

Teachers, parents, and whānau working together in early childhood education

Linda Mitchell, with Maggie Haggerty, Viv Hampton, and Ann Pairman



NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

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Executive summary

There are few reported studies of how teachers in New Zealand early childhood education centres can strengthen their approaches to working in partnership with parents and whānau, or how parent/whānau involvement is perceived by each party.

The research reported here is of a one-year research and professional development project aimed at supporting ways in which teachers and parents/whānau worked together to enhance children's learning and wellbeing. The research involved case studies in three education and care centres and three kindergartens whose teachers wanted to be part of the project. The research explored the professional development processes, the perceptions of teachers and parents/whānau of parent/whānau involvement and the processes of change over the course of the year, and factors that helped or hindered teacher and parent/whānau partnerships.

The case study approach was valuable in allowing exploration, in some depth and over time, of different possibilities for building relationships between teachers and parents/whānau, and consideration of framing factors within six very different early childhood education contexts. The research was undertaken in education and care centres and kindergartens, rather than parent/whānau-led services, to see what is possible in settings where parents/whānau are not the main educators.

A parallel research and professional development project was undertaken by Glenda MacNaughton, University of Melbourne. The research project unfolded differently in each country, and a combined analysis was not made. However, the New Zealand and Australian researchers, Linda Mitchell and Glenda MacNaughton, made a joint presentation to the Eighth Early Childhood Convention, Palmerston North, 22–25 September 2003. The New Zealand presentation is reported in Mitchell (2003). The Australian presentation is reported in MacNaughton (2004). Teachers from five of the six centres also presented a workshop at the convention.

The three professional development advisers, Maggie Haggerty and Viv Hampton of the then Wellington College of Education (now Victoria University of Wellington College of Education), and Ann Pairman, from the Early Childhood Development (ECD – now part of the Ministry of Education), worked with between one and three of the selected centres.

We based our research and professional development on three principles:

- parents and teachers are co-educators of children;

- sharing understanding and knowledge of children from different viewpoints and from different settings can help adults to support and extend children’s learning at home and in the centre; and
- working to empower and develop equitable relationships for parents and teachers will contribute to each party’s understanding of children, teaching, and learning.

Data was collected in two phases in April/May 2002 and March 2003, through interviews with staff, professional development advisers, and five parents (randomly selected), the project network meetings, notes from professional development advisers of work undertaken, and documentation of practices. Main interview themes were: parental aspirations; communication and relationships between parents and staff; parent/whānau involvement; and collaboration between home and ECE centre. In addition, all parents were asked to complete a questionnaire at the end of the project about parent/teacher communication and parental involvement.

Main approaches to working with parents/whānau

The six centres took different approaches to strengthening working relationships with parents/whānau:

- Parents contributed to the education programme as “parent helps”, and were encouraged to document children’s learning in the crèche and at home, thereby deepening understanding about children and their learning.
- Teachers and parents discussed their aspirations and centre philosophy together, and teachers subsequently developed unique and engaging ways to make connections between the centre and home and explain learning processes.
- Teachers included parents in assessment, planning, and curriculum discussions.
- Culturally diverse families were invited to participate in the education programme and centre activities.
- Video was used to communicate with parents and try to build a sense of community, as well as for teachers to analyse pedagogy.
- Ways were found to involve fathers in the life of the kindergarten.

Key messages

Although the contexts were very different, some themes were common to all six centres.

Where partnerships with parents/whānau developed, these were based on mutual respect. Centres made connecting with parents a priority, and some formulated specific practices to create a welcoming atmosphere. Without mutual respect, divisiveness made it difficult to enhance relationships and communication with parents/whānau.

Teachers found out what parents' views and interests were and constructed practices to engage with those interests. A range of strategies to ascertain views was used, including: using parent social occasions and meetings to discuss views; surveying parents and whānau (in one centre parents undertook the survey and analysed the responses); developing innovative ways to find out about the home context and experiences; and discussing values and aspirations with parents/whānau.

Teachers and parents focused on pedagogy and children's learning and wellbeing through:

- parents contributing to assessment, planning, and evaluation;
- teachers explaining the curriculum and environment without educational jargon, and in ways that suited the centre community and engaged participants; and
- teachers inviting parent involvement in the education programme.

Some "hard issues continued to be challenging, in particular, responding to parents' desire for formal "literacy" teaching, and working with parents from multicultural backgrounds.

Professional development processes that were especially successful in helping teachers learn used data from the teachers' own settings and gave teachers access to a range of views. Data were able to be analysed and challenged teachers to critique their own interactions and attitudes.

Layout of report

Chapter 2 briefly examines issues of theory, relevant research on approaches to working with parents/whānau, and methodology. The following two chapters examine the differing approaches taken by the six centres. Chapter 3 examines ways in which three of the early childhood education (ECE) centres went about involving parents and whānau in assessment, planning, evaluation, and communication about children's learning. Chapter 4 examines how the other three ECE centres incorporated parent/whānau values and invited participation in the education programme and centre activities. In both these chapters, parents' aspirations and views of the ECE centre, parents' and teachers' views of communications and outcomes at the start of the project, and views of outcomes are explored. In Chapter 6, Conclusion, key themes and issues in developing constructive relationships between teachers and parents and whānau that support children's learning and wellbeing are discussed. The appendices include copies of the interview schedules.

1. Introduction

There are few reported studies of how teachers in New Zealand early childhood education centres can strengthen their approaches to working in partnership with parents and whānau, or how parent/whānau involvement is perceived by each party.

The research reported here is of a one-year research and professional development project aimed at supporting ways in which teachers and parents/whānau worked together to enhance children's learning and wellbeing. The research involved case studies in three education and care centres and three kindergartens whose teachers wanted to be part of the project. The research explored the professional development processes, and the perceptions of teachers and parents/whānau of parent/whānau involvement and of the processes of change over the course of the year, and factors that helped or hindered teacher and parent/whānau partnerships.

The case study approach was valuable in allowing exploration, in some depth and over time, of different possibilities for building relationships between teachers and parents/whānau, and consideration of framing factors within six very different early childhood education contexts. The research was undertaken in education and care centres and kindergartens, rather than parent/whānau-led services, to see what is possible in settings where parents/whānau are not the main educators.

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- working to empower and develop equitable relationships for parents and teachers will contribute to each party’s understanding of children, teaching, and learning.

Chapter 2 briefly examines issues of theory, relevant research on approaches to working with parents/whānau, and methodology. The following two chapters examine the differing approaches taken by the six centres. Chapter 3 examines ways in which three of the ECE centres went about involving parents and whānau in assessment, planning, evaluation, and communication about children’s learning. Chapter 4 examines how the other three ECE centres incorporated parent/whānau values and invited participation in the education programme and centre activities. In both these chapters, parents’ aspirations and views of the ECE centre and parents’ and teachers’ views of communications and outcomes at the start of the project are explored, as well as their views of the actual outcomes. Chapter 5, Conclusion, discusses key themes and issues in developing constructive relationships between teachers and parents/whānau that support children’s learning and wellbeing.

2. The study in context

Why work with parents/whānau?

Constructive working relationships between teachers and parents/whānau can enhance adults' knowledge and understanding of children and children's learning opportunities, and so contribute to children's learning and wellbeing at home and in the ECE setting. Children who see their parents/whānau working closely together with their teachers "gain a sense of continuity and of being cared for" and experience a "trusting and secure environment in which they can learn and grow" (Whalley & the Pen Green Centre Team, 2001, p. 95). There can also be benefits for parents and whānau in participating in an early childhood education service. These benefits include enhanced social support, and parent learning and development (Mitchell, Royal Tangaere, Mara, & Wylie, 2006).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of human development offers a theoretical rationale for teachers and parents/whānau working in close collaboration. Children's most direct day-to-day reality is within their immediate settings of home, early childhood education service, and neighbourhood. Children's interactions with significant others and their experiences within these settings influence their wellbeing, learning, and development. The quality of children's experiences is also influenced by surrounding ecological systems, such as workplace and community, and the macrosystem of cultural and ideological beliefs and values. The interrelationships between these systems influence the child's learning environment. Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested that the "developmental potential" of a child's participation in two or more settings is enhanced when there is consensus about goals, and supportive linkages between the settings.

In his opening address to the Hui Taumata Matauranga, Mason Durie (2001) highlighted the importance for Māori students of integrated action:

The principle of integrated action recognises the multiple players in education. Success or failure is the result of many forces acting together—school and community; teachers and parents; students and their parents. Lives in New Zealand are too closely intertwined to pretend that action in one sphere does not have actions in another. Unless there is some platform for integrated action, then development will be piecemeal and progress will be uneven (p. 7).

Providing culturally compatible cross-links, including speaking te reo Māori and upholding tikanga Māori, between the child's microsystems of home and educational setting is regarded as a way to optimise the language and social development of children in kōhanga reo (Royal Tangaere, 1997).

As societies change and children spend more time in ECE settings—a process known as “dual or double socialisation”—integrated action between settings of home and early childhood education service becomes even more important (Dencik, 1989; Prout, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c).

New Zealand’s ECE curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, and ECE policy both emphasise the centrality of parents and whānau as partners in an ECE setting. One of the four principles of *Te Whāriki* is that:

The wider world of family and community is an integral part of the early childhood curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 14).

Belonging—Mana whenua, that children and their families feel a sense of belonging—is a strand that arises directly from this principle. Its associated goal is for children and their families to experience an environment where:

- connecting links with the family and the wider world are affirmed and extended
- they know that they have a place
- they feel comfortable with the routines, customs and regular events
- they know the limits and boundaries of acceptable behaviour. (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 15)

The Government’s Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices (Crown, 1996) sets out mandatory requirements for ECE services to work in partnership with parents/guardians and whānau to promote and extend the learning and development of each child who attends or receives the service. There are specific requirements for communication and consultation with parents/guardians and whānau, especially with regard to their child’s progress, interests, abilities, and areas for development, and for management and educators to acknowledge and respect the values, needs, and aspirations of parents/guardians and, where appropriate, whānau.

New Zealand’s ECE policy emphasises the value of collaborative relationships between ECE services and parents and whānau. The strategic plan for ECE *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki* (Crown, 2002) devotes an entire goal to promoting collaborative relationships, including stronger linkages between ECE services and parents and whānau.

Approaches to working with parents/whānau

Various approaches can be taken to teachers and parents/whānau working together to enhance children’s learning and wellbeing. These are discussed below, with examples from recent research. We have not included research about aspects of parent involvement that are not directly associated with pedagogical aims, for example in management, governance, administration, and maintenance.

Sharing pedagogical aims and practices

Sharing pedagogical aims and practices between families and teachers is one way of strengthening the consistency of interactions and environments to support children's learning and development.

As *Kei Tua o te Pae* noted “... assessment can assist the learning community to develop ongoing and diverse learning pathways” (Ministry of Education, 2004, Book 1, p. 3).

In New Zealand, Carr et al. (2001) and *Kei Tua o te Pae* (Ministry of Education, 2004) have discussed how particular forms of assessment can be effective in encouraging parents, children, and teachers to participate in an ECE community, and to contribute to the education programme. Narrative approaches to assessment that describe learning experiences as a story or series of stories over time are valuable in enabling learning to be set within context, and providing data for interpretation. They make sense and are of interest to a range of participants, including children and parents/whānau. Credit assessments, describing episodes of achievement, foreground what children can do and in this way encourage a view of the child as a learner. Assessments can draw on parent/whānau knowledge of their own child. Assessments are useful in planning for further learning, whether at home or in the ECE setting.

Carr et al. provide examples of how all participants in the setting, including parents/whānau, can make a difference to children as learners. They conclude that:

A democratic community might be seen as a characteristic of a place where people are able to (and recognise they are able to): belong, make an authentic and valued contribution, and collectively make a difference for children. We suggest that assessments can help construct just such a democratic community, one in which children and families and staff are willing and valued learners (Carr et al., 2001, p. 34).

Hatherly (2006) has shown how Learning Stories assessments, collected as part of *Kei Tua o te Pae*, and including parents' and children's contributions, may play a role in shaping children's identity as literacy learners, and contribute to children's understanding of the purpose of written literacy. These documented assessments used narrative forms that are “more associated with storytelling than with observation” (p. 27).

In the United Kingdom, the Pen Green Centre for Under Fives and their Families in Corby is well known for its work in involving families in children's learning, as well as for parents being supported themselves. Pen Green tries to follow a process:

whereby all the important adults in a child's life give each other feedback on what seems to be centrally important to the child, and how and what they are learning in the home and in the nursery (Whalley and the Pen Green Centre Team, 2001, p. 139).

The Pen Green loop is a planning and assessment process whereby parents are offered training and supported to observe their child closely at home, for example through written observation or video, and to feed back their observations either verbally or in written form to staff, who in turn make observations of the child at nursery and feed these back to parents. Information from parents is used in planning for that child within the nursery, and parents use information from staff at

home. The Pen Green model is two-way, with parents being encouraged to participate in learning, and teachers critically reflecting on the contributions of parents and families to their own work with children. Narrative examples in Whalley and the Pen Green Centre Team (2001) demonstrate how parents use their learning to understand more about their child and how to support learning at home, for example through sharing anxieties about and coming to understand apparently naughty behaviour. They show how nursery staff are able to relate children's play to child development concepts that parents have studied, and to support and extend the child's learning, using narrative and video observations which parents and staff have made at the centre and at home. In this way, children are offered a challenging and stimulating environment in both settings that draws on each party's understanding and scrutiny.

Malaguzzi (1993) describes the challenge of such pedagogical documentation for teachers, and why and how this may have an impact on parents:

They must provide a steady flow of quality information targeted to parents but appreciated also by children and teachers. This flow of documentation, we believe, introduces parents to a quality of knowing that tangibly changes their expectations. They re-examine their assumptions about their parenting roles and their views about the experience their children are living and take a new and more inquisitive approach to the whole school experience (pp. 63–64).

Many New Zealand centres are also grappling with the reverse challenge: how the contributions which children, parents, and families make to the pedagogical dialogue impact on teachers. This is about input from children, parents, and families, acting to tangibly change teachers' expectations, so that teachers are continually re-examining their teaching roles and their views about the experience the children are living. Pedagogical documentation is becoming a starting point not only for dialogue with others, but also with oneself. This is the realm of critical and reflective practice.

These are some New Zealand examples of parents/whānau working with teachers in pedagogical practices that can contribute to children as learners. Although many teachers do involve parents and whānau in assessment and planning, a sizeable minority do not. NZCER's 2003 national survey¹ found that only 53 percent of parents responding to the questionnaire stated that teachers asked them to participate in planning and assessment for their own child. It also found that:

- Eighteen percent of parents wanted information about their child that they did not currently have, and a further 14 percent were not sure if they wanted more information. Similar percentages of parent committee members gave these responses.

¹ The 2003 national survey included responses from 455 parents, and 171 parent committee members from kindergarten, education and care, home-based services, hospital ECE services, and playcentres. Parent questions included contact with the parent's ECE service. Findings will be published in 2006.

- Nineteen percent of both parents and committee members wanted more “ideas for how I can support my child’s learning”, followed by information about the child’s progress (15 percent parents, 12 percent parent committee), and assessments about their own child (15 percent parents, 11 percent parent committee).
- While playcentre parents had a high level of participation in assessment and planning, only 43 percent of kindergarten parents and 50 percent of education and care centre parents had such participation. Parent committee members (60 percent kindergarten and 51 percent education and care) were more likely to participate in assessment and planning.

The parental survey in the NZCER and Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust evaluation of *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki* (Mitchell et al., in press) showed that an even higher percentage—31 percent—of the 886 parents responding wanted more information about their child. Although most parents surveyed felt welcome in the service, 30 percent of the parents responding wanted more time to talk with the teacher about their child. The main reasons for not having time to talk were that there was not always a suitable time (15 percent) or the teacher was too busy (11 percent). Some also said they themselves were too busy (10 percent).

Supporting parents and whānau to undertake educational activities at home

A UK study, *Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years* (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden, & Bell, 2002), found that children’s cognitive attainment benefited when parents were involved in children’s learning activities at home. Where ECE services promoted a relationship with parents in terms of shared educational aims, and pedagogical efforts were made at home to support the children, good developmental outcomes were achieved, even when the service’s pedagogical practice was not consistently good. In order to influence the development of children in disadvantaged areas, it was not sufficient simply to involve parents in the centre. Staff had to support parents’ role in developing the home environment to support children’s learning. For example, the study found that all the case study settings encouraged parents to read with their children, but there were better cognitive outcomes where settings also encouraged continuity of learning between the ECE centre and the home.

Several studies have shown how workshops with parents and whānau, undertaken from the base of an ECE centre, can contribute to enhanced parent–child interactions to support learning at home.

A small New Zealand study (McNaughton, Wolfgramm, & Afeaki, 1996) showed how six of seven Tongan families in a Tongan ECE centre added a new reading style to their practice of story reading—a style that focused on story meanings. Use of the style seemed to be associated with children having higher scores on measures of letter identification and comprehension. It was important that this new style did not replace the styles which families traditionally used, and which were valued in church and community, but instead added to families’ repertoires. Use of the new style was consistent with Tongan parents’ wish for their children to do well at school.

Elias, Hay, Homel, and Freiburg (2006) report on a project that integrated a parent–child book reading programme into a regular preschool programme, as part of a more integrated comprehensive language programme focused on vocabulary development, abstract language, and concept development. It used books created for each child which were based on the child’s experiences, using photographs taken by parents and teachers. The text was written by parents with their children. The children studied were assessed to be at the lowest level on the Preschool Language Assessment Instrument (measuring language demands placed on children by the teaching and learning situation). Over the six months of the programme, the amount of parent–child reading more than doubled, from an average of 38 minutes per week to 89 minutes.

Like the narrative, credit forms of assessment outlined earlier which attract parents and children, the programme in this study used an engaging text with digital photographs, and involved parents and children in dialogue about real and meaningful experiences. It also provided the child with meaningful experiences relating to the conventions and functions of print, and the relationships between oral and written language (Elias et al., 2006, p. 23).

Parents as educators within early childhood education settings

Parent involvement in the early childhood education programme is seen as another way of parents and teachers working together in the interests of children as learners. The Competent Children, Competent Learners study found no associations between voluntary help in the ECE centre and children’s competency, or between good communication with staff and children’s competency scores throughout the study (Wylie, Hodgen, Ferral, & Thompson, 2006). However, this may have been because the measures of parent involvement did not examine the *nature* of the communication between parents and staff, or of the volunteer help itself. For parent/whānau involvement and communications with staff to impact on children’s learning and development, it seems to be important for the communications and involvement to be about teaching and learning experiences, so that ECE centre and home activities can support one another.

Some insight can be gained from studies of parent/whānau-led ECE centres where parents and whānau fully participate as educators within the education programme, and are responsible for its management. In New Zealand, these include playcentres, playgroups, puna, Pacific Islands early childhood groups, some Pasifika early childhood education centres, and some kōhanga reo. Playgroups internationally are usually run by parents.

Mitchell et al.’s, (2006) study of parent/whānau-led centres found that particular factors were associated with a good quality children’s learning environment. Some of these were structural features of quality that are common to all ECE services, that is good quality resources, adult qualifications and training, and participation in professional development/ wananga. Having a mix of adults, with some holding higher qualifications and having years of ECE experience, also seemed to contribute. They suggested that this is perhaps because parents valued learning through being mentored and working alongside others. In language immersion centres, the communal level of adult fluency in the language was a key factor. Centre–home connections in the interests

of children's learning seemed to be strengthened by parents participating in the education programme on a regular basis, and parents taking up professional development and support.

A study by Tijus, Santolini, and Danis (1997) in four parent-led day-care centres in France had similar findings. In this study, regular participation of parents involved in pedagogical work alongside qualified adults was associated with adult interactions that contributed to a good quality learning environment for children. Parents were involved in pedagogical activities, usually for one half-day per week, under the supervision of professional staff. Parents who participated more in the life of the centre “developed longer lasting exchanges, they found ways to get the child interested, they initiated and exchanged tips with other parents on a variety of activities” (Tijus et al., 1997, p. 14). They suggested that in parent-led services, parents see themselves as teachers, thinking about pedagogical issues and developing their pedagogical capacity.

Researchers involved in playgroup research in the UK, who were interviewed for NZCER and Te Kōhanga Reo's research project Quality in Parent/whānau-led ECE services (Mitchell, Royal Tangaere, & Whitford, 2006), also emphasised the importance of having well-qualified educators working alongside parents.

Issues

Biddulph, Biddulph, and Biddulph (2003) argue that the approaches taken in some parent involvement studies do not match their rhetoric of working in “partnership”, but rather “control parents and promote the values of ... staff at the expense of important local cultural values” (Biddulph et al., 2003, p. 11). For example, in a deficit approach, the source of problems is regarded as the home, which is seen as deficient in the practices necessary to support children's learning and success. Parent/whānau knowledge and skills are regarded as lacking, and a compensatory programme is established to fix this. This approach ignores families' “funds of knowledge” and competence, which can be harnessed to contribute to ECE pedagogy:

The concept of funds of knowledge is based on a simple premise: people are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them knowledge ... a funds of knowledge approach facilitates a systematic and powerful way to represent communities in terms of resources, the wherewithal they possess, and how to harness these resources for classroom teaching (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, pp. ix-x).

Taking a “difference theory” approach, staff acknowledge that cultural differences between families and the early childhood setting may invoke discontinuities for children when they move between the two settings. However, one response to recognition of cultural difference, according to Biddulph et al. (2003) is “cultural domination” (Bereiter, 1985). This “attributes education disadvantage to the subjugating processes ... of a dominant culture imposed on minority children” (p. 10). In this response, teachers may try to improve children's attainment, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, but fail to recognise that they themselves may need to change their own teaching to accommodate diversity.

As Adler (2001) states:

Teachers seek information from both parents and the children in their classes about their lives, beliefs, and experiences, then reflect back to each through their own cultural lenses. The lenses reflect the teachers' own cultural awareness, race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion, and belief systems (p. 154).

Hughes and MacNaughton (1999) reviewed 162 items from international literature, published in the late 1990s, which reported parent involvement programmes or research about parent involvement in early childhood education settings. They concluded that much of the literature on staff/parent relationships in early childhood education concerns problems associated with the relationships. Problems consistently noted by most writers often arose “from the constant ‘othering’ of parental knowledge by staff” (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2000, p. 242), where parental knowledge was subordinated to the knowledge of teachers. Their analysis highlighted three themes underpinning this “othering”: parental knowledge being seen as inadequate; parental knowledge as supplementing and being of secondary importance to staff knowledge; and parental knowledge being unimportant, with parents’ voices absent from the literature.

In these circumstances, Hughes and MacNaughton (2000, p. 247) argued that “communication cannot improve relationships between staff and parents unless it addresses the politics of knowledge underpinning them”. They discussed two different strategies to challenge “othering”. Drawing on Habermas, they discussed the development of consensus about knowledge of children, and designing programmes that reflect that consensus, through rational discussion and open communication that is free of manipulation. Drawing on Lyotard, they discussed the idea that staff and parents should not seek one consensus view, but instead discuss many diverse views of the child, and explore power-knowledge relationships around these. They argued that early childhood staff are more likely to find Lyotard’s ideas useful, because:

Hope for change lies not in our agreements but in our disagreements, because in our disagreements (dissensus) we argue about what is truth and we question the dominant norms and values and seek to change them (p. 255).

Principles of effective working relationships

Drawing on studies of teacher, parent, and whānau relationships that support children’s learning and wellbeing, we have come up with two principles for effective relationships:

1. The relationships are based on understandings that children, parents, and whānau all have strengths and expertise, or “funds of knowledge” (Biddulph et al., 2003; Carr et al., 2001; MacNaughton et al., 1996; Whalley & the Pen Green Centre Team, 2001; Gonzalez et al., 2005). An empowering approach to working with families implies “that parent knowledge of their specific child is at least as valuable as staff’s professional and expert knowledge of children in general” (Hughes & MacNaughton, 2002, p. 18).
2. Goals and aspirations are discussed and shared (Hughes & MacNaughton, 1999; Whalley & the Pen Green Centre Team, 2001).

3. Methodology

Teacher participants

Criteria for selection in the project were that teachers: were interested in parent/whānau involvement within their own centre; had a commitment to the whole teaching team working with one of the professional development advisers to investigate their own pedagogy; and were willing to participate in the research project. The project required commitment over and above professional development: participation in meetings with the six participating centres at the start and finish of the project; and organisation and involvement in case study work in each of the centres.

Kindergartens and education and care centres which were known to be interested in parent/whānau involvement, and were registered with one of the professional development advisers, were invited by the professional development adviser to participate. They were given an information sheet about the project, and a letter inviting participation, with an “agreement to participate” form. They were asked to discuss the project within their centre, fill in the “agreement to participate” form, and contact the researcher if they wished to participate. All the centres that were approached in this way decided to take part. Kindergarten associations were then approached for their agreement that their kindergartens could participate. Information sheets were provided for each family involved in the participating centres.

The letters inviting participation, information pamphlets, research instruments, and blank consent forms are available from NZCER on request. Consent forms gave information about the project and the ways in which data would be used, promised confidentiality, and asked participants if they wanted their first name or another name to be used.

Interview schedules are contained in Appendix 1.

The participating early childhood education centres

The six early childhood education centres that participated in the study were from the greater Wellington area. The centres were very different from each other in roll characteristics, socioeconomic profile, service type, operation, and staffing. Table 1 gives a profile of the centres.

Table 1 Profile of the six early childhood education centres

Name	Type and operation	Roll	Socioeconomic profile*	Main child ethnicity
Education and care for teenage mothers	Education and care Opens school hours	14 under 2s 7 over 2s	Low income	Approximately half Māori, almost half Pākehā, and 5 percent Pacific
City centre	Education and care Full day	2 under 2s 23 over 2s	Middle/high income	Mainly Pākehā
Community crèche	Sessional crèche	12 months and walking to 4 years plus Morning roll: 30 Afternoon roll: 12	Middle/high income	Mainly Pākehā with a small number of other groups
Suburban kindergarten	Kindergarten Sessional	3 and 4 years Morning roll: 40 Afternoon roll: 30	Middle/high income	Mainly Pākehā with a small number of other groups
Rural kindergarten	Kindergarten Sessional	3 and 4 years Morning roll: 30 Afternoon roll: 28	Wide-ranging incomes	Mainly Pākehā with a small number of other groups
Multicultural kindergarten	Kindergarten Sessional	3 and 4 years Morning roll: 40 Afternoon roll: 30	Low/middle income	Approximately half Pākehā, with the next largest groups being Samoan, Māori, Chinese, Somalian, and Tongan, and a small number of other groups

* As described by ECE staff

Professional development and action research

Each professional development adviser was contracted by the Ministry of Education to work with each of their centres for approximately 15 hours' contact time over the course of the year. The professional development was offered as "whole-centre" work: the professional development adviser working with the whole staff team. This approach was favoured because it had the potential for all staff to build from a basis of common understanding and to reinforce each other, and it fitted with the "action research" model that was followed. Carr and Kemmis (1986) define action research as:

A form of reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which practices are carried out (p. 162).

They argue that three conditions are necessary for action research:

- the subject is a form of social practice which is seen as open to action and capable of improvement;
- the method of action research is a self-reflective spiral of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting; and
- the project includes those who are responsible for the practice and is based on collaboration.

Table 2 Staffing profiles and focuses of work with parents and whānau

Name	Staffing	Focus of work with parents and whānau
Centre for teenage mothers	1 head teacher, 1 full-time teacher, 2 job-share teachers, 1 field-based trainee, 1 teacher aide and 1 cook	Identified parents' interests through analysing a parent/teacher workshop and themes from the research interviews; used video to celebrate, interest, and involve parents/whānau in the experiences at the centre; broadened planning, assessment, and curriculum discussions to include parents; involved parents in developing plans for the centre.
City centre	Supervisor, 1 assistant supervisor, 6 teachers, 1 cook	Parents and teachers discussed values and philosophy; teachers found out what parents wanted to understand; strengthened communication with parents about children's learning.
Community crèche	Supervisor, 3 teachers, 2 rostered parent helps	Survey of all parents based on research questions planned and analysed by parents. Connected home and crèche through collaboration between teachers and parents to support children's learning. Some parents contributed their own observations from home to portfolios, including their analysis of schemas; some parents videotaped episodes at crèche.
Multicultural kindergarten	4 teachers in morning, 3 teachers in afternoon	Held parent and whānau lunch meeting to discuss views about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - cultural celebrations; - communication both ways; and - play and understanding the curriculum. Extended understanding of diverse cultures, connected with Migrant Services Ethnic Link; worked with parents to make cultures more visible.
Rural kindergarten	1 head teacher, 1 teacher	Used video as a tool to analyse interactions and observe children closely; made changes to interactions as a consequence. Videotaped the kindergarten "pet day" to highlight parents' contributions and link their contributions to learning.
Suburban kindergarten	1 head teacher, 1 full-time teacher, 0.7 teacher	Teachers did a "gap analysis"; identified working with fathers as an area to develop further; analysed their interactions with fathers; supported fathers to be involved.

The professional development advisers, as “outsiders” in relation to the centre, were able to guide and provide a critical perspective on the work of the centre. The professional development advisers had “hands-on” involvement in different ways, such as videoing the interactions in two centres and then analysing these in collaboration with staff, and participating in parent/staff meetings in two other centres.

In addition, participants met as a whole group at the beginning of the project in April 2002, to discuss aims and ideas, and at the end of the project in March 2003, for staff to present their work and discuss findings.

The staffing profiles and focuses of their work with parents and whānau over the course of the year for each participating centre are set out in Table 2.

Data collection and analysis

The aims of the data collection were to gather sufficient information about each centre from the perspectives of parents, teachers, children (where possible), and professional development advisers, to:

- provide a description of its journey in working collaboratively with parents and whānau through the course of the project;
- highlight the challenges and issues it faced; and
- describe what the centre is like now from the perspectives of participants.

The data in centres was collected in two phases, at the beginning and end of the project, in April/May 2002 and in March 2003, mainly through interviews with:

- staff, five parents/families, and where possible children in each centre; and
- professional development advisers.

In two centres, children were too young to be interviewed. In the other centres, the researcher had limited time to build up relationships with the children interviewed.

Parents were randomly selected and asked if they would participate. Where the focus of the professional development was on a target group, for example working with fathers or working with culturally diverse families, selection was made from these groups.

Interview themes at the start of the project are set out in Table 3. They were largely about participants’ views of communication and relationships between teachers and parents/whānau, the support for and levels of parent/whānau involvement, and collaboration between home and the ECE service. It was useful to ask parents about their hopes and aspirations for children’s learning. This question revealed cultural differences in a multicultural kindergarten between the centre’s teaching and learning practices, and the aspirations for their child’s education of some parents from countries other than New Zealand.

Table 3 Summary of interview themes (April/May 2002)

Theme	Teachers	Parents	Children	Professional development adviser
Hopes and aspirations for children's learning and education		+		
Communication and relationships between parents and staff	+	+	+	
Centre support for parent involvement	+	+		
Parent/whānau involvement	+	+	+	
Collaboration between home and ECE centre	+	+	+	
Aspirations for project	+	+		+
Views of parent involvement and work with the centre				+

As well, documentation was gathered on the centre philosophy, the centre's assessment, planning, and evaluation practices, and how the centre communicated with parents/whānau, for example through portfolios, newsletters, use of notice boards, planned greetings, and induction.

All adult participants were also asked about their aspirations for the research and professional development project.

In March 2003, interviews with teachers and professional development advisers, and the same parents and children (where they were still attending the ECE centre), were held. These interviews asked adult participants to look back over the year at the work that had been undertaken for the project, their perceptions of impact on staff/parent relationships and involvement, and their views about future goals. A questionnaire about involvement was also given to all parents. Response rates for the parent questionnaire varied from 15 percent of families to 100 percent, with low rates (less than 25 percent) in four of the six centres. There is a possibility of bias since those parents who filled in the questionnaire may have not been representative of the parent body. Hence the randomness of the interview participants was important. Data from the questionnaires supplemented data from the interviews.

The questions asked of children did not yield useful information for this study, and data from them is not reported. The questions asked children about their views of what their parent/s do in the ECE centre and what their parents like about it, children's experiences of integrated action between home and the centre, and views of parents' feelings about the centre. Many children gave answers about activities they did at the centre, and some said they took artwork and constructions home. These kinds of responses did not seem to add useful data that provided insight into the research questions. As well, some children were interviewed with their parent, who often prompted the child.

4. Communicating about children’s learning

In this chapter we examine how three early childhood education centres went about involving parents and whānau in assessment, planning, evaluation, and communication in the interests of children’s learning. The main themes for these three education and care centres were:

- connecting home and crèche;
- two-way communication about children’s learning; and
- creating a community of learners.

Connecting home and crèche

The community crèche is a sessional education and care centre in a mainly middle/high-income community. It is run as a parent co-operative. It is located in a community hall which it shares with two community organisations: an after-school programme and a gym. There is a permanent outside play area, but all inside equipment needs to be put out in the morning and packed away at the end of each day to make room for the after-school children. There is always a rich range of equipment set up in areas within the hall. A large empty hall upstairs, with gym mats and wall climbing frames, provides a fine space for children to take their bicycles, do gymnastics, and engage in physical play.

The crèche is owned and managed by parents as a co-operative. It has a commitment to parents as the most important first teachers of the crèche children. The crèche philosophy is to ensure that parents feel welcome, see the place as their own, and work in partnership with educators in the care and education of their children. Community is important and there is a philanthropic ethos — there are always free places at the crèche. The crèche supervisor went on a Margaret May Blackwell Fellowship in 2000, where he was very impressed by the work of the Pen Green Centre for Under Fives and their Families, and the centres he visited in Denmark (Drummond, 2001). Some of the ideas that the crèche implemented during the course of the research and professional development project were influenced by the broader perspectives and practices he studied.

The crèche requires parents to do two “parent helps” per term, as part of belonging to the crèche. There are provisions for maternity/paternity leave of 3–6 months, depending on circumstances, when parents are exempt from parent duty. Parents can bring their child on the day they help and do not have to pay fees on that day. Parents who enrol their child at the crèche have a clear understanding that their involvement within the programme is necessary and beneficial, and are committed to playing this active role.

Table 4 Interview participants in 2002 and 2003

Participants	2002	2003
Parents	5 mothers and 2 fathers from 5 families	4 mothers and 1 father from 4 families (one family had left the crèche)
Teachers	Supervisor Assistant supervisor 2 teachers	Supervisor Assistant supervisor 2 teachers
Professional development adviser	Yes	Yes

Parents' aspirations and views about the crèche

The crèche philosophy and practices were consistent with parents' philosophy and home experiences. Parents were very positive about the social interactions with other adults and children, and the social skills learned at the crèche (e.g. independence, sharing, sitting at the table). Parents liked the range of activities and interactions to extend children's learning:

The crèche covers everything for his age and is ideally suited to his level.

The crèche got her started on a lot of things—socialisation things and book stuff. She also sees kids reading. She seems to have learned colours and numbers ... She does a lot of singing and dancing. She plays a lot with play dough and is more interested in doing it here.

Parents liked the relationships between teachers and children, and the sense of wellbeing and belonging that the crèche engendered:

I like the crèche environment. It has stayed consistent. I know [my child] will be safe there.

[My child] talks about Bob and Rachael—they're his friends. Trust with adults is very good.

There is a feeling of total belonging and I can't speak highly enough of it. The staff let her learn at her own pace but extend her learning. She takes on strange situations readily. The crèche has created two confident girls. [An older sister attended.]

These parents did not regard home as very different from crèche, except for forming and developing family relationships at home. Families had a range of stimulating activities at home, and said children learnt a lot from home through family and individual activities and interactions. Two families said their child's language was extended at home; one through an older brother's "advanced speech and play", the other through the parents' own language. At the crèche, families thought the child learnt to be independent. Children had learnt self-care skills at home, and these were reinforced and extended at the crèche. Parents said there were similar routines at home and crèche for eating, sitting at the table to eat, and handwashing. Discipline was consistent with

home (defuse and distract), and values associated with taking care if someone is hurt, no hitting, being nice to friends, and not discriminating on the basis of gender were also similar.

Views of communication, relationships, and involvement

Parents and teachers had common views about what is important in communication and relationships, what practices contributed to helping parents feel welcome and comfortable, and the value of parents and teachers collaborating in the interests of children's learning. Both parties identified the importance of open communication, warmth, and respect. They highlighted specific crèche practices that contribute to making the crèche a welcoming place: "settling practices", staff members being rostered to greet and farewell children and parents; and parent involvement in lunchtime interactions, where parents have a seat behind their children and join in conversation. Parents and staff regarded the compulsory parent help as a way of connecting families and the crèche. They valued having different ways to communicate about children's learning, including verbal feedback, portfolios, curriculum evenings, and displays of curriculum plans. There was interest from both parents and staff in extending collaboration between parents and staff to support children's learning.

Closer connection between home and crèche

The teachers' work followed an action research cycle of gathering data about parents' views, planning, making changes to practice and processes, and evaluating. Over this time, teachers focused on building closer connections between home and crèche about children's learning.

The interest in even closer collaboration between home and crèche over children's learning was reinforced by a wider group of parents at a curriculum evening and in a parent survey in the early stages of the project.

At the curriculum evening, staff showed a video of children in the crèche and described how they based their emergent curriculum on children's interests. The researcher presented core beliefs that had arisen in the interviews with staff and parents, including parents' desire to be involved and contribute to the crèche, partly for their own reassurance, but also to connect the worlds of home and crèche, and to build up a sense that crèche is part of the child's life. Parents discussed their involvement in the project and what they would like the crèche to focus on. There was clear interest in knowing more about children's learning, knowing how parents could contribute to learning at home, and how staff plan for children's learning. Parents talked about how valuable their understanding of schemas² was for making sense of their child's interests and behaviour.

² Athey (1990, p. 37) defined schemas as "patterns of repeatable behaviours into which experiences are assimilated and ... gradually co-ordinated. Co-ordinations lead to a higher level and more powerful schemas."

Parents wanted to know why staff did things the way they did, and there was a lively discussion when the supervisor explained that the crèche worked from children's interests and strengths, rather than from identifying gaps or deficits. One father said he wanted his child to improve at the things she wasn't good at, and thought these "deficits" needed to be the focus of teaching. Some parents did not understand the "emergent curriculum log". They thought their ability to be involved in this aspect of planning could be improved if the planning was explained better in relation to children's experiences. One parent suggested that the programme should be written at the beginning of each term. This was followed with ideas of example "books" that would track the emergent curriculum in an area of interest or topic, and make the planning process explicit, for example tracking a group of children's interests, or the development of schema or series of schema. Parents also asked for more one-to-one time with teachers to discuss their own child's learning with staff.

Parents enjoyed seeing the video of children in the crèche. In informal conversation a parent commented on the experience of videoing the children herself. She said that "just looking through the eye of the video made her see things" she would not have noticed because it provided a focus and blocked out distractions.

Similar responses were found in a survey of parents organised by a small parent group. Thirty-two parents (54 percent of families) answered the survey, which was based on the research interview questions. The responses were analysed by the group of parents. In terms of building greater connections between home and crèche, the responses had pertinent findings:

- Parents felt welcomed and respected within the crèche.
- The most meaningful curriculum information for parents was child observations. A typical comment was "I really like the observations. They are a really clear picture of who, where, and what, particularly when they record conversations." Some parents also mentioned photos and videos, and the child portfolio (which contains observations).
- Most parents did not mark any curriculum information as being "least meaningful". However, the six parents who did comment on this noted that the emergent curriculum log was least meaningful, or that they did not know what this was.
- There were some suggested strategies for improving the relationship between staff and parents to better support children's learning. Most of these were about reinforcing current practices, especially parents having access to portfolios (five parents), and extending parent/teacher discussion in parent/teacher information/education meetings (six parents). A few parents wanted a formal written report about their child. The idea of a home/crèche notebook was endorsed by two parents, and one wanted to know more about how discussions with staff members are used.

Staff discussed these ideas and findings and firmed up their plans for the project.

At the same time as the project was occurring, the crèche asked the Wellington Childcare Association to do an internal review, "so they did a survey [of staff]. We were surveyed out!" After the Wellington Childcare Association review, the crèche decided to pay the association to

manage its finances, thus enabling staff to have more time working together or separately on professional issues.

How parents and staff worked to build closer connections

- Teachers continued to use video to capture the processes of learning, and encouraged parents who were doing their “parent help” to take video recordings and collect information for their child’s portfolio. Most parents took up this opportunity. The video recordings were used in assessment and talking with parents and children. Teachers also used digital photographs so that they could discuss images with parents and children soon “after the event”. Parents were encouraged to use the camera in sessions.
- Teachers worked with the professional development adviser to modify their emergent curriculum planning processes and make the curriculum more easily understood by parents, and open to parents’ input. They developed a diagram to explain the planning and evaluation process and how parents could be involved. This described a focus on children’s schemas or dispositions, examples of the schemas or dispositions in children’s play and interactions, activities and interactions to extend the schemas and dispositions, and evaluation of learning. Teachers and the professional development adviser reviewed children’s portfolios, and included space for more meaningful and explicit information from parents, and for home observations. Teachers tried to ask parents more open-ended questions to gather information about children. Curriculum evenings continued, and at the end of the project an evening was planned to provide a “hands-on” explanation of the programme and discuss portfolios.
- Parents were encouraged to bring documentation from home to discuss with teachers and children and to display in the crèche. By the end of the project, more parents were bringing documented observations from home, although there was not a “flood” of this coming in. All home documentation was discussed in the fortnightly staff planning meetings. For example:

Anne’s was one family I did some home observations with. And I also did some photographs of her collecting up stones and putting them in bags, demonstrating enclosure schema I suppose ... This photographic documentation from home went into her portfolio, and we also managed to ... follow that interest at crèche, photograph and document it and build on that interest.

On this occasion, the supervisor collected the documentation himself, but said the same process could be followed with parents documenting home experiences.

- Teachers wanted to address parents’ desire to have more individual discussion with them, but some options for this would have required additional staffing. They offered time at the end of sessions for those parents involved in parent help to talk one-to-one with teachers if they wanted to do this.

- The professional development adviser worked with teachers to encourage them to use Learning Stories³ as assessment processes, but teachers tended to continue to use a schemas framework, which parents related to readily and very well.

Views of outcomes

There were similarities between parent and teacher views of the outcomes of the project. Both parties said that they gained deeper knowledge and understanding about children, and this helped them to support learning. Parents understood the curriculum better, and teachers thought they communicated more meaningfully about children and their learning, and drew more on parents' views in teaching and learning processes. Home experiences were reflected in work at the crèche. There was greater appreciation and valuing of each party. Parents attributed this to their sense that their knowledge and contribution are important:

I felt inspired after the meeting I came to. As a parent, without a doubt, they value my input and are interested in finding out about home life. (Mother)

The examples three parents gave of learning from crèche to help their child at home indicated an understanding of working from a strengths basis to reinforce and extend children's competencies, rather than focusing on children's deficits, although these parents interviewed did not include the father who wanted to focus on areas of weakness:

- awareness of the child's language and trying out activities liked by the child;
- picking up on the child's strengths and things that can be encouraged; and
- knowing how to extend rather than frustrate the child.

One of the two parents who took up the opportunity to observe her child at home described a home observation that she had done, and how her knowledge of schema and understanding helped her be more accepting of her child's play:

Parent: She's really big into mud pies. It treks through the house—water and sand. She's very involved in construction and rolling things, making things wet and rolling them up into balls. Neat little balls like those large balls of soap. And she lines them up on the rocks around the surrounding edges of our sandpit.

Interviewer: Did getting to understand schema help you in any way to understand how you could extend her?

Parent: Oh yes. It has. Very much with Anne because she has been very much a classic child to slot. My eldest one wasn't so easy to read. But it has certainly been very helpful in understanding a child's development so you don't frustrate that development. You don't get conflict ... Anne will be the dirtiest, messiest child at crèche but I don't really care ... Today, for example, there was another three pieces of sticking plaster applied to my daughter's

³ A Learning Story is “a documented account of a child's learning event, structured around five key behaviours: taking an interest, being involved, persisting with difficulty, expressing a point of view or feeling, and taking responsibility (or taking another point of view)” (Carr et al., 2000).

anatomy and Bob was quite concerned. But I said ‘If she fell off the wall, she fell off the wall. She didn’t crack anything open. She’s fine. She’s learnt to hold on tighter.’

Table 5 Parent and staff views of outcomes

Participants	Parents	Teachers
Working with children	<p>Parents were more conscious of how they could help their child at home.</p> <p>Two parents who had observed their children at home said this had been a positive initiative and they enjoyed doing this work. Knowledge of schema and understanding helped one parent to be more accepting of her child’s play.</p>	<p>Teachers better able to support child’s interests.</p> <p>Conversations more complex because they drew on greater pool of knowledge.</p> <p>Children’s home experiences and knowledge were affirmed.</p>
Home/crèche connections	<p>Partner who does not come to the crèche got information. Portfolios especially valuable for this.</p>	<p>Teachers drew on home experiences in work at crèche.</p>
Communication about children and learning	<p>More in-depth communication about the programme and their children’s learning.</p> <p>Plans for own child’s learning were “verbalised more”, feedback was “more direct”, there was “more a sense of staff making sure for every child”, and “a higher level of communicating across the board”.</p>	<p>More time talking about children’s passions and interests and discussing observations with parents doing parent help.</p> <p>Talk was in more depth.</p> <p>Parents’ views adopted in planning, assessment, and evaluation.</p> <p>Use of video data with Group Special Education staff about an individual child.</p>
Attitudes	<p>Parents felt more valued and attributed this to their sense that their knowledge and contribution are important.</p>	<p>Parents’ knowledge was more valued.</p> <p>Greater confidence in working with parents.</p>
Staff relationships	<p>Parents always felt comfortable and welcome in the crèche—no changes in these aspects.</p>	<p>Greater sense of team.</p> <p>Staff affirmed by parent comments.</p>

She had also used the video camera during parent help, and noticed that the children liked to watch this and talk about their play:

Parent: I’ve certainly focused when I’ve been parent helping on things that the children have been doing. There was one incident when I was parent helping when the children made a train out of boxes. There were some children in this train with newspapers. Obviously they had seen people on the train reading newspapers, and they had their papers out like this as if they were London commuters. And there was another child who was very much into connecting the chains. And he had these chains strung around for miles, around the

circumference of the fort. As a parent I just took the video... And the children love watching themselves at mat time. We created a mat time which I think's a good thing. It quietens them down before lunch. (Mother)

Views of a small number of parents (six) who completed the parent questionnaire at the end of the project were also positive about the usefulness of information about the education programme, and the level of talk about their child's home experiences. They were very positive about the usefulness of information provided about their own child.

Table 6 Views of parents and whānau (n=6)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Teachers give me useful information about the programme	2	3	1	
Teachers give me useful information about my child	6			
I talk to the teachers about my child's experiences at home		5	1	

Parents commented that they obtained ideas for further development from portfolio observations, got general confirmation about their child's development, for example "that his/her development is okay!", and shared ways of handling the child at home when the child was upset with crèche staff. Parents especially liked teachers' written observations of their child's interests, engagement in crèche activities, and interactions with others:

My daughter has only just begun at crèche. But already I've had a great observation report about her interests at crèche and what she likes to participate in. I'm only beginning to understand the diversity of play that the kids undertake at crèche.

Most agreed that they talked about their child's experiences at home with crèche staff. These fell into three categories: how parents handle certain situations; child's schema and style of play; and what is happening in the child's life, including behavioural problems and "good things".

The professional development adviser found it hard to gauge whether or how relationships between parents and staff had changed through the course of the project but noticed that staff became more proactive in trying to develop a partnership with parents and getting more input from parents of the child at home. She identified a more cohesive staff team, better able to respond to children as a team.

Views of professional development

The professional development adviser thought that she helped the teachers develop clarity about what they would focus on, gave feedback on their practices and challenged some aspects, discussed Learning Stories and the concept of dispositions, and offered practical ideas of things to try, including advice about how planning could be approached after the feedback from the parent

survey. There were some differences of opinion within the staff group, and she said, “In some ways I took a role in mediating conflicts over ideology and trying to clarify things throughout the meetings.” On one hand, the professional development adviser thought it was important for the staff to have someone with skills and knowledge from outside to help them through their own critique, and help with focus. On the other hand, she thought that one thing she had confirmed from working with the crèche was the importance of allowing centres to find their own solutions. She thought it could backfire if solutions were offered that staff did not regard as valid. To some extent, staff felt overburdened by the introduction of Learning Stories and dispositions, preferring to work with schema, which was familiar and worked well for them and for parents.

Staff members were all positive about the professional development. They identified the following ways in which the professional development had helped them:

- helping teachers to focus, giving direction and clarifying issues;
- helping teachers to streamline planning processes, especially organising the emergent curriculum log and portfolios;
- helping teachers to cut down on paperwork and make planning more meaningful;
- enabling the staff to be “more cohesive as a team”;
- helping staff to use the digital camera and put together documentation; and
- offering different ideas and extending staff ideas, having “sensible professional insights”.

Some ongoing issues or dilemmas for staff in working with parents or undertaking professional development were:

- what to do when a parent consistently picks up their child late;
- constraints caused by the crèche being located in a hall, and teachers therefore being unable to put up permanent wall displays; and
- the cost of professional development. There was a view that funding for professional development contracts had been reduced, and opportunities for the next year were confined to cluster meetings. “There should be a right for centres to have one-to-one professional development.”

Conclusion

This crèche started the project with a very high level of parent involvement and sense of “community ownership”. Parents had responsibility for managing the crèche, and all families participated as “parent helps”, working with teachers in the education programme on a regular basis. Parents and teachers shared aims about children’s learning and development, and there were consistencies between pedagogical approaches and values within the crèche, and parents’ interactions with children at home. The greater integration of action between centre and home in the interests of children that occurred during the course of the project drew strength from this foundation.

The common ideals for the children at the crèche and goals for the project that parents and teachers had worked together to formulate seemed to contribute to their work to deepen levels of engagement and understanding. Teachers used feedback from parents about what parents found to be meaningful, and wanted to know more about how to plan their action research, rather than imposing their own views about what to do. This meant that the project work was directly responsive to parents' interests and hooked them in. In addition, teachers did not discard ideas from parents which, on face value, did not seem to be workable. They found a solution to parents wanting one-to-one time with staff that did not involve many hours of extra meeting time, by inviting parents to have such meetings during their parent help session.

The impact of parents and teachers working together to understand more about children and their learning was broader than the stated focus: parents and staff felt more valued for their contributions, and the project work invoked a greater sense of team feeling amongst the staff.

Learning more about and working with families enriched teachers' knowledge about children's interests and experiences, affirmed families, and enabled both parties to extend learning.

Two-way communication about children's learning

The city education and care centre is a full-day education and care centre in a central city suburb. It is located on the ground floor of a villa, divided into three main rooms. One of the rooms becomes a sleeping room during the day. There is a kitchen, small staff room, and office to one side. A verandah leads to the outside play area, which has perspex windows in a back wall so that children can watch the traffic on the motorway below. The centre has a good range of equipment.

This centre is a parent co-operative, and parents are involved in all aspects of centre operation: discussion of the programme and children's learning; governance; fundraising; working bees; and social events. The parent committee and staff work collaboratively. Families are mainly middle/high income and most are in paid employment.

Both staff and parents regard children as the "number one priority", and whenever extra resources are needed for the children, parents raise required funding. Fees are quite high (then \$203 per week).

During most of the programme, the children are not grouped, except after lunch, when a small group of the six oldest children takes part in the "preschool programme" where they are engaged in literacy and other activities. There is a more low-key session running parallel with 3-year-olds, who are invited to join in. The 3-year-old group offers "sustained intellectual activities" and expectations to sit down and complete tasks. There is a mat time for all children before lunch.

As Table 7 shows, three of the teachers who were interviewed in 2002 had left the centre in 2003. However, all the parents involved were able to be re-interviewed in 2003.

Table 7 Interview participants in 2002 and 2003

Participants	2002	2003
Parents	5 mothers and 1 father from 5 families	5 mothers and 1 father from 5 families
Teachers	Supervisor Assistant supervisor 5 teachers	Supervisor Assistant supervisor 2 teachers (3 had left)
Professional development adviser	Yes	Yes

Parents' aspirations and views about the centre

All parents wanted their children to develop their skills and knowledge to the fullest, with some emphasising the importance of positive attitudes towards learning, and of fostering their child's aptitudes and strengths:

I want him to be keen on learning and hope his interest in learning keeps on and doesn't wane. (Mother)

It is important that she has a love of learning. (Mother)

I want an education that allows him to grow into the person he is and utilises his skills, that encourages him in what he wants to do. (Mother)

In the initial interviews, parents were highly appreciative of the centre staff, programme, and environment. They thought the centre contributed to their children's learning through the interactions with other children and adults, and the range of stimulating activities (examples given were woodwork, artwork, music, dough, using scissors). Some parents did not provide this range of activities at home, or regarded them as different from what their children were exposed to at home. Parents said interactions with other children assisted their children to develop socially through playing with others and learning to get on with them. Interactions with adults and children supported children's language development. The way staff "get involved and like the children" was noticed.

Parents were very positive about the "preschool programme". For example, the introduction of the programme and its emphasis on "basic maths, reading, and writing" appealed to a mother who had been considering whether to send her son to kindergarten when he was older, because she thought he would get better preparation for school at kindergarten. Provision of the programme could sway her towards keeping her child at the centre. Only one parent wanted her child to learn anything different at the centre, and this was "prewriting skills".

Broad values were largely shared between home and centre. One parent who had searched for good childcare said the centre appealed to her because it was firm, had a structured day, good discipline, and children were taught to take turns. The main differences between home and the

centre identified by parents were a quieter family environment at home, and the need for children to be more self-sufficient there, and to keep themselves “amused”. Home offered some different opportunities, too. One family said these included going on skiing holidays, attending church, and going tramping. Another said the parents sometimes spoke French at home, and were thinking of getting a French speaking foreign student to help their child learn French.

Views of communications, relationships, and involvement

Parents and teachers had common views about the importance of good communication and respectful relationships between teachers and parents. Both highlighted the fact that the centre is a parent co-operative, and that a culture of shared decision making had been developed between teachers and parents. Decision making relates to all aspects of the centre, and was portrayed as parents and teachers working together in the interests of children.

Practices for communicating with parents about children’s learning included very extensive written information, as well as verbal communication. There were well-established systems for assessing, documenting, and planning for groups of children and individuals, and for discussing assessments and goals with parents. Each teacher was the designated “family group teacher” responsible for assessment and planning for five or six individual children, and for meeting and liaising with their parents. Assessment and planning for every child was discussed by the whole teaching team, but the family group teacher undertook the detailed observations, worked with the parents, and documented the plan in the child’s profile book. At six-monthly intervals, a summary was written by staff of the child’s development, based on *Te Whāriki*, and an individual programme plan was developed. The family group teacher had a formal meeting with parents at this time to discuss the child’s progress and goals. This meeting also provided an opportunity for parents to talk about any other issues. Profile books were available by the entrance, and parents were encouraged to take these home as often as they wanted to.

In addition, there was a diary in the entrance hall for parents to record issues and requests. A “Centre daily events chart” on display had photographs and notes about what had happened on each day. A monthly programme plan was displayed on the wall. “Preschool books” covering what had been done in the preschool programme were written. They indicated what children were learning, and the development of children’s skills.

Parents most appreciated the communication about their own child’s learning. The individual profile book was valued as providing a good record of plans for the child’s learning, progress, and development, and the value of interactions and activities at the centre.

Some parents wanted more information about learning or a stronger focus on literacy and numeracy, for example:

- more explanation of the curriculum;
- practical ideas on how parents could help with learning;
- more numeracy and an individualised programme for children; and

- pre-writing skills.

Teachers had picked up on some parents' desire for literacy and numeracy to be "taught", and this was a dilemma for them.

While parents and teachers emphasised the value of parental involvement in reassuring parents that the child is well cared for, teachers pinpointed the value of parents being part of the learning process at the centre. They thought that parent/whānau involvement is essential because parents are the people who know most about their children. The information teachers can gain to help them plan for the child, and help the child settle and feel comfortable, is invaluable. Teachers thought it important to find out whether there are issues at home that are not evident in the centre, and *vice versa*, because these understandings enable both parties to work to the benefit of the child. Teachers' knowledge of children's experiences enables them to build on these experiences.

Parents portrayed their own role in respect to the centre as more passive: being informed about their child's learning, and following up activities at home. Both parties thought involvement made it easier or provided a forum for parents to raise issues and concerns.

Teachers were interested in deepening connections with parents, and having a greater exchange of observations and views in respect to their children.

Communicating with parents about children's learning

The teachers had experienced student teachers coming to the centre who were using and writing about Learning Stories, and they wanted to understand more about their use in assessment. They thought the concept of Learning Stories fitted well with the research project, and lent itself to inclusion of parents' views in assessment.

Trialling Learning Stories

The professional development adviser introduced Learning Stories to teachers, who then trialled the Learning Stories approach by watching a video segment of children in an early childhood setting, filling in Learning Story sheets and discussing them. Teachers decided that each family group teacher would do Learning Stories for their own children, and discuss interpretation and planning with the wider staff group. In this early phase of the project, everyone was "at a different place" in their understanding of Learning Stories.

Some teachers disagreed with always recording information from a credit rather than a deficit model. They thought it important to focus on children's needs as well as interests, and believed parents also wanted a focus on needs. The Learning Stories approach worked well sometimes, but on other occasions teachers said they were not always able to "find" a Learning Story when they were doing observations. They felt they were trying to fit children into learning dispositions, and these did not always seem to be relevant. A focus on needs suggests that teachers wanted to look out for gaps in skills and knowledge, separate from the environment, and teach to address these. This approach gives weight to easily measurable skills, missing more complex learning outcomes

that include children's learning strategies and motivation, and that require observational assessment in context (Carr et al., 2001).

Teachers gave parents an information pamphlet about Learning Stories, displayed photographs and Learning Stories analyses on their programme planning board, and discussed the Learning Stories approach with parents. These discussions indicated to teachers that "We are not getting through here". Parents did not seem interested in or wanting to be involved in the Learning Stories. This led teachers to examine whether the approach was working for parents.

Revising approaches to assessment and planning

At this time, feedback from the initial research interviews was received. Teachers used this feedback and their own experiences from trialling Learning Stories to plan a parents' workshop, in order to:

- discuss with parents what teachers and parents really value about the ECE centre and want for children;
- explain the programme plan (focused on individuals and groups), system of assessment, and profiles;
- discuss research about parent involvement in children's learning;
- share profile books, and ask parents what they think is most useful and what else they might like to see; and
- ask parents if they would like another workshop and, if so, on what topic, e.g. mathematics and early literacy.

Most of the time at the parents' meeting was spent discussing the centre philosophy, why parents brought their child to the centre, and what parents and teachers valued. A little time was spent discussing the curriculum and developing ideas for better communication with parents about this. One idea, later adopted, was for a "quotes book" for each child of "all those quirky things children say". Parents and staff would each contribute "words and phrases [child] often uses".

Following the parent meeting, the teachers combined Learning Stories with other forms of assessment, and focused on interests and needs for their designated child. Learning dispositions were used to describe outcomes for children, along with other outcomes. Analysis of observations included reference to *Te Whāriki* strands. While using the language of learning dispositions, the team decided to also go back to "using language parents understood", such as maths, science, and literacy, because they connected with parents' interests. They used a lot of photographs, and included a written excerpt to say what was happening in each photograph and why it was important for learning. An example of this approach is given in relation to a photograph of a child stacking blocks in order of size and colour. The written explanation was:

Seriation

To seriate objects from biggest to smallest, children need to understand the concept of 'big' and 'little' and how this relates to other objects. This is a lead into mathematics.

In this photo, W has successfully stacked the cups from biggest to smallest. When the teacher asked him: ‘Can you find the biggest and smallest?’ he was able to identify the correct cups. He also knew the colours blue, yellow, and red.

Teachers devised a common framework for developing individual programme plans that set out the following steps:

- do a summary of development from the observations that you have made over the month;
- give the summary to parents as a draft;
- meet with parents to discuss;
- add in observations parents have done at home; and
- with parents, set goals for the child.

This contrasted with teachers’ previous approach, where teachers would set the goals and then tell parents what they were going to do.

Group goals set in the programme were illustrated with photos and analyses about individual children, so parents could see that “even though it is a group goal, it is focused on the individual child”. This has enabled better linkage between group and individual goals.

Teachers also began using two “home books” (one for older and one for younger children) that are sent home with different children for a week for parents to share, on a page, whatever they want about their child. Parents contribute on the understanding that the “home book” is shared with others. Excerpts in the home book include everyday happenings, such as a day in the life of the child, and photographs of other family members, as well as special events. At mat time the home book is shared with the child’s group. Parents have told teachers that the home book also gives them useful information about other children in the centre.

Documentation for the wall display of what is happening in the programme was made more visually enticing and located where parents would see it. It now includes documentation of spontaneous activities as well as planned activities. The programme planning board was cleared of “other clutter” and put inside the entranceway where all parents have to pass:

Parents stop, they read it, they talk about ‘Oh look, there you are with your child. What are you doing there?’ So for us this is working, and working well. (Teacher)

Views of outcomes

Centre-wide discussion of philosophy and values, and development of assessment and planning approaches that incorporated parent and teacher views about goals for children, seemed to contribute to positive outcomes. Both teachers and parents thought home and centre experiences were better connected and understood, and that assessment and planning processes were deeper for having parental input. Parents especially liked the home book for the opportunity it gave them to provide information about their own child, and to find out about other children and the centre community, as well as for the enjoyment it gave them and their child:

It's a fascinating look into other lives in the centre ... J thinks it is great too. (Parent)

They also liked the quotes book, and enjoyed writing in it and reading what centre staff had written:

It's nice to share the purlers! (Parent)

The stronger communication related to children's learning seems to have led to greater continuity in children's learning between home and centre, and staff being better able to pick up on children's interests.

Issues raised by parents in the initial interviews seemed to have been addressed. For example, a father who, at the initial interview, had wanted his child to have more structured learning opportunities for literacy and numeracy, said he was happy with the class for 3- and 4-year-olds. Another parent said:

The quality of communication has improved. It was good before at a personal level, but now we are provided with a more structured basis for programming. At the same time Letterland came in ... This gives the children focus and helps parents understand preliteracy learning.

It was evident that improved communication about children's learning also made parents and staff feel more comfortable in the centre:

I feel more comfortable here because of the excellent staff communication. (Parent)

I feel more comfortable, especially following the meeting with Sue. It showed she had a really good understanding of what O is doing, what she is interested in, and her ability. (Parent)

Four parents were more involved in the life of the centre than previously: two had joined the committee, and two families were more aware of the importance of involvement and getting to meetings.

Some teachers thought their beliefs concerning parent/whānau involvement in early childhood education had changed, not in direction but in depth:

For me, I've become more aware of how important the connection is. It's finding out more about what goes on at home and in the home environment. Added insight but also added respect about the role that that environment plays in the life of the child when that child comes to the centre. They're not two isolated instances like home and the centre. I always thought there was connection but I've really added to that belief of how important that connection is. (Supervisor)

The views of parents and teachers were largely reflected in the professional development adviser's views. The professional development adviser thought that involvement in the project helped teachers build parent relationships. Teachers were creative in devising their own approaches to planning and assessment, using Learning Stories as one tool amongst many. The professional development adviser felt that this was a positive way of viewing Learning Stories. The project also gave staff an opportunity to create plans for linking individual and group goals.

Table 8 **Parent and staff views of outcomes**

Participants	Parents	Teachers
Working with children	<p>Parents and teachers “notice different things” and provide for continuity in child’s learning by working together.</p>	<p>The stronger connections with families benefit staff communication with children.</p> <p>Children are more in control of their own learning because activities and interactions interest them.</p>
Home/centre connections	<p>Home and centre better connected.</p> <p>“Home book” valued for opportunity to give information about child and find out about other children and the centre. Parents and children “enjoy” the “home book”.</p> <p>Parents and children enjoy the quotes and writing in the “quotes book”.</p> <p>Parents more aware of what they can do at home to help child. Two parents see value of “encouraging what child can do than what child cannot do”.</p>	<p>Parents give more information about their children and teachers find it easier to bring up issues with them.</p> <p>Parents seem to better understand the role of teachers at the centre in encouraging learning and to appreciate the programme planning system.</p>
Communication about children and learning	<p>Parents value having input into assessment and planning. Like having long-term goals.</p> <p>Learning objectives and photographs of children “doing it” help parents understand the process.</p> <p>“Evolutionary changes not revolutionary changes.”</p> <p>Communication more focused, easier to understand.</p> <p>Teachers seen as more proactive in getting parent views.</p>	<p>Teachers communicate better with parents, are more aware of need to use different forms of communication to reach every parent.</p> <p>Goals for children are more specific and in-depth. The plans are better for parental input.</p>
Attitudes	<p>Four of five parents felt more welcome, comfortable, and included. (Fifth always felt welcome etc.)</p>	<p>Teachers value the contribution of parents more.</p> <p>All teachers felt more comfortable in the centre.</p> <p>Teachers thought parents valued them more.</p>
Staff relationships		<p>The common planning systems enable staff to work as a cohesive team with the same understandings. All staff contribute more to planning.</p> <p>Contribution at team meetings is respected more by other teachers.</p>

She thought that there now seemed to be more two-way communication, with parents sharing information from home. The use of language of mathematics and literacy helped parents become more aware of the programme’s goals, and this has benefited staff and parents. The “home book” provides a link between home and the centre and is especially useful for parents who are not able to spend time in the centre. The profile books help children see themselves as competent and capable learners.

A spin-off from the project has been an excellent recent ERO report, with reviewers being impressed by the planning systems.

At the end of the project, eight parents out of 25 (excluding those who were interviewed previously) filled in the parent survey. This small sample of parents had a high level of agreement that teachers give useful information about the child and the programme, and communicated well with parents about home experiences. The neutral parent response was from a parent who had only just come to New Zealand.

Table 9 Views of parents and whānau (other than those interviewed previously) (n=8)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Teachers give me useful information about the programme	3	4	1	
Teachers give me useful information about my child	7	1		
I talk to the teachers about my child's experiences at home	4	4		

One parent wrote of the helpfulness of teachers’ advice:

[The teachers told me] when my child has scratched another child, what their chosen intervention was, so when this occurred again at home with a sibling my management was the same. I found this very helpful.

Views of professional development

The professional development adviser thought the opportunity to take part in professional development had enabled the staff to look closely at Learning Stories and select or reject those aspects that they did or did not like. The scrutiny benefited their planning by providing an opportunity to link individual and group needs. The professional development adviser had to be away during November and December before the project ended and was unable to finish her work with the centre, but a final session was held with another professional development adviser.

Teachers said that the professional development adviser provided them with readings, information, and ideas and ran a workshop. Two teachers thought that the professional development adviser did not completely approve of their insistence on working on children’s

needs as well as interests, preferring them to take a credit approach to assessment and planning. However, this alternative viewpoint also had advantages:

She made us think about what we wanted to do and how we wanted to do it, to look at where we wanted to go When someone doesn't agree with what you are doing, but you want to do it, it makes you argue the case.

Teachers thought that the most important ways in which the professional development helped the centre were in:

- getting the team started and giving a focus for change;
- bringing the team together and scaffolding learning; and
- getting staff discussing their values, and motivating them.

One teacher found some of the information and ideas confusing. The biggest surprise for teachers was finding that Learning Stories did not work for them at this time.

Conclusion

This case study illustrates a centre finding its own way to communicate with parents and to develop assessment and planning processes that address issues which parents are concerned with, while upholding teachers' professional values. In doing this, they started to deal with "hard issues" where parents' and teachers' views about appropriate pedagogy conflicted. It suggests that there are no "ready made answers", and points to the value of teachers and parents collaboratively formulating their centre philosophy, and what that means in practice.

Teachers collaborating with parents to discuss knowledge and understanding of children, and plan for their learning and development, can lead to more meaningful pedagogical approaches that connect to children's interests. These teachers and parents developed unique and engaging ways to make connections with home: the home book and quote book had evident appeal, and were enjoyed by children and families alike. They also strengthened these connections. These examples may be of interest to other centres wanting to make connections between centre and home.

Creating a community of learners

This education and care centre is for the children of teenage parents (all of whom were mothers at the time of interviews) who have returned to secondary school. All parents are low income. It is situated alongside a playcentre in the grounds of a primary school. Many local facilities, including a library, shopping centre, health services, and Plunket services are close by. The parents' own secondary school is five minutes' walk away.

The centre was built in 2000. Until then, parents of infants had "put their babies under their desks" or had their child "minded" in the whānau centre, or in a back room in the adjoining tavern. The centre is largely open plan, but divided by a kitchen area and tables and chairs, so that infants have their own space. The outside environment has a covered deck, native planting, and a

medium-size play area with large sandpit, climbing frame, and a good range of outdoor equipment. The centre is well resourced for all age groups, with babies and toddlers being the main age group. Space for adults is confined, with a small staff room and cupboard-sized office. However, comfortable soft chairs edge the area for babies and toddlers, and mothers often sit here to breastfeed their babies, or be with children.

The centre is organised into four age groupings (6–18 months, 18 months–3 years, 3–5 years, and a group of children who have outgrown the 18 months–3-years group but are too young for the 3–5-year group). Each staff member takes responsibility for the whole needs of individual children (e.g. nappy changing, bottle feeding, giving medicines), planning and assessment, preparing an individual education programme based on an emergent curriculum that incorporates planned and spontaneous experiences, and communicating with parents about the programmes. The groups of children intermix.

The parents do not usually stay during the day because they are at school themselves, except when they are settling their child in. However, two parents are rostered to come to the centre each day to bring the children’s lunch from their own school kitchen, and mothers who are breastfeeding their babies are telephoned to come when their baby needs to be breastfed. If a child is upset or has an accident, the parent can be telephoned; because the school is so close, she is able to come to the centre if necessary. Parents also come on centre trips. One parent is the elected parent representative for liaising between the staff and all parents on a daily basis. All parents are on the committee. Parents also fundraise for the centre. In the last year, the parents raised funding to hire a bus and pay for a trip to the zoo, hold two parties, and buy presents for all the children.

In 2003, one teacher and the teacher aide who were previously interviewed had left. One of the teachers had become a job-share teacher with another teacher. Four of the parents previously interviewed had left the centre. This meant that only one parent whose child was still at the centre could be interviewed for a second time. A second parent who had left to go to polytechnic in December 2002, but had been present during the course of the project, also came back for a second interview. Eight parents from 16 families responded to the survey in 2003.

Table 10 Interview participants in 2002 and 2003

Participants	2002	2003
Parents	5 mothers	2 mothers
Teachers	Head teacher 2 teachers Field-based trainee Teacher aide	Head teacher 1 teacher (job-sharing) Field-based trainee 1 new teacher (job-sharing)
Professional development adviser	Yes	Yes

Parents' aspirations and views about the centre

Each parent highlighted the importance of schooling for their child, reflecting perhaps the importance which they gave to schooling for themselves, and their own decisions to go back to school. One parent commented on her own experiences of leaving in Year 10 and “humbugging around with school”, an experience she did not want for her son. Three parents wanted their child to get higher qualifications if possible, one “in something major, like be a lawyer”. One wanted her child to “be clever and have a job she can be proud of”. One parent said she would like her child to go to a kura kaupapa Māori, or if that was not possible, to a bilingual school, because of the importance of Māori language and culture to her.

Two parents thought that nothing would stop their child getting the kind of education they would like for him/her. Two said that what the child was interested in was most important in deciding how far they went in education. Another said that “being a druggie” or “friends dropping out of school” could influence whether the child stayed at school.

Parents thought that the main value of the centre for them and their child was:

- the positive atmosphere and values and the sense of wellbeing that these engendered;
- the opportunity for children to play with other children and learn to share;
- the range of activities to support children’s learning; and
- the parents’ own learning from what happened at the centre.

Parents emphasised that it was important for their child to feel comfortable and like the centre. They identified that positive feelings were supported by the “atmosphere”, staff interactions, and good social values:

There’s a feeling when you walk through the door that it’s a nice place.

Children are taught to show love instead of hit.

The relationship with staff is good.

The close contact that parents were able to have with the centre helped parents and children feel comfortable. For example, one mother thought her child was helped by the child’s knowledge that her mother would come back to breastfeed her when she needed her.

Parents regarded the interactions their child experienced with other children and adults, especially learning to play with others and share, as of prime value for their child. This was a main difference between the centre and home. There were some different routines and practices, especially around eating (seating arrangement at table at the centre) and sleeping (not having a set bedtime at home). One parent noticed her child “played up” at home, but not at the centre. Only one parent talked about interchange of activities between home and centre, for example singing centre songs at home, and the parent teaching staff her board games. While recognising that the centre sang waiata, had karakia before eating, and used some Māori words, another parent said she would like more Māori to be spoken at the centre. Only one other parent wanted her child to learn something else at the centre—how to write her own name.

Parents said their child learnt from the activities in the centre, commenting on “learning songs and keeping a tune”, “learning about painting and leaves, to draw and write, although not writing yet”, “going to the library and loving books”, and “experiencing different textures”. Some said that these activities or opportunities were not available at home, for example a parent liked the outside play area because she did not have outside play space at home. One parent also appreciated the reputation of the centre as being a “good crèche”. She thought the playground, the separation into age groups, and the good quality of the teachers contributed to this reputation.

Three parents spontaneously talked about their own learning from what happened at the centre. One said that some of the centre activities were things that she would not have thought of doing herself. Another described the centre as “an open parenting book” in providing helpful hints on how to deal with problems, such as her child being “beaten up” by an older cousin who lived in the home.

Parents regarded the main difference between home and the centre as the number of people with whom the child could interact, and some differences in activities in the two settings. Two parents talked about the ways in which their child liked to “mimic” them and to help with “home life skills”, such as cooking, doing the dishes, and washing—experiences that were not available at the centre. One parent said her son stayed up longer at home, while the centre had got him into a routine of sleeping.

Views of communication and relationships

While teachers wanted to work in partnership with parents as “co-educators”, the communication practices tended to be one-way:

- staff telling parents about their child’s experiences;
- staff reassuring and welcoming parents;
- staff giving helpful advice on issues; and
- staff explaining the assessment and planning within each child’s profile.

These communications were appreciated by parents, who indicated a thirst for knowledge, good and bad, about their own child. Parents appreciated the staff knowledge, discussions, and care for their own child and themselves:

Staff are encouraging and talk highly of your kid. (Parent)

Teachers like the parents and look out for your kid. (Parent)

Staff are bound to know if you have a question. (Parent)

Most parents said the biggest challenge for them and for their children was leaving their child and learning to trust others who were “not family”. They were supported by the reassurance they received in being able to stay and settle their child in for as long as necessary, and ring the centre at any time after leaving the child there:

Staff say to ring any time and they don’t get annoyed if you do ring. (Parent)

Most parents reported on advice they had received from staff, largely about behaviour and health problems; for example, feeding problems, how to deal with tantrums, sleeping problems, toilet training, and diarrhoea.

The best communications parents experienced were finding out about their own child; for example, that the child had a “happy nature”, looking at the child’s profile book, finding out that a staff member was attached to a child when she first started. One parent wanted to know more about plans for her child’s learning.

The worst communications for parents were all about their own child—a parent hearing her child had hit another child, a child being bitten and the parent thinking staff had not done enough, and a parent not finding out until after school that her child had fallen over.

Some parents suggested ways to improve communications. These were about parents’ own children:

- holding parent–teacher interviews, instead of the informal arrangement of “Come over and look at the profile books”—that would be helpful because the “teacher could tell you and you would not have to ask”, and it would enable the parent to talk about her own individual child;
- being told about incidents that hurt or upset her child when they happened, rather than after school; and
- staff remembering small requests parents had made about their children.

Both parents and staff thought that good communications between parents and staff supported the child’s sense of wellbeing, and both thought it important for teachers to understand the child’s home upbringing. However, parents emphasised the value for them and their child of knowing what their child was doing during the day and what was planned, while teachers emphasised the value of knowing what practices were acceptable for the parent.

Finding opportunities for more active engagement with parents about their children’s experiences and learning, and assessment and plans for children’s learning, was one of the key staff achievements during the course of the project.

Collaborating in the interests of children

The focus of the project started with teachers wanting to connect with parents’ interest in “things Māori” and strengthen children’s understanding of their own whakapapa (genealogy). It shifted during the course of the professional development to working with parents to build a collaborative relationship in the interests of children.

Making whakapapa dolls

Initially, because of the number of Māori parents in the centre, and staff commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi and to furthering their own knowledge and ways to relate to Māori children and families in the centre, the staff decided they wanted to focus on “things Māori”. They were also interested in finding ways in which parents could be encouraged to take ownership of events

in the centre. One of the ways in which parents had “taken ownership” in the past was through events such as the Christmas party, which the parents organised and held. Staff and the professional development adviser decided on making whakapapa dolls for the centre as a way to bring together the two goals of furthering “things Māori” and parents taking ownership. The whakapapa dolls represent three generations of a family, and are made from wire, cloth, and stuffing:

The dolls are lovely. They are the opposite continuum from Barbie dolls. (Professional development adviser)

Gill McGrath, the early childhood educator who developed the original idea of whakapapa dolls and was asked to hold a day’s workshop with the centre, had made dolls with ECE services and schools since the 1960s. Some dolls were accompanied by books in English or Māori which were based on play with the dolls. The idea was that parents, staff, and children would make the dolls, the dolls would stay in the centre, and this would be a way of helping children to understand the idea of whakapapa.

There was also a wish to experiment with documentation during the doll-making workshop, by documenting this as an event. A doll-making workshop was arranged for an afternoon during the holidays. Staff expected a good turnout, because parents had said they were interested in coming with their children. Parents were reminded of the workshop and given notices advertising it and encouraging participation. While 10 parents said they would come to the afternoon, only one parent and child actually turned up.

The people involved in the afternoon had “loads of fun”. The workshop facilitator brought her family of dolls: Rehu, a grandmother; Hone, a grandfather; Hurinui, the second grandfather; Whirinika, the second grandmother; Clem, Whirinika and Hurinui’s son; Clem and Shaquille’s triplets, Marama, Piripi, and Uira; Shaquille, the triplets’ mother; and Ra, the horse. A wonderful doll, Princess (to be renamed after looking in a name book) was made. Had more people turned up, more dolls would have been made.

Documenting the day on video led to the staff making the story and photos of the doll-making afternoon into a book which is kept in the centre library for “children and parents to visit when they choose”. In discussion at a staff meeting, one teacher also suggested showing the book to the licensee as a way of generating discussion of the learning occurring through the doll-making workshop, and discussing with her how this sort of work might be included in the parents’ school curriculum.

While the activity and its results were valuable for those involved, staff said they were disappointed at the low turnout of parents. Their greatest insight came from hearing a group of parents of sons questioning “Why do we want to make dolls? They’re for girls.” In a staff meeting, the following questions were asked:

- Who was this experience for?
- Was it for staff or parents?

- How did it change our thinking?

Staff concluded that:

We chose the topic thinking we knew what they wanted, and we expected them to follow our lead. Perhaps we should have conferred with parents and let them make the decision. Perhaps we should have asked them that simple question ‘What do you want from us?’ In saying this I believe we have become more reflective as practitioners. (Joint presentation by staff)

From this experience, we found it was not the parents who needed to change, but ourselves as teachers. (Teacher)

Staff saw the children as being the common connection and interest between staff and parents. At the same time, notes from the initial interviews for the research project were sent to staff and parents. These also confirmed to staff that parents were predominantly interested in knowing about their own child’s experiences and learning. In addition, one parent had requested freer access to profile books, another had requested videoing, and another had asked for more Māori language to be spoken. As one teacher said:

It became obvious to us all that we needed to follow their lead.

An immediate change was for staff to get the profile books out of the staff room and display them where parents and children could look at them at any time.

Over the course of the rest of the year, staff worked on three ways of involving parents: making and showing a video of children in the centre; altering the centre’s assessment and planning processes to include parents; and preparing an outdoor environment plan, in collaboration with parents and their ECD⁴ co-ordinator.

Videoring children and adults at the centre

The idea of making a video emerged from discussion about the need to focus on children, and the importance of learning from activities that seemed to work well. A video had been shown in the previous year about what toddlers were doing, and the value of their interactions and activities, and this had been well attended by parents. Feedback from the initial research interviews had shown that parents were wanting to know about what children were learning, what was actually happening at the centre during the day, and why. The focus of the video was intended to capture the flavour of what was happening and to unpack what was valuable, what children were learning, and why those particular opportunities were offered.

⁴ Early Child Development (ECD) was a government agency providing advice and support on environmental and building plans as one of its roles. It has since become part of the Ministry of Education.

Videoring children interacting with others and being involved in activities at the centre, and showing and discussing the video with parents and whānau, turned out to be a highlight for everyone involved. Staff talked to parents about the possibility of videoring, and had asked for their willingness to take part and their agreement to letting their child be videoed. Parents responded enthusiastically.

Two videos were made by the professional development adviser, who then worked with the head teacher to analyse and edit them for showing. During this process, the head teacher and professional development adviser worked out how to section the video, what they thought came out of it, and what they wanted to say about each section. It was not possible to work with the whole team on this aspect, as both the professional development adviser and head teacher would have liked, because the professional development had already exceeded its 15 hours of staff meeting time.

The video showing was also to include still frames from the doll-making afternoon. These were set up for display, and put on the computer and projected onto a large screen. Then the edited video was to be shown with staff talking to this. When it came to putting commentary to stills from the video, the professional development adviser said that they tried not to make the commentary “too text dense”.

The first video showing was advertised as a “parent meeting” with an invitation to “Come and look at your children’s profile book, view a video on your children’s day, and have a cuppa.” It was held straight after school. The video “brought to life ... how the children spent their day, their interactions and interests” (head teacher’s reflective journal). The showing attracted not only almost 100 percent of parents, but also some grandparents and other relatives. This engagement of grandparents made the professional development adviser and teachers think about the framing of the meeting as a “parent meeting”. Since then they have been more conscious of including other family members.

Parents, children, and staff talked and responded to the video. The planned talk by teachers and the whole group discussion did not occur because of the enthusiastic enjoyment by everyone and the “take over by the gaggle of excited children down the front” on seeing the video. But there was a lot of informal talk and discussion of individual profile books. For the first time, parents were invited to make comments in the profile books.

Teachers still wanted to try out ideas of conveying what children were learning, and the value of activities, through showing and discussing videos. A second video was made. This video included recordings of an infant’s interest in a book; infants exploring sensory experiences through the heuristic play basket (a flat basket full of objects with different textures and shapes, such as plastic, wood, fur, silk, egg cup, bone teething ring, spiralled cotton reels); and involvement of children in a range of activities and interactions. The head teacher and professional development adviser took still frames of some sequences after the event, and added some text to them about what was going on. That led to a display of the photos of sequences and the text. A poster about schemas and explanations was part of the display.

Another “parent/whānau” meeting was held, attended this time by all the parents, two fathers, a grandmother, and two grandfathers. Children and parents again looked at the profile books, and parents worked with staff on their child’s individual education programme (see next section). Parents’ and children’s input are now more actively sought as part of the profile documentation:

What we learned was that visual stuff works well, there’s huge interest in that sort of documentation, in documentation around the portfolios, around videos. That gave us a sense of what sort of direction we would work in. It was very much a beginning. (Professional development adviser)

Including parents in assessment, planning, and curriculum discussions

At the start of the project, staff made the plans for the programme, for small groups and for individual children. These plans were not “fixed”, but able to be revised as new opportunities or insights occurred. Individual children’s profile books included a selection of photographs and written descriptions of learning in relation to *Te Whāriki*.

The key change that staff made was to invite parents to participate in planning their child’s Individual Education Programme (IEP), rather than telling them what staff had planned. The process was as follows:

- The teacher asked each parent individually what they would like their child to experience during the term.
- This was matched with a *Te Whāriki* strand and developed into an IEP.
- Later this became more sophisticated, with teachers working with parents individually, showing and discussing *Te Whāriki* goals in relation to the child, and developing a programme from this discussion in which each party contributed their knowledge of the child:

This resulted in a collaborative result, an Individual Educational Programme which was based on parental and staff observations... The parents had very clear ideas about what they wanted from the teachers regarding their children. The suggestions flowed and the results were excellent. (Teacher)

The initial development of the IEP was followed up with a parent meeting, where parents discussed with staff how they felt the child went through the planned experiences, and how these met up with the goals.

The outdoor environment plan

At the same time as the professional development was being offered, plans were being made to move the centre to a new site alongside the parents’ school in 2004. Staff were working with an ECD co-ordinator on developing an outdoor environment plan for the centre. Their greater awareness of the value of involving parents prompted them to invite parents to participate in the planning with them. They saw this as “another way to open the doors and have this ideal input”. Four parents came to a planning meeting after school from 3.30pm to 5.30pm. Both the ECD co-ordinator and the head teacher spoke about design principles and research on the outside

environment. Parents contributed, often linking ideas from their own childhood to the kinds of things they would like for their children:

We all added our ideas about what we would like for our new [centre] and one of the mums reflected on how she had a little seat outside under the tree as a child. (Field-based trainee)

At the end of this meeting, a list of “things we thought were important to include” was developed. A design was later drawn up by the ECD co-ordinator which included what parents liked. Two examples from 11 items that parents would like were:

Planting

- Native plants and trees/fruit trees/trees to climb
- Vegetable garden/digging area/compost (real mud)

Quiet spaces

- Seating/planting privacy/wind chimes/lots of hidey spaces
- Infant space (and changing space?)
- Sleeping space outside
- Eating

The head teacher said she “saw this as just another example of open communication that we are beginning to foster”.

Views of outcomes

Both parents and teachers thought that communication about children’s learning became more reciprocal, with parents contributing to planning for their child’s learning and coming to view themselves as educators too. There seemed to be greater respect and valuing between the parties, and enhanced parental confidence.

Teachers all identified changes in the way they listened to and were willing to take on board ideas from others. Comments included “I am more open to suggestions”, “there is more to offer from all sides”, and “everyone’s input is important”. They recognised a shift in their own role from “top-down teacher” to learner and teacher:

I found out that instead of ‘I’m a teacher and that’s a student’ that I am also a student as well as a teacher. (Teacher)

I think we were kind of up there. We were teachers. (Head teacher)

A stronger sense of community and willingness for parents and staff to have fun together was described by the head teacher. One event was a farewell party for a child turning five, who had been at the centre for three years. The child’s adoration of Spice Girls prompted staff to dress up as Spice Girls and sing and dance to a Spice Girls song. “We felt safe in front of parents to be ourselves, to share the day.” One of the parents dressed as a clown because the clown did not turn

up, and the child’s aunty and uncle came for this last day. The professional development adviser came to the party too, and was prompted by the administrator “Great photo opportunity!”

And the combination was one of community, which said to me, said to [the child], you matter, you really matter, and to that whole family, you matter. (Professional development adviser)

Table 11 **Parent and staff views of outcomes**

Participants	Parents	Teachers
Working with children	Contribute more to child’s learning.	Better advocate for children. IEPs are richer. Children see warmer relationship between staff and parents.
Home/centre connections	Willingness to ask teachers what to do to support child at home now.	Teachers more connected with families.
Communication about children and learning	Learnt about own child’s dispositions from the video showings. Teachers informed parents more about what their children were doing during the day. Parent appreciated very much being involved in the development of the IEP.	Teachers more open about issues as they occur. Teachers open to parental suggestions. Parents less reserved.
Curriculum and ECE regulations	Found the curriculum “a bit strange” but leaflet about <i>Te Whāriki</i> made sense.	Parents having some knowledge of the curriculum. Teachers having to explain the curriculum to parents, thereby enhancing own understanding. Greater parental interest in the children’s curriculum and the policies and regulations covering ECE services.
Attitudes	Parent felt more valued because she was asked what she thought. Parent saw herself as child’s first teacher.	Stronger sense of community. Willingness for parents and staff to have fun together. Greater respect for parents and more equal relationships. Parents seem to have greater confidence. Appreciate need to be non-judgemental.
Staff relationships		Cohesive team work.

Both parents interviewed were very positive about the communications and relationships between staff and parents, and the changes that had occurred in the course of the project.

One described the videoing and video showings like this:

Christine [the headteacher] brought [the idea of videoing] to the parents first and asked if we would like that. And then she called on Maggie [the professional development adviser]. She asked me [as parent representative] to put it forward to the mums to see what they thought about it. And about two weeks later we had a parent–teacher meeting and looked at the video. Heaps of people came—mums, dads, grandparents, aunties, and uncles. I had my niece. Everyone wanted to see what the kids did and how the teachers interacted with the kids. Some of the parents approached Maggie and then spoke to the teachers: ‘What was that play all about? How was my child learning during that play?’ (Parent)

The parent said she learned “a bit” from the showings, including that her child liked to observe others before she had a go herself. This was something the parent had not really noticed before.

Parents noticed that teachers acted on what parents said they wanted. A parent who appreciated being involved in the development of the IEP said:

They come to ask us ‘Is there anything you want your child to learn?’... And they listen and they do it, and we get to see it in their profile books. (Parent)

This parent also appreciated the easy access to the profile books, and thought that this was especially important for parents who did not live locally and missed out on parent meetings. The involvement helped her feel more valued:

Because nobody has ever asked me, you know, what I would like for her. To be learning. Usually they just do it and say she’s done this and this and this. So it was a shock when Christine [the headteacher] came and asked me ‘What do you think would be a good idea for Hinehou?’ [What did you say?] At the time when Christine first asked me, I was trying to teach her the alphabet. So we did heaps of line songs and heaps of alphabet songs and stuff like that. (Parent)

Another personal change for the mother was her willingness to ask teachers what to do at home now. She thought this was because:

It made me feel really important when they came asking me. That made me feel really, really special. Now when we plan things, I ask ‘Is there anything I can do for Hinehou at home?’ I read to Hinehou. She won’t go to sleep unless I read her bedtime stories. They say ‘Just read to her. Keep taking her to the library.’ (Parent)

This understanding of Hinehou’s interests fitted with what Hinehou said when asked what she liked best about the centre. She said “the books and the giraffe”.

A key benefit for the parent was to make her and her partner realise “we are not just her parents, we are also her first teachers”. The parent said she thought she could now contribute a lot more to Hinehou’s learning:

If there's a song she's learning at the [centre] and she comes home singing it and she forgets a line, I ask Christine 'Oh what's that song?' Christine will tell me and I'll be able to sing it with her. (Parent)

The parent saw the roles of teachers and parents as complementary:

They are her teachers. They see some aspects of her that I don't see. And I see some aspects that they don't see. We talk about that. Sometimes you get a surprise. 'Oh I didn't think she could do that.' (Parent)

At the end of the research and professional development project, the eight parents who filled in the survey were generally very positive about communications and relationships with staff.

Table 12 Views of parents and whānau of teacher/parent communications (n=8)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Teachers give me useful information about the programme	5	2	1	
Teachers give me useful information about my child	8			
I talk to the teachers about my child's experiences at home	3	3	1	

Parents liked being asked what they would like in the programme, and being given information about the day's activities, equipment, Ministry, and staffing issues. Knowing about the day was important:

They have a profile book about my daughter so I don't miss a lot of her growing up. (Parent)

Two parents said they used the information about the daily experiences to plan their afternoons and nights with their children, for example how much sleep the child needed. Three parents commented on their wish to be updated on any new things the child does, but were very satisfied with what they were told:

As a parent I always want to know what my child does every minute. The amount of information I get is so much I wouldn't ask for more. (Parent)

Only one parent felt that she did not know much about the programme.

There was unanimous strong agreement that teachers gave useful information about the child. Parents commented on information about eating, sleeping, health issues, activities, when the child learns new things, if the child has excelled at something, and the profile book about each child. For example:

They see her at different angles than I. And the teachers were the ones who told me she might need grommits. And she did. (Parent)

They always tell me what he's been up to during the day, especially when he has overcome a problem. He doesn't like messy play but the other day he had his hands in a tray of paint and did finger painting. (Parent)

One parent wrote that the routine established by teachers helped her to establish a routine at home.

None of the parents wanted the teachers to know anything more about their child's experiences at home. All except one parent listed the kinds of things they tell teachers about home experiences. These were information about sleeping, feeding, eating, allergies, friendships, any changed behaviour, learning experiences, moods, and new skills.

The professional development adviser thought that being part of the project helped teachers to be clearer about some things that parents would like to happen in the centre:

The whole process of having parent involvement as a focus starts people thinking about it. They go down a level, become more analytical and critical. This is a useful thing to do. (Professional development adviser)

In terms of partnership, she thought that teachers were trying to listen, and this listening was clearly evident in the shifts to involving parents in planning. This was a new direction.

Since she was not there before the project happened, it was hard for her to see evidence of whether relationships had changed during the course of the project, except for what staff members and parents said. But she thought that the notion of partnership was much clearer to staff, and that the contributions of staff and parents were more strongly appreciated. Through investigating families' perspectives on children, teachers were able to use their enhanced understanding to offer opportunities for children to have a more active role in learning.

The professional development adviser had the closest linkages with the head teacher, and was aware of changes in her thinking. There were certain directions in which the head teacher wanted to go, and there seemed to be greater clarity about the direction and the steps to take, and greater confidence to do this. The "specialness" of the staff team had been affirmed through the process.

The greatest surprise for the professional development adviser was the low turnout to the doll-making workshop, since the idea of the workshop had been canvassed, and the number who wanted to come had been discussed. She learned from this experience too.

Views of professional development

The professional development adviser said that she offered suggestions on the directions of the centre's work, did the videoing, worked with the head teacher on commentary for the videoing, but didn't always have time to do the commentary together with other staff, and discuss what the video showed. Ideally, she thought that it would have been better to work with the whole team. She found it challenging to work on a video and commentary that would be interesting and useful for different audiences: the child audience; the parent/family audience; and the ERO audience:

That's really complex stuff and you have to experiment and it's time. It's not everyone's cup of tea either. You can't have the whole team doing every single thing together.
(Professional development adviser)

The professional development adviser also provided research papers and readings.

Staff members were all very positive about the professional development and research project. They identified the following ways in which the professional development adviser helped them:

- undertaking the videoing and editing the videos with the head teacher;
- helping teachers to focus;
- drawing attention to children, what they were doing, and why;
- opening up communication with parents; and
- offering guidance and encouragement.

Two teachers said that more time would have made the professional development work better for them. One thought it would have worked better if there was a video camera on the site.

Staff members all talked about the ways in which the professional development had helped them personally. Being professionally supported helped teachers to investigate their own actions, be analytic, and dare to try new things:

It gave me the courage to extend myself and go to places I didn't think I would. I took on the parents' school and what I wanted for staff and parents. A year ago I wouldn't have believed it. (Head teacher)

Bringing in people such as researchers makes you think about what you are doing and where you are doing. (Teacher)

I was surprised [that I would speak publicly about the project] because I am quite shy. (Teacher)

One of the valuable experiences that generated most insight and challenged teachers' assumptions was the surprise created by the low parental turnout at the doll-making afternoon:

When I put all the data together, I laughed at the doll-making. It was so out of tune with the parents. What 15, 16, and 17-year-olds play ladies and make dolls? (Head teacher)

If we hadn't done the dolls we wouldn't have moved on. This was an eye-opener for us. (Field-based trainee)

Another surprise came from some parental responses to the initial interview questions:

Then another parent requested that ... they were informed during the session rather than at the end of the session if a child has fallen down or something has happened to a child, things that you think 'well, they're fine, we'll tell mum at the end of a session.' They said that they felt that they were not included because we told them at the end of the session, rather than ringing up and telling them during the session. That led to lots of talk about power over and power with, and I think that was for me ... a huge learning curve, that you assumed that it's

okay to tell them at the end of a session. So now if anything happened, we would ring them up and let them know and bring them in.

The responses of parents to being involved in planning offered another teacher insight:

I suddenly realised how much a lot of parents did care about what was happening and the milestones.

Conclusion

The relatively unsuccessful experience of trying to generate parent involvement through making whakapapa dolls surprised teachers, and led them to critically discuss their motives and their assumptions of what would interest parents. Having access to data from research interviews about what parents wanted in their relationship with teachers was useful in this discussion. This process led to insights about working collaboratively with parents, and enabled teachers to construct a more equitable relationship, where interests of parents were addressed, and ways were found to gain and use parent knowledge about their own children within the education programme.

Including parents in assessment, planning, and curriculum discussions contributed to learning for all parties:

- parents became more understanding of their own child's learning and appreciative of their own role as educators;
- teachers became more open to the viewpoints of parents, better able to integrate parents' insights into the programme, less guarded, and more willing to try out new things; and
- children seemed to benefit from the collaborative work between teachers and parents.

The use of video in this centre was an especially powerful medium for attracting children, parents, and whānau and conveying learning that occurred.

The case study highlighted some constraints under which the centre worked. The duration of the professional development was limited by the contract to 15 hours of professional development time. In the event, the professional development adviser went over this time allocation and spent much personal time working with the head teacher. But the professional development adviser was not able to engage all staff members in video analysis, and some staff members felt they would have liked more time with her.

5. Parent and whānau participation in the education programme

In this chapter, we examine how three kindergartens incorporated parent and whānau values and invited participation in their education programme and centre activities. Each had a different goal, and took different approaches to trying to engage parents. Two worked with target groups. The main themes for these three kindergartens were:

- working with culturally diverse families;
- involving fathers in the life of the kindergarten; and
- developing a sense of community.

Working with culturally diverse families

This multicultural kindergarten is an old kindergarten in a culturally diverse suburb of Wellington. Many of the families attending the kindergarten have recently come from other countries where their experience of early childhood education pedagogy is very different from the experiences offered in the kindergarten. Some parents have just started to learn English. The teachers themselves had some knowledge of the parents' languages and cultures at the start of the project, but wanted to know more so they could work more effectively with them. Families are mainly low/middle income.

The kindergarten has a large, open indoor space with smaller rooms at either end, and a verandah leading to the outside. It is well resourced. There is better staffing than in most kindergartens, with four teachers to 40 children in the morning and three teachers to 30 children in the afternoon. The kindergarten attracted an additional teacher on the grounds of special needs in the 1980s, because of the number of children from families with English as a second language.

All four teachers were Pākehā New Zealanders. One teacher left during the year, so could not be interviewed again.

Three of the five families interviewed had been in New Zealand for less than a year. Two of the families left the kindergarten in 2003 (the Tongan mother and the Argentinian mother), so could not be interviewed again.

Table 13 Interview participants in 2002 and 2003

Participants	2002	2003
Parents	Chinese mother and father	Chinese mother and father
	Gujarati father	Gujarati father
	Spanish mother	Spanish mother
	Tongan mother	
	Argentinan mother	
Teachers	Head teacher	Head teacher
	3 teachers	2 teachers
Professional development adviser	Yes	Yes

Parents' aspirations and views about the kindergarten

Two families talked about early childhood services in their country of origin, drawing attention to differences in the type of education programmes there compared with in New Zealand. They were unsure of the value of the New Zealand programme and its contribution to learning. These two examples are described in some detail because of the insight they offer on different experiences and beliefs that parents can bring to kindergarten. The examples also highlight the pressures for parents in being in a strange country and speaking a second language.

A family from China

For the mother and father who came from China six months earlier, the question of their aspirations for their daughter's education was a "big question". They wanted her to go through school and definitely have a tertiary education. They regarded "education as a bridge which can help you", a key for a job in the future, important for their daughter's own wellbeing, to help her have an understanding of the environment and herself, and for her future career. They contrasted the greater cost of education in China and the difficulty for families in affording it there, with the lower cost and availability of student loans in New Zealand. While poverty could be a barrier to gaining the kind of education they wanted for their daughter in China, in New Zealand it was not.

There were very marked differences with the early childhood programmes in China:

Father: Back in China in the kindy, the kindy teachers teach so many things. So sometimes if we compare what China can do with the kindy here, we see here children all the time they just play. In China, the teachers would teach the language even, the numbers, how to sing a song, the music stuff, the art, but here I think most of the time they just let them draw themselves. In China, each day the teachers would maybe teach them how to draw something, some Chinese words and numbers, even the simple mathematics stuff.

Mother: And lots of homework.

Father: Here at the mat time they listen to the story and the other time is when they eat the fruits. [Morning tea?] Yes morning tea, they sing the songs.

The relationship with teachers was also different, and the family appreciated that New Zealand teachers were more approachable:

Because I am from another country, the environment is excellent, is marvellous. They try to create a very good relationship. In the Chinese kindergartens, the kindy teachers treat the kids like kids. They always pose themselves as the authority figure even in the kindy. Here we never feel ‘Oh these are the teachers.’ They care for and look after kids. (Father)

The parents thought it important for their daughter to pick up English words, but felt it was hard for her to be motivated to talk to others. One of the key things they wanted from kindergarten was for her to learn English. They emphasised the importance of speaking Chinese at home so that she did not lose her native language, as they had observed with the children of friends. They said their daughter learned from home some Chinese stories, famous ancient poems, number and alphabet, some Chinese songs and English songs. A difference between home and kindergarten was their ability to test their daughter at home:

The thing is we can test what she has learned at home. But it is very hard to test what she has learned in the kindy. For example if I ask her to retell the story the teacher taught her in the kindy, it’s very hard for her to retell the story. I think it’s a language barrier. It’s very hard for me to say if she has got what she heard. (Father)

The parents were keen to understand and know more about their daughter’s experiences, learning, and development, and the early childhood education curriculum. The father said he could “not see an immediate result” from his daughter’s attendance at kindergarten. The parents said that their own limited ability to speak English or unwillingness to ask could be a barrier to communication with the teacher:

Father: For us, we want really feedback, some frequent feedback.

Mother: Maybe it’s my fault. Maybe my English is not so good so the teacher can’t...

Father: Maybe the problem lies with us because we don’t take the initiative. In China we can speak to the teacher very easily... For us sometimes it is very hard to start the conversation. If there is some formal chance like parent interviews in high school—not too long. Let’s have a picture of her in the kindy, maybe give us some guidance for how to help her in education. We really would want some guidance to help us to look beyond the kindy because we are from a foreign country. We want to listen to such things.

The father told of the support he had received from other parents at the kindergarten, and the assistance another father gave him in buying the family’s first car when they started at the kindergarten. During the interview he told how he wanted to contact a dentist and did not know how. He did not know where to find a dentist for his daughter, how to make an appointment or how to find out about costs. (After the interview we sorted this out with the assistance of the head teacher.)

This example demonstrates the difficulty for some parents in understanding the value of the kindergarten's unstructured, child-focused early childhood programme, particularly when they are used to a very different approach. It demonstrates the challenges of communicating when the languages of teachers and parents are different, and the reticence that may be felt by parents in initiating a conversation. It also indicates the wider support that can be offered by kindergarten teachers in putting parents in contact with services, and through introductions to other parents.

A family from Argentina

The Argentinian mother wanted her daughter to have a “global education, all those things, reading, writing that you usually have at kindergarten or at school”. She would like education that can “challenge her intellectual skills”, giving as an example if her child was a painter “to teach her to grow her paint skills”. She would like a good education, to fulfil all the requirements in English, and to prepare her to relate with others and communicate. She would like her daughter to get a degree. She recognised her daughter's frustration at being unable to speak English well and contrasted this with her daughter's experience in Argentina, where she spoke Spanish very fluently, like an adult, and was “head of her group” at kindergarten.

She described differences between early childhood programmes in Argentina and New Zealand:

I don't know if here is better or worse. But here it's different. At the beginning I thought that being so free, if she had the possibility of doing whatever she wanted, and not being in a classroom all the day to learn something, she will not have limits because she is a very wild child in some ways. So if she had limits she will learn quickly. But now, I realise that she feels comfortable and she is fine. The only thing that I think that is not so good in being so free is that children get boring [sic] very quickly. Having to choose what she would like to do, now she starts painting and afterwards she goes into the playground, and then comes back... At the end she does everything in five minutes and in an hour she would say ‘Oh, I did everything.’ In Buenos Aires she didn't have this. She always was doing what the teacher said. And they start painting and after 20 minutes the teacher said ‘Now I am going to sing a song, and we're going to read books, and then go 30 minutes to the playground.’ The teacher marked what they had to do. Here it doesn't happen except mat time and 15 minutes at morning tea. The rest of the time, they just do what they want.

I would feel it is the wrong place if [my daughter] comes every day at home and does every day the same things. If I see that one day she comes and starts singing a song perfectly I'll know she is learning.

The mother would like her child focused more on reading, learning letters, and learning how to write letters, as happens in Argentina. The classrooms are different in Argentina, streamed into age groupings by year, with two teachers for 15 children at age 3. Children stay in the same grouping every year, which the mother thinks helps the children develop close friendships.

The mother thought her daughter was most challenged by learning a new language and experiencing a different country:

Learning a new language. Finding out there are places in the world that are not the same as her own country. I want her to understand why she must speak English here. That is why she was a little bit upset at the beginning. She doesn't speak the English that she can speak. I feel she refuses to speak because she says 'Why do I have to speak in English if I was so confident in my own language.' That's the feeling I have... I know she speaks more than what she shows because I sometimes hear her whispering in English. When my husband and I start speaking to her in English, she says 'I don't understand. I don't understand.' We know she does.

There are differences between home, kindergarten, and New Zealand society in terms of meals and rules about meals. Meals in New Zealand are at different times of the day, and different types of food are eaten. At the kindergarten children have to sit at table, but this is not followed at home.

The biggest challenge for the mother was trying to help her daughter without knowing what to do:

An example. I had to find a way of explaining how she had to act without knowing exactly what I had to tell her. I could only tell her this is the way they do things in New Zealand. Even though we continue our rituals at home.

The mother found it easy to talk to the teachers, and knew that if she wanted to speak with them she could just ask. "They are there when you need them." She also found the teachers helped her in leaving her daughter at the kindergarten:

They put a lot of attention on the needs of parents. I feel that all the teachers support me in all my doubts. When I have a doubt I talk to the teachers and they give me a lot of tools to solve that doubt... Not only the child is taken care of, also how the parents feel. I came here and everything was new for me. I really didn't know how to work with her.

[What were the doubts?]

If I had to leave her crying. Or if I had to take her away, or if I had to stay for a while. Even things I must do at home. They told me some things.

Me and my husband are alone here. All our family are in Argentina and in Argentina she has a lot of uncles and aunts and grandparents. So she also feels very lonely as we feel sometimes.

This example illustrates the complexity for this mother and her family in coming to terms with an educational programme that is different from ones they are accustomed to, communicating in a second language, and being away from their extended family and friends. The kindergarten seems to play a role in understanding these pressures and supporting parents.

Experiences of a Tongan, Gujarati, and Chilean family

The parents whom I interviewed from Tonga, Chile, and India did not talk in detail about early childhood programmes in their countries of origin, but some wanted more formal teaching for their children. The Tongan mother was keen to teach her son to read some words by pointing to words, saying them, and having her son repeat them to her. The Chilean mother would like her

son taught recognition of the alphabet and letters. She thought it would be useful to have an extra teacher in the kindergarten who could test the children.

All parents wanted their child to go as far as possible in education. One of the main things that parents wanted their children to learn from kindergarten was to speak English well. These parents also reinforced the importance of their own language, for example the Gujarati father thought it important to speak his own language at home, so that his son will “know who he is when he goes to India”. He also thought it important for his son to mix with other children from different cultures.

Views of communication and relationships

Parents’ and teachers’ views were similar in valuing an environment that supported and welcomed parents and encouraged interactions amongst parents. Both parents and teachers identified the value of closely linking families with outside community organisations, services, and support. Teachers and parents differed in their views about programme structure, but both wanted effective communication about the programme and children’s learning and development.

Teachers wanted to improve their communication and relationships with parents from diverse cultures in order to better understand those cultures, so that they could respond sensitively and appropriately to the child and family. They particularly wanted to create an environment where parents were supported and comfortable. Teachers were aware of difficulties faced by immigrants when they first arrived at the kindergarten, and wanted to extend their ability to support these families through their own work and linking families to community organisations, services, and people. Dilemmas for teachers were the desire by some parents for a formal structured teaching programme, and getting across ideas about pedagogy when teachers cannot communicate in the parents’ own language.

Parents appreciated the friendliness of teachers, and the role of the kindergarten in supporting them and putting them in contact with other families. Some parents wanted to be linked with services and helped to understand how things are done in New Zealand.

The communications that parents valued the most were largely about their own child, for example:

- a communication where the parent gave ideas to a teacher about working with his child which the teacher followed;
- a teacher giving ideas to the parent about how to separate from her child which the parent found helpful; and
- a teacher talking to a parent about the son’s interests.

Parents wanted to know more about their own child’s learning, experiences, and development, and some were confused by the unstructured kindergarten programme, which was very different from the programme in their country of origin. Some wanted more formal communications with teachers. Parents wanted their children to learn to speak English well.

Expanding knowledge and support for cultural diversity

During the course of the project, teachers worked on developing their own knowledge and understanding of cultural diversity and expanding their linkages with community organisations to better support new immigrants. The challenge of finding ways to communicate about the programme and children's learning is ongoing.

Making plans for working with culturally diverse families

In the first two sessions, the professional development adviser asked teachers to discuss what they wanted to work on, think about the kindergarten's current situation in respect to this work, and plan what they would do.

The teachers drew on data from their survey of parents in the previous year as part of a self-review to evaluate parents' satisfaction with the teachers' style and level of communication. The outcomes were generally positive about communication between teachers and parents, but indicated that while written communications worked well for some parents, there were difficulties in this form of communication for parents who had limited understanding of English.

Teachers identified their own reluctance at times to try to communicate with parents who did not speak English well. Examples were a tendency to ask for help from parents whom teachers knew would understand the request, and avoidance of filling in the form with parents about the child's interests when parents first started the child at kindergarten. They had many questions. These included:

- What are the “dos” and “don'ts”, what are the important cultural things, and what is acceptable? What do we do when our beliefs conflict with the beliefs of others?
- How do we communicate about learning to parents? Do we need more one-to-one interactions?
- Do we need to know more about and utilise the networks in the community? How can we learn about these and create links to support our work?
- Should we compromise on philosophy and values, such as in respect to teaching ABCs, in the interests of parents' wishes and beliefs?

Teachers decided they wanted to know more about the different cultures of the families in order to communicate better, find ways to communicate about learning better, explore ethical dilemmas where teachers' beliefs and practices were in conflict with families' beliefs and practices, and find networks within the community to support their work with culturally diverse families.

They discussed feedback from the initial research interviews with the professional development adviser. They decided they would use this feedback and their own ideas to discuss their work with a wider group of parents under the following three themes:

- play and understanding about the early childhood curriculum;
- communication—both ways; and
- cultural celebrations.

Holding a shared lunch and parent meeting

With support from the professional development adviser and senior teachers, the teachers held a shared lunch and parent meeting to hold this discussion. The lunch was attended by a large number of parents and family members—31 in total, who were representative of most of the kindergarten's cultural groups. The explanation of purpose was:

To listen to and share parents' views and input about the three themes. Teachers are aware from previous surveys that not all voices of the kindergarten community are heard. Teachers have begun to discuss things but realise they would like to hear from families whose cultures are not particularly recognised in the kindergarten. Teachers are aware that there may be some changes they can make to some of their practices to respect the diverse cultures in the community, or there may be ways they can share information about what they do and why in better ways. Teachers want to learn from their parents.

The three themes were then discussed under the following headings:

Theme 1: Cultural celebrations

Parents thought it was good for children to be exposed to a wide range of cultures and celebrate festivals. They identified important dates and traditions in Thai, Muslim, and Ecuadorian cultures. They suggested some useful ideas: to have a calendar of special dates; to ask all parents to notify teachers in advance of important dates coming up; to bring in tapes of music and other such things from their cultural background; to share food from each other's cultures, especially around festivals, for parents to come and talk to children; and to bring in and display family photographs.

Theme 2 : Communication—both ways

Parents were positive about communications overall, and regarded teachers as approachable. Parents very much liked seeing their child's profile. They wanted to know about their child's learning and interactions: anything their child particularly enjoys; what they are good at; anything they need to work on; whether they are listening; how much they get into trouble or push boundaries; things they say during the day; who they play with; how sociable they are; how their English language is progressing; whether they hold pens and pencils properly; and their motor skills.

One suggestion was for children to be encouraged to teach some key words from their own language. Parents could put words or information in the child's profile for the teacher to learn. Greetings could be written on the whiteboard for everyone to become familiar with. Parents could add important or interesting things they want to share from home to the profile books. A diary or notebook could go between kindergarten and home. Teachers' notes written during the day could go into the profile book. More photographs could be used to show what children are learning.

Parents thought the notices and whiteboards were effective forms of written communication. They thought informal chats when things happen are important, and would like more time for connections when the child is picked up. They thought parent/teacher interviews would be helpful, taking place at a set time.

Theme 3: Play and understanding the early childhood curriculum

Parents wanted to share the following information about their children: parents' expectations and concerns; what frightens their child; what interests their child; health issues; what they would like support with; cultural information; expectations; and protocols.

Parents had questions about the profile books and plans for activities and events, for example whether one teacher is responsible for each child, how parents know which teacher has the profile book, how parents could know more about practices and projects. One suggestion to help parents find out about experiences was to video experiences during the session and screen the video for parents, or allow it to be taken home.

Parents were interested in coming into the kindergarten to share their skills or the product of their skills, such as cooking. Teachers said they would plan to support parents who wanted to do this. Parents wanted children's self-help skills to be encouraged in the kindergarten. Parents were interested in having ideas for activities they could do at home.

Parents thought home and kindergarten could be linked through:

- recipes for play dough and slime;
- word and action songs that the parent can learn;
- making a tape of songs from home; and
- encouraging parents to spend even a short time at the kindergarten.

The process of asking parents for their views and focusing on specific aspects in itself led to more open communication. Teachers noticed that parents commented positively about the lunch and parent meeting. One parent offered to share information about the Diwali festival, and another asked to see her child's profile.

The kindergarten's diverse cultures reflected in the kindergarten

Teachers started to become more knowledgeable about the diverse cultures within their kindergarten through talking to parents and reading. They read information and literature about early childhood educators working with families from diverse cultures, and talked with a teacher in another kindergarten who was also working with culturally diverse families. A very helpful connection was made with Migrant Services Ethnic Link, which offered information and advice, resources in different languages, and translating services. However "translators cost quite a lot and we try to use family members".

From a basis of greater confidence through hearing parents' views, reading, and talking, teachers planned their first actions:

- building up kindergarten resources;
- putting up a calendar, and inviting parents to identify significant celebrations for their culture that could be celebrated in the kindergarten;
- working with parents to make the diverse cultures more visible within the kindergarten; and

- bringing cultural celebrations into the kindergarten programme.

In order to avoid tokenism or the gathering of limited knowledge, the teachers felt that all ethnic groups should be gradually celebrated in and around the kindergarten with teachers gaining in knowledge with their kindergarten as they go. (Professional development adviser's notes)

Teachers bought national costumes, saris, and piupiu for the family corner, an Italian food set and a Chinese food set, and some dolls from different cultures. They started building up cultural resource boxes for different countries and asking parents to contribute to them. There are now Chinese, Tongan, Hindu, Australian, and Japanese resource boxes.

Parents wrote their key festivals on an events calendar, and these are being celebrated in the kindergarten. For example, at the beginning of 2003, two of the Chinese families helped the kindergarten to set up a display on Chinese New Year:

The Chinese families were really keen and enthusiastic. They brought in some children's books, they brought in the little red lucky envelopes and explained about those and what happens to those. They made dumplings for us all to try. We actually had two families that made dumplings and brought them to the kindergarten or cooked them there, and we all shared them outside. The children enjoyed that. (Teacher)

Cooking and trying different foods has become an established practice within the kindergarten. Parents have contributed to a recipe book for "anything they enjoy making with their children". It does not necessarily have to be from their own culture. Some parents are now coming into the kindergarten to cook with the children, and their recipe goes into the book. Parents are bringing in tapes with songs from their own country. A "whānau tree" has been made—a painting of a tree displayed on the wall, with families being encouraged to bring photos of the family to put on the branches:

The photos from the families were just trickling in at first, and I think that was because I hadn't actually painted the tree at that stage and it wasn't up, so parents couldn't visually see what it was going to be like ... So I painted it and brought it back and hung it up ... and from then on the photos kept streaming in ... It's added a real conversational theme to the room, with different children and parents looking at it every day to see whose family has been added in. (Teacher)

Making profiles more accessible and useful

Teachers' initial discussions about profiles centred on the purpose of the profile books, what the books contained about children's learning, and access to them. Teachers considered whether the books were solely for their own use, or whether there was value in enabling parents to take them home to share with the wider family. They thought the books portrayed each teacher's individuality, as well as being reflective of the child. Sometimes the careful work put into the books could make it hard for teachers to allow them to be taken out of the kindergarten. Teachers also saw the profile books as important in explaining and justifying practice to ERO. On balance, however, they decided that a prime purpose of the profile books was to communicate with parents

about their child’s learning, and to encourage parents to contribute their views and information about their child.

Teachers saw photographs and video as powerful ways of helping to explain learning to parents with limited English, and discussed the balance of written material, observations, and photographs in the profiles. They questioned the usefulness of their own comments in the profiles when these did not relate to learning, given the interest of parents in their own child’s learning. They tried to make portfolios more accessible to parents by allowing them to be taken home, and making greater use of visual media, with clear explanations of learning in the commentary. They asked parents for more input about their child’s interests, experiences, and skills at home.

Views of outcomes

Both parents and teachers noticed greater visibility of the diverse kindergarten cultures in the kindergarten. There were also shifts in attitudes: parents felt valued for being invited to give their opinions, and appreciated for their contributions to the life of the kindergarten.

Table 14 **Parent and staff views of outcomes: Multicultural kindergarten**

Participants	Parents	Teachers
Cultural diversity reflected in the kindergarten	Greater visibility of diverse cultures. Parallels in values between home and kindergarten noticed (Chilean mother).	Greater visibility of diverse cultures. Greater ability to search and find information about cultures. More knowledgeable about cultures.
Communication about children and learning	Generally no changes noticed.	Portfolios more accessible and meaningful.
Curriculum	Chinese father beginning to see learning processes, but still wanted more formal teaching. Chilean mother still wanted words in own language to be used in the kindergarten. Gujarati father still wanted son to be prepared for school.	
Attitudes	Parents felt valued for being asked their views.	More at ease in talking to parents. Parents seem more relaxed.

The parents who noticed a greater visibility of the diverse cultures said they felt valued through being asked their views at the parent meeting, and appreciated for their contributions to the life of the kindergarten:

When we were asked to give us our ideas we were just feeling we were involved in the decision making of the kindy. That's one way we feel valued. They can choose 'Don't you do this' because the European is the mainstream culture. We are the minority, but we were invited to come here. (Chinese father)

None of the parents thought that communication between teachers and parents about the programme, the child's experiences, plans for the child's learning, the child's progress and development, or how the parents could help the child at home had changed. This suggests that the teachers' efforts to make profiles more accessible and useful to parents did not work for these parents.

Some issues were unresolved for the Chinese father, who still wanted more feedback on his daughter's experience, learning, progress, and development at kindergarten:

That's a thing I think they can do something about that. I still know very little about what she did or in what ways she had improved. They could give us a letter or something just very brief of what she did, how in what way they think she has improved her language or relations with other kids or the teacher. Just like a school report. We equally want to know that information. The other thing is because we speak another language. If we were in China we would spend more time talking to the teachers. Still we have some kind of barrier ... I know they are very busy, but once a term we should have a system so we can have an appointment. Just give us five minutes to talk. (Chinese father)

He again commented on differences between China and New Zealand, and suggested that children from a different culture and a different language background "need a more focused way of teaching and learning" than New Zealand children.

There were some shifts in thinking about how the kindergarten helped children's learning and development. The Chilean mother thought that her son was now more selective about playing with the "good kids" and knowing right from wrong. She thought there were parallels in values taught by the teachers and herself:

Teachers taught 'Leave the bad things inside your head and bring the nice things out.'

In the initial interview she had wanted her son to learn letters and said that now teachers were using sheets to trace letters and had given her these to take home.

While the Chinese father wanted more formal teaching at the kindergarten, he was aware that his daughter's English had improved, she had made friends, and would greet the teacher now. These changes seemed to have led him to slightly revise his view of learning within the kindergarten. When I repeated from his initial interview his desire to test his daughter, he commented:

I think that the result of the learning here maybe is more a process. It is not a result you can catch or see.

The Gujarati father was still keen for his son to be prepared for school. He was teaching him the time and had bought a "Learning machine. It tells you all the spelling, it spells it out. We go through that every second day. It gives him an idea."

The Chilean mother thought it could be good to roster parents to teach the children in their own language. She thought it important to teach in other languages “in a way to make the kids value other kids’ culture and language. Because my kid is embarrassed to talk in Spanish.” She thought parents needed to be enlisted for this task because teachers cannot pronounce the words. “It would be nice for the kids to appreciate other cultures and language because language is a connection for humans.”

Teachers said they had a greater ability to search and find information, were more at ease in talking to parents from diverse cultures, and were more knowledgeable about cultural diversity:

I just feel more comfortable approaching parents. I felt hesitant and nervous before. Now we have good strategies, use easy to understand language, body language, bring other people in, use other families who know better. Children often have better English than their parents.
(Teacher)

Some new knowledge about diversity “surprised” them, by conflicting with what they had always thought or offering insight into differences.

The teachers thought that the greater inclusion of other cultures within the programme had helped some parents feel more relaxed in the kindergarten setting. Evidence of a level of ease is demonstrated in the following examples:

- an African mother whose boy was new to the kindergarten, curling up with cushions in the big tractor tyre and falling asleep in the sun while her boy played happily knowing she was close by; and
- a Somalian grandmother who always makes herself a cup of tea every morning and relaxes on the couch.

The 13 parents filling in the questionnaire had mixed views about communications about the programme, the parent’s child, and whether they talked about experiences from home.

Table 15 Views of parents and whānau of teacher/parent communications (n=13)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Teachers give me useful information about the programme	1	7	1	3
Teachers give me useful information about my child	4	3	2	4
I talk to the teachers about my child's experiences at home	1	7	4	1

Parents’ positive comments included receiving feedback on behaviour problems and interactions with others, information on how the child is playing, helpful information, and appropriate information supplied whenever the parent asked. Some parents wanted to know more about issues. These issues included information about the child’s interactions, the child’s learning, and

“the child’s weaknesses so we can concentrate on that level and as parents try to contribute to overcome that”. One parent wanted information on transition to school, and another wanted an “official feedback session”.

The professional development adviser thought that teachers’ relationships with parents had developed because of their willingness and openness to finding out and acting on parents’ views. It was also likely that relationships with children had improved through the children seeing things that were important to their families within the kindergarten. Connections with others in the community, such as Migrant Services Ethnic Link and other teachers, provided a basis to support the teachers.

She thought their interest in cultural diversity and finding out parents’ views was greater. The work they had done in finding out more about culture and making language, festivals, food, and dress visible and shared within the kindergarten was a good beginning in working with the families.

The professional development adviser thought that a challenge for the teachers now is to work out ways to accommodate beliefs and practices that conflict with the teachers’ New Zealand beliefs and practices, in particular addressing parents’ views of what is appropriate kindergarten pedagogy.

Views of professional development

All teachers thought the professional development had been useful, and identified the following ways in which the professional development adviser helped them:

- providing good readings and ideas of how to do things, including ideas from other centres and “things we hadn’t thought about”;
- suggesting ways to collect data at the parent meeting and collating the data for the team;
- providing reassurance that the kindergarten was on the right track; and
- challenging teachers, and having an “outsider looking in”.

Only one teacher identified a drawback of the professional development: the extra time that it took “after work”.

They thought the project got parents more involved and brought a wider knowledge of culture. It gave the teachers an incentive to focus on things they wanted to work on, and required them to keep on track because their work would be published.

Staff made the following comments about the most important ways the project had helped them personally:

- “It was interesting, I learnt lots and it inspired me as a teacher to keep going.”
- “Doing the presentation [a workshop at the Early Childhood Convention in 2003]—I had to stand up and speak and break things down to key issues.”
- “I am more tolerant and sensitive to other cultures, needs, and frustrations.”

There were surprises: the head teacher was surprised to find out about some cultural things she thought she knew about and didn't, and a teacher was surprised at realising how different some backgrounds were from her own.

The teachers all gained ideas from the one-day seminar when centres presented their work. They talked about the different ways each of the centres did their profiles, and whether some of these ideas could be useful to them. They appreciated the ways in which parents were involved at the community crèche and fathers at the urban kindergarten (see below).

Conclusion

The teachers' work in finding out more about culture and making language, festivals, food, and dress visible and shared within the kindergarten was a good beginning in working with families from cultures different from their own. These have been described by Lisa Terreni and Judi McCallum (2003, p. 1) as the "concrete and explicit aspects of culture", the "tip of the cultural iceberg". These teachers seem to work well and comfortably in the "tip", and some evidence suggests that parents feel relaxed in the kindergarten environment. There is further to go in providing a curriculum approach that acknowledges cultural and linguistic diversity.

An unaddressed challenge is to find ways to communicate with parents about the curriculum, and the teaching and learning processes followed in the kindergarten. Teachers did not work out ways to respond to beliefs about these that conflicted with their own beliefs.

Although the ratios in this kindergarten were better than in most other kindergartens, there were difficulties for teachers in working with the 1:10 staff:child ratios and large groups in such a multicultural context. Parents thought their children needed more individual attention than teachers were able to give, and wanted individual time to talk to teachers themselves.

Using videotape to analyse pedagogy and communicate with parents

This rural kindergarten is a purpose-built kindergarten in a small farming community. It is the only kindergarten in the town, although there are other kindergartens in neighbouring towns.

The kindergarten has a large open indoor space, a good sized office and good outdoor space. It is very well resourced. An adviser comes to the kindergarten once a week to teach children and staff basic te reo Māori.

The roll sizes were 30 children in five morning sessions per week, and 28 children in three afternoon sessions per week. Teachers described incomes of parents as "wide ranging".

The head teacher and teacher were Pākehā New Zealanders. The head teacher left during the project and was replaced by a relieving head teacher. Parents described their ethnicity as European (7), and NZ Māori (1).

Table 16 Interview participants in 2002 and 2003

Participants	2002	2003
Parents	5 mothers and 2 fathers from 5 families	5 mothers and 2 fathers from 5 families
Teachers	Head teacher (left during project) Teacher	Relieving head teacher Teacher
Professional development adviser	Yes	Yes

Parents' aspirations for children's education

Parents thought that the main value of kindergarten was in helping their child develop social skills. Developing friendships with other children, learning to be part of a group, learning to share, being exposed to different points of view and different ways to do things, and “mingling with other kids” were described as some of the benefits. Two parents also commented on the good range of equipment and activities in which children participated. One of these liked the fact that there were trained teachers at kindergarten who “know what to do and zone in and bring [my child] out”.

Parents from three families were critical of the teaching and of the kindergarten programme. These parents thought that more could be done in helping children to read and write and in offering greater cognitive challenge. For example:

[My child is] more socially and physically challenged than intellectually challenged at kindergarten.

This parent regarded her child as “ahead for her age” in language and motor skills and wanted her to be extended.

Those parents who said they wanted more challenge at kindergarten also said they did many activities with their children at home. These activities included counting games, learning the ABC, learning to read and write in a notebook, learning about science, and reading books.

Views of communication and relationships

Only one parent was satisfied with teacher/parent communication at the start of the project. Others differentiated between the communications of the head teacher and the other teacher. They were highly critical of the head teacher's communication about the programme, planning, assessment, and their child's experiences. For example, one mother and father said they had never been told about the programme and would really like to know about it. They commented that the teacher gave good feedback, but the head teacher did not. They did not know what plans were made for their child's learning and had never had any advice on how they could support their child's

learning at home. They said profile books gave some information on their child's learning and development, but they had noticed that some profile books had very little information in them.

Parents from another family wanted to know how their child was doing in a developmental sense, compared with other children of her age:

[Our child] can write her name and knows colours. I want to know whether writing her name and knowing her colours is good. I would like to know whether the teachers do assessment. Do they do reports? Do they have parent meetings? I would like to know whether [our child] is behind, whether she is fitting in.

These parents said they had asked the head teacher for this kind of information, and were disappointed that it was not given.

The initial interviews were done during a week when a group of parents had made a formal complaint to the kindergarten association about the head teacher. At the time of the interview, parents said they wanted the kindergarten association to take action on concerns they had raised. Other suggestions were:

- the kindergarten providing practical tips for parents;
- development of closer parent:teacher relationships; and
- advocacy for parent involvement in education.

Shortly after this, the head teacher was seconded to a different kindergarten and replaced by a relieving head teacher. The parents' formal complaint and the subsequent secondment of the head teacher raised an ethical dilemma for the researcher and professional development adviser about whether to continue with the research project at such a stressful time. We met with the teachers and a representative of the local kindergarten association to canvass their views about continuing in the research project or withdrawing from it. The decision about continuing was left up to the teachers. In this discussion, arguments for continuing were identified as:

- the opportunity to use the planned professional development to build a sense of community;
- the opportunity for teachers to be professionally supported in addressing the issues that had been raised; and
- the interest of the remaining teacher in the use of video for teaching and learning, and her wish to develop her skills and knowledge in this area.

Arguments for withdrawing were:

- that the relieving teacher had not been involved in the decision to be part of the project; and
- that there were many areas of work that the kindergarten needed to address.

The decision of the teachers, made in the following week, was to continue with the project.

Developing a sense of community

When the project focus was developed, the teachers were working on the concerns raised by parents. As well, an Education Review Office (ERO) review was published several months after the project started. This indicated concerns that programme planning, evaluation, and assessment practices were not developed according to children's needs, or based on analysis of observational information. ERO said there was a lack of co-ordinated team approach to curriculum development, implementation, and review.

The main focus of the project was:

- developing a sense of community; and
- creating ways to communicate well with parents and whānau about the curriculum, planning, and assessment of children's learning, and children's experiences.

At the start of the project, the teacher had wanted to learn from constructive critique and improve her pedagogical practice. She also wanted the kindergarten to have a good name. She had a keen interest in equity issues, and had used observation of children to identify gender differences in children's play. She was very interested in learning to use video to enable analysis of what was happening in the kindergarten between children, and between teachers and children. She thought video was a "very cool" idea for examining teaching styles, and described herself as "open to new ideas" and "keen to learn". As part of using video, she wanted to develop resources for parents to illustrate the learning that was occurring.

The relieving head teacher thought it was important to continue with the professional development because she knew that the other teacher was very keen to learn about using video for pedagogical purposes, and did not want the recent events to stand in the way of this opportunity for learning.

Initially, the professional development focused on progressing pedagogical documentation, using it for planning, assessment, and evaluation, and exploring ways of sharing documentation with parents. It was hoped that there would be improvements in the quality and authenticity of the documentation, and that video could be explored to access the child's voice.

The first two professional development meetings explored teachers' aims and decided on the focus. The professional development adviser then videoed both a morning and an afternoon kindergarten session. Teachers had the opportunity to look at the videotapes and then met with the professional development adviser, where together they analysed the videotape.

The video was shown to children and a range of responses was observed. Some children had never seen themselves on video. Others talked about their home videos and this provided some insight into home experiences that teachers would not have had otherwise.

The teachers and the professional development adviser decided to make a second video of kindergarten Pet Day, as a way to highlight and link parents' contributions with the learning that

occurs through a kindergarten activity. This selection of what to document was a deliberate effort to highlight the value placed on parents and community:

In selecting documentation, you say what you value. If parents and community are visible and on display, you signal that ‘We value your input.’ (Professional development adviser)

The Pet Day involved every child and a family member bringing a pet or toy pet:

The parent contribution was phenomenal. Their knowledge and world views added richness to the day. (Professional development adviser)

Every child and pet was captured on video. Later the professional development adviser made still frames of each child and pet, and worked with the teacher to add text to the photos. The teachers put the photos and text into a book that children sometimes chose for story telling. Later, photos and text were put into children’s portfolios that were shared with parents.

Table 17 **Parent and staff views of outcomes**

Participants	Parents	Teacher
Working with children		<p>Base views of children’s skills and abilities on evidence, not assumptions.</p> <p>Awareness of need to give time for children to finish responding.</p> <p>Not to intervene until “whole picture” is clear.</p> <p>Insight into children’s competencies.</p>
Communication and relationships with parents	<p>Positive changes in relationships but because of the changed teaching team, not the project.</p> <p>Portfolios have more observations and information, and are more individualised.</p> <p>More information about goals.</p> <p>Parents know how they can help child at home.</p> <p>Pet Day involved parents.</p>	<p>Research interviews were catalyst for opening up issues.</p> <p>Improved, but because of the changed teaching team, not the project.</p>
Pedagogy		<p>Understanding of value of video for data gathering and analysis.</p> <p>Understanding of value of video for discussion of issues with children.</p>
Staff relationships	No tension between teachers.	

Views of outcomes

Positive changes in staff relationships, staff/parent relationships, and staff communication with parents about children's learning were noticed by the teacher and parents, but attributed to the changed teaching team, rather than the research and professional development project. While the Pet Day involved parents, it was only one event that contributed to building community. Parents and the teacher thought the main factor in building community was the changed teaching team.

Through analysing video data, the teacher gained understanding of some children's competencies, and her own responsiveness and interactions with children, that she had not been aware of.

The teacher said that through analysing herself on video, she had learned:

- not to make assumptions about children's skills and abilities;
- to see the whole picture clearly before intervening; and
- "not to finish sentences for children".

The teacher was "at first shocked and blown away by the data" from the video. The experience of analysing the video enabled her to see things that she had not been aware of and revise her views of children's competencies. She gave an example of a child whom she had thought of as rather "solitary", assertively standing up for himself, and engaging in co-operative play. "For 1½ years I was wrong about C."

Another illuminating excerpt was watching on video a group of children who were planning to climb the fence. They were engaging in problem solving, rich communication, and co-operation when the head teacher intervened and stopped them. This sequence led the teacher to question the ways in which teachers may intervene too quickly before taking stock of a situation.

Through watching herself on video, the teacher said she became aware of her tendency to "butt in" on children's conversations. She felt video helped her to learn to observe children more accurately and focus better on children's interests.

Understanding the value of video as a pedagogical tool was another benefit. The teacher thought video was a very useful tool for documenting interactions and actions for later analysis. There was potential to use video with children, for example to show a conflict situation and discuss with children how they could fix the situation and whether they could act in a different way next time. She thought that getting children to reflect on what they were doing gives children a sense of belonging and being valued. It also gives opportunities for children to give their perspective, for example by reflecting and commenting on what they were doing. Another benefit from the experience of analysing the videos was a greater preparedness to acknowledge areas in which the teacher felt she was less skilled.

The teacher thought the research project initial interviews came at a good time because the interviews enabled people to say what they were feeling. The interviews were a stepping stone for getting things into the open. However, the circumstances meant that the professional development could not be taken as far as she would have liked.

Professional development adviser's perspectives on changes in practice

The professional development adviser could not assess whether there were changed relationships between parents and teachers arising from the project. She thought that the teacher had started to look at kindergarten practices in relation to children's interests more, and to examine how she might do things differently. She thought the teacher had become more reflective about aspects of her practice.

Parents' perspectives on communication, relationships, and involvement

The parents interviewed were not aware of what the kindergarten focused on in the project, although they noticed the video at the Pet Day and the book that was made from it. Parents liked the Pet Day:

Pet Day is fantastic. It was new and exciting. It got parents in there, they had to physically be there. There was lots of interaction between parents and enthusiasm from parents.

One parent thought the book made on Pet Day was just "okay":

It was a bit thin I thought. It seemed not particularly useful in terms of educational tools ... something for children [to see themselves] rather than parents to see learning.

Four families noticed changes in communication from the new teaching team:

- newsletters were fuller, and contained information about goals;
- parents had opportunities to have a say in their child's goals;
- parents were more aware of what they could do to help their child at home;
- portfolios were described as "having a rounder view" with more observations, more written information about the child, a more individualised approach;
- portfolios could now be taken home; and
- a parent said she now had a sense of ownership of the portfolio:

Before I thought 'Who does this belong to? Are we allowed to look?' Now I'm told 'These are yours.' Ownership is ours. I couldn't wait to get it home and read it.

Parents especially valued the portfolios and the opportunity to have a say in their child's goals. They felt their own knowledge of their child and aspirations for learning were being taken into account. One parent described the accuracy with which her child was portrayed in the portfolio, the depth of the description, and the feelings she had about it:

It fed back whole conversations and showed how that portrayed a learning goal. I saw a structure in her development—where she is. It made me proud. The teacher said she showed sensitivity. I might not have thought of that.

This parent thought she had gained greater understanding of free play. She realised through the portfolio that there is purpose to friendships, such as learning leadership, being part of a group, and learning independence.

Only one family interviewed thought there had been little change in their own relationships with the kindergarten. One of these parents felt guilty that as a working parent, she could not be involved at the kindergarten during the day. She thought the issues for working parents were not well understood and that she was not particularly valued:

I never feel particularly valued. I'm always feeling [the teachers] think 'Here she comes, dropping off her kid and rushing off again.'

She spoke of not being able to be early to drop her child off or late to pick her child up. This parent spoke of her dilemma in fitting into the kindergarten timetable to accommodate her own work, which required her to be at her workplace at 9 a.m. She had asked if her child could be dropped off earlier but was told this could not be a regular occurrence.

This family compared kindergarten with the local crèche, commenting on the better staff:child ratios at crèche and the willingness on the part of the crèche to accommodate parents' needs. The father in this family would like the kindergarten to have more social events that involved fathers, and offered opportunity for parent interviews.

At the end of the research and professional development project, the eight parents who filled in the survey were generally positive about communications and relationships.

Table 18 Views of parents and whānau of teacher/parent communications (n=8)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Teachers give me useful information about the programme	1	6	1	
Teachers give me useful information about my child	5	3		
I talk to the teachers about my child's experiences at home	2	5	1	

Views of professional development

The teacher was very positive about the professional development. Analysing video with the professional development adviser helped the teacher understand more about individual children, and analyse her own role as a teacher. The professional development adviser asked questions and made comments about the video that drew the teacher's attention to children and happenings that the teacher thought she might otherwise have overlooked. She would have liked more video analysis sessions with the professional development adviser.

The relieving head teacher was positive about having the opportunity to see how video could be used in a kindergarten. She was surprised at how much information could be gained from using video, and thought this was more than could be gained through observation or still cameras. She thought video could be useful in talking to parents. However, her priority at the time of the

professional development was to “get the kindergarten functioning”. She was not really committed to the project and would have preferred not to participate at this time.

The professional development adviser questioned whether the decision to continue with the professional development had been in the best interests of the kindergarten, since the head teacher and teacher were doing so much extra work to address concerns. She thought doing the professional development the following year would have been more constructive, because both would have had more time for the professional development focus.

Conclusion

The questions asked in the first research interviews seemed to have been a catalyst for parents and the teacher crystallising concerns about the head teacher’s communications and relationships with them and the children, and their discontent about aspects of the education programme. During the interviews, a group of parents formally complained to the kindergarten association about these matters. An ERO review, published a few months later and based on a review done when the head teacher was still at the kindergarten, stated concerns about programme planning, evaluation, and assessment practices, teachers not having a team approach, and some negative interactions with children. The review would have been available to the kindergarten association earlier. The association responded by seconding the head teacher to another kindergarten. The subsequent relieving head teacher and teacher decided to continue with the project, largely because of the teacher’s interest in learning about using video as a pedagogical tool.

The project raised dilemmas for the researcher and professional development adviser:

- The context at the start of the project was tense. The professional development added to teacher workload at a stressful time.
- Research participants confided in the researcher about difficulties they had with the head teacher. This confiding was triggered by the researcher asking questions about teacher/parent communication and relationships. However, at the start of the project the head teacher did not seem to realise that poor communication and relationships between her and parents were issues.
- The kindergarten association seconded the head teacher out of the kindergarten and thereby missed an opportunity to enable her to work through the situation at the kindergarten, with potential support through professional development.

The project was not perceived as influencing change in communications and relationships with parents, although these were enhanced over this time through the work of the relieving head teacher and teacher.

The project introduced the teacher to use of video to analyse teaching and learning, to show and celebrate community events, and as a focus for children to discuss issues. Use of video seemed to be a very effective tool to help the teacher analyse interactions with children, and “see” practices

that she was not aware of. These were positive outcomes for the teacher that would be likely to influence her work with children.

Involving fathers in the life of the kindergarten

This suburban kindergarten is situated in a city suburb, in a mainly high-income community. Most children attending the kindergarten are from two-parent families and most have one or two parents in paid employment. At the start of the project, two fathers were the main caregivers and brought their children to the kindergarten on a daily basis. At the end of the project, nine fathers were in this position.

The rolls were 40 children in the five morning sessions, and 30 children in the three afternoon sessions. Children were aged 3 and 4 years. There were two full-time teachers and one teacher working part-time (0.7).

The kindergarten is located in a redesigned 1900s house. Recently substantial work was done on developing the outside area and building a covered veranda. Space for staff to work is confined, but at the end of the parent involvement project, a new office was being built. A parent roster for working in the kindergarten during the sessions is maintained and receives high levels of support, with two parents rostered for each session. There are also a number of parents staying for part of each day's session. Parents also work on the committee, take part in working bees, donate goods and services, and pay a voluntary donation.

There is a rich range of equipment, books, musical instruments, tapes, and art supplies. The morning kindergarten session has two mat times and the afternoon session has one mat time. In the first morning mat time, any adults present are introduced and welcomed, birthdays and other special events are announced, rules and routines are discussed. All mat times involve the whole group of children sitting on the floor with adults in a circle. They are interactive and there is a strong use of music, storytelling, and dance. During the rest of the programme, teachers and parents usually work with smaller groups of children or individuals.

Just after the project started, the head teacher went on maternity leave. One of the teachers became acting head teacher, and a relieving teacher was employed as a teacher for the duration of the maternity leave. Because of the staff changes, only the two permanently employed teachers were interviewed. We wanted to interview fathers in all families, since the teachers were interested in working with fathers, but this proved too hard to organise.

Table 19 Interview participants in 2002 and 2003

Participants	2002	2003
Parents	3 mothers and 4 fathers from 5 families	3 mothers and 4 fathers from 5 families
Teachers	Head teacher Teacher	Head teacher Teacher
Professional development adviser	Yes	Yes

Aspirations for children and views about the kindergarten

The principles, strands, and goals for *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum, were consistent with the goals of these families for their children, suggesting that there was already a common value base from which teachers and parents could work.

The parents all had goals for their children’s education that included a broad curriculum and encouraged learning dispositions, for example:

- “an insatiable thirst/quest for knowledge”;
- “to show what is possible”; and
- “to encourage her... No experience is beyond her. She is in the top echelon of intelligence and common sense and capable of making her own decisions. I want what she wants.”

Three of the five families also emphasised that the child’s happiness and sense of security, and socialising with others, were important in the kindergarten setting.

While parents’ goals for children’s learning were broad, they all thought the main value of kindergarten was in the social interactions with other children, learning to share, and the range of activities that were available for the children. Involvement in a broader community was seen as a positive feature of kindergarten, although one father would have liked this to be more ethnically mixed. The values of kindergarten were appreciated by parents, for example treating others with respect, not bullying others, not throwing things. One parent commented positively on her child’s English language learning through the kindergarten experience (his first language was German). Teacher attributes were described positively by four families: their “positiveness” and encouragement; being “switched on”; and the quality of their interactions with children (two parents).

There were differing views about the structure of the kindergarten programme: one wanted “a bit more mat time” and another wanted her child “to learn her ABC”, while a father appreciated the free play and did not want his child forced into anything. Three of the five families thought more intense and in-depth learning occurred in the home environment. Comments included:

- the specific interests of the child are fostered at home through one-on-one activities, while kindergarten is “more surface” and “fun”;
- kindergarten is more of a social hub for the child, while at home the fundamentals of education are catered for; and
- the home is more controlled and not a “free rein mess”.

Home was seen by parents as a place where family values and manners were taught and relationships with wider family members were developed. Loving relationships were part of home life. Two families identified differences in discipline between home and kindergarten (one had a more controlled environment at home and in the other, the child could “be naughty and walk away” at home).

All the parents had high goals for their children’s education, wanting their children to “go as far as possible” in gaining formal qualifications. Three parents commented on the importance of qualifications for getting into satisfying paid employment, contrasting opportunities today with opportunities when they were young, where formal qualifications were less necessary. Parents all thought that the only barriers to the children going far in their formal education were their children’s interests and wishes.

Views of communication and relationships

There were commonalities between teachers’ and parents’ views about what was important in parent/teacher relationships: good communication skills; and teachers being available and approachable.

Parents emphasised the importance to them of teachers knowing their child well. They wanted opportunities to find out about their own child’s experiences during the day, to obtain feedback from the teacher about their child’s learning, relationships with others, feelings, and behaviour, and to form a relationship with the “people who the child is being left with”. Parents wanted to find out teachers’ views of their own child, including to be told if their child was upset or having difficulties.

Two fathers who were the main caregivers talked about some discomfort in being male in a kindergarten environment:

The mothers are predominantly friendly. I have had the odd strange attitude regarding being a ‘househusband’ quote, unquote ... But you can’t do anything about that. That’s just the way it is. There are a lot of househusbands in [this community]. Occasionally you encounter more negative reactions to that. They’re not founded on anything other than antiquated morals ... It’s only a tiny pocket. Nothing sinister, just not wanting to involve me or being warm. (Father)

I sometimes feel like a square peg in a round hole. I get frustrated that I can’t get anything done... That cabin fever kind of thing. But I’m not so paranoid now. [What were you paranoid about?] Being a male in a totally female dominated thing. You also are doing something that a lot of males don’t do. And I feel I have started to regress a little bit ...

because I feel I should be out there doing something. Don't get me wrong, because it's not at the forefront of my life. But I feel any male would feel the same. And I think a lot of females would feel like this too. Being with young children is a very difficult time. (Father)

This second father thought it was important in New Zealand society for fathers to be more involved in the care and upbringing of their children:

If I was to be quite blunt, coming from Britain seven years ago what is blatantly obvious is that the blokes out here have to drop the rugby ball and start giving their children a bit more love and attention, because they're going to suffer from lack of attention later... Here it's very like Britain was 40–50 years ago. It's very much mother in the kitchen and the father on the outside. New Zealand is a fantastic country in all sorts of ways but the only thing it is lacking is that social issue. I'm not knocking New Zealand, it's got an awful lot right. (Father)

All families regarded informal talk with teachers as the main way in which they communicated with teachers about their child's experiences, learning, and development. Three families thought this way of communicating was valuable in helping them form a good picture of their child's skills and experiences from the teacher's point of view, and reinforcing what they as parents did. They also appreciated the profile books and wall charts with programme planning.

However, two families wanted regular formal occasions to talk with teachers about their child. One mother wanted to know how the child was getting on in relation to others her age, and thought the kindergarten needed a stronger formal focus on literacy and numeracy. She felt that when communication was largely informal, "the loud children get the attention". Another mother compared the New Zealand kindergarten's informality with her home country, where "you could put your name down and get a formal interview". She thought evening meeting times would enable working parents to come too.

Teachers were aware that some parents wanted a stronger emphasis on learning the alphabet and ABC. They had put out a questionnaire for families 4½ years before and consequently established displays on literacy and invited in guest speakers, while putting more emphasis on literacy in mat times. After that, they were more careful to identify early literacy in children's profiles. A year before, a further questionnaire had indicated that parents were more aware of play, and perceptions were changing.

Both teachers thought they could do some things better. These were:

- having a parents' voice in Learning Stories and profile books, getting parent perspectives of children's learning as it transfers from kindergarten to home and vice versa, showing skills in the two settings and cross referencing these;
- raising awareness of fathers and men in the community and the importance of their role in learning and the kindergarten; and
- always taking care to work from an empowerment rather than deficit model.

Parents placed less emphasis on the linkage between home and kindergarten. A possible reason is that parents were unsure of what this linkage could contribute to the child's learning at kindergarten.

Analysing the current situation and making plans

The main focus of teachers' work was on strengthening their relationships and improving communication with fathers in the kindergarten. This focus was decided after the teachers had done a "gap analysis" in which they answered the following questions:

- What does your centre wish to work on?
- Where is your centre now?
- Where would your centre like to be?
- What steps does your centre need to take to get there?

The teachers identified a communication gap between teachers and parents working full-time, with less two-way communication or opportunities for feedback. Sometimes these parents did not pick up notices or have an opportunity to talk to teachers, and they also missed out on hands-on involvement. The teachers noticed a "lack of connection" between these parents and the kindergarten. Many of the fathers were in this group. There were also a number of fathers who brought their child to the kindergarten, but who did not stay around or have any other contact. There were noticeable differences in the kinds of interactions that men and women had in the kindergarten: men were more involved in doing manual jobs such as lawn mowing, or holding office bearing positions on the committee, rather than taking part in the everyday programme or informal socialisation. While two fathers had taken part in rostered "duty" (parent help), it was mostly mothers who did this work:

We have a lot of men around who are the main caregivers dropping their children off, but often that was the end of it. Virtually all of the women were the ones who were having big input into the sessions. (Head teacher)

Another reason for deciding to work on involving fathers was teachers' interest in trying out ideas they had heard about when they first joined the research project. In the introductory session, there had been discussion of a report on a collaborative international project between the Pen Green Centre for Under Fives and their Families in Corby, and nurseries in Emilia Romagna in Italy (European Commission network on childcare and other measures to reconcile employment and family responsibilities, 1995). A broader aim of that project had been to support increased participation by men in the care and upbringing of their children. The kindergarten teachers were interested in the ways in which staff in the international project had examined their own thinking, feelings, and communications as a basis for making changes, and thought this would be a good starting point for them. Another appealing feature for the teachers was the availability of literature on this topic, and the good practical ideas it contained on how to go about examining their own communications and relationships.

Another expected outcome was to highlight various aspects of practice that could be improved:

[The previous year] each teacher separately had occasion to be at the butt of parental criticism. And it was practices that had been carried out unthinkingly, I suppose. It highlighted for us that we are none of us beyond reproach and we are all on a journey of professional integrity. It made us realise that parents feel concerns and we wanted them to feel really comfortable about sharing those with us, rather than getting really annoyed about kindergarten practices which meant they weren't so happy about their child being there... We do make mistakes and we value parents' input, what they feel and think and what they want. You can never rest on your laurels. New parents and new families bring up issues for you. It's just the evolving nature of working with young parents and families. (Teacher)

As a team, the teachers spent time in discussing and considering the summary of issues raised by parents and teachers in the initial research interviews before they moved into action. During the course of these initial discussions, teachers raised questions about fathers:

- Are they interested?
- How do they perceive their role in the kindergarten?
- Do they enjoy the level of involvement they have?

They conjectured that one reason for differences between men and women in involvement in the life of the kindergarten could be perceptions of what was appropriate to do, inclinations, or how comfortable men felt. Teachers also discussed experiences from the Pen Green work which indicated that fathers may be discouraged from participating in educational sessions by communications that emphasise informality and sharing, because these may appeal more to mothers than to fathers:

The fathers did not want to 'share ideas about their child's learning' or have a chat and a coffee, which is the way in which we would generally advertise our groups. *These fathers wanted to know what they could do to make a difference to their child's learning* [Original italics] (M. Whalley & the Pen Green Centre Team, 2001, p. 51).

The teachers thought that factual, achievement-oriented invitations tended to attract men. They identified some differences in their own communications with men, compared with women:

- Conversations with men tended to be about events, but not the care and nurturing of their child at kindergarten, except when there was an accident.
- Teachers were unsure about how they welcomed and communicated with men, and decided it would be useful to analyse this.
- Teachers did not particularly encourage fathers to respond to profiles.

The teachers firmed up the direction they would take in involving fathers, and in following up feedback from the research interviews, as follows:

- Teachers would support the involvement of fathers through working with them to plan, advertise, and hold a one-off evening for fathers and other family members who were unable to participate in the programme because of other commitments. The evening would be held

from 5pm to 7pm and run as a normal programme. A father from the committee would be asked to write the invitation using “male appropriate language”. Another father would be asked to speak at the evening to generate a discussion about fathers’ involvement in children’s learning. There would be a suggestion box for fathers to put in ideas.

- Teachers would assess the environment to see how “friendly” it was to men, and discuss ways of bringing fathers into focus as a result of the assessment.
- Teachers would invite parents to have a formal opportunity for an individual teacher:parent interview.

Over the remaining course of the project, teachers worked in parallel on these three actions. At the same time, on their own initiative, two fathers who were part of the initial interviews decided to establish a fathers’ support group.

A fathers’ and other significant adults’ evening

In preparation for the evening, a journalist father was asked to construct an advertisement to give a “male flavour” to the invitation. This father actually said that he did not see himself as a “proper bloke” because he “did other things”, but he wrote the invitation.

Teachers did not think that the invitation was greatly different from what they would have written, except for his use of the word “kindy” and the “acorns” logo chosen by the father, which came from a neighbouring kindergarten association.

Twenty-one fathers, one mother, and one older sister came to the evening. The father who wrote the invitation did not himself come to the evening, but his wife came because she did not see the kindergarten on a regular daily basis.

The kindergarten was operated as a normal session, and most stayed for the whole session. It started with mat time:

That highlighted the sense of belonging and connection. It was lovely to see children getting up and being so competent and confident in front of others. (Teacher)

There was a tremendous sense of belonging felt by the teachers as the Dads joined in with the large mat time. They sang or clapped and generally seemed to enjoy being part of the evening. (Professional development adviser’s notes of discussion with teachers)

The fathers took part in a range of activities. They were particularly drawn to the collage and construction areas, building and using tools for constructions. They made hats, swords, and “purposeful things” for and with the children. They did not stay to help clean up, but did some chatting among themselves.

The president, who was a father, spoke at the evening, acknowledging the teachers’ energy, commitment, and work in the kindergarten:

He likened an early experience he had helping at kindergarten to his own work role. He found himself helping children through some negotiations at the carpentry table and said this was a bit like arbitration work he got involved in—thus he drew on similar skills, just transferred them to the kindergarten. He also commented that the fundamental skills for social and other learning areas were gained in this setting and then used for later life and ongoing learning. He commented that parent helping as Dads was very important and acknowledged that he didn't feel that comfortable in the beginning, he didn't know what to do or quite what would be expected of him. (Professional development adviser's notes of teachers' observations)

One of the upshots of the fathers' evening was that teachers noticed that fathers seemed more comfortable in talking to the children about their own occupation, and using their own occupational skills. One of the fathers offered to come in to tape a music session. This seemed to be a niche for him where his interests were useful and able to be shared.

This father described how, "off his own bat", he worked with the children to record and burn a CD, which was also used as a fundraiser:

I got Wendy to play the guitar. I recorded the guitar and then I recorded her singing over the guitar. Then the kids came along one by one who wanted to and sang along to that guide track. So it was Wendy's guitar and Wendy's voice and then maybe 18 children ... They took the CD home afterwards and promptly drove everyone crazy. (Father)

Teachers noticed that this father worked very responsively with the children. He observed the children and "seemed to tune into the things that interested, motivated, or excited them". Teachers described the father's contribution in the kindergarten newsletter as a way of acknowledging his work, and giving an example of the ways that fathers might find their talents or interests could link to the programme. The father has since downloaded songs off the Internet for the kindergarten.

Making environmental changes

Teachers took turns in observing each other's interactions with fathers, and took a stocktake of the kindergarten environment in relation to how men were portrayed, and the visibility of men.

They examined wall displays, what was out in the way of books, children's profile books, notices, and newsletters. They found that most of the photographs illustrating the curriculum, in children's profile books, and of events in the kindergarten were of women and children. Yet the teachers acknowledged that every day men came to the kindergarten, and there had been at least one father on every trip:

You need to look at the physical environment because it's the first thing people look at. We realised we weren't really getting our message across. (Teacher)

Visibility in wall displays was easy to change: the teachers "blasted away" with their digital camera and photographed fathers as they came to the kindergarten.

A theme of men at work was established, and coincidentally over the course of a few weeks, the kindergarten had visits from male firefighters, a male “pirate”, male police officers, and a male carpenter.

Teachers also discussed how “friendly” the physical environment was for men. They noticed at the fathers’ evening that a net containing collage materials was so low that people who were more than 1.9 metres tall, most of whom were men, had to hunch underneath it when working with children. They subsequently took the net down from the ceiling, making the environment “more friendly to tall men and tall women”. Teachers thought about other practical issues. The adult toilet was through the office, but did everyone know where it was? They thought men could feel uncomfortable asking about its location, so put a notice up where everyone could see it. They also put a notice in the children’s toilets pointing out that an adult toilet was also available. Teachers had noticed that men often stood in the corner and did not get down to children’s level, or seem to feel comfortable in sitting in child-sized chairs. They put adult-sized chairs out (although “some mothers kept tidying them away”).

Teachers also started auditing their enrolment forms and policies. They changed the enrolment form, which had space for only one parent’s name, to provide extra spaces:

It wasn’t that they were being sexist. They just inadvertently excluded more than one person. (Teacher)

The audit is ongoing and will cover every policy and written document within the kindergarten.

The notes taken by the professional development adviser on meetings with teachers through this process convey a sense of teachers examining and questioning their practices. In their third meeting, after the fathers’ evening, the notes included the following points from the teachers’ discussion:

- We need to have expectations of Dads to be involved and be a part of the programme.
- We need to take Dads into account on things like the joining letter, having both names of caregivers and Dads included on the starting letter—now it’s just Mums.
- Revisit the parent helper notice—how does it include Dads? How else could it?
- We need to make a really conscious effort to greet all Dads and make them feel welcome.
- We need to share with Dads about their child’s day—the little incidents and the learning.
- We need to share the profiles more consciously and invite Dad’s response to these as well.
- Could survey the interests—a sample could be adapted (from the readings).
- Make additions to newsletters that specifically named Dads’ contributions.

A fathers’ support group

The establishment of a fathers’ support group occurred parallel to the work being done by the teachers. It was initiated by two fathers who noticed that there were now nine or ten fathers who were the main caregiver, where a year before they had been the only two:

We took it on ourselves. We met a few times in a local bar, at first men by themselves as a group. Then we became friendly with their wives and had a few barbies. We dragged in the less ebullient Dads, the shy ones who were always round the fringes. They got involved. It's quite a good scene ... Mums do a similar thing. They meet for coffee at a house or café.
(Father)

Teachers let these fathers know if there is a new Dad who is the main caregiver, and they make contact with him.

Views of outcomes

Teachers reported a greater awareness of their own gender-based stereotypes and assumptions, and this awareness seemed to offer a good base for enhancing relationships and communications with fathers. These “entrenched gender-based attitudes” were a surprise. Teachers are now doing professional development on anti-bias curriculum.

Teachers also said they more readily noticed language and stereotyping in children's play and readiness to address these. Two examples were:

- a boy doing the ironing and being told “Dads don't do the ironing”; and
- a girl asking another girl whose father brought her to the kindergarten and made her lunch, “Is your Mum dead?”

Two of the fathers interviewed helped to plan the “fathers' and other significant adults” evening and establish the men's support group. They were enthusiastic about these initiatives, and as a consequence had got to know more men from the kindergarten community, felt better supported as parents, and were now contributing their skills within the education programme. All parents thought the evening was useful in getting adults who were less involved to find out more about kindergarten alongside their child. Some wanted to repeat the evening and also invite grandparents. Parents also appreciated the opportunity to have a formal interview with teachers about their child's learning.

None of the parents consciously realised there had been changes to the kindergarten environment to make it more “men friendly”, or in the visibility of men in wall displays and documentation.

Table 20 **Parent and staff views of outcomes**

Participants	Parents	Teachers
Working with children	Support for parenting (Father). Fathers more involved in working with children in the programme and doing work around the kindergarten.	Notice and address gender stereotyping in children's play. Know about children's interactions with their fathers and can build on children's interests. Understand more about child's identity within the family.
Communication with parents	Appreciated formal interviews, fathers' evening and men's support group. Fathers felt encouraged to participate.	Make conscious efforts to communicate with both mothers and fathers.
Curriculum		Undertaking further professional development on anti-bias curriculum.
Attitudes	Fathers feel more comfortable and valued.	Greater awareness of gender-based beliefs and practices.

Both the head teacher and the teacher thought the fathers' evening was beneficial for the children because it allowed them to draw on memories of activities the father did with the child, get to know fathers better, and make a connection with home by talking about the father with the child:

I was able to say 'I remember when your Dad came that night to the kindergarten, he was helping you with the sellotape. And I noticed you could do that and you were helping your Dad to do that.' When you have a bigger knowledge of the family ... you can bring them into your conversations more. And the children really appreciate that. It does build relationships. Even the very superficial extent of acknowledging the Dad had come. (Head teacher)

A spin-off from the fathers' night was that the principal of the local school, who was also a kindergarten father, came to the evening. This helped the teachers and principal form a closer working relationship, and "made us feel the school is approachable and the principal is approachable". One development from this closer relationship was each party's agreement to co-ordinate and not hold events on the same night or do fundraising at the same time, as each was often tapping into the same parents.

The two primary caregiver fathers interviewed said they had always felt comfortable and welcomed, but now felt more valued:

I probably feel more valued since last April. I've done a few things, fundraising bits and pieces. I was gently encouraged to do so by the teachers I guess. I ended up on the committee this year, mainly because of a lack of blokes. I wouldn't have done that off my own initiative. (Father)

They both became more involved in the life of the kindergarten. One father thought there were more parents on the committee now and “always someone doing something”. As well as being on the committee himself, he was doing more around the kindergarten, “like putting on door hinges or locks, or putting up a sign”. While this is traditional male work, the other father’s contribution of playing music and making a CD was not. The father who made the CD said his involvement “had escalated upwards”. He thought there were benefits for his daughter from his involvement, because she very much liked him being at kindergarten and taking part in “duty”.

Mothers also noticed “a few more Dads were now involved in doing things”:

It is great to see male involvement, and great to see that kindergarten is not just a female domain, to see Dads as interested. They do it for their kids. (Mother)

A father spoke of the support he got for his parenting role from being with teachers and other parents. He welcomed this because:

The other thing for me is that [child] is my oldest and everything for me is hit and miss as a parent. I just make it up and confirm my views. (Father)

The formal interviews were not attended by any of the parents interviewed, but were regarded positively:

... the teachers formalised the opportunity for parents to have interviews and get an update on the children. They let it be known and the parents could make a booking. It was something they hadn’t done in the past. It was always very informal. Even though I didn’t personally take part I thought it was good to put that in place. (Mother)

This mother said that she is now a member of the committee and able to talk to teachers at other times. She felt that offering formal interviews was a positive move for parents who worked during the day, who did not have a chance to talk to the teachers regularly. She also felt that written communication is particularly important for those parents, and valued the newsletters and profiles, which her employed husband could see.

At the end of the project, only nine parents filled in the survey. These parents were more positive about the information about their own child and talking about the child’s home experiences than about information about the programme. However, one parent gave the father and child evening as an example of getting useful information about the programme. Another thought that:

the offer of parent teacher interviews is great and especially important if my child was being naughty or struggling with work or friends. I would like to be told this so I could talk to the teacher.

One parent had an interest in more advice about bringing up boys:

My only other comment would be on how to focus on boys vs girls i.e. (Raising Boys Book) on how boys need to be taught and handled differently. Is there any structures in place for this concept?

Table 21 Views of parents and whānau of teacher/parent communications (n=9)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Teachers give me useful information about the programme	1	3	3	2
Teachers give me useful information about my child	1	6	1	1
I talk to the teachers about my child's experiences at home		5	2	1

The professional development adviser thought that teachers' perceptions had shifted and they had greater insight into their assumptions and awareness of stereotypical views. She thought that teachers' new perspectives could be attributed to their reading, thinking, and discussions. She thought all teachers had shifted from perceptions of "fathers" as a generic group to "fathers" as individuals.

Views of professional development

Both the teacher and the head teacher thought the professional development had been valuable. For the teachers, having an "outsider" professional development adviser was important because of being an outsider ("she was someone objective whom we know"), and playing particular roles. These roles were to:

- identify issues and provide theoretical ideas, readings, and questions in relation to these (she "gave meaning to our thoughts");
- provide challenge ("she forced us to think"); and
- offer tools, such as ideas for parent/teacher interviews.

They were positive about the professional development and research project for the centre and themselves. They thought the project showed parents that they are valued, their roles are affirmed, and there is an important place for parents to have voice. On a national level, a hope was for the project to make a difference to others. Personally, both felt that the project kept them thinking and developing. This in turn helped to keep kindergarten "rich". These were consistent with the aims for the project which they expressed in the first interview.

Conclusion

Teachers in this kindergarten approached the project from an analytic basis. They decided on the theme of involving fathers in the life of the kindergarten because they had noticed some communication gaps and lack of connection with fathers. They also noticed that involvement of fathers in the kindergarten tended to be limited to manual jobs and office-holding positions, rather than socialising and working with children in the programme. They were also influenced by reading relevant literature.

This case study highlights benefits that occur when professional development and teacher reflection addresses teachers' beliefs as well as their practice. The data gathered for this project—the audit of the environment from a male perspective, and feedback from the research interviews—also helped teachers to recognise issues that they had not been aware of, and to choose a direction for the project that was relevant to parents.

It was also apparent that although the focus of the work was on involving fathers, there were positive benefits for working with children, especially in teachers' recognising and addressing stereotyped play.

6. Conclusion

The ECE centres in this study were based in very different communities, and developed their own practices in response to these contexts. Nevertheless, the approaches taken to teachers and parents/whānau working together in early childhood education have some key themes in common. In this chapter, we discuss these themes within the context of other research evidence, describe effective strategies that teachers in the six centres took to enhancing their working relationships and communication with parents/whānau, and examine processes and factors in the professional development that assisted teachers to develop their collaboration with parents/whānau.

Respect and belonging—a basis for partnership

Where partnerships with parents/whānau developed, these were based on mutual respect, indicative of a belief in a “credit view” of parents and children. Teachers wanted parents to feel the centre was their place as well as their child’s, so that teachers, parents, and children could share experiences and build an environment where parents felt comfortable to be themselves and participate. A sense that this is a “community place” was underlying. Whalley (1997) described ways in which the Pen Green Centre adopted an “open door” attitude to bridge the “conceptual gulf” (Athey, 1990) that exists when people who lack shared experience start working together. Similar bridging happened in the centres in this study.

Centres made connecting with parents and children a priority, and some consciously formulated actions and strategies to create a welcoming atmosphere, for example:

- rostering a person to be at the door to welcome and farewell every parent and child;
- encouraging parents to get to know each other by introducing new families to other families; and
- recognising that some parents are shy and watching out for them at social occasions.

Where mutual respect did not exist, as was the case for one centre at the start of this project, the atmosphere was divisive, and energies of parents/whānau were focused on blame. Constructive working partnerships could not develop without first addressing the relationship issues.

The factor uppermost for parents was that their child was happy and settled. This was consistent with the recent research finding that 87 percent of 886 parents rated their child being “happy and settled” as “very important” (Mitchell et al., in press). Parents in the NZCER national survey, asked to identify the three most important characteristics that they looked for in a good ECE service, also identified affective factors as most important, that is that their children were happy and settled and that there were warm and nurturing teachers and educators.

Integrating action and sharing knowledge between home and ECE centre

The community crèche provided an outstanding example of integrated action between home and ECE centre: parents brought documentation from home that was discussed with teachers and used in planning for children. The observations carried out by parents contributed to their own understanding and to the crèche teachers' understanding.

Similarly, the city ECE centre devised unique ways to find out more about the child's experiences at home. Parents, children, and teachers very much enjoyed a diary going home with a different child each week, where the parents recorded stories and provided photos and drawings of children's experiences at home. This conveyed information about the contexts of children's lives to all participants in the centre community. Similarly, adults loved reading a quote book of the sayings that children come out with.

Strategies teachers found helpful in finding out parent views

When teachers found out from parents what their interests were, and constructed practices to respond to these interests, parents tended to become more engaged and able to contribute more. In all centres, parents' interests were predominantly in their own child. Working with teachers in early childhood education for the benefit of all children often followed on from parents working with teachers for the benefit of their own child.

Where the ECE centre approach to working with parents did not coincide with parents' interests, centres could "miss the mark" in attracting parent involvement. This was particularly evident in the centre that offered teen parents a workshop on whakapapa and doll-making. Only one parent attended the workshop because it was not what parents really wanted to know about and do. In contrast, there was a high level of participation when teachers showed a videotape of the children's day at the centre, because this coincided with the interest of parents/whānau.

Teachers used a range of strategies to find out parents' aspirations and views, and enhance the depth and value of their interactions with parents. Asking parents for their views, and then acting on those views, helped parents to feel that they were important to the centre and could contribute understanding, ideas, and insights that would benefit their child and the education programme.

Discussing values and aspirations

The city centre, in a meeting of parents/whānau, discussed values and aspirations for children, and asked parents what they really wanted to know. This meeting was "inspirational" for the teachers and parents/whānau who attended it. The discussion seemed to contribute to clarity about vision and purpose, bring people into closer connection, and draw attention to the foundation of the centre as a parent co-operative. Discussion about educational values was useful in helping to generate understanding and appreciation between teachers and parents about educational

principles that were important to each party. This example indicates one way in which centres may go about implementing the statement from the Desirable Objectives and Practices that:

9. Management should develop and regularly review a statement of the service's philosophy and the charter, in consultation with educators, parents/guardians and, where appropriate, whānau (Ministry of Education, 1996).

The review can be done in a routine, superficial manner, or may offer opportunity for the centre community, like this centre, to have a deeper discussion about aspirations for children and for teaching and learning.

This practice is consistent with the emphasis by several writers on the value in early childhood education of discussing pedagogical work and aspirations for children. Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (1999) explored the notion of constructing the early childhood education centre as a forum where people can come together for dialogue on a range of topics. Wilton Playcentre, as one of the first designated Centres of Innovation, held an exercise early in the Centre of Innovation project where parents met together to talk about what they really valued. This had similar perceived benefits (Mitchell, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2004). Broström (2003), discussing *Te Whāriki* from a Danish perspective, has suggested the need for more discussion of how we understand and define our visions for children, so that we can incorporate the visions into the activities we create with children. Opening out in these ways can contribute to richer early childhood education services, a greater sense of shared endeavours, and wider community participation.

Surveying parents/whānau

Surveys, alongside verbal methods, were a useful way to ask parents about their views. A group of parents at the community crèche surveyed all parents about their aspirations, views of communication and relationships, and connections between centre and home. Their survey was based on the research study questions. The analysis by parents highlighted that some parents did not understand information about the curriculum very well. An upshot was teachers developing more meaningful explanations, and at the same time streamlining their documentation processes. Another consequence was teachers making time for individual meetings with those parents who wanted these. One rationale for parents doing the surveying and analysis is that parents may feel less constrained about saying what they really think, since teachers are less likely to identify individuals who may make negative comments.

The researcher provided feedback for all centres about the main themes from interviews with parents and teachers. In the community crèche, the themes were presented to a parent/whānau meeting. The information was then used to help plan action.

Parent social occasions and meetings

Parent social occasions were used as an opportunity not only to get parents and children together in an enjoyable experience and help people make contacts with each other, but also to find out parents' views. Strategies were developed with the specific context in mind.

The multicultural kindergarten used a parent/whānau lunch to share food from different cultures and for people to get to know each other, and as a chance to discuss views about cultural celebrations, communication, play, and the ECE curriculum. This was the beginning of this centre's action research.

Fathers and parents who had little contact with the urban kindergarten were invited to an evening to “show the kindergarten in action”. This led to some fathers offering to contribute to the education programme.

Relationship focused on pedagogy and children

If the relationship between teachers and parents/whānau is to foster children's learning and wellbeing, the focus of communication and involvement needs to be on pedagogy and children. Parents may have many types of involvement in early childhood education centres, such as serving on the committee, fundraising, and participating in working bees and social events. These are valuable in contributing to ECE centre provision, and creating opportunities for parents to meet others and learn themselves. But if the purpose of relationships is to connect home and ECE centre practices, contribute to each party's understanding of children, and enhance pedagogy, the focus needs to be on these aspects.

There were three main ways in which study participants made this a focus. These illustrate how learning more about and working with families' “funds of knowledge” (Moll, 2000) can enrich and deepen the interactions that teachers have with children, because they know more about children's interests and experiences. This enables greater complexity in conversations, and affirms children and their families. Parents/whānau can learn from their involvement in pedagogy, and find this helpful in the interactions, activities, and routines they have with their child at home.

Parents contributing to assessment, planning, and evaluation

Teachers and parents/whānau from three centres in this study invited and made opportunities for parents to contribute to assessment, planning, and evaluation for their own child. This involvement was meaningful to parents and enriched the information about the child. Teachers drew on the individual knowledge that parents have of their own child, combined with their own professional knowledge, to develop formative assessments and plan for children's learning.

There were shifts in some centres from teachers making assessments and plans, and then “telling” parents about these, to both parties developing these together. In these centres, teachers had thought they were involving parents, but came to realise that this involvement could happen at a deeper level. The outcome was teachers and parents understanding more about children, and developing approaches that reflected this enhanced understanding. For example, one centre required parents to participate on a term basis as “parent help”, and encouraged parents to document their own child's learning during this time, including videotaping learning episodes, as well as making observations and documenting learning from home. This fed directly into

assessment, planning, and evaluation, and parents' involvement contributed to the education programme.

Explaining the curriculum and environment

Many parents in the project wanted to understand more about the curriculum. Some teachers developed ways to explain their approach to curriculum to parents/whānau, moving away from educational jargon, and using methods to capture interest. Terms such as “emergent curriculum”, and text-dense explanations of *Te Whāriki*, did not seem to get through to many parents.

An especially engaging method of explaining curriculum was through teachers showing videotaped learning episodes of children at the centre, then explaining the learning that happened there. One value of using video is that children as well as parents/whānau are interested in seeing themselves on video, and later, stills can be made and used with print explanations as a wall display. Video episodes can illustrate various points and involve a range of children.

In the centre for teen parents, parents/whānau were invited to contribute to the design of the outdoor environment, drawing on their own memories of what they had liked as children, and what they knew about their own children. These ideas were incorporated into a draft design. In this process, parents discussed principles raised by the ECD co-ordinator about safety and stimulation for children and the ECE regulatory framework, and found out more about these aspects.

These ways of working are consistent with the principle of *Te Whāriki* that family and community will be a wider part of the early childhood curriculum. *Te Whāriki* states that, “Families should be part of the assessment and evaluation of the curriculum as well as children’s learning and development” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 30).

Involving parents in the education programme

Two centres found ways to involve parents in the education programme. They wanted to engage target groups of parents who seemed to be on the periphery in the ECE community, having less direct involvement in the life of the centre and more distant relationships with teachers. In the multicultural kindergarten, these were parents from diverse cultures that were not Pākehā or Māori. In the urban kindergarten, they were fathers.

Some of these parents offered experiences and activities from their own backgrounds, which teachers were less well equipped to offer. The parents’ contribution enriched the education programme. Evidence suggested that these parents started to feel more relaxed in the centre environment and to feel that their contribution was appreciated. This sometimes also led on to parents taking on other roles within the kindergarten, such as positions on the committee.

Dealing with the hard issues

Parents' desire for tests and literacy "teaching"

Most parents were keen to know how well their child was doing, and some thought there should be formal testing of children's skills and knowledge. Print-based literacies of reading and writing were especially important to many parents in this study. Some wanted their child to have structured opportunities for learning reading and writing, and did not appreciate that children were learning through informal methods. The city centre adopted use of language that parents understood, such as maths, science, and literacy, and also catered for parents' desire for structured learning by holding "preschool sessions" for older children which were focused on aspects such as literacy. However, a challenge for many teachers is to explain how literacy learning occurs within their education programme for those parents who believe there should be a structured approach. This study was undertaken before the series *Kei Tua o te Pae: Assessment for learning: Early childhood exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2004) was published. Teachers can now draw on this series, especially Book 6, *Assessment and learning: Competence. Te aromatawai me te ako: Kaiako*, as well as this study, for ideas about how to make learning visible by identifying evidence of competence. The articles by Hatherly (2006), McNaughton et al. (1996), and Elias et al. (2006), reviewed in Chapter 2, provide further ideas about extending and explaining literacy learning. Use of narrative Learning Stories can be useful for encouraging children to engage in literacy events (the narrative story), and for showing parents how these are literacy events, as well as contributing to assessment.

Working with parents of multicultural backgrounds

Teachers in the multicultural kindergarten had difficulty communicating about what children were learning and the value of the education programme to parents whose experiences of education in their countries of origin were very different from the New Zealand experience. *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) argues for the wider world of family and community. The communication strand states that:

The languages and symbols of [children's] own and others' cultures are protected (p. 16).

By opening the door to parents sharing their knowledge about language, cultural events, dress, and foods within the kindergarten, and finding external resources and services to support them, these teachers gained greater understanding of the cultures of children in their kindergarten, and parents were positive about these moves. Visual tools were helpful in communicating to these families, since they did not rely on a language that parents did not know well.

However, these teachers were from a Pākehā background, and did not speak the home language of many children, or have cultural knowledge of other families' child rearing and cultural values. It seems that without support from staff working in a language and cultural role, it will be very hard for their work to address more than some aspects of "the tip of the cultural iceberg". They were eager to have access to resources and advice.

Another issue was the needs of these parents to access a wider range of services within the community than those provided by the kindergarten alone. Lack of familiarity with the New Zealand context meant that some families did not know “taken for granted information” about health and welfare services. Teachers could provide a conduit to these other services.

NZCER and Te Kōhanga Reo’s evaluation of the initial impact and uses of Equity Funding (Mitchell et al., in press) found similar needs for resources and staffing in services with high numbers of Pacific children and children from other ethnic communities. These findings suggest the value of external support, for example, provision of language and cultural resources, interpretation services, and staff professional development, as well as improving the supply of teaching and support staff, especially for these services. The OECD review of early childhood education provision in 12 OECD countries (OECD, 2001) also suggested the need for such support to cater for children from immigrant or ethnic minority backgrounds.

Professional development processes

Some processes were especially successful in helping teachers learn, and improve their working relationship with parents and whānau. These were experiences that:

- gave teachers access to a range of views;
- made sense to teachers (e.g., used observational data from the teacher’s own setting);
- provided evidence that showed the current situation within the centre, and were able to be analysed by the teachers (e.g., videotaped interactions; stocktake of the environment from a male perspective; audit of policies and enrolment forms from a male perspective; survey of parent views);
- helped teachers think by confronting them with data that was unexpected (e.g., experiences of trying to engage parents that were “unsuccessful”); and
- helped teachers analyse attitudes that were taken for granted (e.g., gender-based stereotypes through teachers noticing differences in how they encouraged and communicated with men).

The critical discussions that enabled teachers to analyse data and determine directions were often done after “working hours”, and may have been rationed according to centre budgets. However, teachers were able to find ways around some issues, such as how to provide the one-to-one time that parents were seeking, without incurring a very high extra workload.

In some centres, teachers thought they would have benefited from longer or more intensive professional development, or a continuance of the professional development related to relationships with parents. This could not be guaranteed under a system that apportions professional development for limited duration in yearly contracts.

In their interviews, many teachers said how helpful it was to have an outside expert professional development adviser when they were learning new concepts or challenging their thinking and practice. The involvement of a professional development adviser was useful in helping teachers to

gain “clarity and focus”; providing readings on the topic of investigation; offering ideas on ways to develop; offering practical support, for example in using a video camera, in suggesting ways to streamline assessment and planning processes; and taking staff through the action research process. Several participants also commented that the experience of presenting their work at the Early Childhood Convention helped them to see the wood through the trees, and gave them confidence. Several teaching teams reported that they were a more coherent team because of their involvement in this research and professional development project.

All centres in this study seemed to benefit through the research and professional development project focused on enabling parents/whānau and teachers to work together in early childhood education.

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Appendix A: Phase One interview schedules

First staff interview schedule

Part One: Background Information

Your answers to the first set of questions will enable us to build profiles of the staff who participate in our project.

1. How long have you worked in early childhood services?
2. How long have you worked at your current centre?
3. What is your position in the centre?
4. How long have you held your position?
5. Have there been any significant periods in your career when you were not in paid employment (e.g. illness, maternity leave, study leave)?
6. What are your educational qualifications?
7. Are you studying at the moment towards any higher qualifications (include up-grading if applicable)? If yes, which are they?
8. What are your weekly hours of work?
9. Do you work part-time or full-time?
10. What professional development over the last 5 years have you had most benefit from, and why?
11. How do you describe your ethnicity?

Part Two: Views of parent involvement

We would now like to know about your views of parent involvement.

1. What are your own beliefs concerning parent and whanau involvement in early childhood education?
2. What do you think are important practices in working with parents and whanau?
3. What is your understanding of what your centre really values about parents and whanau?
4. How were these values developed?

Part Three. Centre's current work with parents

We can use your answers to this next section to build pictures of current parent involvement in early childhood education in your centre.

1. How would you describe your centre's current work with parents and whanau to someone who knows nothing about it?
2. What would be the signs for you that your centre's work with parents and whanau is successful?

3. What effects, if any, does your centre's work with parents/whanau have for:
 - a) children
 - b) parents
 - c) family/whanau
 - d) staff
 - e) community _____
4. Have you experienced differences in opinion with parents over what sort of education is best for their children? If yes, please describe what these were and how these differences were dealt with.
5. What things can you think of that would have been of help in this situation?
6. What do you think your centre does well in working with parents and whanau?
7. Is there anything you think you could do better or anything new you could do in your work with parents and whanau? If yes please explain how.
8. What are the factors that help you to work with parents? (These may be outside the control of the centre).
9. What are the factors that hinder your work with parents? (These may be outside the control of the centre).
10. What dilemmas do you face in working with parents in your centre?
11. Do you have people whom you can share these dilemmas with?
12. Are these new dilemmas for you?
13. How do you think you might resolve them?

Part Four: Aspirations for professional development

The next questions are about what you hope to get out of the research and professional development project.

1. Why are you interested in participating in this research and professional development project?
2. What will be the main focus of professional development about parent and whanau involvement in your centre?
3. What would you like to get out of this project:
 - For you personally?
 - For your centre?

Thank you very much for your help. Are there any other issues you would like to discuss about the research and professional development project?

Part One: Background information

Your answers to questions will enable us to build profiles of the parents who will participate in our research project, to see whether different groups of parents have different experiences of being involved in their children's learning in their early childhood centre and what helps and hinders your involvement.

1. How long has your child been going to the centre?

2. How often does your child go to the centre?
Hours per day? Days per week?
What do you usually do when your child is at the early childhood centre?
3. In this interview we are going to talk mostly about _____, you and your early childhood centre. But I would like to get an idea of your family household. Can you tell me about who is in your household?
4. I am going to show you a list of different incomes. Thinking about your family, please tell me the range your family income falls into before tax?

Less than \$15,000 p.a.	π
Between \$15,000 - \$20,000 p.a.	π
Between \$20,000 - \$25,000 p.a.	π
Between \$25,000 - \$30,000 p.a.	π
Between \$30,000 - \$40,000 p.a.	π
Between \$40,000 - \$50,000 p.a.	π
Between \$50,000 - \$60,000 p.a.	π
Between \$60,000 - \$70,000 p.a.	π
More than \$70,000 p.a.	π
5. How would you describe your ethnic background?
6. What is your first language?
7. Do you speak or understand any other language? YES π
 NO π
 What language(s) are these?
8. Finally, please would you tell me something about your education.
 Did you get as much education as you wanted?
9. How far did you go in school?
10. Since leaving school, have you gained any educational or on-the-job qualifications?
11. Are you studying for a qualification at the moment?

Part Two: Hopes and expectations

The next set of questions is about your hopes for _____'s education.

12. What sort of education do you want for _____?
13. Is there anything you can think of that might stop _____ from getting the kind of education you would like him/her to have?
 How far would you like _____ to go in gaining formal qualifications? (School, tertiary education, on-the job qualifications)
14. How does the centre help your child's learning and development?
 Is there anything else you would like your child to learn?
15. What do you think your child learns from home?
 What is different about what they learn at the centre?

Part Three: How the centre supports families

We want to find out how the centre supports families and how you are involved.

16. What do you most like about this centre?
17. What do staff and other parents do to help you feel comfortable/welcome here?
18. What other things could staff and other parents do to help you feel more comfortable/welcome?
19. What has been the biggest challenge for your child in coming here? Examples?
20. What about for you? Examples?
21. How close for your child are the ways you do things at home to the ways things are done here? Examples?
22. How close for you are the ways you do things at home to the ways things are done here? Examples?
23. Can you tell me any ways in which your culture is reflected in the culture of the centre?
24. Now I would like to get a picture of how you are involved in your child's early childhood education. How would you describe your involvement as a parent in the centre to someone who knows nothing about it?
25. How does your involvement in the centre help you as a parent?
26. How does your involvement in the centre help your child?
27. How does your involvement in the centre help the staff?
28. What kinds of involvement do you value the most and why?
29. What kinds of involvement do you value the least and why?

Part Four: Communication with staff

The next set of questions is about how staff communicate with parents to support your child's interests.

30. How do staff communicate with you about the following? (Describe with examples of how this happens and approximately how often)
 - General topics for all parents related to aspects of the programme and the early childhood curriculum, child developmentYour child's experiences, e.g. events in child's day, difficulties child has at the centre, aspects of child's character, child's learning and development
Plans for your child's learning
Child's progress and development
General topics related to management e.g. how the centre runs
How you can help your child e.g. with behaviour, with learning
Other services in the area
Other.
31. Have there been benefits for you and your family from these communications? (Describe).
32. Can you describe the best experience you've had in communicating with staff?
33. Can you describe the worst experience you've had in communicating with staff?
34. Are you able to communicate with staff about your child as much as you would like to? If yes, can you give me examples?
If no, what would you like to communicate to staff about?
What makes it hard for this to happen?
35. What helps you to communicate with staff in the ways that you want?

36. Do you have any suggestions about how staff could improve the ways they communicate with you?

Part Five: Home and centre–integrated action

The next set of questions is about the linkages between your home and the centre.

37. How do staff find out from you information about your child's strengths and interests? What sort of information can you give?
38. How do staff find out from you information about your child's experiences and interests at home?
39. How do staff find out from you about particular events in your child's life e.g. stressful events, kind of weekend the child has had?
40. Did you and staff ever sort out together any problems that your child was having. If yes, describe.
41. Have you ever had differences or different ideas from staff over what sort of education is best for your child?
How was this resolved?
42. Do staff know as much about your child and your family as you would like them to know?
43. Would you like to know any more about the research and professional development project?
44. What would you like to get out of the project?
For you personally?
For your centre?
45. Thank you very much for your help. Are there any issues you would like to discuss about the research and professional development project?
46. Any other comments?

Child interview schedule

Call the centre/kindergarten by the name child uses.

Call the parent/caregiver(s) by the name(s) the child uses.

Ask child to show interviewer around centre/kindergarten and point out their work and things they like. Ask questions as you go.

Children's experiences of involvement

1. Who usually brings you to the centre/kindergarten?
2. And who picks you up?
3. When does your (parent/caregiver) come to the centre/ kindergarten?
4. What does your (parent/caregiver) do when they come to your centre/kindergarten? (Prompt question: Do they watch you work or play at your centre/kindergarten?)
5. Does (parent/caregiver) ask you questions about what you do at the centre/kindergarten? What do you tell them about?

6. Do your teachers and (parent/caregiver) talk with each other very often? What do they talk about?

Children's experiences of integrated action

7. Do you take things home from the centre? What things do you take home?
8. Is there anything you like to bring from home? Can you tell me why?
9. What do you tell your family about the centre/kindergarten? And then what?
10. What do you tell people here about your time at home? And then what?

Children's experiences of home and centre

11. What is your favourite thing to do at the centre/kindergarten? Can you tell me why?
12. What is the hardest thing you have to do at the centre/kindergarten? Can you tell me why?
13. What do you like to do at home that you don't do at the centre/kindergarten? Can you tell me why?

Children's views of parents' feelings

14. What do (parent/caregiver) like most about the centre/kindergarten? Can you tell me why?
15. What do (parent/caregiver) like you to do at the centre/kindergarten? Can you tell me why?

First professional development adviser interview schedule

Part One: Background information

1. How long have you worked in/with early childhood education services?
2. What experiences have you had of parent involvement in early childhood education?

Part Two. Views of parent involvement

1. What are your own beliefs about the role of parent and whanau involvement in early childhood education?
2. What do you think are important practices in working with parents and whanau?
3. What would be the signs for you that a centre's work with parents and whanau is successful?
4. What do you see as the barriers that prevent centres from working well with parents?
5. What do you see as the factors that help centres work well with parents?
6. What skills and knowledge do you have to help centres in this area of their work?

Part Three: Work with early childhood centres

7. Discuss each centre in turn. (Use separate sheets for each centre)

What are the goals of the professional development programme?

How were these goals developed?

What work do you plan to do/have you started to do with the centre?

What would be the signs for you that your professional development programme is successful?

What are the factors that might help you in your work?

What are the barriers that might hinder you?

What are the factors that you think might help a centre in using the professional development?

What are the barriers that might hinder a centre in using the professional development?

What dilemmas do you face in exploring professional development related to work with parents? With people in the centre?

Are these new dilemmas for you?

How do you think you might resolve them?

Part Four: Aspirations for professional development

8. Why are you interested in participating in this research and professional development project?
9. What would you like to get out of this project:
10. For you personally?
11. For the centres with which you are working?

Thank you very much for your help. Are there any other issues you would like to discuss?

Appendix B: Phase Two interview schedules

Second Staff Interview Schedule

Purpose of interview:

- to gather a profile of participant, if they were not part of the first set of interviews
- to find out what participant/centre actually did through project in working with parents, children, others in the community and what they thought of this work
- to gather a clear description of the process of professional development from participant's viewpoint
- to find out future goals.

Profile

Name:

Male Female

Early Childhood Centre:

Part One: Background Information (for any new staff members who have been part of the project where this information was not previously collected).

Your answers to the first set of questions will enable us to build profiles of the staff who participate in our project.

1. How long have you worked in early childhood services?
2. How long have you worked at your current centre?
3. What is your position in the centre?
4. How long have you held your position?
5. What are your educational qualifications?
6. Are you studying at the moment towards any higher qualifications (include up-grading if applicable)? If "yes", which are they?
7. What are your weekly hours of work?

Do you work part-time or full-time?

8. What professional development over the last 5 years have you had most benefit from, and why?
9. How do you describe your ethnicity?

Part Two: Your centre and the *Parent involvement in children's learning* project

In the last year, your centre has been working with (name professional development adviser) on the *Parent involvement in early childhood education* project. In this set of questions I want to ask you about what your centre actually did in this project. Then I'll ask you about changes in pedagogical practices and your own thinking. I'm also asking the centre (staff and parents) to think about documentation that could be useful in illustrating the process of the centre's work for the research publication.

10. What did your centre decide to focus on through its work in the Parent and whanau involvement in children's learning project?
How did the centre make that decision?
Who was involved?
Why did you decide that focus? Did the focus change over the time of the project?
11. How would you describe what you did in this project to someone who knows nothing about it?
What did your centre actually do?
What resources (people, tools and/or ideas) did you use?
Did you collect data?
What use did you make of it?)
12. What do you think changed in your pedagogical practice, if anything, as a result of this project in:
 - a) how parents and educators/teachers work together to support children's learning
 - b) how you work with children
 - c) how you work with other people or organisations in the community?Can you describe these changes?
Why did you make them?
13. Since the project started, is there anything you used to do that you don't do now in working with parents and children?
Is there anything you have modified in working with parents and children?
Are there any totally new things that you do in working with parents and children?
14. How would you describe the impact of these changes on (specify goals for the project in each centre)?
15. How would you describe the impact of these changes in relation to:
staff
children
families
people or organisations in the community?
Any other impacts?
16. What do you think of these changes?

Part Three: The project's effects on staff:parent relationships

Last time I interviewed you I asked what were your own beliefs concerning parent and whanau involvement in early childhood education. You said xxx.

17. How do you think about that now? Any changes in your beliefs? Please describe.

Last time I interviewed you I asked what you think are important practices in working with parents and whanau. You said xxx

18. How do you think about that now? Any changes in what you think? Please describe.

Last time I interviewed you I asked you what is your understanding of what your centre really values about parents and whanau and how these values were developed. You said xxx

19. How do you think about that now? Any changes in your understanding? Please describe.

20. Has the project changed your relationship with the centre

- do you feel more/less comfortable being here?

- more/less welcome?

- more/less valued?

If "yes": How? Are you happy with those changes?

If "no": Why not? Would you like your relationship with the centre/kindergarten to change? If so, how?

21. Has the project changed your relationship with parents at your centre/kindergarten?

If "yes": Please describe. Are those changes for the better?

If "no": Why not, do you think? Would you like those relationships to change? If so, how?

22. Do you have any suggestions about what more could be done to make parents feel comfortable and welcome here?

23. Is there anything you would like to do in working with parents that you cannot do? What prevents you from doing this?

24. Has the project changed your relationships with children at your centre/kindergarten?

If "yes": Please describe. Are those changes for the better?

If "no": Why not, do you think? Would you like those relationships to change? If so, how?

25. Has the project changed your relationship with other people or organisations in the community?

If "yes": Please describe. Are those changes for the better?

If "no": Why not, do you think? Would you like those relationships to change? If so, how?

26. Has the project changed your views about relationships between staff, parents and children?

If "yes": Please describe. Are those changes for the better?

If "no": Why not, do you think? Would you like those relationships to change? If so, how?

27. Has the project changed your view of yourself as a teacher/educator?

If "yes": Please describe. Are those changes for the better?

If "no": Why not?

Part Four: Processes of professional development within the project

28. Please describe what happened in the professional development in your centre
29. What contribution did the professional development adviser make to your centre? Ask for details.
theoretical ideas, practical ideas, literature, tools for data collection, professional development adviser's own viewpoints
30. What did the professional development involve?
Who involved, when, how?
31. What were the pluses and minuses of these?
32. Were there any things you would have liked in the professional development to make it work better for you? If so what were these and why?
33. What were the most important ways, if any, in which the professional development helped your centre?
Why are these important to the centre?
34. What were the most important ways, if any, in which the professional development helped you?
35. Why are these important to you?
36. Were there any surprises for you arising from the project.
If "yes", what were these?
37. Were there any issues or dilemmas for you arising from the project? If "yes", please describe.

Part Five: Future plans

38. Does your centre plan to do anything more about parent involvement?
If "yes", please describe what and when. Who decided that? Who will be involved in it? Do you approve?
If "no", would you like it to? If so what would you like it to do?
39. Has the project interested you in undertaking further professional development around parent involvement?
If "yes", please describe.
40. Would you like opportunities for professional development in other areas?
If "yes", what kind of professional development?
With what focus?
41. Anything else you would like to say?

Second parent interview schedule

Purpose of interview

42. To discover parents' experiences of the Parent Involvement in Children's Learning project
43. To find out whether/how parents' experiences in the project have changed the relationship with centre staff

Part One: Centre's work with families

In the last year, your centre has been working with (name professional development adviser) on the Parent Involvement in Children's Learning project. This interview is one of 30 parent interviews and 28 staff interviews I am doing to evaluate the project. I'm interested in parents' views on the project, and whether anything changed in the course of the project in the way the centre/kindergarten supports you, your relationships with staff, and your contribution to the centre/kindergarten. I'm interested also in whether there is room for further changes in relationships between parents and staff.

I would like to ask you about the project, e.g. what your centre did in the project, how it was established, and about what effects, if any, the project has had. Most of my questions are quite open-ended, so feel free to mention anything about the project that you think is missing from my questions.

Part One: Your centre/kindergarten and the *Parent involvement in children's learning* project

44. What did (name center) focus on in its work for the parent involvement project. (Please describe).
Do you know how the centre made that decision? (Describe).
Who was involved? (Were parents involved?)
Why did the centre decide on that focus?
Were there changes over time?
45. What did your centre do in the course of the project?
What people were involved?
Were you involved?
What happened?
What resources (ideas, people, tools, etc) were used?

Part Two: Changes in staff:parent relationships associated with the project

The next set of questions is about whether you noticed any changes in staff:parent relationships associated with the project.

46. Has the project changed your relationship with the centre/kindergarten?

- any change in how comfortable you feel about being there?
 more/less welcome?
 more/less valued?
 If “yes”: How? Are you happy with those changes?
 If “no”: Why not? Would you like your relationship with the centre/kindergarten to change? If so, how?
47. Has the project changed other parents’ relationships with the centre/kindergarten?
 - any change in how comfortable they feel about being there?
 - more/less welcome?
 - more/less valued?
 48. If “yes”: Please describe
 49. If “no”: Why not, do you think? Do you think any of those parents would like their relationship to change? If “yes”, why?
 50. Has the project changed how educators/teachers communicate with you?
 - about the programme
 - about your child’s experiences
 - about plans for your child’s learning
 - about your child’s progress and development
 - about how you can help your child at home
 51. If “yes”, please describe. Are those changes for the better?
 52. If “no”, why not? Would you like educators/teachers to communicate differently with you? If so, how?
 53. Has the project changed educators’/teachers’ attitudes to parents?
 54. If “yes”, please describe. Are you happy with those changes? Have they benefited you and your family?
 55. If “no”, why not? Would you like educators’/teachers’ attitudes to parents to change? If so, how?

Part Three: The project’s effects on your involvement and views about children’s learning and development

56. Has your involvement in the life of the centre changed because of the project?
 If “yes”, please describe.
 Have there been benefits for you and your child from this? (Describe)
57. Have other parents’ involvement in the life of the centre changed because of the project?
 If “yes”, please describe.
 Have there been benefits for you and your child from this? (Describe)
58. Are there any other ways you would like to be involved in the centre? What, if anything, prevents you from being involved?

Last time I interviewed you I asked how you thought the centre helps your child's learning and development and what else you would like your child to learn. You said xxx

59. Do you agree with that now? Are there any changes or additions you would make now?
 If “yes”, please describe.
 Why would you make these changes?

I also asked what you think your child learns at home and how that is different from what she/he learns at the centre. You said xxx

60. Do you agree with that now?
Are there any changes or additions you would make now?
If “yes”, please describe.
If “yes”, why would you make these changes?
61. Has the project changed your views about whether and how you can contribute to your child’s learning and development?
If “yes”: How?
If “no”: Why not?
62. Has the project changed your view about whether and how staff and parents can work together to contribute to children’s learning?
If “yes”: How?
If “no”,; why not?
63. Does your centre plan to do anything more about parent involvement?
If yes what and when? How was that decision made? Do you approve?
If no, would you like it to? If so, what would you like it to do?

Second professional development advisers

Purpose of interview:

- to find out what each centre actually did through project in working with parents, children, others in the community and what professional development adviser thought of this work
- to gather a clear description of the process of professional development from professional development adviser’s viewpoint
- to find out future goals.

Part One: Centre’s work with parents (same questions to be asked about each centre’s work)

In this section I would like to discuss the work done by (name centre) through the *Parent involvement in early childhood education* project. I want to ask you about what the centre actually did in this project. so that there is a really clear description coming from you and the participants. I’d like to find out about your views of the process, and any changes that you observed in pedagogy within the centre. Then I’d like to talk about documentation that could be useful in illustrating the process of the centre’s work for the research publication.

1. What did (name centre) focus on in the project?
2. How did the centre make that decision? Who made that decision? Who was not involved in the decision?
3. Why did the centre decide on that focus?
4. What did the centre actually do in the project? Who was /wasn’t involved?

Part Two: Processes of professional development

In this section I want to ask you about the processes of professional development for each centre. I have brought the minutes of meetings with centres that you have given me, so some of what we do now will be to fill in gaps.

5. What did the professional development consist of for (name centre).
6. Who participated and who didn't?
7. What resources did you offer the centre? (e.g. ideas, practical advice, assistance in collecting data).
8. How if at all- did the centre benefit from the professional development?
9. Has the project interested you in facilitating further professional development around parent involvement?
If yes, please give details.
If no, would you like to facilitate professional development in other areas?
10. What principles do you think underpin your approach to professional development? Why are these important?
11. Have your views of what is important in professional development changed as a result of this project?

Part Three: The project's effects on staff-parent relationships at the centre

12. Has the project changed relationships between parents and staff at the centre?
If yes: How? Are those changes for the better?
If no: Why not? Would you like those relationships to change? If so, how?
13. Has the project changed relationships between staff and children at the centre?
If yes: How? Are those changes for the better? Do you have any evidence of these changes?
If yes, please describe.
If no: Why not? Would you like those relationships to change? If so, how?
14. Has the project changed relationships between staff and other people or organisations in the community?
If yes: How? Are those changes for the better? Do you have any evidence of these changes?
If yes, please describe.
If no: Why not? Would you like those relationships to change? If so, how?
15. Has the project changed your views of relationships between staff, parents and children?
If yes: How? Are those changes for the better? Do you have any evidence of these changes?
If yes, please describe.
If no: Why not?
16. Has the project changed your views of yourself as a professional development adviser?
If yes: How? Are those changes for the better? Do you have any evidence of these changes?
If yes, please describe.
If no: Why not?

17. Has the project changed educators/teachers' knowledge and understanding?
If yes: How? Are those changes for the better? Do you have any evidence of these changes?
If yes, please describe.
If no: Why not?
18. Has the project changed educators/teachers' attitudes.
If yes: How? Are those changes for the better? Do you have any evidence of these changes?
If yes, please describe.
If no: Why not?
19. Were there any surprises for you? If yes, what were these?
20. Were there any issues, difficulties or dilemmas arising for you ? If yes, please describe for each. How were these resolved?
21. Have you discussed with participants where the centre's work could go now? (Describe)
22. Are there any ways in which you think the centre could be supported in this direction? Are there any ways in which you think it would be hindered in this work?

Part Four: Future plans

23. Have you discussed with the centre whether it wishes to undertake further professional development in the area of parent involvement?
24. Does the centre plan to do anything more about parent involvement? If yes go to 25-27. If no, go to 28
25. What does the centre wish to do and when? How was that decision made?
26. How will you be involved in the centre's plans?
27. What support does the centre need? What obstacles does it face?
28. Would you like the centre to do anything more about parent involvement? If so, what would you like it to do?
29. When I interviewed you last year I asked what you would like to get out of the project. You said xxx What do you now think you got from the project? Why?
30. Any other issues?

Parent and whānau survey

24 March 2003

Survey for parents and whanau

Kia ora

[Name] Kindergarten is part of the *Parent and whanau involvement in children's learning* research and professional development project with the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, Wellington College of Education and Early Childhood Development. The project is examining relationships between parents, whanau and early childhood teachers in early childhood centres; and whether and how the quality of these relationships affects children's learning.

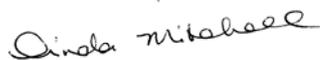
As part of the research we want to find out your views on how parents, whanau and teachers at [Name] Kindergarten get along. We invite you to complete the attached small questionnaire. We are not asking you to put your name on it, and only the researchers will see it. Please put the survey in the box in the kindergarten marked "Parent and whanau survey" for me to collect on 4 April.

The results of this project, including the anonymous questionnaires, will be brought back for discussion with the kindergarten later in the year. The kindergarten will be able to decide how to use them.

Please contact me (details above) if you would like to know more about the questionnaire or about the *Parent and whanau involvement in children's learning* project.

Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely



Linda Mitchell
Senior Researcher

Attach

Survey for parents and whanau

1. The teachers give me useful information about the programme. (Tick one box).

Strongly
Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly
disagree

Please comment and give examples.

2. Is there anything you would like to know more about?

3. The teachers give me useful information about my child. (Tick one box).

Strongly
Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly
disagree

Please comment and give examples

4. Is there anything you would like to know more about?

5. I talk to the teachers about my child's experiences at home. (Tick one box).

Strongly
Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly
disagree

What sort of things?

6. Is there anything you would like teachers to know more about?

7. How are you involved in the life of the kindergarten now?

8. Are there other ways you would like to be involved?

9. Do you have questions about the kindergarten programme, children's learning, your involvement, other things? Please comment.

Thank you very much for your help.
Please contact: Linda Mitchell, New Zealand Council for Educational Research,
P.O. Box 3237, Wellington, Phone (04) 802 1443, email linda.mitchell@nzcer.org.nz
if you would like to know more.