry of Education, 2005). In this document, self-review is defined in the glossary as

a process for finding out how well a service is achieving a shared vision and goals for tamariki (children) that involves improving practice to achieve positive learning outcomes for children. (p. 47).

The rationale for self-review can be traced back to the Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations 1998 Amendment. This regulation was later restated in the *Revised statement of desirable objectives and practices(DOPS) for chartered early childhood services in New Zealand* (Ministry of Education, 1996b), commonly known as the DOPs. In this document DOP 5 states that “*Educators should plan, implement, and evaluate curriculum for children*” (p. 2), while DOP 9 states that “*Management should develop and regularly review a statement of the service’s philosophy and the charter, in consultation with educators, parents/guardians, and where appropriate, whānau*” (p. 3) and DOP 10 (e) states that “*Management and educators should implement policies, objectives, and practices which are regularly evaluated and modified by an ongoing, recorded process of internal review*” (p. 4). As the impetus and rationale for self-review stemmed from government policy it was a top-down initiative that linked early childhood education teaching practice to managerial accountability. A revised definition of self-review was given later in the document, *Ngā Arohaehae whai hua: Self-review guidelines*:

...self-review is a review that is undertaken from within an early childhood education service in order to evaluate practice. This may also be called internal review, quality review, or centre review. Self-review is usually based on the priorities set by the service. Self-review is conducted within the early childhood education service by members of that same service (who are sometimes referred to as a ‘learning community’). (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 8)

From these definitions it can be seen that the term self-review is similar to the process that in some other educational contexts is referred to as evaluation.

In 2002, a ten-year strategic plan for early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand was launched by the government (Ministry of Education, 2002). This plan was a policy document and could be considered as another top-down initiative. The plan once again stresses the importance of quality improvement by making it one of the three main goals of the plan. Self-review was included in the goal to “*establish and reflect on the practices in teaching and learning*” (p. 3). The plan suggests a stepped approach for improving quality, where Step 3 is the development of self-review processes, Step 4 is the piloting of self-review processes, and Step 5 is the implementation of these processes.

In May 2007, a symposium hosted by the Ministry of Education discussed the progress made with the strategic plan. The feedback from the Ministry of Education on the area of “Goal Two – Improve quality” mainly discussed the structural improvements that had taken place, such as a greater number of qualified teachers in the sector. The statement was made that “*Structural factors such as adult: child ratios, qualified teachers and group size together provide the foundations for quality early education*” (p. 6), but later in the report this statement was qualified by stating “*Strong structural quality is necessary but not sufficient for quality teaching and learning*” (p. 7). The strategies that were then described as sector engagement initiatives to improve quality were professional development initiatives based on teaching and learning, such as learning about

Kei Tua o te Pai: Early childhood exemplars (that is pedagogical documentation in the form of narratives of children's learning) and ICT for learning and teaching. The only reference to self-review at this symposium was that *Ngā Arohaehae Whai Hua/ Self-review guidelines for early childhood education* had been distributed by the Ministry of Education to all licensed and chartered early childhood education services the previous year to support them to implement effective self-review (Ministry of Education, 2007). There was no mention of any review processes that had taken place. Reading this I am left to think that there was little evidence of early childhood centres engaging in self-review that could be included in the report.

Nevertheless, in a national survey of early childhood services completed from the end of 2003 to the beginning of 2004, it was reported that 90 percent of managers had completed some form of self-review on "*the implementation of the DOPs and/or other aspects of the ECE service policies and operation, and most teachers (78 percent) were also aware that this happened*" (Mitchell & Brooking, 2007, p.116), while 62 percent reported using *The quality journey: He haerenga whai hua* (Ministry of Education, 1999) as a basis for the review process. So it would seem that despite confusion in the early childhood sector about self-review, self-review of some kind was gradually being adopted. It was against this background that my action research study was conducted.

Evaluation

In order to gain a deeper understanding of self-review I delved more widely into literature about evaluation in education. As this research is based on the notion that educational theories are constructed as part of practice (Lenz Taguchi, 2007;

McNiff, 2002b), it is fitting that evaluation in general is problematised and critiqued so that by “*evaluating the idea of evaluation*” (McNiff, 2003, p. 222) a tentative position on self-review can be taken.

Evaluation is defined in *Ngā arohaehae whai hua: Self-review guidelines for early childhood education* as “*the process of using evidence to form a judgement about how well goals are being met, in order to make decisions about change*” (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 71). Elsewhere evaluation is defined as the correspondence between goals and outcomes (Dahlberg & Åsen, 1994). However, evaluation is not a neutral concept (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007). It is based on particular methodological, epistemological, and political assumptions (McNiff, 2003) that should not be taken-for-granted, but should be understood and critiqued in order for the purpose and effects of evaluation to be fully understood. I consider that there are two main approaches to evaluation and self-review — the technical approach and the approach of practical philosophy. I will now discuss my understanding of each approach and examine the strengths and limitations of each.

Looking first at the technical approach to evaluation, which originates from the positivist paradigm of social enquiry (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007; McNiff, 2003; Moss & Dahlberg, 2008; Schwandt, 1996, 1997) that can be termed “*regulatory modernity*” (Moss & Dahlberg, 2008, p. 5). This paradigm reflects a world view that assumes knowledge is not of our making, but is “out there” and it is the responsibility of the individual to investigate this until an understanding is reached. In this view all research, including evaluation, is seen as a methodical

and systematic process of gathering information according to prescribed criteria that is applied universally to all contexts so as to implement a normative standard. In technical evaluation, the procedure typically follows a process of four steps: the first step is to establish the desirable criteria; then to construct a standard; followed by a measuring performance and comparison with the standard; and finally to collate the data on the performance and make a judgement on it (Schwandt, 1997). Hence in this approach results of the evaluation demonstrate whether or not the standard has been reached, and in so doing, provide evidence of whether “quality” is present (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007; Moss, 2005). For this reason, I believe that the technical approach to evaluation can be referred to as quality assurance which arose from managerialism (Moss, 2006b). Often discourses on quality and evaluation are linked to each other —quality has often been reified to suggest that it is a static, concrete attribute of predetermined objective outcomes, while evaluation is seen as a process to guarantee that these outcomes exist, regardless of the context. With the advent of managerialism and decentralisation in education, quality standards and evaluation became a regulatory device, or a control system, and quality assurance was viewed as necessary to protect children and families. This has been considered a “*policing function*” (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007) that involves surveillance of teachers and mistrust in their ability to behave ethically towards children (Codd, 2008). It can be seen as one group of people in power (in the case of early childhood education services in Aotearoa New Zealand, that group of people is the Ministry of Education) as categorising and controlling another group (the teachers in the early childhood education centres) (McNiff, 2003). In the technical approach to evaluation, quality is defined by an expert

who is external to each early childhood service, and who forms criteria that are objective and designed to be applied universally to all services, while evaluation becomes a technical exercise that is free of values (Dahlberg & Åsen, 1994). However, as the outside expert can only ever form broad criteria that are observable, this form of evaluation can only be applied to external behaviour, whilst not taking into account the values that underpin behaviour (McNiff, 2003).

When used in the context of early childhood education, the emphasis of technical evaluation is on whether the teachers have complied with set criteria, and whether they are competent in applying those criteria to the set standard. The strength of this approach is the belief that a standard can be set that, if maintained, can provide certainty, consistency and reliability. It can give those involved, both from within and outside the service, reassurance in the form of data that standards have been met. In this way technical evaluation can be likened to a safety net to ensure no harm is done.

The weakness of the technical approach to evaluation is that it can be used as a method of control (McNiff, 2003) by enforcing narrow criteria for behaviour that stifles individual initiative to do things differently, ignores diversity of opinion, and marginalises and dehumanises those who do not fit the narrow criteria. This policing function can be considered as undermining the power of individuals and institutions (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007). The early childhood teacher is constructed as a technician, working within an industrial system of work-based competencies that prescribe certain and measurable decontextualised outcomes (Moss, 2006a) that can become the endpoint of education (Curtis & Carter,

2008). The technical approach to teaching focuses on competence rather than reflection, and so may emphasise certainty at the cost of understanding (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007). The technical approach could also be considered detrimental to respectful relationships, to reflective practice and to the development of educational theories.

Despite the limitations of the technical approach to evaluation in early childhood education it can be suitable for reviewing, or evaluating concrete objects (such as building safety standards) or technical procedures (such as hygiene procedures in infant care). I do not, however, believe that if it is used in isolation it is suitable for evaluating any kind of interactions between people, or to make judgments about professional wisdom or ethics (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Urban, 2008).

An alternative approach to evaluation is the approach of practical philosophy (Schwandt, 1996, 1997). Practical philosophy reflects the world view that knowledge is not 'out there', but is constructed by individuals through lived experience. As it is inclusive of diverse perspectives, it reflects the paradigm of postmodernism (Moss & Dahlberg, 2008). Practical philosophy contends that teachers should strive for better understanding of *praxis*, defined as informed action, practical wisdom, self-generation and renewal of praxis (Schwandt, 1997), as well as the ethical and political values that underpin such praxis (Schwandt, 1996). Because educational practice comprises of interactions with other people, research into practical philosophy must involve dialogue and communication, so it requires inquiry and investigation with others, rather than on others, within a specific situation that acknowledges the importance of

contextualism. It also emphasises that self-review or evaluation of practice is based on reflection of pedagogy, rather than on technical competencies. This approach does not involve evaluating what teachers cannot do, but instead, supports them to critically reflect on the knowledge and experiences that form their commonsense knowledge. This process cultivates teachers' practical wisdom, defined as the combination of sound judgement and thoughtful action (Goodfellow, 2003).

Practical philosophy as a way of reviewing practice requires participants to share their views on practice in dialogue with colleagues, not with the aim of achieving consensus, but to construct new knowledge and shared understanding. It involves listening to others' points-of-view without trying to disprove those interpretations, to dominate others, or to find a final solution, but instead tries to examine values, and to create understanding and awareness. The knowledge that is created is context-specific and relative, rather than fixed and certain (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Schwandt, 1996). This knowledge can be seen as living educational theory (Whitehead, 1989). This form of evaluation has also been termed meaning-making, and is described as "*a participatory process of interpretation and judgement, made within a recognised context and in relation to certain critical questions*" (Moss & Dahlberg, 2008, p.6). Hence practical philosophy values the ideals of democracy and autonomy, builds practical wisdom (Goodfellow, 2003), strengthens collaborative relationships and produces professional knowledge, so that the early childhood education teacher is constructed as a professional who develops within reciprocal relationships (Urban, 2008).

Although McNiff does not use the term practical philosophy, she describes a similar process of collaborative enquiry (McNiff, 2003), whereby individuals complete a self-study of their own practice, which they judge according to their own values of what constitutes the most suitable praxis in their specific context. She believes that through this process, new discourses of praxis are constructed. Her definition of evaluation is

...a discursively created concept that communicates how people come to make choices about the ways they wish to live, personally and socially, and can demonstrate how their ways of living count in the development of what is good. (McNiff, 2003 p.225).

Instead of using the term practical wisdom, McNiff (2002a) and Whitehead (1989) use the term “I-theories” or educational theories to describe the knowledge that is constructed in such a process. McNiff (2003) states that individuals should be responsible for their actions and are able to evaluate through self-study whether their actions are in accordance with the values that underpin them. These values may differ between people, as McNiff (2003) believes there is no one right way to act, but each individual’s actions should aim for ‘*developing good social orders*’ (p. 223) and the choices each individual makes should reflect this aim. Hence, McNiff (2003) views evaluation as the way individuals, through self-study, articulate to others the values that underpin their practice and then demonstrate how their practice reflects those values. McNiff feels each individual needs to scrutinise their own discourses of practice to identify if and how these may marginalise or discriminate against others. Peers or colleagues should then critique these discourses, so that a better social order may be developed. McNiff states the strength of this approach is that teachers themselves articulate the values that form the basis of their practice and gather

the evidence through self-study to either validate or modify their practice. In this way, they hold themselves accountable for their own actions. As these actions impact on the context beyond the individual, self-study can also contribute to organizational and social change (McNiff, 2003).

The strength of an evaluation based on practical philosophy is that it creates a depth of understanding and awareness that is not possible to obtain through technical evaluation. In this form of evaluation, practical wisdom is nurtured, while taken-for-granted assumptions about practice are critiqued so decisions can be made about their relevance (Fleer, 2003; Goodfellow, 2003; Moss & Dahlberg, 2008). This form of evaluation can ask ethical questions about what is right and good about early childhood education that would be outside the scope of a technical evaluation (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). For this reason, I believe it is only evaluation, or self-review, based on practical wisdom that is able to develop living educational theories.

However, I believe there are certain conditions that must be present for the practical philosophy approach to evaluation to be successful. There must be teachers who understand what it is to reflect and critique practice and values, and who have a commitment to the value of continuous, critical enquiry into practice. There must also be a culture of listening to others' opinions, time available to engage in reflective discussions, and pedagogical documentation to make visible abstract practice and concepts so that a concrete point of reference exists that can be discussed (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007). Additionally there must be an understanding that this form of evaluation will not give participants the security

of certain fixed answers that a technical approach to evaluation will. Furthermore, as it is often difficult for early childhood teachers to articulate their values and philosophy, participants must be willing to take risks and open themselves to scrutiny as their values and philosophy may be challenged or require change. There are the practical difficulties of allocating the time necessary for participants to engage in dialogue, and the disruptions that constant staff changeovers create. A further difficulty, as McNiff (2003) has pointed out, arises because of the lack of managerial characteristics, such as quantitative measuring of effectiveness and improvement in a review of practical philosophy. Because of this, those in authority may not accept that an approach to evaluation based on dialogue, practical wisdom and meaning-making is a form of evaluation at all.

Although I do not feel that the points I have outlined can be called limitations of this approach, I do feel that the absence of any of the conditions above would create a partial barrier to the successful completion of this form of evaluation. Moss and Dahlberg (2008) recognise the difficulties associated with this form of evaluation if the conditions necessary for its successful completion are not present. In this case, these authors admit that it may be necessary to use a technical form of evaluation “ *which is easier to learn and speak, and requires the capacity to follow instructions and apply techniques correctly*” (p. 8). My own thoughts on this are that, if this is the case, and a technical evaluation is undertaken simply because it is too difficult to implement an evaluation based on practical philosophy, then the limitations of such a review should be made transparent, and a technical evaluation should be regarded as a starting point and

temporary stepping stone to evaluation, while the necessary conditions are put in place to complete an evaluation based on practical philosophy. Ultimately, I hope that the early childhood education sector will build a sound understanding of the epistemological, methodological and professional impact of the two broad types of self-review so that both could be used appropriately according to the review topic.

In summary, both approaches to evaluation, technical and practical philosophy, can contribute to the self-review processes of an early childhood centre. I feel there are aspects of centre practices, such as health and safety, where a technical evaluation is appropriate and useful. In general, the technical approach to evaluation should be regarded as a quality assurance safety net to make sure no harm is done, but I believe unless it is accompanied by critical reflection it will not improve practice. I feel that if teachers wish to successfully review their practice with the aim of modifying it, they must be encouraged to first cultivate the necessary conditions for evaluation based on practical philosophy. Ultimately, I believe evaluation based on practical philosophy should be the goal for self-review in early childhood education so that practical wisdom and living educational theories can be developed that are relevant to each context.

Self-review documents

In order to contextualise self-review in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand, the three government documents on self-review distributed to every early childhood education centre in New Zealand by the Ministry of Education will be discussed and critiqued. The first was *The quality journey: He*

Haerenga whai hua in 1999 (Ministry of Education, 1999), the second *Draft self-review guidelines for early childhood education* in 2005 (Ministry of Education, 2005), and the third *Ngā Arohaehae whai hua: Self-review guidelines for early childhood education* in 2006 (Ministry of Education, 2006). In addition *The cultural self-review: Providing culturally effective, inclusive, education for Māori learners* (Bevan-Brown, 2003) will be reviewed and critiqued. This book was written by an expert outside the government. It deals specifically with self-review of bicultural developments in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In 1995, Anne Meade, who played a pivotal role in the early childhood education reforms of the late 1980s and who co-wrote *The quality journey: He haerenga whai hua* (Ministry of Education, 1999), gave a key note address to the Start Right conference in London (Meade, 1995). In this address she said “*when more teachers become thinking teachers (reflective practitioners) who focus on education of children, children’s learning will be better supported and extended*”. In 1995 the notion that those who worked in early childhood education could be considered teachers and professionals was not a widely held view, but Meade considered that developments towards professionalization were important as “*research is telling us that early childhood teachers need to be professionals if quality early childhood education is to have positive outcomes for children and their families*” (p. 10). Meade made the point in this address that quality assurance systems were one of the developments that would ensure the professionalization of early childhood teachers. Meade further stated that teachers needed to do more than arrange the environment, or they would fall short of being a professional early childhood teacher. However, she observed that early childhood education teachers were often reluctant to accept that they

needed to interact with children in order to extend children's cognitive development. She observed that teachers were more likely to facilitate children's thinking by adding different materials to the learning environment than they were by having conversations with children. Her overall stance in this address was that teachers needed to interact more intentionally with children in order to extend children's thinking and so be considered professional teachers.

In 1999, *The quality journey: He Haerenga whai hua*, co-written by Anne Meade and Anne Kerslake Hendricks, was introduced to all early childhood education centres. The authors had consulted with the early childhood sector before the document was written (Podmore, 2009), and the document follows the three main areas of the Desirable Objectives of Practice (DOPs) by stating the main areas for review are Teaching, Learning and Development, Adult Communication and Collaboration, and Organisational Management (Ministry of Education, 1999). In the introduction, this document states its purpose is to “assist[s] early childhood management and educators to establish quality improvement systems” (p. 5). In this wording, the emphasis is on systems not on teaching practice. The process the document suggests is a cycle of Plan, then Do, then Study, then Act, which is congruent with a technical approach to self-evaluation. The document also explains such technical strategies as setting standards and includes a tool for measuring teaching practice through the use of prescribed performance indicators applicable in any context. These performance indicators were designed to measure teaching performance by categorising each quality indicator into grades of *consistently high quality*, *medium quality*, and *consistently low quality*. One of the reasons given for the development of a

quality improvement system was to achieve “*efficiency and consistency*” (p. 8). All of these features indicate that *The quality journey: He Haerenga whai hua* is based on a technical form of self-review. The assumption is that when using these performance indicators there is a common understanding of what *consistently high quality, medium quality* and *consistently low quality* is. I wonder, however, if an early childhood teacher was graded *consistently low quality* how that would motivate her to improve her teaching. Would she understand what steps were needed to improve her teaching interactions?

However, when I consider Anne Meade’s comment to the Start Right conference that early childhood teachers in the late 1990s were reluctant to engage with children’s cognitive development as they saw their role as mainly one of arranging the environment, I think that by including a specific tool to measure teaching and learning performances by teachers, a deliberate attempt may have been made to encourage early childhood education teachers to focus their attention on their interactions with children rather than the equipment in the environment. It may also have been considered that by outlining a clear process and providing tools that could be used to review interactions, teachers new to self-review would gain an understanding of the process.

In the follow-up research completed in 2002 (Depree & Hayward, 2004), early childhood teachers commented on the usefulness of *The quality journey* as a resource to provide a structured framework for review, and clear guidelines for collecting and documenting data. Other research (White, 2004) demonstrates that the document does not need to be used in an exclusively technical way. For

example in this research project, the participants used the document as an impetus to reflect on and form their own constructions of quality according to their underlying values. Teacher 4 described two effective examples where she had combined technical review with a reflective discussion on practice. The first was an analysis of the accident reports that are a mandatory requirement in the case of accidents. This analysis led to a discussion of safe supervision of children's learning experiences, and a shift of focus in practice. The second example was a checklist of conversations with parents that was completed by all staff. An analysis of this showed that teachers were conversing with some parents often, yet making little contact with other parents or ignoring them altogether. This led to a discussion on equity within the centre and a greater awareness of the importance of building relationships with all families. In general, however, in the period from 2000-2002, many early childhood education teachers struggled to understand both the self-review document, *The quality journey: He Haerenga whai hua*, and the self-review purpose and processes.

In 2005 the second document on self-review, the *Draft self-review guidelines for early childhood education* document (Ministry of Education, 2005) was distributed to all early childhood education centres. This document links self-review to *Te Whāriki, the national early childhood curriculum guidelines* (Ministry of Education, 1996a). It states “*self-review is carried out by the people whose practices are being reviewed... These people are referred to as a learning community who have a shared interest and common purpose in review*” (p. 9). In this document the purpose of self-review is to develop a shared understanding, rather than to measure teaching performance. The document explains that self-

review helps us to reflect on our practices and how they impact on children's learning. It later states that factors such as philosophy, leadership capability, reciprocal and responsive relationships and reflection will impact on how the review is completed, while self-review enables us to be responsive to our shared vision for children. It further states that "*when we can clearly articulate our vision for children and know what we want to achieve through our goals, we are in a position to approach the review process purposefully*" (p. 24). There are four sections that give background information to self-review, but only one section to outline a process that could be followed to implement a review. The suggested process of preparing, gathering, making sense and deciding follows a basic action research cycle, and explains how self-review data can be analysed. This document also includes some reflective questions that can be used for each stage of the review process. There are no prescribed indicators included, but encouragement is given to participants to form their own. I feel that this document does not take the technical approach to evaluation of the earlier document, *The quality journey: He haerenga whai hua*, (Ministry of Education, 1999), but is acknowledging the importance of a practical philosophy approach to evaluation, although not explicitly. I also feel that if this document was seen as complementary to the earlier document, it would have provided a valuable alternative perspective to self-review. However, after consultation with the early childhood education sector, the *Draft self-review guideline for early childhood* (Ministry of Education, 2005) was rewritten.

The third document on self-review is *Ngā Arohaehae whai hua: Self-review guidelines for early childhood education* (Ministry of Education, 2006) which

also uses the weaving metaphor to explain self-review, but states that the two key purposes of self-review are improvement and accountability. This indicates the technical approach to self-review is again being taken. In this document more detail is given for the process of self-review, and one section is included that discusses the elements of an effective review. One of those elements is wisdom – “ *when we engage in effective review, we draw on our combined wisdom*” (p. 46). This document asserts that wisdom is achieved through reflection and reflexivity. The other elements mentioned in this section are relationships, evidence, vision, improvement and ethics. Philosophy is only indirectly referred to in the section on vision. Once again no prescribed indicators are included, but these are explained, and guidance on where to find examples is given. Participants are encouraged to form their own indicators around what they would wish to see in their centre. This is moving towards an approach of practical philosophy. In general this document combines an interesting mixture of a technical approach to self-review with elements of the practical philosophy approach to self-review.

The book *The cultural self-review: Providing culturally effective, inclusive, education for Māori learners* (Bevan-Brown, 2003) was written to provide

a structure and a process that teachers can use to examine carefully how they and their schools or early childhood education centres cater for Māori learners in general, and Māori learners with special needs in particular. (p. 1).

Biculturalism, the acknowledgment of the right of the indigenous Māori cultural knowledge base to co-exist with the dominant western culture of Aotearoa New Zealand society, is an on-going issue and challenge for all involved in education.

This book sets out a stairway to cross-cultural competence. The sincerity of the author of this book to improve the learning of Māori learners is evident. The book gives checklists for principles such as the environment, personnel, policies and resources. It is designed to self-review the school or early childhood centre as a whole, rather than to review the practice of individual teachers. However, as teachers are an important part of the school or early childhood centre, they would be unable to avoid scrutiny completely. The suggested process is that review participants will gather information according to the checklists and then analyse this. From the information gathered it is suggested that an action plan should be drawn up, implemented and then a follow up self-review planned to measure the success of the action plan. The checklists and process are prescribed in the book and the process forms a technical approach to evaluation in the form of an audit. The author states that it is hoped that by following this self-review process Māori learners will benefit. She writes:

The expertise and attitudes of teachers are pivotal. As well as possessing culturally relevant knowledge and valuing Māoritanga (Māori culture, Māori perspectives) teachers must have positive, caring attitudes towards Māori children. (p60).

These words highlight for me the difficulty of self-review where the review process is constructed externally and decontextualised. The author makes the assumption that schools, early childhood education centres and the teachers who work in them possess the culturally relevant knowledge, understand the values of Māoritanga, and adhere to positive, caring values for Māori children. It has been suggested in other literature that we can only ever talk about bicultural developments, or working towards biculturalism, as *Te Whāriki* itself is non-prescriptive and a lack of models for biculturalism exist (Ritchie, 2003). Very

few non-Māori are competent enough in both cultures to have a clear understanding of what is required to implement biculturalism. This book is valuable for the model it has outlined, but to conduct a technical approach to evaluation in a centre on something in which teachers are unlikely to have competence is more likely to demotivate, rather than motivate teachers to engage in furthering bicultural developments. I also feel that if a bicultural model was implemented unthinkingly in a centre as a way to “be bicultural” for the sake of accountability alone, it could only ever be regarded as tokenism. So to be audited in this way may be counterproductive to the ultimate aim of achieving a bicultural education system, as it may build resistance or a hypocritical attitude. I feel that in this instance the approach to evaluation of practical philosophy in which values are examined and this is supplemented with professional learning would be more appropriate.

Others have written about the evaluation process. For example Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2007) have stated that there are different languages of evaluation that take different perspectives and positions. These languages give us a choice in the form of evaluation we undertake. No form of evaluation or self-review, however, is neutral (McNiff, 2003), and each form is based on certain beliefs and values. Moss and Dahlberg (2008) state it is problematic when authors do not state the position they have taken with respect to evaluation or to the paradigm and discourse in which they have situated it. Hence there is often no acknowledgement of the impact the unstated position has on the implications for defining the questions on which the evaluation is based, on the methods chosen, or the interpretation of the data. An assumption is made that teaching will

improve as a consequence of a review, but this is an assumption that may or may not become reality in every instance.

Evidence from the research site

To provide another perspective on self-review, the perceptions of the teachers who participated in this research project were sought. The four teachers, when interviewed after the completion of the self-review process, stated that they found the self-review process valuable. When I asked if their practice had improved as a result of the process, one answered that “*the changes in practice are often subtle*” (Teacher 3, final interview). Teacher 1 replied that:

I think I have given more thought to the word competent and how I view the word competent. I think I allow children more time to do things for themselves and do more for others. (Teacher 1, Final interview).

Teacher 2 reported she became more aware of the words she used to describe children’s learning, as well as more aware of the way she interacted with children and the phrases she used while speaking to them. (Teacher 2, Final interview):

Teacher 2: Well for me personally, it has had a huge impact on me as a beginning teacher. Well, because, my final practicum, we had to write a philosophy before we started teaching, so to be able to review that within a year of graduating to me was very beneficial, and as I said, with being a bit careful with regards to words, you know, even in my day to day... you know, even a word like holistic and all that, I would want to be sure now before I used words like that that I knew what they meant. So that is the impact on me personally. So no matter where I went, you know, if I went to another centre in five years, I think that whole layer of meaning would always have an effect on me through this project.

(Transcription of extra meeting on the 10th March 2008)

Teacher 3 said that as a result of the review process she allows children more opportunities to complete things for themselves by stepping back. Teacher 4 also reported subtle changes to her teaching practice as a result of the review process. When discussing the impact of self-review at a later date, the teachers agreed that any review of practice, including one based on practical philosophy, cannot be seen in isolation from other aspects of teaching practice, such as the advice and guidance programmes that teachers complete as part of the teacher registration process. However, because it was conducted as a whole team, this self-review did make the teachers aware of the layers of meaning behind their philosophy (Transcription of extra meeting on the 10th March 2008).

Teacher 4: So I would believe that participation in a self-review process actually supports you to become a reflective practitioner. So by participating in this self-review process, when you use the terms "reflective practitioner" people would actually think it means thinking on your feet, but how deeply are you actually thinking? By participating in a self-review process you are actually more analytical and critical about your thinking, and your assumptions and your beliefs, and so you might slightly modify your theories. So if I had an I-theory about self-review, it would be that self-review is a really important process when conducted... because we talked about conditions and so on to make it safe, that it is really necessary to become a truly reflective practitioner.

Teacher 2: I mean if you have time to do it... I mean I don't think... with the self-review here we met once a month. I am not sure without that I would have reflected on my own practice at home. You know what I mean? Because it was time set aside with your colleagues, umm, I might get in the car, and think "Oh! I had a great day!" because of so and so and then that is it, because you are on to the next thing. But because you had time set aside with your colleagues you are forced... well not forced, but...

Teacher 4: It puts value on it. It gives value to the whole process of reviewing and reflecting.

Teacher 1: That is what I was saying... it (reflection) is not done at a conscious level, not at that deep level.

Teacher 4: Yes! You might superficially but yeah! That is what I mean about being a reflective practitioner, it takes it down to that deeper level.

(Transcription of extra meeting on the 10th March 2008)

So to answer the question, does self-review improve practice, from the participants' perspective, it does not improve practice in a linear way that can be measured quantitatively, but it improves it in a qualitative way as it provokes teachers to think critically about their practice, to take an alternative viewpoint, and to build collegial relationships through greater understanding of others viewpoints (Burbules & Berk, 1999). The result of this shift in thinking was that, in this case, teachers felt affirmed in their practice, and as a result felt more competent themselves, more respect was given to colleagues as there was greater understanding of each others personal philosophies, and the teachers were more aware of the children's competencies:

Teacher 1: It gave me the opportunity to look more deeply into different aspects of the self-review, so I guess there were different areas of reflection e.g. competency and it enhanced my awareness of the process of reflection.

Teacher 4: And in terms of, like, of the fact that when I look at the images that are being taken by the staff of children during sessions, I think that by having done the self-review process you are actually looking at competent powerful images and whether that is because everyone had focussed on that particular area, they are actually seeing children as competent and they are portraying that to parents and to children themselves as well. And in terms of (being) beneficial... by discussing it together there is more cohesion in the centre with staff understanding the perspectives of each other and there is a shared sense of purpose. While there are subtle differences there is a collective understanding of competence from having done that review process, and what it means.

(Transcription of extra meeting on the 10th March 2008)

Teacher 4 reported anecdotally that she had noticed that, as a result of the self-review process that I had facilitated, the learning stories that the teachers were writing demonstrated more depth and awareness in documenting the children's competencies and learning.

Throughout the meetings, I was aware of the living educational theories (I-theories) that the teachers constructed as they discussed their teaching practice, but I was interested if the teachers themselves felt that the process had assisted them to develop living educational theories:

Teacher 4: I was just going on the question about practical philosophy. .. that we looked at our philosophy in practice and just going back to the question “Is the self-review approach of practical philosophy perceived by the teaching team as beneficial?” Because we have all agreed that self-review is absolutely necessary, but like this approach of looking at our philosophy in practice, what do we believe?

Teacher 1: I think all centres should do it! Well...

Teacher 4: Well, that actual process provided a focus so it was clear what you were going to review, and practical philosophy means that it was meaningful because it is in the centre where we are working, as opposed to a self-review on “Do we meet cleaning regulations?” so could form an educational theory on where we worked.

Teacher 1: It was personal!

*Teacher 4: I guess that was the thing with doing philosophy in practice - that you could actually observe and comment on children’s responses to teaching techniques and approaches that the staff use and that is highlighted in the self-review under all the things that are listed. This is what everybody contributed. I mean, I think it is absolutely fantastic – in what ways did we acknowledge and support children’s competency. So there is evidence that we were thinking and forming theories about putting our philosophy in practice... what practical strategies can we use to support children’s competencies. And while there is a general group thing, it still allows for individuality that... So it makes it authentic and real. And still allows for personal variations, but there is still a shared understanding.
(Transcription of extra meeting on the 10th March 2008)*

These comments show that the teachers who participated in this research of self-review as practical philosophy considered that the self-review approach of practical philosophy was a valid approach that improved practice as well as assisting teachers to form their own living educational theories. Moreover, from the transcript above Teacher 4 has commented on how the approach of practical philosophy is authentic, real and meaningful in contrast to a self-review from a

purely technical perspective such as “*Do we meet the cleaning regulations?*” that gives information on compliance.

Summary

In this chapter the questions discussed were: *Does self-review improve practice? Is the self-review approach of practical philosophy beneficial for the development of living educational theories? Is the practical philosophy approach to self-review a valid approach?* To answer these questions the viewpoints from the literature and the documents on self-review are included, as well as my own views and the views of the participants who participated in this research study.

In summary, the term *improvement of practice* is one that needs to be debated and qualified. I believe that self-review using a technical approach can only provide information on compliance to regulations, and is only appropriate for areas of practice in early childhood education such as health and safety. Obviously, if the results of such a review demonstrate that compliance has not been met, and so practices are revised to then meet the requirements, a self-review based on a technical approach can be said to improve practice. This form of self-review will not, I believe, generate any living educational theories because it typically does not include any form of reflection, dialogue or discussion.

A self-review based on the approach of practical philosophy, in contrast, involves articulating personal theories of practice and discussing these with others. Hence, it is conducive to the formation of living educational theories that

are authentic and relevant to the context where they are formed and to the teachers who form them. On reflecting whether self-review based on practical philosophy improves teaching practice, improvement cannot be measured in any quantitative way, and probably no fixed or certain improvement in observable behaviour could be demonstrated as a result of a self-review based on practical philosophy. The changes or improvements are qualitative and subtle. However, based on evidence from the literature discussed together with my own perceptions and those of the four teachers in this research, it does appear that improvement in practice results from forming a shared understanding, and gaining greater criticality and self-awareness of practice, and by delving deeper into the hidden beliefs and assumptions that underpin practice. This is a process that contributes to the practical wisdom of teachers (Goodfellow, 2003) by constructing living educational theories (McNiff, 2003; Whitehead, 1989) that are authentic and meaningful (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007; Moss & Dahlberg, 2008) to those involved in the self-review process.

Chapter 7: Discussion

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss self-review based on the findings from the three spheres of research that were presented in the previous three chapters. As this research is situated within a social constructionist framework that contends that knowledge is constructed and maintained by groups of people as they interact (Burr, 2003), each of the spheres in these chapters do not stand in isolation from each other, but are inextricably intertwined and reflect the three strands of social constructionism (Quay, 2003). These strands consist of constructivism (my own sphere as an individual, as well as the teachers individual reflections), social constructionism (the teachers' sphere of joint knowledge construction and its impact on my thinking as I write this chapter), and cultural discourse (the documents on self-review that have been formed externally). Together these strands contribute to an epistemological process for constructing and understanding knowledge of self-review in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand. For the purpose of organizing the findings for this thesis in a manageable and coherent manner, these three spheres were separated into three chapters. This chapter will recombine the three spheres so that a position on self-review may be taken. This position is specific to the context in which it was constructed and is linked to the relationships, practice and knowledge within that context (McNiff, 1999) to form a living educational theory of self-review (Whitehead, 1989).

There are two main sections in the chapter. First, I summarize three key findings from the teachers' sphere and my sphere as facilitator and discuss them in the context of (a) theory and findings that informed my original conceptualization of the self review process, and (b) other theories and findings from related literature. Second, I revisit my I-theory of self review in the light of my discussion of these findings and the discourses present in early childhood policy documents.

The Teacher's Sphere

Finding One: The teachers engaged in a self-review process which was based on a social constructionist paradigm and involved reflection and dialogue on practical philosophy; they valued their participation in these processes and consequentially modified some of their ideas about teaching ('I' theories and 'we' theories), values and teaching practices.

Should there be a future occasion to be involved in a self review of teaching practice, I would not hesitate to be part of it. (Teacher 2, Reflective Journal)

This finding is one outcome of my response to the view that the early childhood education community needs investigations of alternative professional learning approaches (Edwards & Nuttall, 2009). Such approaches extend learning beyond the traditional models of professional development where early childhood teachers attended a session that comprised of transmission of decontextualised knowledge by an expert on a specific topic that was deemed to be relevant to the teachers' professional development by an external agency (Wood, 2009; Edwards & Nuttall, 2009, Nuttall & Edwards, 2009). Alternative "post-developmental" (Edwards & Nuttall, 2009, p. 3) approaches, which are considered to represent occasions for professional learning rather than professional development, involve the active construction of knowledge on the part of the participants, encourage teachers to engage in deeper reflection on

perspectives of ethics and philosophy, acknowledge the personal theories that teachers construct in the course of their daily work (Edwards & Nuttall, 2009) and appreciate the situated nature of their learning. The research also reinforces the view that research on professional learning should “attempt to make sense of the ways in which individual perspectives and social phenomena co-evolve and give meaning to the actions and activities comprising particular communities of practice” to focus on “the complex interplay between personal, interpersonal, and collective forms of thinking and action” (Nuttall & Edwards, 2009, p.133). Examples of the adoption of such alternative approaches in New Zealand are the Centres of Innovation (Meade, 2005) and the ICT initiatives that were recently conducted nationally and which engaged teachers in action research projects for extended periods of three years. In Australia, similar approaches have been documented recently in text edited by Edwards and Nuttall (2009). In this text, the various approaches that are discussed are based on socio-cultural theory (Nuttall, Coxon & Read, 2009), cultural-historical activity theory (Georgeson, 2009), post-structural theory (Blaise, 2009), and narrativity (Fleet and Patterson, 2009). Mitchell and Cubey (2003) who compiled a *Best Evidence Synthesis* on professional development in early childhood education also concluded that findings supported approaches that involved the collection of data from the teachers’ own setting that could be reflected on to construct alternative meanings and to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about practice. Meade (2005) when talking about the value and outcomes of the research completed in the Centres of Innovation in Aotearoa New Zealand reiterated this viewpoint.

Such approaches to professional learning are similar to the form of self-review explored in this research, as they all focus on professional learning that is

conducted in the contexts in which the participants work on a daily basis, so they all emphasise the situated nature of learning that allows teachers, both individually and as a teaching team, to construct new perspectives and to reflect critically on their teaching practice in meaningful ways. In addition, the alternative approaches offer further insights into ways in which the approach that I have explored might be further developed. The approach of narrativity (Fleet & Patterson, 2009) for example, could be used. In this research, the video recordings represented a ‘narration’ of everyday teaching incidents and provided documentation of teaching that provoked the teachers’ discussion which allowed collaborative learning to take place. If, while viewing the videos, the teachers had revisited their teaching by narrating the stories of their teaching practice that lay beneath the surface of what was immediately visible, it may have provoked deeper metacognition on practice and encouraged further conversations.

The finding also contributes an additional perspective to research on the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education. Although research on the Reggio Emilio approach has been undertaken that focuses on teachers’ documentation and reflection on children’s learning (e.g. Baxter, 2007; Bayes, 2005), no research completed in Aotearoa New Zealand or Australia has been identified that investigates the same approach that I have taken to the Reggio Emilio conception of the ‘teacher as researcher’ (Malaguzzi, 1998; Rinaldi, 2006). This conception, which is compatible with a post-developmental perspective, is based on the view that teachers need to develop their own philosophy rather than be constrained by rigid adherence to a philosophy that has been formed externally:

“In this context, it is obvious that the role and competency of the teacher are qualified in a different way from how these elements are defined in an

educational environment in which the teacher's job is simply to transmit disciplinary knowledge in their traditional way.

The task is not to find (and teach) a specific series of rules, or to present certain propositions organised into formulas that can be easily learned by others, or to teach a method that can be replicated without modifications.

The teacher's competency is defined in terms more of understandings than of pure knowledge. It indicates a familiarity with critical facts, so as to allow those who possess this familiarity to say what is important and to hypothesize what is suitable for each situation – that is, what is helpful for the learner in a particular situation (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 72)

The findings from my research support Malaguzzi's statement that "*When colleagues work closely together and share common problems, this facilitates the alignment of behaviours, and a modification of personal theories*" (Malaguzzi 1998, p. 86). One instance of this was in relation to the teacher's modification of their views about the concept of children's 'competence' as they engaged in a process of reflection and dialogue about the term. In turn, this process led the teachers to reflect on and talk about their own sense of competency.

The finding also supports the approach to professional learning and development advocated by McNiff and Whitehead (2005) which is based on action research, and the development of I-theory through explorations of values and practice, contradictions in the values teachers espouse and those that are enacted in teaching practice, and the application of practical philosophy. Again this model represents a post-developmental approach. Evidence of this finding was true for both the teachers' engagement in the self review process and my own facilitation of self-review. McNiff has supervised a number of doctoral students who have investigated this approach with respect to their own development of I-theory and practice. (See www.jeanmcniff.com). One of these researchers, Roche (2000), writes how she improved as a teacher through the realisation that there was a mismatch between her values and her practice. She reflects that by complying

with operational and technical prescriptions of teaching that were formed externally she became a “docile sheep” (p.4) in a way that did not benefit the children’s learning. By forming her own personal philosophy of teaching, and by actively reflecting on it, she gained greater awareness of her teaching values and practice, as well as greater confidence in applying both. She also learnt the value of listening to her students, instead of talking at them. Roche feels that the significance of this form of action research is its potential for professional transformation that encourages the construction of personal I-theories of practice. Her conclusion supports the findings in this research which contributes to the body of action research-based case studies of the approach advocated by McNiff and Whitehead (2005). However, as Roche was a primary teacher, her research was conducted primarily as a self-study, and although she discussed her teaching with other colleagues, they were not teaching in the same space as she was. By using Mc Niff and Whitehead’s approach with an early childhood education teaching team, my research study provides a fresh insight into other ways that the living values approach of McNiff and Whitehead can be used.

Finding Two: There were personal and structural factors that interacted in complex ways to influence the teachers’ individual and collective response to the experience of engaging in the self-review processes.

“The importance in reviewing this with others – I was nervous. My feeling of competence as a teacher is intrinsic as it arises with the relationships. It is a mixture of teacher-child competence.” (Teacher 4, transcription of meeting held on 11th June 2007).

The four participating teachers, although having a Pakeha cultural background in common, had varying personal histories, they were of different ages and social backgrounds, and had been teaching in early childhood education for a varying number of years. One was the supervisor of the centre, while one was a newly qualified teacher. The findings indicated that there were both similarities and

differences in the teachers' backgrounds, dispositions and capabilities that helped account for both their shared 'positive' response to the self review process and differences in their individual responses. The main personal factors identified concerned anxiety; language and listening; respect, caring and trust; commitment to reflection and dialogue-based professional learning, and professional identity and professional agency. The findings also indicated that there were a number of contextual or structural factors that influenced the teachers' responses and that the personal and structural factors interacted in complex ways. These individual responses will now be discussed separately.

Anxiety:

All of the teachers revealed that at some time that they felt anxious about being videoed and having their teaching scrutinised by the colleagues. This could be perceived as arising from the novelty of being videoed. This was the first time that the teachers had experienced being videoed and having their teaching practice discussed by their colleagues, so it was not a usual part of their daily routine. In one instance, however, it was the awareness of being a newly qualified teacher in comparison to someone who had taught for more than twenty years that contributed to anxiety. In yet another instance, anxiety arose from having the role of supervisor and being anxious about the possibility of her practice being found wanting by the staff she managed. For another participant, the anxiety stemmed from not wanting to upset other colleagues when discussing their philosophy and teaching practice. It appeared, then, that the anxiety arose primarily from the personal dispositions of the teachers and was relatively short-lived. However, it also could be perceived as arising from concern about being judged against an ideal construct of *the right way to teach* within the cultural

discourses of early childhood teaching that emphasises teaching as a “*technical standardised application of top-down ‘expert’ knowledge that meets objective accountability measures for the purpose of attaining optimal developmental outcomes for children*” (Fenech, Sumision & Shepherd, 2010, p.89). This is a top-down technical discourse that constructs the early childhood education teacher as entirely shaped by compliance to regulations and policy (Urban, 2008) at the cost of individual and collective initiative, competence and agency. Thus social-cultural, as well as personal, factors may also help account for anxiety.

In general, it could be assumed that anxiety will always be present in this form of professional learning or self-review because there is an element of risk-taking involved. It has been suggested that anxiety and risk-taking stems from the cultural challenge of critically reflecting on taken-for-granted assumptions, and that individuals can experience the challenge in various ways. (Fook & Askeland, 2007). In their article on ‘Challenges of critical reflection: ‘Nothing ventured, nothing gained’, Fook and Askeland review these challenges, some of which are represented in the data from this study. This article reveals that while some individuals feel uncomfortable in admitting to a mistake or an aspect of practice that they could improve on, some may perceive critical reflection and group discussion as overly intrusive or confronting. Anxiety may also stem from having differing cultural and individual perceptions of silence and speaking that make engaging in a discussion of this type difficult. In addition, there is the cultural norm of wishing to protect oneself from criticism, negative judgement or disapproval. Individuals may experience anxiety about expressing their views to a group, which is accentuated by being judged by their colleagues at the same time. Furthermore, if a workplace culture emphasises procedures and regulations

rather than critical reflection, teachers may be more prone to anxieties about performing in the right way. Paris and Lung (2008) also suggest that the anxiety formed as a result of critical thinking may be attributed to ‘lost innocence’ where those who have engaged in critical reflection feel a deep sense of loss from having to let go of long held beliefs and perceptions of themselves.

Language, dialogue, listening and silence:

The approach to self-review in this research is highly dependent on teachers being able to articulate and engage in dialogue about their personal philosophies. To be able to engage productively in this dialogue, the teachers must have a professional knowledge base as well as an awareness of the implicit values and beliefs that shape their interpersonal and intrapersonal judgements (Goodfellow, 2003; Malaguzzi, 1998; Wood & Bennett, 2000). The teachers’ formal professional education partly guaranteed that they had the requisite professional knowledge base and provided them with vocabulary and language that they could use to express their knowledge and associated values and beliefs. However, it was apparent that the language used during dialogue can be an obstacle in the self review process if it is used thoughtlessly and the use of jargon can be an instance of this. Sometimes jargon may not be understood by other teachers and its use may provide teachers with a sense of cognitive security that protects them from moving outside of their comfort zone to critically examine both the words they use and the way they may shape practice. In a study of early intervention teachers constructing a shared meaning of practice, one teacher claimed the process was unhelpful to her as she had lost her jargon as a result (Cullen, 2009). This anecdote highlights the importance of dialogue about authentic situations and events, so that teachers cannot retreat to the safety of abstract theories and

words about which naïve and superficial agreements can be made (Moss & Dahlberg, 2008). This example may also be perceived as an example of the anxiety felt from ‘lost innocence’ (Paris and Lung, 2008).

At times the teachers in this study similarly adopted professional jargon. It was especially evident at the beginning of the process in some of the personal philosophy statements, in the meaning map and in the list of competencies. Teacher 2 used the term “*meeting the needs of children*” uncritically at one point and was challenged by the other teachers. Although she stated at one point that having her teaching scrutinised was “*just such a hard thing to do!*” Teacher 2 did begin to reflect on the words that she used and to choose them more carefully. She stated in the final interview that reflecting critically on the language she used to articulate her philosophy was the most significant learning she had gained from the process, and was something she would take with her into teaching situations in the future. Her supervisor (Teacher 4) confided to me that the formative assessment Learning Stories that she completed on children’s learning after the research was completed showed greater depth and detail as she had moved beyond educational jargon to describe the child’s learning in a more thoughtful manner. This indicates that if teachers are placed in the situation where they are expected to articulate personal philosophy and examine their practice, including their use of language, they can rise to the challenge and benefit from it.

As a component of the self review process, the teachers were asked to reflect critically on the meanings associated with specific words that they use to express their philosophies and theories. The findings in relation to the teachers’ dialogue

about competence indicate the teachers found this challenging and they varied in their response. As previously noted, the teachers did construct a deeper and more complex interpretation of the term competence as they considered cultural competency as well as the competencies that disabled children may possess that are different to those of other children. Teachers also started to view interdependency, in contrast to independency, of children as a sign of competency. It was evident that their concept of competence became deeper and more complex as a result of new insights and understandings. Hence I feel one of the most important factors to enable the successful completion of a self-review is a willingness for teachers to participate in reflection on the language that they use to talk about learning and their own teaching. This includes an awareness and understanding of the nuances of language used to articulate teaching practice and this may require them to move beyond their comfort zones to gain a fresh understanding and a greater awareness of their practice. I feel that this willingness would be encouraged if teachers were given more recognition for their expert professional knowledge (I-theories of practice) and so relied less on jargon associated with the expert knowledge of others and which may be meaningless with reference to their particular context.

The culture of the centre in this context was also conducive to the teachers engaging in dialogue. Other researchers have accentuated the significance of this factor as a workplace culture that is not supportive forms a barrier that stifles dialogue. One work-place culture that inhibits critical reflection and open dialogue, for example, is an 'argument culture' where discussion consists of a rigid two-sided debate where only one can be right and neither side reneges.

(Fook and Askelund, 2007). Interestingly, Malaguzzi (1998) and Rinaldi (2006) believe that some degree of conflict is important to critical thinking, and cannot, and should not, be avoided, so that how the conflict is dealt with is the important point. Hence, if a culture of respect exists, the differences of opinion are seen as a chance for mutual engagement and further learning. They would then be viewed as an ‘opportunity for learning’, not ‘an argument’.

The importance of dialogue highlights the importance of listening. Listening is an essential ingredient for the success of self-review as it transforms an individual monologue into an intersubjective discussion. In this way, listening can be considered a prerequisite to any form of learning in a social constructionist sense. We cannot construct our understandings and I-theories in isolation; in order for a theory to exist and be legitimised it needs to be narrated and listened to by others (Rinaldi, 2006). An emphasis on the importance of respectful relationships and dialogue highlights the importance of listening. Listening can be viewed on several levels: the concrete act of listening so that what has been said by another can be heard and answered; listening to one’s inner voice in the form of a thought or reflection; and listening to others to denote sensitivity and openness to ideas other than one’s own (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007; McNiff, McGeady, & Elliot, 2001; Rinaldi, 2006). The success of this research and self-review as practical philosophy depends on all these forms of listening being present.

Listening in the first sense is a straightforward technical exercise where one person’s speech is transmitted to another’s mind through the ear (Dahlberg &

Moss, 2005). This form of listening can be structured into self-review by setting ground rules about participants talking or reading from their journals one at a time (hooks, 1994). By ensuring that listening at this concrete level is occurring, a foundation for the other two levels of listening is made possible. Listening in a metaphorical sense is complex and has many dimensions. To listen to oneself requires a conscious effort to make time to reflect in depth and sometimes to articulate these reflections in a journal or a discussion. In the case of busy teachers reflecting on their practice, it demands that a professional attitude is taken where the time is deliberately put aside to listen and reflect. In addition to this, it requires listening to others, to their ideas and opinions, as a sign of respect and willingness to co-operate, as well as recognition that others have a right to hold views that contradict one's own. As Rinaldi (2006) says:

“It means listening to the differences (what we refer to as the pedagogy of listening) but also listening to and accepting the changes that take place within us, which are generated by our relationships, or better, by our interactions with others. It means letting go of any truths we consider to be absolute, being open to doubt and giving value to negotiation as a strategy of the possible. All of this means – or more precisely, can mean – greater possibilities for us to change, but without making us feel displaced or that we have lost something” (p.140).

The teachers in Reggio Emilia, recognize that, while listening can be difficult, it is considered a prerequisite for any learning. If the conditions for listening are present, it is easier for those participating in the dialogue to feel comfortable to express their views. Accepting that changes will take place within individuals and groups ensures that it is acceptable for participants to change their philosophies, to back-track on their opinions, or to contradict themselves, and that this is not regarded as a sign of weakness, but as a sign of new learning. In

this research, throughout the discussion process there was no effort to bring about a consensus by the end of the study. At the conclusion of the process, the teachers were not all “coming from the same place” as there were still as many differences in attitude and opinion as there had been at the beginning of the process, but a greater understanding of the reason for the differences created more empathy amongst the teachers – *“It has also had an impact on teamwork because you also know where everyone is coming from”* (Teacher 2, final interview).

Fook and Askeland (2007) observe another barrier to critical reflection in the workplace is a culture of silence that can construct teaching as a private activity so that open dialogue about it is avoided. A culture of silence is characterized by individualism, where collaborative action is avoided and each individual stoically persists with difficulty on their own; and by secrecy, where self-disclosure is avoided and mistakes are covered up. If these features exist in an early childhood centre, the synergy that can result from collectivism and inter-dependency of a team culture is lost. In contrast, a workplace that is conducive to critical reflection would be one that acknowledges the importance of personal experiences, opinions, values and emotions (Fook & Askelund, 2007): in other words, a workplace that values dialogue about practical philosophy. This reflective workplace culture can be supported by a culture of listening and a measure of emotional maturity, rather than one of confrontation. The findings of this study in relation to language, dialogue and listening indicate that the culture and the practices of the centre were conducive to critical reflection. The absence of a culture of silence in the sense outlined above indicated that it was also conducive to dialogue about teaching practice. However, I became aware of a

different aspect of a culture of silence when I was facilitating the process of reflection and dialogue: that is a culture of silence that allows stillness and space for reflection; for time to gather one's thoughts and form a thoughtful response. I think this culture of silence is one that many early childhood teachers would welcome.

Valuing, Respect, Caring and Trust:

The teachers spontaneously commented on their shared values concerning their relationships and how these values contributed to their positive experience of and engagement in the self review process. This finding is strongly supported in other research. For example, Meyer, Ashburner and Holman (2006) state that for teachers to feel confident enough to participate in self-review where they engage in dialogue and may experience discomfort, a respectful caring attitude must exist that ensures teachers are not so threatened that they are rendered silent (Stark, 2006). Teachers need to be trusted to form their own interpretations of practice in a way that is meaningful to them so they can control and own any shift of thinking (Dewar & Sharp, 2006). Moreover, nervousness may not only arise because teachers feel intimidated to express their own views, it may also arise from not wanting to upset anyone else:

"I remember going home from this meeting and hoping what I said – nobody had taken it personally...As what we did was pull apart each other's philosophies (which are very personal) – questioning, challenging etc."

(Teacher 1, Reflective
Journal 6/4/07)

As evidence suggests that teachers may find it daunting to express these personal philosophies, for a review based on practical philosophy to be successful, it is essential that teachers care for, trust and respect one another, including their

respective opinions. The findings suggest that these values were present. For example, Teacher 1 wrote in her reflective journal:

“I guess the research was about taking a risk as sharing your personal philosophy is a risk in itself. Sharing our DVDs with our colleagues was another risk and I guess it comes down to the relationships and trust that you have with the people involved in the research.

(Teacher 1, Reflective journal 14/8/07).

The significance of these values has been emphasized in several related studies. Turnbull (2005), writing about the factors contributing to student teachers’ agency while on practicum, states the importance of a positive learning environment, empathetic and supportive teachers, being accepted and valued as a team member, and effective team and collaborative practice. Fleet and Patterson (2009) similarly write about the necessity of creating an emotionally safe space for the “risk-taking inherent in professional disclosure” (p.20). Teacher 4 summed up the importance of mediating the risk involved by stating that because a safe environment had been created, the teachers were more likely to participate in a similar process in the future.

Commitment to reflection and dialogue-based professional learning:

The findings suggest that the teachers’ backgrounds and existing views and values meant that they were already favourably disposed to this approach and that it was supported by the centre’s professional leader. The significance of having supportive leadership and culture is emphasized by Fook and Askeland (2009) who state that if critical reflection in a group is to be successful care must be taken to establish an enabling culture to support it and that this requires more than managerial or supervisory leadership. It requires leadership that encourages professional growth and learning within an organization and that supports an

organizational culture of reflection, discussion, shifts of thinking and openness to change. In the context where this research took place, such leadership existed. Ellinger and Cseh (2007) also conclude that long-term leadership within the organization is needed to support the culture of professional learning and inquiry as well as to set the tone for respectful dialogue, listening and critique of practice.

The teachers believed in the worth of professional learning that involved critical reflection. Each teacher had previously been observed and had participated in such professional learning as part of *an advice and guidance programme* to obtain teacher registration and the supervisor encouraged reflection within the teaching team. Thus, the teachers' professional qualifications and experience laid a foundation of familiarity and confidence on which to build further reflection. The culture within the centre also reflected the view that although procedures and regulations were the basis of daily practice, they were not the main focus of daily practice. An excessive emphasis on compliance and accountability to the regulatory framework is seen as detrimental to critical reflection on practice. (Fenech, Sumison & Shepherd, 2010; Paris & Lung, 2008).

The teachers were also willing to invest time in the process although they recognized that time was often difficult to find for such activities. McGee and Lawrence (2009) state that time is a challenge that takes many guises, which includes time for teachers to collaborate together and time for an outside facilitator to work with them. This is a factor that has also been discussed in related studies. Mitchell and Cubey (2003) collated evidence of the organizational factors in early childhood centres in Aotearoa New Zealand which

supported pedagogy and effective learning outcomes for children. One of these was that teachers need time for reflection and discussion. Mitchell and Brooking (2007) conducted a survey with a representative sample of 610 early childhood services to provide an overview on how changes in the sector are affecting early childhood services, and what the main issues and challenges were for these services. These researchers found that the respondents in their survey stated lack of time was one of the constraints to reflective practice. Searle (2008), who investigated teachers' use of non-contact time (time away from teaching) in education and care centres in Aotearoa New Zealand, found that while teachers themselves had an idealised view that non-contact time could be used for collaboration, professional growth and renewal to enrich teachers' understanding of their pedagogy to enhance children's learning, management had an industrialised view that perceived this as time for completing administrative tasks linked to compliance. With reference to Australia, Edwards and Nuttall (2009) state that most early childhood teachers lack resources, such as time, to support their professional learning, while Fleet and Patterson (2009) similarly conclude that finding time and space for collaborative reflection remains a challenge.

In contrast, Walker (2009) describes the professional learning that she facilitated with a group of play therapists in the United Kingdom. This group put aside an hour a week to meet and discuss their work. To ensure the time was spent productively, the group had to carefully structure a rota of participants to be responsible for the tasks needed to make full use of the hour. Each member of the group took it in turns to bring a typed observation based on their work which was read aloud, and then discussed by the group. Walker states that this process

offered emotional support for therapists, and provided formative feedback which assisted them to form new understandings of practice. The weekly meeting also acted as a form of quality control where the group could challenge either institutional practices, based on policies, or individual practices founded on prejudices, with a view to improvement. Walker sums up these three functions of the group as restorative, formative and normative, and feels that such a group process not only facilitates professional learning but also helps to shape the professional identities of the group members. Rinaldi (2006), by contrast, states that the teachers in the preschools of Reggio Emilia schedule two and a half hours a week specifically for the staff to have meetings, during which they debate and reflect on teaching and learning. All of these examples indicate that structural factors can have significant positive or negative impact on the ability of staff to reflect on their practice.

The centre where this research was carried out closed at 4.00pm daily so the teachers were able to meet from 4.00pm-6.00pm for the discussions. In childcare centres in the greater Auckland area it is not unusual for centres to open at 7.00am and close at 6.30pm. The teachers in these centres work either an early or a late shift. In such contexts, finding time to meet when teachers are not tired and hungry is always difficult. Many staff meetings held in early childhood centres dwell on the practical housekeeping aspects of operating a centre, so dialogue about teaching practice and forming a shared understanding of practice rarely takes place. This indicates early childhood education centres would need to make a deliberate effort to put time aside if such dialogue were to take place on a regular basis. I feel that although this presents difficulties for management, it is not impossible to find creative solutions to this problem if time to review practice

is considered a priority. Hence, creating the space for critical reflection and self-review such as this requires both structural support, such as time, as well as a willingness to engage in the process.

Professional Identity

The teachers' readiness and willingness to engage in this approach to professional learning suggested that it was compatible with, and contributed to, their sense of professional identity. At one point, Teacher 3 commented on how learning enriched their teaching: "*You could not stop learning and just stick at a job day in and day out*" (Teacher 3, Meeting 2, Monday 15th March 2007). Certainly, a range of initiatives have been taken in the New Zealand early childhood education sector which are intended to 'professionalize' teachers. The reforms recommended in the *Education to be more* document (Meade, 1988) ended the division between care (working in a childcare centre) and education (working in a kindergarten) that has caused a false dichotomy in other countries (Moss, 2006a) resulting in a split between childcare workers and teachers. In New Zealand, the requirement for a three-year qualification for early childhood teachers has brought about a subsequent rise in salaries so that pay parity with primary teachers has been achieved. The professionalization of early childhood education teachers has been further shaped by government policies (such as the 10-year strategic plan), government-funded professional development programmes (to create expertise in areas such as the introduction of learning stories and the use of ICT to enhance children's learning) and funding to support advice and guidance programmes for newly-graduated teachers to obtain full teacher registration. The professionalization of early childhood education teachers is continuing to be shaped by their need to fulfil the graduating

standards of the New Zealand Teachers Council (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2007) and to comply with the early childhood code of ethics (National Working Group, 1995).

All of the initiatives outlined are intended to ensure that early childhood education teachers become “professional” and their impact may be reflected in the finding that early childhood teachers, cited being highly paid, being competent, and being and having respectability when asked to define an early childhood education professional (Dalli, 2008), all of which mirror the outward signs of professionalism. However, it should be recognised that the image of teacher professionalism that is presented in the regulations and other documents of the regulating bodies such as the Teacher’s Council, present a particular view or discourse of a professional – that of accountability to an external standard (Urban, 2008). It is a discourse that is similar to the discourse on the technical form of evaluation that purports to demonstrate certainty, consistency and reliability; it is a method of quality assurance that is designed to shape a standard of practice. However there is a danger in allowing these standards to govern early childhood education teachers if they are solely used to assess a teacher’s compliance and conformity to external norms of practice (Appleby, 2010). This view is supported by others such as Blaise,(2009), Dalli and Cherrington, (2009), Edwards and Nuttall, (2009), Fenech, Sumison and Shepherd, (2010), Fleet and Patterson,(2009), and Urban, (2008).

Despite the moves towards professionalization, I feel that the role or identity of the early childhood teacher as envisaged by both the teachers themselves and society in general is still problematic. While early childhood teachers are aware

that teaching young children is specialised and is neither a baby-sitting or substitute mother arrangement, nor implementation of a scaled-down programme designed for older children (Ministry of Education, 1996), for many teachers the role expectations remain fuzzy. There is no longer a clear and certain image of the role an early childhood education teacher as new discourses evolve (Moss, 2006a). Early childhood education teachers are now taught to view children as active learners for whom learning should be actively facilitated. They are also encouraged to view the child through a lens of competency, rather than through the deficit lens of developmental milestones that a child needs to meet. However, what do these perspectives imply for the role of the teacher? In documents such as the national curriculum document, Te Whāriki, prescribed outcomes that can guide teachers' practice are not included, and although this is generally regarded as desirable by the early childhood education sector, it makes the document difficult to interpret from the perspective of the teacher's role. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of opportunities, help and time for teachers to construct their own guidelines through reflection processes (Cullen, 2003). While this lack of clarity about the image of the teacher has arisen, at the same time early childhood education teaching is being 'professionalised' by external agencies such as the Ministry, early childhood teaching is also being perceived as more complex and less fixed and certain by teachers themselves. Nuttall and Edwards (2009) state that *"the complex relational work involved in being an early childhood educator is something that must be learned, yet it is one of the most difficult aspects of educational work to understand and to teach"* (p. 136). The role and image of a teacher and a professional is also viewed as a complex social construction:

“What it means to act ‘professionally’ at any point in time is determined by a web of social, economic, practice and considerations. These influences and expectations change over time according to priorities and beliefs as to how best public services can serve their clients. This developmental feature of professionalism requires that practitioners continually examine their practice” (Ellis & Hancock, 2004, p. 230)

As a researcher and lecturer in early childhood teacher education, I felt confusion about the complexities of the early childhood education teacher’s role and for me this emphasised the important function that a self-review based on practical philosophy may play. Although a technical form of self review functions as a quality assurance method that ensures an acceptable standard of practice to protect the well-being of young children, it may also contribute to teachers becoming a mechanistic teacher-as-technician who lack agency (Appleby, 2010). This construction of an early childhood teacher could be counter-balanced by supporting individual teachers and groups or teams of teachers to engage in critical reflection and dialogue that is based on authentic situations and is context specific. Alternative views could be shared through deliberately creating opportunities for early childhood education teachers to discuss their role as constructors of practical philosophy and I-theories that directly pertain to the teachers’ immediate teaching context. Dalli and Cherrington (2009) endorse this view and also state that a new form of professional learning is required that emphasises the importance of care, relationships and wisdom as central to leadership in early childhood education.

Currently the prevailing view of early childhood education teaching epistemology is that knowledge is produced in academic institutions, is transmitted to early childhood education student teachers, and is then applied in

early childhood education contexts through teaching practice (Urban, 2008). Theory is linked or integrated into practice, but theory and practice are usually seen as discrete. To accept the social constructionist view that theories and knowledge are formed as people go about their daily lives, means that practice generates theory so the two become one and the same. The word pedagogy is often assumed to mean *teaching*, but in its true sense means working with people in a holistic and relational manner that makes no distinction between education, care or upbringing (Moss, 2006a). Pedagogy, therefore, highlights the interactive process between teacher and learner, and the learning environment which includes not only space and resources, but also the dynamic environment of family and community (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009). Reflecting this view, the self-review process based on practical philosophy was intended to prompt the teachers to interrogate those values and to reflect on their moral accountability to children and their families. The process necessarily involved reflection on professional identity and was valued from this perspective by the teachers. Thus, in their PMI feedback (see appendix 4) the teachers listed the following as positives: the opportunity to see and reflect on my own practice; the chance to make connections between philosophy (beliefs and values) and actual interactions with children and gaining insight into this; team-building, forging stronger relationships and better understandings of each other; and a time of fellowship, ideas, contribution and belonging. That the process facilitated the teachers in viewing their practice as more complex is also supported by comments in the *Interesting* section of the PMI feedback. For example, one teacher wrote “*Are there any true answers when there are so many perspectives*

and ways of seeing and doing?” and another wondered *“Are we all living researchers?”*

I suggest that an appropriate starting point for a discussion of practical philosophy or construction of I-theories are teachers’ understandings of pedagogy and the individual values that they bring to their pedagogy (McNiff, 2002a). This would begin a continuous process of dialogue and listening that helps the teachers construct a tentative professional identity that is always open to debate and reconceptualisation. This is a process that requires teachers to see their identity, in part, as a researcher and producer of professional knowledge: someone who is continually searching for deeper understanding and new knowledge of the ways that children’s learning can be supported. Research may involve collating evidence-based examples of practice that relate to a prescribed outcome, such as in a technical approach to self-review, but I feel teachers should also be encouraged to engage in open-ended inquiry from which there can be no certainty or final conclusion, but which will instead encourage further questioning. This is a self-review based on an approach of practical philosophy and in this process, practical wisdom is constructed and shared as teachers become experts of their own contexts (Nuttall and Edwards, 2009).

Teacher Agency

A disposition towards professional learning that involves ‘post developmental approaches’ has been associated with the notion of agency. There are a range of definitions of teacher agency. It has been defined as the capacity of the teacher to apply professional “knowledge, skills, understandings and dispositions in professional practice contexts” (Turnbull, 2004, p. 207). This meaning may be represented in the teachers’ reflections on their own sense of competence, or

agency when they were reflecting on the children's competency. For example teacher 4 observed that the

Competence can be a feeling that you create. So what I mean is, staff might have done some training, may have done some professional development, may have some skills, but may not project the atmosphere of competence. They may have read the theory, but they may not have the feeling inside them, so they don't project this to the children. It comes from a sense of being, it becomes an atmosphere (Teacher 4, Final Interview).

Paris and Lung (2008) consider agency is a sense of autonomy that is combined with moral responsibility and intentional action. Paris and Lung (2008) and Nuttall, Coxon and Read (2009) refer to teachers' individual and collective curiosity and persistence. Another perspective is that agency is not an individual attribute that is inherent in teachers; rather, it results from the position and location of teachers in relation to the cultural discourses that construct them (Fenech, Sumison & Shepherd, 2010). The structures (external factors, such as the position, location, and situation) of teaching and the agency of teachers are viewed as creating a complex tension (Nuttall, Coxon & Read, 2009). Paris and Lung (2008), who have investigated the relationship between agency and child-centred practices in novice early childhood teachers, state that a sense of agency entails a constant monitoring of, not only personal actions, but also the social and physical aspects of the workplace environment in order to assess both one's own and others' competence. Teachers who act with personal agency act with intention and moral responsibility to achieve goals that are meaningful to them. These writers think agency embodies an ability to see possibilities and alternatives, to use initiative, to be mindful and intentional. They believe that agency requires a capacity for self-reflection, self-regulation, and persistence. In other words, it involves using initiative in order to seek possibilities and

alternatives within the constraints of the context in which one is working. Turnbull (2004) states that agency is enhanced by teacher dispositions such as initiative, enthusiasm, professional confidence, collaborative practice, intrinsic motivation and professional commitment. This sense of workplace agency connects back to the paradigm of micro social constructionism that affords personal agency and where constructing alternative possibilities of practice is considered a discourse of hope (Burr, 2003). By refusing to be overly compliant or restricted by the workplace context, or to be constructed entirely by externally-formed stereotypes of early childhood teachers, is to engage in a *discourse of resistance*. In this research there were few discourses of resistance, but it was apparent that the teachers resisted the discourse of traditional female stereotypes as they saw themselves as being very competent in using hand tools and electrical tools and in carpentry in general. In addition, it was my perception as a researcher, that the teachers generally saw themselves as agentic within the context in which they worked.

The view that complex relationships exist between agency and structure has been addressed by Margaret Archer (2003) who is positioned within the critical realist paradigm. Critical realists adopt a realist ontology and a relativist epistemology. While acknowledging that critical realism is a different paradigm from the one that I am positioned in, Archer does offer a helpful lens through which to view what she refers to as *reflexive deliberations*. When people engage in reflexive deliberations, they have an inner conversation about how the world is and what their place is, or could be, in it – in this case, the world of early childhood education and their teaching role within that world. She believes that individuals are able to use personal powers such as language, intentionality and the use of

deliberation to construct personal agency within a context (Archer, 2003; Kahn, 2009). Archer also considers that there are individual differences in how people perceive and react to agential power and structural power and that these differences are reflected in their modes of reflexive deliberation. She identifies four modes of reflexive deliberation. Firstly, *communicative reflexivity* is evident when individuals need others to confirm their internal conversations before they act on them. Communicative reflexivity is supported more in a collaborative, rather than a competitive, environment. It depends on stable interpersonal relationships where teachers are able to share their thoughts. This mode of reflexivity may have underpinned Teacher 1's statement that she would have liked constructive feedback on her teaching and Teacher 2's indications that she wanted others to view her as competent. It could be presumed that communicative reflexives would benefit from a process such as the one outlined in this research as it would give them a legitimate opportunity to engage in dialogue and to 'sound out' others before making decisions.. The second type of reflexive outlined by Archer is *autonomous reflexivity*. In this instance no external endorsement is needed or sought because of the belief that the individual takes responsibility for their own actions. Teacher 1 demonstrated this when she wrote that she believed her teaching competence was intrinsic as it derived from the relationships she had with the children. For autonomous reflexives, work rather than relationships are the main concern of their deliberations (Archer 2003) and Kahn (2009) states that because those who engage in autonomous reflexivity are less reliant on others, they are more prone to change jobs, and thus contexts, to demonstrate agency, and so their deliberations become even more solitary. It could be presumed that autonomous reflexives might also contribute

to a culture of silence that inhibits dialogue on teaching practice amongst a team. For autonomous reflexives, to engage in regular dialogue about practice would reduce the isolation that may form a barrier to teach as a member of a teaching team, rather than teaching as a lone individual. The third type of reflexivity is *meta-reflexivity* which is apparent when individuals are critically reflexive about their own internal conversations and critical about subsequent action, so they stand as social critics and idealists. Although Archer believes that not many individuals sustain meta-reflexivity for long periods, she believes that meta-reflexives who do continually interrogate themselves and society are rarely accepting of the daily situations in which they teach. All of the teachers demonstrated glimpses of this when they talked about how important it was to have a high standard of support for children and their families. However, no teacher demonstrated this type of reflexivity consistently. It could be presumed that teachers would engage in this form of reflexivity more if they engaged in reflection and collaborative dialogue regularly and consistently over a longer period of time, but the idealism that results may prove difficult to enact. The last category Archer describes is *fractured reflexivity*, where personal distress and anxiety mean that individuals cannot conduct a purposeful internal conversation. Thankfully, none of the teachers in the research demonstrated this, but that is not to say that reflection on teaching practice would not ever cause fractured reflexivity. Taking care to create a trusting environment that supports teachers' sense of agency should reduce the likelihood of *fractured reflexivity* occurring, whereas extreme *loss of innocence* may exacerbate it. Archer's framework offers a further helpful perspective on the "life of the mind" (Archer, 2007, p.76) of teachers as they engage in reflection and could be drawn on in future research.

The preceding discussion points to the cyclical reciprocal relationship between critical reflection and agency and highlights how the agency of teachers may be supported by structures within the context (such as time, opportunity for dialogue) and or constrained by external structures imposed on the context (such as compliance to a regulatory framework).

Findings Three: A facilitator can play a constructive and supportive role in the implementation of a self-review process and develop their own ‘I-theory’ in relation to this role through an action research process.

My findings suggest that a supportive environment for reflection and dialogue was already in place to some extent and that my approach to facilitation further supported and encouraged this environment. The teachers in this study commented that they felt affirmed by having an external facilitator, and felt that it made it easier to express an opinion about sensitive issues, but also appreciated that it was someone who was known to them and familiar with their specific context. (See Transcripts of final interviews, Appendix 4). In this study, the previous relationships that I had built with the teachers proved helpful to establishing my credibility as a facilitator, and eased all of us through the initial awkward stages of the process. The teachers also mentioned in their feedback that having an insider to facilitate would not have given the process the same value as an outside facilitator did. Before the discussion began, I outlined a clear process to the teachers so that the participants knew what each meeting would involve. I also negotiated specific details with the participants as the process was underway.

My investigation of my I-theory of self-review, including its facilitation, leads me to both confirm and change aspects of my theory. For example, it confirmed

the importance of ground rules that were intended to help the teachers respect one another's contributions and no one person dominated, so those quieter individuals had the chance to contribute to the discussion. It also reinforced by view that the participants needed to feel cared for and to feel they were in a trusting environment, in order for them to contribute to the dialogue. The relationships that existed amongst the participants, and amongst myself and the participants, were an important influence on the process and my experience confirmed that my role should not include critiquing or challenging their teaching practices (Meyer, Ashburner & Holman, 2006; Stark, 2006). I was also confirmed in believing that by articulating and discussing the values that underpinned practice, teachers' awareness of their own and others practice would be enhanced in a way that could be seen as improving practice in a qualitative way. I was confirmed in my belief that this in turn led to personal and professional growth and greater respect for colleagues. With respect to new insights, I found that an important part of the facilitation process was use of *wait time*, as it was often after a long period of silence that the participants gave the most thoughtful answers. I learnt to value the silence that created a space for teachers to reflect. I also found that if teachers were given the chance to reflect and discuss their philosophy in a caring manner, they were able to create their own shifts in thinking without needing the pressure from an outside facilitator challenging them in a way that made them feel overly anxious. It seemed as if the group process of reflection, being filmed, and the subsequent discussion of the video was enough for teachers to critique and realign their practice to their philosophy.

My findings are supported by findings and conclusions offered by other researchers. For example, Mitchell and Cubey (2003) state that skilled, knowledgeable and critically aware external facilitation is one of the factors that can support professional development. This requires the facilitator to possess a strong theoretical, content, and pedagogical knowledge base, have excellent communication and relationship skills; be a reflective thinker and practitioner themselves; and be able to mentor, model, provide feedback, challenge, and model reflective thinking. Fleet and Patterson (2009, p. 21) believe that facilitators play a key role in *“scaffolding experiences as well as providing additional information and resources along the way and assisting closure at key journey points...”* They also consider it is important for facilitators to be able to share their knowledge, support the people involved and to understand that participation will lead to learning.

Literature refers to learning that is ‘socially constructed and socially embedded’ (Ellinger & Cseh, 2007) such as in this research, as workplace learning, which can be formal, informal or incidental. Ellinger and Cseh researched behaviours of facilitators that employees believed helped them to learn. The behaviours that they identified that I relate to my own facilitation are providing feedback, observing, listening, seeking knowledge or additional insights from others as needed, sharing materials and resources, using examples, removing obstacles, broadening perspectives, and being a role model. Ellinger and Cseh reported that these facilitator behaviours made participants feel affirmed, helped them to understand the power of collaboration and sharing, and assisted them to build better relationships. The contrasting view is that an external facilitator is less effective than an in-house facilitator because they are not familiar with the

context so an external facilitator is unable to give long-term support to new understandings of professional practice (Timperley, 2008). In this instance, however, I did have had prior familiarity with the context and was known to all the participants. In addition, I felt that an external facilitator assisted the teachers to understand and follow the intended processes and it allowed all teachers to participate equitably as one teacher did not need to facilitate as well as participate. I note that in the preschool of Reggio Emilia, facilitators are drawn from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences so that an alternate viewpoint is offered that challenges participants in the review process to evaluate their practice from a fresh perspective.

Revisiting self review: My I-theory of self review

Since beginning this study I have reflected on self review as an approach of practical philosophy and for me this on-going questioning of my own assumptions has continued throughout the writing of this thesis. This has involved reflecting on how I facilitated the research process, my role as a teacher educator, and my views on self-review in general. I now revisit those reflections and the assumptions I made earlier about self-review so that I can document my current understandings.

I began this research by thinking that if early childhood education teachers reviewed their practice by participating in a process that was meaningful to them and that provided them with an opportunity to reflect on and talk about their personal philosophies of practice with others, it would lift their self-esteem and sense of professional worth, resulting in an improvement of teaching and learning practice to benefit children. I considered self-review as practical

philosophy to be more democratic for the teachers and, as it relies heavily on dialogue amongst teaching teams, it presents the possibility that teachers can collegially construct fresh perspectives on teaching and learning that take account of the diverse perspectives of many voices (Moss, 2007). I assumed that if such perspectives were listened to with respect (Rinaldi, 2006) it would lead to an alternative form of criticality (Burbules & Berk, 1999). I thought that if practice was viewed as being complex and multi-layered, it would enable teachers to see more possibilities for children's learning. I was eager to implement a process of self-review as practical philosophy as I thought it preferable to other forms of self-review for the depth of thinking it would forge.

In contrast, I was sceptical about technical forms of self-review. These forms of self-review are based on the evaluation of quality indicators that have been formed externally. As such they often function as a governing mechanism that is intended to normalise early childhood education teachers behaviours. The evaluation process typically consists of observing a teacher's external behaviour to judge whether it meets the externally prescribed standard (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007) as outlined in the accountability requirements. This approach to self review has often been termed a quality assurance system, where evaluation is considered a values free, technical exercise involving the use of prescribed measuring techniques (Dahlberg & Asen, 1994). I believed that as technical self-review processes are usually constructed externally, they do not take into account the context to which they are to be applied. As a consequence, this form of self-review would lack integrity and authenticity. Indeed, rather than being values free, it ignores the values of teachers and centres and imposes instead an

alternative set of managerial values. Early childhood education centres could meet the externally prescribed criteria by observing and documenting behaviour linked to criteria, but those criteria are unlikely to include the intangible attributes of the teachers and the early childhood education centre which are less easy to observe or set criteria for, but are no less important. These attributes consist of abstract notions such as the importance of relationships, respect and equity.

Since completing this research process my thinking has shifted so I have revisited my assumptions about self-review. I deliberately chose an early childhood education centre to complete a self-review of practical philosophy that had an existing culture of professional learning and respect, where there were four qualified teachers willing to participate and where the working day finished early so that teachers had time to engage in discussion and reflection. The centre had been undertaking self-reviews for a number of years, so all the participants had an understanding of the purpose and processes that might contribute to a successful self-review. Still, the teachers experienced nervousness and difficulty, especially at the beginning of the research and professional learning processes. This suggests that not every teaching team would immediately and readily cope with this approach to reviewing practice; instead of lifting self-esteem the approach may contribute to feelings of inadequacy and defensiveness.

In addition, I have revised my assumptions about accountability. The two key purposes of self-review are stated as improvement of practice and accountability to ensure that legal requirements are being met (Ministry of Education, 2005). I

previously thought that this meant demonstrating compliance. I realise now that I had a very one dimensional view of accountability, by which I viewed it as the price of achieving professionalization. I understood that accountability measures had partly been introduced as a precaution against government funding being spent inappropriately, especially in the case of profit-driven early childhood centres that may use the funding for the accumulation of greater assets (Mitchell, 2002). Hence, my understanding of accountability was associated with the notion of compliance to the regulations. Since completing this study, I am more aware of other dimensions of accountability. Vico, as far back as 1725, understood that expression of personal opinion and accountability are linked. He believed that we are each able to express why we do what we do, and because we live in a social world, we are mindful of the expectations and feelings of others because we wish to remain part of the social group in which we exist, rather than be ostracised from it. Teacher 1's wish not to offend anyone is an example of this. In Vico's opinion it is through participating in a group that social order and moral worlds are constructed (Schotter, 1981). It is through participation in these moral worlds that accountability is constructed. Similarly, Goodard and Leask (1992) point out that accountability is only effective if it is linked to responsibility. If people feel responsible they unconsciously try to improve, whereas if the sense of responsibility is missing, they will only make a token effort. So these authors believe that accountability requires understanding, because *"evaluation that does not increase insight and understanding is unable to inform the learning process, which is at the heart of change and improvement of quality"* (p. 156). Goodard and Leask feel that it is the responsibility that teachers feel to the children they teach and their colleagues that creates moral and professional accountability,

whereas compliance to regulations forms contractual accountability. The former sense of accountability was apparent in the teachers' response to the self review process which called for openness, trust and cooperation, and ultimately concern for children's' learning. As an outcome of that accountability, the teachers in this study reported that they valued the improvement in teamwork that followed from a better understanding of where their colleagues were coming from as well as new insights into the concept children's competence they perceived as a result of the review process. They also appreciated that they understood where their colleagues were coming from. I feel that if early childhood education teachers had more opportunities to participate in reviews of practical philosophy, they would build greater collective responsibility for the children they teach and more responsibility for collegiality and well-being amongst the teaching team. I also realise from my own participation in the research that part of the moral accountability is a preparedness to scrutinise one's own practice in order to identify the aspects of it that constitute a living contradiction. More fundamentally, I also now understand the need for both forms of accountability to be present and to complement the other. My research also lead me into literature concerned with personal agency and the different perspectives that teachers may adopt with respect to their own agential power and structural power which have implications for their sense of personal accountability. I now recognize that teachers may hold varying views about their capacity to respond to and possibly resist messages about accountability that emanate from external sources.(Archer, 2003) Some may adopt a *discourse of resistance* that reflects micro or light social constuctionism (Burr, 2003) and that deliberately avoids adopting a culture of over compliance that is detrimental to reflective practice

(Fenech, Sumison & Shepherd, 2010; Paris & Lung, 2008).The teacher's individual views about personal agency also have implications in turn for the way they conceive of and go about constructing their professional identity. Defining agency as autonomy combined with responsibility and intentional action (Paris & Lung, 2008) is associated with the view that autonomous professionals are able to form their own standard of professionalism (Cullen, 2009; Dalli & Cherrington, 2009).

Although I feel that the practical philosophy approach to self-review is very worthwhile, nurturing a culture of inquiry through collaborative professional learning is likely to be a necessary prerequisite. I feel that teachers may not initially engage in deep reflection and dialogue, but may retreat to the safety of educational jargon and clichés. They may also not go beyond their first thoughts and taken for granted ideas about situations and experiences and their own actions (or inactions), to critically examine underpinning beliefs, assumptions and values, and to generate and evaluate their own solutions to their own problems (Haigh, 2000, p.92)

For this reason it is important that a leader or facilitator who is sensitive to the feelings of the participants leads the process, but that the process strives to move teachers beyond the clichés to explore the depths of their own thinking about practice. Many early childhood education centres may not have access to a leader with the practical wisdom or skills to facilitate the process. The research participants in this study reported that feeling comfortable was important, so a self-review may need an extended period of dialogue before teachers feel confident to voice their personal theories of practice. Similarly, as it was the

prior relationships with the centre that allowed the centre staff and me as researcher to feel comfortable with each other, the nature and length of the relationships of those involved in the self-review process must be considered an important factor. This point is highlighted by the teachers at Reggio saying they have been engaging in such discussions for forty years, and the teachers from the Stockholm project stating that four years is not enough to achieve lasting changes in practice from this kind of reflective dialogue (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007). The frequent staff changeovers that are the norm in many early childhood education centres in the Auckland region are likely to create a serious impediment to the success of this approach.

Because of the factors outlined above, I have had to revise my assumptions about an approach to self-review that is based on practical philosophy. I still believe it is very important to be aware and open about the values that shape practice and to continually reflect on these. I consider reviewing practice through a process of dialogue and listening to be an ideal approach that, if conducted by teaching teams, enhances practice in a way that will ultimately benefit children. I think it would contribute to a greater sense of moral accountability being formed amongst the teachers within a team. I also believe that supporting early childhood education teachers to view themselves as researchers of their own practice assists them to revisit and reflect on that practice. However, I feel that in some contexts for some teaching teams this task may be overwhelming. When this is the case, I feel that teachers may need to first participate in a structured self-review that utilises some features of a technical self-review, in the way White (2004) encouraged family day care educators to reflect on set performance indicators.

My assumptions about a technical form of self-review have been similarly revised. I regarded technical self-review as a form of surveillance that indicated a mistrust of teachers (Codd, 1999) that would result in disempowerment. I now consider that if used with respect for the participants, a technical form of self-review can provide information that forms a foundation of certainty to give both families and teachers assurance that an acceptable standard of practice exists. This is particularly so if the aspect of practice being reviewed is one that is technical, such as health and safety issues or building regulation compliance. I can now understand that the technical form of self-review can be a way to facilitate teachers' wider consideration and discussion of the purpose and process of self-review. This in turn may increase teachers' confidence in their ability to engage in the reflection and discussion that involves a self-review approach of practical philosophy.

In summary, I now accept that my earlier assumptions about technical self-review and self-review based on practical philosophy outlined at the beginning of this research to be somewhat naïve and simplistic. Both forms of self-review are valid ways to examine practice depending on the context, the participants, and the nature of the review question. Many forms of self-review or evaluation exist and all can be usefully employed to improve practice. Moss and Dahlberg (2008) claim that the different forms of evaluation can be likened to different "languages of evaluation" (p8) and that the complexities of the world that we live in consist of different perspectives based on different paradigms of understanding. These necessitate that we exist in a "multilingual" world of evaluation. Once the purposes and values that underpin each approach are clearly understood, one or

other approach, or a blend of both approaches can be successfully implemented based on a clear choice of “the evaluation language” that is most appropriate. It may also follow that what is a valid choice now may not be feasible at another time.

However, there is one assumption about self-review that I still firmly believe – that is, that if self-review is only instigated by early childhood education teachers to meet externally prescribed accountability and compliance requirements it is a hollow exercise. I feel that whatever approach is used there must be honest intent and critique from all involved, as it is the authenticity of these intentions and the willingness to participate and learn that will bring about the improvement to teaching practice which will ultimately result in the growth of practical wisdom and thinking teachers who can better support children’s learning.

Considered from another perspective, as Ellis and Handcock (2004) have stated, what it means to act professionally at any one time is determined by social, economic and political discourses that shape and govern teaching practice. Self-review is one part of this complex process. It is a result of government policies that complemented the regulatory framework, Government policies change as governments change. It is important to reflect on whether early childhood teachers should engage in the process because it is a worthwhile process that benefits both teachers themselves and young children and their families, or because it forms part of a government policy. Although policies and regulatory framework provide a common point of reference for early childhood teachers, they make no allowance for development of I-theories of individuals, or we-theories amongst groups of individuals or to explore the connections between other theories and practice through a process viewed as meaning-making or

professional learning. Similarly, policy requirements do not encourage agency or the growth of professional identity. So, this leads me to ask myself, for what reason would I sustain the social construct of self-review? The reason must be that becoming a reflective professional helps teachers to make sense of the situation they are in so that they feel more confident and competent as individuals and as teachers, and so are better able to support children and their families. In so doing each teaching context would become a site of situated learning, a dynamic community of learners, who construct and reconstruct learning and teaching.

“Indeed, it could be said that reflecting on practice is now an essential part of the practitioner’s role in the 21st century. We say this not because of Government’s directives or because a Government agency thinks this will enhance the practice of the workforce. We say it because this is what practitioners are saying they are more than capable of doing. It is our contention that practitioners have active and lively minds, and not solely technocrats who gain skills and competencies. They have a basic disposition to make sense of experience, investigate it, care about others, relate to children and adapt to their physical and cultural environment. What is more, they can engage with others, compare, contrast and deepen their understanding if encouraged to do so” (Reed and Canning, 2010)

There are two further important outcomes of my reflection on self review. First, it has led to engage in *linguistic shading* on the word self-review itself. I now think that the word requires modifying. I recall Fetterman (1996) viewing accountability as looking back and empowerment evaluation as looking forward. I think self-review that involves contractual accountability to the regulatory framework should be called review. However, as there is never only one person involved, the word *self* is misleading, and should not be used. Fetterman termed the function of gaining understanding to guide the future as *empowerment*

evaluation. My perception is that this is a function that builds *moral accountability*. I also would state that the understanding that is formed as a result could be better termed *professional learning* that would build each teacher's professional identity in a way that is context specific.

Second, I have much greater appreciation now of the complexity of this approach to professional learning, and which is apparent in the number of personal and structural factors that influence teachers' experience of and involvement in the process, and in the interactions between these factors which are distinctive for each teacher. This awareness has implications for how I would introduce and facilitate the approach on a future occasion. For example, I would be more aware of the different ways that individual teachers can respond to reflexive deliberations and discussions with colleagues, as well as being more aware of the influence that the facilitator may, or may not, have on the process. I also think that I would place more emphasis on the learning that the process would afford and the opportunities it allows for teachers to shape their own identity, both personally and professionally, as researchers into their own contexts and practices.

Summary

In this chapter I have presented and discussed the main findings. The research confirms teachers' positive response to the professional learning approach that I facilitated. It has also highlighted a range of personal factors, such as anxiety, and structural factors, such as time, that impact on teachers' ability to engage in this approach. The influence of language, listening, and silence, as well as the culture of the context and relationships between the teachers and with myself as facilitator, were also reflected on. Additionally, professional identity and sense of

agency were also discussed as factors that might both influence teachers' response to the approach, and be affected by it. An alternative theoretical lens, originating from critical realism, was introduced to the discussion to demonstrate that individual reactions to critical reflection can vary.

The role of the facilitator was also discussed, as were the precautions that facilitators may need to instigate to ensure that the process is successful. Finally, the consequences of this research for my I-theory of self-review, including my shifts of thinking that occurred as a result of this research, were outlined.

Chapter 8: Current reflections

Although it is usual to complete a thesis with a chapter titled "conclusion", I have instead chosen the title of "Current reflections", as it is in keeping with the social constructionist paradigm (Moss, 2006b). As Teacher 4 stated *"I think what was highlighted for me was that it doesn't stop. You have triggers that make you discuss with staff about competence and practice"*. My intention with this study was not to form any fixed generalisations about self-review in early childhood education, but to explore and discuss an alternative approach to self-review based on practical philosophy completed in a specific context so as to make visible the understandings and interpretations of those immediately involved in the process. In so doing I feel I have made a contribution to both scholarship and practice. Few details of how early childhood education centres have implemented a self-review process, or whether self-review was considered useful, have been

published. It is hoped that this research will provide details of a process that could help guide other centres by focusing on the rich, thick data of one early childhood centre engaging in a self-review approach of practical philosophy.

As noted in the previous chapter, I reflected on the term self-review and concluded that the meanings likely to be associated with it did not represent the overall purpose and the nature of the activities associated with the process that I assisted the teachers to engage in. Rather, that process represented an approach to ‘collaborative professional learning’. While I have made this personal shift, the term self review continues to be used New Zealand early childhood education documents. In the following concluding reflections on those statements I have retained the term self review, but also recommended that it be modified given my critique. I feel that the term “*review*” should be used to refer to a centre reflecting on specific past practice, and that the term “*self*” should not be used as it is confusing and misleading, as the process never involves one person alone. I feel that if a teaching team is involved in reflection and professional dialogue, it should be termed professional learning. I also feel that this should include an acknowledgement that professional knowledge is being constructed as an integral part of the process.

Reflections on my original contributions to scholarship

In completing this research I have reflected on the original contributions to scholarship that I have made. I will outline these succinctly below.

- I have developed an original model of collaborative professional learning that has its paradigm foundation in micro social constructionism, involves teachers in processes of reflection and conversation about practical philosophy; is intended to encourage and support teachers’ development of I-

theory and we-theory through an action research process that focuses on possible contradictions and may lead to changes in values, professional identity and sense of agency as well as new perceptions and possibilities for teaching practices. When used in such contexts as an early childhood centre, the approach can enable teachers to articulate and further develop their personal philosophy and negotiate the collective philosophical values on which to base their teaching practices, including their standards of practice. The approach is democratic in the sense that no one individual is perceived as any more expert than any other.

- The overall research design was original in that three interrelated perspectives on a model of professional learning were investigated concurrently. Thus, teacher, facilitator, and prevailing policy discourse perspectives were considered. The research findings provide a holistic account of personal and structural factors that can influence teachers' response to such an approach to professional learning, and also provide insights into the complexity of interactions between these factors as they influence the professional learning lives of teachers.
- The research investigation, from a designer/facilitator perspective, was based on the action research approach of McNiff and Whitehead (2006) living values approach, and extended its use from a self-study by an individual to use by a teaching team. This innovation of the living values approach demonstrates that it can be adapted for use in a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) as the process demonstrated that participation in this form of self-review promoted professional learning for both myself and the teachers.

In addition to the original contributions to scholarship, this research constructed new possibilities for teaching practice in early childhood education. These are outlined in the remainder of the chapter.

Current reflections on the sphere of self-review

The three documents distributed by the Ministry of Education on self-review outline two broad purposes – the first is to ensure teaching practice meets accountability to the legal requirements; the second is reflection on teaching practice so that it can be improved. Although I previously accepted both these broad purposes as a result of my reading and thinking throughout this research I now view both purposes in a more complex way.

By meeting the purpose of accountability, self-review can be perceived as a governing mechanism to establish norms of practice that reach a standard. Although this approach has been criticised by some as not being respectful of teachers' integrity (Codd, 1999, 2008; McNiff, 2003; Moss & Dahlberg, 2008), I feel that in the current context of Aotearoa New Zealand, a self-review approach that aims to normalise a higher standard of practice for teaching children aged zero to five is justified. I make this claim based on the need to protect the well-being of very young children who spend as long as fifty hours a week in early childhood centres for the first five years of their lives. I am also mindful that in many cases early childhood education centres are now regarded as business enterprises where children are the profit-making commodity (Scherer, 2009). As a society there is a responsibility that these young children are protected, rather than exploited for profit, so to enforce accountability to a prescribed standard is

desirable. However the term accountability can mean more than compliance to the regulations that have been externally formed (contractual accountability), it can also mean acting with integrity in a way that is respectful to others and improving relationships in that particular time and context (moral accountability) (Goodard & Leask, 1992). It is possible to advocate for accountability that serves both functions. As a result of this research, I am now more aware of the difference between contractual accountability and moral accountability, as well as more convinced of the importance of both to ensure that the standard of early childhood education teaching improves.

The second purpose for self-review outlined in the documents is to improve teaching practice. The terms “improve” and “teaching practice” can both be deconstructed to uncover a variety of underlying values and assumptions. Improvement can be seen as a linear progression where teachers move closer to an externally prescribed performance outcome that can be measured quantitatively and can give a certain fixed result. Once again, it is hard to argue against early childhood teachers meeting a normative standard and striving to improve practice, but I believe that improvement should not only be viewed in this linear way, but should also be considered qualitatively where teachers gain a deeper understanding and fresh critical insights into aspects of teaching practice, both individually as teachers and collectively as a teaching team.

Similarly the term “practice” cannot be taken at face value. Practice can be regarded as the application of teaching strategies, as applying theory to practice, as gaining experience in teaching, or as actually generating theories from the

lived experience of teaching. I think it would be empowering for early childhood teachers to understand that while their teaching practice is informed and shaped by the theories they have learnt while studying, they are also continually generating their own theories of practice. (Whitehead, 1989). Such theories reflect values and judgements that determine an aspect of practice that often remain invisible, so I believe a moral obligation exists to scrutinise them in the same way that a contractual obligation scrutinises the policies that determine the observable aspects of practice. I think, in order to make the concept of moral accountability more tangible, it is useful to perceive practice as containing three elements: actions (what I do), explanations (how I account for what I do, including the values I espouse), and reporting (how I make explicit for myself and others what I do and why I do it). (McNiff, 2007). A focus on these three elements provides a framework to support early childhood education teachers to articulate their practice in a meaningful way that avoids the overuse of educational jargon that can lead to notions of practice becoming fixed or entrenched. Additionally, regard for moral accountability would highlight that the ultimate intention for teaching practice is to support children's learning, so this must also be an important consideration when reviewing practice (does my teaching practice support children's learning?).

The definition and understanding of the word "practice" that is accepted by each teaching team largely determines the form a self-review would take. I therefore think that an integral part of a self-review process includes a discussion of questions such as why the review is being undertaken, what purpose it is serving, what values underpin it, and what the key terms of the review mean to the

participants. While reflecting on what has been outlined in the documents, I still recollect Anne Meade's address (Start Right conference, September 20-22 1995) when she stated that when more teachers become thinking teachers children's learning will benefit. I think this is a sound justification for a self-review that is clearly stated and for believing that self-review must always involve each participant engaging in some form of reflection on teaching . A self-review that only focuses on demonstrating how compliance has been met may not provoke teachers' thinking to the same extent.

At the beginning of the research I stated that in general self-review could be either a technical exercise of measuring compliance to an externally formed criteria, or an exercise of practical philosophy and meaning-making. I thought the first approach would only ever demonstrate compliance to reach a minimum standard as it would not encourage teachers to reflect deeply on their teaching. I therefore supported the implementation of the second approach as I regarded it a superior approach. I now consider that the two approaches to self-review, while being different, are complementary. If a centre has little experience in self-review, a technical approach to self-review may be the only feasible method for a centre to use as the structure of such a review provides clear guidelines for a teaching team to follow. If the externally formed criteria are reflected on, interpreted and discussed amongst early childhood education teachers to reach a shared understanding of practice, I now see that the two approaches can be blended. I also consider my previous opinion that a technical form of evaluation would only result in compliance, while the approach of practical philosophy would result in thinking teachers, to be somewhat erroneous. If early childhood

education teachers follow externally prescribed criteria for teaching without reflection on these, it is unlikely that they will become thinking teachers. If, however, teachers reflect on external criteria, they could form a frame of reference on which to base a valuable discussion on practice. Similarly, if teachers never move beyond jargon and clichés to articulate and discuss both philosophy of practice and the values that underpin this, they will not become thinking teachers, so the potential for a self-review approach of practical philosophy to result in fresh insights could be lost.

It would be insightful for early childhood education teachers to understand that self-review is not a term that should be taken for granted, that it is not neutral, and it can be understood from multiple perspectives (Moss & Dahlberg, 2008), each of which has its own epistemological and political value base (McNiff, 2003). I now understand that self-review can take many forms, each of which has a purpose and none of which is any more valid than the other. I consider it is important for early childhood education teachers to deliberate on which approach is suitable for their context, the participants involved, and the issues to be reviewed.

Self-review or evaluation has been described as a language (Moss & Dahlberg, 2008), and in a diverse multilingual world early childhood education teachers need to be encouraged to ask “In this self-review what evaluation language is being spoken? Whose language is it? Who does this language benefit? Who may be silenced? What may remain invisible?” Although these are difficult questions that many may initially struggle to answer, but by grappling with them teachers

would not only develop critical thinking and form fresh insights gained from a greater depth of thinking, but would also gain a sense of autonomy and mastery from the self-review experience. For early childhood teachers to be able to choose an approach and to fully understand why the particular approach has been chosen is to acknowledge their autonomy and professional capabilities.

I have described self-review as “empowerment evaluation” (Fetterman, 1996) as I felt it should be conducted by autonomous professionals in a constructive empowering manner. Since completing the research I ponder on the implications of the word *self* in self-review. There has always been confusion amongst early childhood teachers as to whether *self* implied self study, or whether *self* meant that the review was conducted internally within each centre. I now consider that becoming an autonomous professional not only affords empowerment and rights, but also implies a measure of responsibility. This responsibility includes a commitment to a review that aims to do more than demonstrate a superficial inquiry into behaviour, but that it also requires some introspection. For this reason, I now consider an essential component of self-review is that each teacher involved in it should scrutinise their own practice and the values that underpin it to ask “How can I improve my work?” (McNiff, 2002a). This involves acknowledging that professional knowledge is not “out there”, but is of our making as it exists in our hearts and minds, and so it is within our power to be able to improve the context that immediately surrounds us. Neither I nor the teachers who were involved in this research always found it easy to do this, but I feel that doing so is to be ethical and assists professionals to build moral accountability and self-regulation, as well as a sense of agency. I have come to

realise that by then extending the process to include discussions with others, the dialogue becomes transformational (Rinaldi, 2006) as it changes relationships, understandings and interpretations both within each participant and amongst the group. So, I now feel that whatever form of self-review is chosen, it is essential that it includes an element of self-study based on respectful dialogue and listening within the community of practice. This is an ideal and is probably difficult to prescribe in policy documents, but I feel it is an ideal worth striving for.

Reflections on the teacher's sphere

Early childhood education teachers have undergone a decade of rapid professionalization that has impacted on their professional image and identity. In the midst of global economic uncertainty, it is very hard for anyone to predict what the future may hold and what conditions early childhood education teachers of the future may need to contend with. I feel it is timely that the early childhood education sector considers carefully the teachers they want to shape for the future. Are teachers who reach an externally prescribed standard of competency enough? Or is it also important to shape thinking teachers who are able to combine competence with practical philosophy so that practical wisdom is developed? I consider an emphasis on standards of competency and a content knowledge base to meet short-term needs only. By forming and reflecting on practical philosophy and engaging in dialogue to discuss this philosophy, teachers would enhance their professional image with new dimensions – that is, to profess, or state the values that underpin their practice, and to demonstrate how these are integrated into their practice. (McNiff, 1999). With an unknown

future and constant social change the competencies and the knowledge base of teachers may need to evolve significantly. For this reason, it is more important to nurture teachers who are self-aware and who are able to blend a professional knowledge base with thoughtful action so that sound decisions are made about children's learning. In the future practical wisdom may become an important professional attribute – one that is more easily able to meet the changing demands of early childhood teaching.

Practical wisdom requires us, as a profession, to not only acknowledge, explore, and support professional learning of content knowledge, but also those aspects of practice that are usually hidden (Goodfellow, 2003), but that form strong personal theories that define practice. (Malaguzzi, 1998). These aspects of practice are the values that underpin that practice without which it is impossible to make an educational judgement. (Whitehead, 1989). Evidence elsewhere (Cullen, 2003, 2009; Fler, 2003; Goodfellow, 2003; Nuttall, 2003), as well as in this study, indicates that at present teachers struggle to articulate personal philosophy. However, both the teachers in Reggio Emilia, and the teachers in this study, demonstrate that it is not an impossible task; it is a matter of making this a priority. If time is put aside on a regular basis, teachers can build this capacity, along with the construction of a culture of respectful and caring listening. So, although I no longer think that approaches to self-review can automatically be classified as appropriate or inappropriate, I remain convinced that a self-review based on this approach is a worthwhile undertaking. I feel it is an approach that potentially can be adopted more widely.

I believe this form of self-review, as well as developing a capacity for practical wisdom that would prepare teachers to face unknown challenges and form a basis for thinking about teaching practice, would also forge a new professional identity for early childhood education teachers. By constructing a personal philosophy, each teacher would gain awareness; by sharing it with others the individual teacher would be affirmed, and by participating in dialogue, listening and respecting each other's personal philosophies a teaching team would be able to contribute to joint action that was democratically decided on.

From a pragmatic perspective, the teachers in this study remarked that participation in this self-review approach of practical philosophy made a marked difference in the workplace relationships and the respect (as opposed to tolerance) with which they interacted with each other. This feature alone must be considered an improvement in practice.

I also am more aware now that a community of practice at all levels is a result of negotiation, rather than a result of policies to be complied with. If the participants in the community do not feel a moral accountability to the policies that are imposed on them, they are not likely to embrace them wholeheartedly. The democratic process of dialogue and negotiation may bring an alignment of both internal moral accountability and external contractual accountability. I feel if that early childhood education teachers who are reticent to engage in self-review are made aware of the importance of both forms of accountability they may be more willing to undertake a self-review. If, on the other hand, teachers do not perceive its relevance in their immediate context, they are less likely to plan

and participate in a review. Writers on self-review (Wansbrough, 2004; White, 2004) have noted a reluctance by early childhood education teachers to participate in self-review; this may be because they do not regard it as meaningful and relevant to their practice, but see it as just an accountability measure to some outside agency that takes time but contributes little to their work. I believe that if opportunities were made available for early childhood centres to reflect and discuss their practice in meaningful ways as a teaching team, this reluctance may dissipate.

Reflections on my own sphere

The section above outlines my reflections concerning self-review in early childhood education and the knowledge which has been constructed as part of the research process that may inform others in the early childhood education sector. However, it also behoves me to document reflections on my learning since embarking on this research, and to acknowledge the powerful lessons that I learnt throughout the research process.

Like early childhood education teachers who take refuge in educational jargon, at the beginning of this research, I took refuge in the literature. I read about concepts and used terms verbally, such as ‘social constructionism’, ‘accountability’, ‘self-review’, ‘community of learners’ as described by various authors in the academy, but I now realise I lacked a deep understanding of some of these terms. Many of the powerful lessons I have learned derive from my developing greater criticality regarding these terms. I have now constructed fresh perspectives of them.

I realised, of course, that early childhood education teachers had practical knowledge that was specific to their context, just as I have practical knowledge about the context where I work on a daily basis. However, I realise now that I regarded theory and practice as separate entities. Without thinking deeply about it, I took for granted that theory belonged on the high ground of abstract formal thinking, while practice was stuck in the swampy lowlands. (Schon, 1995). I now see that practice and theory are not separate entities, for practice is already theoretical (Lenz Taguchi, 2007) as living educational theories and discourses are being constantly formed, reformed or abandoned. By documenting and reifying what it is that we each do, and how and why we do it, we are creating living educational theory (Whitehead, 1989). Formerly I used the phrase *“linking theory to practice”* with the early childhood education students whom I teach; I now regard theory and practice as integral to and inseparable from each other.

Similarly, I am now more aware that ‘social constructionism’ describes the relational, experiential aspects of learning that have often been seen as subordinate to the academic aspects of learning. I have a deeper understanding of how important respectful relationships, dialogue and listening are to the learning process, and to the well-being and smooth functioning of early childhood education centres, and workplaces generally. It is the experiential and relational aspect of learning that affirms us as individuals. It also builds another facet of professionalism for early childhood education teachers as it is through dialogue (professing what we believe) that we build our own identities, as well as building a strong early childhood education community of practice. As a colleague and a

member of the wider professional early childhood education community, I will strive to similarly build respectful relationships through listening, dialogue, and negotiation that aim for greater personal and social understanding, while accepting that sometimes dissention is needed to challenge and transform thinking.

I understand too that the term “*community of practice*” (Wenger, 1998) is more than a descriptive term. A community of practice performs the important function of melding each participant’s individual practice into shared professional practice through interaction and discussion. In an early childhood education context, it is by constructing an authentic community of practice to engage in dialogue to build a shared understanding of practice that a solid foundation for children’s learning is formed. Conversely, if teachers only ever approach teaching in an early childhood setting as an individual pursuit, the teaching and learning that each child experiences may be disjointed and piecemeal, and the teaching team may never reap the benefits of team synergy that can result from greater understanding of each other’s values and practice.

Since completing this research, I value the renewed understanding of accountability I have gained. Schotter (1981) interpreting the ideas of Grammaticus Vico (1688-1744) suggested that the world that is external to us is experienced in a different way than the world in which we directly participate, so participation in a social world that is of our making forms an accountability that is separate and different from the external accountability to which we each need to legally comply. Vico explained that the accountability from our social context

arises from wishing to remain in favour with the group, but I feel that a sense of moral accountability also comes from having built respect and understanding for the people that we interact with each day. Vico explains that as individuals construct and shape the cultures in which they participate, they become self-regulating. Wenger (1998) similarly feels that by participating in a community of learners a sense of accountability to our colleagues is built. Early childhood centres must make a deliberate effort to construct and shape cultures of respect, as by feeling respected and valued as individuals, early childhood education teachers will be more easily able to respect children and their families. It is by sharing stories with each other, by engaging in dialogue, respectful listening and negotiation of meanings about our everyday existence that we form a connection with those people with whom we continually interact, and through this connection we construct a sense of moral accountability. From a personal perspective, as a result of this research, I had a powerful lesson myself in the moral accountability that derives from relationships. Since completing the data collection, I am compelled to complete the research in the best way that I can, as I am accountable to the four early childhood education teachers who gave up their personal time to meet with me.

Apart from a deeper and more complex understanding of these concepts, through this process I also recognise the importance of self-study. I understand that improving my practice involves more than reading articles and attending conferences. Improving practice involves scrutinising the values that underpin what I do and that define how I interact with others. I now feel a greater moral obligation to reflect and review my own practice as a teacher educator in the

institution where I am employed, as a colleague, and as a member of the early childhood education community in general. I feel that as society changes and the demands of early childhood education change, my self-awareness also needs to be continually refined. In order for this to happen, I must be comfortable in being challenged by others and to accept that I must challenge myself by crossing borders.

As a teacher educator, I now have a renewed commitment to building reflection, discussion and listening amongst the students in each lecture. I will be more careful to check that I have not resorted to transmission of theoretical knowledge only, but will strive to facilitate a process where students are supported to express their subjective viewpoints, to listen respectfully to others, and to reflect on their teaching so as to become thinking teachers. I consider that the term “*thinking teacher*” should not only be interpreted as thinking about academic knowledge, but also thinking to gain self-awareness, awareness of the importance of relationships with other people and thinking about the everyday experiences of being a teacher.

Finally, I realise that like early childhood teachers who struggle to express their personal philosophies, at the beginning of this research, I struggled to articulate my personal philosophy of self-review in early childhood education. I also resorted to the clichés and jargon of evaluation terminology that avoided confronting my own thoughts and “putting them out there”. By participating in a process that began with the hesitant use of taken for granted terminology, I have now constructed a deeper understanding of the meaning of those terms. As Vico

explained, knowing something through direct participation (knowing why it is as it is) is a deeper sense of knowing (Schotter, 1981). Through conversations and dialogue with colleagues, supervisors, early childhood education teachers, and, most importantly, the participants in this research study, I have moved beyond the clichés to find my own voice to express my beliefs. It has made a huge impact on my thinking to realise how sometimes quite an incidental comment or conversation has resulted in a transformation of my thinking.

Recommendations

Based on the reflections of self-review in early childhood education, particularly that of practical philosophy, outlined in this research, I wish to make the following recommendations for the early childhood education sector to consider:

- That early childhood education teachers are supported to engage in regular self-study of their teaching practice so that children's learning may be extended and enhanced.
- That early childhood education teachers are supported to articulate their personal philosophies of practice so that they develop an awareness of the implicit values and beliefs that underpin practice. This should be a way for teachers to find their own voices and develop agency, rather than rely on educational opinions. Although this recommendation has implications for teacher educators, it also has implications for centre managers and supervisors, and for the teacher mentors who are responsible for the advice and guidance of newly qualified early childhood teachers. I believe it is important that this is a continuing process as philosophies of practice evolve with experience.

- That, complementary to the first recommendation, the skills of negotiating philosophies of practice amongst teaching teams should be nurtured. This requires that such teams be supported to engage in respectful dialogue so that a culture of listening is formed.
- That self-review be considered as a regular form of professional learning instead of only being discussed as a system of governance to check whether teachers comply with the regulatory framework. This change may remove the resistance to self-review that presently exists towards self-review in the early childhood education sector.
- That teachers are not only encouraged to participate in self-review as a form of external accountability, but are also encouraged to delve beneath the taken for granted assumptions of self-review purposes and processes. It is important for early childhood education teachers to be aware that there are many forms of self-review, each having its own epistemological, methodological and political assumptions that should be made transparent. Expertise and understanding is required so that early childhood education teachers are able to choose the form of self-review that is most appropriate for the topic.
- That the early childhood education sector not only review teaching behaviour, but also teaching beliefs and values. It is important that the early childhood education sector accepts that reviewing practice should not be confined to behaviour, but should also be concerned with reviewing values, and the personal philosophies that underpin practice.
- That early childhood education centres prioritise making time to discuss and negotiate practical philosophy. The result of this need not be an

emphasis on everyone thinking alike, as diverse opinions should be welcomed, but it should result in teachers gaining a greater understanding of each other's practice – why they each do what they do.

- Finally, and pragmatically – that a greater use of videoing teaching practice in early childhood centres is explored. This is an uncomplicated method of allowing teachers to step outside themselves to view their own practice in their everyday teaching context and so should enhance reflection on practice.

Limitations to this research

This research provided rich thick data from a case study at one centre with four teachers who undertook a self-review based on practical philosophy. This section outlines the limitations to this study. The first is that because it is a qualitative case study of one early childhood education centre, the results cannot be generalised. The reality we constructed throughout the research process enabled the teachers to view children's competence with new understanding, and created a greater self-awareness of their teaching practice and personal philosophies within their specific context. It also demonstrated that reviewing practice using an approach of practical philosophy is a feasible approach. In other contexts at other times a different perception of teaching practice and self-review would arise from similarly structured discussions, so it is impossible to generalise or make broad assumptions based on this research.

Secondly there were limitations within the context and the process of this research. The aspect of practice chosen to look at in-depth was one that was

common to all participants' philosophies and that the teachers agreed was important. This shaped the dialogue and the findings that followed. However, what if an aspect had been chosen that the teachers had differences of opinions about? The teachers all reported in their performance appraisal that being involved in the research process was the highlight of their year. Would they have reported this if we had chosen an aspect that they strong differences in opinion about? What if we had continued for a longer period of time with the process? Would it still have been judged so favourably? What possibilities and new directions would have evolved if another phase to look more closely at the shared philosophy had been facilitated? All of these additional questions indicate that the findings are very specific to the situation, the time and the context in which they occurred.

Thirdly, I am aware that the research process was planned so that each teacher was filmed individually, and each teacher's practice was viewed on an individual basis. The teachers did discuss their individual philosophies and construct a meaning-map of the commonalities and points of differences, but, in retrospect, the emphasis was on the individual as part of the team. It was a limitation of the research that a greater emphasis was not given to the collective philosophy and the collective practice of the team, and that there was not more discussion focused on this. To facilitate a process that focussed on collective practice of a team is be an area for future study.

Fourthly, in the final discussion, Teacher 4 stated that self-review was not completed in isolation from other influences within early childhood education

that provoked teachers to reflect on their practice. Two additional important influences are the external reviews conducted by the Education Review Office, and the impact on practice of pedagogical documentation in the form of Learning Stories. The first influence refers to the fact that the Education Review Office changed its method of reviewing early childhood education centres to include questioning each centre about self-reviews they have completed. This has forced many early childhood education centres that may have otherwise avoided them, to undertake some form of self-review. I feel the reports of the Education Review Office have a huge potential to shape both the philosophies and goals of early childhood teaching practice, by establishing an expectation for regular self-review. The influence on self-review that the external reviews conducted by Education Review Office had on the centre that participated in this research was not explored and is a limitation of the study.

Fifthly, the importance of the formative assessment method of Learning Stories has been emphasised by the Ministry of Education by funding professional development courses to introduce these to early childhood education teachers. Kei Tua o te Pae, the assessment for learning project (Ministry of Education, 2004) describes assessing children as “*noticing, recognising, and responding*” (p. 6). As the data in this research indicated, what each teacher notices, recognises and responds to depends on their personal philosophies, values and self-awareness. Teachers bring their own socially constructed lens with which to observe children. This research did not include looking at learning stories to see how personal philosophies of practice impacted on the writing of the learning story, and therefore the feedback given to the child and the family. Learning

stories are also promoted as a way of documenting teaching and learning to enable early childhood education teachers to reflect on and review their practice. I feel that as documenting formative assessment of children's learning in this way is now an important part of practice, it is a limitation of this study that the influence the writing of these has on practice was not included in some way. The impact that both these important influences have on teaching practice and self-review is worthy of future investigation.

Finally, while self-review based on an approach of practical philosophy was successful in this instance, in another context the process may have been very different. I ponder what it would be like in a context where not all of the teachers were fully qualified? Or a context where the teachers all had differing philosophies? Or in a context where everyone had a set philosophy such as Steiner or Montessori? Most of all I ponder on whether I would have been able to facilitate the process as competently in a context where I did not have a prior relationship with the participants.

Summary

I began this research by thinking that if early childhood education teachers reviewed their practice by participating in a process that was meaningful to them, it would lift their self-esteem and contribute to greater job satisfaction and professional worth, as well as improving teaching practice in a way that benefits children. I was mindful that if only external behaviour was reviewed, it would not result in teachers gaining self-awareness of the personal theories and implicit

knowledge that shaped their teaching. I thought that a self-review based on a technicist paradigm would not succeed in improving teaching practice, if such a review was completed solely for accountability purposes. This concern was the starting point for my inquiry into self-review.

I found that although the teachers initially experienced difficulty in expressing their individual philosophies, negotiating a collective philosophy, being videoed, and putting their practice “out there” for scrutiny, they all later gave feedback that participation in the research was the highlight of their year. I found that by engaging in the discussions and reflecting on both self-review and my own daily practice as a teacher educator, I have gained fresh insights and a new depth of understanding both my teaching practice and the notion of self-review. I feel that reviewing teaching practice by examining personal philosophies and the values that shape teaching is a worthwhile undertaking. As Teacher 1 said in her reflective journal, it is a risk, but it is a risk worth taking.

It is my hope that by documenting the rich thick data of how one early childhood education centre engaged in self-review based on an approach of practical philosophy, awareness will be constructed of an additional language of evaluation that other early childhood centres can use. I hope that early childhood education teachers will understand that while it is not always comfortable to have ones practice scrutinised, it can be a constructive form of professional learning that results in personal and professional growth. I believe that if early childhood education teachers grasp opportunities for dialogue with colleagues who value a culture of respectful listening as a way to connect with others then a community

of practice will be built that ultimately benefits the children and families with whom we interact on a daily basis.

Throughout 2007, on wet winter evenings, when the meetings with the teachers were taking place, I was often concerned that I was encroaching on their personal time and was worried that participation in the meetings may have been an imposition rather than a pleasure. On my last visit to the centre to conduct the final interviews, the teachers handed me a card. Inside it said: “*Thanks for the journey!*” As it was a journey we undertook together, in return I would like to thank them.

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Appendix 1: Consent forms and information sheets

Consent form for Management



Research Project: Self-review in early childhood education: A New Zealand case study

Early Childhood Centre Management

I/We give permission for Anne Grey to approach the early childhood teachers in this centre who have expressed an interest to be involved in this project.

I understand that involvement is voluntary, and that confidentiality regarding the name of the centre and the staff will be preserved in the final report and any subsequent publications.

Signed.....

Name.....

Date.....

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 25th September 2006 AUTEK Reference number 06/176

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Consent form for Participants



Project title: Self-review in early childhood education: A New Zealand case study

Project Supervisor: Neil Haigh

Researcher: Anne Grey

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 25th September 2005.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I/We give permission for Anne Grey to approach the early childhood teachers in this centre who have expressed an interest to be involved in this research project.
- ☐ I understand that identity of my fellow participants and our discussions in the group is confidential to the group and I agree to keep this information confidential.
- ☐ I understand that the group discussions will be video/audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that the interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that I will be videoed while teaching.
- ☐ I consent to allowing artefacts (programme plans, assessment of children and documentation of children's learning) to be used as part of the data collection where relevant.
- ☐ Understand that all artefacts and data collected will be stored securely, used only for the research and destroyed on completion of the research project
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature:

.....

...

Participant's name:

.....

.....

Participant's Contact Details :

.....

***Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 25th
September 2006 ATEC Reference number 06/176***

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Information sheet for the participants



Information sheet

Project title: Self review in early childhood education: A New Zealand Case study

Researcher: Anne Grey

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project. The details of the research project are outlined in this sheet.

Purpose of the study:

This research proposes to examine self-review in early childhood education. It does this by asking teachers to articulate their personal philosophy of teaching and to discuss this with the other teachers in the team. They will then be videoed while teaching and a further discussion on how the philosophy is reflected in the teaching will take place.

What happens in the study:

Teachers will be asked to write about their philosophy and then discuss it with their colleagues. The purpose of this group discussion will be to form a philosophy that represents the teaching team through reflection and dialogue. It will form the basis of a collective philosophy. A visual representation of the collective philosophy in the form of a meaning map will be made as a reference point for further discussions.

The teaching team will then choose one aspect of their philosophy that they wish to explore further. Each teacher will be videoed in turn, so that the teaching team can reflect and discuss how the teacher's practice does and does not reflect the collective philosophy. Each teacher will be given a reflective journal so that they can record thoughts and reflections between meetings. These may be shared as part of the discussion. Any photos or documentation of the children's learning that has relevance to the discussion topic may also be used in the discussion.

When each teacher has been videoed and a discussion of their practice has taken place, the researcher will collate a journal of the process that the centre can keep as a record of self-review.

After the completion of the process, the researcher each teacher will reflect on the process individually, and in a group to gain their insights and perspectives on the review process.

It is anticipated that the research project will take from 6-8 months. The researcher will conduct a monthly meeting with the teaching team. The following data will be collected:

Individual reflective writing: At the first and last meeting each participant will write a reflective piece on their individual philosophy of teaching.

Meaning-map: This will be formed in a group discussion and may be referred to throughout the research.

Reflective journals: Reflective journals will be kept both by the researcher and by the participants.

Teaching and Learning Stories: Although they are not formed specifically for the research project, they may sometimes be relevant to the aspect of practice being researched.

- **The transcripts** of the dialogue that takes place in the discussion groups. These will be analysed using the NVIVO programme.
- Any **digital photos**, with comments on their significance, that the group may wish to include.
- **Audiotapes** that have been taken of group discussions. These will be transcribed by the researcher and analysed by the above process.
- **Videotapes** of teachers practice. These videotapes will be used as a basis of discussion by the teachers.

Before being included in the final research all transcriptions will be returned to the teachers involved to check for accuracy.

Participants concerns

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor:

Anne Grey

Phone: 09-921-9999 ext: 7231

E-Mail: anne.grey@aut.ac.nz

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTECH, Madeline Banda, madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 8044.

This research is approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on the 25th September 2006
AUTECH Reference number 06/176

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix 2: Participants profiles and philosophy statements

Teacher 1

Profile Sheet

Name: (Teacher 1)

Write one sentence to describe the centre you work in: Non profit, mixed aged community centre.

Have you ever worked in any other centre: Yes

Childcare

If yes, please select from the list below and specify how many years experience

Kindergarten

Childcare – yes.

Nanny

Family Daycare worker

Primary School Teacher

After school hours care - babysitting

Special Education Worker

How many years have you worked in early childhood education in total?

10 years

What motivated you to choose early childhood education as a career?

Interest in children's development.

Enjoyed working with children and families

A belief in the importance of early childhood education

Do you have any mentors or role models who have guided your development in early childhood education?

The present supervisor.

If yes, what have you learnt from them?

A dedication for ongoing learning

Professionalism

How to implement theory into practice.

Please list all your professional qualifications

Name of qualification	Date completed	Name of Institution
New Zealand Nanny Certificate	1996	AIT
Diploma in ECE and care	1997	AIT
Diploma of Teaching (ECE)	2002	TOPNZ

Summarise the three most important individual experiences, either past or present, that have influenced your development as an early childhood teacher:

1. Realising that I can learn from and alongside children, rather than always being the teacher.
2. 2.Recognising the struggle many immigrant families have settling into New Zealand's society and culture
3. My on-going work with children, parents, teachers and the wider ECE community has developed my personal and professional confidence.

In your professional development are there any particular areas of development that are significant to you? Are there any areas that you feel are a strength or an area of specialisation?

Working with children and families with English as an additional language
Passion for working with families and supporting parents

Write one sentence that summarises your beliefs about the following:

In relation to the teaching and learning environment I believe that:

The learning and teaching environment should enhance children's sense of belonging, individuality and holistic development.

In relation to how children learn I believe that:

Children learn when their interests are acknowledged and scaffolded through their interactions with the environment, peers, parents and teachers.

In relation to my role as a teacher I believe that:

It is to be nurturing, encouraging children to be confident, independent learners, secure in their sense of self through listening, co-constructing, observing and role modelling.

In relation to the programme I believe that:

It should be emergent – following the children's lead and building on strengths and interests.

In relation to my interactions with children I believe that:

I build strong reciprocal relationships through observing and listening, supporting and respecting children.

In relation to my interactions with families I believe that:

Through being at crèche for 9 years I have built strong reciprocal relationships with families.

In relation to my interactions with colleagues I believe that: I am a team player, who is able to both accept and follow guidance as well as provide support to colleagues in a professional manner.

In relation to my interactions with the community I believe that:

Through teacher registration, professional development, visiting students and lecturers, networking meetings, I have built relationships with the wider ECE community.

In the future what professional goals would you like to achieve?

1. Continue working with students and work on articulating practice, giving reasons that link to policies and theorists.
2. I would like to further my knowledge in ICT.

Philosophy Statement: Teacher 1

I believe in the fundamental right of the child to a childhood where there is a time to dream, learn, and grow in a nurturing place surrounded by warm caring people.

I recognise that children are competent learners and that the curriculum arises naturally from child/children and child/adult interactions as well as their interests and those of parents, staff, and the surrounding environment.

I recognise that children are competent learners and that the curriculum arises naturally from child/child and child/adult interactions as well as their interests and those of parents, staff, and the surrounding environment.

I believe in an environment that celebrates the enjoyment and the importance of childhood in a welcoming, happy and relaxed manner, and where open communication and involvement with children, parents, and staff is welcomed and encouraged.

I believe in recognising the individuality of each and every child and in providing a play based programme that allows the individual to learn and develop holistically at their own pace.

I acknowledge and foster the bicultural awareness proposed by the treaty of Waitangi and believe that exposure to a variety of ethnic backgrounds, ages, genders and children with special rights will enrich (ed) the knowledge of each child.

I understand the importance of creating partnerships with families/whanau and with the wider community. I acknowledge, celebrate, and incorporate the cultural diversity of the families within our community and aim to create a place where children and their families feel respected, secure and supported.

I believe the importance of updating skills, knowledge and keeping up with current thoughts and practices through professional development.

Teacher 2

Profile sheet

Name: Teacher 2

Write one sentence to describe the centre you work in: A non-profit sessional mixed age centre with qualified teachers supporting children and their families so they feel valued, competent and competent.

Have you ever worked in any other centre: No

As a relief teacher for an agency.

If yes, please select from the list below and specify how many years experience

6 months

Kindergarten

Childcare On-going babysitting for my sister.

Nanny 2 years overseas

Family Daycare worker

Primary School Teacher 6 years

After school hours care Kip McGrath (tutor) 2 years

Special Education Worker Teacher Aid – 2 years

How many years have you worked in early childhood education in total?

1 year

What motivated you to choose early childhood education as a career?

To continue my tertiary education, to work with younger children with a recognised qualification, to work with younger children as I developed a fascination with the way they learnt.

Do you have any mentors or role models who have guided your development in early childhood education?

No although through my study I have great respect for particular lecturers, J.R. and D.H.

If yes, what have you learnt from them?

Passion and respect

Professionalism for the ECE sector

Please list all your professional qualifications

Name of qualification	Date completed	Name of Institution
Diploma of Teaching (Primary)	1991	ACE, Epsom
Graduate Diploma In Teaching in ECE	2006	The University of Auckland

Summarise the three most important individual experiences, either past or present, that have influenced your development as an early childhood teacher:

1. Going to African schools and kindergartens and seeing what can be done with little resources

2. Believing in a partnership with families and children that wasn't always there in the primary sector because of the pressure of tests and workload
3. Playing with children with a belief that children “ learn through play”.

In your professional development are there any particular areas of development that are significant to you? Are there any areas that you feel are a strength or an area of specialisation?

Going to the ULearn 06 ICT conference in Christchurch where all sectors of education met. I believe in ICT for all and making sure that ECE is involved in this.

Write one sentence that summarises your beliefs about the following:

In relation to the teaching and learning environment I believe that:

Teaching and learning is intertwined in that children and teacher are both learning and teaching from/ with each other throughout the day.

In relation to how children learn I believe that:

Children learn through play and learn where there is an inclusive programme where individual choice and decision making is made by children.

In relation to my role as a teacher I believe that:

I need to be a provider, supporter, guider, observer and collaborator throughout my working day as well as a listener and a positive role model for the children.

In relation to the programme I believe that:

There is a need for a balance between structure, routine, play, free choice and mat time.

In relation to my interactions with children I believe that:

Children are competent and capable and my interactions with them need to acknowledge this so they feel confident and enthusiastic to try out new things.

In relation to my interactions with families I believe that:

We work in partnership as learning begins at home. By extending learning of the child in ECE and explaining how children learn through play, families will keep informed.

In relation to my interactions with colleagues I believe that:

One needs to listen to others, work as a team member and player, reflect on our practice and programme, be open to change and new ideas.

In relation to my interactions with the community I believe that:

We need to raise the profile of the ECE sector so that the community at large understands we are not just “ carers” or “babysitting”.

In the future what professional goals would you like to achieve?

Masters in Education

Teacher 2: My personal philosophy

“A child’s like a piece of paper on which every person leaves a mark.”
Chinese Proverb

I value the importance of the home environment, family and culture and believe that by working in partnership with parents and families each child will grow in their emotional, physical with the skills and strategies to take the next step in their learning and social development. Learning begins at home and by extending the learning in early childhood the foundations will be laid for successful future learning. I believe my role is to provide a child with the skills and strategies to take the next step in their learning so that these experiences will carry them through into their lives as adults.

It is important to understand and acknowledge the differing needs, rates of development, backgrounds and interests of students. I believe all children then will be given the opportunity to develop to their full potential so that opportunities to learn are not limited by age, gender, ability or cultural background. It is my role to see potentials rather than problems, and strengths rather than weaknesses, so that each child is respected and treated as an individual.

I am interested in the whole child and believe that education should provide both social and life skills as well as a comprehensive information base and the skills to access it. A positive environment is an important prerequisite to this and by fostering a positive self-image in every child they will be enthusiastic, eager and confident to try new things without fear of failure. By encouraging and scaffolding children to try out new things for themselves, to work and play alongside with peers and adults, the child then learn from others, develop self-esteem, become socially competent, share with peers and be able to look after themselves, others and the environment.

A child has an innate desire to explore and discover, which I will foster and encourage with play and learning situations with a child’s Need (*this was later contradicted and changed to right*), strength or emerging interest. (*I will accept that sometimes children simply need to play and that other times the play will lead to teaching*) and learning experiences which will be engaging, absorbing, interesting and challenging so that both the child and I will have a meaningful and satisfying day while exploring our options, capabilities and interests. To achieve an inclusive programme where individual choice and decision –making by children are important so that the child learns independence, pursues their own thinking and takes responsibility for their own learning is important to me.

I am committed to not only the learning of children but to my own learning so I believe in reflection upon my own teaching practice. I need to be many things at different times, provider, supporter, guider, observer and collaborator but what I always want to be is a listener and a positive role model, to care, empower and be a catalyst for young children, so they realize and achieve their potential. I want to inspire and be inspiring. I believe that we can learn and teach through play leading to teaching.

Teacher 3

Profile Sheet

Name: Teacher 3

Write one sentence to describe the centre you work in:

Have you ever worked in any other centre: Yes

If yes, please select from the list below and specify how many years experience

Kindergarten

Childcare

Nanny

Family Daycare worker: 2 years respite care for foster families and families under stress

Primary School Teacher

After school hours care

Special Education Worker

How many years have you worked in early childhood education in total?

5 years in Playcentre as an involved parent

5 years as educator – part time + 1 year part time

What motivated you to choose early childhood education as a career?

Becoming involved in Playcentre with my daughter I found a passion within myself, for providing a positive environment in which children were nurtured, valued and inspired. Encouragement and support from peers within this environment motivated me to gain qualification to develop my passion

Do you have any mentors or role models who have guided your development in early childhood education?

Lecturers of college – JR especially

If yes, what have you learnt from them?

Passion and respect

Speak up for ECE

Please list all your professional qualifications

Name of qualification	Date completed	Name of Institution
B.Ed (ECT)	Dec 2004	University of Auckland
		(ACE)

Summarise the three most important individual experiences, either past or present, that have influenced your development as an early childhood teacher:

Trust – from other parents and in myself

In your professional development are there any particular areas of development that are significant to you? Are there any areas that you feel are a strength or an area of specialisation?

Making a positive connection with positive boys
Child advocacy

Write one sentence that summarises your beliefs about the following:

In relation to the teaching and learning environment I believe that:

I am responsible through my actions – as a team member, setting up the environment, interactions, for the experiences of every child that comes into that environment

In relation to how children learn I believe that:

Children learn through interactions. By experiencing, observing, exploring, relationships within environments.

In relation to my role as a teacher I believe that: By building relationships that are based on trust, are responsive, reciprocal and respectful, by standing by children ready to support and scaffold, I will fulfil my role as educator – through knowledge and sharing.

In relation to the programme I believe that:

Planning should evolve from the interests the children bring with them, while also offering them opportunities to explore new and varied learning experiences.

In relation to my interactions with children I believe that:

My role as an educator is to support, encourage and be there to extend the children's skills encouraging them to express their experiences through different medium.

In relation to my interactions with families I believe that:

Respect for the families is paramount. Listening to the families aspirations for their child and providing support through learning stories/newsletters/etc.

In relation to my interactions with colleagues I believe that:

We are all individuals that come together as a team with a common goal. Responsive, reciprocal, respectful relationships provide opportunity for this to happen

In relation to my interactions with the community I believe that:

Community support is required for the ongoing benefit of all e.g. fundraising

In the future what professional goals would you like to achieve?

A better understanding and working knowledge of children and their families. I would like to do a child psychology paper as well as a child advocacy paper, but first I must finish my registration.

Teacher 3 Philosophy Statment: 12.02.2007

I believe all people are capable and competent given the time and space to explore/ experience the environments they encounter in their own way. I believe that we are all individuals, with different approaches to life, different ways of communicating and expressing ourselves and different ways of seeing the world. I see each child as unique, responsive to the environments in which they have the opportunity to interact, learning from the experiences.

I aim to create an environment that inspires curiosity and exploration an environment in which children feel safe with time for unhurried involvement in their social interactions with others and the resources. With time to discover and explore their passions, discuss and share their findings with others. Time to formulate questions problem solve and find answers. Time to find and explore and develop their passions.

An environment in which each child feels valued with a strong sense of belonging created through consistent boundaries and routines.

An environment which shows respect for their ideas, thoughts and ways of doing.

A listening, nurturing, responsive environment which supports the building of positive relationships creating a culture of reciprocative learning experiences.

Teacher 4

Name: Teacher 4

Write one sentence to describe the centre you work in: A learning community that cares (Awhi)

Have you ever worked in any other centre: Yes

If yes, please select from the list below and specify how many years experience

Kindergarten

Childcare Community Creche 5 years

Playcentre Co-ordinator 1 year

Parent involvement 10 years

Nanny

Family Daycare worker 3 years

Primary School Teacher

After school hours care 1 year

Special Education Worker (support) 2 years

How many years have you worked in early childhood education in total?

17 years (1990-2007), plus (1984-1990 parent involvement in Playcentre)

What motivated you to choose early childhood education as a career?

To learn more about children's learning and a deep satisfaction with "Magical moments" when connections and relationships are strengthened.

Do you have any mentors or role models who have guided your development in early childhood education?

Most definitely

If yes, what have you learnt from them?

The value of dialogue & listening & ongoing learning and reflection.

Valuing diversity.

Forming respectful relationships with children and parents

The value of mentors and role models in guiding, supporting, challenging and affirming others in early childhood to strive for high quality.

Please list all your professional qualifications

Name of qualification	Date completed	Name of Institution
Dip Tchg ECE	1998	Seacoh
NZCS Biology	1977	ATI

Summarise the three most important individual experiences, either past or present, that have influenced your development as an early childhood teacher:

Joining RE Provocations: sharing dialogue, presentations, conferences, books etc to explore Reggio Emilia approaches to early childhood (particularly hearing Carlina Rinaldi at conference).

At high school, student in wheelchair left outside – no one to help her up the stairs – the realization of my belief in the right to participate

Establishing a new early childhood centre

In your professional development are there any particular areas of development that are significant to you? Are there any areas that you feel are a strength or an area of specialisation?

Write one sentence that summarises your beliefs about the following:

In relation to the teaching and learning environment I believe that:

Fostering a safe environment for children, teachers and parents to make meaningful connections over time to support children's learning.

In relation to how children learn I believe that:

Children's learning is holistic, where relationships with people, places and things and reflections in cultural context, develops co-construction of knowledge.

In relation to my role as a teacher I believe that:

I am continually learning

In relation to the programme I believe that:

All children have the right to participate

In relation to my interactions with children I believe that:

These should be genuine, respectful, sensitive and responsive.

In relation to my interactions with families I believe that:

Mutual trust, respect and sharing knowledge strengthens a learning community.

In relation to my interactions with colleagues I believe that:

We learn from each other

In relation to my interactions with the community I believe that:

This involves listening, advocating for children and families and sharing knowledge

In the future what professional goals would you like to achieve?

After this exercise:

- To better articulate my philosophy
- To use ICT in a meaningful way to make learning visible

Teacher 4 Philosophy statement:

“A work in progress”

My individual philosophy of teaching is represented by the “Milky Way” where each star has its own luminescence and together past, present and future they light up the universe.

I believe that each child is a unique individual with the right to participation. To participate in an environment where children’s ability to play, curiosity, ideas and wonder are listened to, respected and valued. I also believe in the value of participation, a sense of belonging, for families and teachers.

I believe teaching and learning are woven together, with trust, respect and hope. I value learning as an active life-long process where experience, reflection and social participation give meaning to living, being and learning.

I believe learning is strengthened when relationships are valued, interconnecting children, families and teachers building social community and cultural identity.

Appendix 3: Transcriptions of meetings two and seven

Meeting Two

Transcription of the second meeting of the participants (Monday 15th March)

The teachers were discussing their philosophies and what was common to all of them.

Teacher 4: The other thing that I thought of is competence...that the view of the child as competent came through in a few of them.

Teacher 1: yes!

Teacher 4: Mine was in here on paper, but I didn't write it.

Teacher 1: How shall I write it... put child and competence.

Teacher 1: Teacher 2 put that in her last bit, but it wasn't in this bit. I put it in, but teacher 3 didn't.

Teacher 4: But I thought that it was implied throughout.

Teacher 2: And that is why we are here aren't we? Because we are committed to...

Teacher 3: Setting the children up for... no, not setting them up

Teacher 4: Well I don't know... what do we want to call it?

Teacher 1: On-going learning?

Teacher 4: On-going learning? Yes, so that encompasses...

Teacher 3: I think what we are saying is that we see ourselves as learners that are involved... rather than just the teacher and the learner. We are actually learning from the child, and the child.... That is why I put reciprocal learners.... "a culture of reciprocal learning experiences", there we are!

Teacher 4: Is that what we meant by a community of learners. No but I mean learning for life and life long learning is a wee bit different, well. I don't know if it is different but... learning is integral to life isn't it?

Teacher 1: That is really good!

Teacher 4: Like from what I can see everybody's values, I mean that is why we are here... Like as humans, one of the things that we value as humans is having a brain to think, isn't it? Is thinking... thinking and learning.

Teacher 1: You just take that for granted.

Teacher 4: We don't!

Teacher 3: We don't, but many people do.

Teacher 4: So I guess that would come under the value of that.. of that sameness, that we all learn..

Teacher 3: From experiences

Teacher 4: In part, but it is learning from

Teacher 3: You could not stop learning and just stick at a job day in and day out.

Teacher 2: That is why we are all here tonight, aren't we, because we all realise that our learning did not stop at University...

Teacher3: Oh, god, no!

Teacher 2: We are here to carry on...

Teacher 3: Exploring!!

Teacher 2: Yeah!

Teacher 4: Maybe we should just put on-going learning for all, or something like that!

Teacher 1: O.K. That sounds good!

Teacher 3: You see, as I said, that is why I put a culture of reciprocative learning experiences which is built within

Teacher 2: Because otherwise we would never do any professional development.

Teacher 3: No, exactly!

Teacher 1: Things to think about? No, hang on, is there any more of these?

Teacher 4: Well I thought play came through in a few... that play was an important

Teacher 3: I found interaction and relationships

Teacher 1: Yes, relationships...

Teacher 3: Partnership with parents

Teacher 1: Hang on... what did you say first before relationships?

Teacher 4: I just said play had come through as an important aspect of philosophy...like with the value of play.

Teacher 2: Yes, definitely.

Teacher 4: Then relationships.

Teacher 1: I thought that relationships were interactions and communication... so are they different?

Teacher 4: Well, I have over here "listen to them and open communication".

Teacher 3: Communication is slightly different

Teacher 1: So shall I put them differently.

Teacher 4: Yeah!

Teacher 3: Yeah! Because they are all different aspects of the same thing.

Teacher 1: O.K.

Teacher 2: O.K. Relationships

Teacher 3: Structured in a nice neat list... that's what I said

Teacher 1: I don't structure!

Teacher 3: Mine would have been in a mind map all over the page.

Teacher 1: Well no-one else grabbed the pen so

Teacher 3: Well go on then, I am not going to say anything. I was just observing!

Teacher 4: It is good to see you showing some leadership skills – professional leadership – you grabbed the pen

Teacher 1: Interactions and communication! See now it is not in a straight line.

Teacher 3: No, it looks good! I shouldn't have said anything!

Teacher 4: Now I am just off on another tangent – I am just thinking, did we have responsive because...

Teacher 3: Yes, I did

Teacher 1: I did.

Teacher 3: Here look! That my last statement is an environment that shows respect for the ideas, thoughts and ways of doing, listening and a natural response to the environment which supports the building of positive relationships creating a culture of respect.

Teacher 4: Because I mean we could, in our philosophy of teaching, value things but it doesn't mean that you are going to do anything about it.

Teacher 3: I like that idea.

Teacher 4: So being responsive you actually take on that responsibility to action it.

Teacher 1: So I write down responsibility?

Teacher 2: To action it!

Teacher 4: It is an action isn't it. It is a response

Teacher 3: Yes, react.

Teacher 4: Yes, in a different sort of way.

Teacher 1: Hang on!

Teacher 3: And that is where I see my role as a teacher is to actually respond.

Teacher 1: What was the first word? What was the actual word that you guys used?

Teacher 3 and Teacher 4: Response and responsible

Teacher 1: But I was also going to write here – responsibility.....

Teacher 3: Because that comes after that professionalism and all that sort of stuff.

Teacher 4: So that is where I saw those principles coming through.

Teacher 1: Sensitive?

Teacher 4: Oh Yeah! Sensitive! So I saw competent child and that sort of thing as empowerment and

Teacher 1: So shall I write those words here.... empowerment.

Teacher 3: Put an "E" next to them, because that's like holistic, family and community, and then they are the strands

Teacher 4: Holistic is not actually in there, but what did come through in a few of them was about the whole child

Teacher 1: So that should be in the things to think about

Teacher 4: So is that one of the similarities?

Teacher 4: Even if you didn't use the word holistic, the whole child. It is a different way for some people, but with the whole child and trying to get across that whole thing about physical, spiritual and the well being of the child

Teacher 3: a sense of belonging...

Teacher 1: I just need to do another word

Teacher 4: And then the family and community came through, and then the relationships came through... you know, partnerships and relationships, you know because you can have relationships without it being a partnership.

Teacher 1: Hang on, where does flexibility go!

Teacher 4: In things to think about because, like, for example, one of the things is "creating consistent boundaries and routines" because does belonging only come from consistency? And if you value uniqueness and individuality then I would view flexibility as being... ummm... something that can be valued.

Teacher 1: I am trying to think...

Teacher 2: It is something that we take for granted

Teacher 1: Maybe that is why I didn't put it in my writing.

Teacher 3: But maybe that is something that came up when I was reading it... it came up that sometimes it doesn't come through.

Teacher 1: Yeah!

Teacher 4: I think this was here about making choices – the curriculum arises naturally from the child-children/child-adult

Interactions, but could this be only if, you know, naturally... I mean does it just happen naturally with nothing?

Teacher 1: Well, no! It can't just happen! It depends if their needs are met first really.

Teacher 3: No it depends on the way the environment is set up!

Teacher 4: Well that is why I like reading that really! Because then it made me think about ... well, does this happen like that or does it have to be open responsive and sensitive, and it is about making choices because the child responds.... Makes a choice about responding to other children, the teachers make a choice about responding to the child

Teacher 1: Or to another teacher, or to the environment

Teacher 3: I agree with you because I do agree that children do not respond in a natural way to the environment until they feel like they belong within it... they have that sense of being able to... though some children take longer than others to feel like that.

Teacher 1: To feel comfortable.

Teacher 3: To feel comfortable and to know what resources are there ... to say can we get out the such and such and to ask for different things.

Teacher 4: Like, you know, boundaries and conforming to society is like viewing uniqueness and flexibility versus sameness.

Teacher 3: It is giving them time too, isn't it, to think outside the square and not just giving them the answers.

Teacher 2: Shall we write that through yours?

Teacher 3: Time, time, time, yeah, I have got it all the way through, because it does for me

Teacher 2: I have got "time for reflecting"... it is very interesting.

Teacher 4: And I have ... I said that I wanted to put time in but I knew that it wasn't

Teacher 2: Yes, it is right through

Teacher 3: Time to explore, time, time, time to formulate questions and time to think, time to even develop their passions, so it is just so rushed today that a lot of children just do not get time to stop and watch something, like the men put up a fence, or whatever, because someone is always going "C'mon, c'mon, c'mon!"

Teacher 2: And the same thing with teacher 1... a time, "time to dream, learn and grow!". I don't think I even mentioned time!

Teacher 4: I did that in my diary, but I said that I wasn't going to...

Teacher 3: But what you read out of your diary was quite different. When I came to read yours I thought I know you've got a work in progress but where is the rest of it gone?

Teacher 4: Well there is this bit here?

Teacher 1: What were you saying about time?

Teacher 4: Yeah! That is what I said. Philosophically, I value time, time to reflect and even out the pace to become deeply involved, but practice is governed by factors such as session time, and with professional development and with family time and... so that is why I didn't put it in even though philosophically I value time.

Teacher 3: And time for me is sometimes my own worst enemy, because I get involved in what I am doing, just like children, and actually lose track of it, and whoa! The whole days gone without me even, you know! Thinking

about, well I had better eat! So time is a big one for me! And time management!

Teacher 2: So time came through strongly, particularly in two of them.

Teacher 1: So where does that go?

Teacher 2: Maybe it is not important!

Teacher 3: Yes it is, it is! It needs to go on there.

Teacher 4: And even though I didn't write it in, I wrote about it in my diary, so that is a similar thing.

Teacher 3: And I read it out when we were talking.

Teacher 1: I'll just write it in.

Teacher 4: We value it, but we acknowledge that in practice... yes, we do value it, so that when we get a precious moment when you can be with someone

Teacher 1: You do it!

Teacher 4: Yes, you do it! But you acknowledge that...

Teacher 2: You don't have this big thing about (?).

Teacher 3: She is really getting into it!

Teacher 4: Because today she was saying, "Well, how do you know what it was like to be a butterfly?"

Teacher 2: Well, we had a spare spot, so I put one of those butterflies up.

Teacher 1: Oh! That is great!

Teacher 2: Because there was such an interest!

Teacher 4: But they can come back...

Teacher 3: Oh! No! that would be good!

Teacher 4: Well, we didn't actually have listening. Well, we did, it was sort of throughout that that whole concept of listening and respect... you know like cos like I have been quite influenced by the Reggio sort of thing of listening.

Teacher 1: Listening to children!

Teacher 3: I had thought of that in here... listening and responsive.

Teacher 2: And I have covered it myself a bit.

Teacher 1: Yes, you said that

Teacher 2: I always want to be, but it doesn't necessarily ... But, it is the same sort of thing. You do want to be a listener, but... that is my philosophy, but sometimes I know that

Teacher 4: But sometimes you do just...

Teacher 4: You don't cross them off, but you only really acknowledge...

Teacher 2: A lot of the crying that we had this afternoon, well I listened to that, but I didn't ...

Teacher 4: respond?

Teacher 2: respond to one particular child, you know what I mean.

Teacher 3: I agree with you!

Teacher 2: I listened to what she was doing

Teacher 3: And you were aware of what she is doing and where she is at, but we know...

Teacher 4: If you know her you know that

Teacher 2: It is just a noise to get attention.

Teacher 4: And that is like the other day like listening to a child... I was putting a child to sleep, and there was another child in here with a bucket, and he waited patiently and he was just walking around and he caught my eye

and he caught someone else's eye, and he was waiting for bucket to be filled up and he didn't say any words and he waited for ten minutes, waiting for someone to respond to him... but, you know what I mean, listening was actually just observing him, watching and seeing that and, like you say, it can be busy, busy, so when I came out I said something to him to show that I had been aware of what he was trying to do.

Teacher 3: And it was the same with (the name of a child) though today, like we said "I'm wet!" and I said, "Oh! Are you?" "I'm wet" and I said "Are you? I can see that your sleeves are wet!"

Teacher 1: Then you said, "so what do you want me to do?"

Teacher 3: Yes, I did. Then he said "I'm wet!" again, so I said, "Would you like me to do something?"

Teacher 1: He said "Over in my bag"

Teacher 3: No he didn't. He said "My tee-shirts wet"

Teacher 1: He soon got his bag!

Teacher 3: But that was only after about ten interactions that he finally said that "I need you to get my bag". And I said, "How about I open the gate so that you can get your bag". We had this whole dialogue of actually getting him to ask me to do what he wanted me to do instead rather than just saying my sleeves are wet and for me to actually tell him what to do.

Teacher 1: He wanted us to just go and get it.

Teacher 4: But also with Teacher 2 taking the photos of that wedding, you know, she was listening not with just her ears, but she could see that this was an important thing that was being acted out, so she went and got the photos so that then she could share it and then writing up the learning story, then she sort of re-lived those emotions of the moment because you were actually engaged in what was going on.

Teacher 2: And they didn't need us to be part of it.

Teacher 3: And that is why the camera is so good to be able sit back...

Teacher 4: But you were part of it because they knew you and... it supposed you would call it the spiritual awareness or the empathy link... they knew that you were part of it and respecting what they were doing, and acknowledging that it was important for them to do that.

Teacher 1: So do I write that this thing in here?

Teacher 3: No, on the other side ... I think we all listen!

Teacher 1: But it wasn't on any of our things...

Teacher 3: It was on mine!

Teacher 1: Oh, yes it was!

Teacher 4: But it depends on your definition of listening.

Teacher 3: That is what I am saying... yes, OK!

Teacher 1: I will just put it hear!

Teacher 4: Listening can be with your eyes, your ears and your heart. I think all of it.

Teacher 1: I think respecting...

Teacher 2: You know, sometimes I think... one of the big reasons I went into teaching originally was that I was always going to be there for... because I was one of them... was the quiet, the average child that always worked hard but never got acknowledged, but unfortunately, that doesn't always happen because you are so grateful for those children that are just so good that don't make a noise and you can You have to, or I have to,

really make sure that they get attention. And I think that is something that I think happens right through the sector, even when I was attending lectures, there is always people who get the attention and responses, and that is just the way it is, and those middle people just don't.

Teacher 3: It is interesting that you have acknowledged that it does happen, so you can almost forgive your teachers for not acknowledging you.

Teacher 2: I have failed on that acknowledgement so...

Teacher 3: So the parent acknowledgement made up for it...

Teacher 1: But listening also for me comes under respect.

Teacher 3: And that interactions, goes with reciprocal.

Teacher 1: The other thing that I got was culture.

Teacher 4: Yes, I did too.

Teacher 1: The word culture – I don't know if they were the same... well, actually, you didn't have culture in yours

Teacher 3: Yes I did!

Teacher 1: Where?

Teacher 3: In the last paragraph!

Teacher 1 : Oh! Maybe I did

Teacher 3: Creating a culture of..

Teacher 4: But whether that is..

Teacher 1: Where? Where?

Teacher 3: Right down the bottom! Second to last line.

Teacher 1: Oh! OK, but I kind of circled your “we are all individuals with different approaches to life, different ways of communicating and expressing ourselves” and I thought that that related to culture.

Teacher 3: Definitely.

Teacher 1: Culture. That is what I thought! I didn't even see that.

Teacher 3: But I do think that the centre creates its own culture as well though.

Teacher 4: Yes, I think so too. There are types of culture

Teacher 3: There is personal culture, yeah, there is – there is ethnical culture. There is ethnicity and there is culture's within the ethnicity.

Teacher 1: There is cultural identity, and cultural diversity.

Teacher 4: So there were different, a different couple of words.

Teacher 3: Lots of different ways

Teacher 2: I think of culture as ethnic background.

Teacher 4: I tried to encompass as much as possible in these few words, because I am always accused of being verbose.

Teacher 3: Oh! me too.

Teacher 4: which was cultural identity, so that was both acknowledging children's cultural background as well as creating a cultural identity within the community that you are teaching in.

Teacher 1: I don't know if I wrote about creating a culture – I don't think I..

Teacher 4: Yours has got culture as in cultural diversity. So although I didn't use the word “Biculturalism” that was part of the thinking behind my “cultural diversity” was the cultural background in the New Zealand context – biculturalism, and so it was more than just cultural identity, because that sort of came from more to, I think, about Mason Durie's southern cross model when I think about culture.

Teacher 1: So what can I write about cultural identity?

Teacher 2: Just write the word culture, because we are just doing areas, aren't we?

Me: Have we written everything and everyone's philosophy that they wanted to think about, or have we....

Teacher 3: Do we want to add anything?

Teacher 4: We must have forgotten something!

Teacher 1: Was there anything that we missed out of yours (Teacher 2) that was on the end of it?

Teacher 3: Because we didn't get the end of it.

Me: I will have to add it into the thing on my computer. I am sorry about that.

Teacher 2: That is alright – I have new one now.

Teacher 1: Oh! You changed something.

Teacher 3: Oh, that is alright. You are allowed to.

Teacher 2: It is a growing thing.

Teacher 1: What about differences?

Teacher 4: Oh, actually there was something!

Teacher 1: Was there something else?

Teacher 4: Oh yes, I was just thinking of something... umm! There was things coming from some of them about rights and about acknowledging that.

Teacher 3: The rights of the child?

Teacher 4: The rights of the child

Teacher 1: Yeah

Teacher 4: I don't know whether that would come under the competent child, or whether – no! I think that is something separate again.... The rights of the child.

Teacher 3: I think I would put it under seeing the child as competent, which would mean I would see it as the child has the right to be acknowledged as a person.

Teacher 1: I'm sorry – I was just saying as I was meaning, as I was saying that they have a right to be a child. It probably doesn't make sense to anyone else, but it makes sense to me. Sorry... what were you saying?

Teacher 3: I was just saying that the word "rights" covers that for other people.

Teacher 4: If we put rights under similarities then we are acknowledging that

Teacher 1: there is rights.

Teacher 4: But not as in like as in...

Teacher 3: A right to be heard, a right to be listened to

Teacher 4: And I guess by participation I didn't just mean umm children joining in, I was trying to encompass more, like, about being a citizen. Like that would be our ultimate sort of aim, so being a citizen would not just be about coming into the centre and playing, it is about being who you are and retaining that but being a part of

Teacher 1: Like the individuality, sort like that

Teacher 4: And like being responsive too – like by participating there is an underlying expectation that you will participate and contribute in your own way – like contribution, you know what I mean – by participation, I actually mean participation and contribution together.

Teacher 3: Yeah, because it is that sense of belonging that allows a child

Teacher 4: it gives a child opportunities, that they have the right to be, to live!

Teacher 2: To listen or whatever they do, they have that right!

Teacher 4: But it will be responsive and we have the obligation to...

Teacher 2: But to do that, you know, rocking behaviour and all that, if that child...

Teacher 3: But I did find it difficult to take something off (name of child) that he was obviously enjoying and he was using different things to do that with.. it was quite difficult really for me because I felt he had that right... it is a really difficult one.

Teacher 4: It is like freedom or choice

Teacher 3: Choices would be a good one for me to go in there

Teacher 1: Well, you can have that, but you cant have choices all the time. I mean, we weren't giving (name of child) a choice today... in the last few days

Teacher 3: Although choices, behaviour and actions means sometimes not giving a choice.

Teacher 1: Today I just said" C'mon (name of child), it is time for music". I wasn't giving him a choice.

Teacher 3: It is safety for me, if he is out there by himself... you know, we can't be watching him.

Teacher 1: Yes, you can justify that and I am agreeing with what you are saying, but I am just saying

Teacher 2: It is very hard, because that is what you think the philosophy is that you want

Teacher 1: Yes, that is what I would like

Teacher 4: So that is why we are thinking about it because in practice there are times when you just cant do it all the time.

Teacher 3: And (the name of the child) does make a choice to rebel at that time, and it is very effective.

Teacher 1: Oh today he had the greatest music time of all when he finally got there... he had a great time.

Teacher 3: That is what I am saying... he makes a choice of the time that he picks to be as non-compliant as possible.

Teacher 4: So do we put the things to think about that were in some things and not in others

Teacher 3: The reason I actually chose to be so hard on him was.... (end of tape).

Teacher 3: His behaviour at home has been abominable, every time he doesn't want to do something.

Teacher 4: So in a way if you value the rights to participation, then actually he does participate. We should value the fact that he doesn't have a choice of opting out of participation – he participates in his own way. He is valuing participation because he is part of the group.

Teacher 1; Yeah, yeah! So you've gotta give him the choice.

Teacher 2: Well we are doing that with all the children in a way, aren't we? If they wander away, we go and....

Teacher 3: You give them a choice, don't we! I mean the first few sessions were bad.... I mean we might as well use him as an example, because he is quite extreme.... The first time I tried to include him in here and I actually put him out on the deck because he was making quite a racket, the next two times I actually stayed up this end with him, the next time I put him down there and he ummm! Kicked up and one of the students tried to calm him and that made him squeal even more and luckily she didn't back off and then he joined in music... and then this morning he joined in music again and (Teacher 1) said this morning he

joined in music again, so in some ways...there are certain choices that a child can be given without... within boundaries, without giving into them and letting them run riot...

Teacher 1: Who had boundaries in their philosophy?

Teacher 3: I did.. routines and boundaries so the child can feel safe.

Teacher 1: Routines?

Teacher 4: Yes, but that is where that flexibility comes in too.

Teacher 3: I put consistent boundaries...and routines.

Teacher 4: So is our philosophy about teaching routines?

Teachers 1, 2 and 3: No!

Teacher 4: I was just thinking that .. is it something to think about?

Teacher 3: But routines do create that sense of belonging, a sense of knowing an environment and what is happening .. that is how I look at it. It is the same as children in the home... they like to have a set clock routine, a certain routine.

Teacher 4: And I am just thinking.. something that came up right at the beginning when we were filled in the forms about when we described the centre.. so like awahi or caring was mentioned

Teacher 3: Yeah! Teacher 1 mentioned it! She described it really nicely

Teacher 4: Yes, that could be underlying it and

Teacher 1; You mean when I put a welcoming, happy and relaxed centre?

Teacher 3: Yes, you put warm caring people, nurturing... nurturing and caring.

Teacher 1: The environment?

Teacher 4: Because I think caring, it's about different things, like temperament ... it's not that I care for children as a carer, do you know what I mean... it is like

Teacher 3: I agree with you... it is about the interpretation again, isn't it?

Caring...it is about empathy, and the... rather than the actual doing. Yes, you do care for children because you do change nappies for them and you feed them.

Teacher 1: Yes, it is that you care for them, that you actually like them. That was the implication of the term childcare...that you did all the care things, and no education.

Teacher 2: Yes, it is something to think about, isn't it? That whole word! It is the terminology, isn't it?

Teacher 4: It is can you separate education and care? Which is when they called it educare, but you know that emotional side is part of being....

Teacher 3: Yes, they relate it so much to children, but you know, I think we all need it...that caring, that somebody cares about us, that somebody is there to look after us if something happens. You know, it's like, you need that network of people to know that. Yes, young children do need us to change their nappies and all that, but so do some older people at the other end...so I don't know!

Teacher 4: So maybe values... even though we were talking about values, I guess what comes up, is what is valued, so that people are valued. You know, people *are* valued.

Teacher 3: I think we all do value people.

Teacher 1; But we were talking about care!

Teacher 4: Yes, but don't you value life and people? Otherwise, if we had a fire and we went out there and I thought "Oh well,...like, Barbie is in there, and here we are – I had to try and think of a name that no child here has! – and if I didn't value or care, I just wouldn't bother about that one.

Teacher 3: Yeah! No, you're right!

Teacher 4: So philosophy? I guess it is with that responsibility that ... are there times with your philosophy that you have a responsibility to yourself and your children to have expectations, such as fire drills and those sorts of things, like the regulations?

Teacher 3: and these are imposed upon your philosophy and your choice that you can make

Teacher 4: So I guess our philosophy is that if you are paid to work in an early childhood environment then you somehow acknowledge that those regulations are there for a purpose... and you can challenge them philosophically by finding ways to fit... to comply as well as ... I know we don't teach about complying, but it is part of it.

Teacher 3: It is. I think I know what you mean because you have to show that you have had a fire drill, it is a safety thing, and, yes, you do teach children to learn, but you do actually impose that whistle..

Teacher 1: It is the same as climbing up on things... they are capable of climbing up, but, if it is on the book shelf, for example, I will still say, hop down – even though I know that they are safe... well...

Teacher 3: They're going to fall off the top and crack their head open. It is the same with me with (name of the child), where he climbed up the tree, and you were like " Oh my God! He's up the tree!"

Teacher 2: It was because he was so high! And he was right at the back.

Teacher 3: Yeah! But my children used to climb trees, and they were fine

Teacher 4: Whereas I would never let them climb up without being in the banana sling, because I take the responsibility as centre manager...

Teacher 1: Someone did that to me the other day..

Teacher 2: I don't know how it happened. We were outside and we didn't see him go outside,

Teacher 1: And he just wouldn't come down. I knew he was capable but still...

Teacher 3: But that's the thing. You say you want to give children the opportunity to be in early childhood, to be a child, but part of being a child is challenging yourself without rules or regulations of parents or whatever standing over you, so...

Teacher 2: It is like that lovely photo of E. Now she climbed on that chair to have a better look and found that there were four or five chairs there, and said "Look!" and I thought "Oh! She has climbed up the chairs," and then I thought "Oh!" You know what I mean!

Teacher 1: You just bring that down to her.

Teacher 2: I thought "She has already done it". You see what I mean.

Teacher 4: and if she hadn't been so motivated to get to it - that she had to do it herself

Teacher 2: yet I know that we shouldn't have let her climb the chairs!

Teacher 3: But at the same time we don't want to encourage them, or be seen to encourage them to climb the chairs, because that is a no-no. And what other word that I think should go on there is consistency – we haven't got consistency and that is one thing that is quite important.

Teacher 4: But I see it as in...

Teacher 3: Flexible?

Teacher 4: No, as in contrast. I mean, do you always have things consistent or do you allow for some flexibility? Does everything always have to be consistent?

Teacher 1: Consistency in staff?

Teacher 3: Consistency in staff and in basic routines, and I don't mean that that has to go by the clock. I am not saying that you have to look at the clock every five minutes, but what I am saying is that even in our routines children arrive, they play, we have music before, we have something to eat before they go outside, and then story time... and it doesn't mean that we run to a clock, it just means that there is some consistency as to what happens in a session, and in the way we respond to certain behaviours, such as climbing the book nook, or climbing, you know, that there are certain rules that are always consistent.

Teacher 2: The number of nappy people today that noticed that that mobile wasn't there.

Teacher 1: Oh! The hook's broken. I meant to buy another hook.

Teacher 4: It is just that the hook broke.

Teacher 2: I was just winding round. I didn't do it to wind....

Teacher 3: That is just familiarity though.

Teacher 1: rather than consistency

Teacher 3: Yes, because I keep wanting to change that terrible plastic blooming teddy bear thing and one of the mums... I was talking to one of the mums the other day and she said "Don't do that... my daughter is always talks about changing nappies with the teddy bear

Teacher 2: I know

Teacher 1: Yes, that is what they do – they point to it

Teacher 2: Yes, and I broke it!

Teacher 4: Yes, we can blame (teacher 2)!

Teacher 3: Maybe it is an opportunity to add to have something else!

Me: What is it?

Teacher 1: a mobile

Me: You can buy them down the market. You can always get another one.

Teacher 1: It only needs a new hook.

Teacher 4: So with consistency, even though there has been a child who has been really attached to Teacher 1, even though she has been away for two weeks, there is enough consistency with the rest of the staff and trust in the environment, trusted us that we would meet his needs

Teacher 3: trusted us within that environment

Teacher 4: and we trusted him that he would behave, respond in such a way, we acknowledged that he would be competent and capable enough to handle a slight degree of change

Teacher 3: Yeah, he was really good!

Teacher 4: So I guess it comes back to that whole thing that we had on social before – independence versus interdependence.

Teacher 3: But that to me talks about building communities and relationships, and we have got the individual, but we have also got the culture and the partnerships and the relationships, which is the interdependence.

Me: I guess the thing that we need to decide on now is..

Teacher 1: Wow! I didn't realise the time. I was really getting into that!

Me: I guess what we have to decide, and I don't know if you want to decide it now, or whether you want to think about it now, or discuss it among yourselves, or what, but if we were going to look at one value

Teacher 1: One of these?

Me: Yes, anything, in depth and we videoed each person in turn, and showed how their practice reviewed that, what one would we choose? Or would it be one, because I hear you saying that words like participation mean belonging and contribution and well-being so like, you choose one word and then you could break it down to the other things that you meant, or you could choose one that wasn't able to break down... so I don't know where you want to take it? Like what do you think? And it can be for any reason that you look at it. It can be to see whether you are contradicting your own values... or in what ways are you demonstrating it...or how is it impacting on the children. I don't know, just what would you like to look at more closely.

Teacher 2: Well, we have done interactions, haven't we?

Teacher 3: Maybe competence.

Teacher 2: That competence one.. it is quite interesting, like with art, if you have six children and all the paint is wet, I don't think I am encouraging the children to be competent to put their things out on the deck... do you know what I mean.

Teacher 1: Because...

Teacher 3: No, but we all have moments like that. It's like how do we reflect competence. That is where choice comes into it.

Teacher 2: It would be quite challenging. It would be quite hard

Me: Do you mean "How do we support competence?" Is it?

Teacher 3: Yeah! I suppose so! Well I don't know!

Me: How do you support it because it is focusing on the child

Teacher 3: How do we show the child that we think...

Teacher 2: that they are competent! Yeah!

Me: So it is how do you reflect it.. so how do you give messages to the child

Teacher 3: that they can do it for themselves.

Teacher 4: In what ways do we value...

Teacher 1: show them that we value independence

Teacher 3: I don't know – how would you word that!

Teacher 4: Yes, you see like, I just straightaway, with that independence versus interdependence we need to set about valuing competence as a... what are the words?

Teacher 1: valuing independence

Teacher 4: Yes, valuing independence. Then, like in practice, when you ask someone to look after their brother, you could actually argue that you are acknowledging the competent child because you value interdependence, and you see the competency of looking after their brother, as opposed to valuing the brother's independence.

Teacher 3: Yes, because that is competence. Competence is not independence necessarily, competence is actually to me being able to ask for help, acknowledge that you actually need help.

Teacher 1: I can see this is a good one to look at.

Teacher 1: Also

Teacher 3: I think it is a very good one.

Teacher 2: I think it is a good one.

Teacher 3: I think it is like the conversation I had with (Child's name). I knew he had the words to ask, he had the language and everything, but he expected me to be cued by his one sentence... "my shirt is wet." So I was supposed to sort it all

out. So especially as he is getting older that he needs to actually have the language to say: "I need help. Can you open the gate so I can get my bag?"

Teacher 1: Well, isn't that competence as well?

Teacher 3: It is! But it is the competence to be able to do that, and not just to expect someone else to jump in and do it all for you... which might be his culture at home, but he needs to use his language skills.

Teacher 1: and is competence saying to a child "Oh, you can do it!" when they are outside walking along the plank and want to hold your hand.

Teacher 3: Yeah! It is!

Teacher 1: and encouraging!

Teacher 3: It is!

Teacher 1: I just want to know!

Teacher 3: Yes, It is to me!

Teacher 4: I think that is why we are doing it so we find out what it is that you view as competence.

Teacher 3: I think it is a very good thing to look at.

Teacher 2: Oh! Definitely.

Me: I mean it links back to Te Whariki, doesn't it? That the whole aim of education is "competent, confident learners".

Teacher 4: But that is where the challenge lies is in defining as a teacher with your philosophy what you view as supporting competence, or acknowledging competence so, like you said with that other one, it might be that a younger child should show competency by looking after himself, but then if you value interdependency, so that is what you reflect on and look at.

Teacher 1: Yeah!

Teacher 4: So it is no-one saying it is either or. It is just about thinking about it, I think.

Teacher 3: But I think part of that interdependency is that competency that there is someone within the group that will look after you.

Teacher 1: Interdependency.... I-N-T-E-R?

Teacher 4: So in a way, asking for help is interdependence because you are acknowledging the adult's role in being able

Teacher 3: or the other child's...

Teacher 1: and they are competent to ask!

Teacher 3: that somebody can actually help you.

Teacher 2: that has more information.

Teacher 3: You are showing your competence in knowing those people around you, though, aren't you? that you go to...

Teacher 1: Yes, that's the one.

Teacher 4: With competency, I was just thinking, if you wanted to link it to the ERO report what they wanted us to focus on was

Teacher 1: Social competence?

Teacher 4: No, interdependence... when she suggested that some teachers... I will just go and get the actual wording.

Teacher 3: Some teachers what?

Teacher 2: What ERO thought we needed to work on.

Teacher 3: Oh! O.K.

Teacher 2: I think so!

Teacher 3: That is interesting! It is good if you can always link things with other things and look at them from other angles.

Teacher 2: I may have said something that helps me see that it is sometimes hard to see something conflicting in my own philosophy, and that is just because of my own well-being... so that has been a big thing for me.

Teacher 4: So one thing was about choice. It said how the programme and routines cater for children's individual preferences, but that wasn't it. It was about promoting social development here, if we are going to focus on that. It said "there are some instances of very good support given to children to make connections with each other and to play co-operatively. At other times teachers did not take... an awareness of others and to develop collaboration and interdependency between children." So I don't know whether we can somehow build that into...

Teacher 2: I think it would be good proof to ERO that we do do it!

Teacher 3: I think so!

Teacher 4: So one aspect of the competent child may be about collaboration and interdependence between children.

Teacher 3: Yes! I think so! I think it is about encouraging and allowing.. well not allowing, I hate that word too... but standing back and letting the children create their own interactions and rules and that, without putting your bit in that changes the whole perspective of where they're taking it. And that sees them as competent to be able to role play the wedding, or role play and go through the emotions and the uh... and even when they are arguing to stand back until it... not necessarily until it gets fisticuffs because one has got more language, but it is really good to stand back because 90% of the time you will actually find that the children will sort it out.

Teacher 1: It is like when one is in the car...

Teacher 3: yes, if you step in too quickly, you are denying them the opportunity to work it out..

Teacher 1: or another child to come in and help.

Teacher 3: Yeah! You could always say "I saw Do that the other day – why don't you ask him?"

Me: So if we looked at competence: what was that question we said: How do children... sorry I got left behind... with the writing.

Teacher 4: In what ways do we show, do we demonstrate the competence in young children. Was that it?

Me: Demonstrate? In our practice... that we value

Teacher 3: and encourage competence. I'd love to put something like that.

Me: that we value and encourage

Teacher 3: We want everybody to do things for themselves. Some children want everybody to do everything for them, whereas we encourage them to put their cup and their plate in the bin, e encourage them to

Teacher 4: But if we see children as competent, why do we have to encourage them?

Teacher 1: Well in what way do we demonstrate...

Teacher 3: No, but you are showing, I don't know, but you are showing them that you respect their ability. I am not saying that you have to encourage them, but

Teacher 2: But for some children it is the same.

Teacher 3: Yeah, I know. I am not saying that you have to encourage them.

Teacher 2: Just because of time sometimes you do it for them.

Teacher 4: That is exactly what it is like for a parent because it is easier, quicker and

Teacher 2: So it will be quite interesting.

Teacher 1: And I reckon that if you video it... us... me, I am not saying you guys, that I know that I do it... sometimes... when it is music time and a child isn't coming or whatever, and you need to be inside...

Teacher 3: You have to! Well, not have to, but you do sometimes, because so many things impact.

Teacher 1: And that goes into that choice.

Teacher 4: But then I don't think that will affect your practice...

Teacher 2: Yes I do too. That is why it is a good thing to look at.

Teacher 2: Yes, it is funny all the things teacher 3 is saying. I actually said to A., I said "See her on the obstacle course". I said to teacher 3, I somehow think that I have just made her dependent on me because I look out, and look what has happened.

Teacher 3: But as I said to you though, some children actually need that attachment figure while they base themselves.

Teacher 2: She still needs it when she first comes in, but not very much now. But that whole thing when she first sees me as this person

Teacher 1: Who is there for me. She is quite... (could not transcribe)

Teacher 3: Look at S. She is had the young student wrapped around her little finger today and I was thinking you will be gone in a week and she'll be expecting one of us to do that.

Teacher 2: But around A. I have to remember what she was like at the beginning. She was so unsettled.

Teacher 3: But her mother was actually worried that her older siblings had modelled that to her because actually her personality is quite different, and her older siblings had actually modelled that that is how you behave in new social situations.... You come over all shy.

Teacher 2: So try not to video A. and I please.

Me: I also think that an interesting sub-question is the whole notion of how rights link to competency and how boundaries link to competency. There is the example of the tree that you gave. What do you decide? Does the child have the right to climb the tree and is competent... or do we need to set the boundaries that he doesn't climb tree. So it is not that straightforward.

Teacher 4: And in what ways do they express competency... there are probably other ways that he could express his competency

Teacher 3: At a kindergarten they had a lovely big old tree, and they had a front fence and a concrete path, and the tree hung over the concrete path.

Teacher 3: Oh no!

Teacher 2: But (name of child) just snuck around the back, he saw a bird's nest, and he wanted the bird's nest right at the top.

Teacher 3: And that was his goal. So that is to me, my role with my children with my children in that sort of situation was "O.K. Look around! Are the branches actually strong enough?" It is making them aware... to become aware of their surroundings so they don't put themselves in danger.

Teacher 4: Then there is that slide that we had at (professional development) with that busy two year old child using the machete...

Teacher 1: Yeah!

(Tape ended).

Meeting seven

Transcription of extra meeting on 10th March 2008

Present: Anne, Teacher 1, Teacher 2 and Teacher 4. Teacher 3 has recently left her position.

Anne: Thank you once again for making the time to attend this meeting. O.K. So we will just go through the questions one by one. The first one is “How does an individual teacher review practice by investigating how philosophy is applied.? And I said that would be answered by outlining the process we went through. Like, that is the *how* that we did it, but if you want to add anything. So, like, I thought that we wouldn’t need to spend much time on that, because that is the process we went through, and once we set out the process, then that is self explanatory, but if you needed to add anything to that.

Teacher 1: I think I read it differently to that. I couldn’t quite...I wasn’t sure. I didn’t quite know what the answer was.

Anne: O.K.

Teacher 1: So for question 1 where it says “ How does an individual teacher review practice by investigating how philosophy is applied?” ...Oh! I don’t really know what I was trying to say... I said I don’t think it is done at a conscious level necessarily all the time as in. I guess I was looking at more philosophy in practice. Like “ How does an individual teacher review their practice?”

Anne: Well that is fine!

Teacher 1: So Like I said there might be times when I think “Oh! I don’t agree with that!”, when someone says something or does something, so I guess then that you are reviewing your philosophy of practice there, but also through teacher registration and training through professional development, it is these times where we have the opportunity and are encouraged to review practice and philosophy. Is that OK?

Anne: Yes, that is good! There is no right or wrong answer.

Teacher 4: Well, I think it ties in with what Anne says about following the process. What you are saying is that just because we are following the process it does not stand in isolation. It is not alone, because things like teacher registration and students and professional development are impacting along the way as well.

Teacher 1: Yes, it is those times as well that we review our practice and how it meets your philosophy.

Anne: O.K. Any other comments. But the next part is “ How does participating in the self review process assist a teacher to form I-theories of their own practice and self review?” So an I-theory is a theory that formed by yourself, just an impression or idea, as opposed to an external-theory, like Piaget says, or Vygotsky says, or Carlina Rinaldi says.... An I-theory is something that is formed in this context because you know the children, and know how things are here, so...

Teacher 4: So in our context, the way the self-review process was conducted using the videos, I think, provided a focus for them to form I-theories of review and practice, because it was relevant in the centre to the staff and children at that time.

Anne : And what would your ides be? What do you think about self-review?

Teacher 1: Are you asking anyone specifically? Or anyone?

Anne: Anyone.

Teacher 2: Well for me personally, it has made me more aware of the words that I use. For example, in my philosophy, I was just writing words, without really thinking about what they were meaning, or the layers of meaning. So for me that is the biggest thing I gained out of self-review.... Is looking at not just dictionary meanings, but the layers of meanings, and to think more carefully.

Teacher 1: But as you say, that is what came out of it. And then I just put... ummm... that, perhaps my I-theories have changed because I am more aware and thoughtful of the words that I use, of what I am doing and what I am not doing, and what I could do in relation to my self. It reinforced, what Teacher 4 was saying, what I believe and why I do things... what word did you use?

Teacher 4: Affirming!

Teacher 1: Yes *affirming*... that is the word you used! It enhances my reflections.

Teacher 4: So I would believe that participation in a self-review process actually supports you to become a reflective practitioner. So by participating in this self-review process, when you use the terms "reflective practitioner" people would actually think it means thinking on your feet, but how deeply are you actually thinking? By participating in a self-review process you are actually more analytical and critical about your thinking, and your assumptions and your beliefs, and so you might slightly modify your theories. So if I had an I-theory about self review, it would be that self-review is a really important process when conducted... because we talked about conditions and so on to make it safe, that it is really necessary to become a truly reflective practitioner.

Teacher 2: I mean if you have time to do it... I mean I don't think... with the self review here we met once a month. I am not sure without that I would have reflected on my own practice at home. You know what I mean? Because it was time set aside with your colleagues, umm, I might get in the car, and think "Oh! I had a great day!" because of so and so and then that is it, because you are on to the next thing. But because you had time set aside with your colleagues you are forced... well not forced, but...

Teacher 4: It puts value on it. It gives value to the whole process of reviewing and reflecting.

Teacher 1: That is what I was saying... it is not done at a conscious level, not at that deep level.

Teacher 4: Yes! You might superficially but yeah! That is what I mean about being a reflective practitioner, it takes it down to that deeper level.

Teacher 2: And it is quiet and there are no phones ringing.

Teacher 1: Because I think we could argue that if, at a team meeting, we had discussed competence, and what it meant, we would not have got the depth that we got following this process of self review. And looking at the video allowed for all the things like body movement and facial expressions and actually allowed you to look more deeply at yourself, than what you would with someone observing you and giving you feedback.

Anne: So then, the next question is, umm, do you feel, is it perceived by individual teachers as beneficial for the development of I-theories. I guess you could say that I-theories equal reflections.

Teacher 1: Uhhah!

Teacher 4: Yes! Because unless you reflect, you are not going to form any I-theories!

Anne: So do you think it was beneficial!

Teacher 1: Yes! It was beneficial as far as what Anne was already doing. I am not saying I didn't learn anything, but I am just saying it was beneficial for those reasons. It gave me the opportunity to look... I found some of these questions rolled into each other... it gave me the opportunity to look more deeply into different aspects of the self-review, so I guess there were different areas of reflection e.g. competency and it enhanced my awareness of the process of reflection.

Anne: O.K.

Teacher 4: And in terms of, like, of the fact that when I look at the images that are being taken by the staff of children during sessions, I think that by having done the self-review process you are actually looking at competent powerful images and whether that is because everyone had focussed on that particular area, they are actually seeing children as competent and they are portraying that to parents and to children themselves as well. And in terms of beneficial... by discussing it together there is more cohesion in the centre with staff understanding the perspectives of each other and there is a shared sense of purpose. While there are subtle differences there is a collective understanding of competence from having done that review process, and what it means.

Anne: O.K. So I know that on an individual basis it has helped you improve practice because you have reflected more, but when you go down to the next set of questions, it says "How do the staff members of an early childhood centre review practice by investigating how a collective philosophy is applied?" Just by picking up what you said, I would say equity through dialogue, and what Teacher 2 said, by making time, and shared sense of purpose.

Teacher 1: What question are we doing?

Anne: I am just discussing the questions one by one. The next question is "How do the staff members of an early childhood centre review practice by investigating how collective philosophy is applied?.... shared sense of purpose and cohesion.

Teacher 2: Yeah! And just by participation! Like we all had to participate, didn't we? Like sometimes in a meeting, or something like that, there maybe one person, I am not saying that is how it is here, but maybe one person is more dominant than the others. .. that is just groups and that is the way it is, and others are quieter, but I think the way it was set out, everyone participated, everyone had their voice, and it didn't matter that Teacher 4 is the supervisor and that I am a part-timer, it was all pretty everyone had their turn.

Anne: So to add to that we could say, in a way, it built equity. Like I have got here that it built cohesion. It sort of made it more equitable.

Teacher 2: Well, there was lots of respect and encouragement and I think

Anne: Yes! It was nice!

Teacher 2: And I know that Teacher 1 and Teacher 3, with me it is different because I am a part-timer, but I know Teacher 1 and Teacher 3 would discuss things during the week, and write them down and bring them to the next meeting.

Anne: So my next question is "Is the self-review approach of practical philosophy (which we did) perceived by the teaching team as beneficial for the development of educational I-theories?" that should be "we-theories". I mean, has the centre as a whole, got a shared theory of self-review? Like what do you think now as a centre?

Teacher 4: Well, first of all, everyone has agreed that it was beneficial, and the importance of it. So there is the first thing, that it actually is really important.

Anne: Self review in general, or that approach?

Teacher 4: No, I think because we did discuss in general, about the climate setting, the time and all those factors that came into it..

Teacher 1: And that we know you and so it is that...

Teacher 2: And it is time put aside to focus on it, isn't it? Whereas, in a staff meeting, we have an agenda and have quite a few things to cover.

Anne: Staff meetings are hard, aren't they? You have such a lot of things you have to cover...

Teacher 4: So one of the theories about the self review in this question, may be that we believe in the value of self-review.

Teacher 2: Well, I believe in the value of self review, but umm, because of time in early childhood, it may not always be... it was lovely to have this project and for you to do it every six months, but that is unlikely to happen, unless someone else approaches us to do a doctorate. Is that true? That is my theory.

Teacher 4: I was just going on the question about practical philosophy. .. that we looked at our philosophy in practice and just going back to the question "Is the self-review approach of practical philosophy perceived by the teaching team as beneficial?" Because we have all agreed that self-review is absolutely necessary, but like this approach of looking at out philosophy in practice, what do we believe?

Teacher 1: I think all centres should do it? Well...

Teacher 4: Well, that actual process provided a focus so it was clear what you were going to review, and practical philosophy means that it was meaningful because it is in the centre where we are working, as opposed to a self-review on "Do we meet cleaning regulations?" so could form an educational theory on where we worked.

Teacher 1: It was personal!

Anne: It looked at what you believed, and how they were formed and why they were formed, but is still practical. You know, I think, what would be the point if it wasn't practical.

Teacher 4: I guess that was the thing with doing philosophy in practice - that you could actually observe and comment on children's responses to teaching techniques and approaches that the staff use and that is highlighted in the self-review under all the things that are listed. This is what everybody contributed. I mean, I think it is absolutely fantastic – in what ways did we acknowledge and support children's competency. So there is evidence that we were thinking and forming theories about putting our philosophy in practice... what practical strategies can we use to support children's competencies. And while there is a general group thing, it still allows for individuality that...

Anne: I guess is a WE-theory too. I guess that if it was a straight-jacket and didn't allow for individuality... if we were all clones of each other.

Teacher 4: So it makes it authentic and real. And still allows for personal variations, but there is still a shared understanding.

Anne: Do you think it has had a long term impact?

Teacher 1: On the staff, or on us personally or on the centre?

Anne: Like it wasn't just a short-term wonder?

Teacher 2: Well for me personally, it has had a huge impact on me as a beginning teacher. Well, because, my final practicum, we had to write a

philosophy before we started teaching, so to be able to review that within a year of graduating to me was very beneficial, and as I said, with being a bit careful with regards to words, you know, even in my day to day... you know, even a word like holistic and all that, I would want to be sure now before I used words like that that I knew what they meant. So that is the impact on me personally. So no matter where I went, you know, if I went to another centre in five years, I think that whole layer of meaning would always have an effect on me through this project.

Teacher 4: Well I think for me it has highlighted that it is complex. Teaching is very very complex, and it does need time and discussion and reflection. And that was my little thought before, was that none of us works in isolation from each other so we cant, even if we call it an I-theory, it has actually been formed because of interactions and relationships with children and other adults. If you were in isolation by yourself, it would be hard to form an I-theory unless you had experiences and had interactions and something to.... So if I did a self-review on myself by myself and didn't have this whole process it would not have really had the depth or the impact as what it has had through discussing with other staff. And going back to that long-term thing, because of that focus on competence, it actually comes up all the time. I find I am often thinking of it.

Teacher 1: Well, that relates to what we discussed with competence. I had what I thought was a really nice experience balancing along the beam outside and then two younger children were saying, "Can I help you? Can I help you?" and they put their hands out and I thought "Well, isn't that great that they could do that and sing out", and then I gave the camera to an older child to take the photo. So that whole power thing was shifted and because, I guess, that my position is not always seen as that, so they are making a deliberate conscious choice in practice to have some opportunities where you are not stepping in or directing and you are actually, in terms of putting your philosophy in practice,

Anne: I mean, where is it, what Teacher 2 said over here about everyone taking a turn so equity of the team is established...you could say that a similar shift in power has taken place with the children because you saw them as competent when you see each other as competent within a team what, you know, you can be individuals but you are all competent, it flattens out the power too. You know, it is not sort of, like you said, Teacher 4 was like before. Whereas if you had a boss who thought she was the person that was the most competent and she had to be the person who would let you know how to be competent, that would be a whole different way of using power.

Do you think that by focusing on the children's competence, you acknowledged your own competence and the competence of the team more?

Teacher 4: I would argue that you have to be a competent teacher to be able to know what competency is, and to see and respond to competency in children. It would be very hard for a child to show you competence if a teacher was not competent in supporting competency.

Teacher 1: Because if they were not competent in supporting competency, that would mean they are not competent.

Anne: Did that process that we all went through make you all feel more competent as teachers?

Teacher 2: I remember commenting on that and I said that on viewing the video of me encouraging competency in the art area I had felt like a competent teacher because sometimes I don't always feel like this., as I can get so caught up in

other things. But then someone challenged me on that and said that perhaps though if I always felt competent as a teacher I could become too confident as a teacher and try out the same things all the time without taking risks.

Anne: That's a good point.

Teacher 2: But I remember watching the DVD, watching it at home and feeling good about my practice, and that was about the first time... I thought "Oh! I am OK!"

Anne: I am just thinking about myself and I think the ideal is to think "Yes, I am competent, but I need to improve on such and such!" But if you thought that you were totally hopeless you would be bashing yourself up all the time. And probably you can't improve on your skills unless you feel a certain amount of confidence. To take a risk, yes, but to take a risk you sort of have to be competent.

Teacher 2: Yes. And I mean if I thought I was the most fantastic teacher out I would probably keep on doing the same old things.....

Anne: It could make you insensitive to other people. Do you think this project has made you see each other as more competent?

Teacher 2: I think we all did... I mean we thought... it was fantastic watching the DVDs and seeing each other teach... I mean to see teacher 3, for me, through her relationships and her enthusiasm, and just umm teacher 4, by valuing the child's competence by modelling what they were doing... and I think that is what we do all the time..... picking up on the non-verbal...and Teacher 1 even though the sound quality was bad there, I couldn't hear a lot of what you said in it, but I picked up on the co-construction and body language, and maybe I wouldn't have noticed it if I could have heard everything, do you know what I mean.

Anne: You notice other teacher's characteristics... OK. Is there anything else that anyone would like to say? I said we would finish after an hour, so I would like to thank you all once again for coming. I need to think now about how this project has affected my practice. I thought "well that is quite difficult to articulate!"

Teacher 4: Yes it is quite difficult and it is quite complex!

Teacher 1: Yes.

Anne: And I thought that it hasn't affected me that much in as far as teaching students goes, but because I am the programme leader now, it has affected the way I try to work with the other lecturers and in the early childhood centre, it has affected the way I try work in the role of licensee.

Teacher 4: Because as licensee you are working with practitioners.

Anne: At the teachers only day everyone had to make a poster and I told them, for example, and I had to say who I am and what I believe in, so it was a fast track version of these. We shared our viewpoints up to lunch time and then went and worked on how our views would apply to areas in the early childhood centre. It was good, it felt real, not just words but thought behind it.

Teacher 1: There is another thing that I wrote for question four on how does the process help teachers to improve practice... I wrote that "it can help practice if individuals are willing to improve.. I didn't know what word to use... meaning improve or change... I was trying to find the right word... by knowing what they do and why. I mean they can reflect all they want but if you are not open to doing anything about it then what is the point. And then the last bit is, I just put...about strengthening the teaching team. I just put.. about the relationships which has

helped to understand what team members philosophies are, their thinking and why they do things, or say things. It is what you made a point about.

Teacher 4: Yes, it was about the cohesion and understanding.

Teacher 1: Yes, which is what I put in that last question.

Teacher 4: Yes, I think you can go through the process and

Teacher 1: Yes, it strengthened teacher relationships. It is hard to know what team members are thinking and why we do things... in relation to sharing our philosophies made me more comfortable to discuss philosophies with the team which may lead to improved practice.

Teacher 4: And an offshoot of this is that as associate teachers, like three of us are associate teachers, it has actually been really useful to have been through the process of articulating our personal philosophy and knowing how difficult this is and sharing it with students and you have got a ground work for them to think their philosophy. There is a ripple effect it goes out wider and they think about their own philosophy and the challenge, so the self-review process does not just affect us and the children in the centre, it also affects the wider early childhood community as well.

Teacher 4: Maybe that is an extra point to add to what Teacher 2 said about the time... is that with time just the natural length thing... in that having the extra time with meetings, you can get more clarity and meaning than in just a single meeting.

Anne: OK! That is great, and I would just like to thank you all again for making the time.

Appendix Four: P.M.I. Feedback and final interviews

Feedback from PMI (Plus, Minus and Interesting) forms

The following is a collation of the responses from the participants after the research was complete.

Please give feedback on how this research process was for you...

Positives:

Making connections between my philosophy (beliefs and values) and actual interactions with the children.

Gaining insight into others perspectives and philosophy

Team building, forging stronger relationships and better understandings of each other

Recognise strength of and importance of relationships with children

Opportunity to strengthen relationships with colleagues

Opportunity to think and reflect deeply about many ideas, aspects, issues etc throughout the research

Opportunity to see and reflect on my own practice

Opportunity to help out Anne and strengthen the relationship with Anne, the centre and staff

Already knowing and having a relationship with researcher (Anne).

Can use research as evidence of on-going professional development for teacher registration

Opportunity to write and reflect on my own philosophy.

The environment of being filmed and meetings – being comfortable to express thoughts

Opportunity to reflect during meetings.

A time of fellowship, ideas, contribution and belonging

To participate in a project and research which would enable a student to obtain a Doctor of Education qualification as I have a belief in on-going education and that it is important to have more teachers/lecturers in ECE obtain this to raise the profile of the ECE sector.

To be involved in group/individual reflection through written journals/ reflections and discussion

To have the time to really explore one aspect of my philosophy

To view others and my practice through video. Not only did it show how I valued competence in children, but lead me to really examine how I could adjust/improve other areas of my practice. (For example, I now spend a lot more time at the carpentry table and endeavour to use more open questions in all areas).

To allow me to explore my own competence as a teacher

Negatives:

Time – additional time needed on top of work, family etc with extra meetings.
Some days I think “better” than others.

Insufficient ICT knowledge frustrating e.g. would like to edit DVD to produce a copy for a parent; getting the sound louder on the play back took time.

I would have liked to written a lot more in my journal at work when I was involved in a discussion about competence with other teachers in between meeting the researcher, however a lack of time/release did not always allow me to do this so I was not able to write down how I valued and encouraged competence in children on a daily basis or complete learning stories to document this

Seeing a difference in how people interact when an outside person observing and is part of the discussions

Having to give up time for meetings

Risk of sharing philosophy with others

Risk of sharing DVD of our practice

Interesting:

The more we explored the concept of competency the more questions we asked ourselves about expectations, perspectives and the diversity of these and the “answers” we found/explored.

Are there any true answers when there are so many perspectives and ways of seeing and doing?

All philosophies were similar... what if they had been completely different

No staff changes during the research... what would have happened if a staff member had left

When choosing the word competent, it was interesting that it enhanced awareness of it being around

I found it easy to reflect and share thoughts, reflections etc. I wonder if this was enhanced by being (feeling) comfortable within the environment (and the people involved).

We all had some common threads in our initial philosophies. I wonder if this would have been the case if we hadn't all been qualified teachers

That a word has many layers, rather than just the meaning written in the dictionary

It would be wonderful to have the time to explore other words in such depth, for example, empower, agency, and “ako”.

To be involved in a project with many faces from ECE, that is, an AUT lecturer/researcher, Supervisor who also works as a teacher/educator on the floor and two other teacher/educators (one of whom is recently qualified) and the other with 9 years experience. Although having my practice viewed was really “putting myself out there” and there is always a risk sharing viewpoints/beliefs the people involved in this project were non judgmental, and non-threatening which lead to encouragement, participation, respect and a shared vision

“Human element” of research – transcripts of the dialogue at meetings documented the words spoken but doesn't reflect the ways the words are said to convey meaning e.g. questioning, emphasis on words and non-verbal language and atmosphere. Are we all living researchers?

Looking at one aspect “competence”, also allowed for exploration of other features identified in the philosophies. Emphasised the inter-relationships that occur (connections).

My eyes opened wider to the concept, therefore rediscovering “competence” and it became highlighted in what I was doing e.g. came across readings, became aware of the angle given in Tiziana’s address (attending P.D.), a conversation with others, recognizing in children e.g. a child talked about in a discussion (2nd). I observed supporting a younger child to do what he had previously not wanted to do (3 months previously). It continues to pop up!

Final Interview- Teacher 1.

Describe the research experience

To be honest, as soon as it finished, I haven't thought about it, except in my practice, in regards to competency and viewing children as competent. I think it was a good experience, I am really glad that I was able to be involved in it for my own professional development, and also as a team professional development thing.

What did you gain personally from the process?

I guess seeing myself on the DVD and putting myself out there – it is not really me, but I guess being in my own environment and with people I am comfortable with, I get more out of it. – like looking at my own practice, looking at competency, reflecting, and the chance to reflect that deeply.

What did you gain professionally from the process?

Working as a team and strengthening, having that time to reflect between meetings gave us the chance to have discussions between colleagues. Also to look at my practice – to reflect on how I saw children as competent.

What did you think of the process?

I think it was good, the way we had discussions, looked at individual philosophies, reflected. In regards to doing the videos, that was an important part because we had done so much reflecting and writing on our philosophies and on competencies. Therefore the videos gave us the chance to reflect back. The video was important as we had it to reflect back on to see if our practice was what we said it was. Having the time between meetings was great so we could reflect between meetings.

How did the process support teamwork?

Yeah! That was one of my positives. I guess with everyone sharing their philosophies to start with, we realised that many points were similar. If the philosophies were different, relationships still probably would have been strengthened, but it would have been more awkward. Having the time between meetings, we could talk about it and reflect. Having the videos, everyone commented on the positives in our practice, and no-one else criticised. When we were being videoed, we knew that the team was there if there was a crying child. Normally I would have been up and down and all over the place, but I knew that the team would be there – it contributed to team work.

Did the process change your practice in any way?

I think I have given more thought to the word competent and how I view the word competent. I think I allow children more time to do things for themselves and do more for others. But when time is a factor... I think there is even more

time when they could do things. Sometimes when I have 12 nappies to change, I get the bag rather than saying “C’mon, let’s find your bag!” But now I am aware. Watching the video, I was aware of what I was doing to view the children as competent and what I wasn’t doing to view the children as competent.

How was the process different from other self-reviews that you have experienced?

I guess because it was focussed on you as an individual and your practice. I guess it was individual, but also team. I felt everyone contributed equally because everyone was asked to contribute. I think because we were given the time before meetings to reflect, and everyone was at the meetings and everyone shared. It was enjoyable; I think it was because it was focused on us, our philosophy, our practice.

Is this a valid form of self review?

Yeah. Definitely! I guess for some of the above reasons – it was focused on philosophy and practice. It would be good if all centres could do it and also because it was focused on you as an early childhood teacher and as part of a team. If we were just doing it, and you hadn’t come in, I am not sure if it would have had the same effect.

Any other comments?

Well, I think it was very worthwhile, great to be able to reflect so deeply & to look at our own practice and philosophy and work with the team. I think because we know you, it made it quite comfortable to say whatever.

Final Interview – Teacher 2

Describe the research process

I still think it was very beneficial – even though I may have moved on from *competent* I am still careful about the words I use and the layers of meaning. I still think the process of meeting monthly was very beneficial.

Did you gain anything personally from the process?

I suppose my – I will have to think about it. Because a lot of no.1 sums up what I think. I think it is good that my philosophy is on track with what I believe.

Did you gain anything professionally from the process?

I think the same sort of thing. I think it was good for me to have another time to discuss – not the day to day matters – the deep reflections, seeing everyone's practice and seeing people's strengths, and really respecting people – although I respected them before.

What do think about the process?

I must say I felt the first time was a bit daunting – reading out my philosophy. I felt that everyone looked at the words, it was the whole word *need* that people looked at. I wrote what I believed at the time. I was a bit careful after that. I don't think it could have been any other way. Because we all showed competence at the art table – but do we show it in the sand pit? I also didn't value the carpentry table, because I didn't realise that all centres didn't have it. I now do much more in the carpentry table.

How did the process support teamwork?

I think when we were videoing there was more teamwork – others had to pick up what you would normally do. It has also had an impact on teamwork because you also know where everyone is coming from. But Time is always a problem. We could be more of a team if we had more time. So it was great to have that time every three weeks to sit and discuss.

Did the process change your practice in any way?

I am now very aware of words and their meaning – for *competence*. I became conscious of the words I used with children. In the video I often used the phrase "Let's do that together!", whereas children can often do it themselves, or children can do it with each other's help. Maybe it just shows how important professional development is and the power of being videoed – not just for 10 minutes, but for a whole hour.

How was the process different to other self-reviews?

This was my first self-review – before this I have only experienced a review of policy.

Do you think it is a valid form of self-review?

Yes, definitely. It was great finishing with a meal. It was a celebration of a journey. It was very valid for here with everybody being fully qualified. If it was in a big centre, with unqualified staff, it would have been really different, but still beneficial.

Any other comments?

For me, I am just so pleased I was involved in it. But one of the main reasons for being involved is that I feel the professionalism of early childhood should be supported. If I participated, it would be one more person getting a doctorate.

Because I was so busy looking at the words, I didn't look at my philosophy, but when you drew us all together at the end, we all came back to it.

Final interview – Teacher 3

1. Describe the research experience.

It was daunting to start with because of expectations. It flowed well because it fitted in with our everyday practice. I enjoyed the discussion because it was a chance to explore other team members' perspectives of me personally and what they observed of my practice.

2. What did you gain personally from the process?

Insight into how my philosophy fits with my practice. It gave me the opportunity to explore one aspect of competency. I was able to reflect on how I do things personally, and it was relevant to practice.

3. What did you gain professionally from the process?

I was able to apply and enhance my interactions with children. I was able to build stronger relationships with children by giving more time and less help. Even though I didn't think I saw them as needy, I interfered. So I was able to step back and give more time, while being there if they needed me. I gave them time and space.

4. What did you think of the process?

The process made it valid, because we could examine it (the philosophy and the words used) with everybody's interpretation. The process was very supportive of my personal growth so we had time to engage and enact what we had discussed.

5. How did the process support teamwork?

This process gave us a wonderful insight into teamwork – even though everyone wrote it down in a different way, it was fundamentally the same vision – the ideal outcome was the same – so it built fellowship.

6. Did the process change your practice in any way?

Yeah! Because I take that step back and socially, I give more opportunity for children to work it out for themselves. As a person, I have grown as well. The children really know I am there if they need me. Need is a horrible word but if they require me to do something, I am there.

7. How was the process different to other self-reviews?

Other self-reviews have been short-term and one-off, but this one, because of the process set-up over time, once a month, it reinforced and supported the changes.

8. Do you think it is a valid form of self-review?

I would recommend it – what you put down in words, you don't always enact. What you put down in words is an ideal, but with this form, I realised that it is often hard to enact. The changes in practice to improve are often subtle. It was good also to have the outside perspective and support. It was very supportive doing this in a team – our philosophies were all so similar. We practice in a slightly different way, but we all want the same outcome. I think it could be a

team building exercise, because the outside person coming in mediates the process.

Any other comments?

Thank you for making it so valid and inspirational, and we all benefitted from it.

Final interview Teacher 4.

Describe the research experience.

Well, I think what was highlighted for me was that it doesn't stop. You have triggers that make you discuss with staff about competence and practice. An example of this was when I gave a presentation at a hui in Auckland, it was the powerful images of the children and their competence, and the image of the teachers supporting this that made the presentation. Also from the perspective as a supervisor, that competence can be a feeling that you create. So what I mean, staff might have done training, may have done professional development, may have some skills, but may not project the atmosphere of competence. They may have read the theory, but they may not have the feeling inside them, so they don't project this to the children. It comes from a sense of being, it becomes an atmosphere. When you think and talk about things individually and with staff, it comes up and we can revisit it. I would look back and say an outcome would be that by viewing videos, reflecting and talking about it, teachers were affirmed in their own competence and so are more able to use this to reflect children's competence back to them. When we did look at competence, it led to a discussion on interdependence as competence, not just individual competence.

What did you gain personally for the process?

A deeper understanding of my own philosophy – I still have to work on a better articulation of it. I also feel I got affirmation of teaching practice, deeper understanding of children's competence and my practice. I hope that in practice, it has led to deeper meaning and connections with parents. It has led to share with other visitors to the centre where our thinking was at the time – we spoke to another lecturer about a 1 year old giving a card and how we viewed that child as competent. It also helped that when we edited videos of children with special rights, it allowed greater discrimination and scrutiny. Because we had a lens of competency, we always had professional discretion, we had our awareness sharpened, so we edited more critically, and provided very powerful images of children with special rights as being competent.

What did you gain professionally from the process?

Being able to reflect on theories and how it relates to my philosophy. I guess a stronger sense of the teaching self. Professionally, because you are not a teacher in isolation, it strengthened relationships within the team while still being individuals through building a shared understanding. Even though we are articulating our philosophy better, I feel it is still hard when there are contradictions and multiple viewpoints. Therefore, in terms of sharing knowledge with parents and students, because we have written about it, thought about it in depth, talked about it, it is easier to share it with others.

What did you think about the process?

The time between meetings was great, to think about and reflect on what was said. I think the first data sheet mentioned role models and we didn't mention really mention this. I wondered if we are going back to this. Using videos was

great because it is contextual. You can read mannerisms etc that you couldn't if it was just one person observing practice. Looking back at the journal, it is quite a collection of entries – it is quite good to make it a part of the process. But the process was quite long and by the last video, everyone was quite bored. It is still relevant viewing it at a later date than when it was filmed, as a video evokes more images and thoughts. When you looked at the video again, everyone commented on shifts in the children's development and relationships.

How did the process support teamwork?

I think it strengthened team work. While still acknowledging individual philosophies, we were able to see all the similarities. They are able to work more easily together because they can see why certain approaches are used. I think it is really valuable for an outsider – more objective view, rather than one of the staff members doing it. It has created ongoing discussions about competency.

Has the process changed your practice?

It has not changed it to a huge degree, but it has changed it. I guess it is more attuned to finding ways to work with children's competencies, in terms of thinking and social relationships with each other.

How was the process different from other self-reviews?

An external facilitator was different. This was especially valuable when talking about external factors that are sensitive.

Because it was over a year, it allowed for deeper thinking.

It gives understanding of the process

Because a safe environment was created, teachers are more likely to participate in the future.

It was meaningful on a personal and centre level. Sometimes self-reviews are done on the regulations and are more procedural, whereas this was a very deep undertaking.

All the staff commented in their performance appraisal that being involved in this research was a highlight of their year. They could use it for teacher registration and it gave them a deeper sense of self as a teacher. The journal was evidence of this.

Do you think the process is a valid form of self review?

Absolutely – because it is about the people involved- the stakeholders- because it is in your setting, about you as an individual, the team, the centre, with the added value of having clarification from an outsider. It was also about taking ownership because you made it clear that the participants would drive the process. The guidelines clarified the process, you had time for reflection in between, but there were deadlines to meet. There was no definite result at the end, but it has developed understanding and it has motivated us to keep exploring. We have now become interested in Tuakana-teina interdependence. There were spin offs that have been sparked by the process. Choosing one aspect was important because we could have wafted on in all sorts of directions. Choosing one thing gave a clear direction and a sense of achievement.

Any other comments:

Holistic is an overused word – but it is a rounded way of developing professionally. It did become in-depth on an emotional level, we did collect background information – readings, dictionary – and the whole issue of having to express thoughts. Some people felt more confident in verbal expression, others felt more confident in discussions, and the videos gave a kinetic visualisation of body language. If someone hadn't articulated themselves verbally, they still showed that they were powerful teachers. It provided a more equitable ground for participation between myself, as supervisor, and the rest of the team. Actually, I am really proud of having achieved it, of having written reflections, participated in it for a year while the centre was being extended, and we had committed to another professional development contract. I feel proud! It was a whole year!

Everyone had a deep sense of satisfaction at the end. Having an outsider recording the discussion, and us reading from the reflective journal, put value on what we thought! That wouldn't be the same if it was an insider.

I don't know if a total outsider would have had the same results. It is important that the person coming in does have a rapport, and an understanding of the operations and the background of the staff – for example, the pressures that the staff are under, that it is mixed age, 150 children a week are attending. It was beneficial that there were no set outcomes at the beginning and that we didn't need to travel outside of the centre. You (the researcher) were flexible in the time that you came. The staff respect and trust you and know your academic background and appreciate your academic strength and knowledge. They also know that you have a lot of group facilitation knowledge; it encouraged them to be involved in the research.