New Beginnings Preschool

Centre of Innovation

May 2003 – June 2006

Final Research Report

Putting identity into Community

– nurturing an early childhood learning community through visual art and project work in the curriculum

Lead writers: Jocelyn Wright,

Debbie Ryder and Elaine Mayo

CHRISTCHURCH COLLEGE of EDUCATION

Te Whare Whai Matauraka Ki Otautahi

DISCE UT DOCEAS

NEW Pre-School .INC

Lead writers Jocelyn Wright, Debbie Ryder and Elaine Mayo

New Beginnings Preschool

136 Aldwins Road

Christchurch

ISBN 0-478-13558-0

Web ISBN 0-478-13559-9

Putting identity into community
- nurturing an early childhood learning community through visual art and project work in the curriculum

Lead writers: Jocelyn Wright,
Debbie Ryder and Elaine Mayo

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the numerous participants of this research project who have in some way contributed to emerging knowledge and insights about teaching and learning at New Beginnings Preschool.

The teacher researcher team's passion for learning and teaching sustained the process of the research journey. The honesty and openness of this team has enabled others privileged insights into the real life of early childhood teachers and their learning community.

Children, parents/whanau and the Management Board of New Beginnings Preschool have allowed their lived experiences in the centre to be put under teacher scrutiny, in particular, the children and parents who have contributed to, or participated in the learning and teaching stories contained in this report.

Members of the research advisory group shared a genuine interest in the work of the research team and assisted to take interpretation and thinking to a deeper level. The advisory group nurtured the research team's growing research capabilities.

Anne Meade, as COI project co-ordinator, and the Ministry of Education empowered the project through guidance and resourcing for the three-year project.

The research team's partners and families provided personal support and understanding that enabled individual researchers to contribute their energy and commitment to the project.

A particular note of appreciation is made to Elaine Mayo for her tireless encouragement and help with the development of this report. We also express our thanks to Elizabeth O'Connor for all the support and assistance she gave during the editing phase of this document.

Table of contents

Putting identity into communIty

New Beginnings Preschool Centre of Innovation research report

"Shared knowledge or common sense lies at the core of any successful society." (Saul, 2001 p.19)

Executive summary

New Beginnings Preschool is one of six New Zealand early childhood centres that participated in the first round of the Ministry of Education's Centres of Innovation three-year research project. The hallmark of this research programme is action research led by participant teacher researchers. Throughout the project the teaching team at New Beginnings Preschool worked in partnership with a research associate to explore the ways in which visual arts and project work in the curriculum contributed to building a community of learners in this early childhood environment.

The research question that guided the project at New Beginnings Preschool was:

> *'In what ways can visual art and a project approach to curriculum contribute towards building a community of learners in New Beginnings Preschool?'*

The research project involved New Beginnings Preschool teachers and community in developing and strengthening understandings of Rogoff's (1994) concept of a community of learners, one in which learning is positioned as a transformation of participation. The innovative practices of visual art and project work formed the focus lenses for the research; these curriculum practices are not reported on separately in the main body of this report. The overall intent of the research was to develop understandings of how these two areas of curriculum contribute to building community involvement and participation, and to children's learning. The teacher researcher team identified four key areas that they need to nurture in order to build a community of learning: individual identity, relationships, community of practice identity, and empowerment. The ways in which visual art and project work practices changed and were enhanced to build the learning community are described throughout the report. In essence the teacher researcher team became involved in learning how to do its work better.

Development of the curriculum areas - visual art and project work

The head teacher had introduced the innovations of visual art and project work to the centre in the two years prior to commencement of this research project. Project work practices had been firmly embedded in the programme by the teaching team and visual art practices were beginning to take

shape. Through involvement in the research project the teaching team strengthened theoretical understandings and teaching practices in relation to each of these curriculum areas. Investigations focused on these curriculum areas enabled the teacher researcher team to develop a view of participants in the learning community as co-learners; capable, confident teachers and learners.

Visual art

Investigations into visual art practices began with the teaching team questioning existing practices following the employment of their second visual art teacher. The research exploration involved teachers critiquing knowledge, understandings and practice both personally and collectively as their understanding of practice underwent a significant shift. Visual art practices shifted from being viewed as a separate component of the programme, influenced by a concept of what was developmentally appropriate in practice along with creative self-expression, to a paradigm where the art programme was inclusive of all age groups in the centre, integrated into the curriculum, implemented by all teachers (not solely by the art teacher), and based on sound relationships among the art teacher, parents, teachers and children. This paradigm was interpreted as:

Co-learning by children and adults: underpinned by the belief that engaging in art experiences is a cognitive "activity of the mind, of relationships, as well as feelings" (Visser, 2003, p.1).

Visual art became integrated in the centre programme as teacher confidence to participate in this learning domain increased. The value of having a teacher with visual art expertise contributed to teachers' learning as much as it did to children's learning.

The key findings that emerged in relation to visual art teaching and learning include….

Teacher learning through developing visual art

- Differences in teaching styles directly influence children's participation. A directive teacher style restricts children as co-learners.
- Teachers gained a more positive view of themselves as teachers and learners in visual art through gaining understandings of their past and present influences, who they are and how they came to be.
- Teachers increased individual confidence in working with children in visual art; they became more interested and willing to participate.
- Participating in art with children is a valuable source of learning.
- Individuals need not strive to be the same. Visual art encourages individuality where individual approach and expression is valued.

- Participating in a ‘considered’ way is more valuable than seeking a ‘right’ way to teaching in visual art. A considered approach to teaching involves practices embedded in respectful relationships. The factors teachers identified as necessary to consider are: promoting a positive self image, sense of satisfaction and achievement, value of and respect for others’ work, appreciation of aesthetics and beauty, and promoting a sense of self as competent and capable.
- The key for teachers is to really ‘listen’ to the child and follow their agenda, not impose their own.
- Visual art is a social activity during which adults and children can engage in reciprocal relationships.

Visual art development in the programme

Three areas of the programme were enhanced; time, space and relationships.

- Adult child relationships became underpinned by:
    - acceptance of difference and diversity.
    - an awareness of how valuing individual knowledge and expertise contributes to a person’s self-esteem and in turn encourages participation in the community
    - an understanding of how individuals enter social relationships with unique interests, strengths and abilities. Through social interaction expertise is shared.
    - a belief that individual contribution enriches learning opportunities for the social group and nurtures community learning.
- Teachers made environmental changes to provide more unrestricted access to art space and resources, and provision for continued experiences
- Kai routine changed to become a rolling time, allowing children uninterrupted time for their art work

Shifts in teacher participation

All teachers increased participation in teaching and learning in the area of visual art. Teachers moved their practice from an intuitive level to one that is informed and thought about as evidenced by:

- Teachers working collectively and sharing enthusiasm to work with children
- All teachers participating in art experiences with children. Visual art in the programme is not the sole responsibility of an art teacher.

- The art teacher's expertise and support began to be utilized more as other teachers actively sought her guidance
- Teachers thought more deeply about what art experiences they wanted to offer children, both inside and outside the centre, and why they want to offer these
- The level of respect for children's work increased by ensuring up-to-date work was displayed and individual children's art folders were introduced

Children's visual art learning

Five key components of visual art in the programme became visible during the research project: natural resources, textiles, paint and drawing, print-making, and collage.

- As children's confidence and competence in these components increased, complexity was added to their art experiences by combining different media and techniques so they could learn to use their skills in different ways to achieve different effects or purposes.
- Real and authentic tools and resources were used competently by children of all ages. Adults displayed their respect for children as capable and competent visual art learners by ensuring children had access to quality resources.
- Visual art is more than being creative or having an experience. It is a tool that children use to persevere with projects, convey ideas and to work in collaboration with others.
- Copying, or observing and using the ideas of others, is a central strategy to co-learning. It involves sharing ideas and ways of doing things in a manner that all children can participate in. Children don't need to rely on language to be able to engage in co-constructing knowledge and abilities.
- Art provides a means for children to communicate ideas, be curious, make connections, to challenge one's self, test and explore ideas.
- Children developed an attitude of ' I know I can do it.' This became evident as children used their knowledge and competence to pursue their own ideas. For example, a child would come with an idea of what they wanted to make and through discussion with a teacher could select the resources needed, develop a plan and set about creating.
- Children's art projects would often continue over days as the child added to and worked on their task until they were completely satisfied with their end result.

Visual art attracts community participation

- Visual art created interest and curiosity within the community and as a result, participants gained knowledge of and capabilities in the use of different media, techniques and ways to express ideas.
- Parents frequently commented on how their creativity was rekindled, and that they were doing similar art activities at home for themselves and with their children.
- Parental appreciation for their children's art was visible as they displayed pride in their child's work. Comments about how they intended to display the work at home or give as gifts to family and friends were often heard.

A common identity: Adults and children as teachers and learners

A key outcome in the area of visual art learning has been the construction of the identity of visual art teachers and learners, one in which children and adults display similar characteristics. The research team present these findings as a set of learning dispositions directly connected to Te Whāriki, the early childhood curriculum: Dreamer and Player (Well-being), Achiever (Belonging), Explorer (Exploration), Communicator (Communication), Participator, Facilitator, Contributor (Contribution). Through visual art children have access to all areas of learning outlined in Te Whāriki, the early childhood curriculum. Once art was seen as a way to incorporate other curriculum areas to make learning fun and to present on a table for an activity – but no longer.

Project work

The vision of members of this community (parents/whanau, children and teachers) engaging together in children's learning had been established through the implementation of a project approach to curriculum prior to this research project. During the course of the three-year project the centre experienced a number of staff changes. These changes threw into relief the need for teachers to develop collective understandings of project work practices and perspectives about the value of this approach. Inheriting practices that had previously been established was insufficient in supporting new teachers to implement projects with children. They needed to understand and have ownership of the practices. Children, parents and whanau on the other hand had experienced shared participation in project work and retained the expectation that this would continue. It became the responsibility of the changing teaching team to find pathways to re-ignite the project work vision for their community.

The key findings that emerged in relation to implementing project work include….

Strengthened teacher understandings

- Projects are about focused and sustained areas of learning. They involve the joint participation of children, parents and teachers who investigate and make discoveries about the processes and content of learning.
- Projects originate with the child. They are based on areas of learning or interest of the child/ren so as to engage children in purposeful and meaningful learning.
- Teachers cannot predetermine a project journey direction.
- Participants can be experts as well as learners, as knowledge and learning occurs as a shared venture within a social context.
- Project work is supported by documentation that engages community participants in discussing and revisiting experiences.

Understanding the teacher role

In project work, teachers:

- Attend to children's thinking
- Respond to children's interests and enquiries by adding ideas to extend experiences
- Facilitate children's connections with prior experience and learning
- Enrich the experience with the provision of resources, including resource people
- Engage in learning with the children and parents, and model an enjoyment of learning
- Facilitate shared meaning-making by unravelling the known and unknown
- Develop their own content knowledge through researching for and with the children.

Practices that nurture community participation in projects

Project work practices establish a culture in the community, one in which parents, children and teachers hold expectations for engaging together in explorations and learning.

- Children, parents and teachers play an active part in projects as they are empowered as teachers and learners.
- Communication practices, including visual and documented, between preschool and home make participation visible to the community and contribute to the expectation that parents and whanua will be kept informed and invited to participate.

- Children's learning is encouraged, supported and celebrated as connecting links between home and centre cohere.
- Engaging in dialogue with children is an essential component of project implementation.
- Group meetings with children establish a culture for participation by using familiar artefacts and resources such as a regular space and time of day, a routine that establishes expectations to participate, eg. turns to talk, drawing ideas, bringing things from home.
- Participation in group meetings is child driven as interest in the project inquiry determines whether or not children wish to participate.

A recent shift in teacher understanding and practice

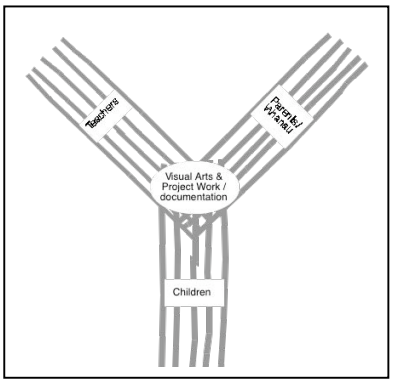
A recent change in project work practices came about through the influence of teachers attending a workshop presented by Alise Shaffer alongside teacher investigation into how to do their work better. Acknowledgement of the shift in understanding came about as the teacher researcher team reflected on their research data (recent stories about centre projects) and noticed that they were using a different word to describe a project. The term 'inquiry' was visible in documentation; it hadn't been before. The shift from using the term project to the term inquiry reflected a difference in what teachers identified as the basis for the children's learning experiences. The key area of difference is that projects are finding out about a topic or theme whereas inquiries are more about exploring thinking and finding answers or solutions. Teachers acknowledge that in an inquiry, power is given over to the children, teachers follow their lead.

Nurturing a learning community

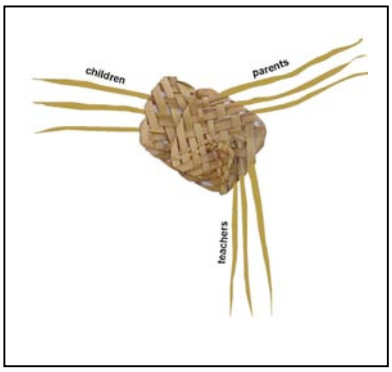
The learning and teaching community described in this report is one that did not just naturally form when a group of people came together. It is not the physical environment in which members of a community come together that contributes to building a learning community; rather this is grounded in the people, how they relate and what they do. The curriculum areas of project work and visual art provided the research team with focus lenses through which to view the community in action as they arrived at understandings of how a learning community can be developed and nurtured. It was discovered that it is what teachers do in these areas of curriculum that differentiates between a regular early childhood place of learning from an early childhood learning community. This learning community became characterised by active particpation and dialogue. Teachers achieved this through valuing individual difference and diversity, developing respectful and trusting

relationships, sharing excitement for children's learning and encouraging particpation, and sharing responsibility within the community for curriculum experiences.

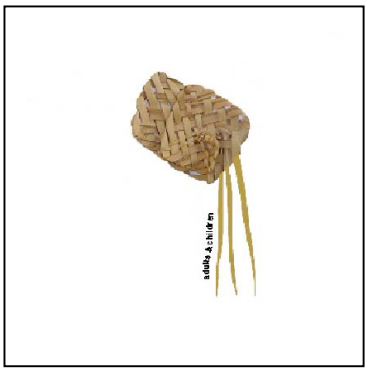
The image of New Beginnings Preschool as a learning community evolved during the course of the three-year research project. This is diagrammatically presented in the following three images.



1. Three groups of participants



2. Individuals within the groups



3. Participants as learners and teachers

1. Three main groups of participants in the learning community were identified at the beginning of the research; parents/whanau, children and teachers. The research focus was to gain understanding of how a project approach in tandem with a strong focus on visual art strengthens the weaving, or fabric, of the community. The central whāriki in the diagram is woven from three strands of harakeke, the participants in the community. The way they are woven together represented how project work and visual art in the centre were viewed as providing the space for joint participation to occur, that is parents, children and teachers participating and learning together.

2. The original visual representation developed from two-dimensional to a three-dimensional diagram. The woven harakeke putiputi (flower) became a significant metaphor for representing the developing understandings of New Beginnings Preschool's community of learners. The three layers of weaving representing the flower became significant as the research team adopted the use of and strengthened their understandings of Rogoff's (2003) three lenses of analysis of socio-cultural activity. The background layer represents the environment (home and centre as explained above) as the whāriki (or culture) where the Principles of Te Whāriki are woven together. The middle layer represents the communication practices that nurture relationships and a culture of dialogue among participants. The layer in the front represents the ways in which individuals become visible through participation in community practices at different times and in different ways. The lenses enabled the interrelationship between individuals, and relationships amongst

community participants and the centre context to come into view. This second image acknowledged participants in a way that the first did not, as individuals within the group of participants.

3. The image of the harakeke flower further evolved as the teacher researcher team strengthened understandings of the Preschool community as a learning community. Teachers re-defined their view of teachers, parents and children as separate groups of participants (as positioned in the first two diagrams) to one that has little differentiation between the groups. The image of children and adults as co-learners, who share similar responsibilities and characteristics as teachers and learners, was formed.

A 'community of learners' for this teaching team means a community where everyone is respected and valued as partners in the learning process, with each member bringing a wealth of experience and knowledge to the relationship. Through social participation each person gains not only knowledge and capabilities, but also an understanding of the purpose that knowledge serves and confidence in themselves as participants.

We found that the four key areas that need to be nurtured in order to build a community of learning are: individual identity that nourishes co-learning, transforming relationships through dialogue, nurturing a community of practice identity, and empowering the community.

Individual identity nourishes co-learning

The teacher researcher team shifted their perspective of the identity of participants as group members, to identity as an individual within a group, and finally individual identity as a capable and competent member of the community, a co-learner.

The key findings that emerged in relation to individual identity include….

- Identity relates to who we are, defined through our lived experiences and interactions – how we live from day-to-day.
- The perception teachers hold of themselves, and the people in the community, influences practice and in turn how people participate in the community.
- Parental participation is not always evident in the centre, it can occur beyond the walls of the centre and looks different for different people at different times.
- Parents have an interdependent relationship with the centre, the two sets of adults (parents and teachers) are complementary.
- Rogoff's three foci of analysis was a useful tool for teachers to use to focus on individuals while retaining the complete picture of the teaching and learning experience. Teaching and

learning documentation recognised how individuals contribute to learning as well as how an individual's changing participation is illustrative of learning.

- Documentation of children's learning both informs and invites parental participation.
- Parents are major contributors to their child's learning.
- Teaching styles can directly influence children's participation. When the teacher role is more directive, children take a passive role.
- As special interests and strengths are nurtured; the child gains confidence, enjoyment and a sense of identity within his/her relationships.
- Teachers strengthened their individual identity as visual art learners, and as one who guides learning through interactions.
- Personal relationships with colleagues contributed to improvements in the way the team worked together, evidenced by increased respect for and tolerance of difference and diversity, and recognition of and valuing others expertise.
- Adults and children share a co-learner identity. Children and adults display common behaviours and characteristics when engaged in visual art.
- Co-construction involves a shift from the teacher supporting, identifying learning and responding to it, to becoming an active participant, and contributor – a co-learner.
- Individual identity came to mean acceptance of self and others as both a learner and teacher regardless of the role one has in the community.
- As co-learners the identity of individuals is honoured, valued and respected.

Transforming relationships through dialogue

Relationships are the cornerstone of our community of learners. Developing respectful and trusting relationships among parents, children and teachers is at the very heart of teacher practice in an early childhood learning community.

The key findings that emerged in relation to relationships include….

- Parents, teachers and children are all participants in the centre's community of learning
- Relationships are a catalyst for participation, learning occurs in the process of participation
- Building relationships with **all** parents is hard work – it doesn't just happen
- Teacher communication practices became based on acknowledgement that all parents are interested and willing to support their child, in their own way and time.

- Children's on-going learning experiences became richer and more meaningful as teachers developed practices to promote closer relationships with parents. As these relationships developed, dialogue became easier and more prevalent in the centre.
- Participation takes on different forms in different contexts at different times. Within transforming relationships, collaborative partnerships are encouraged to occur, and family members are invited to play an extensive part in their child's learning process.
- Transforming relationships develop within a culture of dialogue in the centre. Teachers cultivated a culture of dialogue through documentation, visual representations and personal communication.
- The ways in which dialogue fosters developing relationships, parental participation and children's learning is presented as a five level framework that demonstrates how, through dialogue, teachers can 'hear' the multiple voices of the community and work collaboratively in support of children's learning. "When we don't hear, our sense of community is lost."
- Rogoff's (2003) three lenses for analysis of socio cultural activity aided the teaching team to uncover multiple layers of child, teacher and parent participation or learning occurring within the centre.

Nurturing a community of practice identity

Community identity forms as adults and children participate, relate, make decisions and learn together within an environment that recognises an inter-connectedness between the Preschool and children's homes. Engaging together in learning is the practice this community has in common.

The key findings that emerged in relation to the community of practice identity include….

- Learning together is the magic (practice) that drives the learning community.
- The enthusiasm and passion for learning modelled by teachers becomes infectious to other participants of the community.
- Participation in the community needs to be nurtured. Teachers have the important role of nurturing the participation of others through sharing excitement for children's learning and making pathways for particpation accessible.
- The identity of the community is underpinned by an understanding that the community consists of a collective group of people who use collaborative processes to make decisions about the community's activity.
- The community values multiple perspectives, meanings and viewpoints. In a collective group of people, each person can act differently.

- Collaborative decision-making influences the actions of individuals.
- Individuals within the community are shaped by and in turn shape the identity of the learning community
- Teacher participation is centrally important in shaping community identity. Teacher beliefs and practices create a culture or way of doing things for the community. The ways in which community members respond to the culture contributes to the identity of the community.
- The identity of the learning community is one in which home and Preschool come together in an interdependent way in support of children's learning.
- Community identity undergoes constant evolution, rather than abrupt or radical change: practices of the past continue in some form.

  "The temporal dimension of identity is critical. Not only do we keep negotiating our identities, but they place our engagement in practice in this temporal context. We are always simultaneously dealing with specific situations, participating in the histories of certain practices, and involved in becoming certain persons. As trajectories, our identities incorporate the past and the future in the very process of negotiating the present. (Wenger, 1998. p. 155)"
- In times of change historical and cultural practices remain influential on current practice in the centre.
- A learning community takes time and opens itself to taking risks while building community.

Empowering the community

Empowerment is a 'way of being' in a learning community; it is a part of the culture of the community. Empowerment is grounded in the people of the community, how they relate and what they do. The concept of empowerment is understood as a spirit that permeates the centre.

The key findings that emerged in relation to empowering the community include….

- Empowerment as the spirit of the community leads to people engaging together in shared responsibilities while also having freedom to act and grow individually.
- Teachers empower the community by providing space for others to adopt different roles and responsibilities, including leadership.
- Through empowering parental participation, children's learning is supported and nurtured beyond the walls of the centre.
- The traditional role of 'teachers as experts' is given over to one of 'teachers as co-learners', as expertise within the community is recognized, valued and utilized.
- Empowerment is evident in the things teachers do; in the things they say; and in who they are.

- During periods of change the needs of one group of participants in the community can overshadow that of other participants. The community can be disempowered as avenues for community participation disappear.
- Continuity in children's learning across settings is a valuable outcome of an empowered community.

Life long learning as a valued outcome

This research project has nurtured life long learning through the interactions of teachers, parents, and children within a learning community. Teacher practice is guided by the principles of Te Whāriki and therefore experienced as the community participates in the life of the centre.

The key findings that emerged in relation to life long learning….

- New Beginnings Preschool exists and lives as a community of learners as the Principles of Te Whāriki are enacted for all members of the community.
- All members of the community are ready, willing and able learners.
- Community members enrich their learning through participation in this early childhood environment. Their learning equips them with knowledge, skills and dispositions that enable them to continue learning in other contexts.
- Continuity of learning is evident when children and parents display confidence to participate competently in other settings.

Building a community of practice through particpation in research

Pedagogical documentation as data including teaching and learning stories

The use of regular centre pedagogical documentation as research data proved to be an effective tool for the purposes of this research. Rather than gathering data as an extra task, the use of teaching and learning stories ensured that research activity remained embedded in teacher practice. This data supported teachers to engage in reflective discussions based on what they actually do and what occurs in the centre as a result. Discrepancies within the data could not be disputed as the data researchers generated was about their own practice.

Because learning stories and teacher reflection were constantly the focus of analysis these documentation practices were further developed. Changes were made to the ways in which

teaching and learning is documented in the centre as a result of teacher learning about the needs of the community as well as their strengthened understanding of socio-cultural theory.

Teaching and learning stories provided ready access to view centre practice from an historical position. Acknowledgement of historical influences contributed to teacher learning as they came to recognise how differences in theoretical perspectives influence practice. The stories offered researchers the opportunity to look back as well as to look forward as they strove to form a collective view of the learning community.

Collective praxis – collaborative action research as professional development

Teacher learning and resulting changes made to pedagogical practice are significant outcomes of the teacher researcher team's participation in this action research project. Teachers themselves viewed the three-year project as valuable professional development for the centre. They examined their own practices and learnt how to do their work better. The collaborative action research methodology described in this report was instrumental in creating a learning community culture within the teaching team. This culture became established as, through participatory action research, the teacher researcher team was nurtured in the four key areas of individual identity, relationships, community of practice identity, and empowerment. These features contribute to an understanding of what constitutes effective professional development for early childhood teachers.

Individual identity

Each teacher's knowledge, skills and understandings were valued and respected. Research processes built knowledge by challenging assumptions and exposing discrepancies within a climate of trust. Processes and research tools supported the voice of individuals to be heard and allowed space for individual investigation and learning. Teachers developed an awareness of and gained strength in their personal and professional beliefs, values and understandings. Difference and diversity within the team became viewed as a valued quality of the team. Differences nourished co-learning. Likewise, centre practices were inclusive of and nourished by diversity within the community.

Relationships

Relationships between members of the research team, built on trust and respect, developed and strengthened over time through dialogue. New members to the teaching team were given time to talk to build collegial relationships as well as time to become familiar with the research project. The complementary practices of pedagogical documentation and teacher discussion used in research

processes drew in new teacher's participation. Collaborative participation in critical reflective discussions about their work supported the development of both personal and professional relationships.

The research associate and teaching staff had developed relationships prior to beginning this research project. The research associate had previously facilitated professional development in the centre through a Ministry of Education early childhood professional development contract. Respectful and trusting relationships between the research associate and teacher researchers strengthened through involvement in research. The research associate's role developed as that of a critical friend; one who questions, challenges discrepancies and assumptions, introduces new perspectives, and encourages new ideas and ongoing investigations. Through intensive involvement with the teaching team the research associate became an 'insider' while being able to retain an 'outsider' perspective.

Community of practice identity

Teacher researchers shared a common purpose integrated throughout their research investigations; they were motivated to learn about their practice to benefit teaching and learning for their community. Research tools and processes retained a focus on community participation. Data generated was grounded in 'real' centre life. The collaborative nature of the investigations exposed the views of others and contributed to a stronger appreciation of the interplay between teacher practice and community (children, parents/whanau) participation. Access to relevant literature contributed another layer of views and perspectives that both influenced and gave confidence to emerging knowledge and understandings about this learning community. Teacher researchers' engaged together in an area of shared interest as they socially constructed changed understandings and practice both individually and collaboratively.

Dissemination of this research project was an expectation of the Centre of Innovation research responsibilities. Teachers and the management board had numerous opportunities to share and discuss their experiences in differing contexts; from visitors to the centre to presentations at national and international conferences. While initially the thought of presenting created anxiety for the presenters the experience itself contributed to participant confidence in and understandings about their research journey. The stories contained within this report were written for the purpose of dissemination at various points along the research journey. The process of writing assisted teacher researchers to clarify their thinking and, as a result, made new learning explicit. Writing became a process of making teacher learning visible for individuals as well as the collective group.

Dissemination responsibilities assisted to consolidate researcher learning through a process of what Wenger (1998) describes as reification.

> "*Reification refers to the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into 'thingness'. In so doing we create points of focus around which the negotiation of meaning becomes organised."* (Wenger, 1998. p.58)

Empowerment

The research design, investigations and processes were teacher driven. Areas of investigation were relevant and meaningful for the context of the centre. The research team was able to participate in the project through access to resources such as time for meetings, technology and literature, along with the constant support of an outside facilitator, the research associate funded by the Ministry of Education. The research associate engaged in learning with the team and contributed as a critical friend. The teaching team retained ownership of research outcomes and celebrated developments within their community.

Preface

This research recognizes that we live in a postmodern era where knowledge is characterized by "unruliness" (Stronach and Maclure,1997, p.98), and perceived as the ability to perform or act effectively (Lyotard, Kvale). Unlike forms of research that seek to consolidate meaning and identify patterns that can be generalized across populations, this research recognizes that in times of rapid, dynamic, unpredictable change it is important for all professional educators to be adaptable, to be informed of options, and to be selective in choosing appropriate actions: no longer are we guided by rules established by previous generations; no longer can we 'arrest' or 'freeze' the truth, or delay action until consensus is reached. Through its focus on knowledge that is generated collectively, this research addresses the complexity of meaning as we are coming to understand it.

> Postmodern deconstruction must *address* rather than *arrest* the 'mobilisation' of meaning in educational policy, and attend to the *uncertain trajectories* of meanings in contemporary times. (Stronach and Maclure, 1997: 97, italics added)

The research shows that teachers and researchers, working in a learning community (early childhood education in this case), can utilize prior theoretical understandings, united with fresh observations, questions, reflections and experiments, to arrive at new knowledge which both arises out of and is integrated with practice in that community. This insight and integration was underpinned by a specific approach to data gathering, analysis and collective knowledge construction (in this case, coming to understand through sharing learning stories).

Artificial boundaries between theory and practice are broken down in ways that point to exciting future possibilities for professional praxis.

The methodological backdrop to this research is built upon approaches to collective practitioner research described in Mayo (2003). It relies upon post-structural, critical and neo-pragmatic theory, and is informed by complexity theory from the new sciences (Wheatley, 1999). Though some reference is made to these theoretical abstractions throughout the report, above all, this research tells stories about the experiences and insights of children, teachers and parents working at the New Beginning Preschool, in Christchurch, New Zealand, between 2002 and 2006.

This report provides an example of how postmodern approaches to research can be embedded in the everyday lives of teachers who are growing in their understandings of themselves and the communities in which they work. By viewing the teacher as a member of a team, which, collectively, seeks to investigate particular aspects of individual and collective practice, this research shows how new knowledge can be constructed socially and collectively.

> Social constructionism is counterintuitive … with regard to our notions of personhood this means that the very idea that we exist as separate, discrete individuals, that our emotions are personal, spontaneous expressions of an inner self we call personality is fundamentally questioned. (Burr, 1995, p. 17)

This research demonstrates the kind of sharing of knowledge within a community that Saul (2001) refers to as integrated thought, something, which enables each individual in the group to act intelligently, sensibly, and confidently – something that is sadly lacking in workplaces.

> What prevents us from acting as if we were … intelligent is our unwillingness to insist on integrated thought – that is to act as if we shared knowledge with others in society. (Saul, 2001, p. 64)

The teacher researchers in this study have built on existing theory to develop working models, which guide their praxis (see, for example, the description of New Beginnings Preschool Framework in chapter 3). When such clearly articulated understandings are embedded in the culture of a community, the community develops a the resilience of a community of practice which, as Schalager and Fusco (2002) point out, links practitioners, providers and researchers; it is able to grow, evolve, and reproduce its membership; community members take on multiple roles such as broker, moderator, mentor and learner in different contexts. They argue that:

> … a community of practice is not just another term used to convey a sense of professional kinship or shared interest; it is an integral, evolving identity that spans stakeholder groups within a school system. (Schalager and Fusco, 2002, p. 217)

The exciting feature of this community is that the teachers themselves take on the role of researchers. This means that the processes developed within this project are likely to continue: the notion of teacher as researcher within community is firmly embedded as an ongoing model for professional growth – the quotations from teacher researchers at the start of each chapter give some hint of the impact of this project on their self esteem, their competence as educators, and their collective intelligence as they work with children and their parents.

This research demonstrates an approach to knowledge construction that is based on the idea that "societal systems have no goals to be achieved, rather they have relations to be maintained" (Skyttner, 1996, p. 248). Insights from complexity theory (although not described as such, in practice) allowed the teacher researchers at New Beginnings Preschool to look holistically at their work and to call on theory developed by others if and when it seemed appropriate. The shared methodological knowledge of this community has been summarised in four ways within this report (see the sections highlighted in grey throughout the document): "influences" point to literature which has been fundamental in guiding guided collective thinking and action; "supporting literature" point to literature where the ideas resonate because of their similarity to findings of this

community; “research processes” describe how data have been gathered and analysed in order to address specific questions or needs; “findings” report on theory the teacher researchers have developed and incorporated into their practice. These four constructs, taken together, provide an approach to collective knowledge construction that could well have wide implications for future professional learning within educational settings.

A current challenge for the education system is to move beyond deficit theories where the cause of social problems is deemed to lie with the individual, toward more holistic approaches where the focus is on relationships among individuals and patterns of communication within communities. The need is for a shift from dominant psychological approaches to research, which focuses on the individual to more holistic approaches, which consider the complexity of lived experience where theory can, at best, provide us with insight into how to act in the light of new challenges. Complexity theory points out that social problems (appropriately called *wicked problems* by some) are never solved, at best they are only resolved - over and over again (Skyttner, 1996, p. 248). This insight suggests that educational research within educational settings needs to transcend the classical methods of the social sciences which seek theories about best practice: an important new focus for educational research is find ways to enable the *wicked problems* of teaching, including day-to-day problems, to be addressed by teacher researchers, *in situ,* and for those findings to be documented and disseminated in ways that impact on policy.

The centres of innovation research at New Beginnings Preschool provides insights into how schools, early childhood institutions, and, indeed, tertiary institutions might develop as learning communities where *wicked problems* are addressed collectively within local educational settings.

Elaine Mayo

March 2006

Overview of chapters and layout

Chapter 1: Introduction: Community, context and research

New Beginnings Preschool is one of six New Zealand early childhood centres participating in the first round of the Ministry of Education's Centres of Innovation three-year research project. The hallmark of this research programme is action research led by participant teacher researchers. Throughout the project the teaching team at New Beginnings Preschool worked in partnership with a research associate to explore the ways in which visual arts and project work in the curriculum contributed to building a community of learners in this early childhood environment. Significant outcomes of the research include new understandings of the construction of identity, both individual and collective, within the Preschool community.

This chapter gives details of all the strands of the community within and about which this research took place. It introduces background from theory (and other contextual factors). Finally, it presents the three innovations we investigated, and explains our approach to emerging data.

Chapter 2: "Who are we?" : Individual identity

This chapter presents findings that illustrate the strengthening of individual identity for members of our community: teachers, parents/whanau and children. In the first section of this chapter, we describe how understandings about parent identity emerged from insights gained through a parent survey. Parental perspectives strongly influenced the teacher researchers' view of their parent community and as a result parents became valued and acknowledged as individuals rather than seen as a group of people with common characteristics. The second section of this chapter tells how teachers brought the notion of individual identity (child, parent and teacher) into current learning and teaching documentation practices and, in so doing, strengthened their understandings of socio-cultural learning theory. The concluding section describes the emergence of an identity of individuals in this learning community as co-learners; adults and children sharing the roles of teacher and learner. This understanding emerged as teachers firstly questioned difference in pedagogical approaches in visual art. Through developing teacher confidence and capability in working in visual art with children, teachers gained a positive view of themselves as learners in this domain and community participation in visual art strengthened. One teacher's story is shared as an example of the process teachers experienced in coming to know oneself as a learner and teacher. The outcome of this area of exploration is presented as a framework that describes the image of a co-learner in visual art. The identity of the co-learner is described as:

An explorer,

An achiever,

A participator, facilitator, contributor,

A dreamer and player, and

A communicator.

Chapter 3: "Doing the hard work": Relationships

This chapter explores the 'hard work' or intentional aspects of being a teacher in a community of learners as teachers develop practices to promote closer relationships with parents. As these relationships develop, dialogue becomes easier and more prevalent in the centre. The chapter tells the story of the teachers' journey of building parental participation in children's learning, from the realization that dialogue means two-way communication to establishing practices where mutual communication becomes an expectation within the community. Children's on-going learning experiences become richer and more meaningful.

Analysis of teacher and parent relationships led the research team to identify a five level framework that illustrates movement from relationships based on uni-directional information-giving to relationships of interdependence. One learning story, set in the centre's infant and toddler context, is shared to illustrate this framework in action. This story illuminates the interrelationship of teacher/parent dialogue, developing relationships and children's learning.

An individual teacher's story describes how her learning about doing the 'hard work' is put into action, articulating an understanding of the importance of relationships (espoused) does not mean they will occur. This teacher discovered how doing (enacting) the hard work to build reciprocal and responsive relationships with one family had beneficial outcomes for her as teacher, as well as the parents, child and wider family.

Chapter 4: "Igniting the magic": Community of practice identity

This chapter describes how our Preschool community identity is developed by exploring the practices and routines, tools and artefacts, climate and culture of the centre. It demonstrates the understanding we gained of how individuals and groups within the community are shaped by and in turn shape the identity of the learning community through the practices adopted within the early childhood programme. Teacher practice is instrumental in nurturing a 'community of learning' identity.

In this chapter we focus on people's participation in community processes that form common practice, and how practices evolve and respond to the changing community. We explore the connection between historical cultural practices and emerging new practices as the teaching team undertake a process of re-constructing project work in the curriculum. Prior knowledge and understandings merge with new ones as the teacher researcher team experience change in the community. Our community's identity undergoes constant evolution, rather than abrupt or radical change: practices of the past continue in some form but do not necessarily remain the same.

The first section of this chapter explores the impact of change in teacher curriculum practices on community identity. The teacher researcher team reviewed and reflected on centre documentation to develop an understanding of how participation in the community is affected by change in community culture and new curriculum teaching practices. The second section explores the impact of change in community membership on centre practices as the group of over-two teachers' grapple with re-constructing their collective approach to group project work implementation during a period of staffing changes. The 'magic' of the community engaging with and participating together in learning appeared to have been lost and this team wanted to re-ignite it. A group project story is presented to illustrate how projects became re-established in the programme; however, it does not look exactly the same as before as the basis for group learning through projects shifts from a topic to an inquiry. Changes in teacher practice and learning are described and explained in relation to how participation of children, teachers and parents/whanau influenced the re-construction of practice. The final section of this chapter explores the reasons underpinning the shifts in project work practice. The critical role teacher's hold in a community of learners comes into view. Teachers were able to make effective change by taking notice of the participation of children and parents/whanau rather than focussing on the perceived needs of the teaching team.

Chapter 5: "A way of being": Empowerment

This chapter posits the view that empowerment is a 'way of being' in a learning community. It is a part of the culture of the community. We described relationships in chapter 3 as the heart of a learning community. In this chapter we position empowerment as the spirit of the community.

The learning and teaching community described in this report is one that did not just naturally form when a group of people came together. The community we have described and illustrated is one that is underpinned by the principle of empowerment. Each chapter of this report has acknowledged that it is not the physical environment in which members of a community come together that contributes to building a learning community; rather this is grounded in the people, how they relate

and what they do. The curriculum areas of project work and visual art provided the research team with focus lenses through which to view the community in action as they arrived at understandings of how a learning community can be developed and nurtured. It was discovered that it is what teachers do in these areas of curriculum that differentiates between a regular early childhood place of learning from an early childhood learning community.

The concept of empowerment is familiar to the early childhood sector in New Zealand as it is one of the four principles outlined in Te Whāriki, the early childhood curriculum (1996). Te Whāriki (p. 40) describes an empowering curriculum as one that enables children to:

- Take increasing responsibility for their own learning and care
- Develop an enhanced sense of self-worth, identity, confidence and enjoyment
- Contribute their own special strengths and interests
- Learn useful and appropriate ways to find out what they want to know
- Understand their own individual ways of learning and being creative.

These valued outcomes of the early childhood curriculum are explored in this chapter as we apply the understanding of empowerment that emerged through our research project. We describe the concept of empowerment as a spirit that permeates the centre.

Chapter 6: Reflections on life long learning

This research project has nurtured life long learning through the interactions of teachers, parents, and children within a learning community. Teacher practice is guided by the principles of Te Whāriki and therefore experienced as the community participates in the life of the centre. Participation in the innovative practices of visual art and project work has contributed to learning for all participants in the centre. Ways in which learning manifests itself is not always immediately evident within the early childhood environment however; we have gained some insight into how our practices nurture the foundations for on-going learning. The story shared by a parent in this chapter provides a strong sense of how valuable participation in a community of learners can be for children and adults alike.

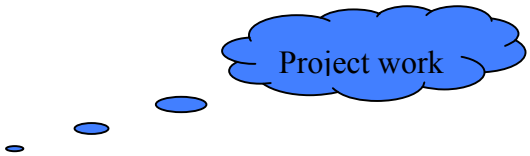
How the report is set out

Each chapter discusses one of the four key areas that the teacher researcher team identified as needing to be nurtured in order to build a community of learning: individual identity, relationships, community of practice identity, and empowerment.

Relevant literature, influences on our thinking and research processes we used are marked by grey boxes within the text. It is possible to make sense of our story without reading these details.

- Stories provided by the participant teacher researchers are included to illustrate and give life to the concepts discussed. Extended learning stories are marked by coloured bars on the left side of the page.

- Visual art interest: readers who wish to follow the developments in visual art through this report are provided with the 'signpost' of a yellow bubble.



- Project work interest: readers who wish to follow the developments in project work through this report are provided with the 'signpost' of a blue bubble.

Chapter 1 – Introduction: Community, context and research

"I feel I have gained so much personally from the research… the ideas which have evolved. I have gained confidence in myself and my beliefs." (Libby Hopkins, teacher researcher)

The Centres of Innovation research project

New Beginnings Preschool is one of six New Zealand early childhood centres participating in the first round of the Ministry of Education's Centres of Innovation three-year research project. The hallmark of this research programme is action research led by participant teacher researchers. Throughout the project the teaching team at New Beginnings Preschool worked in partnership with a research associate to explore the ways in which visual arts and project work in the curriculum contributed to building a community of learners in this early childhood environment. Significant outcomes of the research include new understandings of the construction of identity, both individual and collective, within the Preschool community.

This chapter gives details of all the strands of the community within and about which this research took place. It introduces background from theory (and other contextual factors). Finally, it presents the three innovations we investigated, and explains our approach to emerging data.

The community: New Beginnings Preschool

New Beginnings Preschool is a community-based early childhood centre, established in 1983. The centre caters for a range of diverse ethnicities and backgrounds in the suburb of Linwood, in Christchurch. The centre is open for six hours a day and is licensed for a maximum of 39 children, including eight under-two tear old's. The majority of children attend half days with up to 100 children attending in a week. The centre staff comprises seven teachers, one administrator, one art teacher, and one support person. A representative parent committee manages the centre, with the Head Teacher and Licensee sharing overall responsibility as co-managers.

The research participants

Project director and head teacher: Debbie Ryder

Debbie Ryder held the responsibility for New Beginnings Preschool both as head teacher and as project director to fulfil Ministry of Education contractual obligations for the research project. Three main areas of responsibility were defined in the Ministry of Educations contractual agreement for the delivery of Centre of Innovation services:

- To further develop and document innovative learning and teaching practices using Te Whāriki, early childhood curriculum
- To work with researchers to find out the changes that occur in children's learning and parents' participation as these practices come into play
- To share information with others about their innovative learning and teaching practices.

At the beginning of the project Debbie (director) and Jocelyn (research associate, see below) entered into a formalized relationship agreement that outlined the ways in which they agreed to distribute tasks and work together. Meetings between the project director and research associate occurred on a weekly basis throughout the course of the project. These meetings were instrumental to the research as the ongoing insights and occurrences in the centre were shared and reflected on. Debbie was a pivotal link among Jocelyn, the teacher researchers and the centre. Planning and preparation for fulfilling dissemination responsibilities were also undertaken during these meetings. All writing for dissemination was a collaborative venture between Debbie and Jocelyn in the first instance, with other participants contributing as and when their stories became central to the material being compiled and disseminated.

Teacher researchers: Christina Taylor, Libby Hopkins, Sarah Henriod, Alana Farrant, Katrina Jones, Carolyn Adams, Dawn Calvert, Liz Royal, Nicky Agnew, Philip Rush, Rebecca Holding, Elisa Smith

All teachers employed at New Beginnings Preschool during the three-year research project participated as teacher researchers in the project. The staff consists of two infant and toddler teachers, five over-two teachers and one art teacher.

During the course of this project, membership of the teacher researcher team changed as existing staff left the centre and new members joined. A total of thirteen teacher researchers contributed to the project over the period of three years. While change affected continuity of the research at times, it also offered insights that might not have otherwise presented themselves. Members new to the teacher researcher team brought fresh perspectives and interests offering the opportunity to take a critical look at the research activity. The research focus and areas of exploration proved to be of interest and relevance to new teachers, indicating that the research explorations have application to the wider early childhood sector. The outcomes are likely to be of benefit to others. Regular staff changes can be a common occurrence in an early childhood environment as membership of any community is ever evolving. As this research was interested in exploring the concept of a community of learners within this particular environment, changes in staffing became advantageous in building understandings of how a learning community continues to function through change.

Research associate: Jocelyn Wright

A research associate participated alongside the teacher researcher team to offer guidance, practical support and a critical perspective. Jocelyn had formed a professional relationship with the teaching team in the eighteen months prior to the research project. As a professional development facilitator she had supported the teaching team during its previous process of reconstructing the curriculum. Continuation of this relationship during the course of the research project was viewed to be advantageous to the teaching team as existing understandings between the associate and teaching team could enable growth and development to proceed. Trust and respect between participants was already established.

The role of the research associate was described in the Ministry of Education's contractual agreement for delivery of Centre of Innovation research associate services as follows:

> The research associate will provide research and professional development expertise throughout the project to ensure quality research design, instruments, processes and reporting, offered in a manner that builds the research capacity of staff and community of the Centre of Innovation (COI). The research associate will offer support and a critical perspective on the COI's innovative teaching and learning practices, access research evidence and information, provision of research (and professional development) workshops as appropriate, and support for dissemination activity. (Ministry of Education, 2003).

Research advisory group: Elaine Mayo, Joce Nuttall, Ruth Boyask, Baljit Kaur and Alex Gunn.

A research advisory group was established at the beginning of the project. The three members of the wider research community within Christchurch invited to participate were selected according to their particular areas of research interest. The advisory team offered the opportunity to strengthen the research by contributing research expertise in the focus areas of the research project. These were identified as learning within communities, visual art and participatory research. Their role was to act as mentors and a sounding board to support and guide the research team.

At the end of the first year of the project, two members of this group (Joce and Ruth) moved overseas and were replaced; however, ongoing contact and interest in the project continued through an e-group. Ruth returned to New Zealand a year later and rejoined the group.

Jocelyn and Debbie met with the advisory group about four times a year. During these times, particular aspects of the research became a focus for discussion and critique. Meetings were tape-recorded and the recordings made available for any member of the teacher researcher group.

Collaborative researcher: Elaine Mayo

Elaine, a member of the research advisory team, held further responsibility as a collaborative researcher. This role involved maintaining closer contact with the research director and associate. Elaine was 'on call' for discussion, advice and guidance. She took responsibility for maintaining

contact with advisory group members, organizing advisory meetings, and establishing an electronic site as a place where ongoing dialogue among all research participants could occur. The support provided by Elaine gave teacher researchers confidence in their attempts to structure and record insights in ways that made sense to the teaching team. The team was encouraged to work within frames that reflected their own practices and ways of operating so that research conventions did not dictate the process. Initial analytical ideas and constructed understandings generated within the teacher researcher team were explored and critiqued during discussions with the collaborative researcher. Elaine's PhD thesis (Mayo, 2003), *Toward collective praxis in teacher education: Complexity, pragmatism and praxis* provided a theoretical backdrop to the methodological developments.

Community participants

All children and families who attended New Beginnings Preschool during the three-year research project self-selected to be research participants. As the research data emerged, a selection of community participants came to the fore and is referred to in this report.

Participatory action research

Participatory action research methodology was adopted as the approach to this research project. (Wadsworth, 1998) describes participatory action research as "action that is researched, changed and re-researched, within the research process by participants". The eight members of the teaching team at New Beginnings Preschool were participant researchers involved in actively examining together their current action (innovative teaching and learning) in order to change and improve it. The teacher researchers participated as "designers, selectors of methods, contributors of data, analysers and concluders, and then takers of new actions" (ibid) throughout all stages of the action research.

The research project involved New Beginnings Preschool in developing and strengthening understandings of Rogoff's (1994) concept of a community of learners, one in which learning is positioned as a transformation of participation. The innovative practices of visual art and project work formed the focus lenses for the research. The intent was to develop understandings of how these two curriculum aspects contribute to community involvement and participation and to children's learning in order to develop and strengthen centre practices. In essence the teacher researcher team became involved in learning how to do its work better.

The process of action research involved the practitioner researchers in a series of cycles during which they identified an area of focus, collected data, analyzed and interpreted data and developed plans for action (Mills, 2003). The teacher researcher team adapted the phases of the action research cycle to better fit with their current teaching and learning practices. The terms 'notice', 'recognise', 'respond' and 're-visit' were in current use by teachers to describe their current assessment, planning and evaluation processes. Adopting these terms for the action research process provided a familiar framework for the teachers to follow.

- **notice** was used to describe the data collection phase of the research process;
- **recognize** refers to the phase of reflection on, analysis and interpretation of data;
- **respond** was the resulting plan for action, development and implementation; and
- **re-visit**, a phase of reflection, evaluation and identification of the continued focus.

The re-visit step allowed for reflection on the investigation at hand as well as on the overarching research question. This acknowledged that the research project consisted of many smaller research cycles, each shedding some light on the main question. The action research process did not always proceed in tidy sequential order; however, the four process steps enabled the team to retain sight of where explorations were going.

Reflective practice

Teacher reflection on the practice of teaching and learning was an established process in the centre. Teachers worked within a strong philosophy of reflective practice where they are concerned not only with the intentions, meanings and values of their own practice, but with how their practice impacts on others. The teaching team had previously used the work of Brookfield (1995) and was familiar with his four analytical lenses of reflective practice: *autobiographical, student eyes, colleagues' experiences,* and *theory.* Centre practices had established opportunity for teachers to reflect on teaching and learning within groups as well as individually. Individually, teachers documented accounts of children's learning (learning and teaching stories) during non-contact time when they reflected on the significance of and the influences on the learning they were taking notice of. Teachers then had opportunity to participate in collective reflection during teacher team meetings, at which time individual teachers' stories of children's learning were talked about. These meetings occurred weekly both for small groups of teachers and for the team as a whole. In small groups' reflection focused on what was occurring for participants within the various projects in the centre, while whole team meetings were a time for sharing across teams and for considering the centre as a whole. During these meetings teachers' reflective thoughts were documented, and were returned to at subsequent meetings. Reflection on practice was not confined to these structured

times, as teachers informally discussed, debated and considered teaching and learning as a regular part of their everyday practice. The structured opportunities enabled the team to make more conscious their socially constructed understandings. Reflective practice in the centre was viewed as a social activity.

During the course of the research project the teacher researcher team adopted the use of Rogoff's (2003) analytical framework as a reflection tool: *intrapersonal; interpersonal; cultural/institutional focus of analysis.* As Brookfield's four analytical lenses of reflective practice had provided teachers with a tool to view practice from other perspectives, so too did Rogoff's lenses. The teacher researcher team was able to reframe experience by using these different perspectives. Reflective practice held a central position throughout the research project, one that was viewed as complementary to the action research process. Reflective practice, as a process of thinking about and in practice (Schön, 1983), cemented each process step of the action research cycles.

The research design

Prior to involvement in this research project, the teaching team at New Beginnings Preschool had adopted a 'community of learners' approach to the way they worked in the centre. Their understanding of this model of learning, described by Rogoff (1994) as "learning and development occurring as people participate in socio-cultural activities of their community", was influential on the definitions of teaching roles and responsibilities within the centre as well as on the practices involving the children and the community. A 'community of learners' for this teaching team means a community where everyone is respected as equitable partners in the learning process, with each member bringing a wealth of experience and knowledge to the relationship. Through social participation each person gains not only knowledge but also an understanding of the purpose that knowledge serves. The participatory action research approach adopted for the research project has been in keeping with this model of working together. Research activity was organized and planned to ensure all participating teachers have the opportunity to be fully involved. The research activity was not to become a separate task but would be embedded in the work that teachers do.

A research design was diagrammatically developed in the initial stages of the research. This provided a blueprint for the teacher research team throughout the project. It mapped out the possible direction of research enquiry within the proposed three-year time frame.

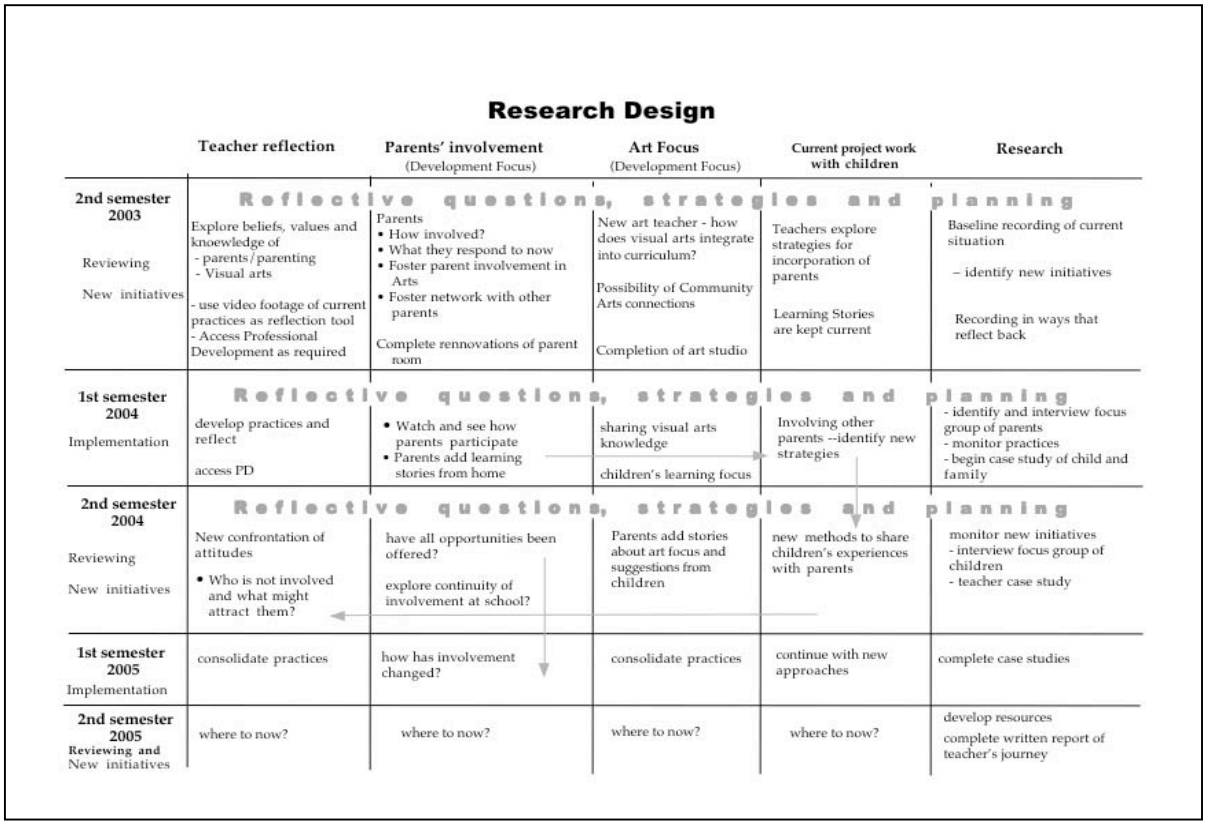


Exhibit 1.1 : The initial research design

Monthly meetings among the teacher researchers and associate provided a structure to research cycles and the time required for reflection on data and analytical discussions. In the final year of the project the frequency of these meetings increased to fortnightly, as more time was needed for in-depth analysis and dialogue. Team discussions were tape-recorded and re-presented to all participants as ongoing data for the project. Continued research activity emerged in direct response to the teacher researchers' interests and inquiries. The focus of each cycle of research was directly connected to teacher practice, ensuring that resulting learning was meaningful and relevant for all participants. The teacher researchers also participated in weekly team meetings to focus on research tasks and continued reflection, or in other words to help them "keep on task!"

During preparation for the three-year research project, teachers identified all forms of centre documentation as data for the research. This included documentation of project work, children's learning stories, individual teachers and research associate's journals, team meeting minutes and planning journals and all tape-recorded research meetings. This data was used in different ways at appropriate times throughout the research project. For example, project work documentation over a one-year period was used for analysis of changes in practice and participation; document analysis

was used with a one-year collection of teaching and learning stories; recordings of meetings were transcribed and re-presented for focused analysis. Further research tools were developed specifically for an identified purpose as the research progressed. For example, a parent survey was developed and distributed at a time when the research team wanted to explore parental views of centre communication practices; an event-recording sheet was developed to record teacher/parent information sharing episodes; video was used as a tool for collecting examples of teacher interaction with children; informal interviews between the research associate and particular members of the community were recorded to provide insights and reflections in areas of interest to the research team.

The research journey

Research began in two distinctive action research cycles, one exploring parental participation and the other visual art. As the research progressed a further cycle emerged to focus on project work. Exhibit 1.2 illustrates how the cycles became interwoven as the insights and understandings gained through one exploration had a direct impact on the others.

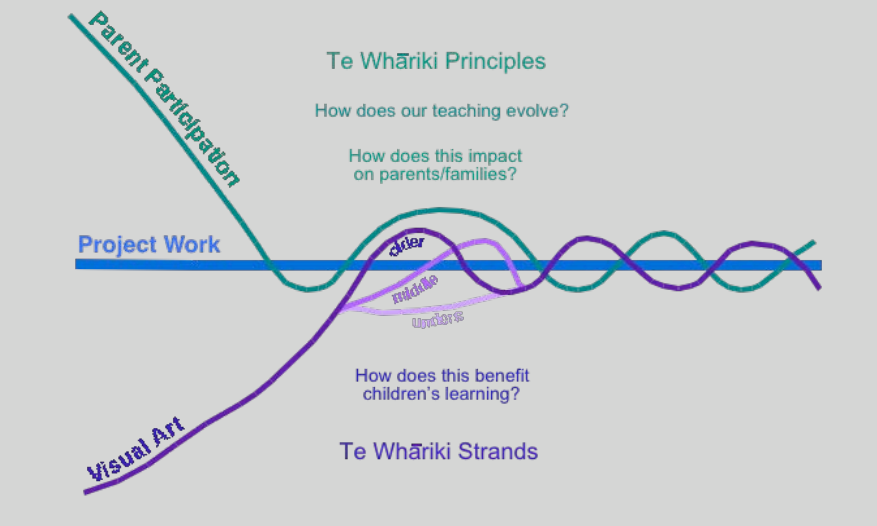


Exhibit 1.2: Cycles became interwoven

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained for this research project through the Christchurch College of Education. All teachers and parents were given information about the project and expectations of their involvement so that they could make informed decisions about participation. Parents also completed the agreement to participate on behalf of their own child or children. This process continued throughout the project to ensure all new families and teaching staff completed these requirements. Before any material could be disseminated, it was shared with the people included in

it to make sure they consented to the use of the material. For example if a child's photo image or a parent's comment were included the child and parent had the opportunity to view the complete presentation before it was disseminated more widely.

Influences from theory

Three themes guided our planning: community of learners, project work, and the visual art curriculum.

Community of learners

The concept of a community of learners originates from socio-cultural constructivist views of learning. Interest in a community of learners as a model to be considered in educational circles has gained momentum in the previous decade. The call for an expression of interest to be involved in the Centres of Innovation project (2002) identified community of learners as one area the Ministry of Education was interested in researching. In the early childhood sector, interest in this concept has been stimulated by the fact that the early childhood curriculum Te Whāriki (1996) is strongly underpinned by socio-cultural theory: "This curriculum emphasizes the critical role of socially and culturally mediated learning and of reciprocal and responsive relationships for children with people, places and things" (p. 9). As early childhood teachers have worked to implement the curriculum as intended, they have also been challenged to explore its theoretical underpinnings.

Various authors have used various words to describe understandings and interpretations of communities in action. For example, Wenger (1998) uses the term community of practice and Rogoff (2003), community of learners. All draw from socio-cultural theories discussed by people like Lev Vygosky, John Dewey, Urie Bronfenbrenner and Barbara Rogoff who share the belief that learning is fundamentally a social activity: "there can be no development of an isolated individual, for each individual is interconnected with other people" (Drewery & Bird, 2004, p. 70). The factor common to all is the reference to learning through participation in a social community context.

> The interdependence of adults and children in contributing to emergent understandings through joint involvement in culturally meaningful activities is at the heart of Vygotskian school experiences. (Berk & Winsler, p. 115)

The differing terminology used to describe learning in communities is predominantly a theoretical debate. Two members of the research team were fortunate to attend a seminar with Etienne Wenger where he was able to shed some light on this phenomenon. Wenger explained that the term community of practice was appropriate for our research. It might become a community of inquiry – "the use of a term such as inquiry is a 'good goal;' however, you need to assume it is a community

of practice in order to leave the research open" (personal communication, 2005). Wenger went on to explain how the use of the term 'learner' presupposes the need to align to a definition of what a learner is, thus possibly again closing the research inquiry. This debate entered research deliberations in the final year of the project, providing further insight to the emergent research findings. The way in which this became influential will be described in chapter two of this report.

Rogoff's (1994) ideas about a community of learners have been influential on the teacher researcher team involved in this project. The team adopted Rogoff's view of a community of learning approach as one in which learning is perceived as a process of transformation of participation itself. As Rogoff (ibid) describes, "The idea of a community of learners is based on the premise that learning occurs as people participate in shared endeavours with others, with all playing active but often asymmetrical roles in socio-cultural activity" (p. 209). The teacher researcher team was particularly interested in community participation in terms of the two innovative curriculum practices, visual art and project work.

Rogoff argues that as an instructional model a community of learners is based on a philosophy different from that of transmission or acquisition models of learning. In the transmission model the teacher is viewed as the expert and the learner as an empty vessel; the acquisition model views the learner as discovering knowledge through their own endeavours with the teacher having a passive role so as not to interfere with the process. In a community of learners model, learning occurs where participants (teachers and learners) are actively involved in meaningful social activity (Rogoff, 1994). The activity reflects the learning that is valued by the community itself. Through social participation, each person gains not only knowledge but also the purpose that knowledge serves. In other words the learning is meaningful and purposeful. These understandings closely resonated with teachers' prior experiences of teaching and learning within the centre and the journey of change they had embarked on.

Social constructivist approach: Project work

In the initial application to participate in the Centre of Innovation Project, the head teacher talked about teachers "leaving behind a more behaviourist curriculum and seeing ourselves practising a co-constructivist approach". The teaching team had undertaken a review of their teaching and learning practices and as a result reconstructed the teaching role from one underpinned by developmental and behaviourist theories, in which the 'teacher' was an orchestrator or technicist (Haggerty 1998),

to that of a collaborative partner in children's learning. The focus of the curriculum became that of providing meaningful learning experiences through negotiating curriculum with children.

The changes made to teacher practice were initially influenced by the work reported on from Reggio Emilia (Giudici, 2001) early childhood centres in Italy, where project work and visual art play a significant part in the ways their learning communities operate. Teachers were inspired by the prospect of parents and community being similarly collaborative in children's endeavours and, twelve months prior to the research project, began the journey to develop a community of learners in the centre through the implementation of a project approach to curriculum. The use of narrative documentation that described and celebrated children's project work learning became an effective tool for sharing and reflecting on learning occurring in the programme amongst teachers, parents and children. This formed the basis for ongoing reflection and shared understandings about what is meaningful learning for children within this community.

Project work documentation acknowledges and invites participation of children and adults and as a result parent participation became more visible within the centre. The value of parental involvement in children's learning is widely recognized in literature in New Zealand. Findings of various research such as the *'Ten years old and competent'* study (Wylie, 2001) and *'Picking up the pace'* (Phillips, McNaughton & MacDonald 2002) indicate that outcomes beneficial for children's learning result from collaborative learning ventures among teachers, parents and children. The *Best evidence synthesis – quality teaching early foundations* (Farquhar, 2003) identifies "fostering of a 'community of learning' approach where there are many varied opportunities for collaboration and social learning" as a key feature of quality early education. The centre began to experience and acknowledge these benefits within its own community.

The pedagogical perspective of the teaching team became underpinned by socio-cultural co-constructivist views of teaching and learning evidenced by the team's belief in a collaborative approach to learning, in which everyone, children, teachers, and parents, is involved in sharing ideas, dialogue, a sense of common purpose, and communication of shared values. Teachers were working toward the vision of establishing a socio-cultural environment, positioning learners and teachers as group members who influence, and are also influenced by each other.

Social constructivist approach: Visual art

Originally, the idea of having a 'specialist' visual art teacher in the centre came from reading about the Reggio Emilia perspective (see, for example, Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998). Up until early 2002 the centre worked within a developmental theoretical framework (Gunn, 1998; Lewis, 1998; Visser, 2003), where art was seen as a developmental activity in the centre. In practice, this meant that the paints and paper were always put out on the easel and an art 'activity' was always to be found on a table alongside play-dough and puzzles. There was very little teacher interaction; in fact the role of the early childhood teacher was simply to ensure that all equipment was fairly distributed amongst those at the table, that pictures were named, and that the art resources on the table were re-presented for the next child to use. Studies into the provision of visual arts in early childhood (Gunn, 1998; Lewis, 1998) suggested the centre was not alone in this approach. In both cases the authors reported that teachers' practices were, at that time, firmly entrenched in this 'child-centred' orientation.

As visual art in the New Beginnings Preschool curriculum began to take shape under the influence of a visual art teacher in 2003, the teaching staff began to question visual art as a body of knowledge, something to understand. Their experiences during the last four months of 2003 provoked thinking about different pedagogical approaches and theoretical underpinnings. The practice that had evolved did not sit comfortably with the team's understandings of socio-cultural co-constructivist ideas of teaching and learning in which learning is viewed as a social activity. The research project involved the teaching team exploring ways to establish visual art in the curriculum within this view of pedagogy. It will become apparent later in this research report that while investigation into visual art began as a separate cycle of research, the recursive nature of our action research meant that teacher learning led to visual art becoming embedded within teacher practice in all aspects of the curriculum. Visual art is not reported on separately; however, significant areas of learning about visual art pedagogy are signalled to the reader. This has been done for two reasons:

1. Easy accessibility and identification for the reader who is only interested in reading about the visual arts innovation and development.
2. To reflect our belief that visual art is not a separate component of curriculum.

Innovations at New Beginnings Preschool

A learning community

At the beginning of this research project the teacher researcher team diagrammatically presented their perspective of the members of their learning community. Three main groups of participants in the learning community were identified, parents/whanau, children and teachers. The research focus was to gain understanding of how a project approach in tandem with a strong focus on visual art strengthens the weaving, or fabric, of the community.

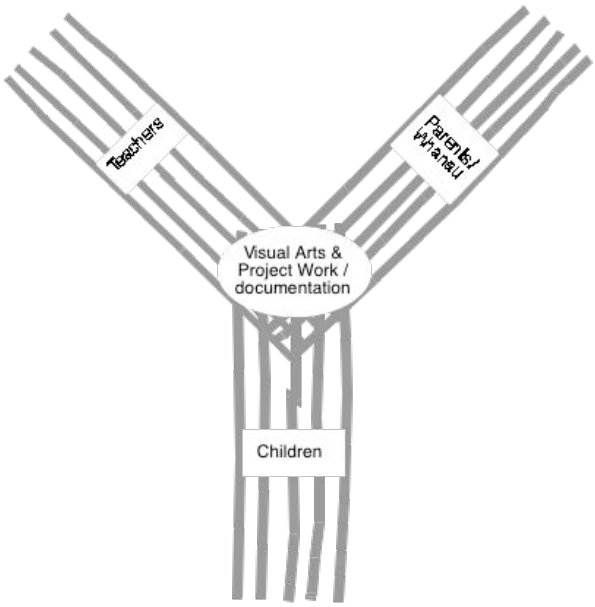


Exhibit 1.3: The initial design – three groups of participants

The central whāriki is woven from three strands of harakeke, the participants in the community. The way they are woven together represented how project work and visual art in the centre were viewed as providing the space for joint participation to occur, that is parents, children and teachers participating and learning together.

Through the research process the original visual representation developed from two-dimensional to a three-dimensional diagram. The woven harakeke putiputi (flower) became a significant metaphor for representing the developing understandings of this community of learners.

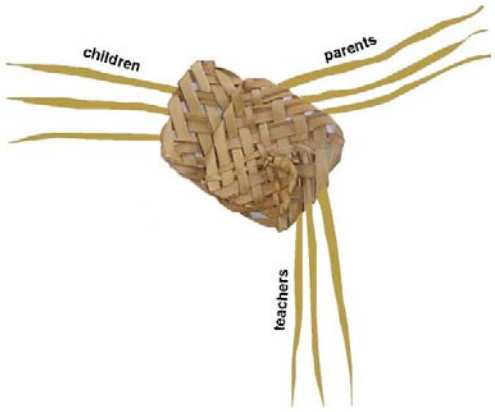


Exhibit 1.4: The first evolution – three dimensions or layers

The three layers of weaving representing the flower became significant as the research team adopted the use of and strengthened their understandings of Rogoff's (2003) three lenses of analysis of socio-cultural activity. The use of the three analytical lenses, intrapersonal, interpersonal and cultural/institutional provided a way for the research team to focus on individuals, relationships and cultural/contextual aspects of the centre without disconnecting learning from the socio-cultural context of the centre. As Rogoff (2003) describes "Together, the interpersonal, personal and cultural/institutional aspects of the event constitute the activity. No aspect exists or can be studied in isolation from the others" (p. 58). This three-lens tool provided the research team with a systematic approach by which to explore and gain understandings of the complexity of the Preschool's learning community. It became a map that guided the teacher researcher team in its journey, as each lens indicated where the focus of the research was without losing sight of where understandings were going. The research team was able to explore a particular aspect such as an individual's participation while, at the same time, acknowledging the interrelationship of other aspects of the event. Each research cycle became integrally connected to others, and each cycle contributed to forming an overall picture of the learning community.

Both diagrams present children, parents and teachers as defined groups; however, the second image allowed individuals to be acknowledged in a way that the first did not, as individuals within the collective group. Labelling the groups can bring assumptions about a group's role and responsibility that can be limiting for individuals within the groups. As the research progressed the image of the harakeke flower further evolved (exhibit 1.5) as understandings of the Preschool community as a learning community strengthened.

Exhibit 1.5: Further evolution – Particpants as learners and teachers

Teachers re-defined their view of teachers, parents and children as separate groups of participants to one that has little differentiation between the groups. The image of children and adults as co-learners, who share similar characteristics, and teaching and learning responsibilities, was formed.

These three images are returned to in chapter 2 to illustrate the teacher researcher team's shift in the identity of participants as group members, to identity as an individual within a group, and finally individual identity as a capable and competent member of the community, a co-learner.

Project work

The project approach to curriculum engages children, parents and teachers together in in-depth explorations based on interests (or topics) that have emerged from the children. This approach is grounded in theories proposed by Loris Malaguzzi, Lev Vygotsky, Barbara Rogoff and John Dewey. Projects provide the opportunity for children to be involved in constructing their knowledge and understandings through shared dialogue and exploration. As explained by Gandini:

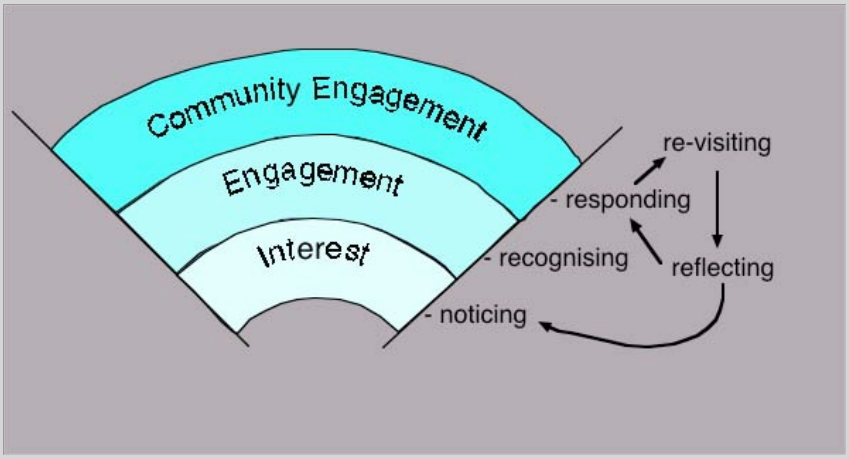
> They (projects) are based on the strong conviction that learning by doing is of great importance and that to discuss in group and to revisit ideas and experiences is the premier way of gaining better understanding and learning." (cited in Helm, 2001).

At the time of the centre's acceptance into the research programme, project work was firmly embedded in practice. Through the implementation of a project approach teachers are able to negotiate with and follow the ideas and views the children offer. A socio-constructivist theoretical

view of learning and development underpin this approach where learning is viewed as an interaction between the learner's prior knowledge and other experiences. Children's prior knowledge is related to both developmental and experiential factors and is influenced directly by their social world. In project work teachers, children and parents work collaboratively to develop shared understandings and acquire new knowledge through explorations and investigations of things that are relevant and meaningful to all parties. The process involved in project work is reflective of a learning community in action. It involves all participants in socially constructed learning.

Exhibit 1.6 Embedded theory - processes shared at the beginning of the project

The following diagram presents the teacher's diagrammatic representation of the processes of project work and what they mean for the centre's community of learners.



There are three process elements to a project:

1. The topic is of interest. The learning needs to be relevant to children's lives in order to be meaningful.
2. The children engage with the topic of interest. There need to be a variety of ways a child or children can, and will want to, actively engage in investigating the topic.
3. The community engages with the interests of the child or children. The community can be parents, teachers, and/or others who value the learning, recognize the worth of the topic, and take up offers to participate.

The processes teachers and the community use to identify and develop project work are described as 'noticing', 'recognizing' and the 3 R's, 'responding, re-visiting and reflecting'. They have similarities to the processes used for assessment of individual children's learning (see Carr, 2001) although they involve a collective rather than individualistic approach.

Noticing a child or children's interest is something teachers do in discussion with each other about what they have observed in the centre and what they know about the current context of the child's life from family.

Recognizing focuses on children's learning dispositions, on what children can do, and on sharing the significance of the learning – individual or group – with children and parents, and within the teaching team.

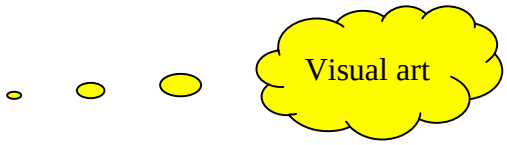
Responding is done collaboratively and entails a spiral of reflecting, re-visiting, and responding by all three of the key interested parties (children, parents and teachers). Teachers describe this spiral using the words of Paolo Cagairi:

> It is like a recursive path, in terms of a spiral that turns around on itself but also changes sometimes. It responds to many intentions. (personal communication, Reggio Emilia study tour, 2004)

Each step of the process involves the engagement of all participants in the learning community. The project is about a collective learning journey involving children, parents and teachers. Community engagement brings children's prior experiences into the centre allowing opportunities for teachers and parents to facilitate experiences children can relate to, make connections with and extend their learning from.

Community engagement is fostered through the use of a range of documentation methods that not only inform but also invite contribution and participation. Project work documentation in the centre is a tool for communication among the teachers, children and parents, forming a basis for reflective discussion amongst participants about children's learning.

Visual art



An art teacher is employed by the Preschool fifteen hours per week to offer children opportunity for ongoing and specialized visual art teaching and learning. Funding for the art teacher was sourced from the Ministry of Education's Equity funding scheme. Early in 2003 the Head Teacher suggested having an artist at the centre after reading about the Reggio Emilia perspective (see, for example, Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1998). Just as the centre used the 'project approach' as a means of communication between children, teachers and families, the head teacher saw the potential 'visual arts' held as one of the many 'languages' of communication within the learning community. Following further discussion with the teaching team and her co-manager, an artist was employed. The art teacher position was above the required adult:child ratio in the centre so that this person could commit their time to working with children in visual art. The impact of this idea became immediately visible, as the head teacher reflects:

> *"Right from the beginning we could see evidence of this being a worthwhile addition to our curriculum. (That was how we viewed it at the time). The first evidence was in the interactions of our quieter children; suddenly visual arts were becoming 'a form of communication or language' (Gunn, 2000) for these children."* (Debbie, personal reflection. 2003)

In this early childhood setting, project work is the over-arching 'cultural tool' that enables all three participants of this community to use the processes of 'active inquiry'. Weaving visual arts into project work was one of the main reasons for employing a separate visual art teacher as the head teacher explained:

> *One of the main reasons for employing someone with art expertise or art experience was to allow the opportunity to develop a stronger sense of identity and continuity within the area of visual art. The expectation was that there would also be continuity between project inquiries*

occurring within the centre and visual arts. Visual arts were seen as a way of assisting children to re-present their ideas. However, this is all very well in theory but what exactly does it look like in practice? Is it a workable concept? How does it differ from the role of other ECE teachers within the centre environment? One of the main differences between the identity of the art teacher and the identity of other teachers is that the art teacher is not counted in the regulated ratio of teachers to children that is mandatory within all ECE centres. This therefore means the art teacher's time is given solely over to interacting, planning and documenting visual art experiences. (Debbie, personal reflection. 2003)

New Beginnings Preschool has an art studio/workshop dedicated to encouraging creative art opportunities. When the centre applied to be part of the Centre of Innovation research programme, it also applied for a capital grant to convert the existing, almost totally enclosed art room, into a more accessible, welcoming area. One of the major changes was opening up an entire wall space and putting glass into this area so that children could use the art area without needing constant adult supervision. Renovations have also included a huge round skylight window to allow more natural light. These changes have enhanced the sense of space and light in the room, important factors in a visual art friendly environment.

The newly designed area includes a sink at child's height to allow for independent washing of hands and brushes etc. It was recognized that for a child, spending time at the sink with hands in the water, can be an absorbing experience in itself. A sink and storage area was also provided adjacent to the art room for the adults working in this area. This acknowledged that there are times when supervision is important and allowed for equipment to be cleaned at the same time.

Over the course of this three-year project visual art was to bring a further dimension to active inquiry, enabling children, teachers and parents to experience visually the creation of group knowledge. Under the guidance of the visual art teacher children, teachers and parents were introduced to a wide range of visual art experiences. The art programme evolved as children and the art teacher initially established respectful relationships and developed foundation skills in the use of the tools and media. Early experiences included collage, painting, sewing, and the use of natural resources.

Five main components of visual art in the programme became visible over the first year: natural resources, textiles, paint and drawing, printmaking, and collage. As children's confidence and competence in the use of these components increased, complexity was added to their art experiences by combining different media and techniques so they could learn to use their skills in

different ways to achieve different effects or purposes. For example, sewing with wool on hessian was extended to sewing with collage materials, to mending dolls clothes, to sewing together a large teepee (tent) for play purposes. Wool itself was explored from experiencing a visit from a lamb to using a spinning wheel, to felting with the wool. Children made puppets and bags by sewing up their feltings. Another example is how paint media was used, from painting on different surfaces to painting flower pots and tee shirts, to using dye and crayons, to marbling, and then dye and Indian ink, and dye painting on silk. The large lengths of silk were then hung as drapes in the infant and toddler area. Complexity was added to printmaking as children explored string printing, screen printing, and using clay and plaster of paris. Children were encouraged to use their growing competence in the use of visual art tools and media to support their own creative ideas.

The art teacher provided continuity in visual art learning experiences by supporting children when they requested to revisit prior experiences. As children's confidence and competence with media and resources grew so too did the ways in which they began to use visual art for their own purposes. They developed an attitude of ' I know I can do it.' This became evident as children used their knowledge and competence to pursue their own ideas. For example, a child would come with an idea of what they wanted to make and through discussion with the art teacher could select the resources needed, develop a plan and set about creating. These projects would often continue over days as the child added to and worked on their task until they were completely satisfied with their end result. This model of how the art teacher and children worked together in visual art is reflected in the way in which visual art became integrated in the programme through this research project.

Visual art learning reached out into the community as teachers and parents participated alongside the children. Visual art created interest and curiosity within the community and as a result, participants gained knowledge of and capabilities in the use of different media, techniques and ways to express ideas. As the adults in the community watched or involved themselves in many of the art experiences their prior memories of art were stimulated. Parents frequently commented on how their creativity was rekindled, and that they were doing similar art activities at home for themselves and with their children. Parental appreciation for their children's art was visible as they displayed pride in their child's work, comments about how they intended to display the work at home or give as gifts to family and friends were often heard.

In the following chapters of this report the teaching team's journey into developing confidence and competence as teachers of visual art will be described. Visual art in the programme does not remain the sole responsibility of the art teacher

Chapter 2 - "Who are we?": Individual identity

"I have gained so much from the art experiences we all took part in. By this I mean the closeness and sharing of teacher learning and getting to know our passions and interests. This has continued throughout as we respect our differences and talents in our professional working day." (Christina Taylor, teacher researcher)

Introduction

This chapter presents findings that illustrate the strengthening of individual identity for members of our community: teachers, parents/whanau and children. In the first section of this chapter, we describe how understandings about parent identity emerged from insights gained through a parent survey. Parental perspectives strongly influenced the teacher researchers' view of their parent community and as a result parents became valued and acknowledged as individuals rather than seen as a group of people with common characteristics. The second section of this chapter tells how teachers brought the notion of individual identity (child, parent and teacher) into current learning and teaching documentation practices and, in so doing, strengthened their understandings of socio-cultural learning theory. The concluding section describes the emergence of an identity of individuals in this learning community as co-learners; adults and children sharing the roles of teacher and learner. This understanding emerged as teachers firstly questioned difference in pedagogical approaches in visual art. Through developing teacher confidence and capability in working in visual art with children, teachers gained a positive view of themselves as learners in this domain and community participation in visual art strengthened. One teacher's story is shared as an example of the process teachers experienced in coming to know oneself as a learner and teacher. The outcome of this area of exploration is presented as a framework that describes the image of a co-learner in visual art. The identity of the co-learner is described as:

An explorer,

An achiever,

A participator, facilitator, contributor,

A dreamer and player, and

A communicator.

Individual identity

The placement of this chapter early in this research report reflects how significant acknowledgement of individual identity has been to this research journey, as evidenced in the title of the report. The I in "communIty" can refer to I for individual as well as I for identity.

This research is based on particular assumptions about the way identity is created and understood: that is, that *identity* relates to who we are, defined through our lived experiences and interactions - how we live from day to day. Developing an understanding of identity of individuals, parents, children and teachers, was a critical influence on teacher practice and in turn on participation in the community.

Influences point to literature that has helped us shape our ideas.

Influence 2.1: Wenger (1998) - Communities of practice

Wenger (1998) suggests that identity is the way we define who we are through a layering of events of participation and reification. Identity emerges in the ways our experience and its social interpretation inform each other; it is an ever evolving concept. Identity differs from self image, as

> 'who we are lies in the way we live day to day, not just in what we think or say about ourselves, although that is of course part (but only part) of the way we live' (p. 151).

To view identity as a label or category can limit understanding of what identity means in practice. Identity in the context of our research has been constructed through experience and interpretation as we have negotiated meaning through our research data.

Identity is something we internalise; our actions and behaviours are manifestations of how we view ourselves and how we view others. Teachers at New Beginnings Preschool came to understand how the perception they hold of themselves and the people in the community (or the way they define others) influences their practice and in turn influences how people participate in their community. This journey to understanding will be illustrated through the use of the three diagrams previously presented in chapter 1 of this report. The diagrams illustrate a shift firstly from identity as a group member to identity as an individual within a group, and finally individual identity as a co-learner, a capable and competent member of the community.

Participating in research that focused on teacher practice contributed to teachers strengthening their individual personal and professional identity and also their view of capable, competent others: colleagues, parents/whanau and children. Teachers developed an identity of themselves as teachers and learners that generated understanding of what it means to be a *co-learner*. The term *co-learner* describes a relationship in which teaching and learning is a venture shared among participants, where responsibility and expertise are fluidly shared. That is, no one participant retains power in the relationship.

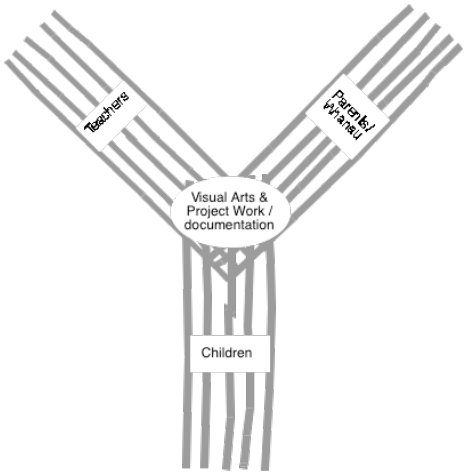
Influence 2.2: Jordon (2004) - Co-construction

Our definition of a *co-learner* has been influenced by Jordan's (2004) description of the co-construction metaphor, one in which she describes co-construction as a process of constructing with others. Co-construction places emphasis on teachers and children together studying meanings. *Co-learner* is the name we have given to any partner in the co-construction process.

The identity of parents as participants

As teacher researchers began this research project they held very strong views of their community as a social setting in which joint participation by parents/whanau, children and teachers in children's learning could occur. At this time participants in the community were described by teachers as groups of parents, teachers and children as the first exhibit (2.1) depicts.

Exhibit 2.1: Three groups of participants



Teachers viewed themselves at that time as a collaborative group responsible for planning and preparing the learning environment, for ensuring parents were kept informed of children's everyday experiences and for supporting children's participation and learning. The groups of children and parents/whanau were viewed by teachers according to assumptions about their position in the community. For example, children were the learners, teachers the teachers, and parents could choose to be bystanders, participants or contributors.

Building parental participation in children's learning was an initial goal for the teacher researcher team. This aspect of the research is described in more detail in chapter 3. In this chapter we highlight one of the outcomes of this research cycle, recognition by teachers of all parents as interested and willing participants in their children's learning. Teachers came to view parents as individuals, each interested and willing to participate in ways that they chose.

Changing views on parental participation

Many parents were already viewed as active participants in centre life. Teachers had identified participating parents as those who joined in centre events, contributed resources and expertise, spent time in discussions with teachers, read documentation displays or their child's profile books or took them home, as well as those who were members of the management committee. What the teacher researcher team discovered is that participation is not always visible in the centre. Previous assumptions held about those parents not visible in the centre as being not interested were challenged as teachers discovered how participation looks different for individuals at different times.

Listening to the perspectives parents offered in a parent survey contributed to teacher learning in this area.

Research process inserts explain how people worked within this project.

Research process 2.1: Surveying parent opinion

A parent survey was distributed to a total of seventy-six families who had children attending the centre at that time. The purpose of the survey was to gather information from parents about the value of the documentation in children's profile books and to elicit parent perspectives about building relationships and participation in the centre.

Thirty-seven surveys (almost 50%) were completed and returned. While the response rate was lower than expected, it was significant in that a large number of the responses came from parents who were not previously represented in research data. Previous activity involved recording an overview of the families who were actively participating in their children's learning at the centre. Prior to the parent survey 57% of the families had been identified as active participants. Of the parent survey responses, thirteen (35% of the total) were from parents who were not represented in our data. Another twelve (32.5%) were from parents who had limited previous involvement. The remaining 32.5% represent parents who are actively involved.

The survey was collated and distributed to the teacher researcher team to individually reflect on prior to participating in a team meeting where discussion and analysis occurred.

The responses to three questions in particular provided the teacher researcher team insight into how parents view themselves in their relationship with the centre. The first question asked '*How do you feel about contributing information from home to your child's profile book?'* This had been a recent addition to profile book practices. Teachers were looking for feedback on whether it was a practice that was equally valued by parents and teachers.

Overall, parents enthusiastically supported the practice. Parents reinforced teacher beliefs that contextual information about children is essential to supporting children's learning. E.g. *"a great way to keep the information flowing and helps both parties to make important links and decisions"; "it's great because every day (child) learns new things and if we all know it's easier to keep it going"; "I think it's good to bring in things from home, it shows interest coming from the parents in what the kids are doing"; "if I can help my child in any way, I'm in!"*

These responses validated parents as interested participants in their child's learning. Parents clearly indicated that not only are they interested but they also assume responsibility for supporting their children's learning at the centre. Teachers could let go of any reservation held about their expectations of parents to contribute to children's teaching and learning. While parental contribution was not always evident within the centre, it was occurring at home.

Parents are partners

The identity of parents as willing partners in children's learning was made visible to teachers through the responses to the second question *'What are your views about the parent role and the teacher's role in our centre?'* This question attracted the largest amount of parental response. Three key messages summed up the views of parents.

1. Teachers and parents share a dual role in children's education. Many commented on how they believe parents and children need to work together for the child's benefit. E.g. "*I feel it is important to try to integrate roles and relationships between the two if possible. It's good for the child to experience a bit of home at preschool and vice versa"; "the teacher's role is to encourage at preschool and the parent's role is to continue to encourage at home. Both (need to) keep the communication open between the two and discover how best for the child to learn."* It was clearly evident that parents value the connectedness of centre and home as being important in supporting children's learning.
2. The parent's role is to support teachers. Parents spoke of how they help teachers by sharing information and becoming involved in centre activity when they choose to. There was also some acknowledgement of how they support teachers by supporting their child at home, *"I believe that children need their parents to support and encourage their work at the centre – if mum/dad are excited and interested it enables the kids to be free with their imagination."*
3. The teacher's role is to support parents. Parents discussed how they learn from teachers and appreciate the expertise they bring to the relationship. As one parent explained, *"the teacher's role is to not only help parents teach the children but to teach the parents as well."*

Parents in this community presented the view of an interdependent relationship with teachers. They see the two sets of adults as complementary. Parents offered a view of themselves as teachers as well as learners in their relationship with the centre. The traditional view of teachers in the centre as experts did not predominate; the comments were suggestive of parents viewing themselves as co-learning partners.

Parents are active particpants

The responses from the third question '*How do you use the profile book when you take it home?'* significantly contributed to teacher researcher's understandings of parent participation. The following summarizes the ways children's profiles books were used by parents:

1. Parents use the information to inform them of their child's learning and development and the progress they are making. E.g. *" I read it so I know what new things my boy's learnt"; "look back on how much (child) has achieved over the past year"; " By reading it I am able to catch up on (child's) progress – this is especially important to me as I am not there very often."*

2. The profile books are used to celebrate the child with family, whanau, friends and others. E.g. *"We look through it together, (child) and I. I share it with my family and where appropriate, my friends. I like to show off my baby"; "I show it to my son's family (Grandma, dad etc,)"; "I show it to friends and family."*

3. They provide the basis of discussion between families and their child. The types of discussions described indicated that children revisit and consolidate their learning experiences and participate in self-assessment with their parent/family. E.g. *"we read it as a family then talk about what the photos are about and her drawings and pictures. We try to answer her questions and explain what the letters are about"; "show dad and go through them with the children and ask them what they think is happening in the picture."*

4. Parents use the information to keep them current with their child's project interests at the centre so they can support their child's participation. E.g. *"...look at the new project they are currently doing and encourage them to talk about it."*

5. Parents use the profile book as a link between centre and home to provide continuity in experiences. E.g. *" (I) try to think of ways to further their learning skills – keep it going at home as well as preschool"; "I might write about things the children like to do at home, holiday pages, notes on general development or experiences that relate to projects."*

Parent participation took on new meaning as teachers reflected on these parents' comments. Participation was occurring in ways that teachers had previously been unaware of. Children's profile books acted as a vehicle for home/centre communication as well as a tool that supported participation of the wider community, children, family/whanau and friends.

It was important to the teacher researcher team that the opinions offered in the survey included those from many parents who were previously considered non-participants (or not interested). The

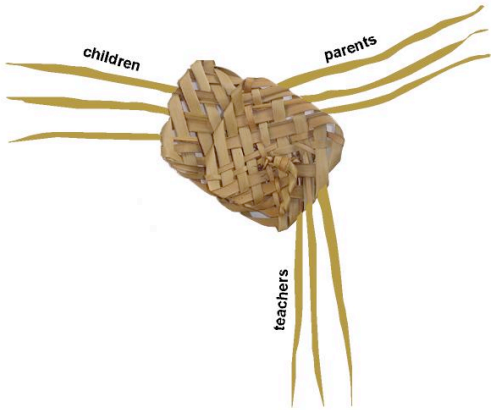
understandings gained through these responses contributed to teachers revising their image of the parents to one of equitable partners in the community.

A shift in the image of parents/whanau

Teachers acknowledged that their view of parent participants in the community had shifted from one that assumed some were interested while others weren't, to an understanding that all parents were willing and interested partners. Through the survey parents contributed a view of themselves as willing and interested participants in the learning community. Teachers discovered that parental participation occurs beyond the walls of the centre, and that participation looks different for different people at different times. Parents described how they supported their child's learning and they provided an image of themselves as co-learning partners. This challenged teachers' prior assumptions that some parents were disinterested or not willing to be involved. Teacher practice responded to the shift in image of parents by further developing communication practices to invite participation in children's learning and provide individual choice in pathways to participate. This aspect of the research is described fully in Chapter 3 – Doing the hard work, building relationships.

This early research process involved teachers challenging previously held assumptions and definitions of the differing groups of participants. Exhibit 2.2 illustrates the shifting image of individuals in the community. The boundaries around each group were broken down as individuals became valued for who they are, empowered to contribute and participate through their own choice and in their own way.

Exhibit 2.2: The first evolution – viewing individuals



Sharpening the focus on individuals within the group context

From the beginning of this research project the teacher researcher team articulated a strong belief in children as competent and capable learners. This view had shaped teacher practice in implementing a project approach to the curriculum. Teachers had developed documentation practices to capture the continuity in children's learning that occurs through engagement in project work. Alongside this documentation teachers also collected learning stories of children involved in other aspects of the centre programme. A convergence in the action research cycles occurred at this point as investigations into parental participation connected with investigations into project work. Documentation of children's learning was the common factor. On reflection, teachers identified that they were documenting children's learning in two distinctly different ways, one as an individual child in the regular programme and the other as a group participant in project work. Participation in project work was documented as a group experience, describing and discussing learning as if all participants were gaining similar outcomes, whereas participation in other aspects of the programme was documented as an individual experience with individual learning highlighted. In Chapter 3, the impact of this discovery and teacher learning about documenting individual children's learning is further described. In this chapter we focus attention on how teachers developed ways to sharpen their focus on individual learning within a group-learning context, and in so doing developed an understanding of 'learning as a transformation of participation' (Rogoff, 2003).

Individuals within social learning theory

Placing a focus on individual children within a social learning context posed a dilemma for teachers. Prior to 2002, centre documentation practice had been heavily influenced by developmental views of learning, where individuals were observed and assessed in isolation from the social context of the centre. Concern raised by the team was that there could be a tendency to revert to the previous 'developmental' flavour of writing if they began to write solely about individuals involved in group projects. The team needed an alternative approach. Prior discussions about the use of Barbara Rogoff's (2003) three analytical lenses provided a possible tool for teachers to use that would enable them to focus on individuals while retaining the complete 'picture' of the teaching and learning experience. The team decided to revisit this idea.

Influence 2.3: Rogoff (2003) Three foci of analysis

Rogoff (2003) proposes three foci for analysis of socio-cultural activity, Intrapersonal, Interpersonal, and Cultural-institutional. Together the three foci for analysis (or lenses) constitute the experience: no aspect can be studied in isolation from the other. Analysis of interpersonal relationships would not be able to occur without information about the context in which they are working. At the same time attention is paid to personal processes occurring within the

experience. The observer is also important because the focus of analysis stems from what we as observers choose to examine. "The distinction between what we choose to foreground or background lies in our analysis, and is not assumed to be a separate entity in reality." (Rogoff, ibid).

Intrapersonal lens: the individual is the focus of analysis with interpersonal and cultural institutional information available in the background.

Interpersonal lens: the focus is on what people are doing together, the role they play and the relationships among them. A sense of individual and cultural information is needed to understand what the people are doing.

Cultural/institutional lens: the focus is on cultural institutional processes such as: how practices develop and why, how practices connect with the culture and history and how they evolve. Detail about particular people and their relations with each other are back-grounded.

The use of the three lenses in the 'recognize' phase of learning and teaching stories offered teachers a way to discuss the significance of an individual child's learning in more depth while at the same time acknowledging the influences among the individual, relationships and the learning context. Teachers decided to trial this form of analysis in their documentation of ongoing learning and teaching stories. Through the use of the three lenses for analysis of socio-cultural activity teachers found they could foreground individual children's learning while at the same time keep their eyes on influential factors such as relationships and centre practices.

Influence 2.4: Carr (1998) Learning stories

Learning Stories as an assessment framework was introduced to the early childhood sector as a result of Margaret Carr's (1998) research project *"Assessing Children's Experiences in early Childhood."* 'Learning Stories' are structured narratives that track children's strengths and interests: they emphasize the aim of early childhood as the development of children's identities as competent learners in a range of different arenas" (Cowie & Carr, 2005. p.97). Assessment in a learning story involves a formative process in which learning is noticed, recognized and responded to. In the documentation the learning occasion is described (notice), analyzed (recognize), and followed by an indication of how teachers may act on this (respond) to further support the child's learning. The stories form the basis for discussion among teachers, teachers and parents/whanau and children. Involvement and contribution of all participants is actively invited throughout the process.

The following story is an example of how teachers' use of the three lenses for analysis enables one child's learning, or transformation of participation, to be fore-grounded. Michael's story illustrates the way the three lenses were incorporated into the existing narrative style of documentation. In telling his story it will be seen that all three lenses remain in view to provide the full picture. The story gives information about him (*intrapersonal lens)* while at the same time, information available in the background includes other people he is working with (*interpersonal lens)* and the context he is learning within (*contextual/institutional lens)*.

Michael's story - using Rogoff's three lenses - told by Debbie

Michael's story

Written by Debbie: 2004 - 2005

Michael has been involved in a project called 'above and below the sea'. A number of children and their families had been visiting the beach to collect resources to contribute toward the children's investigations. Debbie, as one of the teachers, recorded an occasion when she saw Michael and his grandmother in the car park of the centre.

Michael's learning story (1a)

"I heard him talking with his grandmother about going to the beach. Of course my ears perked up – great, more connections being made to our project focus. I talked with Michael and his grandmother about how great it would be for them to find 'unusual' things on the beach. They both went off chatting amongst themselves about their trip to the beach. The next time I saw Michael was with his Mum, they both came and found Katrina and myself to show us the things that Michael and his grandmother had collected on their trip to the beach. In came Michael with a box that was almost too big for him to carry – he very proudly put the box down, and Katrina and I started to look through the things that he had picked up. There were large pieces of seaweed, pods, shells, driftwood, crab shells and normal 'beach treasures'. Then there were some unusual things that no one else had brought in so far – sea sponge, shells with hair growing out of them, and beach flowers! We asked Michael if he wanted to bring them in to group time and he said yes. We talked about a safe place to store them until then, and decided on the top of the lockers." (Debbie, August 04)

As teachers, our prior knowledge of Michael was that he had not as yet contributed resources towards the development of a project. He seemed to sit on the periphery of the group time activities and was very quiet when encouraged to contribute to group conversations. His mother also seemed to 'sit on the periphery' in her knowledge about the regular cultural practices of the group time. So it was with some surprise and delight when Michael and his mum proudly produced the 'treasures' that Michael and his grandmother had collected from their beach trip.

Michael's learning story (1b)

Group time came and we were all excited by this big box that Michael had behind him when he was sitting down. I asked if anyone had brought anything to do with our project and Michael said that he did. We put the box in the middle and bit-by-bit I started taking things out of the box, and as I did I asked the children if they knew the names of the different natural beach resources. Out came the seaweed, shells, crab shells – all the children quickly named these items. The seaweed with the pods came out, and with a little encouragement Michael was also able to name the pod. It started to get a bit tricky though when I pulled out the sea sponge – but it didn't take one child long to call it a sponge – the children all had to take their turn in holding the sponge, unfortunately it got broken up slightly. Michael seemed to take this very well, considering how proud he was of his treasures! The children were amazed by the beach flowers! The discussion amongst the group flowed throughout the group time – all because of Michael's trip to the beach with his grandmother and the 'treasure' they both found together (Debbie, August 2004)

What happened to all those 'treasures' Michael collected from the beach? The story continues…

Michael's learning story (1c)

During the group time the resources were all displayed on the floor in the middle of the group. After group time finished we wanted to leave them on display. It was the end of the day and Michael wanted to take all his treasures home again. Mum wanted him to keep some at the centre and so we both encouraged him to just choose a few special things to take home. I got a plastic bag and then Michael chose a few special things that Mum was saying could either go around some pot plants, in the garden, or better still – make a display in the house. Michael was very satisfied with the items he chose and went away very happily. (Debbie, August 04)

This story was added to Michael's profile book with the addition of a question for Corrina, "What happened to the 'beach treasures' once Michael and you got home?"

Corrina, Michael's mother, responds by writing in Michael's profile book.

Michael's story (1d)

"When we finally got around to it we put the goodies from the beach into a big blue pot that we have outside by the garage. In the pot we have pansies and daffodils growing. It is decorated with shells and driftwood. I must say Michael didn't want to know much about this

probably because it took a week to do, and dad decided to fix the car at the same time I did this. So the beach lost, and fixing cars won! However I would definitely say Michael really enjoyed his beach project." *Cheers. Corrina*

His grandmother was also asked if she would tell the story of going to the beach with Michael. She also wrote in his profile book.

Michael's story (1e)

After picking up Michael from the centre we came home and sat out on the deck where Michael had fish and chips and a doughnut, with a drink for lunch, then we went across to the beach to find some 'goodies' for Michael's project. Michael really talked my ears off with. "We'll go to the beach, eh Nan… Look Nan a crab!... There's a stick Nan!" On arriving at the beach though Michael's first sentence was…. "We won't go down there though will we Nan?" Michael was pointing to where the surf was breaking, for some reason Michael does not like the sea, although he does enjoy playing in the sand. It was a great day weather wise, and both Michael and I had a lot of fun that day on the beach. (Michael's grandmother, August 04)

In Michael's story we can see that there have been many opportunities for the project to be discussed between Michael and his mother, grandmother, teachers, and other children in his group. Every time each person discusses it with Michael his understanding of the project grows. Michael's family trip to the beach was an example of how joint participation with people he trusted has supported him to develop confidence to participate in other social settings, as well as developing his understandings even further. Michael's confidence to participate and contribute to group-time discussions significantly developed during this project. Michael's development could not be attributed to his participation in the centre alone. He benefited from continuity in his experiences between home and centre. Michael brought the results of those interactions into the group work in the centre; all experienced change and learning as a result, and Michael showed increased level of participation and self-confidence.

The use of Rogoff's three lenses for analysis proved to be an effective tool in supporting teachers to strengthen their understanding of a socio-cultural view of teaching and learning. Changes they made to documentation were reflective of this. The teacher researcher team developed a sequence of photographs based on Michael's experience to visually represent the way in which they background and foreground the focus of interest when documenting stories.

Intrapersonal lens

Michael is the focus of the observation

Interpersonal lens

Interactions and relationships are taken notice of

Cultural/institutional lens

Centre practice, environment, resources and the language used become the focus

Individual children's learning is noticed and celebrated without being disconnected from the social context of the centre. Teachers gained a greater appreciation of the ways in which centre practice, relationships and individual participation are mutually creating each other. The ways in which Michael's participation in this project was documented enabled teachers to focus on his learning as well as acknowledging supporting relationships and influences.

Michael's Transformation of Participation comes into view.

Teacher awareness of Michael's developing confidence to participate and his emerging enthusiasm for learning in relation to a project influenced the choice of the next centre project focus. Michael was provided the opportunity to consolidate this social learning by participating in a project in which he held a high level of interest. During this second project, "Things on wheels," Michael's development as a 'ready, willing and able' learner clearly came into view. The knowledge teachers had gained about Michael during the first project contributed to the way they acknowledged his transformation during the second project. In the first project he was seen to make the first tentative steps in participating in a group project with support from his family. In the second he became a key player in the project; his enthusiasm influenced the direction of this project.

Teachers have individual non-contact time to complete learning story documentation. They also meet together weekly as a group to reflect on the project journey and make plans for future experiences that could support and extend learning. During one of these meetings the three teachers involved in the 'Things on wheels' project with the children reflected together on Michael's transformation. Their insights were documented using the frame of the three lenses, intrapersonal, interpersonal and cultural/institutional, as a teaching and learning story to share with his family.

Michael's learning story (2)

Written by Debbie- September 04

The intrapersonal lens: Michael's participation

Over the last few weeks Michael has brought in something new to do with wheels almost every day! One particular day he brought in his very special cars from home. Dad wasn't too sure about whether Michael should bring them in, but Michael's mum, Corrina, reassured him that they would be safe on the top of the lockers until group time. Michael was so proud that day! Since then Michael has brought in a variety of items that relate to the 'wheels' project, they have come in different forms.

We've had photos of Michael's Uncle Mike's and Shane's many cars, cars that race and cars that make a lot of noise! We've had amazing photos of Michael's Dad's truck with Michael driving the truck (well sitting in the drivers seat anyway). We've had skateboards, dump-trucks, and more racing cars! Every time Michael brings something new in, he contributes more to the discussion and reveals more knowledge about trucks and things with wheels!

The Interpersonal lens: Relationships that supported Michael's learning

We believe that a key person supporting Michael's learning is his mum Corrina. Ever since I first discussed with her the possibility of this as a project focus due to the interest that I know Michael already had, she has been supportive of Michael's interest 100%. Every time that Michael brings something new Corrina gives the back ground information of the item. Like the fact that he uses the dump truck to pick up and dump the garden weeds!

Every time Corrina gives the teachers this background information, it allows us to remind Michael of this information, and tell the rest of the group. Michael's Dad also plays a big part in his learning experiences as he takes Michael for rides in his big work truck, and puts Michael on his knee to 'drive' the truck through Eastgate car park! Michael's extended family i.e. uncle Mike and Shane, also play a part in Michael's learning experiences as Michael brings in photos of their cars, and times that they have raced at Woodford Glen Raceway. The children and teachers of the older learning group support, and are also supported by, Michael's learning. More and more children are contributing items from home that relate to the 'wheels' interest, and I am sure that this is due to Michael's huge interest and passion he shows for 'anything with wheels'.

Michael's story - using Rogoff's three lenses - told by Debbie

The cultural institutional lens: **Centre practices that supported Michael's learning**

- *Daily group time – Michael can anticipate a time in the day when he knows his voice is heard, his contribution is acknowledged.*
- *'Bringing items from home' - Michael's interest in the project is 'visible', and makes connecting links with home and centre.*
- *Recording group time - Michael's conversation is documented, allowing teachers to reflect on his learning at a later date.*
- *Same three teachers - Michael has relationships with people who know him well. His learning is followed in detail through learning story documentation, and conversations between teachers and with Corrina.*
- *Corrina's participation - Michael is supported to build on the familiar and to make sense of the unfamiliar. Michael gained familiarity with project work practices through the support of his family and began to confidently particpate. Ongoing conversations with Corrina supported teachers to gain contextual knowledge to support their work with Michael.*
- *Learning and teaching stories - Documenting Michael's learning allows for Michael's family to have an understanding of what his learning looks like when he's at the centre*

Michael's story - using Rogoff's three lenses - told by Debbie

The importance of stories about Michael's learning

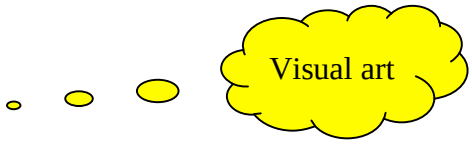
Michael's story became a significant example for teachers of how the learning community functions. It resonated in a number of ways with other continuous stories teachers had been collecting about individual children. The use of the three lenses of analysis provided teachers with a tool that enabled them to identify the interrelationship between their practices and the outcomes of the experience for individual members of the community. Use of the cultural institutional lens contributed particularly clearly to teachers acknowledging how their practices respond to individual children's participation. Previously this had not been recognised. Through Michael's story teachers were able to see how the individual is supported to engage in learning, and how individual participation (i.e. Michael and his family) contributes not only to their own learning but also to the learning of the social group.

Project work practices had evolved over time, often in response to the needs of a particular project at the time, and had become part of the way things are done here to support community participation in projects. Teachers identified how the practices established in the centre had created

a ‘project work culture’ characterised by the regular time of the day when children and adults come together to discuss the project, documentation that both informs and invites parental participation and the regular expectation for children to bring things from home to share and talk about.

Documentation as a pathway to parental participation

Michael’s story provided clear examples of how ‘project work’ documentation acts as a tool through which parent expertise and interest is called on. Parental interest is captured more strongly when it has particular relevance to parents’ own experiences. Some parents become key participants in the course of a project where they were being viewed as an ‘expert’. In the example above, both Michael’s parents joined in. As a result of authentic parental participation they saw themselves, and were viewed by the teachers, as major contributors to all children’s learning. Further data also showed that those parents who can be identified as key participants during a project often continue their centre participation in other ways beyond the focus of project-work. An example of this was that over the period of two projects, two ‘expert’ parents subsequently joined the centre management committee.



The awakening of teacher identity: Learning through visual art development

Two art teachers were employed during the course of this research project and provided the teacher researcher team the opportunity to explore the notion of identity in relation to the vision they held for the art teacher’s role in the centre. The research team was aware that within a learning community the art teacher would be influential on the way things would be done in the centre as well as to the ways other participate. The research team was concerned not with the individual person with but with the approach each art teacher adopted. As visual art began to take shape in the centre teachers began questioning pedagogical approaches to visual art. An art teacher whose time was given solely to facilitating, planning and documenting visual art teaching and learning offered teachers a mirror through which to view and think about their own practice and beliefs.

The story of developing the visual arts

The first art teacher

The first art teacher employed by the centre brought to his role a strong belief in the competence of the child, and creativity flourished. At the end of the first six months with an artist on the team, the centre mounted an exhibition of their artwork for the Christmas party. Parents came and admired it; all the adults were very proud of the children's work - it was great to see it valued. This value was especially evident in the way the artwork was displayed beautifully at the centre. The art teacher had offered opportunities for the children to experience 'paint' as a true medium for expression. As the children's work was also displayed at the local mall, children could communicate to friends and family their love for this expressive medium. It became evident that art was becoming a form of communication within the early childhood setting. Some of the art teacher's practices led to discussions at staff meetings. Children's art experiences had become viewed as a separate component of the curriculum. The art teacher's lack of prior knowledge about the early childhood curriculum was making it difficult for him to grasp the holistic nature of children's learning and also the importance of centre home relationships. The teachers discussed possible links between the visual arts programme and Te Whāriki. The influence of these early discussions will become evident in a later section of this chapter where a visual arts framework with strong links to Te Whāriki is presented.

Due to professional and family commitments, the first art teacher was unable to continue at the centre, and resigned. At first, the centre was unsure whether to continue their art programme in the same way, with a new teacher. The teachers and management used the occasion of employing a new art teacher as an opportunity for evaluation. Could this departure become a catalyst for change?

The second art teacher

It was very evident at the interview stage that the new art teacher had a personal love of art and creativity. She had always been involved with visual arts, whether it be with her own children when they were young, i.e. the setting up of an art corner for them at home or her attendance at children's camps providing the art programme, her work in early childhood centres, or her own attendance at art classes as her continued personal/professional development. In a recent reflection she stated her philosophy as:

…Through art/creativity you gain the knowledge, skills and ability to be able to relate to the world around you… In every person there is creativity – it is our gift within. No one needs to be the same or do things the same way. Teachers have differing prior experiences and knowledge to draw from… (September 2005)

Following the employment of this art teacher it took time to define her role within the programme. Under her influence, visual art took shape in the centre, and, through on-going explorations of the teaching team, became influential on the practice of individual teachers. This art teacher made contributions to the regular research meetings and practical art workshops. Her beliefs, practice and image of the competent child are combined in the way she describes the main characteristics of her approach to visual art provision:

- Respect for children's work
- The provision for uninterrupted space and time
- Safe spaces in which to socialise and appreciate others' work
- Children display their confidence through guiding others
- Children build up a large skill base through participating in a wide range of experiences
- These skills can be taken into all other areas of learning within and beyond the centre
- Time to watch and learn from others is a valuable part of the learning process
- Use of 'real' media and resources contribute to a sense of pride and respect
- Early childhood is not a practice run for learning.

The art teacher has no hesitation in saying that she has (and models) certain rules in the art room that children know they should follow, including respect for each other's artwork. She makes it quite clear that she is not happy if a child paints somebody else's artwork while the child is doing it. She says that children can work together on a piece of work but if someone is working on their own and their work is interfered with then she will discuss with the interfering child how she would have felt if someone had marked or damaged their work. Children can choose to work together, or choose to work on their own – this is their choice. She says that the room is not quiet all the time, but she expects a certain level of calmness to prevail.

The community of learners approach embedded in the centre philosophy is also evident within the philosophy of our second art teacher in the way she views expertise as not just being held by the adults. Children can also have expert knowledge in areas where some

adults do not. For example: the art teacher had taught the children over a number of different sessions the technique involved in 'felting'. When a visiting student teacher showed interest in this process, it was a child who confidently showed her what to do:

> *The children have built up a large skill base and are able to work with many different resources. One 3 year-old child confidently showed (guided) a trainee teacher through all the stages of wool felting. The trainee teacher was most impressed with her skills. What the children are gaining are skills that can be taken into the community, with the confidence to use them, experiment and try new ideas not just with visual arts but with many situations in life*. (September 2005)

The art teacher described another experience where she was teaching the children to use Indian ink. She explained that just because the children are small doesn't mean that they should not use equipment that is real and authentic.

> *…So many times you see people just say - oh it doesn't matter, they're only little it doesn't matter! I'm very fussy about it being presented well for them… for them to be able to get the results that are pleasing to them…*

It was becoming evident with the visual art approach advocated by the second art teacher that she believed in the 'competent artist', whether it be adult or child.

Exploring the difference between the art approaches

As mentioned above, the resignation of the first art teacher created a 'provocation' for teachers and parent board members to re-visit the purpose and role of the art teacher in the centre. In line with regular practice in the centre, the teachers read some relevant articles to investigate the topic and then discussed the ideas generated. A paper by Visser (2003) threw into relief the progression of paradigms in visual arts at New Beginnings Pre-school. They recognised they had demonstrated three paradigms in action:

1. The Child study paradigm

Prior to the employment of an art teacher, art resources were displayed on table-tops, and paints were replenished at the easels. If children asked for resources they were either given them, or shown where to get them from. The role of the teacher was to stay slightly removed from the child's visual art experience. It was believed at the time that the influence of the teacher would be detrimental to the child's visual art experience. Teachers were not to ask anything about the child's work, as this might put an 'adult influence' on children's visual art work. This was interpreted as

The child study paradigm: believe that art development happens in stages, and offer experiences perceived to be developmentally appropriate.

2. The progressive education paradigm

The centre then decided to employ what they thought was an 'art expert' to introduce their expertise and passion to the children. The plan was to provide children with the medium of art (and other visual mediums) as a means of expressive communication. We found that not all children were attracted to this 'visual experience', but those who were became encouraged to use visual art as a language. These children used art as a means of communication with the art teacher, with each other, and with their families. The first teacher had a lot of art experience but no early childhood teaching experience; this meant that he lacked understanding of the holistic learning of young children. This led us to interpret the second paradigm as:

The progressive education paradigm: believe in creative self expression; accept individual differences in creative endeavours with free access to a range of art media.

3. Co-learning paradigm

With the employment of the second art teacher it was evident that the teachers knew much more about what they did and didn't want as features of the art programme. The teachers wanted to change to a paradigm where the art programme was inclusive of all age groups in the centre, integrated into the curriculum, implemented by all teachers (not solely by the art teacher), and based on sound relationships among the art teacher and parents, teachers and children. This third paradigm was interpreted as:

Co-learning by children and adults: underpinned by the belief that engaging in art experiences is a cognitive "activity of the mind, of relationships, as well as feelings" (Visser, 2003, p.1).

Identity of teachers as co-learners

The concept of a co-learner identity initially emerged during a cycle of research undertaken by three teachers. These teachers held responsibility for project work with the older group of children. Their current project was called 'above and below the sea' and involved representing understandings and knowledge through the use of visual art tools and media. Together children and teachers were creating a large pictorial representation on a canvas. The children and teachers came together for a daily group time to participate in discussions and investigations of the project focus. The teachers had developed an interest in exploring how these group times supported co-learning.

Research process 2.2: Reflective writing around the idea of co-learning

Teachers began their research by recording their current understandings of co-learning based on the following questions:

- What does co-learning look like in the group time?
- What does co-learning look like specifically for the children?
- What does co-learning look like between the teachers and the children?
- What does co-learning look like among the teachers?

Following this reflective process teachers videoed a selection of three different group time sessions. The video footage was later viewed by the teachers and research associate to compare it with initial ideas, to identify discrepancies or new understandings and to discover what conditions enable co-learning to occur.

Are we who we think we are?

One segment of the video footage became significant in contributing to teachers' understandings about co-learning. The episode was a group time involving ten children and three teachers. The activity included introducing children to their first artwork on canvas, experimenting with collage ideas and sharing things from home.

Teachers identified 'ways of being' for teachers and children based on the video footage. They identified three approaches to teaching: where the teacher initiates and leads the conversation, where the interactions are shared, and where the child initiates the conversation. These approaches are summarised in exhibit 2.4.

Exhibit 2.4 Ways of being for teachers and children based on teachers' video clips

	Ways of being – teacher	Ways of being – child
Teacher initiated and led (presenting the canvas)	Information giving Focusing discussion Questioning – what do you like about the…?	Sitting, listening Taking responsibility for own participation, responding appropriately Taking turns Asking teacher
Interactive – shared role (collage work)	Scaffolding – actively participating Questioning – I wonder what's happened, do you think…, what do you think that might be, can you see that, what do you think is happening in that? Sharing ideas/theorizing – you think it could be a white….maybe, or it could be … Listening and responding Sharing ideas & knowledge	Actively participating – touching, exploring Making choices Communicating – asking for resources, questioning, asking for support/help, sharing ideas – I think it's Bruce, someone eats penguins, sharks eat fishy and duckies Recognizing their achievements – I made a spiral, hey it's the same
Child initiated and led (bringing things from home)	Listening to children Scaffolding – building on children's conversations Questioning children's ideas	Sitting, directly communicating with peers – listening & questioning Offering ideas Engaged and relating own experience to the conversations

Co-learning and visual art teaching styles

What became apparent in the data were differences in teaching styles and in how these styles directly influence children's participation. Teachers began to recognize that one particular style restricted children as co-learners. Children had revealed themselves as capable and competent co-learners; however, when the teacher role became more directive, children took a more passive role. This was challenging to the teachers and left them uncomfortable about their identity. The

particular image presented on the video was in conflict with the teaching team's vision of a community of learners in action. Discussion and debate among the teachers was shared with the whole teaching team. The question "are we who we think we are?" was clearly raised.

The exhibit 2.5 is a photograph of the canvas completed during the 'above and below the sea' project. Teachers viewed the contrast between the bottom and top half of the image as representational of the shifts they made in their practice as a result of this exploration. The orderliness of the bottom section represented a time when teacher initiated practice dominated whereas the top section (above the sea) was completed when teachers moved towards using a more interactive co-learning approach with children. Children's ideas and creativity are more evident.

Exhibit 2.5 Above and below the sea

Participation as researchers of their own practices had a powerful effect in changing teacher expectations and understanding about teaching and learning. The effects of teachers changing their practice in children's learning became apparent on the canvas. This event engaged teachers in

continued discussion as they reflected on their experience; it challenged views about approaches to visual art teaching and learning. As these were discussed the differing perspectives teachers held became evident. As a team they were provoked to further explore visual art teaching and learning in an attempt to understand the dilemma that had arisen: "Is there a right way to teach visual art?"

Is there a right way to teach visual art?

Teachers came from differing backgrounds and had gained their qualifications from different providers so that establishing a culture within this centre for implementing visual art demanded they engage in reflective discussion about their vision for this in the centre. While team discussions resulted in a clearly articulated vision and expectations, collective practice based on this did not always result. Staff changes during the first eighteen months of the research project meant that continuity of group understandings did not occur. The majority of teachers participating in the final eighteen months of the research had not been involved in the initial phase of the research. As new teachers came on board they inherited the team vision to establish visual art as an integrated part of the curriculum for children and became actively involved in developing practices to achieve this. Through team discussions, teachers found they shared a common unease. They did not all feel very confident in working with children in this learning domain. A range of ability and expertise in visual art within the team was evident, with some teachers acknowledging they had a real passion in this area while others indicated they felt less able and ill-equipped.

Fear of doing the wrong thing

In general, teachers felt their training and preparation for teaching had not provided them with a sound understanding of teaching and learning in visual art from a socio-cultural perspective. They struggled with prior 'messages' such as 'too much interference in children's creative experiences can be damaging for the child' that seemed to be in direct conflict with their current understandings of how important teacher/child interactions are in the learning process. While they were able to embrace socio-cultural constructivist views on teaching and learning in other areas of their work, such acceptance was proving problematic in the area of visual art. As a result, some teachers admitted to avoiding participation in visual art with children through fear that they might 'do the wrong thing'. Perhaps non-participation would have been acceptable if the art teacher had been viewed as providing the expertise necessary for the centre's programme; however, the vision of the team was to establish visual art as an integrated part of the curriculum for children. To achieve this the teaching team acknowledged that all teachers needed to be active participants in visual art experiences with children

The research exploration involved teachers critiquing knowledge and understandings on a personal level and then revealing insights of themselves to their colleagues. The process resulted in teachers gaining a sense of individual identity as they developed an understanding of themselves in relation to their colleagues. It became apparent that when individual teacher identity in relation to this curriculum area was acknowledged, the collective practice of the team was strengthened.

Research process 2.3: Collective investigation within a community of practice - visual art

This phase of the research involved teachers coming together to explore their practices in more depth, much like the way in which Wenger et al. (1998) describe a community of practice:

> "Groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly."

Teachers acknowledged that they wanted to improve their knowledge and understandings about teaching and learning practices in visual art. This provided them with a common purpose and a defined 'domain' to engage with. Wenger (2005) explains that a community of practice has three key fundamental characteristics – a social system and set of relationships (community), a domain (area of knowledge) and a focus on practice. These elements were clearly evident in this research cycle.

The research design involved three different areas of activity over an eight-month period that contributed to a phase of analysis and interpretation. The teacher/researcher team was interested in how teachers co-constructed visual art in the curriculum, what knowledge and understandings developed and how this impacted on practice.

The activities and approaches used to gather data were:

1 Teachers documented a sequence of two individual reflections. The first was written prior to engaging in further research activity and described past influences and views that teachers felt had had an impact on their view of themselves in relation to visual art. The second followed participation in art workshops and team discussions. It focused on how teachers viewed their personal development as teachers of art, how their beliefs and knowledge had changed and what experiences had contributed to this. The key points in individual reflections were summarized and represented in a chart to the team for further reflection.

2 Teachers participated in a series of art workshops to experience 'being an artist.' Two teachers had recently attended a national art conference and made the suggestion of participating in art workshops where teachers could experience visual art as learners themselves. They had also been introduced to the concept of 'art as a narrative' and saw this as an opportunity to explore this concept as a team, based on their own experience. Teachers viewed their participation as a way to develop their own abilities in visual art. Team meetings followed each workshop and involved teachers in reflection and analysis of each experience. Each discussion was tape-recorded.

3 Finally, visual art teaching and learning stories (Carr,1998) collected over the course of a year (127 in total) were gathered together and collated according to authorship. Each teacher's collection of learning and teaching stories was available as data to reflect on, alongside their personal recollections of prior influences and experiences, in support of their second reflective writing.

Data from teachers' individual reflections was re-presented in table form by the research associate. The first column, 'prior view/experiences', drew on data from the teachers' first reflective writing. A framework of questions had been distributed to teachers to guide their second reflective writing process. Analysis of this data involved drawing out the key words, phrases and ideas each teacher had documented. Presenting this information as a table provided teachers with easy access to each teacher's journey of learning. The table was distributed to the team prior to a teacher researcher meeting at which time teachers questioned and clarified the detail with each other.

Developing teacher confidence

The framework displayed in appendix 1 (pages 190-92) developed as a result of individual teacher reflection: the analysis of these data contributed to teachers clarifying their understandings of,

indeed, acknowledging and valuing, their individual identities. The majority of teachers acknowledged they had increased confidence in working with children in visual art; there was a general sense of teachers feeling more interested and willing to participate. The view of visual art as a social activity during which teachers and children can engage in reciprocal relationships was strongly evident as an emerging or consolidated belief of teachers.

Differing experiences were contributing factors to individual teacher learning. There was no set recipe for all. Teacher learning was an interplay of experience, relationships and reflection. Participating in art experiences was identified as a major contributor to teacher learning; however, as the data suggests, it would not have been effective in isolation. It is interesting to note that teachers referred to participating as involving both children and adults. There was some recognition here that participating with children was a valuable source of learning; children as teachers? Teachers discussed their learning from an individual perspective. The process had allowed individuals to explore personal views and participation; however, the outcome from exploring individual pathways was one of collective strength.

When this framework was shared within the teaching team, teachers commented on how they were learning about each other in a way that they had not done previously. Presenting the data in a table format made 'shifts' in thinking, understanding and practice of individuals explicit to the team. Personal learning was overtly shared. Teachers had made explicit how previous practice in the centre had been influenced by individuals' prior knowledge and experiences, and how they viewed themselves in relation to 'being an artist'. In summary, individuals' pasts affected participation in art. Acknowledgement of this meant teachers acquired a more positive view of themselves as learners in this domain. Alongside this teachers developed personal connections with colleagues that contributed to improvements in the way the team worked together. This was described in terms of respect for and tolerance of difference and diversity, and recognition and value of individual expertise.

Adopting a considered approach – space, time and relationships

Learning about being an 'artist' and art teacher created an awareness that individuals need not strive to be the same. Initial inquiries may have been motivated by a need to discover the 'right' way to engage with young children in visual art, but an outcome of the action research has been recognition that participating in a 'considered' way is more valuable than seeking a 'right' way. Visual art encourages individuality where individual approach and expression is valued. A considered approach to implementing visual art experiences involves practices embedded in respectful

relationships. The factors teachers identified as necessary to consider are: promoting a positive self image, sense of satisfaction and achievement, value of and respect for others' work, appreciation of aesthetics and beauty, and promoting a sense of self as competent and capable.

As a next step, teachers moved from their own learning experiences to what it might mean for children as learners in the centre. Three areas of the programme were identified as needing consideration: space, time and relationships. Space to spread out or to be alone had been particularly valued during workshops. Teachers considered the layout of the art room and whether other areas of the environment could be utilized. Time to pursue ideas and engage in the activity of art was seen to be particularly important. Teachers began considering how they could make more time available for children by changing existing routines: for example, a whole group kai time could become a rolling time.

Relationships provided the biggest challenge for teachers. They acknowledged that genuine, respectful, and responsive interactions during teacher workshops had a profound impact on how participants came to view themselves. They questioned the negative impact overuse of common phrases with children could have. Phrases such as "I like the way you do …" or "would you like to tell me about…." can lose their genuineness. Interactions among adults had been predominantly about giving valued feedback, insightful ideas, seeking opinion, and acceptance. Teachers had also become aware of how in their own learning experiences they tended to seek out relationships with others with whom they felt they had an affinity, those who knew them well and in whom they had confidence. They also discussed how overuse of praise could have an effect opposite to that intended, in that children become motivated to receive generalized personal recognition from the adult rather than recognition for their achievements, work and thinking. At a follow-up meeting with the research associate, a month later, the teacher researcher team reflected on changes that had occurred in the centre programme as a result of their investigations. Teacher participation was acknowledged as the most significant area of difference. The research process had enabled teachers to move their practice from an intuitive level to one that is informed and thought about, as evident in appendix 1 (pages 190-92).

Findings sections summarize our emerging understandings

Findings 2.1: Shifts in participation by teachers

Some of the shifts in teacher participation that occurred in the centre included:

- Teachers working collectively and sharing enthusiasm to work with children
- All teachers participating in art experiences with children
- The art teacher's expertise and support began to be utilized more by others
- Teachers drew on each other's strengths and interests - guidance from others was actively sought
- Teachers continually reflected and questioned themselves; there was an increased awareness of how the teacher role and interactions may influence children
- Teachers thought more deeply about what art experiences they want to offer children, both inside and outside the centre, and why they want to offer these
- Teachers made environmental changes to provide more unrestricted access to art space and resources and provision for continued experiences
- Kai routine changed to become a rolling time, allowing children uninterrupted time for their artwork
- The level of respect for children's work increased by ensuring up-to-date work was displayed and individual children's art folders were introduced
- Teachers began observing, discussing and documenting children's collaborative and continuous ventures in art more, rather than individual one-off snapshot stories.

Findings: Shifts in participation by teachers

Sarah's story: coming to know self and others

Sarah's story is an example of how one teacher came to gain a greater understanding of her own dual identities as a learner and as one who guides learning through her interactions. A similar understanding of the dual identities of children also emerged. Sarah initially held an identity as one who 'felt hopeless' in the area of visual art. She talked of how she avoided participating with children in art because she felt she had limited ability to offer. Her research journey was motivated by the team's previous exploration through which some of her prior views were challenged. For Sarah, the issue of children copying others was confusing. The detail in her story is important because it shows how the alternation between writing about events and the consideration of

implications and possible interpretation of those events allowed her to gain insight into an issue that concerned her.

Research process 2.4: Data gathering, discussion and story telling

Sarah collected the following data over a two-month timeframe during her regular participation in the centre programme:

- episodes of children involved in copying documented in her reflective journal
- photographs to support the journal entries and learning stories
- learning and teaching stories that she considered relevant.

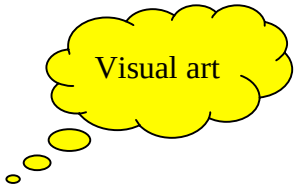
The data was collated and discussed with the research associate at two meetings. Emerging implications and understandings were documented as further data.

At the final meeting with the research associate all data was collated and analyzed. Understandings were gained by analyzing and interpreting across and among data. A series of journal entries and learning stories were selected to illustrate the resulting learning.

Sarah then wrote an account of her journey and presented this at a Centre of Innovation hui, 29 – 30th Nov 05.

To copy or not?

Sarah's story



Author Sarah, November 05

Introduction

Visual arts is one of the components our centre has been exploring through our involvement in the Centre Of Innovation research. All teachers have been actively researching this subject over the past 2 years with our research associate as an integral part of our journey. My involvement began when my colleague and I investigated how visual art can support younger children's learning within project work. At that time we encountered many challenges to our perception of the teacher role. For me, it raised questions about many of my ideas and understandings of children's learning in visual art.

As a whole team (8 teachers) we have regularly had meetings where we discussed our views on visual arts, what we felt should be the teachers' role and we reviewed current visual art literature. We also engaged in visual art workshops together after hours at the centre. Through these workshops we were able to personally explore what engaging in visual arts felt like. We would then share with the group how we felt during the experience as well as about our final product. Our feelings were varied. Some teachers felt uncomfortable about their artistic abilities, while others were very comfortable. This helped us understand what children may sometimes feel when creating work. We all felt strongly that visual art was an important part of the curriculum and an important cultural tool. We were provoked to think about how we as adults showed children that art is a

Sarah's story: – coming to know self and others

valued tool of our culture. We could all answer this question in relation to cultural tools such as the written word as we model and use text in many ways with children. Why is art any different?

Through these numerous art explorations and discussions I decided to investigate an area that had niggled at me for some time - artistic copying. As a team we had made a commitment to engage more actively in visual art with and alongside children. We shared a belief that if children are to view art as something that is valued within the culture of the centre then adults need to be seen participating in art themselves. This created a dilemma for me. If we work alongside children using art media and techniques how do we avoid the pitfalls such as children receiving the message that adult art is **the** model? Together the research associate and I proposed the question, "Is copying a valid technique for learning?" I already had some preconceived notions. I did not think that copying was a valid technique for learning. I felt it had negative connotations; it made me think of forgery and theft. Regardless I was eager to embark on this research journey and find some answers. I gained my first piece of research data with a child named Justice.

Sarah's Journal, 16/6/05 **Working with Justice (1)**

We got some paper and crayons and set them down on the floor (the art table was in use). I started to draw the vase and Justice immediately started to copy what I was doing. I said to her not to copy my picture, and just draw what she saw. I told her this was what I was doing. She looked a bit frustrated and was not confident. She said "Sarah I can't draw it." I told her she could - it didn't matter if it did not look exactly like what she had seen, just give it a go. She asked if I could at least draw the vase for her. I relented and drew the vase for her. I assured her that she could draw the flowers. She proceeded drawing the flowers (still looking at my picture and the vase). As she was drawing the flowers, at each flower she would ask me if it looked OK. I told that it was great and whatever she drew it would be fine as it was drawing what she saw. She looked at her picture and said it was not good enough.

Justice had always shown a strong interest and competency in art and was often found painting or drawing in the art room. She always had a large collection of paintings to take home every day. I thought working alongside with her would be a rewarding and positive experience for both of us. I envisioned us contently sitting beside each other concentrating on studying the vase of beautiful flowers and then interpreting what we each saw onto our papers. However, it was not an overly happy experience for either one of us. Even though there was a model, Justice felt compelled to copy me rather than the vase of flowers. She then compared her work with mine, and was not satisfied with her results. Through this comparison, she gained a negative view of her capabilities and her potential. I was distressed that she had ignored the model and concentrated on my sketch. It bothered me because I felt that copying my work impeded her unique creativity that she might have concluded that there was only one right way to draw flowers which was based solely on my interpretation. This also deeply worried me as I did not (and still don't) categorize myself with having strong artistic ability. I compare my artistic abilities to those of a 12 or 13 year old. What if she always based her drawing of flowers on this immature model and never progressed to reach her potential? Penny Brownlee (1991) echoed my thoughts. She discusses how providing children with an adult picture will take away their chance to sort out ideas on how a particular object may look and draw it in a symbolic form. Additionally

I believed that I had inhibited Justice's creativity and lowered her self-esteem. Justice in turn was frustrated and upset with herself.

A turning point in my research

Although I was initially disappointed with my first story documenting copying, I was not thwarted and continued to collect stories on children's copying. I needed more stories to answer my proposed question. Rather than set up and "stage" incidents of copying (i.e. providing children with a model to draw from) I decided to observe children working together in their natural environment. I always had my notebook and camera handy if a copying situation arose. I took notice of children's interactions together, and the language they used when documenting my stories.

Findings

Through collecting a range of stories I was able to compile several findings that I found significant. Firstly, when children copy each other, the process can foster a sense of belonging. Saffron was relatively new to the centre and I felt that through working alongside and following Brianna's lead, Saffron developed a 'connectedness' with Brianna. There was a sense of acceptance between them. This story, along with others I had collected, also illustrated to me that children don't mind being copied – they don't have the need to secure ownership of their ideas.

Sarah's Journal 21.7.05 - Copying Circles (2)

I was outside and the art easel was set up outside (it's usually in the art room). Nobody was painting and I saw Brianna wasn't currently engaged. She was walking past me when I asked her if she would like to do a painting. She answered that she would like to do a painting if I sat beside her. I agreed, and we both sat down on the wee chairs in front of the easel.

I was just painting lines, and Brianna was doing her own painting (swirls of different colours). While I was painting, Saffron approached me and said that she wanted to do a painting. *I told her that I was nearly finished with my painting, and then she could have my seat. I quickly finished and relinquished my chair to her.* Brianna then announced that she had finished her painting, and would like to do another one. I took off our paintings, and hung them on the wire to dry. I stood a few feet behind the girls, waiting to see what they would paint. Brianna started painting away. I watched as Saffron stared at what Brianna was painting, and then proceeded to copy the image onto her paper. Both of the children were painting circles. I noted that Saffron spent much of her time looking at what Brianna was doing.

Secondly, children can move seamlessly into the roles of copier and the one being copied as Brianna illustrates in the next story.

Sarah's journal 19.7.05 - Moving between roles (3)

Emalee and Brianna were painting at the art easel together. After they had finished painting, Brianna followed Emalee to the round table. Emalee began to fold a piece of paper, and then tape each of the folded bits. I noticed Brianna watching her. Brianna then too got a plain piece of paper, and a tape dispenser, and sat beside Emalee. She too began to fold and tape each of the folds. Emalee announced that this was a present for her mum. Brianna then too said that she was making a present for her mum.

These two stories exemplify Brianna's dual roles. In the first story she was the one who was being copied. In the second story she copied Emalee's idea and process of making a present. In both situations Brianna participated confidently. There was no sense of unease. I noticed that Emalee also benefited from the experience as it was somehow cementing the friendship between the two girls. Emalee's abilities were being recognised by Brianna and I wondered about the impact this had on Emalee's view of herself. It appears that every child can gain benefits from engaging in either role.

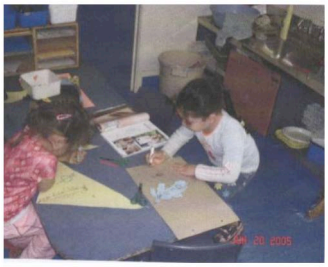
The following collection of stories about Paris' involvement in visual art experiences helped me to gain an understanding of how embedded copying is as a learning strategy children naturally use for different purposes.

Sarah's Journal 19.7.05 - Copying as an embedded learning strategy (4)

Quinn found one of the plastic cotton reels and began to coat the top with glue. Paris was sitting beside him, and noticed what he was doing. She finished her dye painting, and went to retrieve one of the reels as well. She too coated the top with glue. Quinn began to stick various items on his reel (cotton, ice cream sticks, etc). Paris then too found some things to stick on hers. Crahsau was busily painting at the table, and he finished his painting, and followed the same process as the other two children. Denzel (child on the left) watched the other three children, but continued on his painting. Paris said she was finished, and left her reel. All of the other children soon said that they were finished as well and exited the art room after Paris.

This group of children borrowed ideas from each other while being totally engaged in exploring the media and resources for themselves. Again there was a sense of belonging apparent at the time which was in some way evident in the way they all decided to move on within a short time of each other. The next story sees Paris again in the position of wanting help with getting started. This time she is more formally involved in copying another child as Nina becomes the "teacher" who competently shows her the process.

Sarah's Journal 20.6.05 - Formal copying (5)



All of the teachers have turns with having a week of afternoons in the art room. It was my rostered week so I was in the art room when Paris asked me to help her draw a butterfly. I asked what I could do to help her and she said "draw a butterfly". I looked at what she had done so far on her paper. She had drawn the body of the butterfly so I remarked that she appeared to be nearly finished with her butterfly. She could indeed draw a butterfly. She told me that she couldn't draw a butterfly. Nina was sitting nearby and had heard our conversation. She walked over to where Paris was and traced with her finger how to draw the outline of a butterfly on Paris's paper. As Paris and I watched Nina trace the outline with her finger I remarked to Paris that Nina might be a good teacher of drawing butterflies. I asked Nina if she would like to show Paris the way that she draws butterflies. Nina nodded her head. She was quite excited at this prospect and quickly walked around the art room looking for something to draw with. I offered her a coloured pencil but she shook her head and took a marker instead. She then drew a butterfly directly on the collage that she was working on. Paris watched her intently and immediately copied her technique. Once Paris had finished drawing the butterfly she announced that she now had a butterfly puppet. Nina the began cutting out the objects she had drawn on her collage. Paris then got a pair of scissors and began to cut out her drawings.

It was obvious to me that Nina relished her role as teacher to Paris. She could barely contain her excitement as she hurried around the art room looking for the right pen to use to demonstrate to Paris her way of drawing butterflies. Interestingly, Nina adopted Paris' idea of cutting the figures out at the end. Each had something to contribute so that it became a mutually benefiting relationship. This to me became an example of how, through social participation, children engage in co-constructing their ideas and skills. In the next story Paris again seeks assistance however this time I felt I now had a range of strategies that I could offer in support of Paris' endeavours.

From a learning and teaching story documented by Sarah (6) (21.7.05)

Paris' story about a foot

In the afternoon, I went into the art room to see what creations were occurring. Makayla was sitting at the round table by herself. I noticed she was busy cutting paper with scissors. I was soon joined by Paris. Paris looked at what Makayla was doing and said, "That looks like a foot, can you make one for me?" I told Paris that I could help her make a foot, or she could copy what Makayla was doing, or ask Makayla to show her how to make one. Makayla heard my suggestions and said, "No. I won't show her". Paris then responded with. "I can draw it then, and cut it out". I watched Paris as she did this. Paris then told me a story about her "foot".

Once upon a time there was a monster. He found a footprint and said "Ahhh, that's my footprint." He hoped in the rubbish bin since someone was coming. He got out of the

rubbish. It was a girl coming. He went across the bridge and then went into his cubbyhouse and slept with the girl who was his girlfriend. The end.

My strategies didn't go as planned however I realised that by giving choices I had allowed Paris time to consider her own participation. Her initial idea to draw a foot was inspired by copying her interpretation of what Mikayla was doing. Perhaps in this instance if someone had provided the support or model Paris may not have proceeded to produce an image she felt proud of, nor script a creative story about it. On reflection I can see how I allowed Paris to make decisions on what her next step was to be. This enabled her to pursue her own agenda while I remained ready and willing to offer help as and when needed. I didn't feel compelled to act on her initial request but rather waited to gauge the amount of involvement she needed from me. How fickle interacting with children in visual art is.

The last story about Paris describes her in a situation where she confidently participates with other children to produce a finished product that they are all proud of. It consolidates my view of how children co-construct their ideas through watching and interacting with others. Each person's contribution is respected and valued – a learning community in action.

From a learning and teaching story documented by Sarah (7)

(26.7.05)

A climate of collaboration

I was in the art room, when Lorraine (teacher) called me over to the under's door. She was telling me about a crab that Reko had found on the under's side. She explained how he had stepped on it, and was busy putting the crab back together like a jigsaw puzzle. She added that some other children came over to help him. She had even taken a couple photos to document this. Lorraine suggested to Reko and the other children (Paris and Quentin) that they could go into the art room and stick the crab pieces on a piece of paper. The children seemed to like this suggestion, and filed on out to the art room. I trailed after them, to add support if needed. Paris got a piece of paper and they sat on either side of Reko. I sat opposite them - just watching their interactions. Paris and Quentin watched as Reko put glue on the paper, and stuck each of the crab remnants on the paper. After he was finished, the children studied the piece of paper. Quentin declared; "It needs decorations" and Paris said, "The crab needs something to look at" Quentin hopped off his chair and grabbed some magazines. He began to flip through them and carefully cut out the photos that appealed to him. Paris found some cellophane and began to cut this out as well. When Paris and Quentin had cut out a piece (ready to be stuck on) I noticed that they laid it on the paper. It was Reko's job to glue it, and determine where it would be stuck. Paris turned to Reko and said, "This is your picture eh"? Reko nodded his head. I really enjoyed my time watching the interactions of Paris, Quentin, and Reko. There was a strong culture of respect between all of the children. They also showed great respect to the crushed crab. They carefully put it back together, and gave it brilliant decorations to look at. They each were able to contribute their ideas and they collaborated beautifully on their crab motif. Later in the day, Reko proudly showed his mum the completed crab collage. Great job everyone!!

Paris' stories reinforce how valuable copying is as a learning strategy. Adopting the role of copier allows children to borrow ideas from each other to get started, try something new, learn a technique, or follow a process. In Paris' first story, she got started by borrowing another child's idea of using a reel to decorate and followed the process the other child used. She tried something new by copying the model from another child of how to draw a butterfly. She followed a process by collaborating with two other children in the art room to create a collage. Furthermore when collaborating with the other two children she offered her own suggestions and put in some hard work, even though it was determined that she would not "own" this piece of work. She was motivated by the other child's satisfaction. The children's stories taught me a lot about what my role could look like. They naturally use strategies that support, encourage and teach others. My confidence to work with visual art alongside children was growing.

The final story I will share is one that provoked further reflection for me. It has some features in common with the very first story about Justice, however the outcome is almost the opposite. Reflecting on this story has helped to address my initial concerns about how to avoid the pitfalls when children copy another. Connor's story describes how he copied an idea and process from me, but the product was completely different. He created a picture that was significant and meaningful to him

From a learning and teaching story documented by Sarah (8) (28.7.05)

Faces!

I was in the art room and there was nothing set up on the circular table. I put out an assortment of materials markers, glue, coloured paper, scissors, foam pieces, etc).

A couple of children came into the art room and began to use the materials - all differently from each other. Connor then arrived, and sat down beside me. He got a piece of paper and began to draw on it. I was feeling a bit creative myself, and decided to join the children. I glued three round buttons and some Styrofoam on my paper. I then outlined it in marker, so it looked liked a face. Connor watched what I was doing, and announced that he would like to make a face as well.

We discovered that I had used all of the round bits, so we got some down. Connor chose which of the colours he wanted to represent the eyes and nose. He diligently worked on his face and I watched him. Once he had finished gluing on the eyes, nose and mouth, he then used the same marker as me. Instead of drawing a face he drew circles around the eyes.

He looked at me smiling and declared that they were glasses. He pointed at his picture and told me that he had also drawn some ears. I said it was an awesome face, and asked him if I could take his photo with it. He agreed.

A familiar feature of Justice's and Connor's stories is that I was working with the art materials alongside the children. In both instances they copied what I was doing however on closer scrutiny I discovered a difference – one that has influenced my practice and strengthened my understandings. In Justice's story, she offered the initial idea when she suggested "Let's draw the flowers". Connor used copying to borrow my idea and then adapted it to create his own outcome. He followed his own agenda. When I think about Justice I can now see that her initial idea was interpreted by me and that the direction we took

was my idea. I had not closely 'listened' to her request, what did she mean by 'let's draw the flowers'? Perhaps she had a different approach in mind – what was her agenda? At that time my practice was heavily influenced by the understanding I held that children's work should be their own and so I created the situation, and expectation, for Justice to do her thing separately from me. I feel that by us both drawing separately from the same model Justice felt a compulsion to copy my work. Her original idea might have been that we could do it together, and if we had engaged in co-construction the outcome may have been mutually beneficial.

What have I learnt?

I have discovered that 'copy' is not a four-letter word, it is a valid technique for learning. Copying is a natural way of learning. Howard Gardiner (1980) confirms this for me by describing how children naturally copy sources, models, photographs, other pieces of work or people, if they don't have previous knowledge or schemas of how something looks or is done. My collection of stories illustrates for me how it is an approach to building a repertoire of visual art knowledge and ability.

Sarah's Reflections (9) - A summary of her own learning

From Sarah's presentation to the Centre of Innovation Hui (29.11.05)

I have learnt that copying has several benefits for children whether the copier or those being copied.

- *Being the "copied" gives children an opportunity to have their abilities recognised by others, it boosts their confidence and sense of achievement. Children are powerful teachers for other children.*
- *Copying and being copied contributes towards a sense of inclusion in and belonging to the group.*
- *The copier is a self-motivated learner who has learnt to use an effective learning strategy.*

Copying is a central strategy to co-learning. It involves sharing ideas and ways of doing things in a manner that all children can participate. Children don't need to rely on language to be able to engage in co-constructing knowledge and abilities.

Regarding the role of the teacher I feel that there is a definite place for teachers working with and alongside children within visual arts. Teachers can assist and guide children in the teaching of techniques, ideas and skills that they haven't been introduced to. It's necessary for children to copy these newly taught techniques to enhance and further their artistic development. The key is to really 'listen' to the child and follow their agenda, not impose your own.

I also feel that it is the teacher's role to show a genuine interest in visual art. This can be best achieved by sitting alongside children to paint, draw, or work together. If children don't experience an environment where art is used and valued by adults how do they gain an understanding of the important place art has in our culture? A danger is that they will come to view art as a child's entertainment activity.

Personally I have grown enormously in my confidence and competence as a visual art teacher. It doesn't matter about the level of my own ability – when co-constructing with children I am continually learning and this is exciting!

Discovering a common identity: Adults and children as teachers and learners

Following on from the process of individual learning in visual art the teacher researcher team began to analyze data collated from the collection of teaching and learning stories. The project director and research associate undertook initial data analysis using a process of word analysis. Two lists of descriptors were developed, one that described the children's learning and participation and the other the teachers'. These were presented to the teacher researcher team to make sense of. Research interest was in discovering how the teacher and child were being presented through centre documentation. What image was being represented of teachers and learners in this community? Common themes or categories about children within the data were explored and refined by the teacher researcher team at two research meetings. Lively discussion and debate abounded as the team built up a collective image of the child as a teacher and learner in visual art.

Research process 2.5: Document analysis of learning stories

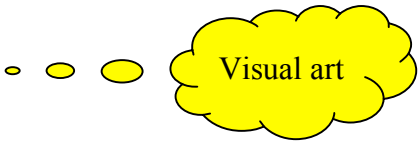
A form of document analysis was applied to the 127 *learning and teaching stories* to determine how children's visual art learning was being described. Descriptors of the teacher role were also drawn from the data to provide insight into how teachers were constructing and describing their participation with children.

Analysis of the data continued as teachers focused on the second list, descriptors of teacher participation. In the learning and teaching stories, descriptors of the adult were predominantly about the teaching role; however, earlier research data had powerfully identified teachers as learners in this domain. It was a poignant moment when the teacher researcher team came to the realization that descriptors of children as teachers and learners matched those of the teacher; the descriptors of adults resonated with those of the children. The following exhibit presents some examples of the commonalities we found.

Exhibit 2.6: Commonalities in descriptors of children and adults

Children	Teachers
Trying things out, testing, experimenting	Trying out new things, excited
Articulates ideas, explains work or actions, describes their story about their art	Explaining the process, discussing problems, sharing their story about the product of their art
Watches or listens to others, borrows ideas, learns from others	Observes, uses other peoples ideas, ask for help and critique
Continues over time, returns to and revisits prior use of media and techniques	Needing time to continue work, adding to original ideas, using new learning
Proud, shares completed work with others, satisfied	Proud, sense of achievement, displays work

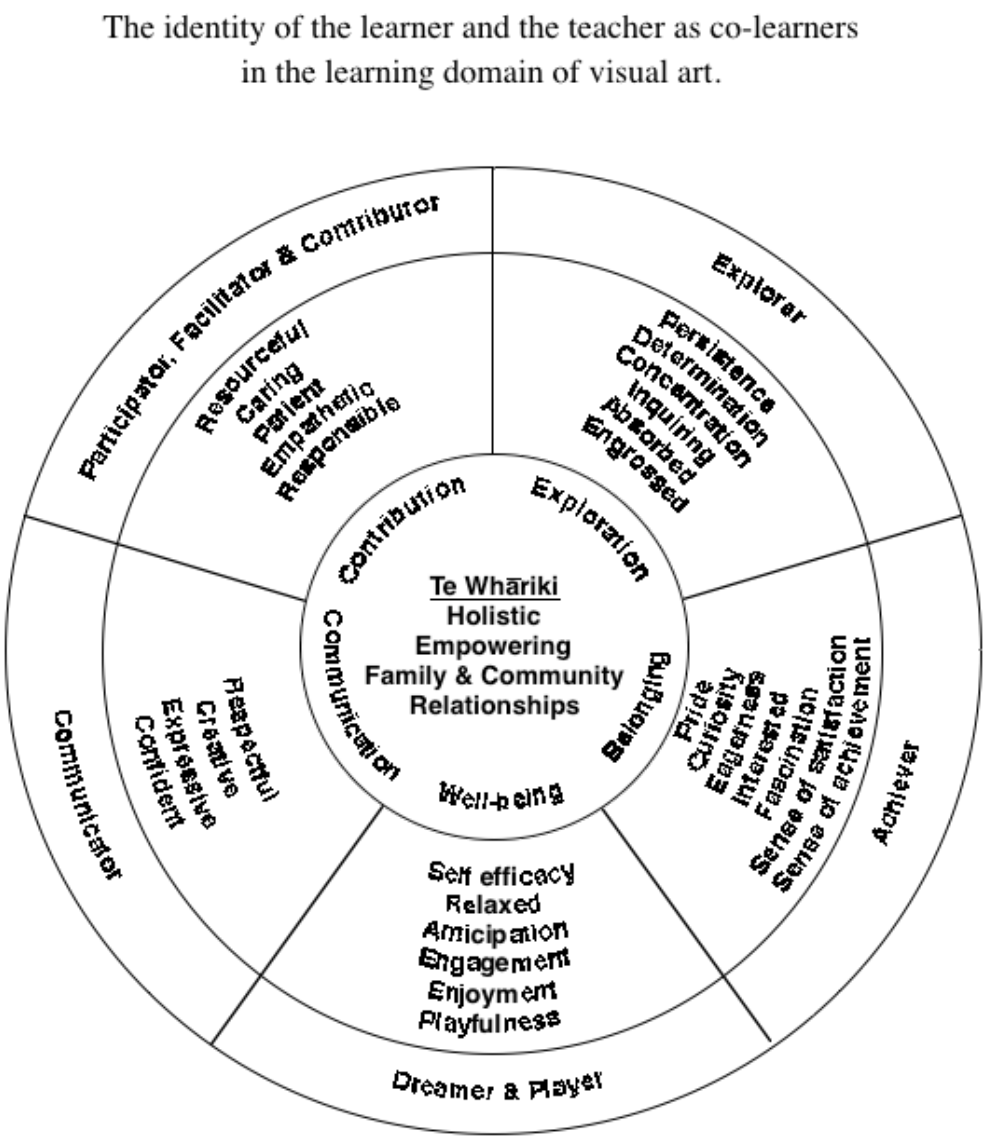
The teacher researcher team came to understand that all participants (adults and children) share both the teaching and learning roles. They had, in fact, uncovered the identity of co-learners in the area of visual art.



Te Whāriki and visual art teaching and learning

To present these findings in an accessible way to the early childhood sector, the teacher researcher team drew on the strands and principles of Te Whāriki as a framework. A comfortable connection was made between the descriptors of identity as a visual art teacher and learner as defined by the research team and the strands of Te Whāriki. Exhibit 2.7 presents the resulting framework.

Exhibit 2.7: A framework developed by the research teaching team



Placing the principles and strands of Te Whāriki in the centre of the framework represents how the curriculum is viewed as central to visual art learning and teaching. The second circle lists those descriptors that emerged from the data that the research team considered illustrative of learning dispositions. The teacher researcher team made connections with Margaret Carr's (Carr, 2001) learning and teaching story framework to categorize the dispositions alongside the strands.

Influence 2.5: Carr (2001) Learning dispositions within Te Whāriki

Use of a narrative learning and teaching story approach to assessment involves illustrating domains of learning dispositions in action. Carr (2001) has situated these domains alongside the strands of Te Whāriki, an indication that they are worthwhile outcomes for early childhood. The five domains of learning disposition as they connect to Te Whāriki are: taking an interest (Belonging); being involved (Wellbeing); persisting with difficulty and uncertainty (Exploration); communicating with others (Communication); and taking responsibility (Contribution).

Learning dispositions are described by Carr (2001) as 'situated learning strategies plus motivation'. She goes on to describe them in terms of 'being ready, willing and able' to participate in various ways: a combination of inclination, sensitivity to occasion, and the relevant skill and knowledge" (p. 21).

Influence 2.6: Cowie and Carr (2004) Dispositions as actions

Cowie and Carr (2004) discuss how the concept of 'dispositions' has been 'hard to pin down with the clarity that would be helpful to teachers'. They clarify the situation by suggesting that inclinations or dispositions are centrally associated with identity as a learner, social schema, and a possible self. Cowie and Carr suggest "there is merit in reading 'disposition' not as a noun, as a 'thing' to be acquired, but as a verb with qualifying adverbs" (p. 88). We have come to understand dispositions more in terms of actions rather than as a verb or a noun. In Cowie and Carr's description of dispositions they remind us that valued attributes or dispositions will necessarily reflect a particular cultural perspective.

The image of the visual art learner and teacher

The dispositions we describe can be viewed as outcomes of this particular learning environment. The learning environment our teacher researcher team had been attempting to develop is one in which engaging in visual art experiences is a cognitive "activity of the mind, of relationships, as well as of feelings" (Visser, 2003, p. 1). The identity of learner teacher as described by the terms presented in the outer circle of the diagram resonates with this aspiration. This identity is applicable to both adults and children. Each of these terms is further supported by descriptions of observed actions or behaviours indicative of each domain of identity. See appendix 2 (p. 193) for the list of actions and behaviours.

Adults and children share a co-learner identity

Teachers gained confidence in their own dual identities as teachers and learners through exploring their approaches to implementing visual art in the curriculum. Developing an understanding of one's own identity contributed to an acceptance and view of colleagues as capable and competent members of the teaching team. Prior assumptions and views teachers previously held of themselves became challenged as they individually developed:

- a belief in themselves as teachers and learners in visual art through gaining understandings of their past and present influences, who they are and how they came to be.
- acceptance of difference and diversity. It is not necessary to be the same or to do things in the same way – it's OK to be different.
- an awareness of how valuing individual knowledge and expertise contributes to a person's self-esteem and in turn encourages participation in the community
- an understanding of how individuals enter social relationships with unique interests, strengths and abilities. Through social interaction expertise is shared
- a belief that individual contribution enriches learning opportunities for the social group and nurtures community learning.

Teachers came to understand themselves as individuals as opposed to fitting the image they held about being a teacher within a team, or as a member of a group. Individual identity came to mean acceptance of self and others as both a learner and a teacher regardless of the role or label one has in the community. As a result, teacher participation in visual art with children increased and through these experiences the image of children and adults as co-learners who share similar characteristics was formed. Exhibit 2.8 offers an illustration of this view.

Exhibit 2.8: Further evolution – Participants as learners and teachers

Teachers re-defined their view of teachers, parents and children as groups of participants to one that has less differentiation between the groups. All participants in New Beginnings Preschool community hold a position as competent and capable teachers and learners. The teaching and learning roles became entwined as teachers gained understanding of how one does not occur in isolation from the other. Teaching and learning occur through social interaction. The social context involves children and adults in negotiating meanings and understandings, individuals contribute to their own developing knowledge, skills and abilities, as well that of others. Participants within this learning community share the position of co-learners. As co-learners the identity of individuals is honoured, valued and respected.

Who are we? - Concluding reflections

Community learning

The concept of individual identity was not something that this research team set out to explore. Recognition of identity as an influential factor in the learning community emerged through the research processes. The image the teacher researcher team held of participants in the community shifted from one that viewed parents, children and teachers as different groups within the community to one which views all participants, children and adults, as co-learners. Individual identity came to mean acceptance of self and others as both a learner and teacher regardless of the role one has in the community. This view of individual identity nourishes a co-learning relationship.

The learning journey of the teacher researcher team challenged previously held assumptions and beliefs in the way children, teachers and parents had been defined as separate groups of community participants. The shift in view contributed to a more equitable relationship in teaching and learning ventures in the centre. Teachers discovered how the perception they hold of themselves and how they define others influences their practice, and in turn influences how people participate in their community. For example, as teachers recognised parents as individuals, practices changed to empower parents to contribute and participate through their own choice and in their own way. Another example is when teachers developed a view of themselves as learners in visual art they also strengthened their view of children as teachers. Teaching and learning became a shared venture where responsibility and expertise is shared. Adults were learning from children, children were learning from adults. In this relationship all participants are respected, valued and empowered in their dual identities: learners and teachers.

Early documentation of project work presented children, parents and teachers participating together within a group-learning context. Teachers discovered that individuals were not always visible in this form of documentation. With an increased awareness of how taking notice of and giving value to the individual contributes to a person's identity, teachers looked to find ways that enabled them to discuss individual participation in project work without disconnecting the individual from the social context. Following use of a tool for analysis (Rogoff's three lenses of analysis of socio-cultural activity, 2003) changes were made to the documentation of children's learning experiences to enable the 'social individual' to come to the fore. The term 'social individual' was adopted as it reflected how teachers strengthened their view of the individual as one who, through social interaction, participates within the dual identities of teacher and learner. Changes to documentation

provided recognition of how individuals contribute to learning as well as how an individual's changing participation is illustrative of learning.

Teacher learning in the area of visual art created an awareness that individuals need not strive to be the same. The art teacher's approach to implementing visual art in the programme became influential on the practice of individual teachers. Visual art took shape in the centre alongside ongoing explorations about the teaching team's beliefs and abilities in art. The process allowed individual teachers to explore personal views and participation; the outcome from exploring individual pathways was one of collective strength within the teaching team. Teachers concluded that participating in visual art with children in a 'considered' way is more valuable than seeking a 'right' way. A considered approach to implementing visual art experiences involves practices embedded in respectful relationships that honour the individual for who they are. In their interactions with children teachers seek to promote a positive self image; sense of satisfaction and achievement; value and respect for others' work; appreciation of aesthetics and beauty; and enhancing a sense of self as competent and capable.

Teachers found it necessary to make changes within the programme to allow more space and time for children to engage with and pursue their art interests. For example, a rolling kai approach replaced a whole group kai time, the layout of the art room was redefined and further space made available in the main playroom, and more care and consideration was given to displaying art in the centre. These changes reflected the respect teachers developed for visual art in the community.

Researcher learning

Understandings of individual identities emerged in this study through the interplay of experience, personal and professional relationships, and reflective processes as supported by research activity. To understand how identity came to be acknowledged as central to this research, we can look at three significant aspects of the research method.

Influences and supporting literature

The research team acknowledged that, at times, theory informed and directly influenced practice in the centre. Research processes took on ideas and theoretical frameworks to support the teacher researcher team in their investigations. Theories that suited the research team's needs were chosen to foster conversation and to find useful explanatory models, while at the same time the theories were not treated as ideologies to be followed slavishly. For example, Visser (2003) had provided

initial insight into underpinning beliefs of co-learning: *"engaging in art experiences is a cognitive activity of the mind, of relationships, as well as feelings"*. Teachers took on and adapted these understandings as they related them to their own experiences and practice. Discussing and interpreting differing perspectives influenced teacher practice and, as a result, practice became grounded in strengthened understandings.

Research tools

Standard tools of educational research underpinned our search for meaning. Data were gathered using surveys, and their contents analyzed: these yielded insights into what was going on in our early childhood environment. The strategy of summarizing raw data into a table enabled the teachers to gain insight into their personal differences. Alongside these, the routine practices of systematic documentation and fostering of reflective thinking provided triangulation to validate the teachers' trustworthiness as researchers.

Research Processes

Teachers learnt through involvement in processes where they interacted with each other. Teacher learning related to interaction (Rogoff's interpersonal lens, see pgs. 57-58), experience in the learning environment (cultural/institutional) as well as personal reflection through journaling and writing learning stories (intrapersonal). New knowledge has been shaped by the teachers' desire to understand their role from a socio-cultural constructivist perspective.

Processes were embedded in meaningful and relevant contexts. Participants involved themselves because the learning was of value to them individually as well as collectively. It enabled them to do things better. Research revealed how tacit knowledge had functioned powerfully in organising and maintaining practice. Through processes of personal and collective practice and reflection, the team confronted those assumptions and co-constructed new improved practices.

Chapter 3 - "Doing the hard work" : Relationships

"It's amazing how differently I now see my role as a teacher and how, through being a teacher/researcher, it has improved my practice, made me comfortable with change. I have become more open and tolerant to others' opinions, practices and reflections." (Alana Farrant, teacher researcher)

Introduction

This chapter explores the 'hard work' or intentional aspects of being a teacher in a community of learners as teachers develop practices to promote closer relationships with parents. As these relationships develop, dialogue becomes easier and more prevalent in the centre. The chapter tells the story of the teachers' journey of building parental participation in children's learning, from the realization that dialogue means two-way communication to establishing practices where mutual communication becomes an expectation within the community. Children's on-going learning experiences become richer and more meaningful.

Analysis of teacher and parent relationships led the research team to identify a five level framework that illustrates movement from relationships based on uni-directional information-giving to relationships of interdependence. One learning story, set in the centre's infant and toddler context, is shared to illustrate this framework in action. This story illuminates the interrelationship of teacher/parent dialogue, developing relationships and children's learning.

An individual teacher's story describes how her learning about doing the 'hard work' is put into action, articulating an understanding of the importance of relationships (espoused) does not mean they will occur. This teacher discovered how doing (enacting) the hard work to build reciprocal and responsive relationships with one family had beneficial outcomes for her as teacher, as well as the parents, child and wider family.

Teacher parent relationships

Relationships is one of the four foundational principles for the early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki: "Children learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places, and things." (p. 43)

During this research exploration a broader understanding of parent teacher relationships develops as we interpret this principle in relation to our community of learners. People learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places, and things. Every member of a learning community has the right to responsive and reciprocal relationships, not just the children in attendance.

A common view in early childhood education is that the main participants in centres are children and teachers. Parents deliver their child to the centre and teachers have responsibility for the child's well-being and learning during their time in the environment. This is not the view we hold in our community of learners. Parents, teachers and children are all participants in learning. Therefore the principle of relationships applies to all. Relationships are the cornerstone of our community of learners.

Relationships among members of the community involve social interaction. In a situation such as a busy early childhood centre, where parents and teachers often have limited opportunity for interaction, relationships with parents can often be paid lip service to, rather than being an area where teachers place their energies. Teachers need to prioritise practices in which they can engage in meaningful and mutually beneficial dialogue. This research team discovered that building partnerships with parents is an intentional part of being a teacher.

Supporting literature describes research which has produced ideas that are similar to ours.

Supporting literature 3.1: Partnerships

Stonehouse and Gonzalez-Mena (2004) discuss the need for strong collaborative partnerships to occur among educators, children and families as a way of building positive relationships within early childhood settings. Some of the elements of effective partnerships are: trust, reciprocal respect, ongoing open communication, empathy, and recognition of partner's strengths. Partnership needs to be a perspective that underpins everything that happens in an early childhood setting.

Doing the hard work – Building parent teacher relationships

Before the research team could explore what collaborative relationships might look like within this early childhood setting it was firstly important to identify the current role that parents played within the centre (discussed in the section on parent identity in Chapter 2). Teachers began their research by exploring the ways parents displayed an interest in project work and what teachers do to promote opportunities for parental participation. The interest in parental participation came about from acknowledging that there are three groups of participants in the centre's community of learners: parents/whanau, children and teachers. While it was evident that children and teachers engage in participating together through project work occurring in the programme, the third partner (parents) was not strongly represented. Teachers wanted to strengthen parental participation.

Documentation as a tool for communication

Documenting project work and children's learning was highly valued by teachers as a means to inform their teaching and learning processes as well as to communicate and celebrate learning with the families. Documentation adorned walls of the centre and also filled individual children's profile books. The existing practice of the centre was that documentation needed to be visual as well as written so that it can be shared between family and centre. Teachers believed it promoted discussion and the sharing of information. Teachers were interested in whether parents valued this documentation; did it contribute to their participation? What other opportunities did parents access?

Research process 3.1: Phase one – teachers write narratives, collated by research associate for discussion

Data gathering involved teachers documenting narrative observations of occasions when parents displayed an interest in project work over a one-month timeframe. The observations were written as narrative stories that contained detail about what parents displayed an interest in, which forms of documentation they accessed and what they did as a result. As observations were documented they were displayed for all team members to view enabling teachers to clarify the occasion with each other. The data was collected by the research associate and collated to present to the teaching team at a team meeting.

Early identification of the importance of relationships

Data gathered during the initial investigation represented 22% of families who use the centre. Teachers identified that they knew the children and adults on the list very well. It was no surprise; the list reflected the established relationships already existing, and provided initial data to reflect on. Parents' active involvement in communication with the centre was occurring through different pathways:

- Looking at and reading project board documentation displays
- Reading their child's profile book
- Joining in children's group time
- Informal personal contact with teachers
- Attending an organized get together.

This early data reinforced to teachers the significance of relationships with parents. Using their knowledge of the learning disposition framework (Carr, 2001) teachers identified a similarity in the ways in which parents move from displaying an interest to becoming involved**.** The key to building parental participation was for teachers to focus on building practices that create a sense of belonging and well-being in the centre. The use of parents' first names was identified as fundamental to building relationships. Of the 22 parents represented in the data, seven were

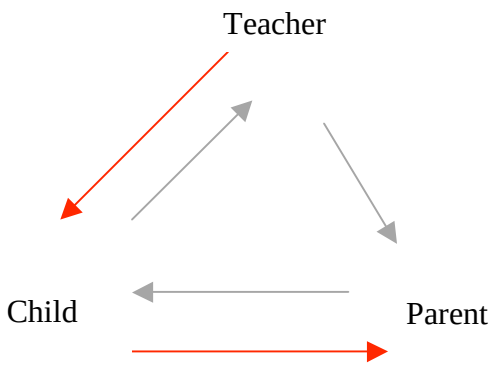
referred to by name. Teachers identified that they need to do the 'hard work', remembering names, using them in conversation and providing a welcoming environment in order to build relationships.

Identifying a need to increase two-way communication

The initial data showed that individual children's profile books were the most frequently accessed avenues for communication. They created a variety of opportunities for parental interest and involvement. These included: reading and talking about it with their child; putting things in the profile book with their child; taking the book home with their child. These parents said that they enjoyed learning about what their child does – art, songs; this was usually followed up by a discussion with a teacher. Through the actions of this small sampling of parents represented in the data, teachers were able to gain insight into possibilities for enhancing their practices to build stronger relationships with all parents/whanau. Documentation in children's profile books was identified as a form of communication that can promote parental involvement and participation in children's learning.

The information recorded in the profile books was seen to support parent/child, child/parent and teacher/parent communication. As a result parents became better informed of their child's participation and learning at the centre. While it was evident that the parents represented in the data communicated with teachers through personal discussions, teachers felt less confident that this was common for all parents. It appeared that one connection was a weak link in the communication triangle, that of parent to teacher.

Exhibit 3.1 Communication triangle



Through further analysis of the data the teacher researcher team became focused on identifying and developing practices to encourage two-way communication with parents. Initial ideas included:

- Strengthening a sense of belonging and well-being for all parents in their relationship with the centre, by taking time to chat with parents; ensuring all teachers know and use parents' first names; complete the new whanau room development and explore possibilities for its use.
- Encourage parents to take their child's profile book home to share with others
- Develop new ways that the profile book can be used to directly communicate with parents and encourage communication from parents e.g. include newsletters & project work updates; add written questions to parents at the end of children's learning stories and/or newsletters
- Make the profile books more accessible to families in the under two area.
- Develop new ways to use display boards to provide parents with opportunities to add their thoughts, comments, and ideas.

Supporting literature 3.2: Collaborative partnerships

Puckett & Diffily (1999) discuss how educators and family members create collaborative partnerships by being willing to make a commitment to teaching and learning and by sharing information that is mutually beneficial.

BINGO: Narratives informing research and practice

Our definition of a BINGO story: a narrative story that describes occasions when all three members of the community (parent, teacher and child) are jointly engaged in shared meaning making.

As teachers analyzed the initial data the concept of BINGO stories developed (refer to page 102 for an example of a BINGO story). Some of the narrative accounts that had been collected were of occasions when parents shared their interest with teachers, with the child also participating in the dialogue. There was often a follow-up action taken by one or more participant as a result of the initial conversation. These stories excited the teaching team. On closer inspection it was seen that the stories described occasions where all three members (parent, child and teacher) of the community were jointly engaged and learning from each other. The term BINGO formed in the process of 'becoming aware' of this mutual engagement in an occasion of inter-subjectivity. Through developing shared understandings each member had in some way been transformed – it was a BINGO experience! BINGO stories contributed to teacher knowledge about practice and cemented the teaching team's vision for the type of community relationships they aspired to.

Supporting literature 3.3: Intersubjectivity

Berk and Winsler (1995) discuss inter-subjectivity as an important quality of good scaffolding.

> "A concept introduced by Newson and Newson (1975), inter-subjectivity refers to the process whereby two participants who begin a task with a different understanding arrive at a shared understanding" (p. 27).

The 'task' in the context of the centre regularly related to sharing information about children's learning experiences and coming to understand the significance of the learning and the experience itself. In Rogoff's (2003) words these were

occasions "when mutual understandings occurred between people in interaction: it cannot be attributed to one person or another" (p. 285). The child, parent and teacher had each contributed in some way and had each moved on with a common understanding.

The teacher research team decided to continue to write 'little narratives' of learning as they occurred among all three participants of their learning community. These BINGO stories were viewed as valuable documentation that informed regular centre teaching and learning practices. Teachers found that BINGO stories did not stand alone. They were often the first in a string of stories about a child's learning, which needed to be written as regular learning story practice and included in the child's profile book. Developing shared understandings appeared to stimulate continued interest in the child's learning, with participants becoming actively involved in continual teaching and learning practices. The sequential stories represented a social narrative of learning through mutual construction.

Supporting literature 3.4: Constructing stories together – voices of children, parents and teachers

BINGO stories are inclusive of children, parents and teachers. Other researchers make similar links. Arthur, et al. (2005) offer a perspective of socio-cultural theory as encouraging the inclusion of children as co-participants in learning communities rather than as subjects to be talked about and planned for. Further support for our BINGO idea came from Hughes and MacNaughton (2000). They discuss the use of what Lyotard (1984) called 'little narratives': these are stories in a localized setting (whether that be home or ECE centre), that acknowledge the expertise of all three participants – child, parent, teacher - and encourage the 'voices' of all three participants.

Teachers commented on how useful 'writing' had become in supporting their team teaching practices. The documentation was useful as a basis for individual teacher and team reflection, informing relationships with others and as a memory of events over time.

Supporting literature 3.5: Writing narratives

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) offer some understanding into why writing narratives can be advantageous to teachers and their practice.

> "Education and educational studies are a form of experience…… narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience. Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it" (p.18).

Teachers involved in writing of their experiences are also involved in thinking about them. When the documentation is shared with others it draws in other perspectives and broadens understandings.

The gradual generation of BINGO stories provoked discussion and dialogue among teachers day-by-day. Sharing stories as they were written enabled all teachers to 'be a part' of the unfolding story and raised consciousness of the relationships and resulting benefits. The information strengthened their knowledge and understanding of the occasion and therefore allowed them to 'enter' the

relationship. With up to 100 families and a team of eight teachers in this centre, it was often difficult to view the 'bigger picture' of relationships with individual parents. These stories made visible the benefits to children's learning of connecting links between home and centre.

Monitoring the effect of increasing two-way communication

Teachers completed a further process of data collection to monitor the effects of the initiatives implemented to increase two-way communication opportunities for parents. Data collected throughout the course of two projects with children was collated and analyzed by the teacher researcher team. Four categories of the ways in which parents responded were identified: written responses; practical responses; verbal responses; contributing 'home pages' to their child's book.

Research process 3.2: Phase two – monitoring the outcomes of planned initiatives

Two main data gathering tools were used to monitor the outcomes of planned initiatives:

1 Documenting parental responses

A data-recording sheet was used to document parental responses to project letters and children's learning stories. The data-recording sheet listed every child. Teachers monitored parental responses by ticking whether the response was written, verbal or practical. If verbal or practical, teachers documented a brief description of the event. Copies of written responses made by parents in their child's profile book were gathered together along with the original communication from teachers (i.e. the learning story or newsletter that had prompted the response). Data was collated by summing up the number and type of response for each parent.

2 Continued collections of written BINGO stories.

The data was collected over the course of two children's projects involving approximately a five-month period in total. The data was collated and represented by the research associate. Phase one data was presented alongside data from phase two for comparison.

Early evidence of the development of 'two-way' communication

During the research process there were times when quantitative research methods proved helpful to give the 'bigger picture' of parent participation. By using this process we could see that 54 out of a total of 95 families were represented in the data indicating that 57% of the families were responding in some way to the two-way communication opportunities with teachers. The following tables summarises details.

Exhibit 3.2 Parental responses across two phases

Kind of response	Percentage of parents responding in **phase 1**	Percentage of parents responding in **phase 2**	Percentage of parents responding in **either phase**
Written response	13.7	22	28.5
Verbal or practical response	22	32.5	44
Homepage	6	10.5	15.5

Exhibit 3.3 How individual parents responded

Response categories	Number of parents responding
Written only	5
Written & homepage	5
Written & practical/verbal	12
Written, practical/verbal & homepage	5
Practical/verbal only	21
Practical/verbal & homepage	5
Homepage only	1
Total number of parents	**54**

Findings 3.1: Increasing parent participation

The number of parents participating in their child's learning experiences at the centre had dramatically increased since the beginning of the research.

There was an increase in the use of written responses between phase one and two, with more parents choosing this form of communication.

Ten parents repeatedly used written responses as a means of communication.

Most parents chose a combination of ways to respond. Patterns to individual parent responses across the data were classified into seven categories. The range of parental responses indicated that providing different opportunities for communicating enables parents to make a choice to best suit their preferences.

Responding to communications in a practical or verbal way was the most commonly used response to teachers' communication.

Inclusion of questions from teachers in the documentation contained in children's profiles contributed to an increase in this response from parents. The questions appear to invite participation.

Findings : Increasing parent participation

Unexpected finding: BINGO stories as a catalyst for change

When initially preparing the data for the teacher researcher team to analyze the head teacher and research associate noticed a difference in tone and writing style across some of the learning stories presented in the raw data. On closer scrutiny it became evident that those stories identified as BINGO stories were written with an underpinning socio-cultural perspective, while a range of regular learning stories appeared to present information with a more developmental perspective.

The head teacher and research associate were provoked to explore with the teacher researcher team why this was so.

A selected range of stories was re-presented for teachers to critique and compare at a team meeting. Using this as a professional development opportunity, teachers provided themselves with information about Barbara Rogoff's (2003) three lenses for analysis from a socio-cultural perspective. The use of these lenses was discussed in more detail in chapter 2. For the purposes of this chapter it is important to recall that the lenses bring into focus individuals, relationships, and the context. What the teacher researcher team discovered was that all three lenses could be used with the BINGO stories whereas some of the other 'stories' only allowed a focus on the child. The following examples of stories illustrate the teacher researchers' discovery. The first story is an example of one of the regular teaching and learning stories.

Albert's learning story 5th Nov. 2003

Written by Liz

Noticing

Albert has settled very quickly into the preschool environment. He loves to play outside especially in the sandpit. Albert has the confidence to choose and experiment with play items, in many different ways. He is learning to play alongside other children and is a very social child. Albert is developing an understanding of the links between the preschool setting and his home environment. He is developing an understanding that preschool is his place to play and mum comes back to pick him up.

Recognizing

Albert is developing an awareness of the connections between home and the preschool setting as the teachers learn more about him and his family. He likes to have conversations about mum and his home, it makes him smile when we say that mum will be back soon.

Responding

We will continue to have conversations with Albert about his family and his home environment. We will encourage Albert to show his family what he does at preschool and let him feel that his family is involved in preschool life as well. We will extend Albert's love of the outside by letting him have happy new experiences on these wonderful warm days.

Teachers' dilemmas – what to put in learning stories

In this first story Albert's learning is 'reported on' to the reader (parent). The information provided to the parent suggests that the teacher has knowledge of what is important about Albert's learning. It is presented in a summative manner with little opportunity for the parent to feel s/he has a place in contributing to or supporting his learning. This style of documentation can be seen to promote a power imbalance in the relationship between teacher and parent. Teachers considered how this style of documentation could also present a view of the child as a learner who is progressing

through predefined developmental criteria, which is in direct conflict with their understanding of the child as a competent, confident learner. In this example Albert appears to be disempowered as a learner. Decisions are made for him and about him.

On further reflection, the teacher researcher team came to view this style of story as a 'one-off snapshot', as it often stood alone without any further connecting information from home or centre. Teachers acknowledged that though they did not use this form of documentation all the time, at times they found themselves 'slipping into' this style. During periods of pressure, teachers found they were reduced to 'generating' documentation for children and parents to meet the centre's expectation that every child's learning would be recorded and discussed with parents.

The second example, as follows, is a BINGO story. The narrative describes the full story of Albert's learning experience and acknowledges the critical role parent and teacher play in this. Albert's participation is central to the story.

Albert 11th Feb. 2004 – a BINGO story

Written by Christina

This morning as Albert arrived with his mum (Mandi) he was a little sad for her to leave. So I, (Christina) found the book 'The wheels on the bus' for a story and sing-a-long. I explained to Mandi how Albert loves to hear stories and joins in with singing and actions. Mandi exclaimed "*Albert loves the Fimbles and the song with actions called Wibble Wobble!"* Albert had a big smile and twinkle in his eye. Mum sang a verse of the song with actions and I asked *"where did you hear about this song and could you write it out for us?"* Lots of talking occurred as mum explained, with Albert all eyes and smiling. Both of us (teachers) said to Mandi how we appreciate his enthusiasm and input to group times. Mandi left promising to print out the song for us from the BBC internet site.

At morning tea time we sang with the children – open shut them and twinkle twinkle little star. I asked Albert if he wanted to choose a song and then remembered the 'Fimbles' song his mum had mentioned. I mentioned this song to Albert and sang what I could remember. Albert had a broad smile and began to quietly sing also. We sang along together and then said to Albert "*when mum comes with the words for your song we will all sing it with you".* He smiled.

Twelve o'clock came and Mandi came in with the print out of the Fimbles' Wibble Wobble song! Mum and Albert were proud and happy to share their song with the actions and it was lovely to see the happy connection with his mum, his friends at preschool and the teachers.

The song is on our project board for all to learn and we will be singing it often, as all the children appeared to like it. Ka pai Albert and Mandi, thank-you for sharing.

Teachers' dilemmas – what to put in learning stories

This example was considered to be a more user-friendly approach to writing stories of children's learning. It was illustrative of a real, meaningful learning occasion. The three headings; notice,

recognize, and respond, had not been used in this story. Teachers reflected on how removal of the framework in documentation allows them to write in a free narrative style. They considered the framework of the process was firmly embedded in teacher practice so that the three steps of the process would be evident in every piece of writing teachers do. In Albert's example above teachers have recognized his enjoyment and interest in singing familiar songs and the supporting role his Mum had in this. They have also indicated how they intend to respond to his learning by "singing it often".

Reflecting on the differences in the way they depicted the child in each of the stories teachers referred to the first as the 'developing' child and the second as the 'social' child, as the text of the second story places the child's participation in a social context. It is a conversational style that includes parental comments or acknowledgement of parental participation. Teachers considered this style of documentation would 'speak' directly to parents as if one were having a face-to-face conversation.

Data analysis as a catalyst for change

The process of analysis involved teachers in the use of real data from their work in the centre. The stories could not be argued with, nor questioned as inaccurate data. The experience challenged teachers and became a catalyst for change in practice. The BINGO stories had provided a rich insight into learning experiences and provided information teachers could use to support further learning. They were also viewed as supportive of relationships between home and centre. The one-off snapshot learning stories presented were not. The outcome was that all teachers held a clear vision for their documentation practices. They knew what they wanted to avoid, and what to aim for, in presenting stories to their community.

Through discussion, the term BINGO developed dual meanings for the research team. BINGO stories, as discussed above, informed and enlightened teachers in developing a collective vision for building relationships through documentation. A new use of the word BINGO developed as a result of ongoing research activity. Use of the term BINGO became evident during analytical discussions, when the collective group experienced an 'aha' moment; "we've got it, we understand!" These occasions were described as a 'BINGO moment'.

Our definition of the term **BINGO moment:** a moment of collective realization and insight. BINGO moments are when a group of people develop shared understandings about underpinning beliefs, values or perspectives of pedagogical practice.

Research process 3.3: Capturing insights and sharing ideas together

A new term was coined and adopted by the teacher researcher team. Even although we were not aware of this at the time, the term BINGO came to shift in meaning and understanding as new knowledge emerged. The teacher researcher team realized that part of the process of creating new knowledge is refining definitions of terms. Through team discussions, collective understandings developed that needed a word to convey the shared meaning. We created a word and meaning that wasn't there before. New knowledge, created in the centre, is expressed and understood through the term BINGO.

The impact of the analysis process on teachers is illustrated in this brief account about one teacher's reaction – her BINGO moment. This particular teacher was present at the research meeting mentioned above. She had been listening intently at the meeting, and then suddenly got up and went out to get some of the children's profile books, she came back into the room and opened them. She was quietly observing a variety of learning stories she had written, and then said something that had a profound effect on the way children's learning was to be viewed and documented within the centre from that moment forth.

These are her words as she reflects back on that meeting:

> *Over 85% of my learning stories that I have written were 'true' learning stories – moments when a light bulb flashed and I knew I had witnessed some learning that was significant to that child. However the remaining 15% of learning stories didn't follow this framework. For children who I didn't really know, or I was aware lacked a recent learning story, I 'fabricated' a learning story. This style of learning story was simply a narrative of what I had observed about the child. For instance, how they had settled in, how they adapted to routines etc. I never felt comfortable with this style of writing but felt a duty to write something about that child if there was nothing current in the book.* (Teacher reflection, Nov.05)

After this particular teacher had noted the difference between the 'light bulb moment' style of documentation, and the 'fabricated story' – it allowed the teaching team as a whole to acknowledge and own up to sometimes writing the fabricated settling-in stories themselves. The team vowed and declared never to write a fabricated story again! The participatory research process adopted by the research team has allowed teachers to truly discover for themselves the significance of documentation in relation to relationship building.

Coming into view: Communication as a foundation to building partnership relationships

The previous research process had led the teacher researcher team to understandings of how their practice was influential on developing relationships with their community. The 'hard work' of teachers is more than obligatory communication. The efforts put into creating opportunities for authentic and purposeful communication between teacher and parents/whanau have beneficial outcomes for the whole community. It became useful to relate developing understanding to a framework, offered by MacNaughton and Hughes (2003), which enabled the teacher researcher team to describe the different types of relationships experienced in the centre through the research process, and the type of relationship this team was aiming for.

Supporting literature 3.6: Relationships

MacNaughton and Hughes (2003) identify three different relationships between educators and families:

Conforming is where the educator is viewed as the expert who can teach families about child development and appropriate experiences for children. Within this type of relationship the educator is perceived to hold all the knowledge, therefore *knowledge is a one-way process from teacher to parent.*

Reforming is where teachers and family members collaborate to share information about the children; this might be done in a verbal, written or visual way.

Transforming is where collaborative partnerships are encouraged to occur, where family members are invited to play an extensive part in their child's learning process.

Initially teachers in this early childhood centre began their written documentation journey by 'telling' the parents about learning experiences that occurred for their child; there was little room for reply. However, results from the early data collection process began to show that the use of direct written questions to parents at the end of a teaching and learning story contributed to increasing parental participation in children's learning experiences. As two-way communication increased, relationships moved from 'conforming' to 'reforming'. The changes made to the way in which teachers documented children's learning stories also 'shifted' the image of the teacher as the expert in the relationship. The addition of meaningful comments and questions to parents provided the space for parents to enter conversations with teachers in the knowledge that their opinion and views were valued.

In the reforming relationship, two-way sharing of information became embedded in centre practices. The parent-initiated contributions of information from home (homepages) suggested that 'shared ownership' of children's profile books had occurred. Project work with children and the supporting documentation provide a shared area of interest for all adults in the child's world, drawing them

together with the child's learning as the common goal. The child's profile book was the vehicle for sharing this interest between home and centre.

Teachers reflected on how individual parent responses to their child's learning stories appeared to be associated with their child's increasing confidence to participate and contribute to a project exploration. A definite two-way process was occurring between home and centre as parents were supporting their children to contribute in practical ways by bringing resources, and sharing in discussion with teachers. During this early project work participation, there were also signs of parents choosing to participate as 'experts'.

The third style of relationship between educator and parent, *transforming*, became visible as a broader understanding of parental participation in children's learning experiences emerged. As explained in chapter 2, participation was not always visible in the centre. The teacher researcher team gained a view of how participation takes on different forms in different contexts at different times. Within the transforming relationship, collaborative partnerships are encouraged to occur, and family members are invited to play an extensive part in their child's learning process. Developing this type of relationship is what the teacher researcher team recognizes as being the 'hard work' for teachers. It challenges the traditional view of the teacher parent relationship. Mac Naughton and Hughes (2003) say that within the *transforming* relationship, traditional knowledge-power links between educator and parents are challenged as there is no 'fixed body of knowledge' about children that teachers have and parents lack. Within this type of relationship, teachers focus on sharing and 'negotiating' knowledge, and parents have real voice and expertise.

Developing a culture of dialogue

The teacher researcher team formed the view that transforming relationships develop within a culture of dialogue in the centre. Use of the term 'dialogue' enabled the teacher researcher team to differentiate between 'passing' or 'playful' exchanges (Smith, M. 2003) and those that engage participants in meaning-making and shared understandings over time. The intention of the teacher researcher team was not to neglect the importance of the more passing conversations but to bring into focus the culture of ongoing meaningful conversations, dialogue. The communication practices the team implemented were seen to be ones that could cultivate parental participation in their child's learning. Documentation, visual representations and personal communications combined to provide pathways to participate in dialogue. They are all forms of conversation that together can

create a flow on effect from one to the other. This fluidity in conversation is how the teacher researcher team came to view the culture of dialogue that was forming in the centre.

Supporting literature 3.7: Conversation and dialogue

Smith, M. (2003) offered useful insights into differences between conversation and dialogue. Smith critiques and discusses four academic writers' interpretations of the term dialogue. He summarized by suggesting that educators "should not make too much of the differences between conversation and dialogue." The academic debate was suggestive of dialogue occurring as a formalized process, which is not in keeping with the types of activities that informal and community educators are involved in. In his opinion "conversation like dialogue is, at heart, a 'kind of social relation that engages its participants' (Burbles 1993: 19). The act of engaging with another – whatever the subject matter – is significant in itself." One point made by Smith strongly resonated with this teacher researcher team's experience:

> "local educators engage in activities directed towards discovery and new understanding (what Burbles 1993:8 describes as 'dialogue'), but they are also concerned with being and belonging. Here, seemingly trivial exchanges are of central importance and if neglected lead to major problems. Dialogue in the sense that Freire uses the term is only one element of the work local educators do" (p8).

Dialogue, relationships, parental participation and children's learning

The remainder of this chapter is made up of two stories that illustrate how the teacher researcher team utilized their new knowledge and understandings about developing relationships with parents/whanau. As they worked together, they gained fresh understandings, they talked more, and further ideas and theories emerged. The infant toddler team story brings into relief the interrelationship of teacher/parent dialogue, developing relationships, parental participation and children's learning. The five level framework presented emerged as teachers analyzed their work on the basis of reading Rogoff's (2003) ideas on the use of an interpersonal focus of analysis.

The infant toddler story … As told by Debbie

The link between dialogue and developing relationships: The infant toddler story – an individual project

Author Debbie, April 2005

The infant and toddler area has eight children at any one time, and two teachers. There is a half door that separates the infant toddler and over-two area, where there are 31 two to five year old children. There is a large viewing window, taking up

almost a whole side of the main dividing wall, allowing the children in the infant and toddler area to watch the older children play on the 'big side'.

In principle, the infant and toddler area is designed specifically for under-two aged children only. Under the New Zealand Early Childhood Education regulations we are required to provide separate space for children under the age of two years old. However, as the teaching team began to view all members of the early childhood centre as part of a learning 'community', there was a change in the way the teachers viewed this restricted infant and toddler space. For quite some time now, children of all ages can request to either come into the infant and toddler area or leave the area. Older children do this verbally, whereas the younger children initiate this action non-verbally by standing at the door. As project work (or inquiry based learning) continues in the infant and toddler environment it invites the participation of the older children as well as that of the infant and toddlers.

Inviting opportunities for shared engagement

Project work in our centre provides opportunity for shared engagement in children's learning. Teachers and parents share the children's endeavors with each other through a process of documentation and conversation, and through this process participation grows. The multiple layers of project work and participation that occur within the infant and toddler environment are supported by relationships and practices that facilitate meaningful links between the home and centre. The teaching team believes that the learning community within which they operate extends far further than the four walls of this centre: it includes the homes and lives of the families who make up the community of learners as a whole. The pedagogical practices of documentation and verbal communication co-exist to create a culture of dialogue that supports this particular community of learners.

A framework for learning supported by dialogue, documentation and mutual engagement

As the infant and toddler teachers worked with children and their parents, the teacher/researcher team identified a framework (the New Beginnings Preschool Framework, (NBPF)) that explored how levels of documentation assist levels of relationship. The teacher researcher team noticed that strengthened levels of socio-cultural documentation encouraged strengthened levels of mutual engagement and

dialogue between the teacher and parent – between home and centre. Mutual engagement between home and centre was exemplified within the infant and toddler's environment as teachers put the focus on the *social individual.* Teachers explored the work of Barbara Rogoff's (2003) *transformation of participation perspective;* putting a socio-cultural *intra-personal lens of analysis* on the individual child, their family and their home environment.

New Beginnings Preschool Framework (NBPF) for dialogue, documentation and mutual engagement

Level one: *One-way information giving* – verbal: Parent developing trust in the relationship

Level Two: *Information giving and response* – verbal and written: Sharing an interest

Level Three: *Verbal dialogue*: Mutual engagement and respect

Level Four: *Documented dialogue:* Strengthened engagement and respect

Level Five: *Continuous two way documented and verbal dialogue*: Shared responsibility and interdependence

A *teaching and learning story* format will be used to illustrate the 'mutual engagement' framework in action. It will also be seen that the teacher researchers applied Rogoff's (2003) *intra-personal lens of analysis* to the teaching and learning of a child within their setting, that is, the focus has been put on one child, his family, and the ECE setting. Casey's story illustrates the progress of developing relationships with one child's parent though the five stages listed above.

Supporting literature 3.8: Culturally responsive interactions

Arthur et al. (2005), talks about the importance of this first stage of the framework where an exchange of information about the child occurs. There is also an initial exchange of information as the parent enrols the child. Enrolment time can be used to gather meaningful information about the child's family context, expectations and values. Information is gathered about relevant family members, and other adults who play an important role in the child's life. Arthur et al. (ibid) continues to say that it is important to find out about children's every day experiences and interests, so that the programme can become culturally responsive and relevant for the child.

The infant toddler story … As told by Debbie

Introducing Casey…

Casey is a young boy who not only was having difficulty parting from his mother at the beginning of the session, but remained quite anxious throughout the entire session. Casey's mum's name is Trudy. At the time, Casey was 20 months old. During this early unsettled period Trudi described Casey as being an "*extremely clingy, very unhappy wee man… He was very lost without Mum and Dad and exhausted from his distress when he came home (from the centre)".*

Casey's story begins … Level 1: **One-way information giving – verbal**

Teacher reflections about Casey, March 05

Authors - Debbie and Dawn

When Casey first started attending the centre he would arrive with his mum at lunch time, well after the other children were settled in the highchairs or at the table for lunch. This was always a hurried experience for both Casey and mum, with Trudi relaying such messages as – *"Casey might be tired, he might not eat his lunch, he might want a sleep, etc.."* Everyone was a little tense, as we all knew Casey would be extremely upset the minute mum left. Trudi would leave quite quickly as she would often be running late. Before she left we would try to reassure her that everything would be all right, and that we would ring her if necessary.

NBPF - Level one: One-way information giving – verbal

Parent developing trust in the relationship

- the parent informs the teacher about the needs of their child
- the teacher reassures the parent that they have understood this important care-giving information that the parent is passing on
- this always occurs at the beginning of the child's attendance.

Similarities can be seen between the NBPF framework created by the research team and the three types of relationships discussed earlier: *conforming, reforming* and *transforming* (Mac Naughton and Hughes, 2003). The first two levels of the framework sit firmly within the *conforming* type or relationship where knowledge is a one-way process between parent to teacher or teacher to parent. In our interpretation of the conforming relationship we differ from that of MacNaughton and Hughes. We acknowledge that in the early stages of a relationship the

The infant toddler story … As told by Debbie

parent holds knowledge that is important to share with the teacher. This knowledge is usually situated within the child's immediate need for care. At this time the parent is the expert.

Casey's story continues … Level 2: **Information giving and response – verbal and written: Sharing an interest**

Teacher reflections about Casey, March 05

Authors – Debbie and Dawn

We were very careful as to how we recorded the fact that Casey would take quite some time to settle, but we believed in being honest with Trudi and in her own words she described Casey as "extremely clingy". When Trudi returned we would tell her honestly about Casey's afternoon with us, pulling out the highlights and reassuring her that as time goes by his anxiety will lessen, and he will begin to trust Dawn and myself. Often this communication was supported with a learning and teaching story in Casey's profile book. Establishing a relationship with Trudi at this stage was very important. We were not going to gain Casey's trust if we didn't first gain her trust. If he can see this relationship forming it will model good practice and allow him more choices.

This narrative illustrates the way that one-way communication occurs, from teacher to parent. The teacher at this time shares information about the child's time at the centre, the teacher has the 'expert' knowledge. This one-way communication can be both verbal and documented.

NBPF - Level Two: Sharing an interest

Information giving and response – verbal and written -

- the teacher shares information about the child's day with the parent
- regular written Teaching and Learning stories in the child's profile supports the verbal communication
- the parent shows interest in this information and they may respond by talking about any new experiences they have noticed their child doing lately at home
- this generally occurs at the end of the child's session.

Casey's story continues … Level 3: **Verbal dialogue: Mutual engagement and respect**

Taken from a learning and teaching story – 3.2.05

Author - Debbie

Developing Relationships

It was first thing in the morning and Casey's mum was settling Casey in for his session... We talked about creativity in very young children and the belief that the under-two teachers have in having visual arts occurring for the children every day. Trudi told us that she enjoyed art and music herself, and that while she is seeing the musical ability come through to some of her children, she would love to see that love of art occur maybe for Casey. Trudi said that she was keen on developing an area for Casey outside so that he could paint, draw etc. I said that is what we do at the centre – visual art seems to work well outside. Trudi talked about maybe bringing her electronic piano into the centre, and I told her about how we have a group time at 11.45 and that would be a really good time.

Throughout the session we noticed that if Casey was near either Dawn or me then he was quite happy. We talked about encouraging that closeness and bond to occur, rather than trying to encourage him to be 'independent'. It seemed that as long as he was aware that a trusted adult was within near distance, he was then able to safely explore his environment. We will be working with Casey closely at developing this trusting relationship, while at the same time talking with Trudi and developing our relationship with her more as well. I'm sure that the more Casey sees the teachers and his mum relating together, the stronger his sense of well-being will be.

Trudi we would love to have you in to play your piano at the centre sometime, and maybe share your art and/or some photos of Casey doing his art at home.

It can be seen from the above narrative that verbal dialogue is now occurring between Trudi, and the teachers, and we are beginning to establish a relationship of two-way communication with each other. Creating a 'culture' of dialogue with parents is an important pedagogical practice in the infant and toddler environment. The teacher research team found the best time for this to occur is when the parents are bringing their children in

at the beginning of a session.

As the on-going communication and documentation process continues it can be seen that a 'transformation of participation' (Rogoff, 2003) is occurring between the parent and teacher.

NBPF - Level Three: Verbal dialogue

Mutual engagement and respect

- the teacher and parent communicate *with each other* using a two-way process of communication
- the teacher reflects on what she has have noticed in the child's current learning and discusses experiences that can be offered to the child in relation to the child's emerging learning
- the parent responds by reflecting how the child may be involved in similar experiences at home or how they might be able to extend these experiences to occur at home
- this contextual information assists both the parent and the teacher to be able to understand what the child's current *learning project* looks like

this generally happens in that quiet 'chat' time at the beginning of the child's session and at the end of the child's session.

Supporting literature 3.10: A transforming relationship

This type of relationship is what MacNaughton and Hughes (2003) calls a *transforming* relationship. A 'knowledge' shift is occurring as both parent and teacher are acknowledging each other's expertise when it comes to the child's learning.

The continuation of Casey's Learning Story illustrates the value of the fourth level of communication: written and visual dialogue. Casey's story continues …

Level 4: Documented dialogue: Strengthened engagement and respect

Taken from a learning and teaching story – 15.2.05

Author – Debbie

It's been important for Casey that he begins to feel a sense of security while at the centre. The teachers are building a relationship with Trudi as well as Casey. This is important for Casey so that he begins to understand that this is a trusted place to be, and that it is OK to leave mum for a short time. It's been interesting to talk with Trudi, as we build up a picture

of Casey's life away from the centre. Trudi talked about having the art easel at home for Casey, and that Casey's dad noticed that Casey was happy and content at this activity as long as he was near him (we've noticed the same at the centre).

I took these two photos to show that although Casey was upset when leaving mum during this particular session (he did need the constant contact with either myself or Dawn on this particular day) there were times when he was completely content. These were the 'routine' times of the day when Casey was in the highchair eating his

morning-tea, and when he was having his bottle in the pram. His hand up in the air is indicating his contentedness. The second picture shows us the 'bigger picture' where Casey was sitting alongside another child Bradlee, and Casey was very happy with this close contact. We will continue to closely record Casey's development as he realizes that he can have trusting and secure relationships with the two under-two teachers, and then broaden this trust out to his other friends.

In the story above it can be seen how discussions that the teachers have had with Trudi have been 'fed back' to her, and describes how this is slowly impacting on Casey's learning.

The value in closely tracking a child's journey by regularly documenting it to share with others has tremendous potential for the developing interest of the 'social individual'. Showing this through visual as well as written documentation speaks to everyone in a way that words cannot. In a recent parent survey we asked what parents valued as the most effective form of documentation. Photos were judged the most effective with the narrative 'learning and teaching story' process coming a close second.

NBPF - Level Four: Documented dialogue

Strengthened engagement and respect

- documentation adds a deeper and more complex level to the communication process as the child's on-going project is followed by both parent and teacher
- the teacher documents the child's learning project over time as it emerges
- photographs are used to assist parent and child to re-visit the learning with family members at home; photographs also help visually communicate the relationships that are developing for the child, causing another source of communication between family and child
- a previous dialogue between the parent and teacher is often used in the narrative story to affirm the connections made between home and centre, and the powerful effect this has on their child's learning
- sometimes a written question is asked of the parents at the end of the learning story, acting as a responding - 'where to next?' for their child
- at this stage we may see parents responding to this in-depth documentation process by contributing information and/or photos of their child involved in similar learning experiences at home.

The infant toddler story … As told by Debbie

Supporting literature 3.11: Different ways of communicating

Arthur et al. (2005) talk about offering different forms of communication styles for parents, as for some parents written communication will be appropriate, whereas for others it may be more suitable to share information verbally. Helm and Katz (2001) talk about how the documentation process can often inspire parents to carry on a project focus or discussions at home, where parents contribute resources that relate to the focus and join in experiences and excursions.

Casey's story concludes … Level 5: Increasing relationships.

Continued from the learning and teaching story 15.2.05

Author – Debbie

Debbie, Dawn and Trudi had spent the first half hour of the session talking together, and in this time Casey played happily alongside his mum and his brother. Casey was still a little unsure when mum left.

We decided it would be better for him to go outside with Dawn as it was quite active inside with some of the older children. Casey indicated to Dawn that he wanted to go over to the over-two side, and so she went with him. When I came back from my morning tea break Casey was being very brave walking along a plank raised above the ground. We continued to spend time outside on the over-twos when everyone went in, and then it was time to come in for morning tea. Normally Casey sits in the high chair, but something told me he would now think he was a big boy and might enjoy sitting at the table. After morning tea, Casey showed an interest in a number of activities that were on offer inside. He especially enjoyed pulling the car track apart and curiously wondering what it was for. After this we moved over to the large glass that looks through to the over-twos. We saw Christina, and she saw us. We waved to Christina,

and she waved back. And then an amazing thing happened… as some other children were indicating that they wanted to go through to the over-twos inside, and Casey was by my side – he went through as well! Straight over to Christina. He spent quite some time interacting with her – he knows Christina from when she taught on the infant toddler side last year, she's another familiar adult to him. It wasn't long before Casey was interacting with other children with Christina near by. He waved back to me a few times, completely happy in his new found independence! Great work Casey!

Trudi's response (below) illustrates the deeper and more complex verbal dialogue that now occurs between herself and the infant and toddler teachers.

Trudi's response to Casey's transformation (30.2.05)

It's awesome watching Casey, our 20 month old son, burst through the door at New Beginnings Pre-school and announce his presence to everyone. He races straight to the over two "big-boy" area and takes in his surroundings. This is such a far cry from the extremely clingy, very unhappy wee man, exhausted from his distress when he came home. He now looks forward to his morning at crèche and runs to grab his bag when I say the word. His confidence has grown unbelievably both here and at home. His vocabulary has tripled and he is a lot more definite about what he wants (and what he doesn't want!) We have also noticed a huge change in him at home too. He's learnt to 'trade' toys with his older brother Devon (4), and is quite often the centre of games between himself, Devon and older sister India (11). We know this is because of his nurturing and educating care at New Beginnings Pre-school. Debbie, Dawn and Lorraine (and all other staff) are both comforting and very encouraging when it comes to trying new things. I believe that the key to this is that his lovely caregivers keep the lines of communication up between themselves and the parents. They take a huge interest in what works for us at home, and will then try to incorporate that into his learning and play at crèche. They also have ideas for what may help me, as a parent. Debbie, Dawn and Lorraine – Casey just loves you – and so do we!!! Thank you for caring so much about our son. We are so grateful!!

Mum and Dad (Trudi and Shane.)

Supporting literature 3.12: Documentation

Arthur et al. (2003) describe how "documentation makes children's ideas and thinking visible to children, families and teachers … Photographs, brief explanatory narrative and learning stories provide opportunities for families and children as well as staff to revisit and reflect on experiences" (p.58). Documentation provides opportunities for teachers and families to collaborate together in a process of exchanging ideas, sharing insights and information and working together to make joint decisions for children's learning.…

These processes promote collaborative partnerships that are respectful and inclusive of diverse perspectives and that foster dialogue where issues can be discussed and changes to practices suggested in a climate of open communication. (Arthur et al., 2003, p. 58)

NBPF Level Five: Shared responsibility and interdependence

Continuous two way documented and verbal dialogue

- a very complex picture is now being developed as the parent and teacher communicate in written, visual and verbal form
- teaching and learning becomes a shared process between the home and centre
- parent interest extends beyond their own child's learning; parent to parent dialogue about programme experiences occurs
- parents may be seen to take initiative for curriculum decisions.

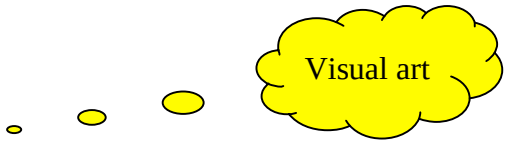
Relationships and dialogue illuminate 'transformations of participation'

In an earlier paper, Ryder & Wright (2004) described the teacher researcher team's understanding of a community of learners by quoting Rogoff (1994): *"(It) is based on the premise that learning and development occurs as people participate in shared endeavors with others" (p.1).* The later work of Rogoff (2003), in particular her three analytical lenses - intra-personal, interpersonal, cultural/institutional - has aided the teaching research team to uncover multiple layers of participation or learning occurring within their early childhood context. Rogoff's (ibid) transformation of participation perspective has allowed them to 'put words' to a strengthening understanding of the socio-cultural relationships that occur both in and out of their centre environment.

Casey's story has illustrated how a *transformation of participation* occurred for all involved within his teaching and learning. Casey's transformation was evident in his physical use of the early childhood environment as he progressed from needing to always be near his mother, to needing the support of his infant and toddler teachers, to his full exploration of the centre (including the 'big side'). Through strengthened relationships with Trudi, we saw her transform from a parent who would quickly bring Casey in to the centre and then leave, to a parent who would regularly sit and talk with the teachers for at

least half an hour. The teachers' transformation has been illustrated in how their pedagogical practices of documentation and verbal communication developed to become dialogues that supported the community of learners as a whole.

Through dialogue we can 'hear' the multiple voices of our community and work collaboratively in support of children's learning. When we don't hear, our sense of community is lost.



Relationships in action in the area of visual art: Alana's story of learning

In this section, 'Alana's story of learning', an individual teacher describes what she has learnt about relationships through her involvement with a child in visual art. Alana had been developing her own abilities in working with children in the area of visual art. In this story she is challenged in her learning about being a co-learner in art.

Through earlier investigations into visual art teaching and learning, teachers became aware of how, in their own learning experiences, they tended to seek out relationships with others with whom they felt an affinity to their approach to art, someone who knew them well and in whom they had confidence. This understanding is echoed in the relationship between teacher and child in this story.

Building the transformative type of relationship between parent and teacher can occur in any area of the early childhood curriculum. In this story, a child is using visual art to represent his ideas. Alana transfers her learning about building relationships with parents through communication practices that share the excitement of the child's learning. The child's learning becomes a shared process between home and centre.

Learning to be a co-learner: Challenging my role in the visual arts

Alana's Story of Learning

Author Alana, 28th November 2005

Introduction

Through my participation in the centre's research explorations of visual art in the centre my own teaching practices have been challenged. I arrived at New Beginnings with limited experience and skill in visual arts but with an interest and desire to see visual arts more in early childhood education. I believed that I had come well equipped with all the ideas and activities needed to incorporate visual arts into an EC centre. At that time I 'knew' it wasn't about the product but the experience. I 'knew' not to ask a child what they were drawing; I also 'knew' that too much input and assistance from me could hinder children's creativity. This thinking was evident in the way I documented learning stories at that point. The following example illustrates a typical response from one of those earlier learning stories:

> *Continue to provide assistance (e.g. holding nails) and support her ideas. Extend her thinking by providing books with different forms of transportation. Discuss together the processes, as she is involved in these tasks. Extend thinking and encourage conversation…*

I believed my role as a teacher was to scaffold children's learning. I was aware of providing support, encouraging and giving assistance but only when needed or initiated by the child.

The action research process our teaching team has been involved in has challenged me to move beyond the comfortable space I held as the 'facilitator' of a child's experience. I became really interested in exploring the part I play in children's art experiences. I looked at how I responded to children's artwork, how I was displaying it. Was I allowing enough time for children to make decisions on tasks they are involved in? Was I giving too much input? Was I encouraging children's ideas and thoughts to be represented visually? Do I have enough knowledge in this area to confidently communicate, guide and teach skills (to encourage visual arts)?

As a result I have developed my understanding of what co-construction looks like in practice. My image of the child changed as I began seeing every day that children are

confident competent learners. My relationships with children, and their families, have been strengthened through constructing with children rather than 'teaching them' or keeping myself one-step removed from them. Continuity in children's learning, both within the centre and between centre and home has emerged as a beneficial outcome of my investigation. My view of myself as teacher in the area of visual art made a dramatic shift, as I will share through the stories told in this paper.

Background to my Journey

As a teaching team we began our research exploration by discussing our visual art experiences at team meetings. It became evident that individually we had different approaches and attitudes to visual arts. Our approaches and attitudes have become clearer to us through participating in team art workshops, reflecting upon our personal history and through looking back over our collection of learning stories about visual art experiences of the past year.

The team art workshops involved us as a team meeting together after work and working on a piece of art. We chose the media we wanted to use. Some of us came equipped with an idea in mind and with materials while others sat down in front of a blank canvas and paints with no idea in mind. Following each workshop we recorded our personal reflection about these times and then met as a group to share. Alongside this we have gained a deeper insight into ourselves as artists through reflectively writing about our personal history and prior influences in relation to art. These too have been shared at team meetings. We found our relationships have been strengthened as we began to understand each other in a more intimate way. This knowledge of each other has enabled us to acknowledge and respect each other's strengths and vulnerabilities in a way that was not evident earlier.

My interest in visual art had been spurred. I began building my own content knowledge in visuals arts by reading various literatures on the topic. I began reflecting upon my practice and the practice of others through team discussions and informal discussions with colleagues. I began to really understand the concept of co- construction and was noticing it when it was in my practice and when it wasn't. I was noticing things that I hadn't before.

As a team we had made quite a significant shift in the ways that we documented children's learning stories around the same time as we became involved in our action

research into visual art. This change involved both the content and presentation of stories. We began to write stories using Barbara Rogoff's (2003) three lenses for analysis. This helped us to reflect on each story from an intra-personal, inter-personal and cultural institutional perspective. In other words it allowed us to see the entire picture. I was no longer observing only the child: this approach required me to see the entire context of the child's learning, including myself in the frame. Changes to the presentation of stories meant that we held more poetic license; we removed the headings; (notice, recognize and respond), to allow for a freer flow in our writing. The three-step process was firmly embedded in our practice and would be evident in each of the stories we wrote. It was just that using the headings sometimes impeded the flow of one story to another, particularly for the reader (namely, our parents).

By collecting and analyzing learning stories in relation to the visual arts over the year we became aware of our individual style of writing about the visual arts, how we had progressed or changed, and how our attitudes and approach came across in our stories. Through this process I was able to see how my approach to engaging with children in visual art changed. It became evident that I had gained confidence in my belief and approach to the visual arts. I had become empowered in this area with the understanding that I was co-constructing, not interfering with the creative process of a child.

My teacher: Blake

Many of my current practices, and what I have come to value, are made visible through one child's stories involving visual arts. Blake's story began in February this year (2005), when he announced he would like me to make a car, "A Holden!" And so the projects began, first with a Red Holden then a Spiderman Aeroplane followed by a Shark boat and what began as a Fireboat. When reflecting on these stories I wondered whether Blake was motivated more by the experience of working together and being involved, having an idea and achieving it rather than doing this for the experience of being creative. This had been my experience of our teacher workshops where I got satisfaction from the experience but while working on an idea. The experience for me had more to do with the surroundings than 'creating with collage'. I didn't enjoy the experience of our first workshop at all because I felt uncomfortable. It was new, we didn't know or feel comfortable talking about each other's work or giving input, there was limited space and I was rushed. I really enjoyed the last workshop experience because we had talked about it

and realized we had all felt the same. I felt more comfortable with people seeing my work and giving input; there was more space; I was enjoying the quietness with music in the background and I had more time. This was the first thing that I identified in my practice. Visual art was more than being creative or having 'an experience'. It was, in fact, also a tool that children use to persevere with projects, convey ideas and to work in collaboration with others.

My Learning

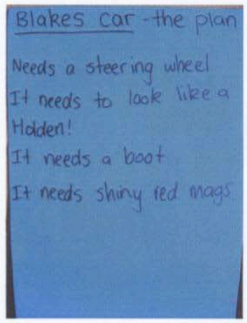
Blake's 1st story taught me about how valuable offering ideas can be.

Blake's Red Holden!

February 2005

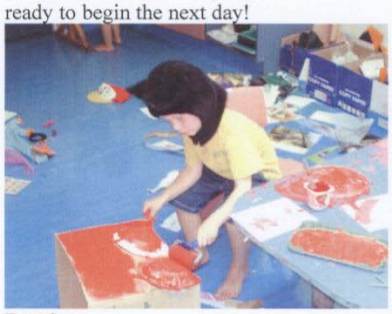
Day 1

One afternoon when I was in the art room, Blake came in announcing he would like me to make him a car, "A Holden!" I said to him that he could make a Holden himself and that I could help him. First of all we sat down together and discussed this Holden he wanted to make. I said we should write it down as our plan to help us. As I hung this on the wall Blake drew a picture of the Holden he was to make. He pointed to the parts which he had mentioned in his plan.



We found a large box for the body of the car and talked about what we could use for wheels. As the day was coming to an end we found a safe place for the box and hung up his picture along with the plan. We were ready to begin the next day!

Blake then set to work painting it- shiny red! As he was working away busily, he would inform children what he was making and of course talking about Holden's! At the end of the day he was very happy to hang it up to dry and leave it for another day.



Day 2

The next afternoon Blake came running into the art room. "I want to do my car", he exclaimed. Together we stuck the wheels on with cellotape.

Day 3

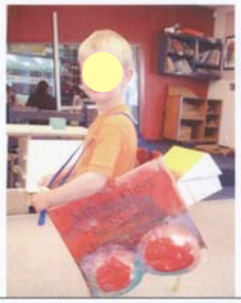
Blake wanted to continue his car that morning I asked if he was happy to finish it that afternoon when I was going to be in the art room. He was very happy to do so, and came

running in straight after lunch. "I want my car….and I am going to paint inside as well". I brought down his car. We found that the wheels were falling off. Blake set to work sticking them back down. He also added some more paint. When he had finished I pointed out to him the plan and read it aloud, "oh the boot", he exclaimed. We found a box we thought would be a great boot and together we stuck it on. He then set straight to work painting it. By this time Blake was getting a wee following! Children were popping in and out to chat and observe Blake's Holden. Blake was very happy to talk to them as he was building and painting. Blake was excited as we hung it up as he knew tomorrow we were able to add the "shoulder straps".

What a great Holden Blake!

Day 4

In the morning Blake came running over to me and asked if he could have his Holden. I bought it down for him and asked Libby if she could help Blake with the shoulder straps as I had to go outside. Libby was very keen to help and together the shoulder straps were fastened! Finally The Holden was finished and Blake, who was very proud, spent the entire day driving around preschool in it. (I heard from Mum the following week that this continued at home also!)



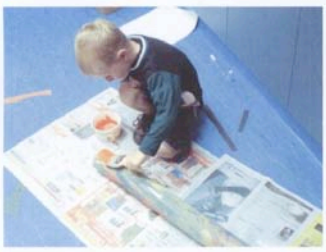
Blake I am so proud of such a wonderful job you did constructing and painting your red Holden! I loved the way you knew what you wanted for your plan and referred back to this and your picture. You showed much commitment to this project and persevered each day to complete it. You enjoyed interacting with other children during this process and talking about Holden's. I think it's fair to say you won't be an owner of a Ford in the future! I know you had lots of fun driving around in it. Well done Blake!

I wonder what we could make next….

As a participant in Blake's work I became comfortable giving my ideas and input to build upon his creative processes. I offered the idea of writing his ideas down "as *our* plan to help *us*". This suggestion didn't hinder his creativity but instead allowed a creative process to occur which directed his thinking. It gave him a sense that it was something he was going to work on over time but with a certainty that there was going to be an end product, something that is very important to Blake. Having a plan and a picture that he had drawn hung on the wall showed him and other children that we take their ideas seriously and are committed to working on such projects with them. With my understanding of Blake I knew that for him more than anything it was about having a Holden to drive around in! I wanted him though to persevere with this project and be proud of the time and effort he put into it. I identified with Blake that the timing had to be right- he wasn't interested if there was something else going on! I have noticed that Blake needed the right time, space and support and this remained constant in all his

Blake constructs a Spiderman Aeroplane!
9-13th March 2005

Today Blake approached me and said, "I want to make a Spiderman aeroplane". Earlier that day Bevan had suggested this idea to him. We set to work immediately, first writing a plan. As we were doing this Blake was looking around for ideas of materials he could use to make his aeroplane, he found a very large cylinder and decided that could be used for the body of the aeroplane. He had already decided that he was going to paint his aeroplane orange. As he was painting Izzy came over a watched him, he then found a small paper town cylinder and painted alongside Blake. When Dad arrived Blake eagerly ran and showed him his cylinder (aeroplane) hanging up to dry.



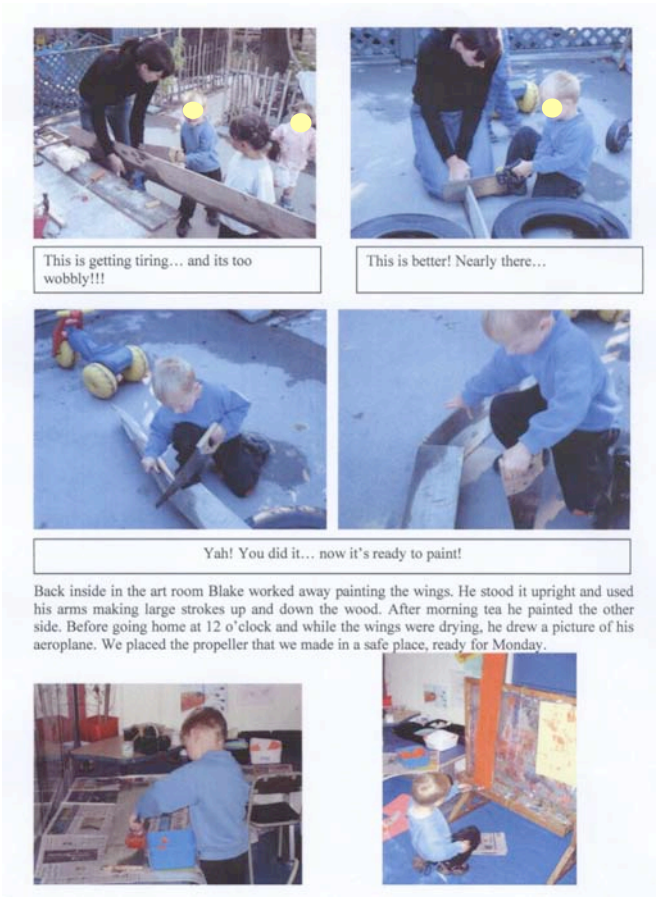
The next day first thing in the morning, he came over to me and said, "Are we going to start on my aeroplane?" I talked to Mum about his aeroplane and she informed me that he still plays with his Holden at home and had recently very proudly showed it to a family friend.
In the art room we talked about different things we could use for wings, Blake said that they had to be big. We went outside and I had a look around out back for some materials. I found a very large plank of wood. Blake's eyes lit up when he saw it and

He tried to saw it flat on the ground….that didn't work….

This didn't work very well either…

projects. If too many children were around he would become frustrated/irritated, and we would just work on it later.

My documentation began to reflect a genuine and personal relationship as I recognized and responded to Blake's learning. This was different from my previous stories where it was evident that I viewed my role as a teacher was to encourage, support and provide. Previously I had almost kept myself removed from the child and in so doing missed the opportunity to share the special moments that the visual arts offer and bring to those involved. These moments easily connect us with children allowing us see each child's uniqueness and help us to understand their thoughts and feelings.



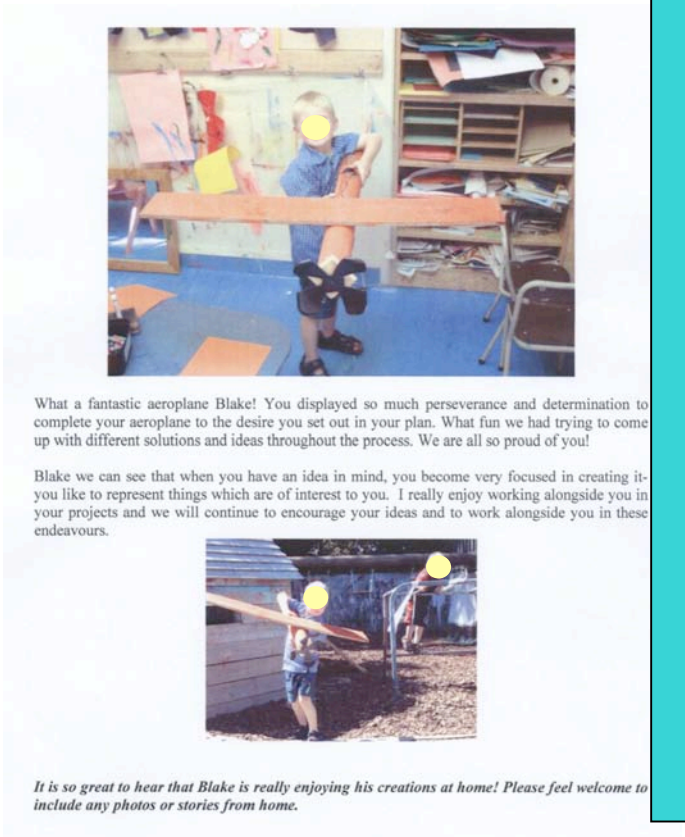
It would appear that Blake valued the relationship we had developed as he returned to me some weeks later with another idea. This time he wanted to make a Spiderman aeroplane. Amanda, his Mum, was excited about this project. Documentation of his red Holden had captured her interest. There had been talk about his project ideas at home as well as in the centre. As I began documenting this sequence of stories I made a conscious effort to include his parents' participation as well.

Blake's Spiderman Aeroplane

After the weekend everything was dry. Blake examined the pieces and moved the wings up and down on the body of the aeroplane. He hammered the wings into place. When he had finished he lifted it up, "Wow…it's so big", he announced. He then decided that he wanted to draw Spiderman on the plane.

The aeroplane was almost finished with only the propeller to go. Blake wasn't ready to do this straight away and wanted to go and play outside. In the afternoon he informed me that he would like to finish his Spiderman Aeroplane. After he hammered the propeller onto a piece of wood, we sat and thought of different ways to stick it on to the aeroplane. Blake suggested Sellotape, however he found this didn't work, he then remembered the hot glue gun, "Yeah…that will work" he exclaimed. Once it had heated up Blake carefully glued around the edges. We quickly stuck it on the aeroplane! Just to make sure it stuck, Blake added some Sellotape as well. Once that was done Blake stood up holding the plane with the biggest grin…Wow! The Spiderman Aeroplane was finished.

Blake's stories illustrate the way in which my documentation changed. I began including myself in the story in the first person, and writing it with Blake in mind as an important 'audience.' I was using words and phrases such as; "*I said*" "*Together we*", "*we thought*", and "*I found…*" As I started to write what I had noticed I initially became uncomfortable. The stories I wrote felt more than just me noticing what he had done (his learning); they were stories I wanted to meaningfully tell that could contribute to the project rather than ones that would just provide evidence of Blake's learning. By placing myself as a central participant in the experience I felt a greater connection with and interest in Blake's projects. I was doing more than supporting and observing them. The following two examples illustrate the shift I have made, from a helpful observer, identifying learning and responding to it, to an active participant and contributor – a co-learner.



What a fantastic aeroplane Blake! You displayed so much perseverance and determination to complete your aeroplane to the desire you set out in your plan. What fun we had trying to come up with different solutions and ideas throughout the process. We are all so proud of you!

Blake we can see that when you have an idea in mind, you become very focused in creating it- you like to represent things which are of interest to you. I really enjoy working alongside you in your projects and we will continue to encourage your ideas and to work alongside you in these endeavours.

It is so great to hear that Blake is really enjoying his creations at home! Please feel welcome to include any photos or stories from home.

From a learning and teaching story documented by Alana, 20.5.04

Recognizing: Emalee showed much curiosity and interest in what the other children were making and after standing back and observing, she demonstrated confidence and the ability to express a need by initiating to carry out the task of constructing an aeroplane herself.

Responding: Provide appropriate resources and materials to create more opportunities for Emalee to construct her ideas and interests. Continue to provide assistance (e.g. holding nails) and support her ideas. Extend her thinking by providing books with different forms of transportation. Discuss together the processes as she is involved in these tasks, Extend thinking and encourage conversation by asking questions which are of relevance and interest to Emalee as she is constructing.

From a learning and teaching story documented by Alana, 13.3.05

What a fantastic aeroplane Blake! You displayed so much perseverance and determination to complete your aeroplane to the desire you set out in your plan. What fun we had trying to come up with different solutions and ideas throughout the process. We are all so proud of you!

Blake I can see that when you have an idea in mind, you become very focused in creating it- you like to represent things which are of interest to you. I really enjoy working alongside you in your projects and will continue to encourage your ideas and work alongside you in these endeavours.

Documentation of Blake's projects also promoted conversation and support from Blake's parents. There was a feeling that everyone was excited about Blake's projects and it was important. With each completed project Amanda (his Mum) has told me how careful Blake is with them and keeps them in the spare room when he isn't using them or showing family and friends! I wonder if such care was taken because of the time and effort he put into each project. The photos from the Spiderman aeroplane tell a story in itself and I know Blake particularly enjoyed looking at these, as did other children when I displayed it in the art room.

My final story about Blake

Blake's Shark boat... May 2005
Written by Alana

After weeks of talk about the shark boat we finally got it started. A picture from a book prompted Blake and now we had something to work from. Blake found a box that was of similar shape in the collage bins. He also got a piece of cardboard and a yogurt container for its "nose". I thought it would be fun and effective if we tried paper mache for this project; Blake was keen for that idea.

He traced around the outside of the egg carton. And drew a tail off it. We cut the tail out and stuck it onto the body. Blake noticed from looking at the picture that we didn't need a fin on top and it only needed small fins off the side.

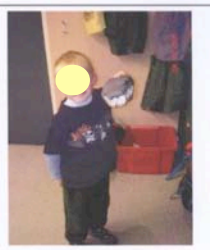
Next we prepared the paper mache, Blake had fun ripping the paper up and using his hands to mix it through the paste. Nicola came over as Blake was beginning to paper mache he very proudly told her all about the shark boat and showed her the picture in the book. Blake informed Nicola that she could help by holding the carton while he stuck the paper on. Nicola was happy to do this and they happily chatted to each other.

After morning tea they contin
the project finishing it off. We
about how it was getting really
and forming shape from the lay
paper. Blake put it up on the be
dry on a piece of cardboard
wrote his name all around it! N
had to wait until it dried, so
could paint it and add the fi
touches.

The following day I was in the Whanau room having lunch when Blake can
with Dad holding the not quite completed Shark boat, he told me that he
like to take it home to finish it. I thought that was a good idea and I kne
it had taken so long to get it started he would be very keen to get it ho
finished!

Several weeks went by and to my surprise (as I had almost forgotten!
came bursting through the door one morning holding a beautiful finished
boat. He was so very proud and so was mum as I think the experien
rekindled past feelings of paper mache! Many children throughout t
wanted to see and have a turn with the shark boat, Blake was very ho
share it around and talk about it to his friends.

Wow Blake what team work it was starting, making and finishing the long awaited shark boat! It is great that you had such an imaginative idea and persevered with it for so long and after 2 attempts already! You really took initiative in reminding me of this project. I really enjoyed talking lots about this shark boat and your enthusiasm for this idea that you had so clearly visualised and then found in a book.
Thanks Mum and Dad for your support and enthusiasm for this and all his projects.



If you have any photos o
making or playing wi

Blake's final story illustrates how continuity of learning occurred when centre and home both engaged in his Shark Boat project. Blake's idea and creativity was supported and extended through the encouragement and participation of his peers and family.

One word really stands out for me when I think of Blake's stories and that is perseverance! Visual art is a fantastic way for children to practice perseverance. Even the shark boat, which I had forgotten about, was being persevered on with help from mum at home, rather than sitting uncompleted. Blake's stories show that art is so much more than what I initially thought. Art provides a means for children to work together, communicate ideas, be curious, make connections, to challenge one's self, test and explore ideas, and the list goes on… Once I saw art as a way to incorporate other curriculum areas to make learning fun and to present on a table for an activity - but no longer!

Alana's story - Learning to be a co-learner - *Challenging my teacher role*

Alana's reflections: A summary of her own learning

Alana gave a presentation to the Centre of Innovation Hui on 29 November 2005. She presented the following summary of what she has learnt.

- About my identity as a teacher (participator, contributor and facilitator) and learner (player and dreamer)

Blake's stories have enabled me to feel comfortable in working with children and also offer more support than I once felt comfortable with. This does not mean that I would be exactly the same with the next child who wanted to make a Holden! Children are artists and just like artists, each is so different and individual. Whereas one artist may paint without an idea in mind, another would have planned it from the day, to the setting and the feeling. Neither is better than the other. As a teacher I have realized this and no longer restrict children to simply an 'experience' nor do I restrict them to participating in an art 'activity'. In fact I have found it is easier to provide neither, however trying to ensure children always have access to all materials and different mediums so *they can do either*.

I find by working *alongside* children you can discover their own methods and approaches and work *with them* in that way.

- That Blake is both as learner and teacher

Blake came to me with an idea, an idea he wanted to create. He knew what he wanted and I played the role as a facilitator to put his vision into a plan. Having a plan gave Blake direction and a foreseeable end product, this enabling him to initiate and make decisions towards the stages and completion of his projects. Blake's perseverance in these projects and desire to finish each project motivated me and encouraged my participation, especially the many times when I could have easily been too busy and procrastinated to the next day. It was these times where I became the learner - led and encouraged by Blake.

- That documentation contributed to continuity in Blake's learning through strengthening relationships

The documentation provided a way for the projects to connect to others. Blake was proud of his documentation and as he showed others the photos supporting his stories he was able to talk about the process with peers, other teachers and with his parents. His parents loved taking these stories home and were able to feel part of the experience, take interest and have

conversations, this bringing continuity to Blake's explorations and learning at home.

- That relationships are a foundation for learning within Visual Art

Blake was more than able to complete his projects independently, particularly since he had established plans and accessible materials. However Blake would not emerge to the next stage or work on these projects until we had time to work on them together. There was pleasure in this for both of us because in these times we would have fun experimenting, chatting and laughing together; we were building a strong relationship. I believe this was the reason for the time spent on each project; it was very unhurried and each stage or step to completion was done to a standard that pleased Blake rather than a quick job to get the end product. If it had been a hurried process to make something and I had never been approached with the idea or, importantly, followed the idea, we would not have had an opportunity to build a relationship and furthermore neither would Blake's Mum have been involved in the processes, through stories from Blake and myself and immediately with Blake to make his shark boat. Through these projects, Blake, Amanda and myself had opportunities to participate, contribute and facilitate - an individual project became a group project and gave life and meaning to a child's idea.

Doing the hard work - Concluding reflections

Community learning

Developing respectful and trusting relationships among parents, children and teachers is at the very heart of teacher practice in an early childhood learning community. Relationships are a catalyst for participation, learning occurs in the process of participation. Teachers have the responsibility for developing a culture of dialogue within the early childhood context in order to build relationships that value and acknowledge each person's expertise.

'Creating a culture of dialogue' in all communication practices involves putting aside prior assumptions and opening oneself to the possibilities and joy that engaging together can bring. It involves taking risks, as neither participant has control over where learning might go.

The view of parental participation as something visible in the centre 'shifted' to one that views all parents as active participants. More parents demonstrated attributes of participation. As relationships between teachers and parents moved into a *transforming* style, previous assumptions held by teachers about parental willingness and interest in their child were challenged. Through a mutual interest in the child, parental participation occurred in ways that were not always visible within the centre walls. Teacher communication practices became based on the knowledge that all parents are interested and willing to support their child, in their own way and time.

Children's learning experiences become richer and more meaningful through the participation of parents in the programme. As a result of strengthening relationships with parents, teachers increased their knowledge and understanding of both individual and groups of children, enabling them to make meaningful connections with the prior experiences and competence of the children in the programme.

Some cultural aspects of the centre changed as a result of the increase in parental participation. Taking children's profile books home became regular practice, as did written personal communication between parent and staff. A new expectation became evident – parents expected that information in the profile books would keep them informed, and invite participation and contribution.

An outcome of the development of dialogue in the centre was evidenced in the language used by community members. A parallel can be drawn between the way that the community began to share a common language about project work during communications with centre staff and the way that the teacher researcher team has extended its own common language repertoire. Words such as

‘BINGO’ and ‘dialogue’ became common usage as the researcher team developed shared meanings and understandings. Language as a cultural tool of this community reflects shared understandings about children’s learning.

Visual art is part of the language of the community. By this, the teachers mean that visual art provides children, parents and teachers a visual way to communicate with and understand each other. This communication may occur within the visual representation of a current group project, or a child’s individual piece of art. Visual art is a communication tool that links centre life with home life. Teachers regard creativity as the use of processes similar to those needed for acquiring knowledge; both involve active inquiry. Creativity using visual arts media produces a form of documentation of children’s imaginative thought and inquiry.

Researcher learning

We have found that, by using a variety of research tools, we are able to explore our own ideas and investigate our own theories. Thinking about research in terms of the following structures has helped us see research as being closely linked to our daily work as teachers.

Supporting literature

Emerging understandings of the research team were strengthened by literature that resonated with the team’s thinking. The literature at times ‘put words’ to the new thinking and in other situations acted as affirmation of the team’s understandings. For example, the literature on parent teacher partnerships listed elements of effective partnerships that correlated with what the research team were discovering. The literature about different types of relationships between educators and parents offered confidence to the communication framework that had been developed. Literature supported the research team’s confidence in the development of both pedagogical practices and research processes.

Research tools

Regular centre pedagogical documentation used as research data supported teachers to engage in reflective discussions based on what they actually do and what occurs in the centre as a result. This type of data threw into relief discrepancies in practice that could not be disputed, as the data researchers had generated was about their own practice.

The collection of quantitative data on types of contact with parents was initially viewed as ‘just a data recording method’; however, the research team acknowledged the value of this data during

analysis. Interpretation of the data into numbers provided teachers with the 'bigger picture' of parental participation, the ways they responded and what actually eventuated. A quantitative comparison of phase one and two provided confirmation of developments making a difference in the community, and motivated the team in continuing these practices.

Individual teachers' BINGO story data was collated and represented to the team as collective data, thus extending the view held by individual teachers. Teachers learnt through reflecting on each other's experiences as well as on their own. The shared understanding generated may not have arisen if left in the realm of individual reflection.

Findings

Our emerging ideas have surfaced as findings. These findings report on the theories or understandings that have become part of the culture of New Beginnings Preschool. Our theories evolve over time. As is described in the report, our understanding of BINGO stories evolved: currently both meanings continue to be used. The New Beginnings Preschool Framework initially emerged through the work undertaken by the infant and toddler teachers. The Framework offered a theory that other teachers related to and could apply to their everyday practice.

Chapter 4 - Igniting the magic : Community identity

"It (the research journey) has looked different for all of us, depending on our own passion and strengths, but for myself this journey has allowed me to grow and develop a strong teaching philosophy which I believe in and recognize as ever changing, moving forward." (Katrina Jones, teacher researcher)

Introduction

This chapter describes how our Preschool community identity is developed by exploring the practices and routines, tools and artefacts, climate and culture of the centre. It demonstrates the understanding we gained of how individuals and groups within the community are shaped by and in turn shape the identity of the learning community through the practices adopted within the early childhood programme. Teacher practice is instrumental in nurturing a 'community of learning' identity.

In this chapter we focus on people's participation in community processes that form common practice, and how practices evolve and respond to the changing community. We explore the connection between historical cultural practices and emerging new practices as the teaching team undertake a process of re-constructing project work in the curriculum. Prior knowledge and understandings merge with new ones as the teacher researcher team experience change in the community. Our community's identity undergoes constant evolution, rather than abrupt or radical change: practices of the past continue in some form but do not necessarily remain the same.

Supporting literature 4.1: Identities as trajectories within social settings

In social learning theory, writers discuss how cultural and historical practices are influential on current and future practices within communities and therefore reshape community identity as well as the people within it.

Wenger (1998) states "The temporal dimension of identity is critical. Not only do we keep negotiating our identities, but they place our engagement in practice in this temporal context. We are always simultaneously dealing with specific situations, participating in the histories of certain practices, and involved in becoming certain persons. As trajectories, our identities incorporate the past and the future in the very process of negotiating the present. (p. 155)"

The first section of this chapter explores the impact of change in teacher curriculum practices on community identity. The teacher researcher team reviewed and reflected on centre documentation to develop an understanding of how participation in the community is affected by change in community culture and new curriculum teaching practices. The second section explores the impact of change in community membership on centre practices as the group of over-two teachers' grapple with re-constructing their collective approach to group project work implementation during a period of staffing changes. The 'magic' of the community engaging with and participating together in learning appeared to have been lost and this team wanted to re-ignite

it. A group project story is presented to illustrate how projects became re-established in the programme; however, it does not look exactly the same as before as the basis for group learning through projects shifts from a topic to an inquiry. Changes in teacher practice and learning are described and explained in relation to how participation of children, teachers and parents/whanau influenced the re-construction of practice. The final section of this chapter explores the reasons underpinning the shifts in project work practice. The critical role teacher's hold in a community of learners comes into view. Teachers were able to make effective change by taking notice of the participation of children and parents/whanau rather than focussing on the perceived needs of the teaching team.

Community identity

The identity of our community could be described simplistically as a place characterised by all parties, teachers, parents/whanau and children, sharing a mutual interest in children's learning and development. Through this research process the teacher researcher team formed a deeper understanding of this community's identity, one that encompasses the interrelationship of people, places and things. Our view of the Preschool's community is underpinned by an understanding that the community consists of a collective group of people who use collaborative processes to make decisions about the community's activities.

Supporting literature 4.2: Defining 'collaborative' and 'collective'.

To develop understandings about how people in this learning community function as a group we found it necessary to define for ourselves a differentiation between the terms collective and collaborative.

Collaborative - Bullough & Gitlin (2001) suggest that 'collaborative' is not a concept with a singular meaning and that it is important to clarify this concept. The understanding that we developed is that 'collaborative' describes the process of participants in the community engaging together in discussion to come to an agreement. It is process for developing shared understandings, a shared vision or shared beliefs. An outcome of collaborative interactions is that it can provide a common frame of understanding within which the people participate.

Collective – Mayo (2003) offers an interpretation of 'collective' that captured our understanding:

> **"C**ollective refers to multiple perspectives, meanings and viewpoints which might be brought together within an assembly of people, *collective* connotes the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, that no single part carries all of the knowledge or understanding of the group, and that new knowledge is generated, in context, as people work together to learn from each other and to decide what they will agree, where to differ, and how they will act (individually and collectively) as a result." (p.10)

With this understanding of 'collective' we believe that individuals make up a collective group of participants in the learning community. Each person can act differently however, collaborative decisions influence actions. We use the term collective to denote that it is not about members of the community needing to 'be the same'. The community values 'multiple perspectives, meanings and viewpoints'.

Community identity forms as people relate, participate, make decisions and learn together within an environment that actively values difference and diversity of people within the community. Our

interpretation of an environment extends beyond a physical place to include the culture and spirit of the community. Our notion of empowerment as the spirit of the community as is explored further in chapter 5. The environment we are describing is one that recognises an inter-connectedness between the Preschool and children's homes. The early childhood environment provides space and opportunity for community members to become involved, to participate, to learn and to teach in different ways and at different times. Children's home environments act in similar ways. The identity of our learning community is offered as a connected concept where centre and home come together in an interdependent way in support of children's learning.

As described in chapter 2 the visual imagery used by the research team evolved over time as the team came to understand different elements of the learning community. In chapter 2 the identity of individuals in the community is described as that of both teachers and learners. Within this view individual difference and diversity amongst group members is valued by the community. In chapter 3 the significance of relationships in nurturing participation in the community is revealed. Creating a culture of dialogue to nurture relationships among participants becomes a conscious role of teachers. In this chapter the dual identities of people as teachers and learners, and the relationships among them, are viewed as foundational factors for building a learning community.

The following exhibit captures the teacher researchers' image of the identity of this learning community.

Exhibit 4.1: Community identity as weaving participation

Adults and children belong to this learning community. Participating together creates a complex form of weaving in which individuals move in and out through the layers. The background layer

represents the environment (home and centre as explained above) as the whariki (or culture) where the Principles of Te Whāriki are woven together. The middle layer represents the communication practices that nurture relationships and a culture of dialogue among participants. The layer in the front represents the ways in which individuals become visible through participation in community practices at different times and in different ways. The community practices this research project focussed on were around projects and visual art.

Participation in the learning community needs to be nurtured as it cannot be assumed that it will naturally occur as a result of people coming together. In this early childhood context teachers have the important role of nurturing the participation of others, children and adults. Teacher practice involves making space for this participation. To make the space, teachers work with an understanding of how participants within a community hold differing roles and responsibilities, each contributing towards achieving the common purpose of the group – children's care and education. Collaboration between participants involves actively seeking out and listening to the opinions and views of others with resulting community actions reflective of the collaboration.

Change in the community

Change is part of the community's identity. As this research project progressed, the centre experienced a number of changes. As a consequence of our first action research cycles, teachers had developed new practices to promote parental participation and were also involved in strengthening their own participation in visual art with children. Alongside these changes in curriculum, teachers experienced change in membership of the teaching team. Four new teachers joined the team during the first eighteen months of the project. One of these changes was that of the assistant supervisor. At the beginning of the second eighteen months further change occurred in the infant and toddler's teaching team. A new teacher was employed and the centre supervisor moved from the over-twos team to the infant and toddlers team. As is common in early childhood centres, there was also a change in children and families attending the centre, when the older children moved on to school.

The impact of change became of interest to the teacher researcher team. While it was not evident during separate action research cycles, it emerged as we began viewing and analyzing the overall research journey. The experiences of teachers and the centre community over the last eighteen months of the project became valuable in developing understandings about issues of change in a learning community.

Impact of change in teacher curriculum practice on community participation

Over the first twelve months of the research project teachers had developed practices to strengthen two-way communication practices among teachers, and teachers and parents/whanau in order to support relationship development and provide pathways for community participation in children's learning. At the same time teacher participation and confidence in visual art had increased as all teachers had been involved in moving visual art to an integrated part of the curriculum. A question for the research team was "so what does this mean for the community?" Historically, project work practices were firmly embedded in the centre curriculum. Project-work practices had established a culture in the community, one in which parents, children and teachers held expectations for engaging together in explorations and learning. The research team was interested in finding out how increased parental participation and teacher confidence in visual art had impacted on community participation within project work, and in what ways project work practices may have evolved.

Research process 4.1: Exploring the data together

Teachers undertook a process of analysis of project work documentation gathered over the previous 12 months to gain an understanding of the impact of change in curriculum practice on parent, child and teacher participation. This process had been suggested by the research advisory group as an approach to uncovering the interrelationship between participation and centre practices.

The three groups of teachers chose three projects each had undertaken during the past year. As a guide, teachers were requested to select one project that had taken place in the initial phase of change, the second during developments and the third at a time teachers considered the new practices to be well established. Documentation included teachers' meeting journals, children's learning stories and the collation of project documentation as presented for families/whanau to view. Each team reviewed their documentation in three separate cycles and fed back their reflections at monthly whole team meetings.

- Cycle one explored what was being documented about parental participation,
- Cycle two looked at what was recorded about children, and
- Cycle three looked at what was being recorded about the teaching role.

Teacher learning by looking to the past

This research process strengthened teacher relationships by building dialogue across all team members about their beliefs and values regarding using a project approach to curriculum. It occurred at a critical point as it allowed three members, recently new to the teaching team, to contribute to what amounted to a review of the centre's philosophy. These teachers had not been involved in all the projects under review however, used this as an opportunity to develop their understandings about project work practices.

As the teacher researcher team analyzed the data they acknowledged how community practices, or ways of doing things, had evolved in direct response to the participation of members of the community. The process highlighted shifts that had occurred in teaching practice and offered understanding into why change had occurred. One major shift identified was that teachers had come to view all parents as 'interested and competent parents'. Teaching practices had evolved to reflect this belief and as a result parent competence had strongly come in to view. Arthur et al. (1996) discuss how the process of empowering families starts with the recognition that they are competent people who make decisions for and about their children. On reflection, teachers could see how earlier practice might have been influenced by an assumption that not all parents are interested or want to be involved.

The following summaries provide insight into how teachers made sense of the data as they came to understand the interrelationship between community participation and collective teaching practice.

Findings 4.1: Improved outcomes in relation to parental participation

- Parental participation became more apparent over time as parents contributed ideas to, participated in and sometimes led the group's experiences in project work.
- Documentation and data highlighted the variety of ways in which parents support their children's participation in project explorations, including bringing relevant articles in from home, joining group times and encouraging their child to participate, assisting on excursions and continuing discussions with their child at home.
- Earlier projects showed that parents were informed about the children's experiences after they had occurred whereas the more recent projects involved communication with parents from the beginning.
- Project focus moved from occurring as a negotiated process between children and teachers to one that also includes parents.
- Parents engaged noticeably more with their child's documentation in profile books, with many contributing comments and information.

Findings : Improved outcomes in relation to parental participation

- Teachers reflected on how they were aware of many parents discussing children's learning and experiences with them more regularly.
- Parental interest in children's visual art experiences had come to form the basis of discussion between teacher and parent.

Findings : Improved outcomes in relation to parental participation

Findings 4.2: Improved outcomes in relation to children's participation

- Documentation about children's learning was typically set in the social context of the project work experience and reflected learning that teachers' value in relation to project work.
- For the older learning group, documentation of children's learning included the ways in which children expressed and contributed ideas and knowledge, how they participated with each other, the ways they went about exploring and investigating and the knowledge they were gaining.
- The younger two learning groups' documentation included accounts of how children participated socially, the ways in which individuals engaged in the experiences, how common interests were shared and how children interacted and communicated with teachers and peers.
- Teachers in the infant toddler group identified the significant role parents play in assisting teachers to have the necessary knowledge and understanding of each child.
- Children displayed increased confidence to engage in project investigations as a direct result of the support provided by parents. Their project focus appeared to continue beyond centre experiences.
- Project work and visual art as social activities was reflected in documentation. Teachers, parents and children were written about as a collective group engaged in learning together.
- Children's visual art learning was more evident. Teaching and learning stories described the use of visual art tools and media as supportive to children's emerging knowledge and understandings.

Findings : Improved outcome in relation to children's participation

Findings 4.3: Outcomes in relation to teacher participation

- All three teaching groups identified that over the period of the three projects their practices had changed as they took into account parents' ideas and contributions. Some examples of this were:

  - The use of project letters, updating parents on what the children were participating in and inviting parental contributions,
  - Including excursions with parental support as part of children's investigations,
  - Provision of a communal notice-board for parents to write up ideas,
  - Including parent comments or information from parents in children's learning stories in profiles,
  - Including a question to parents at the end of a learning story,
  - Sharing centre resources with parents such as books and audio tapes,
  - Holding 'celebration' events with parents and children for each project.

- Parental comments and direct feedback or questions to parents in documentation had gradually increased. Teachers commented on how writing about parents in the various forms of documentation was initially an uncomfortable experience. However, as parents engaged with their documentation this practice was reinforced as worthwhile and purposeful and it had become embedded in regular teacher practice.
- There were relatively few project work learning stories specifically about individual children, as the majority of the documentation described the group experience in a general way. Individual children were not necessarily referred to unless it was the child who could be identified as a key player in the group project.
- Teachers were incorporating visual art experiences into children's project work investigations more frequently. Experiences with children and other staff had contributed to individual teachers' confidence to participate in this curriculum area. Joint participation in visual art resulted in an increase of teaching and learning stories.

Findings Outcome in relation to teacher rparticpation

- Approaches to project work implementation strengthened as the changed mini-teams became more comfortable in their working relationships. Team-work practices are a critical component of project work.

Findings Outcome in relation to teacher rparticpation

The review of documentation highlighted how project work had developed as a culture within the community, one that all participants (children, parents and teachers) had influenced. There was a sense that the practices that had evolved created familiarity for the community in the way things are done in project work. Communication practices made participation visible to the community, and in some ways this contributed to an expectation by the community that they will be kept informed and offered opportunities to participate.

The impact of change in community membership on the cultural practices of project work

Toward the end of the review process further changes in staffing occurred as two longer-term members shifted from one area of the centre to the other, between over-twos and infants and toddlers. This resulted in change in membership of the three mini-teaching teams who each took responsibility for projects with the three age-groupings of children (infant and toddlers, the younger group and older group). There was also a change occurring in children's relationships as many of the older children were leaving for school.

During the final stages of the review process the new teachers to the mini-teaching teams had the opportunity to learn about project work practices in their new area of responsibility and therefore come from an 'informed place'. Research became a tool for improving knowledge of everyday teaching and learning practice. Although this proved to be a time consuming activity it also served as a very timely exercise: the process was beneficial for the teaching team as a whole! Teacher learning benefited through data analysis. The process of the whole teacher researcher team reflecting on how things were, are now and might be in the future, uncovered a fusion of the centre's past and present, and indicated a possible future identity.

Teacher relationships were being strengthened by continuing to engage in dialogue across all team members about their beliefs and values regarding using a project approach to curriculum. An outcome of the ongoing dialogue was the emergence of a collective teacher identity in relation to project work. The new and established teachers shared and discussed collective understandings and ways of acting. Commonalities in what teachers do in project work with the various age groups of children were identified as the teachers' collective identity and provided a basis for the teaching team to progress from.

Teachers:

- Attend to children's thinking
- Respond to children's interests and enquiries by adding ideas to extend the experience
- Facilitate children's connections with prior experience and learning
- Enrich the experience with the provision of resources, including resource people
- Engage in learning with the children and parents and model an enjoyment of learning
- Facilitate shared meaning-making by unravelling the known and unknown
- Develop their own content knowledge through researching for and with the children.

Discussion about project work continued as the newly forming teaching teams continued to develop their working relationships. At this point the teacher researcher team became aware that there were only three remaining teachers who had been a part of establishing and implementing project work from the beginning of the centre's journey (4 years ago). The other five teachers had begun working in the centre at different times, and had learnt about and adopted project work practices through 'coming on board'. As teacher relationships strengthened so too did a climate of inquiry as some existing practices became questioned.

Time for further change

The 'culture' of scheduled group times became questioned. Teachers discussed how a sense of 'compulsion to attend' had crept in to the group times, with children and teachers becoming less engaged. The tension teachers were experiencing appeared to be a tension between the vision of the principle of empowerment (Ministry of Education,1996) and the view they held for co-learning with children. The principle of empowerment in the early childhood curriculum cautions against compulsion for children's participation whereas co-learning had connotations at that time that teachers and children come together for a group dialogue. Coercion versus co-learning?

Teachers also become aware that they had only been observing and documenting each group of children as a 'cohesive' unit:

> *"The separate group times, they are much more than just a time of the day when the over-twos just happen to be split into two groups for convenience' sake. We seem to be interpreting these two groups as two separate 'cohesive units' of children that (within each group) magically seem to want to learn the same thing, that is – the current project focus.*

But did they, how many of them were ever engaged with this experience at any one time?"
(Head teacher's personal reflection, Nov 2005)

Teachers expressed frustration about how they were feeling obliged to keep the children in the group for the sake of team management while, at the same time attempting to engage the interest of all children in the group. Moreover, recent experiences of children's individual projects (refer to Blake's story, chapter 3 and Michaels story, chapter 2) had highlighted how a group often does not follow one 'single rhythm' (Giudici *et al.,* 2001) or interest area. In a collective group of individuals, there are in fact a multitude of 'rhythms' or areas of interest occurring within any one moment of time. The culture of co-learning within a group should involve participants engaging in an interest together by contributing their own perspectives, knowledge and enthusiasms. In reality, the tensions of compulsion and disengagement were not conducive to creating the enriching conditions for the group-learning situation.

Supporting literature 4.3: Group situations enrich certain kinds of intelligence

Giudici *et al*., (2001) describe a group situation as offering an enriching condition where many of the characteristics of intelligence are recognized and utilized, that is 'argumentation and explaining, negotiation, the capacity to consider multiple possibilities of the same problem, and the ability to use other points of view as a resource.' (p. 165).

A further concern voiced by teaching staff was that they had become aware of parents viewing the placement of their child in the two groups of children as an indication of their child's progression. Parents regularly asked when their child would move to the next group as if seeing this movement as a form of graduation for their child. Teachers were very uncomfortable with this as it felt as though this view placed unreasonable expectations and pressures on children. This was a situation where centre practice had been misinterpreted within the community. Teachers were motivated to change practice to rectify the situation for the children.

Following team discussions the practice of having 'scheduled group times' for the differing age groups of children was stopped. However, the action of giving up the scheduled group time created a 'void' for teachers in which they felt a sense of insecurity about how project work could continue. The group times had previously been pivotal to supporting ongoing project work. The implications of no longer separating the over-two year olds into age specific groupings for project work were that project work now potentially involved all five staff and all 31 children in the over-two programme.

Reconnecting with the vision: Re-igniting the 'magic'

Teachers attempted to re-establish group project work in the programme over a three month period without scheduled group times for discussion and dialogue with children. They had hoped that group times would just emerge during the regular programme as they continued to hold a belief in the value of engaging in group dialogue with children; however, this was not to be. During team discussions frustrations about progress were apparent. As one teacher described it, *"I know we've changed our format…. I know we're all a bit tentative about it 'cos it's new, but I'd love that magic that we once did have."*

The magic this teacher referred to is the vision teachers held for project work in the centre. It was based on the longer-term teachers' prior experiences and can be illustrated in the following story.

Julie MacMillan, a parent and management board member at the centre, had previously shared her story with the teaching team. This story was viewed as an historic artefact of the learning community as it encapsulated the vision of 'magic' that the teaching team strove to re-ignite. It illustrated the value of connected experiences between home and preschool when all participants take on active and shared roles in children's learning. Julie's own interest was stimulated through a group project experience in the centre that then became a shared learning experience with all of her family. Her story was an example of continuity in learning between the centre and home in which each setting has taken responsibility for co-constructing learning with her son Liam.

Julie's story: Hot air balloons

Written by Julie for a presentation at the Community-Based Childcare Early Childhood Education Workshop Day, 29.5.04

The reason why I joined the management board is to have the input into running the centre and knowing that the decisions I make can be beneficial for my son in the centre. One of the big draw cards for my reason to join was knowing that the centre had just been accepted in the Centre of Innovation research project. Not that I knew a lot about it at the time but I wanted to learn more and thought if I was on the management board I would be able to have that knowledge.

I would like to tell you about one of the projects and how Liam, my 2 year old son, has continued to learn from it, not only at preschool but also from his experiences outside preschool with his family.

One morning I enter the centre and here is the art teacher, Libby, filling a hot air balloon with a hair dryer. Of course everyone including children and parents are so interested in this. It seems like none of the parents want to leave as they are all enthralled by the experience. That morning the balloon is taken outside for the children to really see how it works. The children are just so engrossed by it.

The following Saturday we had just finished dinner and I looked out the kitchen window to see a hot air balloon in the sky. My two boys quickly look out the window and see it too. I realize it is descending so we drop everything and jump in the car to follow the balloon. I try and figure out where it is so I start heading to the Lyttelton tunnel road. I have two very excited boys in the car with the seven year old asking me questions about how they fly and descend. I have to be a science teacher now as well as driver. We hit Lyttelton tunnel road and are

confronted with half of Christchurch doing the same as us. The road is full, with cars parked on the side of the road watching the balloon land in a paddock. I have Liam just saying "balloon, balloon", and the seven year old asking me a lot of questions which I didn't know a lot about. We watch it land and how the balloon is packed up. I even learnt a couple of things, like the vent on top of the balloon is opened up to empty it of air.

Then we learn there is going to be a hot air balloon display at Hororata on Saturday evening. We decide to pack a picnic dinner and head out to Hororata. As we near Hororata the cars are only moving at a snail pace. We can't believe how many people are here in this little country town to see the balloons. We see a fabulous display with 12 balloons just hovering off the ground and glowing to the beat of the music. What a great experience and both boys thoroughly enjoyed it, as we did!

Then on Wednesday some library books that Libby (teacher) has brought into the preschool were left out on the table at pick up time. Liam picks one up. Somehow he finds a book with a picture of hot air balloons. Libby goes to the books and realizes he has found a page with the balloons. Then the subject is bought up. With Libby's enthusiasm, she gets out the hot air balloon and starts talking to Liam about his experiences with the balloons. She even makes a wee poem:

1,2,3,4,5.
Watching hot air
balloons in the sky.
6.7.8.9.10.
The wind has blown
them away again.

Without teachers' enthusiasm this whole experience with hot air balloons would not have had the same impact, not only on Liam's life but also on that of his family.

Julie's Story: re-igniting the 'magic'

This story exemplified the centre's image of its community of learners in action. Each participant was instrumental in the learning process and each transformed in some way as a result (Rogoff, 1994). Liam had the benefit of having his interest in and learning about hot air balloons

recognized and facilitated in both settings, centre and home. Julie acknowledges the duality of her role as both teacher and learner. Centre practices involved a relationship between Julie and the teachers in which sharing contextual knowledge of Liam's experiences was valued. Julie's familiarity with centre project work is evidenced in her use of the common language associated with this in the centre. The shared excitement and recognition of all participants' contributions is what teachers mean by 'magic' BINGO moments.

Reconstructing practice: Re-building community culture

Removal of the group times as a cultural practice in the programme had resulted in 'a loss of magic'. Removing the group times had detrimentally impacted on the participation of teachers, children and parents. The teacher researcher team became involved in exploring how to re-construct group project work in the curriculum.

Research Process 4.2: Teacher researchers investigate approaches to project work

1. Two research meetings held one month apart with the research associate were devoted to reflective discussion about project work in the centre. At the first meeting teachers brainstormed a list of existing teaching practices they considered to be important to retain in order to support project work. The time between meetings provided teachers with the opportunity to reflect on current project work experiences in order to confirm or review their initial ideas. At the second meeting the list was re-visited and the resulting discussion tape-recorded and transcribed. Teachers redefined their understandings of projects and identified a list of 'teaching principles' to guide team practices.

2. Teachers implemented their ideas for project work over a further four months. At weekly team meetings they monitored their progress and discussed issues as they arose. Decisions made were documented in the staff-meeting book.

3. The teacher researcher team met five months later to reflect on and review project work practices to identify key developments and the reasons underpinning these.

Teacher learning through the process of change

The 'void' that occurred as a result of removing scheduled group times provided the time for the teaching team to take a fresh look at how they could proceed with group project work in the centre. The team acknowledged that taking away an established practice allowed them to view aspects of their practice that they would not have otherwise been aware of. The practice of scheduled group times had been an inherited practice for this current teaching team. They had also inherited other established processes and structures that supported the team to implement project work in the centre. The process of reflecting on what they collectively had come to value about project work as an approach to curriculum enabled the teaching team to relate their ongoing experiences to their beliefs about how the project approach is supportive to learning in this

community. Experience of the way things were contributed to the team determining how things might be.

Finding the spark: The teachers' story

The following story provides insight into the over twos teachers' journey as they gradually re-establish project work in the centre and a revised culture around it. The project occurred over the course of three months. As the project unfolded teaching practices responded to the participation of children. It becomes evident that this project experience involved teachers in learning about and questioning their own practices. The magic that project work offers begins to be re-ignited and community identity once again emerges.

How does fire start on water?

A project inquiry

Author Alana, February 2006

Last year brought many changes in how we implemented project work into the over-two programme. From the beginning of the year we began to really reflect upon what project work looked like in our centre. This resulted in us collectively questioning aspects of our individual practices and that of the centre.

The project inquiry, "How does fire start on water" emerged from a discussion I had with a child in the middle of last year. I had recently attended the Alise Shafer workshop at the Christchurch College of Education. It was here where I deepened my understanding of inquiry based learning and this encouraged me to return to work with new eyes and ears - I was seeing *and* noticing, listening *and* hearing what children were saying and it was interesting and exciting!

Influence 4.1: Alise Shafer workshop

From personal notes taken during Alise Shafer's workshop ***"The stories we tell: finding, understanding and enhancing out own stories through documentation"*** held at Christchurch College of Education, 9.7.05

Alise's presentation challenged early childhood teachers to "set aside adult agendas to listen to children and understand what the emergent curriculum really is." Alise proposed a concept of 'repair theory' that she bases on the theoretical foundation of social constructivism.

> "It begins with the child and what they bring to the experience (their theory). Peers and children come together to unpack the facts that make up the theory. When you find the fact that doesn't

How does fire start on water? A project inquiry

fit, you bring that to the fore to challenge their theory. This results in new theory and then you unpack and check it again with the children. Constructivism is about a cycle of unpacking theory and reconstructing it – theory repair." (Jocelyn's notes)

A child's inquiry

This project originated with Blake, which was no surprise to me, as my earlier story of Blake (Chapter 3) describes how we developed a strong working relationship. This time Blake was planning for making a fireboat and I was writing down his plan. He explained:

> *"It will be red, fire boats are red. It needs a hose at the back and a hose at the front…if there is a fire on the water… (pauses and looks away thinking) up from the sky and it comes on the water, then it will put out the fire on the water"*.

We went on to discuss this further. Blake knew that water from the hoses was there to put the fire out; however, if that theory is true how could it be that the sea-water couldn't put out the fire? We couldn't help but wonder, "If water puts out fire, how does fire start on water?"

A group inquiry: The reflection process

As a team we have weekly reflection meetings to discuss the project. At this time we had been between projects for several weeks. We had reformed mini-teaching teams again and as a new team we had been spending our reflection meetings discussing a vision for what we believed project work to be. As part of the research process we took this discussion to the entire team. We believed that by discussing it as a mini-team and documenting it in our own reflections first it would assist us to work together as a whole team to incorporate the vision into centre practice.

Teacher reflections taken from teachers' journal - week ending 29 July 2005

Alana, Christina and Sarah

We asked ourselves what we believed project work to be and how this looked in our practice and programme. We all strongly agreed that a project is child-led, emerged from an inquiry of a child (or teacher) and is supported by us by listening and recording the children's discussions and using drawing as a tool for children to convey theories, thoughts and ideas (this is an area that we are keen to see happening). We will follow

the inquiry until we have discovered it! This is looking different again from our projects last year; Sarah and I agree that these projects were more teacher-led and while they were from children's interest the projects were not an inquiry as such. We talked about the theory repair that Alise Shafer talked about at her workshop. This is what we want to see in our projects - not teaching children the facts of the topic …

The re-introduction of group times

Group times allow children to meet together to discuss and share their thoughts, experience and theories on the project topic. Group times enable direction for the project and often generate interest; however, we have found that alone they do not sustain interest.

In the past we had a scheduled group time every day at 11:45am with children forming three different groups. We had removed this as is explained in the earlier part of this chapter. We then offered emergent group times, for groups that emerged during children's play and conversations supported by a teacher or teachers. This approach did not occur as we originally thought it would. We found it was too big a jump to move from a set time where everyone comes together, to meeting together in an informal approach whenever, however and with whomever! We had to find our place again and this time we compromised between the two, offering a group time every morning at 10:30am for children who wanted to come, as well as any other group times that emerged during the day.

What this looks like in practice

Depending on the day, we like to have at least two teachers come to the group time, one to record conversations and the other as a facilitator. Beforehand we invite all children by informing them what it is that we are discussing (this is usually determined from the previous day). Depending on the day and stage of the project we may have anywhere between two and twelve children. The ideal number we have found is between four and seven children, as this number allows for in-depth discussion resulting in meaningful group meetings lasting up to 30 minutes. We introduced the idea of the children having an opportunity to draw to convey their ideas at the end of the group time. Often the drawing done after the meeting enables children to continue the meetings further. As the children draw, their ideas and stories

arise, and this can stir dialogue again.

An example of exactly how beneficial this has been is when Tyler, a child who always came to our group times but never contributed, verbally quietly shared with us his experience of fire. Unfortunately we weren't able to understand what he was saying so we offered him a clip-board to draw on to convey what he was saying. As he was doing this he began to more confidently tell us what he was drawing. Once he knew that we understood he became very comfortable and the other children were naturally very excited about this fire he had seen.

Tyler told me about his experience of fire!

"The white building was on fire, a big one"

"Where were you?" I asked

"At the big hotel, looking out the window."

Connor asked "why were you looking out the window?"

"because I heard it"

I asked "What noise was it?"

"No I heard the fire engines" Tyler clarified

Teacher reflections

Taken from teachers' planning journal: Alana, Christina and Sarah, week ending 17 August 200

In a recent meeting Tyler T told us *briefly* about a fire he had seen in a white building and I wasn't too sure exactly what he was saying, however when he came to draw, he began to tell me all about it, he pointed to the window and the building, he told me he was in a hotel looking out the window at the fire. By this stage other children where listening and Connor asked him some questions, "How did you hear it?" etc. I look forward to talking with Mum about this experience it sounded very exciting!

As we became more accustomed to having group times again, they became a strong focus point in our reflection meetings. We began examining our role within these times, our practice and what is it we want to achieve from these times. The first change we made was changing the title 'group times' to 'group meetings'. We wanted

these times purely for discussion separate from group times and experiences that happen throughout the day. We felt the word meeting reflected what it was we wanted to achieve; a common ground where we all come together to reflect, inform, challenge, review and plan.

Contextual happenings within the centre

The interest in fire was further developing in the centre: Libby, our art teacher, had become aware of it through hearing conversations during her work with children. Libby began to work on a plaster of paris volcano with the children. This led to further inquiries that she supported and followed through with visual experiences, books and a DVD on an eruption. This was all coinciding with our project inquiry. As teachers we hadn't even had a chance to share about it amongst ourselves. The children had done this for us. At this stage different teachers were working with children in different ways on a common topic. This was enabling different interests and inquiries to be followed. Momentum built for this project and the outcomes met the needs of a wide range of children.

Differing theories on fire

During our meetings and conversations throughout each day we heard different theories and ideas from the children regarding fire, based on their personal experience and prior knowledge and those of other children. By listening to these and documenting them we were able to detect the direction of the project inquiry and help repair some of these theories. Fire on water was a common theme and there was no doubt that the children knew fire could start on water. Many of them had seen this in a book or on T.V. They were also all in agreement that water puts fire out. We reflected upon the children's conversations and it was obvious through these that they had questioned how there could be fire on water if water puts fire out. We agreed that there was a universal interest in this inquiry and that we would follow this inquiry as a group.

Why can't fire start on water?

During our meetings we (children and teachers) decided we needed to test 'starting a fire on water.' It was decided there was no other way! With lots of conversation about safety issues we carefully tried lighting a bowl of water using a match but with no luck. The children were convinced it was the matches that were failing and if we used a

lighter it would work. Testing this new idea some days later we found it still wasn't lighting. The children talked among themselves.

Documented account of group time discussion – 15th August

Crahsau said, "Maybe sand would help?" The children agreed and went to get some sand. This didn't work either!

Cayden approached and said, "Fire can't start on water, water is water, fire is fire - water dies it!" The group of children was perplexed… I wonder who we could ask, who would know?

Cayden replied, "I know… we could go to the beach and ask a man on a boat…fire does start on fire because I looked at a volcano book and it was on the water".

Planning a trip to ask a man on a boat

We informed the children in our group meeting about Cayden's idea and everyone agreed that going to find a man on a boat was the solution to our inquiry. We then had the problem of finding a boat that we could get on. Cayden said, "If the boat stops at the sand we could hop on"; Toby had a totally different idea, "Some boats have wheels so we can buy one, it's near the beach (the shop)". We planned to go to Lyttelton and came up with the idea of asking the man who steers the Diamond Harbour launch which leaves every ½ hour for a return trip. The children at that stage didn't realize that we also planned to actually take them on the boat!

Off we go!

Kevin, a parent coming on the trip, helped planned the route. It was very scenic on the way over the hills and then through the tunnel on the way back. Rob (Albert's Dad) led the way and made two stops at view-points for us all to get out and have a look at the view of the harbour to incorporate children's interest in volcanoes. As the children learnt, this harbour was once a volcano.

Many of the children had never been on a boat, so at the beginning it was very overwhelming but by the end of the trip the children were ready to ask Stu (the Captain) some questions. He told us that he had never seen a fire on water but had heard of them happening before in the harbour and that they were caused from oil that has leaked from

ships. The children were particularly happy when he mentioned that hoses from the boats put out the fires!

The end of an inquiry

The trip appeared to satisfy the children's understanding and questions about fire on water, but there was still an interest in fire in general. Kevin, our supportive parent and ex-fireman, offered to make a phone call to the fire department to ask if they could help us in some way. As a result a fire-engine arrived at the centre and children had the opportunity to explore the fire-truck. They were also provided with messages about fire safety and how to keep themselves safe. This was valuable learning for everyone in the centre but also left us with a dilemma. How do we safely support children's interests and inquiries as they develop their knowledge about fire? We collaborated with Libby (art teacher) as we knew she was also aware of this interest and together we generated some ideas to bring back to discuss with the children. An investigation into volcanoes eventuated, but that's another story for another time …

Summary

We never envisioned that as a result of making the structural changes to group times we would become so involved in reflecting upon, discussing and challenging our practices both individually and as a team. Through the fire on water inquiry we were able to put new practices and processes in place and find our place within these. We discovered new practices such as drawing at the end of meetings. Old practices which we aren't prepared to give away, are finding ground again especially parental participation, as we believe parents are also finding their place in project work again.

Children drawing their ideas and theories related to our project at the end of group meetings has been really beneficial to our understanding of children and helps us make sense of their feelings, experiences and thoughts. The children love this time with some deciding to join us just for this part. We spend a great length of time drawing and we document as much conversation as we can from the children at this time. We display their pictures alongside their stories and comments in our project folder for the children to revisit and show their friends and family. This practice has become a regular part of our project group meetings and there are aspects of it we are now further considering. We have been asking ourselves how we can support children with their drawing skills. We also want to make meaningful observations about the children's work by examining their

drawings more closely as a team.

Through this project our collective practices and understandings have been strengthened. Through this project we came to understand how pursuing a child's inquiry can result in valuable learning for adults just as much as for the children. This is what excites us and motivates our work with the children and families at the centre. As a team we held the common belief that children are empowered teachers and learners, competent and confident. Now that we have experienced the power of this belief, we understand and believe it whole-heartedly.

How does fire start on water?

Reflections on teacher learning: Why practice changed

When the teacher researcher team had its final meeting, group project work was well underway again in the centre; however, it did not look the same as before. The team reflected on what had changed and why these changes had come about. It became evident that the original beliefs about the elements and processes of project work and how these are supportive of community learning (as described in chapter 1) had been retained in the minds of the collective group. The changes that had been made were in relation to the organizational structures, teacher practices that support project work and, perhaps most significantly, understandings of what a project focus is.

The team recognized they had been too focused on their own needs in their initial attempts to re-establish project work, as they attempted to redefine their roles and responsibilities to accommodate new staff arriving at that time. Their way forward had been to shift their focus back to their community in the following ways:

1. Refocusing on the children. In the absence of group project work (during the reconstruction period) teachers had begun to identify with individual children's learning as holding resemblance to a project journey. They had been documenting sequences of stories such as the stories about Casey and Blake in chapter 3 (individual projects). Children had shown teachers that project learning was occurring, it just looked different from how teachers were attempting to construct it.
2. Refocusing on what was happening for the community. Informal conversations amongst teachers and parents revealed that parents and whanau had been asking about projects, they were waiting for direction from the teachers.

1. Refocusing on the children

The teaching team's experiences with individual projects had 'opened their eyes' to how children engage in many forms of projects, in different ways and different times. 'Coming to know' children's autonomous projects (a term introduced by Giudici, Rinaldi & Krechevsky (2001)) was an important factor teachers considered as they forged new ways to document children's individual on-going learning. Teachers gained an appreciation of how project investigations can occur at any time throughout the centre programme. On reflection they realized that previously too much reliance had been placed on scheduled group times as the 'time project work occurred'.

Supporting literature 4.4: Autonomous projects

Giudici, Rinaldi & Krechevsky (2001) recognize that "there are many projects that children carry out in a completely autonomous way…We only *come to know* of a few of these, but we are certain that many of them happen without us being aware of them" (p.174).

Findings 4.4: Individual projects

The teaching team had come to view their continuous stories about individual children's learning as 'individual projects' as they had begun to mirror all the elements of what this team understood about projects:

- Projects are about focused areas of learning, not necessarily a topic but an inquiry. They involve the joint participation of children, parents and teachers who are involved in investigating and making discoveries about learning.
- Project inquiries originate with the child. They are based on an area of learning or interest of the child/ren.
- A project journey cannot be predetermined.
- Project journeys are about sustained and involved learning over time. Teachers and others engage with the child or children's interest and follow through the journey with them.
- Project inquiries are a vehicle for social participation. The social grouping involves parents, teachers and children participating together. The group may be in relation to one child or a larger group of children.
- Participants can be experts as well as learners as knowledge and learning occurs as a shared venture within a social context.
- Project inquiries are supported by documentation that engages community participants in discussing and revisiting experiences.

Findings : individual projects

The teaching team retained the belief that group times with children are essential for engaging in dialogue about project investigations and for participating in co-learning. They acknowledged that this naturally occurs when working with individuals or two or three children during an

individual project but is more difficult to orchestrate with larger groups of children. The team found it useful to make a differentiation between group times that engage people in dialogue and group times where people participate in a learning experience or activity. They introduced the concept of group meetings for dialogue, and group experiences for investigative activity. This shared understanding supported them in their way forward. Group project work experiences could occur at any time during the programme and allow flexibility as children chose to participate. Interestingly, the team could identify how, over time, the group experiences always attracted those children who were vitally interested in the project and more often than not it was the full time children. The infectiousness of the experience attracted others who sometimes became fully involved, as did their families.

2. Refocusing on what was happening for the community

During periods of change the teacher researcher team became aware of the fact that, as new staff joined the teaching team, their interest/focus shifted from creating opportunities for authentic and purposeful communication between parents and teachers to a focus on developing shared understandings about project work within the team. They were paying less attention to centre communication practices and relationships with families and, as a result, project work failed to attract full participation of family, children and even teachers. Sustaining a project journey had proved difficult at that time for teachers as reduced participation meant that the enthusiasm and motivation to follow children's learning over time rested with the teaching team or even individual teachers. This situation differed from the earlier time when teachers within the mini-teaching teams held common understandings about project work and confidently engaged the community in children's learning experiences, as was evidenced in the data they had explored together. It appeared that when the teachers shared and had confidence in a collective identity, community participation grew. When change occurred within the teaching team, their collective identity became fragile and community participation was reduced.

The teaching team returned their focus to the participation of children and parents in their community. They became aware of how previous scheduled group times had excluded the participation of children who attended afternoons only as they always occurred just before lunch-time. In this centre, 80% of children attend on a part-time basis, with different children attending different portions of the week and mainly for nine hours each. Prior practice was not seen to be inclusive. As an inherited practice the team had not inherited the original understanding that underpinned the practice. The original teaching team had planned the timing of group times with the vision that both morning and afternoon children could participate.

A new structure was put in place to support group-meeting times in both the morning and afternoons. 10.30 am and 1.30pm were viewed as times of the day when team members could work together in a group meeting context. Scheduled meetings did not need to take place every day as the team acknowledged there was still a place for emergent group meetings with children. The scheduled time established a collective understanding within the team that this was the time when teachers would work in collaborative support of one another to facilitate and document children's discussions. Participation in a meeting was driven by child choice as the regular programme continued. Children's interest in the project inquiry would determine whether or not they wished to participate.

Teachers were able to retain their mini-teaching team structure to focus on project planning as the existing organization of non-contact meetings together remained in place. One mini-teaching team took responsibility for the morning meeting and one project, while the other for the afternoon meeting and another project. The team saw that this approach could allow for afternoon children's project inquiries to differ from the morning children's. The team could also see how a common project could eventuate as a result of the images and discussion that permeates the centre when a project is in full swing.

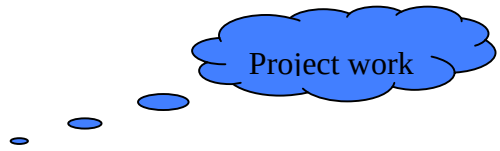
Teachers came to realize that creating a culture for group meetings by using familiar artefacts and resources was supportive of children's participation. They discussed how creating a sense of purpose and importance for focused group discussions enabled children to predict and choose their participation. As one teacher commented; *"when we have this group time we've been getting out a specific mat or something so the children realize that they're having a group time, and they bring out that, like wow, it's group time. And that interest in; 'I wonder what we're going to be talking about?' That really helps."* Teachers had also noticed how some children have reconnected with the prior culture of group meeting participation as they re-establish group norms of behaviour: *"like (child) saying it's my turn to talk. Mm, and they've been good about passing things round the circle. You know how we used to pass it round?"* It became apparent to teachers that the children in their community had not lost their motivation to participate; they had been waiting for teachers to provide the opportunities again. Another aspect that created a sense of familiarity with a project was that children seemed to identify with the mini teaching team responsible for each project investigation.

For the teaching team, the removal of scheduled group times had also meant that children were no longer separated into age specific groups for projects. Teachers' identity of competent and capable members of the community now meant that younger and older children participated

together in project investigations. The teaching team found that this brought challenges as well as benefits to their work. They acknowledged that older children provided a role model of participation for the younger children during these discussion times; *"it's a bit harder for the young ones to get that idea of (sitting in) a circle though. But I think with the culture of the older ones it will hopefully help them copy."* This concept was not totally new in the centre as past teaching teams had noted younger siblings joining an older group. The difference was now in the reasons behind the age mixing of children. Previously it had been viewed as supportive of separation from parents, whereas now it was viewed as productive of community learning as every member has something to offer and something to gain as a result.

The critical role of teachers in community identity.

These teachers collectively held strong beliefs about the value of using a project approach to curriculum for children. These beliefs had been shaped partially through the inherited experiences of the community as well as through the passion of the longer-term teachers who had experienced the magic of projects. Engaging in critical dialogue and reflection enabled the current teaching team to honestly evaluate practices and processes for implementing projects. An outcome of this area of exploration has been that teachers gained understanding of how centrally important their participation is in shaping this community. Teachers set the scene for the culture of the community through their beliefs, relationships and practices. While the teaching team had turned their energies inwards to focus on their practice, the community had been in waiting; teachers had taken their eyes off their community. When they returned their focus to the community they found that children and parents/whanau held a key to the way forward. The identity of the learning community came into view again as teachers negotiated their beliefs with the participation of people in the learning community to form a better match between their vision and practice.



An emerging new insight – an exciting shift in understanding

As project practices became re-established the teacher researcher team became aware that a subtle but very significant shift had occurred in understandings about what a project is based on. Acknowledgement of the shift in understanding came about as the teacher researcher team reflected on their research data (recent stories about centre projects) and noticed that they were

using a different word to describe a project. The term 'inquiry' was visible in documentation; it hadn't been before. On reflection, teachers acknowledge that this concept is difficult to put into words for others however, the shift we are highlighting is apparent in the way projects are now talked about as project inquiries rather than project work.

The '*How does fire start on water?*' story in this chapter illustrates the shift. As described in this story one influence to change in teacher practice had occurred when some of the teaching team attended Alise Shaffer's workshop. The ideas Alise shared about children theorizing and inquiring held relevance for teachers as it was at the time when the team were questioning their approaches and understandings about project work in the centre. Alise's ideas added a new layer of thought for teachers. The influence of this teacher learning emerged quietly during the period the team were attempting to re-establish projects in the centre.

A key difference between project work and project inquiry that the research team identify is that a project is viewed as a topic whereas an inquiry it is framed more as a question that demands investigation. The following chart captures some of the shifts, or changes in the ways community members participate, that the teacher researcher team have become aware of through recent experience.

Exhibit 4.2: Unpacking differences between project work and project inquiry

	Project work	Project inquiry
Teachers	▪ Look for a common theme in children's interests ▪ Listen to what children know and don't know ▪ Discuss knowledge and offer perspectives ▪ Prepare ideas and resources to enable children to explore the topic ▪ Organise experiences to support learning about the project focus ▪ More often in the lead – in the drivers seat while negotiating with the passenger ▪ Document learning as a collection of stories about children 'finding out' about the project topic	▪ Listen more and talk less ▪ Closely follow children's thinking/actions and look for the ideas or concepts they are querying ▪ Share interest in the inquiry – it has relevance to teachers as well! ▪ Spend time supporting children to communicate ideas and thinking e.g. through visual media ▪ Consider experiences that may extend children's thinking or enable them to discover solutions ▪ More often following the lead of children – in the passenger seat negotiating with the driver (the child/ren) ▪ Document learning as a sequence of connected stories about children making sense of their inquiry

Children	▪ Child/ren's interest – a topic ▪ Discuss knowledge and offer perspectives ▪ Collaborate and negotiate what they would like to do next or how they could learn more ▪ Knowledge and understandings about the topic is the main focus for learning ▪ Actively participate in a social context	▪ Child/ren's inquiry or a wonder ▪ Talk and discuss, think and consider ▪ Collaborate and negotiate what they would like to do next or how they could learn more – often initiate the next step ▪ Capabilities and learning dispositions for ongoing learning are the main focus for learning – the process of coming to know as well as what they learn ▪ Actively participate in a social context
Parents/Whanau	▪ Become interested through their child's participation in centre experiences ▪ Discuss knowledge and offer perspectives ▪ Participate by contributing expertise and support ▪ Offer resources	▪ Participate through sharing in the inquiry – they are questioning too! ▪ Share and discuss their queries/theories with teachers ▪ Participate by contributing expertise and support ▪ Offer resources

Developing understandings of using inquiries as the basis for group learning experiences in the centre continues to be a focus for the teaching team as this research project comes to an end. In the following chapter, 'A way of being', we return to this shift in teacher understanding as we identify another influence that is contributing to the changes teachers are making to practice.

Igniting the magic - Concluding reflections

Community learning

Learning together is the 'magic' that drives this learning community. The enthusiasm and passion for learning – their own and others - modeled by teachers becomes infectious to other participants of the community. If they wane, community participation wanes.

Teachers hold a critical role in shaping the learning community. Teacher beliefs and practice in the early childhood centre create a culture for the community. The ways in which community members respond to the culture, or ways of doing things, forms the identity of the community. The practices teachers adopt have a direct effect on participation of others within their learning community. When the practices of the teaching team become tenuous or fragile, they can have a detrimental impact on the participation of other community members, children and parents.

Teachers who are motivated and driven by a community vision forge a collective teacher identity that can reshape, repair and build community identity.

Community identity is not a static concept. Participation in the learning community is a pathway to continuity of learning for individuals as experiences, knowledge and understandings gained in the early childhood context are layered over the experiences, knowledge and understandings each individual brings with them. Participating collectively is a pathway to future community learning as individual and collective learning is layered over historical and current centre practices, values and beliefs. Individual and community identity is co-emergent as both individuals and the community learn and transform through participation.

Change in a learning community can provide the opportunity for critical re-evaluation of the community's activity. Practices or ways of doing things never stay the same; they adapt and alter according to the influences of the community. Existing practices become a launching pad for developing new ways of doing things when members engage in honest reflective discussions. By taking notice of the 'voices' of the community, teachers can deconstruct practice, and then reconstruct it to develop a better match between their vision for participation in the community and practice. A learning community takes time and opens itself to taking risks while building community.

From the beginning of this project teachers identified with the view of children as competent and capable learners. As the research progressed, residue of the developmental perspective was discovered in teacher practices. It became apparent that adopting a socio-cultural co-constructivist pedagogical approach cannot be a simple task. Early childhood teachers, in general, have come from a historical position where developmental and behaviourist theories have dominated teacher training and practice. Our research verified the perspective that historical and cultural practices remain influential on current and future practices. It is not a simple matter of 'off with the old and on with the new'. This New Beginnings Preschool teacher researcher team has progressed in its socio-cultural understandings through intensive investigations of individual and collective practices. A question that remains in the minds of the teaching team is "are there further developmental theoretical influences remaining in practice that we have not yet questioned?" The answer to this remains unknown as the team continues to question, reflect on and challenge teaching practices in the centre.

Documentation of learning is a valued artifact of the community. It is a key feature of our Preschool's identity. The relationship between observation, documentation and teacher reflection

leads to informed parents which in turn leads to parental knowledge and informed parental participation. Children's learning is encouraged, supported and celebrated as connecting links between home and centre cohere.

Researcher learning

Influences and supporting literature

Initial understandings of socio-cultural theory supported teachers to recognize theory in practice. Teachers began to be adept at acknowledging the influence of varying theoretical perspectives. Influencing theory also provided confidence to the research team in the approach they took to their investigations because supporting literature affirmed that the dilemmas and emerging understandings of the team were relevant and worthwhile areas to continue investigating.

Influence gained through attendance at a one-day workshop (*The Stories we tell*. Shafer, A. 2005) proved to be significant as the ideas presented resonated with teachers' current dilemmas. Because a number of the teaching team attended the workshop they were able to immediately put new knowledge and understandings into practice as a team.

Research processes

Teacher documentation was the main tool of this research activity. Teaching and learning stories alongside the regular practice of documenting teacher reflections in journals provided the team with data based on centre practice. Documentation that offered researchers the opportunity to look back as well as to look forward proved to be invaluable as they strove to form a collective view of the learning community.

In addition, regular research practice of tape recording and transcribing discussion formed a memory of past thinking that assisted researchers in clarifying and debating collective perspectives. It enabled individual voices within the collective group to be heard. The end result was enhanced by reflection undertaken by the group as a whole.

Processes involved systematically looking to the past, the present and the future. Acknowledgement of historical influences contributed to teacher learning as teachers came to recognize differences in the impact of different theoretical influences on practice. Community identity incorporates the past and the future in the very process of negotiating the present.

Research investigations began in the domain of practice by focussing on the implementation of projects. The recursive element in all the processes was again evident as findings from previous research cycles, such as parental participation and visual art, contributed to the changes teachers

made to the ways they developed their practices in support of projects. Teachers were constantly building on current knowledge and experience and bringing that into their new investigations.

Chapter 5 - 'A way of being': Empowerment

"The research processes made me understand more about myself as well as the children. Overall, a very rewarding and beneficial experience." (Sarah Henriod, teacher researcher)

Introduction

This chapter posits the view that empowerment is a 'way of being' in a learning community. It is a part of the culture of the community. We described relationships in chapter 3 as the heart of a learning community. In this chapter we position empowerment as the spirit of the community.

The learning and teaching community described in this report is one that did not just naturally form when a group of people came together. The community we have described and illustrated is one that is underpinned by the principle of empowerment. Each chapter of this report has acknowledged that it is not the physical environment in which members of a community come together that contributes to building a learning community; rather this is grounded in the people, how they relate and what they do. The curriculum areas of project work and visual art provided the research team with focus lenses through which to view the community in action as they arrived at understandings of how a learning community can be developed and nurtured. It was discovered that it is what teachers do in these areas of curriculum that differentiates between a regular early childhood place of learning from an early childhood learning community.

The concept of empowerment is familiar to the early childhood sector in New Zealand as it is one of the four principles outlined in Te Whāriki, the early childhood curriculum (1996). Te Whāriki (p. 40) describes an empowering curriculum as one that enables children to:

- Take increasing responsibility for their own learning and care
- Develop an enhanced sense of self-worth, identity, confidence and enjoyment
- Contribute their own special strengths and interests
- Learn useful and appropriate ways to find out what they want to know
- Understand their own individual ways of learning and being creative.

These valued outcomes of the early childhood curriculum are explored in this chapter as we apply the understanding of empowerment that emerged through our research project. We attempt to describe the concept of empowerment as a spirit that permeates the centre.

The empowered community

Throughout this research report, teachers have been seen to nurture an empowering environment for members of their community. The stories of teaching and learning offer insight into our

understanding of the empowered child. For example, in chapter 2 Michael is empowered to take increasing responsibility for his learning as his ideas and contributions to the Sea and Wheels projects are encouraged. His confidence to participate strengthens and he gains an enhanced sense of self worth. Similar patterns can be seen in the stories of Blake (Red holden and Aeroplane stories) and Casey (Separation story) in chapter 3. These stories illustrate how the child's special interests and strengths are nurtured; the children gain confidence, enjoyment and a sense of identity within their relationships. Blake's story in particular describes him as a self-motivated learner who develops a positive view of his creativity as he learns different strategies to pursue his learning goals. This view of empowerment aligns with the intent of Te Whāriki. However, our perspective of empowerment moves us beyond recognizing outcomes for the individual child. The stories present a view of children, parents and teachers engaged in projects as empowered teachers and learners.

The active participation of the parents and whanau in projects contributed significantly to empowering the children in the stories shared in this report. In order to participate in such a manner, parents and whanau too have been empowered. Arthur et al. (1996) describe empowerment as *"taking a proactive stance that recognizes the competence people already have, or their potential competence"* (p. 13). The proactive stance taken by the teachers at New Beginnings Preschool reflects their belief that transforming relationships within the community are a catalyst for increased participation in children's learning. The relationships they strive to nurture are founded on a belief in the competence and confidence of all individuals as teachers and learners, and that collective participation contributes to the learning of all members of the community. The parents represented in the stories of Michael, Blake, Casey and Julie provide evidence of how, through open communication and collaboration with the centre staff, children and parents take on roles and responsibilities in teaching and learning practices. Through the collection of stories we gain insight into how parents themselves develop confidence and a sense of self-worth as educators in our community, how they take on increasing responsibility for their own participation as well as that of others, how they contribute their own special strengths and interests and join in learning in useful and appropriate ways.

Through the empowerment of parents and whanau, children's learning is supported and nurtured beyond the walls of the centre. If we view an empowering curriculum solely as applicable to children, we limit their learning opportunities. Continuity in children's learning across settings is a valuable outcome of an empowered community.

This research project found that through acknowledging and valuing individuals, interdependance within the community strengthens. Individuals are valued for who they are and are empowered to contribute and participate through their own choice. Through participation, trusting and respectful relationships among particpants are strengthened. Centre communication practices engage participants in ongoing dialogue that support relationships to further develop, based on shared responsibility and interdependance. Rogoff (2003) presents a view of interdependence in community; "*People can both co-ordinate with others and act autonomously"* (p. 202). This view of interdependence accords with our view of how empowerment, as the spirit of the community, leads to people engaging together in shared responsibilities while also having freedom to act and grow individually.

The role of the teacher

The significance of how teachers act, think and relate to others for achieving our vision has emerged in each chapter of this report. In chapter 2 the notion of individual identity is positioned as recognition of people as competent and confident teachers and learners. Chapter 3 identifies building respectful and trusting relationships within the community as needing actions with that intent on the part of the teacher. Relationships are viewed as a form of social glue that allows identity of individuals to interact with community identity. In chapter 4 community identity is described as forming as people interact and utilize community resources in everyday activity. These three chapters encapsulate the beliefs, values and practices that emerged and became strengthened among teachers through the three-year research journey.

As a learning community, New Beginnings Preschool embodies the aspirations and actions of the teachers. It is therefore reasonable to look to the teachers to understand how and why the spirit of empowerment exists as it does in this community. Our understanding of empowerment is that it is about giving over exclusive power and shifting to collaboration and negotiation. The traditional role of 'teachers as experts' is given over to one of 'teachers as co-learners', as expertise within the community is recognized, valued and utilized. Leadership in the community is not static or assigned to one individual or group of people but can emerge in response to differing situations. Teachers empower the community by providing space for others to adopt different roles and responsibilities, including leadership.

Discussion amongst the teacher researcher team about empowerment as a defining concept of the community proved initially to be problematic. When asked what makes this early childhood environment an empowering place to be teachers commented that "it is just the way we are'. The

team needed to reflect back on its research journey to identify how empowerment is realized in this community. The following comment offers insight into how the spirit of empowerment of the community is embedded in the minds of teachers. Teachers were discussing their motivation for and approach to addressing challenges in the centre programme:

> "*Maybe we're just looking for the way that's going to work for all of us so that we can all work together…. ongoing together, looking for a good positive outcome for us, the children, the families, we're looking for it to work all the way through. We had community on our mind as well ourselves."* (Team discussion, 28.2.06)

Decisions made by the teaching team focus on all members of the community rather than one group of participants or the other.

Findings 5.1: Empowerment in the things we do

The teaching team organizes 'ways of doing' in the centre programme: this enables participants to develop patterns of participation attuned to those 'ways'. Identity of others is directly shaped by the practices in which they learn. When practices are empowering, participants learn to be empowering. The research team drew on examples of some of the decisions they had made during the research project to illustrate this understanding:

- Provision of real and authentic art media and resources: children learn that they are trusted and respected as capable and competent learners and in turn display respect for the resources and environment.
- Removal of timetabled whole group times such as kai time and group times – the power of choice to participate is given over to the child. Children learn to participate as self-motivated learners and share their knowledge with others.
- Providing easy access to children's profile books and encouraging families to take these home: ownership of the books moved from centre to family. Families began contributing and sharing information.
- Addition of personally relevant comments and questions to parents in centre documentation: parents learn that their views are valued and make a difference for their child. Parents responded and participation in children's learning increased.
- Adoption of a friendly, chatty style of documentation for teaching and learning stories: power of knowledge moved from teacher to a shared power. Communications represented two-way communication rather than a one-way process. Parental participation in their child's learning and in centre practice increased.
- Developing consistent and familiar routines for group meetings with children: children learn to predict and plan for their participation. They take responsibility for organizing and maintaining group participation norms as well as taking the lead in discussions and direction of their investigations.
- Provision of space for and commitment to continuing children's explorations over as long as the child requires: children learn that their ideas are valued and

Findings : Empowerment in the things we do

that learning can take you to unknown places over time. One child's enthusiasm for learning can be motivational and empowering for others as they become drawn into episodes of co-learning.

Findings 5.2: Empowerment in the things we say

Empowerment is evident in the spoken words used by teachers. Participants become attuned to the way of being in the centre through interactional conversations. Spoken words are powerful indicators of how one is viewed by others. The teaching team acknowledged that through the research process they have co-constructed new terminology as signifiers of shared meanings and understandings. These terms can be viewed as expressions of empowering beliefs and understandings.

- Group meetings and group experiences : underpinning meanings were based on providing children choice of participation.
- BINGO: the term was introduced in recognition of participants engaged in shared meaning making. The term defined empowering relationships among teacher, parent and child.
- Descriptors of visual art teachers and learners: dreamer & player; contributor, participator, & facilitator; achiever; explorer; and communicator. These terms all encapsulate the image of a co-learner. The underpinning understanding is that people need to be empowered in their dual identities of learner and teacher in order to participate effectively as co-learners.
- Infant and toddlers rather than under two's: the term under two conjures up an impression that these children are 'not yet there". They are yet to become over two's; it creates a focus on the deficit. The use of infant toddler is an empowering term that acknowledges these children as competent capable learners in their own right.
- Project inquiry: acknowledges that learning is about active inquiry. The child's inquiry is central to the learning process and cannot be 'highjacked' by another persons interpretation of what they might be interested in. The child is empowered as a learner to pursue his/her inquiry.

Findings : Empowerment in the things we say

Findings 5.3: Empowerment in who we are

Teachers identify the key conviction that underpins empowerment in the centre as a belief in the competence and confidence of children and adults as both teachers and learners. This belief not only shapes how things are done and what is said but is also entrenched in the personae of teachers and is shown through teachers' interactions and self-identity. This teacher researcher team identifies the following characteristics of an empowering teacher*:*

- Willing to take risks and accept challenge
- Passionate and enthusiastic about teaching and learning
- Open to other people's ideas
- View of self as both learner and teacher
- Team player who willingly supports and nurtures others

Findings : Empowerment in who we are

- Willing to lead and to be led
- Accepting of change as part of every day life
- Ability to 'hear' people, not just listen to their words
- Respectful of every parent as an individual in their own right, not just as a child's parent
- Practises critical reflection, of self and collectively with the teaching team
- Effective communicator, able to engage with everyone without the 'baggage' of assumptions
- Committed to the aspirations of the teaching team and community
- Committed to guiding not controlling
- Can take responsibility for self as well as others

Findings : Empowerment in who we are

Teachers hold a view of themselves as capable and confident members of the community. They put 'willing to take risks and accept challenge' at the head of their list as it seems the most salient characteristic. One teacher put this understanding into words as she explained it as being a part of who each individual teacher is: "*In life, if you try something and make a mistake it's OK. You can undo that and try again. You just reflect on it and try again."* (Team discussion, 28.2.06)

This research project has involved this teaching team in investigating their own practices and understandings. Their journey of inquiry has involved seeking understandings about and solutions to dilemmas, as well as developing knowledge of effective approaches to enhancing learning for the children in their community. Their inquiries did not take them to seek out another person's answer, or to adopt a 'proven' recipe for success. They demonstrated a commitment to the community by taking on the challenge of the research project and taking risks in learning so that the outcome would better serve their learning comunity; the New Beginnings Preschool.

In developing this list of teacher characterisitcs the teacher researcher team reinforced the notion of respecting parents as crucial members of their community:

> *"We have to have the belief that parents are a crucial part of the community – without it there wouldn't be such a great need or desire to really make connections and relationships other than just 'hi, did you have a good day?' You have to make the effort."* (Team Discussion, 14.3.06)

The belief that children are capable learners and teachers was reinforced by the following: *"they (children) can take things to heights we don't know they are capable of."* (from teacher discussion, Feb. 2006).

Empowerment of teachers

We need to identify practices that teachers welcome and perform confidently in order to understand what enables teachers to be empowering in their role. We explore two main practices to discuss empowerment of teachers: centre leadership and management practices, and the practice of action research.

Empowered by centre leadership and management practices

The Management Board of the centre consists of a group of parents who voluntarily take on centre governance responsibilities. This group played an integral role in the centre from the initial stage of submitting an expression of interest in the Centres of Innovation (COI) programme. The decision to approach the COI challenge was not taken lightly. The management board believed in the competence of the teachers, the competence of the children, and the competence of themselves as representatives of the centre's parents. The ways in which roles and responsibilities of the management board are distributed is reflective of this belief. Each person initially takes on a particular responsibility. These responsibilities can be given over to another at any time as the incumbent shares their knowledge and initiates the new person into the role. Overall centre management responsibility is shared between the licensee (board chair) and the head teacher. This structure results in a distribution of power where no one person holds exclusive control. The voices of teachers and parents are represented in management decisions.

The management board empowered the teaching/research team by supporting practices such as:

- Regular weekly non-contact time for individual teachers as well as for the teaching team to meet and engage in professional dialogue
- Staffing above regulatory adult: child ratios
- Establishing curriculum budgets so teachers have autonomy in decision-making.

The head teacher holds a critical role as pivot between the management and teaching groups. She holds dual roles of teaching and management responsibilities. Her leadership cannot be overlooked as we consider empowerment in this community. As explained earlier in this report the innovative ideas for teaching and learning using a project approach and visual art originated with the head teacher. The empowering structures and practices of the centre had been established under the influence of the head teacher's beliefs and vision. The development of the innovative practices in the centre, as told in this report, are illustrative of how an empowered community can progress and take ownership of new inspirational ideas. Leadership was not about a hierarchical head showing

the way but about provoking thinking and empowering others to learn and grow, while at the same time engaging in learning with the community.

Empowerment through research involvement

As each chapter has discussed in the final reflective comments, teachers' participation as practitioner researchers in this research project has proven to be an empowering experience.

Finding 5.4: Empowerment through research involvement

Participation in this research project enabled teachers to:

- focus on their practice,
- draw on theoretical tools and understandings to strengthen their investigations into practice,
- gain insights from literature to assist in understanding practice, and
- participate in processes that enable individual and collective knowledge to develop.

Findings : Empowerment through research involvement

The result of this empowerment has been implementation of practices that are personally and theoretically sound. Teachers in this environment have not developed as clones of each other but have gained strength in their individuality as well as their collective practice. They have been empowered in their own learning and development as early childhood professionals.

The infant toddler teachers' experience

Teacher learning about the participatory action research process has had an impact on pedagogical practices in the centre. When the research began, teachers identified a similarity between the action research process and their regular curriculum management process. They adopted familiar terms to describe the cyclical steps of action research (see chapter 1 – Research approaches - for a detailed explanation). Over time teachers gained knowledge of action research through their experience, and began to use action research language to define their assessment, planning and evaluation practices. This approach began in the infant and toddler area. Over the period of a year, two teachers adopted the framework of reflection, design, fieldwork, analysis and conclusion, and plan/reflect (Wadsworth, 1991) as a guide for emergent curriculum planning in the infant and toddler programme. This occurred at a time when both teachers were new to this area of teaching and were exploring together how they could support project work for infant and toddlers. Their experience is told in the following infant and toddler story of empowerment.

Empowerment in action within the infant and toddler environment

Authors: Debbie and Dawn

The following story describes an approach to working with infants and toddlers based on the philosophy of empowerment: empowerment of the child, empowerment of the parent, empowerment of the teacher. As has been said in the introduction to this chapter, it is the practices of the teachers that differentiate an early childhood learning community from a regular early childhood place of learning.

Introduction

The beginning of 2005 saw two new infant and toddler teachers begin working in this area of the centre. We had both spent the majority of our time in ECE working with over two year old children, therefore to come into an infant and toddler environment brought with it a variety of questions. What do relationships look like for this age group? What was does group learning look like for this age group? What is our image of the infant and toddler? We chose to refer to the environment as 'infant and toddler' due to the conations that go with the term 'under-two'. This commonly used ECE term appears to describe the two year old age as some sort of 'benchmark' age, which then could mean that those children who are younger than that age are somehow 'lesser than'. It would probably be fair to say that we both had similar assumptions regarding this age group when we first started – however the year was going to allow us to discover something completely different!

We began the year in the only way we knew how – look for an interest that was emerging from one or a few children and start from there. At the time there were two children in particular who seemed to need the outside environment as part of the daily settling process. This raised the question - 'why are children so interested in the outside environment'. This interest as a project inquiry was initially documented in the regular learning story format with the addition of our weekly emergent planning reflections. We used the 'noticing, recognizing, responding' framework.

Influence of theory

Very quickly it seemed that this 'project' was going to look different from those done with the 2-5 year aged children. Individual learning appeared stronger in this area. The following important themes emerged for us during this first project inquiry:

- A sound understanding of the *intra-personal* (Rogoff, 2003) view of the 'social individual' developed. Documentation allowed us to create an on-going in-depth view of the child, while at the same time focusing on the important people, places and things that surrounded the child.
- Communication practices that strengthen parental engagement were analyzed as we formulated a *five-level framework of communication and documentation* that supports relationship development between parent and teacher. This framework can be found in chapter 3 of this report in "Casey's story".

Theory as a foundation for practice

For about a month we slowly introduced more and more natural materials into the environment after one of us had read an article *Experimenting with the world: John Dewey and the early childhood classroom* (Cuffaro, 1995), viewing the *social individual* from a Deweyan perspective. This article gave guidance to the social individual, group experiences, and connections with home and community. Where Cuffaro (ibid) talked about using materials and experiences as 'play partners', we chose to interpret this as being 'natural' materials for the purposes of assisting our own thinking. As a result, the second project inquiry for the year presented itself – "*The use of natural materials as a way of extending active participation within the inside environment".*

Strengthening teacher understanding of participatory action research

Early April saw one us having to give a talk at the Christchurch College of Education on action research. We had both just presented at the recent "Too Infantastic" Conference. These two events served to provoke us to explore action research as a form of emergent curriculum planning for their project work. We began to incorporate the participatory action research process of: reflection, design, fieldwork, analysis and conclusion, and planning (Wadsworth, 1991) into project work planning. Using this action research methodology for emergent planning enabled us to become far more aware of the 'journey' of the inquiry as it moved through the stages. We felt that we were 'paving the way' for a new approach to working with infants and toddlers:

- In the use of participatory action research processes for curriculum planning.
- In the introduction of a new curriculum approach for infants and toddlers based on natural materials. We had an 'innate understanding' of how natural materials stimulate and inspire very young children's imagination and creativity.

We became aware that an 'overall project' had now embedded itself: not just in our practice, but in the practice of the infant and toddler community as a whole i.e.; *'the use of natural materials'.* Read on and we'll tell you how. Moreover this current exploration was now being interpreted as more of a 'research cycle of inquiry', rather than another 'project'.

Engaging parental interest

Parents had come on-board with the idea of the use of natural materials with their children. Natural materials were being displayed visually in the morning alongside other 'found' objects – children were naturally curious as to the 'open-ended' nature of the materials. Musical instruments 'displayed' alongside dolls, shells and stones of many various colours complemented the equipment on offer to the children. Play dough was replaced by clay, and plastic cutters were replaced by shells. Children's and parents' curiosity was continually being stimulated. The environment was changing as 'nature' was on display inside creating an aesthetically pleasing and calming atmosphere. Teachers, parents and children were all talking about the beauty of nature.

Rethinking 'visual art' for infants and toddlers

The philosophy of this particular infant and toddler environment is that all materials should be accessible for the children so that they can access them when they want to. Therefore, the door to the cupboard where art materials are kept is always open with the materials kept at a low shelf level for easy accessibility for the young children. Children

experienced paint, clay, pens, collage etc. as a normal part of their everyday programme. There was another layer of 'visual' art that became apparent within this environment and that was the display philosophy. Displays included teacher's own art-work and children's work alongside natural materials both inside and outside. The term 'visual' extended past its traditional sense. Visual art was in the environment! The environment was visual art!

Members of the infant and toddler community became empowered as artists in their own right. They took their visual art display ability into their own private homes etc. Visual art had certainly embedded itself into the infant and toddler community as a whole. Visual art helped create relationships that were unique due to the participant's enjoyment of the visual display of natural materials.

Planning for the new outside area

By this time it was clear to parents and teachers that something needed to be done about the outside environment to improve its aesthetics and value what it could contribute to the infants and toddlers curriculum and inquiries. So a meeting was planned to explore what we (the infant and toddler community) wanted the outside environment to look like. Interested parents and teachers attended. Parents suggested a working bee so a date was set. On the day those parents and teachers that could come gave up seven hours of their Sunday to develop a beautiful natural environment. Teachers and parents shared responsibility for the final 'look' of the outside area. All agreed it was well worth the effort of everyone involved.

Teacher reflection

In the 'analysis and conclusion' stage of the participatory action research cycle we reflected on the way parents had became empowered to make decisions for their children's outdoor environment. We had both made it clear that this was the parents' responsibility, as well as the teachers. This decision-making process was very evident during the time when one teacher went off to buy more native plants with a parent and on return found a whole area that had been designed, planned and created by the parents. We documented our reflections about this experience during our weekly planning non-contact time. We were interested in evaluating how our practices had attracted parental participation in the project inquiry. Our documentation shows that our attention moved from parental involvement to questions about and recognition of children's learning:

Taken from teachers' planning journal, October 2005.

Due to the on-going nature of this inquiry, we wanted to entice further participation from parents. We felt that a good way to do this was to present all information regarding the project in photo and narrative format within the infant and toddler area. We saw that there were differing reasons for this visual documentation as the journey of the inquiry preceded; they were:

- *Invite participation through information giving, i.e.: newsletter put up on door (not, however given out personally to each parent),*
- *Entice participation through information giving, i.e.: reporting back what had been brought through teacher reflections,*
- *Inspire the contribution of ideas through photographic media, i.e.: examples of outside environments found in magazines, and*
- *Celebrate participation through sharing narratives and photos of the working-bee; this served to strengthen the relationships of those people who participated, while also informing the community as a whole.*

Identifying increased parent participation, community spirit, engagement

The parents who have participated to a more in-depth level within the project have also been involved in a process where their relationships have been strengthened between teachers. Community spirit has developed throughout the project as we have noticed people who are not directly involved with our infant and toddlers area, wanting to become involved, This includes some over-two teachers, partners of teachers, and the teacher who works with the infant and toddlers part time and her family. Even an over-two parent (who was on the committee) felt a desire to participate. The philosophy behind the new environment has become a talking point with new and existing parents. It allows you a common ground to talk with to parents, ie: we all have connections with the natural environment (if we think back to when we were children).

We reflected on an environment that we called – 'inside outside / outside in':

The previous inquiry looked at the use of natural materials as a form of 'play and display' for the inside. This current inquiry saw us, initially, exploring what a 'play and display' with natural materials concept would look like for the outside. Our data (in the form of photos) supports increased gross motor experiences in action. We have had to remind ourselves to record this use of the environment as the children are naturally setting their own new challenges on such a regular basis that it seems commonplace. We have noticed that while this current inquiry was based on looking at the outside, the inside use of natural materials has strengthened even more. This tells us that what was originally a project inquiry has now become our curriculum, flowing between the inside and the outside.

Identifying children's strengthened engagement

It became apparent throughout the introduction of natural materials into the children's environment that provision was made for more exploratory play spaces. The transformation of the outside play space has allowed for:

- *Individual children's needs and challenges to be met,*
- *The provision of materials that have more than one purpose, which meet the needs of different abilities,*
- *Children to sit and wonder, and take time out,*
- *Children to be stimulated to try out theories, to set their challenges and feel powerful,*
- *Continuity of children's experiences/learning between home and centre,*
- *An affinity or deeper connection with the natural world around them that provides for a strengthened sense of well-being,*
- *The provision of materials that adults can relate to and play with as well, grounded in the familiar, making past connections,*
- *Parents and teachers to contribute to the environment as well as children as they come to it from a shared perspective, and*
- *An environment that commands respect.*

Redefining project work - for the infants and toddlers

As we progressed through the projects of 2005, we began to interpret a different type of project, in fact we became increasingly uncomfortable with the term project-based learning and become more comfortable with the terminology of inquiry-based learning. The word project didn't seems to sit comfortably with the inquiry developments that occurred. The term 'inquiry' is one that we interpret as allowing for all inquiries within the community. The 'nature' of the inquiry will look different for different participants.

Documentation plays a huge part within the process of an inquiry. As the documentation develops and strengthens so do the parent/teacher/child relationships. The 'open nature' of an inquiry means that everyone's participations is acknowledged as being valuable. Everyone's participation is documented - the child, the parent/whanau, other children involved in the child's learning, and the centre as a whole. Inquiry based learning invites participation, which in turn builds empowerment. Children's natural curiosities are repsonded to as adults ask more and 'tell' less. We came to the infant and toddler environment with a belief in the 'competent child'. After a year of working together we have also gained a picture of the 'competent parent', and view our practice as being 'competent teachers'. Competence creates a sense of empowerment. As children, parents and teachers become empowered within this community of learners, a community of inquiry develops; one that `is built on a philosophy of participation.

Reshaping 'emergent planning' through the use of Participatory Action Research

As we incorporated the principles of participatory action research into our reflection and planning process, we began to view a new area of interest as a 'spin-off' cycle from the previous inquiry rather than a completely different project. The following framework guides our emergent planning process:

1. *Reflection* starts the process off as teachers allow time to for a new interest to emerge, children's individual or group learning is documented using the learning story process during this time. Teachers continue to meet weekly to reflect together.
2. *Design* – this stage may occur over one or two meetings – teachers have taken the time to reflect on the interest and are now at a point where they interpret the area of inquiry, and design where to from here.
3. *Fieldwork* – this stage is the central part of the inquiry and occurs over many weeks. As the inquiry interest is identified it allows children, parents and teachers to work together in a atmosphere of participation. On-going documentation records everyone's participation within the inquiry. Continuity is strengthened within the environment.
4. *Analysis and Conclusion* – this stage sees the inquiry interest coming to an end. Once again the teachers spend at least a couple of weeks discussing the progress of the inquiry and what they have discovered through out the process.
5. *Plan* – A new area of inquiry is developing as a 'spin-off' from the previous inquiry. This area is identified, and the teachers' then move through the process again as a new cycle begins!

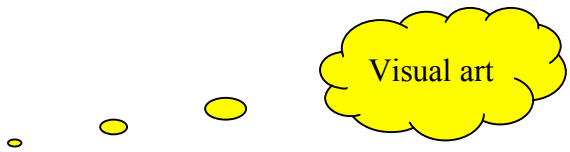
Embedding participatory action research as regular practice

Over the year the infant and toddler teachers shared their work with the whole team at weekly meetings. Over-two teachers have now begun adopting action research processes into their own work. This has occurred alongside recognition of the emerging insight described at the end of chapter 4; the shift from project work to project inquiries. It would appear that there have been two influences to this shift. One was when teachers were introduced to new thinking about children's theories and queries, and the other has been the experience gained through using participatory action research as a process for teacher learning. Action research begins with an inquiry, it is about participants using their own practices and the tools available to them to explore and uncover new learning as they pursue their query. The framework of participatory action research sits comfortably with the ways teachers aspire to work with children's inquiries. This will be a continued area of inquiry for the teaching team. Teachers acknowledge that their experience in action research over the past three years will have a lasting impact. Perhaps it is as we earlier described: participants in a community develop patterns of participation aligned to the practices in which they learn. These teachers have attuned themselves to participatory action research practices that have proven to be of value in different ways, individually as well as collectively.

A way of being - Concluding reflections

Community learning

The spirit of empowerment permeates the people, place and things at New Beginnings Preschool. Empowerment, as the spirit of the community, fosters interdependent relationships between children, teachers and parents/whanau. Empowering relationships are viewed as a form of social glue that allows identity of individuals to interact with community identity so that each is, in some complex iterative way, constantly feeding into and creating the other.



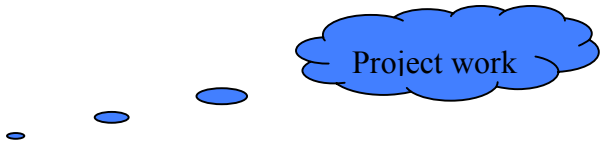
Visual Art

Empowerment of teachers played a strong part in their investigations into visual art in the centre. As described in chapter two, the initial investigation originated through a growing awareness of differing perspectives and a need for this team to firmly position their own beliefs and practices.

The research journey enabled teachers to come to understand themselves in relation to visual art in their own lives. Participation in art workshops offered teachers something that they otherwise did not have the opportunity for within this busy early childhood centre. They talked about how they were able to socialize and 'experience being themselves' as opposed to meeting for regular centre administrative requirements. This proved to be important in strengthening respectful and trusting relationships within the teaching team. As individuals shared personal information about their feelings and experiences, team relationships strengthened, as did the way they worked together in the programme. Acceptance of diverse perspectives within the teaching team reached out into the community. Teachers spoke of being more open and in tune with others, having more tolerance and understanding. Teachers came to understand visual art as a very personal expression. The expression frequently used to describe this was that 'art is like a window to the soul.'

As individual teachers felt empowered through their own special strengths and abilities, they were motivated to learn more. Teacher stories contained in this report are a testimony to this learning. A key outcome in this area of investigation has been the emergence of teachers' conscious knowledge and understandings of this community's visual art values and beliefs, or in other words an understanding of the paradigm that has become embedded through practice in the community. The principles that underpin the approach taken to visual art teaching and learning in the centre can be summed up as:

- All participants are empowered as teachers and learners. We learn from and respect each other's approach to art.
- Individuality in art learning and creation contributes to community learning.
- Art and creativity lives within – expression is a personal pursuit.
- Through art one expresses feelings, emotions, ideas, imagination, thinking and wonderings.
- Art is a tool for communicating and creating, as well as a product for appreciating.
- Art learning involves a body of knowledge, 'know how' and self-efficacy.



Project work

Project work practices in the centre programme evolved over the three years of this research project as the teaching team engaged in discussions and explorations to review and develop practice. The opportunities for discussion proved to be instrumental to strengthening the collective vision of the teaching team. Discussions provided the thinking time, when teachers reflected on what was

happening for children and families in relation to their vision for project work in the curriculum. Teachers were empowered through the research process to find their own way as they deconstructed and reconstructed practices and understandings. They commented on how important it was not to be guided by a sense of needing to 'do it the right way'. There was no need to adhere to a recipe for implementing project work in the centre.

Changes in project work practices occurred as the teaching team experienced change in team membership. Throughout periods of staff change the teaching team never lost sight of the key principle underpinning the project approach to curriculum; the socio-constructivist theoretical view of learning and development. The understanding of children, parents and teachers working collaboratively to develop shared understandings and aquire new knowledge through explorations and investigations of things that are relevant and meaningful to all parties was passed on to new members of the teaching team. In the early phase, exisiting staff continued project practices and new staff joined in.

At a time when a number of staff changes occurred within a short time-frame, alongside changes in existing teacher responsibilities, change impacted more dramatically on the community. Exisiting practices were questioned and the decision was made to remove one of the supporting project work structures; group time. Unknowingly, the team removed one of the cultural practices of the learning community and, as a result, community participation suffered. Group times had provided a familiar routine and time for shared communcation among community members. The community became disempowered as this avenue for particpation dissappeared. During this time the vision of community engaging together in children's learning was retained by both teachers and parents. This provided the teaching team with the impetus to continue to work toward re-igniting the magic the community once had. The memory of what the community had once enjoyed was present in the centre; families had experienced it, documentation provided evidence of it, longer-term teachers talked about it, and children's learning stories showed that they were continuing to use similar processes for their learning. The vision was owned by the community, teachers had responsibility for reconstructing practices that would enable the vision to re-ignite. Participation in this research project provided extra motivation for continuing to reconstruct projects in the programme.

Projects became re-established in the centre and once again there was excitement in the community as parents, children and teachers engaged together in learning. Teachers found they needed to focus on what was happening for their community rather than what was, or was not, happening for the teaching team in order to find a direction to build their project practices once again. The teaching team is but one group of people who make up the community. In a learning community, allowing

the needs of one group to overshadow that of other participants can be detrimental to the community or in other words, disempowering.

Some practices that now support projects differ in ways from previous practices. Changes include:

- Documenting children's learning to invite two-way communication with parents
- Documenting children's learning as a sequence of connected stories through which individual children's learning and progress is visible
- Re-introducing group meetings at a different time of the day with the understanding that children joined in of their own choice i.e. when it held relevance and meaning for them
- A mixed age range of children (2-5 year olds) can work together on project inquiries in the over two area
- Forming projects around an inquiry rather than a topic

Many of the original practices that supported project implementation remain, such as:

- Teachers working together during group meetings with children to facilitate and document the discussions
- Collating documentation about children's involvement in children's profile books that parents and children can access and take home
- Teachers meeting during non-contact time to analyse and discuss children's learning, and to prepare for how they intend to respond
- Providing varied opportunities throughout a project to encourage and support parents/whanau as interested and willing participants
- Documenting projects as journeys of learning that are collated into books or wall displays

Researcher learning

Research processes

The final stages of this research project involved the teacher researcher team in preparing, drafting, revising and writing the final research report. As a collaborative exercise the team participated in reflective discussions that looked back on the full picture of the three-year research journey. Findings were affirmed and consolidated as members related their experiences to the written

document. The notion of empowerment was explored in depth during the process of reflection and writing.

Teacher reflection on involvement in participatory action research processes held strong resemblance to the vision of an empowering curriculum for children as expressed in Te Whāriki. Teacher researchers concur with the belief that participatory action research has enabled them to:

- Take increasing responsibility for their own learning and care
- Develop an enhanced sense of identity, self-worth, confidence and enjoyment
- Contribute their own special strengths and interests
- Learn useful and appropriate ways to find out what they want to know
- Understand their own individual ways of learning and being creative.

Chapter 6 – Reflections on life long learning

"I will always carry on what I learnt by incorporating my knowledge into wherever I teach.' (Carolyn Adams, teacher researcher)

Introduction

This research project has nurtured life long learning through the interactions of teachers, parents, and children within a learning community. Teacher practice is guided by the principles of Te Whāriki and therefore experienced as the community participates in the life of the centre. Participation in the innovative practices of visual art and project work has contributed to learning for all participants in the centre. Ways in which learning manifests itself is not always immediately evident within the early childhood environment however, we have gained some insight into how our practices nurture the foundations for on-going learning. The story shared by a parent in this chapter provides a strong sense of how valuable participation in a community of learners can be for children and adults alike.

Te Whāriki as curriculum for a learning community

The chapters of this report have been structured around individual identity, relationships, community identity and empowerment. If another set of lenses were over-layered on these chapters it would bring into focus the principles of Te Whāriki, the early childhood curriculum. Individual identity has all the hallmarks of the principle holistic development, community identity is strongly embedded in the beliefs that underpin the principle family and community, while the principles of empowerment and relationships are clearly evident.

- Individual identity – Holistic development
- Relationships - Relationships
- Community identity – Family and community
- Empowerment – Empowerment

This learning community considers that the intent of Te Whāriki, the early childhood curriculum, is applicable to every member. An empowering curriculum enables all community participants to have access to the valued areas of learning contained in the curriculum. It would be disempowering to participants of this community to assume the early childhood curriculum principles are applicable to children only.

New Beginnings Preschool exists and lives as a community of learners as the principles of Te Whāriki are enacted for all members of its community. The underpinning aspiration of this description is that all participants of the community, as 'ready, willing, and able' learners, will enrich their learning through participation in the early childhood environment and that this learning will equip them with knowledge, skills and dispositions that will enable them to continue learning in other contexts. This holistic view of learning is not always visible within the early childhood setting within the timeframe of the child and families' attendance. Teachers can notice aspects of learning; however, the true significance does not necessarily show itself until the learner displays his/her competence in other settings. During the final stages of this research project the teacher researcher team gained some insights that affirmed and supported the view that children and adults benefit from participating in an early childhood learning community. The following reflection from a parent, Rachel Barrie, is one example of this understanding. More often than not parents share their experiences through informal conversation. Teachers gain a general sense that experience in early childhood is benefiting their community but this cannot easily be substantiated.

Rachel had shared her interest in visual art during the first year of the research project at which time she was puzzled as to why she saw such a difference between approaches in early childhood and school. Her older son had just begun schooling. She made a comment about her younger son at that time, *"I can only hope that what he (Cole) is learning now will stay with him even when he is told to paint a picture a certain way."* Eighteen months later Rachel documented the following story for this report after firstly excitedly telling the teachers. The story illustrates that it is not only the child's prior learning that supports his confidence to participate competently in another setting but also the parent's. Rachel has confidence in her knowledge to be able to participate by sharing her knowledge with another.

Rachel's story about Cole at school

Author Rachel, February 2006

When Cole had been at school for about two months, his classroom's topic was dinosaurs. One day they were to sew around a Dinosaur outline on material with a needle and thread. Cole had finished his quite a bit ahead of the rest of his class mates and wanted to go and show his other teacher (his class had two teachers) who was in another part of the school at the time. As he seemed quite proud of his work and had finished early he was allowed to go and show her. The next day when I went into school his teacher was quite excited about his sewing and was commenting on how he

had been so quick to grasp the concept of it. This was my opportunity to tell her all about Cole's old preschool and how they were part of COI. I explained all about it and that we had an art teacher, Libby. I told her all the really neat things that the children did with Libby and that Cole had already done sewing with Libby among other things. Cole's teacher was really interested in this and wanted to know all the things they had done. I felt really proud to be explaining this to a school-teacher, and also excited that Cole had been able to experience doing art with Libby, as she allowed the children to explore their creativity. In my experience (with having an older child at school) once they go to school, they are all told how to do their paintings, build their buildings etc. and all their pictures look the same as their classmates'.

Cole really enjoyed his time at preschool and his creativity has continued to show and I hope it always will.

Rachel.

References

Arthur, L., Beecher, B., Dockett, S., Farmer, S. & Death, E. (1996). *Programming and planning in early childhood settings.* NSW: Harcourt Brace.

Arthur, L., Beecher, L., Death, E., Dockett, S. & Farmer, S (2005). *Programming and planning in early childhood settings* (2nd ed.). Victoria: Thomson Learning.

Berk, L. & Winsler, A. (1995). *Scaffolding children's learning: Vygotsky and early childhood education.* Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Brookfield, S. D. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher.* San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass.

Brownlee. P.(1990). *Magic Places: young children's creative work* (2nd ed.) Wellington: Bryce Francis Graphics Ltd.

Bullough, R.V. & Gitlin, A.D. (2001). *Becoming a student of teaching: Linking knowledge, production and practice.* (2nd Ed.) New York & London. Routledge-Falmer.

Burr, V. (1995). *An introduction to social constructionism.* London: Routledge.

Carr, M. (1998). *Assessing children's learning in early childhood settings*, a series of three video tapes and a workshop booklet for practitioners. Wellington: NZCER.

Carr, M. (2001). *Assessment in early childhood settings: Learning stories*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Clandinin, D., & Connelly, F. (2000). *Narrative inquiry, experience and story in qualitative research.* San Francisco: Jossey-Boss Publishers.

Cowie, B. & Carr, M. (2005). The consequences of socio-cultural assessment. In A. Anning, J. Cullen & M. Fleer. (Eds). *Early childhood education: Society and culture*. London: Sage. Chapter 8. 95 – 106.

Cuffaro, H. (1995). *Experimenting with the world: John Dewey and the early childhood classroom.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Drewery, W. & Bird, L. (2004). *Human Development in Aotearoa: A journey through life* (2nd ed.). Manukau City: McGraw-Hill Book Company New Zealand Ltd.

Edwards, C., Gandini, L. & Forman, G. (1996). *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education.* New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Farquhar, S. (2003). *Quality teaching early foundations: Best evidence synthesis* (Ministry of Education). Wellington: Childforum Research Network.

Gardner, H. (1980). *Artful scribbles: The significance of children's drawing.* USA: Basic Books.

Giudici, C., Rinaldi, C. & Krechevski, M. (Eds) (2001). *Making learning visible: Children as individuals and group learners.* Reggio Emilia: Reggio Children.

Gunn, A. (1998). *Visual art in early childhood centres.* Unpublished MA thesis, University of Canterbury, Christchurch.

Haggerty, M. (1998). *Sighting, citing and siting Te Whāriki: Exploring the use of video feedback as a tool for critical pedagogy: The experiences of five early childhood centres.* Unpublished MEd thesis, Victoria University, Wellington.

Helm, J. & Katz, L. (2001). *Young investigators: The project approach in the early years.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Jordan, B. (2003). *Scaffolding learning and co-constructing in early childhood: Teachers' professional development modelling their sharing of power with children.* Paper presented at the 8th early childhood convention, Palmerston North, Sept. 24th, 2003.

Kvale, S. (1996). Themes of postmodernity. In W.T. Anderson (Ed.). *The Fontana post modernism reader* (pp. 18-25). London: Fontana Press.

Lewis, P. (1998). *Art in early childhood.* Unpublished M.Ed. thesis, University of Canterbury, Christchurch.

Lyotard, J.-F. (1984). *The post-modern condition: A report on knowledge* (G. Bennington & B. Massumi, Trans.). Manchester: Manchester University Press.

MacNaughton, G. & Hughes, P. (2003). Parents and communities. *Shaping early childhood: Learners, curriculum and contexts.* Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

Mayo, H. E. (2003). *Toward collective praxis in teacher education: Complexity, pragmatism and practice.* Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Canterbury, Christchurch.

Mills, G. (2003). *Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher* (2nd ed.). Ohio: Merrill Prentice Hall.

Ministry of Education. (1996). *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mā ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early childhood curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.

Ministry of Education. (2002). *Call for expression of interest in 1st round of early childhood centres of innovation research project*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

Ministry of Education. (2003). *Agreement for the delivery of centre of innovation research services*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

Phillips, G., McNaughton, S. & MacDonald, S. (2002). *Picking up the pace*. Auckland: The Child Literacy Foundation and Woolf Fisher Research Centre.

Puckett,M & Diffily, D. (1999). *Teaching young children: An introduction to the early childhood profession.* Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace.

Rogoff, B. (1994). Developing understanding of the idea of communities of learners. *Mind, Culture and Activity,* 1. No 4(Fall), pp.209 - 229.

Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Ryder, D. & Wright, J. (2003). *Building a community of learners: New Beginnings Preschool.* Unpublished. Paper presented at Teachers making a difference conference, Christchurch College of Education. 23rd April 2004.

Ryder, D. & Wright, J. (2004). *Multiple voices and multiple layers of learning: Exploring notions of dialogue and engagement.* Paper presented at the Sixth Child and Family Policy Conference, Dunedin, 7th -9th July 2005.

Saul, J. R. (2001). *On equilibrium.* Camberwell, Victoria, Australia: Penguin.

Schlager, M. S., & Fusco, J. (2002). Teacher professional development, technology, and communities of practice: Are we putting the cart before the horse? *The Information Society*, 19, 203-220.

Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner*: *how professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.

Shafer, A. (2005). *The stories we tell: Finding, understanding and enhancing our own stories through documentation.* Paper presented at Learning Partners Workshop, Christchurch College of Education, 9 July, 2005.

Skyttner, L. (1996). *General systems theory: An introduction.* Basingstoke: MacMillan Press.

Smith, M. (2003). *Dialogue and conversation*. Downloaded from http://www.infed.org/bibio/b-dialog.htm, 2004.

Stonehouse, A & Gonzalez-Mena, J (2004). *Making links: A collaborative approach to planning and practice in early childhood services.* Sydney: Pademelon Press.

Stronach, I., & MacLure, M. (1997). Educational research undone: The postmodern embrace. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Visser, J. (2003). *Process, enjoyment and participation: Reconceptualising the educator's image of the infant and toddler as artist.* Auckland: Manukau Institute of Technology.

Wadsworth, Y. (1991). *Everyday evaluation on the run*. Melbourne: Action Research Issues Association (Incorporated).

Wadsworth, Y. (1998). What is Participatory Action Research? *Action Research International*.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wenger, E. (2005). *Communities of practice seminar booklet*. Handout presented at Christchurch College of Education workshop, 28th July 2005.

Wheatley, M. J. (1999). *Leadership and the new science : Discovering order in a chaotic world*. (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Wylie, C. (2001). *Ten years old and competent.* Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Coming to know self as a visual arts teacher: the collation of personal reflections

Teacher	**Prior view /experience** (tacit knowledge/ theories)	**Key shifts**	**Emerging/consolidated beliefs and understandings** (explicit theories)	**What contributed?**
Teacher 1	Not enjoyable drawing experiences Amazement at and connectedness felt with Maori art Unsure/afraid – no talent	Confidence Enjoyment/ excitement Interest in art experiences	About supporting the process rather than focus on representation Art is about individuality Teacher role is to support children in their explorations through art and art processes Teachers and children are both learners and teachers – it is a shared relationship	Participation with children Own enjoyment Watching the centre as a whole develop Conversations with peers and parents Trying things out, watching others
Teacher 2	Compared self against competent family members Self as arty – not artist Limited school influence "Passion, time and technique are ingredients of an artist"	Increased knowledge Confidence Enthusiasm Enjoyment Relaxed in attitude and responses	Art and being an artist is for everyone Being an artist can look different for everyone Art is a social activity based on relationships and learning from/with others Art is fun – you want to share the experience Art shows a feeling The process is a joy – the product can also be	Listening to others Reading literature Participating with children Art workshop - having a go
Teacher 3	Schooling and holiday programmes contributed to positive view Access to resources at home	Confidence	Art is a social activity of this community Gain learning and development (in other areas) through being creative Not always only about the process but sometimes needs to be the product – valuing the product alongside the visual art process	Participating with children Prior experience and training

	2 years art school "How good painting and being creative makes me feel and develop as a person"		Child develops sense of self (inner development) and enjoyment of their achievement Art is a child directed exploration – pursuing own ideas, goals and voice Based on relationships of respect and honesty Visual art experiences require time Sharing photographical record can better capture sense of enjoyment/excitement Teachers need to recognise own strengths and pass on what they enjoy	
Teacher 4	Feeling of being hopeless in comparison to family – no innate ability	Developed under-standings about copying Teacher initiated and led art experiences are not beneficial to children's learning Relaxed Confidence	Teacher's role is to support and extend children's art experiences Children are wonderful teachers for others (role models) Both process and product are important Benefits to both teacher and children if children determine the direction Copying can be a valid technique – there are benefits to both copier and the copied There is a subtle distinction between copying the idea and copying the product – the first feeling more comfortable Working with small numbers preferable to larger groups	Participating with children Enjoyment of the process Reflecting on own learning stories
Teacher 5	"Eye for detail and beauty part of my personality" Fond memories from kindergarten through primary but not high school Enjoyed again once left school and during training	Comfortable Free to explore Enjoyment	Children need opportunity to develop competence in use of skills, processes and media. Teachers need to value visual art – to be shown in their practice with children. Time is necessary for children to make decisions. Teachers need to be knowledgeable enough to be able to confidently communicate, guide and teach skills	Confronted by differing practices - reflection Reading literature Conferences/workshops Discussion with others

Teacher 6	Self love of art and creativity Involvement throughout personal and professional life "Through art/creativity you gain the knowledge, skills and ability to be able to relate to the world around you" "In every person there is creativity – it is our gift within"	No-one needs to be the same or do things the same way Teachers have differing prior experiences and knowledge to draw from	Children's work and space needs to be respected Some children need uninterrupted space and time to work while others need safe space to socialise and appreciate Children display their competence through guiding others Through participating in a wide range of experiences children build up a large skill base that can be confidently taken into all other areas of learning within and beyond the centre Time to watch and learn from others is a valuable part of the learning process Use of 'real' media and resources contributes to sense of pride and respect – early childhood is not a practice run for learning	Strengthened relationships with others art workshops, working together.
Teacher 7	Positive family role models – mother artist Fifth form art tedious Art history enjoyable Artist friends, travel, Reggio Emilia influences	Working alongside children rather than just presenting the materials Confidence in verbalising what I am doing when working alongside children, what I like about my work or the work of others	When my interest is there the children become more engaged Using a more abstract style seems more inclusive to the children's work Teachers have different strengths or enthusiasms – this encourages others to explore further Visual art is a part of infant and toddlers' everyday experiences	Reading and discussing literature. Participating in workshops
Teacher 8	Have strengths in performing art/music No interest in visual art so didn't see need to view myself as an artist	Confidence in ability to articulate and justify practices with parents Not so concerned with mess Aware of own and others preferences Valuing product alongside process	Being caught up in routines and concern for things like messy clothing can limit, impede or deter participation for both children and adults - teacher motivation overcomes this Although the process of a child's art experience is the most important part of visual art, it is important to value the product There are times when art is about the end product Individual teachers' preferences of media can be complementary and offer the children a wider range	Reflecting on collection of stories Participating in workshops Challenged self through engaging with media not so fond of

Appendix 2 Identity of visual art co-learners - behaviours indicative of each domain of identity

Communicator (Communication)
- Non-verbally communicating and expressing
- Articulates ideas
- Pursues ideas – makes them evident through actions
- Explains work or actions
- Describes story
- Visually represents ideas, understandings
- Asks for feedback
- Uses new terminology
- Willingly shares/displays work
- Listens to others
- Values opinion of others
- Shows respect for others work
- Shows appreciation of product

Explorer (Exploration)
- Exploring with senses
- Engaged
- Experimenting
- Trying things out, testing
- Using books, models, pictures as resources
- Purposefully accessing resources
- Setting goals. Being prepared
- Pursuing ideas
- Making connections with prior experiences
- Learning a process
- Developing control and mastery of tools and resources
- Constructing
- Trying again
- Repeating process
- Copying previous experience
- Problem solving
- Borrowing ideas from others

Dreamer and Player (Wellbeing)
- Joins in
- Responds to feedback and praise
- Is playful with media
- Enjoys friendships
- Is imaginative
- Takes time
- Questions
- Observes
- Shares enjoyment with others
- Gives it a go

Participator, Facilitator, Contributor (Contribution)
- Works with and alongside others
- Interacts with peers
- Borrows and shares ideas
- Co-operates, takes turns
- Co-constructs with peers and adults
- Asks for help
- Role models
- Shares expertise
- Shows others
- Teaches a process to others
- Encourages
- Assists
- Inspires others
- Values others contributions
- Shares ideas and suggests methods
- Includes others in experiences

Achiever (Belonging)
- Chooses to join in, participate
- Recognizes
- Plans, evaluates and critiques own work
- Has a purpose for completed product
- Completes own task
- Works independently
- Makes connections over time
- Continues, revisits
- Displays mastery
- Shares knowledge
- Displays satisfaction
- Shares completed work with others
- Initiates ideas