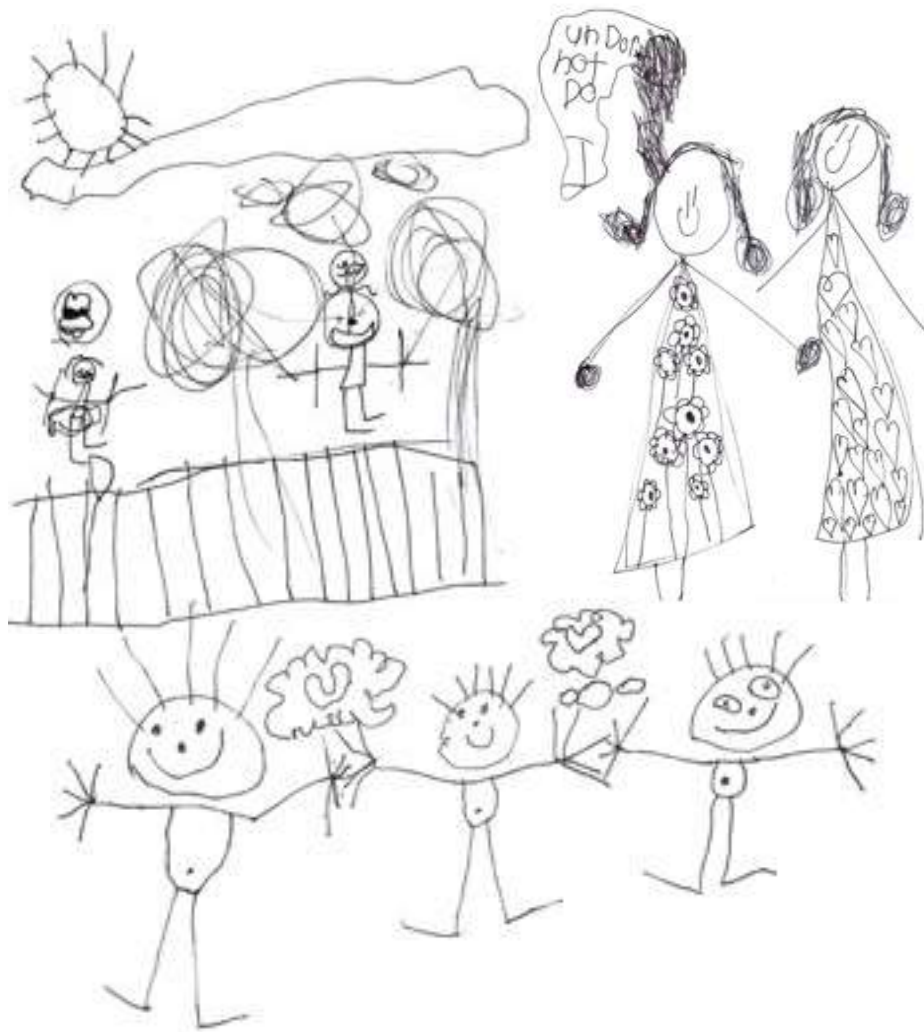


Teaching & Learning in Culturally Diverse Early Childhood Centres



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recent research has highlighted challenges for refugees and immigrants in accessing Early Childhood Education (ECE) services that are responsive to their cultural and linguistic identities and to the contexts of their lives. However, there are few studies of how early childhood pedagogy can address such challenges. This qualitative study aimed to generate an exploration and analysis of culturally responsive teaching and learning in three diverse education and care centres. It investigated how teachers in these diverse settings practically implemented their values by drawing on the funds of knowledge and cultural capital of the families they worked with, weaving these values into the fabric of the national curriculum, *Te Whāriki*. In doing so, the research aimed to identify culturally responsive teaching practice.

Research questions

The two research questions were:

1. What does culturally diverse teaching and learning look like in early childhood settings?
2. How are the values and practices of diverse families accessed and integrated into the curriculum?

Theoretical frame

Teachers and researchers worked within a social constructionist theoretical frame which holds that concepts are socially constructed within an historical and cultural context. The research involved collaborations between the university researchers and two or three teachers in each of three culturally diverse Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres. At the start of the project and towards the end of the project, the three teaching teams and researchers came together for a day's workshop. In these ways the pedagogical knowledge of the teachers and the research knowledge of the researchers were able to be pooled.

Methods

The three education and care centres were: Mangere East Family Service Centre, an integrated ECE centre with health and social services and a predominantly Pasifika and Māori community; Pakuranga Baptist Kindergarten, a centre with a predominantly Asian community; and the Carol White Centre, a centre for children from refugee families with adult learning opportunities alongside.

Data was collected through:

- **Focus group discussions** with the six participating teachers held at an initial workshop to investigate and discuss teachers' experiences and ideas about culturally responsive pedagogy.
- **Video recordings** of three case study children taken in each centre during their free play.
- **Video recordings** of the participating teachers taken in each centre to capture the arrival of families and children and included the children's transition from family members to the teachers.
- **Semi-structured interviews** held with the parents of the children in their family home or at the centre. Parents were asked to view selected episodes of the videotape and their narrative stories regarding the episode were recorded. The video recordings were used as a catalyst for discussion about learning that is valued, their child's strengths, interests and strategies as

learners, the funds of knowledge families hold, experiences and aspirations for their child, and continuities between home and centre.

- **Semi-structured interviews** were held with the participating teachers in each centre, who were asked to view the videotapes of themselves teaching and of the children, and pick out episodes that they thought were significant, especially related to belonging, communication, language and culture. They were asked to explain reasons for their choice.

Findings

Each centre was absolutely distinctive and main themes, examples and documentation from each are discussed in three separate chapters, Chapters 3, 4 and 5. However, in looking across the three centres, some generalisations could be drawn.

The role of the teachers was relationship-based, an idea that is “at the heart of the *Te Whāriki* curriculum” (Peters, 2009, p. 23). Teachers had developed strategies for intercultural exchange of ideas within their own teaching team and with families. They took responsibility for finding out about family values and catering for these within their practice. The teachers provided an environment that was co-constructed with family members and aligned with the ‘Relationships’ principle of *Te Whāriki*. The context of the ECE centres was co-produced—each member contributing to the setting to create the setting.

The creation of ‘a new world’ within each centre was managed by the shared values of the teachers and families, where the teachers valued and spent time in observing what each family needed and where, and through taking time to listen to parents and children. The teachers demonstrated a culture not only of questioning, but also of listening and a willingness to change. Teachers had an articulated value base that was open for discussion and shaped around the changing needs of their families and children. Teachers reflected on their own “taken for granted assumptions”, examining the roles and justifications for established practices. In doing so, they were supported through their reading and study, professional development workshops, and being part of research investigating their own practice.

In looking across the three centres, the worth in multicultural communities of enabling first languages to be used and cultural practices to be understood and incorporated as a basis for good communication, learning and development were highlighted. Parental involvement in supporting diversity of cultures and identity in the early years was given priority. Provision was made for the diverse languages and cultures of the families and community—through employment of staff from different cultural backgrounds, inviting children and families to contribute their knowledge and expertise, and reinforcing the value and use of children’s home languages.

This project has contributed knowledge on *how* teaching and learning in culturally diverse early childhood settings are practically implemented and supported through the national curriculum framework.

1. INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of the research reported here was to explore the values and practices of early childhood teachers who are working with children and families from diverse cultural backgrounds in New Zealand. It investigated how teachers in these diverse settings practically implemented their values by drawing on the funds of knowledge and cultural capital of the families they worked with, weaving these values into the fabric of the national curriculum, *Te Whāriki*. In doing so, the research aimed to identify effective teaching practice in culturally diverse early childhood settings.

Background

Multicultural learning and teaching is a foundational value expressed within the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). *Te Whāriki*, emphasises:

the critical role of socially and culturally mediated learning and of reciprocal and responsive relationships for children with people, places, and things. Children learn through collaboration with adults and peers, through guided participation and observation of others, as well as through individual exploration and reflection. (p. 9)

The curriculum highlights the importance for teachers to support the cultural identity of all children through ensuring that programmes and resources are sensitive and responsive to the different cultures and heritages among the families of the children attending that service. It places emphasis on communication, setting out as an aim that “The languages and symbols of [the children’s] own and other cultures are promoted and protected” (p. 72). Supporting the aims outlined in the national curriculum, *Kei tua o te Pae: Assessment for learning: Early childhood exemplars*, and particularly Book 5, supports teachers and educators to take action to make connections between the early childhood setting and home and include families and whānau in the early childhood centre’s curriculum and assessment (Ministry of Education, 2005).

Statistics show that the enrolment of children from culturally diverse backgrounds in early childhood education has grown markedly, the enrolment of Asian children, for example, has increased from 7,383 in 2000 to 17,900 in 2013; the enrolment of Pasifika children has grown from 7,834 in 2000 to 14,515 in 2013 (Ministry of Education, 2014). It is therefore evident that a growing number of children enrolled in early childhood settings in New Zealand include those whose cultures are different from the mainstream culture of New Zealand. The mainstream culture referred to in this research is “the dominant Pākehā mainstream culture” (Ritchie, 2003, p. 2). Teaching practice with culturally diverse children, therefore, becomes an important aspect of early childhood education in New Zealand

Despite the aspirations of *Te Whāriki*, practical applications to embrace cultural diversities in education institutions in New Zealand face challenges. A report from the Education Review Office (2008) asked immigrant and refugee parents in schools about parents’ expectations of schools, what helped engagement and what made it difficult. Parents’ biggest concerns were about developing effective communication that took account of their language and culture. These parents liked to be asked to help out, to be informed and to contribute to their child’s learning. They wanted their child to be treated as an equal in the New Zealand education system. Many of the parents who spoke to Educational Review Office (ERO) expressed their belief that New Zealand schools were not good at working with diverse communities.

Another recent study in the school sector has also contributed to this realisation. In his discussion about positioning of Māori students in New Zealand, Bishop (2010) argues that power imbalance between the dominant culture and minority cultures is pervasive in education. This, along with the prior mentioned research, leads to our awareness that there may be a deficit in the educational experiences of children and families whose lived experiences are devalued in current teaching practices involving ethnic minority children. A significant reason for ineffective teaching and learning

experiences in education is therefore recognised as being the result of teachers' attitudes to minority cultures that impinge on their teaching practices.

Of the few studies that have been conducted on culturally diverse education in New Zealand early childhood settings in recent years, none have focused directly on teaching and learning practices. They have, however, all identified this as an important area for future research. Research by Mitchell and Ouko (Mitchell & Ouko, 2010, 2012) investigating the perspectives of Congolese refugee families in early childhood education in New Zealand suggested that aspirations for early childhood education came into three main themes. These families wanted early childhood education to offer space for social and cultural connectedness. They wanted opportunity for themselves and their children to learn English. They also wanted early childhood education to support a sense of agency so that they and their children can contribute to society. A recommendation was for services to plan and provide programmes that are responsive to the wider context, beliefs and values of the attending children and families.

One study of culturally diverse education came from Guo's recently completed PhD project on Chinese immigrant children in early childhood centres (Guo, 2010). Through in depth multiple case studies of eight children, their parents and early childhood teachers in five early childhood centres, her study identified a number of issues in early childhood teaching practice. In the summary of findings, Guo reports:

The teaching experiences identified in this research are complex, involving questions of the personal, intercultural, sociocultural, practical and political positioning of a wide range of issues in relation to teachers' work with diverse cultural children and families. From a sociocultural perspective, the implications that the study has drawn for early childhood teachers are profound since a shift in their beliefs and practices is required for them to respond visibly and appropriately to diverse cultures. (2010, p. 262)

Early childhood teachers' problematic one-fit-for-all treatment of children from all cultures was identified in Chan's very recent literature review of critical multiculturalism in early childhood settings (2011). The key argument in Chan's work is that early childhood teachers in New Zealand should develop better understandings of the needs of immigrant children and families in order to implement critical pedagogies that are culturally sensitive and responsive (2011). Likewise, Ritchie (2003) acknowledged in her study on early childhood teachers' attitudes to biculturalism that the dominant Pākehā value system has shaped the educational notion of what is appropriate for children of all cultures. In a recent study, Ritchie and Rau (2008) once again depicted education in New Zealand as a powerful mechanism that privileges Pākehā dominated pedagogy.

Internationally, writers (Gundara & Portera, 2008; Guo, 2012; Miller & Petriwskyj, 2013; Portera, 2008) have critiqued the focus of multicultural education on co-existence, celebration of diversity and the absorption of minority cultural groups into a dominant group educational system. Rather, they argue that deficit assumptions about students from minority groups need to be challenged, and that interactions need to explore complexity and difference to an end that is open. Portera (2008) states: "Intercultural education offers the opportunity to 'show' real cultural differences, to compare and exchange them, in a word, to *interact*: action in the activity; a compulsory principle in every educational relationship" (p. 488). These are challenging ideas.

A way forward

The current study is based on the findings arising from Mitchell's and Ouko's (2012) and Guo's (2010) research as well as the insightful studies discussed above. Limitations of teaching strategies with diverse cultural families and children in early childhood settings suggest an in-depth study in this area is warranted.

We adopted a view that in studying and improving teaching practice in culturally diverse early childhood settings, we would adopt the concept of culturally responsive pedagogy. Previous studies in schools have identified that culturally responsive pedagogy is implemented when teachers bridge

connections between children's learning in their education institution and in their own cultural communities, when teachers and students collectively make sense of learning and teaching, and when diverse ways of learning are provided and privileged in classrooms (Cowie et al., 2011). Recently, Miller and Petriwskyj (2013) challenged early childhood teachers to move to an intercultural education, which they argue requires intercultural dialogue with a range of families and critical and reflective practice. These ideas serve as a springboard for understanding the practices of culturally responsive pedagogy in early childhood centres and were also useful points of reference in the present research.

The research project investigated values and practices through case studies of teaching and learning in three culturally diverse education and care centres.

Layout of the report

Chapter 2 gives an outline of the methodology used in the research. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 draw on interviews, video data and assessment documentation to present the findings for each of the three centres in the study. In chapter 6, Conclusion and discussion, we analyse findings across the three centres to address the research questions, highlight challenges and identify areas for further research.

2. METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study generating an in depth exploration and analysis of culturally responsive teaching and learning in three diverse education and care centres. It examines what teaching and learning interactions are occurring currently and how teachers find out about and use the funds of knowledge of families and community to enrich the education programme and respond to children's experiences and interests. The findings address questions raised in prior research by Karen Guo (2010) on Chinese immigrant parents' perspectives on early childhood, and by Linda Mitchell and Amondi Ouko on Congolese refugee families' experiences of living in New Zealand and aspirations for their children (Mitchell & Ouko, 2012). Both these studies highlighted that changes were needed to early childhood practice in New Zealand to enable immigrant and refugee families to achieve a greater sense of cultural and social connectedness and of agency. This will be at least in part when the cultural values and practices of families are reflected in the curriculum.

Research questions

The two research questions were as follows:

1. What does culturally diverse teaching and learning look like in early childhood settings?
2. How are the values and practices of diverse families accessed and integrated into the curriculum?

Theoretical frame

Teachers and researchers were working within a social constructionist theoretical frame which holds that concepts are socially constructed within an historical and cultural context. We see the research being enriched by drawing on the perspectives of the key players within each early childhood community. The research involved collaborations between the university researchers and two teachers in each of three centres. At the start of the project and towards the end of the project, the three teaching teams and researchers came together for a day's workshop. In these ways the pedagogical knowledge of the teachers and the research knowledge of the researchers were able to be pooled. The qualitative methods used in this study provide data from a variety of perspectives enabling triangulation. The collaboration between teachers and researchers and the discussions with the wider education and care centre communities strengthened the trustworthiness of the data and findings.

Participants

The research took place in three education and care centres in Auckland. The researchers already had an established relationship with staff from these centres and entered into a relationship agreement to undertake research together. The centres varied in terms of ethnicities of children and family services offered. Mangere East Family Service Centre is an integrated ECE centre with health and social services and a predominantly Pasifika and Māori community; Pakuranga Baptist Kindergarten, a centre with a predominantly Asian community; and the Carol White Centre, a centre for children from refugee families with adult learning opportunities alongside.

Table 1. Characteristics of the three education and care centres

Centre	ECE provision	Family services	Children*
Mangere East Family Service Centre, Mangere	Managed by family service centre board of governors. Full day education and care centre with 50 children over two years and seven children under two years. Roll number 57.	Offers a range of services including parent advice and support, HIPPY, Social Workers in Schools, counselling, and health services.	Māori 17, Tongan 13, Samoan 9, NZ European/Pākehā 6, Cook Island Māori 6, Niuean 4, Fijian 1, Indian 1.
Carol White Family Centre, Kohimarama	Incorporated society. Full day education and care centre licensed for 41 children, including up to 12 aged under 2 years. Roll number 62.	Caters for a largely refugee migrant community. Most of the centre children have parents attending the college's Refugee Education and Families (REAF) programme, which operates in buildings adjacent to the centre. Bilingual support staff are employed to assist teachers as they work with children and their families.	NZ European/Pākehā 1, Afghani 32, Burmese 10, Sudanese 7, Iraqi 3, Ethiopian 2, European 2, Burundian 1, Iranian 1, Japanese 1, Kurdish 1, Nigerian 1.
Pakuranga Baptist Kindergarten, Pakuranga	Private/independent Sessional education and care centre licensed for 40 children over 2 years. Roll number 77.	In 2009, the ERO review reported that teachers and centre managers had identified that the once bi-cultural kindergarten has developed into a multicultural centre that is reflective of the changing demographics of the local community.	NZ European/Pākehā 36, Māori 4, Chinese 15, Indian 5, Tongan 4, South East Asian 3, South African 1, other Asian 8, other European 1.

* Ethnicity of children taken from Education Review Office most recent review at the time the study started.

Methods

Two teachers and three families and their children from each centre were invited to be key participants in the study. The teachers from all three centres came together for an initial and final workshop. Amondi Ouko undertook the data gathering in the Carol White Centre, Karen Guo¹ in the Pakuranga Baptist Kindergarten and Linda Mitchell in the Mangere East Family Service Centre. Linda had an overview of all three centres. Amanda Bateman worked with the team on analysis and writing.

Focus group discussions with the six participating teachers were held at an initial workshop to investigate and discuss teachers' experiences and ideas about culturally responsive pedagogy. Each teaching team made a 20 minute presentation outlining information about

- their families and community, and
- how they access and integrate the values and practices of their own families into the curriculum

Each presentation was followed by a group discussion and the presentations and discussion were audio recorded for future use throughout the analysis.

Video recordings of the case study children were taken in each centre. Each of the three participating children wore a wireless microphone for approximately one hour during their free play. This was

¹ Karen left the University of Waikato in July 2013 to live in Australia and was not able to participate in the analysis and writing.

intended to capture the times when they choose to interact with the teachers, and the reason for their interaction, as well as times when the teachers approached them and the discussions which unfolded.

Video recordings of the participating teachers were taken in each centre. Each participating teacher wore a wireless microphone and was video recorded for approximately two hours for one morning each. This was intended to capture the arrival of families and children and included the children's transition from family members to the teachers.

Semi-structured interviews were held with the parents of the children in their family home or at the centre. The researcher for the centre, with a teacher/interpreter where necessary, held the interview. Parents were asked to view selected episodes of the videotape and their narrative stories regarding the episode were recorded. The video recordings were used as a catalyst for discussion about learning that is valued, their child's strengths, interests and strategies as learners, the funds of knowledge families hold, experiences and aspirations for their child, and continuities between home and centre. This method has previously been used by teachers and researchers investigating multi-modal literacies at Wadestown Kindergarten Centre of Innovation (Mitchell, Simonsen, & Haggerty, 2009; Simonsen et al., 2010).

Semi-structured interviews were held with the participating teachers in each centre, who were asked to view the videotapes of themselves teaching and of the children, and pick out episodes that they thought were significant, especially related to belonging, communication, language and culture. They were asked to explain why they thought the episodes were significant.

Data analysis

Data analysis was undertaken by the researchers. The study used the idea of building stories of teaching and learning in context through analysis of videotaped episodes, interview data and documentation (wall displays, information and learning stories) from each centre. Illustrations or "thick descriptions" were made of the different education and care settings, and of particular aspects that enable teachers to be responsive to cultural diversity or where there may have been barriers. In this way, the practice, culture and unique contexts of each setting was appreciated.

As prior research in this area suggests that children belonging to a minority culture experience difficulties when interacting with peers and teachers in their school environment due to communication issues (Guo, 2010) it is anticipated that there could be moments during the case studies where the participating children are also engaged in such experiences. The ways in which the children communicated their intentions and desires to teachers, and to each other, was therefore of interest. Through the use of conversation analysis (CA) and membership categorisation analysis (MCA), the systematic and orderly ways of communicating with teachers through verbal and non-verbal turn taking, and the social organisation processes that co-produced the teaching and learning environment was revealed. Using CA and MCA to approach the analysis of culturally responsive pedagogy offers insight into the detailed ways in which one turn at talk by one person, either the teacher or child in this situation, prompts a response from the recipient of that talk (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). In relation to the current study, those turns at talk can reveal how teaching and learning is co-produced in such a detailed way through verbal and non-verbal turn taking in everyday practice. Equally, problematic experiences regarding failure of understanding through communication breakdown between two parties and the consequent social complications related to such an episode will be analysed to reveal how such barriers to effective culturally responsive pedagogy can be approached. This close analysis of the turn taking processes in communication between children, teachers and family members will afford an insight into periods of time where teaching and learning experiences are culturally responsive or hindered due to problems with communication, and so will also work to address the research questions.

Upon completion of the data analysis the researchers met with participating teachers to discuss the analysis and participants' views of it, and to finalise the report.

The project was subject to the University of Waikato's Ethics procedures, stipulated in the Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations. It had research ethics approval from the Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee.

3. PAKURANGA BAPTIST KINDERGARTEN

Each participating early childhood centre identified a special aspect of the setting, for Pakuranga Baptist Kindergarten their special character is being a Christian centre. It is licensed for 40 children over two years, and has a roll number of around 80.

Pakuranga Baptist Kindergarten was founded in 1973 by the church. It was relocated to its current site 20 years ago into a purpose built facility. An aspiration is for kindergarten children to learn about the New Zealand environment so many natural elements that enable children to explore in open ended ways have been incorporated.

The children are Pākehā New Zealand, Māori, Chinese, Indian, Tongan, Samoan, Malaysian, Taiwanese, South African and French. The roles, qualifications, years of teaching experience and ethnicities of teaching staff are set out in Table 2.

Table 2. Characteristics of Pakuranga Baptist Kindergarten teachers

Role	Qualifications	Years of teaching	Ethnicity
Supervisor (Jacqui)#	BEd	16	Pākehā
Teacher (Wendy)#	BEd, Grad Dip Tchg (ECE)	4 ½	Chinese
Teacher (Olivia)	BA, BEd, MEd	10	Chinese
Teacher (Sudha)	BA, Dip Tchg (ECE)	7	Indian
Teacher (Wilma)	Dip Tchg (ECE)	6	Sri Lankan

Participated in interviews and workshops, gathered documentation

Jacqui Lees, the supervisor, speaks English, and a little French and Cantonese. She is a very experienced, registered early childhood teacher. Wendy Xiao is an early childhood teacher and speaks Mandarin, English and Cantonese. Both Jacqui and Wendy took part in the one day workshop at the start of the project where they made a presentation about their kindergarten.

During our time at their kindergarten, we interviewed and video-recorded, Jacqui and Wendy. We also videorecorded three children during a morning at the kindergarten and interviewed the family members who usually brought the child to the kindergarten. These children were Liam, Jagroop and QinQin.

Liam, aged four years, is the older of two children in his family. His mum is Japanese and his dad is “kiwi”. The family mainly speak Japanese at home, and Liam likes to speak Japanese at the kindergarten and play with his friend who is also Japanese and whose mother is friends with Liam’s mum. Liam’s mum had her friend with her in the interview to help interpret.

Jagroop, aged four years has an older sibling at school. His mum and dad are Punjabi. Jagroop’s family lives with their extended family, which includes a niece aged eight years. Jagroop’s first language is Punjabi. Both the niece and older sibling attended the kindergarten, so for Jagroop, kindergarten was described as a “natural progression”.

QinQin, aged four years, is an only child. He lives with his maternal grandparents and parents, who are all Chinese. His parents are very busy working two jobs so the grandparents do a significant amount of caregiving. QinQin has a close relationship with his paternal grandparents in China, and regularly phones them and chats with them. Wendy interpreted for the grandparents in the interview.

Teachers, families and children at Pakuranga Baptist Kindergarten have created a community where everyone has a place, and where values and goals for children are made explicit and discussed. The cultural diversity of families in the kindergarten is reflected in a kindergarten where home languages are valued, used and encouraged. Cultural resources and artefacts are plentiful and it is commonplace to see families contributing from their own base of knowledge and expertise.

Belonging

A foundational value for the teachers is to create, with their community, a kindergarten where people are welcomed and have a valued place, a sense of belonging.

We consider ourselves a family, and ... they become part of our wider family, and we become part of theirs. So for me it's about belonging, rather than membership, I don't like the word 'membership'. It sounds exclusive, it's about belonging. 'Membership' kind of makes it sound like a club. (Jacqui)

Pedagogical practices, relationships and family contribution help to build a culture of belonging.

As families arrive and as they leave, a teacher stands at the door to greet and farewell people. Teachers explained that this is important to many of the cultures in their community and themselves—that you feel greeted and welcomed when you come in. Teachers speak the home languages of families; teachers switch languages to greet families in their home languages. According to Wendy, this practice reinforces that in this environment, languages are acceptable and valued and used.

The video of Jacqui standing by the door to greet families at the start of the session shows her calling to Wendy to come over to talk with a mother. Jacqui's realisation on analysing this video excerpt was that she tries to "find the person who that parent is comfortable talking to". She realised she spent a lot of time watching to see who people go and talk to and then shepherding them to that person.

The following extracts from the interview with QinQin's grandparents convey similar perceptions that the kindergarten reinforces their cultural values and promotes belonging. The grandparents said they wanted QinQin to be well rounded and spoke of his physical, intellectual, creative, spiritual and social abilities. They hoped that the kindergarten would encourage all these aspects, and related their aspirations to values in traditional Chinese society.

... [we] want an overall wellbeing of QinQin, good character and collaborative thinking and his overall development. Physically healthy, ... the pleasure of beauty things, and have arty stuff and also intelligent. [Grandfather]

This is also kind of traditionally what a Chinese family would like to have for their child. They want them to be all good. You've got to be good, and kind heart, intelligent and you also have to be physically well and also creative and hard working. Comes from traditional Chinese culture.... It is a big concept and it has quite high standards but there are lots of little things underneath. [Grandfather as translated by Wendy]

The grandparents' description of QinQin's feelings about the kindergarten reinforced the sense that children and families feel comfortable here and a sense of the kindergarten being "our place". They said QinQin loves the kindergarten. Every morning when he wakes up, he says, "I want to go to kindy now", and they feel his behaviour there is almost like at home. They "feel that this is a kind of home, for family as well". Socialising with other children was important to them. The favourite video episode they singled out was of QinQin helping other children fix the digger in the sandpit. They liked to see him collaborating and engaging with kiwi kids.

The kindergarten has several grandparents bringing their grandchild and participating. One of the video clips shows a Chinese grandma telling Wendy that her grandchild was absent for a week. The transcript of the conversation below illustrates Wendy switching languages as she talks with a Chinese Grandma and Jacqui.

Wendy: Welcome Chen Chen. 一个礼拜没看见他了，怎么搞的？(I have not seen him for a week. What's happened?)

Grandma of Chen Chen: 不行了，他咳嗽，说是有传染。完了上医院，也吃了药，好一点了。(He was not good. He coughed and it was said to be infectious. We took him to hospital and he had some medicine. He is getting better.)

Wendy (to Jacqui): He was sick last week. Coughed a lot.

Jacqui: ... Feeling better?

Grandma: 他们说是传染性的，好多了，吐得呀！家里头都是。(They said it was infectious. He is much better. He vomited everywhere at home!)

Wendy: He was vomiting.

Grandma: 连着两天吐，完了好了。现在好点了。(He had vomited two days in row. After that he was better. He is better.)

Jacqui: He is quite happy now. Look! (Chen Chen ran to the playground and J who was holding Wendy's hand went to the playground to play with him.)

Wendy: Here goes Jack. Jack immediately let me go. Jack 马上去和他玩了。(Jack immediately went to play with him.)

Commenting on this episode, Wendy observed that in many centres, Chinese grandparents who do not know the English language avoid too much contact with the teachers, "they just quickly drop the children and walk away". She thought that the grandma felt confident to talk to Jacqui about the things at home because of her very strong sense of belonging.

I feel like she feels comfortable to come to talk to us ... she knows that she can talk to English-speaking teachers. I feel like that's something quite important for the whole family to feel that this is a kindy that I belong to, it's not just for the little one, it's also for me to come to talk about what's happened at home. (Wendy)

Jacqui said she understood what the grandma was saying because of knowing a little Mandarin and reading the grandma's hand signals.

Videoed episodes of children and parents leaving showed parents at ease in asking teachers about their child's day. Teachers talked honestly and explicitly. In this excerpt, Jacqui talks with a parent about her two children, Peter and Marie. The focus is on Marie's settling, and also how she is supported by her friend Peter. Peter's care for Marie is praised; concern is also expressed that he should not be pressured to care for her.

Mum: Marie was okay today?

Jacqui: Yep pretty much. She's getting a little bit better all the time.

Mum: Yeah she will get used to it aye.

Jacqui: Yeah and he [Marie's friend Peter] took a while to settle too.

Mum: Yeah, yeah. He's a great help I think.

Jacqui: He's actually a very kind friend with Marie. He's very good at looking after her.

Mum: Yeah.

Jacqui: But we don't want to put too much pressure on him. We don't want him to feel like it's his job 'cos it's our job.

Mum: (Laughs) thank you very much.

Jacqui: Bye Peter.

Mum: Say 'Bye'.

Peter: (Waves at teacher)

Jacqui: Bye, bye.

Mum: Thank you so much.

Jacqui: See you.

Mum: See you.

Teachers facilitate connections to support families through playing a brokering role. In the following videoed episode, Jacqui is using the friendship between two children, Sarah and Tanya, to facilitate childcare support for Tanya's mum who had started work.

Jacqui: Did you tell mum you had a really good time with Tanya today?

Mum: Oh yes.

Jacqui: Such a nice friendship. I actually suggested her mum talk to you about it. I don't know if you work, do you work?

Mum: Not at the moment, no.

Jacqui: Work's changed a bit for her and she is not able to be so flexible so she's changing Tanya to a couple of different days, but keeping her here a couple of days, but is a little bit worried about what will happen in the holidays. I suggested that maybe she talk to you about it.

Mum: Yeah nah, I have already talked to her about that they can have some play dates. Sarah, come on.

Jacqui: Well talk to her about it because she gets a bit shy about bringing it up.

Mum: Oh okay yeah, she needs to because it's really difficult.

Jacqui goes on to reinforce the value of friendships and a sense of belonging for Sarah. In these ways, curriculum values are made transparent. Evident in this interchange, too, is the openness of Sarah's mum to talking about her personal life, an indication of a trusting relationship with teachers.

Jacqui: It's really, really, really nice to see her making friends with somebody because she's been playing by herself a lot until recently.

Mum: It's changed a lot since her dad's left.

Jacqui: I do think that the full days have helped because it feels like she thinks she owns the place, which is really nice.

Mum: Yep.

Jacqui: It's nice to see them feeling like they belong so much that they can sort of yeah.

On a community level, 'word of mouth' is one of the main ways that families find out about the kindergarten. The Chinese families and the Japanese families often come in cohorts because they have heard through their friends that this is a place where people know you, where they will be comfortable. Friendships are sustained amongst children and helped by children speaking a common home language. Liam's mum commented on Liam being most comfortable and socialising and talking most when he is amongst Japanese speaking children.

Engagement with family cultural values and educational views

Working constructively with families whose educational views and cultural values are different from those of the teacher requires great care and thoughtfulness. The kindergarten practice is based on an

understanding that values are not universally shared; that understanding different family values is necessary; and that conscious thought needs to be given to how family values are catered for.

From your little sheltered perspective everybody shares the same values and I think one of the first things in early childhood I learned was this idea of independence is not shared by everybody. That, interdependence is also very important and so we started to alter a little bit, the way we thought about values and trying to understand what the values were that our families were bringing, and integrate those into what we were doing. So—you know, somebody said to me, “Why does my child need to be able to dress themselves? I can dress them? That is my job”. And so we started to think more about, okay that's what they're doing at home, we need to think about how we, how we're fitting into their world. Instead of just expecting everybody that comes to us to subscribe to our value set. (Jacqui)

Jacqui and Wendy described deliberate processes to find out about the values of families. Communication about values is helped by having staff able to speak the languages of families. When families enrol their children, teachers ask them what they want for their children. This is a common practice in many ECE centres in New Zealand, but more than that, these teachers consciously plan for discussions with groups of parents to talk about values—their own values as teachers and how these might meet with family values—what that looks like with different groups of people. This interest to try to generate understanding from all perspectives attracts families.

And I think that one of the reasons that we attract so many Chinese families ... is because of that values base, that collaboration and respect thing that's quite strongly part of us, is also a cultural thing as well. (Jacqui)

These teachers recognise the complexity and plurality of values that exist. They could be characterised as having inquiring attitudes, a willingness to be uncertain and to investigate.

Because you're constantly being confronted by things that you don't understand so you have to find it out. You have to discover. (Jacqui)

In finding out about values, teachers do not give away core principles about curriculum, but respect and acknowledge parents' values and work to generate understanding among all participants. For example, the teachers said they recognised water play and other activities valued by teachers, could be seen as 'dangerous stuff'. Risk taking was a big concern for many parents. This was exemplified in the discussion by Jagroop's parents of Jagroop using an adult saw at the carpentry table. The parents noticed most in the video that Jagroop was happy, busy and doing things. They noticed his interest in carpentry and said that they would never have that for him at home as it might be dangerous, but they thought he did that quite well in the kindergarten setting. In this example, the parent acknowledged that Jagroop was handling the saw with competence; perhaps signifying a shift in the parent's theories about learning in response to seeing what Jagroop could do.

Teachers start by developing an understanding of the areas of concern held by parents, derived from listening to parents and from teachers who have understanding from their similar cultural background. There is an induction process where teachers talk about the ways they manage things so that parents are not scared of harm. In relation to risk-taking, through informal daily communication, teachers try to convey a message that knowing how to protect from harm is a kind of learning.

Many families in this centre, especially Indian and Chinese families, are concerned about readiness for school and expect children to learn to read, write and do maths; a common belief is that learning occurs through structured teaching and worksheets. The teachers use a variety of verbal and written ways to explain the learning that happens through play in relation to these areas of concern. Documented Learning Stories play a vital role in reinforcing what teachers say in daily conversations about learning. Within Learning Stories, teachers highlight learning areas that they know are concerns for parents—as well as other learning.

... we do focus on those core subjects [of concern to parents] and we talk a lot about how the arts reinforce some of that stuff and how they have value. So ... even things like the sandpit, ... I was thinking about that story about [Child A] and the sand when

he first came because he's never been exposed to putting his feet in the sand, it was scary for him. And Wendy did a whole bunch of stories on the bravery of [Child A] going into the sand when he obviously didn't like it, and he's got one foot in and he's uncomfortable, deeply uncomfortable and being encouraged by us to step in and try it and talking about that bravery and how that works for learning; that it's a characteristic of children who are learning, they try new things, they're brave.

The child got used to the sandpit and "loves it now, he couldn't do without it". (Peter)

Wendy described a conscious process of thinking and team discussion that occurs when values are found to differ.

I think you have to—every time you meet something that is different than your own values, you have to take a look at it, how do we let this in? ... And I think with everything that happens you have to assess, is this something that enriches me or is it something that is just diametrically opposed ... to what I believe and so I need to challenge it and discuss it.

In a follow-up to the research project, these teachers carried out a review of language and culture in their kindergarten, gathering survey data from parents and inviting children to draw their ideas about relationships. They asked children three questions:

1. How do you feel when someone speaks in their own language to you?
2. Who do you play with?
3. How do you feel when you meet someone who doesn't speak your language?

Children's responses showed they felt they could communicate with others and saw themselves as having the potential to learn each other's languages, to negotiate different understandings and to put effort into trying to understand.

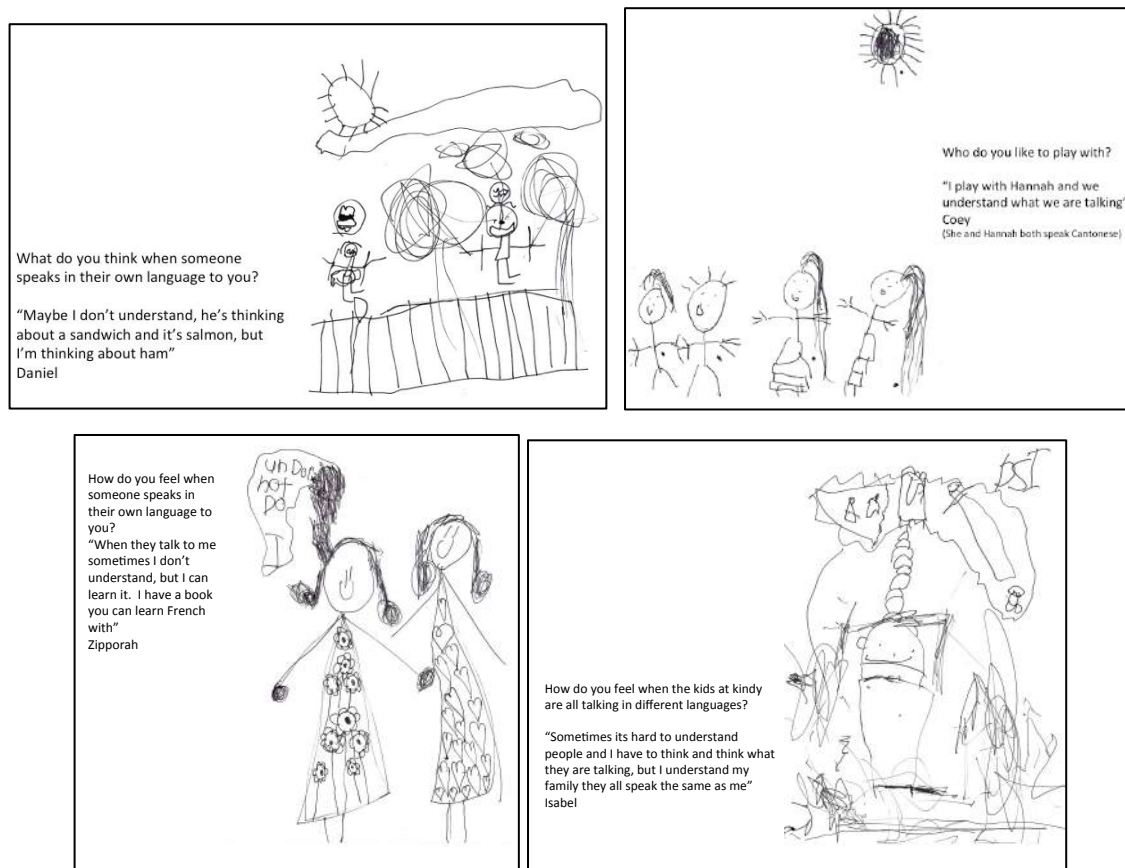


Figure 1. Children's drawings of their ideas about relationships

Through the review these teachers were able to more closely understand and engage with family aspirations and educational values. The review highlighted areas for them to extend. They decided to be more intentional about incorporating stories and songs from different cultures into large group experiences and to include more Māori stories and traditional tales. They resolved also to prepare a booklet for parents of bilingual learners that talks through some of the issues parents have concerns about (e.g., mixing of languages) and what research says about this.

Through these deliberate means to find out, educational beliefs and cultural values of families and teachers alike become visible, better able to be analysed and understood. This is a basis for the links made between cultural values and educational views that are held in the settings of home and kindergarten.

Languages

Many of the children are learning two or three or more languages at the same time. Language learning and socialisation were predominant aspirations for the parents whom we interviewed. The teachers said that many parents and grandparents had concerns about their child's English language learning. Jacqui and Wendy regarded it as very important that the child had a strong home language as a foundation for learning English and other languages. "Our job is to advocate for their home language as much as possible" (Jacqui). Greeting children with different languages is an important practice, helping children know that languages are "accepted, valued and used" (Wendy). Wendy also regarded her responsibility as offering a balance of speaking in Mandarin or Cantonese when this was the child's language and English because in some environments teachers would not speak Chinese languages. These ideals were visible in the video clips and in documented assessments for children.

In the video clip discussed below, a dad is talking with Jacqui about his son Michael's anger, poor speech and limited friendships with other children, which were portrayed as being interrelated. The mum in this family speaks predominantly Cantonese, and the dad speaks English.

Jacqui tells the dad that Michael cried a little that morning, but she did not phone the dad because he did settle. Jacqui and the dad commented on Michael's anger and Jacqui conjectured that, "He's a bright little boy that gets frustrated easily". The dad then raised concerns about Michael's poorly understood speech as a rationale for Michael's anger. He conveyed worry about Michael's 'developmental stage'.

Dad: Yeah, because I think his speech is not that good, not for his age anyway I don't think. 'Cos even we struggle to understand him at home what he's trying to talk about it and he'll get angry....

Jacqui: Sometimes, yeah.

Dad: Because he's trying to get something across and can't do it. Like even Cole [younger brother] we start to understand what he wants but Michael's yeah.

Jacqui: Are you worried about the speech thing?

Dad: Starting to be a little bit.

Jacqui: Do you want me to contact GSE, special ed.? For some speech support. I'm not sure. We haven't got a lot of time.

Dad: Yeah, I don't think so.

Jacqui: You don't want to worry about it yet?

Dad: Yeah, oh.

Jacqui: He can make himself understood.

Dad: Yeah, yeah at the moment ... Maybe it's just the two languages

Jacqui: ... I think they join in together and get muddled up between them and they are changing codes in their head between English and Chinese and just trying to work out where they're going so....

Dad: Yeah, I think with him it's like someone that is a bad speller or has messy writing and try to cover it up and I think he's trying to do that same thing with his speech.

Jacqui: People might not notice.

Dad: Yeah.

Jacqui: So we'd be starting to get worried soon. Do you want to go in and find him? Do you want to go in and find him?

Dad: You want to go grab him?

Jacqui: Go, go shout at....

Dad: We will definitely talk to him about friends and that.

Jacqui: Yeah, and who he'd like to be friends with.

Dad: Yeah.

Jacqui: Instead of who he is friends with now, who he would like to be friends with. 'Cos at the moment all he is saying to me is just John, just John. I think they were doing quite well he and John then [Child B] came back from holiday and it's disrupted it a bit.

Dad: Yeah.

This conversation begins with Michael's Dad initiating the topic of his son's language as being problematic as he makes a link between his speech being 'not that good' and his son getting 'angry'. Initially Jacqui does not make any suggestions about a solution to this problem, and this allows Michael's Dad the opportunity to move on from this subject, or continue discussing the problem, as he does. When Michael's Dad persists with his perception of Michael's language ability as problematic by comparing it to being worse than Michael's younger brother, Jacqui directly asks him if he is "worried about the speech thing". When the Dad affirms that he is, although in a limited way "a little bit", Jacqui recognizes that he has genuine concerns and offers him professional help.

The interchange took place in the playground when the dad came to pick up Michael. It demonstrates a relationship where the dad is confident and comfortable to talk to Jacqui about his concerns, and where both contribute to the discussion from their own knowledge base. Jacqui in her role as a teacher offers the dad access to specialist speech support, while reassuring him that Michael can make himself understood. At the same time she conveys that if the problem continues much longer, then it might be time to act. She picks up the father's rationale that Michael's speech difficulties could be to do with learning two languages and offers some expert advice that learning two languages at the same time and code switching may cause confusion and, consequently could lead to problems in peer relationships (Cekaite & Bjork-Willen, 2013). She also offers expert advice that the dad find out about Michael's preferred friendships (not just who are his friends), noting that she herself has not been able to find this out ["he is saying to me it's just John"]. In this way, Jacqui is relying on the dad, who has a close parental relationship with Michael, to find out information that would be of value in facilitating Michael's friendships. The episode indicates a joint working together on a challenge that both parties take seriously and can contribute to addressing.

After revisiting this interaction between herself and the child's father, Jacqui responded by talking about the connection that the father made between the child's social life and language within the kindergarten:

So mum speaks Cantonese and dad speaks English. So he has been slower developing language than they would have liked. So mostly I was reassuring him that children who speak two languages often take a while to become fluent in both and they swap

between in bits that they're confident in. And so he was struggling a little bit with relationships, partly because he's quite shy anyway and partly because it started off we were talking about friendships actually—'cause when I asked him who he was friends with he said nobody'. And so I was getting dad to ask him just to make sure that I was getting all the information and dad was concerned about, he thought that he wasn't making friends because of language issues which we don't usually find to be a huge problem, do we?

We find that the children go—they find their own way to communicate and it isn't necessarily even with words. But I wanted to reassure dad that if he wanted support there was support available through GSE, but if not, that we were quite comfortable that he was coming along in the way we expect with a child who's learning more than one language at a time. (Jacqui)

Both teachers recognised the multiple languages of children, not only spoken. Multiple literacies such as gesture, drama, music, and drawing play vital roles in the ways children experience and make sense of the world and communicate.

Often the children are silent for a long time and they talk with their hands, they talk with their eyes, but not necessarily with words. (Jacqui)

Jacqui cited *Kei Tua o te Pae* (Ministry of Education, 2005) as writing about “observing and listening in as valid strategies for learning”. Teachers used this idea as a lens to analyse learning episodes and to explain learning strategies to others. Teachers found it had particular relevance to second language learners.

... so we grab hold of that, and we go ‘our two year olds are observing and listening in and they become more actively engaged later on once they have developed an understanding of how this place works’. We find that particularly with the second language learners, that we see the way they strategise their learning, they watch and listen a lot before they become actively involved. They're actively involved but in a different way. We used to find that ERO would come and would say this child is not engaged and we would say ... we knew they were engaged but we didn't really have the way to—a language to frame it, the engagement that we saw. And so that idea of observing and listening in, [as] strategies for learning, we just grabbed hold of that and went yes, this is what they're doing. (Jacqui)

Wendy finds that when she writes Learning Stories, she notices a lot of learning is happening through children watching. She draws attention to the value of learning through watching and the role played by older children in modelling and supporting the learning of younger children.

Dylan the Builder

April 2013
By Wendy

Dylan you were busy sawing a piece of wood while some younger children gathered around and watched you. You gave Ryan and Sarah, who also wanted turns, a go too. You told them to slide the saw forward and backward and then demonstrated the way to make sure that they understood you. Then, you showed them how you measured the progress of sawing with a piece of plastic strap. Dylan you were a builder.



Wendy's Reflection:

Carpentry was one of Dylan's favourite activities at kindy. I still remember, when Dylan first started kindy, he too learned a lot from older children like Jayden and Daniel. Now it was his turn. Dylan was now competent with the carpentry tools. He was also confident to share his skills with the younger ones. I was so happy to see Dylan keep on making important contributions to other children's learning. And I knew he was proud of himself too when he identified himself as a builder!

Figure 2. Learning from peers

It is commonplace for children and teachers to switch from one language to another in this kindergarten. Children take their new language learning home. Jacqui found it interesting that according to their mums, two children who always spoke in Mandarin Chinese, sang in English at home even though the kindergarten had plentiful music in different languages so that children hear what they are familiar with.

QinQin was described by his grandparents as speaking mainly Cantonese at home, but when his grandparents were in China he was able to swap to Mandarin when he spoke to grandpa and to Cantonese when he spoke to grandma. He notices when someone is ‘kiwi’ and says “Hello” in English. QinQin means diligent—this was said to be a good name for him because he is persistent.

Wendy’s Learning Story of the multi-modal QinQin below displays his ease in switching from one language to another.

The Multilingual Qin Qin

29th July 2013
By Wendy






Qin Qin, today your best buddy Brendan did not come to kindy. You looked a little lonely in the beginning of the day but soon you started to find new friends. You played with Katelyn first who was new to kindy. You spoke in Cantonese to her and really looked after her. Later you and Ayzal set up an ice-cream shop. You eagerly offered it to Cullen in English: "Want ice cream? Want ice cream?" You left the sandpit for a while and found a rock in the garden. You saw Chen Chen and asked him in Mandarin Chinese "Do you want it?" Chen Chen said no and then you turned to Kumaran and offered it again in English to him.

Wendy's reflection:
 The central function of language is communication. Qin Qin is a confident communicator and has shown amazing linguistic skills when he approaches children with different languages. Qin Qin has demonstrated his social competence when he interacts with children around him with ease and confidence. Qin Qin is good at using drawing to represent his ideas and is also starting to show interest in letters and writing.
 I am so proud of the progress he's made!



Figure 3. Multilingual Qin Qin

Later Wendy wrote the same story for Qin Qin in Chinese characters with his English words written in English, thereby helping Qin Qin explore a link between written language and spoken word in two languages.



勤勤，今天你最好的朋友Brendan不上幼儿园，早上的时候你显得有点孤单，但是很快你就开始和其它小朋友一起玩啦！你先是和Katelyn一起在沙池里玩，你们俩愉快地用广东话交谈。很快你又和Ayzal一起在沙池里建了个雪糕店，我看见你热心地用英文向Cullen推销雪糕，“Want ice cream? Want ice cream?”（要雪糕吗？要雪糕吗？）你离开了沙池一会儿，在花园里找到一块小石头，见到晨晨就大声用国语问他“你要不要？”晨晨表示不要后，你继续用国语说，“你不要，他们要！”然后转向Kumaran用英文交流。

语言的中心功能就是交流。勤勤在和和其他小朋友交流时，信心满满。他可以使用不同的语言轻松地和其它小朋友沟通。勤勤已经能用图画来表达自己的意思，最近他也开始对字母开始感兴趣，早上也开始学着要来签到了！勤勤的进步真大啊，我真为你骄傲！

家长的话：

Figure 4. Qin Qin's learning story in Chinese characters

Wendy's learning story of reading a Chinese book to Zipporah, Lucia, Daniel, Sarah, Chloe and Ryan conveys the value for all children of learning the languages of each other. Stuart McNaughton (1995) suggests that through family activities children “develop ideas and values about literacy practices and activities and their personal and social identity” (p. 17). We extend this idea to the activities within the kindergarten where reading activities at the kindergarten were helping children develop ideas and values about literacy activities in relation to self and others. Wendy's reflections relate the learning to an idea that education is multi-lingual and supports children to learn to appreciate difference and diversity.



Reading The Pet Dragon

March 2014
By Wendy



Today I took Zipporah, Lucia, Daniel, Emily, Chloe and Ryan outside during the rest time. I shared a story called *The Pet Dragon* with them. This was an interesting book not only had its own plot but also it gave a fascinating introduction to Chinese writings. There was an obvious interest of you guys as you were all listened with great concentration. When we reached to the last page of the book, it listed out all the Chinese characters that were covered in the book. Guess what, you could already recognise many of the characters!

Wendy's Reflection:

Teachers went to a Reggio Emilia conference recently and were all inspired by the ideas of "welcoming the other" as the core of education today. It is the foundation of a democratic society to be open to the others, and to learn to live together. We live in a multi-ethnic society which also is reflected in our kindergarten. It could be the first place for children to have the opportunity to get a glimpse into other cultures. In this special case, what Chinese language sounds like and looks like. It is really great to see Zipporah, Lucia, Daniel and Emily develop interest and pleasure in discovering an unfamiliar language that is different from home. For Ryan and Chloe, it was an opportunity to learn something about the written language of their home language. One day maybe they would learn how to read and write the Chinese characters as well.



Figure 5. A glimpse of what Chinese language sounds and looks like

One upshot from the everyday use of different languages is that "A lot of our children think they speak multiple languages" (Jacqui). For example, a child who speaks Cantonese at home had learned Mandarin in the kindergarten, which Wendy explained has a lot of similarities "only the sound is different".

Stimulating cross-cultural learning and contribution

All three families who were interviewed appreciated the ethnic and cultural diversity of the kindergarten. QinQin's grandparents thought it important that QinQin could share his culture with others as well as experience and appreciate others' cultures. Jagroop's parents mentioned that it is really great that Jagroop has the opportunity to learn about difference (culture, language, food and religion) and appreciate these as learning moments. They did not want Jagroop to lose his cultural identity but they wanted him have the opportunity to experience diversity. Liam's mum liked the mix of nationalities but was most concerned about Liam learning English and developing socially. All three families liked the fact that there was a teacher of the same culture whom they felt they could communicate and share with.

Teachers stimulate cross cultural learning through encouraging children and adults to teach each other.

Like I learned to say water in their language (Japanese) because he pointed so many times and say 'mizu' and I say 'water'. And I think also the child [is] very happy to see that a teacher is also kind of learning from them, that's where confidence comes from. (Wendy)

One video clip showed Wendy talking to a Japanese-speaking boy and his friend, a girl who could speak both Japanese and English and whose language skills were good. Wendy asked the Japanese girl to teach her more Japanese. She said "I'm learning Japanese and that's what I position myself as, I'm also a learner and I'm happy to learn your language and you can teach me about your language". They played 'Who am I?' and the Japanese girl said 'sensei' means teacher in Japanese. "I am your Japanese teacher".

In another clip, Wendy is seen trying to build relationships across cultures between children in the sandpit.

Building relationships is encouraged cross culturally and across values bases amongst families and teachers. When Jacqui was first employed as the supervisor at the kindergarten, there were no Chinese staff or speakers of Mandarin or Cantonese. Jacqui became the 'Chinese teacher', taking language lessons and learning about the place of food from families.

Two of the families took me in and I had Mandarin lessons and Cantonese lessons after kindy once a week and I'm terrible at it, I can remember about three things, but I learned a lot about them through that because I would go to their homes once a week and we would have food and language lessons. And for the parents, they said language and food go hand in hand so you can't come to my place to learn the language without having tea and having food and also you need to know these things about us, this is—so when other teachers came on board, we dug more deeply into that. (Jacqui)

Children and families are encouraged to bring their knowledge and expertise to share. Dancing is important for Sri Lankan and Indian families—"So they bring that and share that with us". The kindergarten recently had a dragon dance. Teachers, families and children come together around "feasts" held once a term in the kindergarten, where everybody from a cultural group comes in and prepares food all together and then everybody eats.

And when we asked the children what a feast was, I was thinking that it would probably be sausage rolls and fairy bread, but no it was chicken and noodles. It was real food, so we cooked real food for them. The Japanese families come in and make sushi with the children; sushi is one of the childrens' favourite foods. ... I think everybody gets to have a go with things, and try out other peoples' food. Just recently, we had a fabulous Chinese feast and a load of the grandparents came. ... And then they all stay and join us ... So these are just sort of food times really. (Jacqui)

Feasts were highlighted by all three families interviewed as one of the best things about the kindergarten—parents coming in and showing how to make their own food and having the opportunity to share. Such practices were portrayed by Jacqui as "helping all to grow".

The kindergarten is a Christian kindergarten and part of a church culture which teachers recognise other people may not understand. Great care is taken to be inclusive about religious beliefs and language, and to connect across religions. Beliefs are openly discussed: “You tell me about your beliefs, I will tell you about mine and we can share and make it a connecting thing instead of a divisive thing” (Jacqui).

An ongoing identity project is exploring identity as place-based, that people construct who they are in different places. The project started from discussion about families where children identified different roles played in different places, such as “I am the little sister, I am the baby but then at kindy I’m not the baby, I’m the big kid”. Children are encouraged to look at these kinds of ideas about identity.

The identity project came up partly because teachers were involved in this research study, and

... talking about language and culture and families and belonging. ... I find whatever you are focusing on, that is what you see. ... We became more aware I think. That’s the really nice thing about being part of this work.
(Jacqui)

Teachers encourage contribution and affirmed identity and this is visible in many kindergarten learning stories, where home language and culture is reinforced.

Staffing and resources

Ten years ago staff in the kindergarten were described as all being European/Pākehā. Jacqui made a conscious decision with the kindergarten committee that, as staff left they would be replaced by staff who had varied cultural backgrounds reflecting backgrounds of families in their community. As discussed, before Chinese teachers were employed, Jacqui set about learning Mandarin and Cantonese herself.

Currently teachers are from Southern India (speaker of Tamil, Hindi, English); Sri Lanka (speaker of Sinhalese, English); Hong Kong (speaker of Cantonese, English, Mandarin); New Zealand (speaker of English, Mandarin and Cantonese); and China (speaker of Mandarin, Cantonese and English). This employment of culturally varied staff has been important in communicating with families and children, and going beyond surface levels in developing cross-cultural understanding as families, staff and children all learn from each other. Ongoing conscious efforts are made to generate collective understanding about the values of staff and families.

Staff and families provide cultural resources and artefacts; books in English, Chinese, Korean and Japanese line the book shelf. Families and teachers read the books in the languages in which they are written, such as a Korean mum reading a Korean story book in her language. Songs are sung in different home languages. The family corner has many cultural artefacts and resources are available for puppet shows. Decisions about the use of cultural artefacts are made by members of specific cultural groups, such as a decision that it was not appropriate to use chopsticks for drumming that was made by a Chinese teacher.

Discussion

In reflecting on the interviews, video episodes and Learning Stories we saw the role of the teachers as relationship-based, an idea that is “at the heart of the *Te Whāriki* curriculum” (Peters, 2009, p. 23). Teachers had developed strategies for intercultural exchange of ideas within their own teaching team and with families. They took responsibility for finding out about family values and catering for these within their practice.

The context of the kindergarten was co-produced—each member contributing to the setting to create the setting. In this way, the early childhood community members were “creating a world”, a terminology used by Bruner:

One of the people whom I have admired all of my adult life is Gian Battista Vico. It was Vico who recognized that there was some important way in which human beings not only lived in reality, but created the reality in which they lived. Now a new chapter in this revolution has begun. We begin to realize that the revolution begins in childhood, in the way in which we make it possible for our children to create a world. (Bruner, 1998, p. 6)

These teachers valued and spent time in observing what was needed and where, and listening to parents and children. They demonstrated an attitude of questioning and a willingness to change. Teachers had an articulated value base that was open for discussion. Consistently, teachers reflected on their own 'taken for granted assumptions', examining the roles and justifications for established practices. In doing so, they were supported through their reading and study, professional development workshops, and being part of research investigating their own practice.

Provision was made for the diverse languages and cultures of the kindergarten families and community—through employment of staff from different cultural backgrounds, inviting children and families to contribute their knowledge and expertise, reinforcing the value and use of children's home languages.

4. MANGERE EAST FAMILY SERVICE CENTRE

The special character for Mangere East Family Service Centre is the integrated nature of this early years provision. The early childhood centre was founded in 1993 as part of a pilot programme for six family service centres to be established in low socioeconomic communities. These family service centres were intended to “break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage, and improve the ability of families to be self-reliant” <http://www.familyservices.govt.nz> The early childhood centre is part of a range of services, including parent advice and support, the Home Instruction Programme for Preschool and Year One Youngsters (HIPPY), Social Workers in Schools, counselling, and health services. The early childhood centre is governed by the Family Service Centre board of governors.

The early childhood centre began as a playgroup in the school hall of Mangere East Primary School, running two days per week. It was allocated land in the school playing fields and a licensed centre was built. This began as a sessional centre with older children coming in the morning and younger children in the afternoon. That operating structure was soon changed to enable family groupings to come together. From the start, there was an emphasis on family and community, and supporting teachers in training to do their hours at the centre. The centre is now a full day education and care centre with 50 children over two years and seven children under two years. It is flexible in operation: some children come for sessions and others stay for the day.

The children are Tongan, Samoan, Cook Island, Niuean, Fijian, Māori, Chinese, Indian, and Pākehā New Zealand. The roles, qualifications, years of teaching experience and ethnicities of teaching staff are set out in Table 3.

Table 3. Characteristics of Mangere East Family Service Centre teachers

Role	Qualifications	Years of teaching	Ethnicity
Supervisor (Karen)#	BTchgLng	33	Māori/Cook Island
Teacher (Leanne)##	Dip Tchg	14	European/Māori
Teacher (Amy)##	BEd	2	Niuean/French/ Māori/ Polish
Teacher (Maara)	DipTchg	10	Cook Island
Teacher (Rachael)	Dip Tchg	26	Pākehā

Participated in workshops, gathered documentation

Participated in interviews and final workshop, gathered documentation

Karen Matata, the supervisor, is Māori/Cook Island and speaks English, te reo Māori and a little Cantonese. She is a very experienced, registered early childhood teacher who has been teaching 33 years and has been employed by the Family Service Centre since it started. Karen took part in the one day workshop at the start of the project where she made a presentation about their centre, and gathered documentation. Leanne Rapana is an early childhood teacher in the early childhood centre; she is European/ Māori and speaks English and te reo Māori and a little Tongan and Samoan. Amy Taunga describes herself as “very multicultural”—her mother is Niuean and French and father is Māori and Polish and she was raised with a Samoan family. Her husband is Tongan. She speaks English, and uses basic te reo, Niuean and Tongan, and Samoan.

During our time at their centre, we interviewed and video-recorded Leanne and Amy. We also videorecorded three children during a morning at the centre and interviewed the family members who usually brought the child to the kindergarten. These children were Jahvase, Malia and Kaneal.

Jahvase, aged four years, is the youngest of a family of three children. Jahvase started at the centre when he was two years old. His mum is Māori/Niuean and his dad is Samoan/Māori. The mother described herself as knowing a little bit of basic Māori and where she comes from, but not being familiar with the Niuean side.

Malia, is the fourth child of a family of five children. She has just turned five years and will be starting the Catholic school that her older siblings and cousins attend. This was described as “a family”. Her mum is Tokelauan but came to New Zealand as a baby, and her dad is Samoan. English and some Samoan is spoken at home.

Kaneal, aged four years, is the youngest of a family of three children. Her parents are both Cook Islanders. The dad speaks Tokelauan fluently and the mum understands quite a lot and also learned some te reo Māori. The dad teaches the children a little Cook Islands Māori but, according to the mum, “he’d rather teach them English in the house because that is what the modern language is”.

Teachers, families and children at Mangere East Family Service Centre have created a community where the holistic development of children is fostered and opportunities for families to contribute and participate are supported. In keeping with family values and aspirations and teacher regard for a bicultural curriculum, much emphasis is placed on te reo Māori and on the mainly Pasifika home languages and cultures of the participating children.

Wellbeing and belonging

The supervisor, Karen, described the philosophy of the centre as being “about whānau and manāki, looking after people and being part of family”. The centre’s three rules are to sit down when you eat, to be walking inside, and to be looking after each other. Family and community contribution and caring were evident from the centre’s beginnings as a playgroup in the school hall when parents were always present with their children and involved in the programme. Although there is now no requirement for families to be present with their children, their involvement is invited and has continued. The main reason for the centre changing from a sessional centre with older children in the morning and younger children in the afternoon to a centre with family/whānau groupings was to enable the philosophy of whānau and manāki to be upheld. Now, 20 years after its establishment “children of children are coming” and children who attended in the past often call in—a testament to the close relationships that have been built.

I’ll sit in my office and some teenager will walk in the door and say, “Guess, do you remember me, miss? Guess who I am?” You think to yourself [Name] you haven’t changed very much. “Oh, you do still remember me?”

The integrated nature of the centre gives prominence not only to early childhood education but to wider supports and opportunities for families to participate. This wider purpose is consistent with an ecological view of learning and development that recognises the multiple influences in all directions of the communities in which the child belongs, the contexts of children’s lives and the early childhood setting.

The centre ideals and practice are reflected well within the strands of wellbeing and belonging within *Te Whāriki*. The wellbeing strand has an overarching aim that the health and wellbeing of the child are protected and nurtured. The environment needs to be one where children’s health is promoted, their emotional wellbeing is nurtured and they are kept safe from harm. This centre caters at a basic health level by offering food if children are hungry, hence for example, in the morning there is breakfast food always on hand. Amy described food and kai in Māori and Pasifika cultures as a sign of “bringing everyone together.... It’s all to do with family and all the values [children] have within their family and at home and they bring that kind of learning into our centre”. This is reflected in children’s dramatic play which often revolves around cooking activity, and opportunities to participate in cooking and preparing food as a collective group at the centre. The cooking activities within the centre are often initiated by the children, arising from reading or home experiences, and often special foods from Pasifika countries.

Parents commented on the close emotional connections their children had with the teachers and their trust in the centre. Malia, who during the study left to go to primary school, talks of missing her teachers from the centre and wanting to know what her little brother did there each day, according to Malia's mum. The centre was described by another parent as being "family orientated". Kaneal's mum observed that Kaneal loves the teachers and loves coming to the centre. "She's very, very close to the teachers and I think she pretty well knows where her space is with the teachers". Kaneal was portrayed as confident and able to express herself and ask for what she needed.

She's not afraid to ask the teachers for anything as well as her peers at school, and she communicates with me very well at home and dad, and she tells me who's who at school and what's what.

Emotional wellbeing was noticed by teachers too. Children call all the teachers "Aunty", which Leanne attributes to teachers having a close bond with families and being like a 'family'. Amy noticed the sense of trust conveyed by families when they left their child in the centre. After looking at the video clips she said:

I picked out that you could see that our families in the community know that they have a place in our centre; and that shows when parents, you know, are leaving to go to work and things like that, they know that their children will be taken care of. Like, there was quite a few children in that recording that their parents had left to go to work and they were upset so they came to me and I, you know, just gave them care and reassured them that they'll be fine and that mum and dad will be back. And they also felt comfortable.

Amy commented on how she distracted one child who was upset at her mother leaving by feeding the fish in the fish tank with her. The child then told Amy she felt hungry and Amy made her a peanut butter sandwich. "Once she had that sandwich she felt really good; you know, she returned back to the normal routine. ... if she didn't feel comfortable here she wouldn't ask for it". This child felt confident to express her needs, knowing that these would be attended to.

Empowering for families

All the staff members at Mangere East Family Service Centre are local, brought up in Mangere and now living in Mangere or close by. This enables them to hold a first-hand understanding of the community and its networks, and for informal contact to happen with families in the community outside centre opening times. Karen explained "you know local because you are local":

So everybody we know, we know because we live in the community, we work in the community.... And I always shop at Mangere Pak'n'Save because that's where you find parents, and so you're kind of walking around and say, [...] 'I haven't seen you for a while, why haven't you been at preschool?' ... 'Oh sorry I've been sick,' ... 'I meant to ring up' or else we come back and we say 'hey, did you see muesli bars are on special, ..., two for five dollars' and so we share all this kind of information and yeah, so you know local because you are local.

Staff members are involved in community activities in many ways. The director of the centre, Peter Sykes, is a minister and so they often go to weddings because he gets invited to be the celebrant. They also go to funerals when someone in the community has died. A team of language interpreters is available within the family service centre if communication with families with English as an additional language is difficult. There are social workers and counsellors—"we have a team who work with prostitutes, street people, transgender families and vulnerable families; we have a HIPPY (Home Interaction Programme for Parents and Youngsters) programme that runs from our group; we have a men's shed for men to hang out in and build things and make things". The men had made equipment for the early childhood centre.

The connectedness with community support services and wider opportunities for family involvement in the centre were portrayed by participating parents as life changing.

Kaneal's mum spoke about the friendliness and warmth that helped her become more sociable.

They've helped my family so much; not only my family but myself as well so ... and before I came to the centre I was so withdrawn, I didn't really talk that much. But now I chat about ... can't keep my mouth shut. ... they're always friendly, you know? Always offering cups of coffee, even when I came in after going to another job they were still, you know, always welcoming. (Kaneal's mum)

She had hopes that Kaneal would "finish her education to the end" and took responsibility for teaching and supporting Kaneal to be ready for school. She had taken part with Kaneal in the Family Service Centre's HIPPIY programme and appreciated that programme. The centre had been a big part of the mum's life and she had often stayed to help there, doing the books and helping clean. She said she would miss the centre but "I won't stop going back, I will still always be back and so will the girls".

Jahvase mum, referring to the counselling services available for things in the family, and described the centre as offering "a lot more than just going to school". She thought communication with families was good and she liked to be involved.

I come and see the teachers every day. ... And I get involved with my kids' learning here. It's not just a drop-off centre and that's it, but I actually come every day and get involved with—not just with Jahvase as well, with other students, like to know their parents and especially with his little group of friends.

Some parents were employed within the centre in various capacities. Jahvase mum, Liz, was working at the centre in a voluntary position in 2013. In 2014 she was employed as a paid support staff member, doing relieving over the lunch break, resource and equipment maintenance, supporting excursions etc. Georgina, Kaneal's mum, was a HIPPIY tutor. This followed on from volunteer work undertaken with a charitable trust. The management saw the competence and potential in families and these opportunities to work were sometimes transformative, a step into other paid employment and training, as illustrated in this story told by Malia's mum who shifted from volunteering to being paid for her work in the centre, to finding external paid employment:

When I was looking for a job I said "Oh, it's so stressful to look for a job, it's been ten years since I've worked and it's so hard to find a job". And they're like, "why don't you come in and help?"—cause I'm always here—so I'm like, "what are you trying to say?" They said, "no, you're always here helping out, you might as well come in and get paid for it".

Yeah, I helped, like, just cut up fruits and clean things up, you know ... and yeah, I got paid for it and then they ended up being my referees, because it's been ten years and I don't know where all my other referees [are], it's all changed. So they helped me get into BK, Burger King, and Countdown. And with Burger King the pay rate wasn't good so I left that one and went to work at Countdown, and now Countdown is ... the pay rate's getting topped up, you know, it's getting even higher ... I'm so thankful that they gave me the job here. It was a good start to getting back into work mode. (Malia's mum)

These insights highlight the significance of ECE services connecting with culturally diverse families to generate a sense of belonging, of feeling connected, of membership. Such practices require teachers to be open-minded about family and community funds of knowledge and cultural capital, and to be welcoming of family contributions not simply on their own terms.

Language, culture and Identity

The development of a curriculum whāriki, a woven mat, inclusive of language and culture plays a critical role in strengthening identity. The teachers at the centre were able to speak and understand amongst them all, the languages of the community of Pasifika children and families. Biculturalism was a foundational principle. The teachers make a conscious effort to use te reo Māori and the home languages of children and encourage cultural practices within the programme. These emphases were

noticeable in the video-clips and were described as being of great value by teachers and families. The teachers were observed responding to these family values in their everyday interactions with children as they included the use of language in ways that were relevant to the context. Hence, Malia's mum praised the way teachers encouraged speaking of te reo Māori and of home languages.

I love it they are open to speaking different languages. With the Māori, Malia will come home with the Māori words ... Because I was brought up with English but I always went to Tokelauan events; I can understand what everyone's saying but I can't speak and ... I'm glad that they encourage speaking your language because I try and tell my husband speak Samoan to them all the time because I can't pick up the Samoan and I can't pick up the Tokelauan but I can understand it.

Jahvase' mum described herself as Māori/Niuean, but said she was not familiar with the Niuean side. She described her own, and the children's, learning during Niuean Language Week, noticing that this was not simply a one-off event, but that the children's interest, teaching and learning continued over time.

And just like last week they had Niuean Week, so I was all for it, I was here for a couple of days learning about it as well....

The teachers here, they just went out and got books and flags and they did some baking that Niueans cook, like ... and just the instruments ... yeah, it was really good and the children were really good and then from the start of the week they were learning an item and singing a song; by the end of the week they knew it off by heart and this being a new week, it wasn't—no, it's not Niuean Language Week this week, but the kids are still asking “can we sing this song? Can we dance to it?” so it's good to see.

Every Pasifika nation has its own week of celebration. All the children learn the dance from that culture throughout the week that they can perform with parents and whānau in the concert at the end of the week. In the photographs below, children are performing dances during Tongan Week.



Figure 6. Children dancing during Tongan week

The story below pinpoints Jahavase's interest and participation in activities during Niuean Week. These are linked to his own cultural identity.



Figure 7. Jahvaze and his Niuean culture

Use of a range of languages is evident on a daily basis in the centre where teachers take the opportunity to engage with the languages they know and pass their knowledge on to the children in the context of everyday interactions. In the following example, one of the early childhood teachers, Leanne, is sitting outside with two children, colouring and drawing pictures. One of the children initiates an interaction with the teacher and Leanne follows the child's interest whilst also incorporating Māori language.

Leanne: We could probably make kites (looks up towards the sky).

Child: Look, look (holds up a stencil to Leanne).

Leanne: Yes, shapes (looks at the child's picture). How many shapes do you have? (Points to the child's picture).

Child: (Counts very quietly out of audio range whilst pointing to her picture.)

Leanne: Sixteen! Lets count. One ... two....

Child: Two (Leanne and the child count together up to ten.)

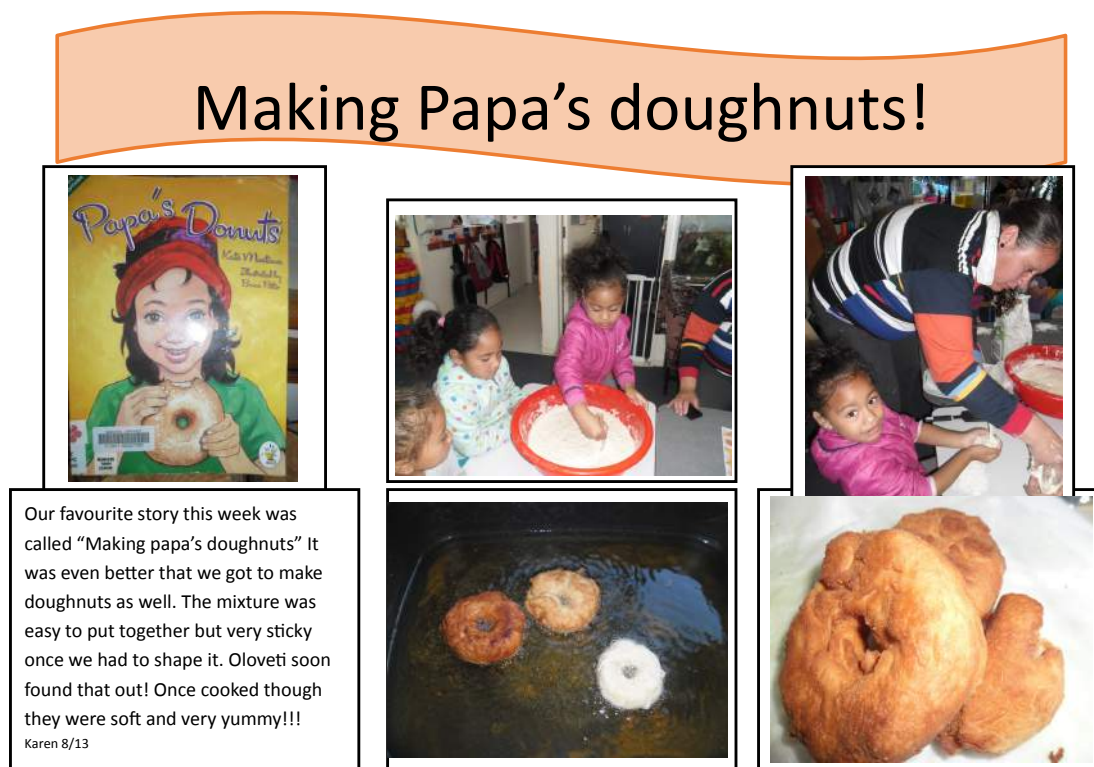
Child: Ten.

Leanne: Ten! Tahī, rua, toru, whā, rima, ono, whitu, waru, iwa, tekau. That's a lot. That is a lot isn't it.

In this example, the child initiates the interaction by attending to a specific object and activity as she shows the teacher the stencil she has been using to draw shapes with. The teacher notices the child's interest and recognises it as an opportunity for a teaching and learning episode, shown in her next action as she responds to the activity that the child has been engaged with. She attends to the child's interest by looking at her picture and positively affirming her efforts, then extending on the learning by involving counting in two languages, first in English and then in te reo Māori. Through following the child's interest in such a way the teacher engages in a bilingual knowledge exchange, reaffirming the value of the language and being respectful to the aspirations identified by the child's family. This type of interaction also demonstrates how the teachers practically implement the bilingual immersion aspirations of the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, where "The use of the Māori

language and creative arts in the programme should be encouraged, and staff should be supported in learning the language and in understanding issues relating to being bilingual” (p. 73). Here, the teacher’s knowledge of te reo Māori enabled her to provide a language learning environment for the children she was interacting with.

Teachers make connections between stories read at the centre and activities in the children’s lives. The book “Making papa’s doughnuts” and the recipe for doughnuts within it were the catalyst for the cooking that followed.



Our favourite story this week was called “Making papa’s doughnuts” It was even better that we got to make doughnuts as well. The mixture was easy to put together but very sticky once we had to shape it. Oloveti soon found that out! Once cooked though they were soft and very yummy!!!
Karen 8/13

Figure 8. Connecting stories with centre activities

Through providing for and actively encouraging opportunities for children and families to foster a sense of belonging, not only do the teachers’ actions respond to the aspirations and values of the families, they also align with the intentions of *Te Whāriki* where,

The early childhood education setting should be like a caring home: a secure and safe place where each member is entitled to respect and to the best of care. The feeling of belonging, in the widest sense, contributes to inner well-being, security, and identity. Children need to know that they are accepted for who they are. (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 54)

The teachers emphasized this important link between belonging and identity, where they were often seen reinforcing the children’s positive identities as the following observation demonstrates. Leanne, teacher, was sitting outside with two girls, Esther and Oloveti, who were using the centre’s felt tip pens to colour their finger nails:

Esther: We love Samoan nail polish. [Colouring nails with a felt tip pen].

Leanne: Is that what you call it?

Esther: Yeah.

Leanne: Is that what you call the Samoan nail polish?

Esther & Oloveti: Yeah.

Leanne: Aren't you Tongan Oloveti? (Looks at Oloveti, who is also colouring her nails, and touches her arm.)

Oloveti: Hmmm?

Leanne: Aren't you Tongan?

Oloveti: Yes.

Leanne: Oh.

Esther: I'm not Tongan.

Leanne: You're a Samoan.

Esther: I'm a Samoan!! (Smiles and looks up.)

Leanne: Yes! You say Talofa! And Oloveti says Mālō e lelei! Aye Oloveti?

Oloveti: Yeah.

Leanne: Mmmm.

Esther: You always say Mālō e lelei.

Leanne: Yeah.

Oloveti: I need to cos my mum says to.

Leanne: Cos your mum said! Huh! What other Tongan words do you know? Do you know how to say thank you?

Oloveti: (Whispers something.)

Leanne: Like Malo....

Oloveti and Esther: Mālō 'aupito.

Leanne: Mālō 'aupito? Mālō 'aupito says thank you and what about ... Esther? Do you know how to say thank you in Samoan?

Esther: Yep.

Leanne: What do you say?

Esther: Fa'afetai.

Leanne: Fa'afetai, well done, you're so clever. You are excellent!

This interaction demonstrates how Leanne encourages the children to use their home language as she prompts them to speak in that language and positively reaffirms their efforts. Through attending to the child's cultural identity Leanne also encourages the children to think about who they are through the words they speak, an aspect of teaching and learning that is valued by their families, as observed by Oloveti "I need to cos my mum says to". This links back to the aspirations of Te Whāriki where the importance of positive cultural identity is recognised. This respect for children's knowledge of their language was often recognised in everyday interactions with teachers where the teachers would position themselves as learners of the children's cultural knowledge, reaffirming the child's sense of cultural identity as positive and as an area of their expertise.

Leanne described this practice of encouraging home language use and treating children as experts as an intentional strategy. She picked out this episode as one she really liked, "because here at the centre there's a great sense of belonging ... acknowledging who they are and valuing their culture is important". She described another incident where two Samoan children were talking away in their own language and Leanne asked 'What are you saying?'

And they're saying "Oh no, we're saying you've got pretty hair", and I tried to say it and they have a laugh at me ... they're teaching me so the whole experience was them teaching me.... I just really appreciate learning from the children, they're our biggest resource, you know, and why not acknowledge that? Yeah. So I think that's really

important. Like, if you don't know the language, you don't know the culture, you know—ask. Yeah. And parents as well. And ... when I did the story I had to ask one of our Samoan students, “could you please help me with the spelling of how to write ‘pretty hair’?” And so she was quite happy to do that.

Connections between the centre and home experiences and values were evident to parents. In one video episode, Jahvase and his friend spent over half an hour cleaning the play dough and family corner area at tidy up time. When asked what she noticed about Jahvase in a video of this episode, Jahvase’ mum remarked on these connections with home practices and that Jahvase had extended what he would do at home (“growing up”), along with his persistence, enjoyment and meticulousness.

Oh, just the change of growing up and becoming a young little boy, you know, helping clean was ... I mean, I always show him at home, you know, [...] clean and tidying up after himself is good if you're going to play with something, put it away when you've finished with it ... And just to see him with a cloth and everything and wiping cupboards when it was tidy-up time, it was just tidy-up time, they didn't need to go to those lengths, wiping the cupboards. I was quite amazed and happy with his work.... The video went on for quite a bit and you could see the change from how it was a mess, like the play dough area to before and after, it actually gave me little teary eyes just seeing them in there working like a hard-working man and didn't realise that he was getting videotaped and just on with his work, so ... and he enjoyed it, he actually enjoyed it.

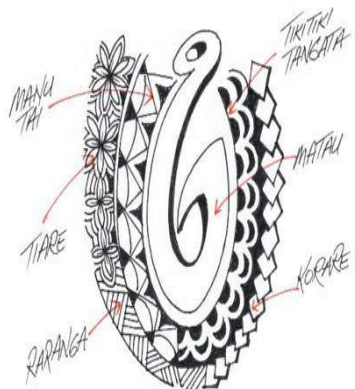
The Cook Island patterns taken home by Jacob following a group project prompted Jacob’s dad to show the children his own Cook Island tattoos. The example shows the ease for this dad in participating in this way, and the excitement for children of matching the Cook Island pattern that they were drawing with the dad’s body tattoo. The significance and place of cultural patterns was given recognition through these activities.



'Akono'anga-Cultural patterns

Tuesday 3rd of June 2014 Leanne

Tamariki had lots of fun doing some Cook Island patterns of Tiare, Matou and Raranga patterns. We will use these to make some lovely wall borders for our curriculum Cook Island wall.



Joshua discovered a different way to print his patterns.

Elijah P. enjoyed discovering the different patterns and prints.



Joe Ed, Wade and Eliyazah enjoyed painting the borders.

Figure 9. 'Akono' anga—Cultural patterns



'Akono'anga-Cultural patterns

More Cook Island learning around these patterns. Audrianna, Willie, Jacob and Josiah-Marley and others all join in to draw the patterns. Each of them choose the pattern that they liked. Jacob talks about his dad's Cook Island tattoo. When dad came in we took photos of his tattoo.



Wow! Tangaroa and a turtle.



Figure 10. Significance of akono'anga—cultural patterns

Discussion

This model of ECE as a 'hub', in which ECE is provided alongside integrated access to interdisciplinary teams able to provide health, welfare and parenting support, and the potential for family and community participation has been shown to be highly successful internationally and in New Zealand (Clarkin-Phillips & Carr, 2009, 2012; Mitchell, Meagher-Lundberg, Davison, Kara, & Kalavite, in preparation; Munford, Sanders, Maden, & Maden, 2007; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2003; Whalley & the Pen Green Centre Team, 2007). Such a model is said to be particularly effective in low income communities where barriers may exist to families easily accessing support services. Leseman and Slot (2014) have argued that "to combat poverty effectively, access to high quality ECE needs to be accompanied by support to families" (p. 8). The value of this integrated model at Mangere East Family Service Centre was evident in the stories of families who had made use of parenting and counselling services and taken up opportunities for their own involvement in the life of the centre. Most important was that the centre's staff did not operate from deficit perceptions; they saw the knowledge and skills residing in families. The centre's recognition of their personal worth and engagement in paid work through the centre changed the future for some parents.

Staff lived in the community, knew the community and attended events in the community. The children attending the centre conveyed a strong sense of trust and emotional connection with teachers and this was reinforced by families. These links to Te Whāriki strands of wellbeing and belonging were a focus.

The centre showed a sustained commitment to the different languages and cultures of the Pasifika community of families—Samoan, Tongan, Niuean, Cook Islands Māori, Fijian—are all heard and visible in wall displays and documentation, alongside te reo Māori. Like other centres in the study, staff who were fluent speakers of the diverse languages of the community were employed and children were also teachers of others. Teachers made intentional links to connect use of home language to a pride in cultural identity and to positively affirm cultures through celebrations involving children, families and community.

5. CAROL WHITE FAMILY CENTRE

The Carol White Family Centre is a refugee family centre, the only one of its kind in New Zealand. Children are Burmese, Sudanese, Afghani, Iraqi, Ethiopian, Burundian, Iranian, Japanese, Kurdish, European and Nigerian. Within the same ethnic group, families may be from different religions. Families are all quota refugees who enter New Zealand through the United Nations pathway and spend six weeks of orientation to New Zealand at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre on their arrival. Most of the Carol White Family Centre children have parents attending the Refugee Education and Families (REAF) programme, which operates in buildings adjacent to the centre. Here, parents learn English and take part in many other opportunities for learning through community classes—cooking, sewing, gardening, Zumba, self-defence, games, sports, citizenship classes and computing. A peace garden, a vegetable garden cared for by families, was nominated in the Auckland City Council’s ‘Sustainable Environment Awards’ because it met the criteria as something that protects and enhances Auckland’s environment and heritage. The centre and REAF programme are located in the grounds of Selwyn College, and connections with the school include a regular Friday visit to the school library.

The programme was the vision of Carol White, who was then principal of Selwyn College. When the Kosovars had arrived in New Zealand, many came to Selwyn College and she saw the mums leaving with the babies and the men going to Auckland University of Technology (AUT) for English classes. The women had nothing. She approached all the churches of all denominations in the area and they set up English classes for the women in their church halls. Three years later, a grant was obtained to build the centre at Selwyn College and the programmes were consolidated and brought together. The centre was opened in 2004. It is a full day education and care centre licensed for 41 children, including 12 children under two years of age. The under two year-olds have a special area for them and their mums. The centre operates a school term and is closed for holidays.

Families attending the Carol White Family Centre have varying and different experiences of education in their home countries. Some parents, especially women, do not read and write their own language and they did not have opportunity to go to school. Others experienced an education system very different from New Zealand’s. Hence, expectations about what an education programme should look like and what parents want for their children’s education at this centre are diverse.

The roles, qualifications, years of teaching experience and ethnicities of teaching staff are set out in Table 4.

Table 4. Characteristics of teachers

Role	Qualifications	Years of teaching	Ethnicity	Languages spoken
Senior teacher/director (Robyn)#	Post Grad Dip Tchg (ECE)	30+	New Zealander	English
Supervisor (Htwe Htwe)#	BEd	6	Burmese	Burmese, English
Teacher (Rose, who has recently left)	BEd	6	New Zealander	English
Teacher (Liana)	Post Grad Dip Tchg (ECE)	6	Indonesian	English, Bahasa
Teacher (Chris)	Post Grad Dip Tchg (ECE)	1	Indonesian	English, Bahasa

Participated in interviews and workshop, gathered documentation

Robyn Gerrity, the senior teacher and director of the Carol White Family Centre, is a New Zealander. She is a very experienced, registered early childhood teacher who has been teaching for over 30 years. She has been the director of the centre since it opened, and has worked with refugee families for 17 years. In 2011, Robyn was recipient of the Margaret May Blackwell Early Childhood Travel Fellowship to examine responsive pedagogy. She describes herself as deeply passionate regarding New Zealand early childhood education, children and families and the issues families face daily. The global situation of war and the protection of children and families is a major concern for her.

Htwe Htwe Myint came to New Zealand from Burma in 1992. She is a fluent speaker and writer of Burmese (her home language) and English.

She became an intermediate school teacher after completing a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry, at Mandalay University, Burma. In New Zealand, Htwe Htwe first worked as a language support teacher in a primary school, and then taught for 5-6 years in an early childhood centre. After finishing her BTchg (ECE), she became supervisor of the Carol White Centre. Her role is a bilingual teacher, cultural broker, trusted interpreter and community representative. Her knowledge, experience and skills enable her to work in an informed and compassionate way as a qualified ECE teacher. She describes her views about use of home languages: “For me, any time is the right time for home language use, as languages are communication tools for fostering cultures and mediating identity and learning”. She regards her work as “orienting families and children towards bicultural and bilingual lives”.

During our time at the centre, we interviewed and video-recorded Robyn and Htwe Htwe. We also videorecorded three children during a morning at the centre and interviewed the family members who usually brought the child to the kindergarten. These children were Sar Yar Chan, Ong Mannout, and Nyankiir.

Sar Yar Chan, aged four years, is the middle child of three. She has an older brother and a younger sister. Her parents are Burmese and speak Burmese at home. Sar Yar Chan was born in Malaysia. The family came to New Zealand two years ago, and spent time at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre on arrival.

Ong Mannout, aged four years, is the youngest of four sons. His parents are Burmese. He was born in Malaysia. His dad speaks Burmese Mon and his mum speaks a little Tavoy. Ong Mannout speaks fluent Mon, Burmese, Tavoy and now English which he has learned since arrival.

Nyankiir, aged four years, is Sudanese and from a family of nine children. When she first came to New Zealand the mother did not know any English—she learned English at the Carol White Centre.

The family interviews took place in family homes, and were attended not only by the children’s parents, but a wider extended family of relations and friends. Children and adults all showed a lively interest in the interviews and watching the video recording. The families offered wonderful hospitality and food. This was a point of difference in the interviews with these families, a demonstration of how the families operate as communities.



Figure 11. Families taking part in research: Interviews

Teachers, families and children at Carol White Family Centre have created a community where a commitment to social justice underpins relationships amongst all participants. This is a family-centred community where the contributions of families are woven into the curriculum. The languages and cultures of children, families and staff are valued and used, and regarded as vital for building a strong sense of identity. These values fit in well with the idea of children growing up as competent.

A social justice philosophy

The aspirational statement from *Te Whāriki* for children “to grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9) lies at the heart of the Carol White Family Centre programme. The centre’s philosophy is about children and families becoming rich contributors to this society. Further, the programme is grounded and enhanced by knowledge and awareness of the refugee experience and the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1990). An overarching value is that there must be dignity and justice for all.

We pay special attention to supporting and enhancing children’s languages and cultures and enabling children, and then their families to develop a strong, rich identity which we believe bridges the past, and the present, and the future learning for all of us. (Robyn)

Robyn used the bridge metaphor to describe the collective responsibility held by all members of the community and how they see themselves in this centre.

Imagine crossing the world on a bridge to get over. And what we mean by that is we mean intergenerational, we are crossing together. And some people are fast and some people are slow and there's many variations within that 'we', but we mean everybody. So this is a proverb and it came from one of our African families that it's better to build bridges.

For these reasons the team of qualified, registered and bilingual and multilingual teachers is very important. Htwe Htwe, who is Burmese, spoke of being able to communicate with Burmese children on a deep level and explain teaching and learning to families who feel confident in talking to her. Communication at a deep level strengthens family engagement. This employment of staff who can communicate with families in their home language and who have cultural understanding encourages social justice in the centre through ensuring each member of the centre has their linguistic and cultural identity recognised and respected.

The parents who were interviewed all conveyed the powerful role of the centre in reinforcing and bridging cultural understanding and inter-cultural learning, language and identity, in drawing on skills and knowledge of each family and of supporting families towards their future hopes. These parents all had high educational aspirations for their children; they wanted their children to have their own dreams and would support them to follow these dreams. They regarded education as contributing to a good life. The Carol White Centre was seen as a special place for children and families supporting their aspirations.

Family values and aspirations

A foundation for intercultural understanding is the alignment of human values that are fostered in the centre and home. All parents interviewed identified with common values in homes and the centre that are visible in the relationships and foregrounded in documented learning stories. Robyn spoke of noticing this alignment when she went into the homes to talk with families about the video-recording of their child for the research project:

Philosophically they're very close to us—the belief in the happiness, the kindness, those intrinsic values, they value really highly. And when they see their children operating and ... being engaged in those types of behaviours they are really, really thrilled.... When we went to the homes, every single home articulated those values. (Robyn)

Significant ways in which teachers cater for parents' educational aspirations are through adaptations to the education programme, through inviting family participation in the programme, and through making visible and explaining desired learning. Adaptations to the teaching environment are evident with regard to structured teaching opportunities, which many families desired.

We make sure that we have some formality in here to meet [parent needs], especially the writing and reading expectations. So we make sure that everything is available - lined paper, pencils for more formal [writing] and models of letters . . . but we would have that anyway because we have a whole range [of activities]. And parents, we invite them [to teach] so they will sit with their children when they come, and do ABC. (Robyn)

The parents were said to take great pleasure and pride in teaching their own children, and the children co-operate well. The learning story *Nyankiir is a writer* highlights Nyankiir as 'becoming an expert' in writing thereby reinforcing Nyankiir's identity as a writer with a 'mastery orientation' —she practises and practises. The story is positive about the teaching role of Nyankiir's mum, and makes connections to how children learn within a social context, from learning that has interest and meaning for them.



Nyankeir is a writer.

Carol White Family Centre 2012.

Nyankiir is a Writer.

March 2012.

Today as I find you at our writing table Nyankuiir, I notice you have written two letters as some letter Os and also some Cs. We have some letter N template so we have a look at how capital letter N goes. You are writing very competently Nyankuiir, just three years old, you are a confident learner and today you showed me just what you can do. Your mum is a very good teacher and she helps you with all of your letters. You have become very interested in writing lately. This seems to be when you arrive and you and your mum spend some time together practicing many letters. Every day you are practicing and practicing. Look Auntie Robyn I can do C you tell me. C for cat. You are becoming an expert Nyankuiir.

I look forward to us working together and discovering more letters that interest you. We should try M for mummy and T for Tabitha, your mummy's name.

Te Whariki reminds us that children enjoy their learning when it is in a social context, when they are interested and when their learning has meaning for them. Nyankuiir knows she is a writer and she knows A B C and now she is writing those letters. Love to you from Teacher Robyn.

Figure 12. Nyankiir is a writer

More generally, Nyankiir is developing an identity that is positive about learning, and able to support further learning. Siraj Blatchford (2004) describes mastery orientation as children tending, after a setback, to “focus on effort and strategies instead of worrying that they are incompetent” (p. 11), and problem solving.

Through conversations, teachers explained what they do and why, in order to generate parental understanding. For example, water play was described as being a source of tension with some families. These families are from land-locked countries where there may not be an abundance of water and water is not something children play with. In order to make connections with families about the importance of these types of learning experiences the teachers discuss with them the fact that New Zealand is an island surrounded by water and therefore the importance of children learning confidence when interacting with water, as well as the soothing and relaxing properties of water play for children who are upset or stressed. “And the families are very happy because the children are happy”.

A family centred community creating a fair world

Carol White is a family centred centre. It takes a village to raise a child but here the different communities raise the child. The families have never met each other before in their own countries but they work alongside each other here (Robyn).

All the parents interviewed commented on their sense of belonging, that the centre is a place where they feel at home and where they are supported.

When I come to the centre I feel like I am going to my mother’s or sister’s house. I am lucky, if I go somewhere else, I cannot meet people like the ones I have at my centre. If I have an appointment with work and income, I can leave my child at the centre and they also help me fill the form and explain to me what it means. All the teachers help and Robyn always give me the clothes for my daughter. If I do not go to the centre, they ring to find out what is wrong. The teachers and Robyn makes us feel special (Sudanese mum).

The teachers are called ‘Aunty’ alongside their own name as a sign of respect and friendship. It adds to the warmth and the richness of this centre and the family philosophy that underpins it. Teachers understand that when children and families are comfortable they can be open to learning. The statement of centre philosophy highlights the belief that “by building deep respectful trusting relationships with children and families we are developing a community of learning underpinned by a family context”.

The languages and cultures of all participants – children, families, communities and teachers – are noticed and recognised in action and through documentation and resources. Photographic and written documentation about the different communities, written languages and community and cultural events crowds the walls. Traditional costumes are available for dress up. Many community languages are used; books in different languages are available. These have often been purchased overseas because they cannot be bought in New Zealand; they are treasured.

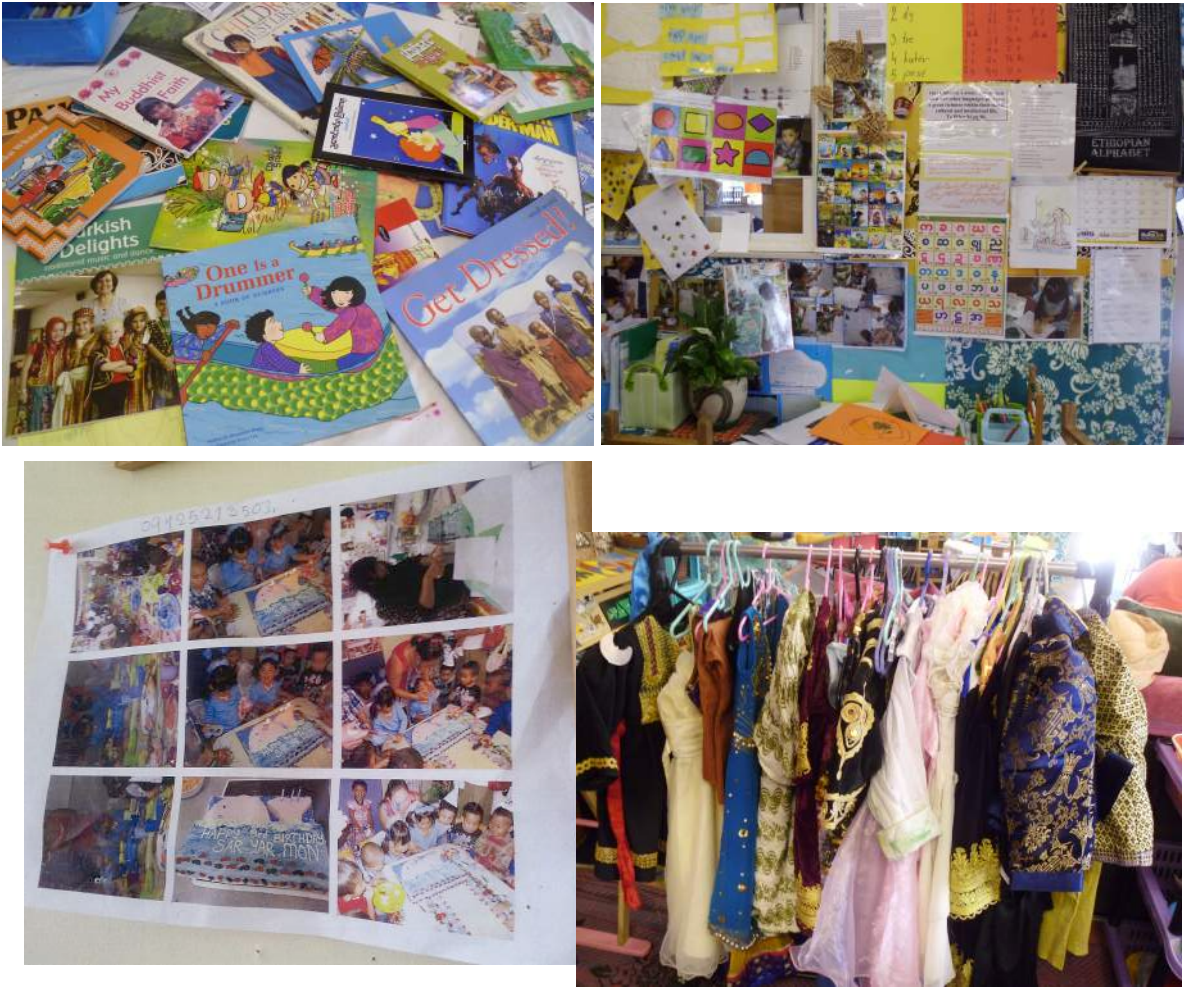


Figure 13. Wall displays, books and traditional costumes

Belonging in this centre is also about children and families being empowered to participate. Children are encouraged to take care of and guide others, a concept similar to the kaupapa Māori concept of tuakana teina. Donald, Glynn and Barnard (2004) explain tuakana teina within a Māori worldview as being conceived as more than peer tutoring or buddy support. “It also carries cultural meanings to do with the caring relationship of an older sibling towards a younger sibling; including the rights and responsibilities that each has towards the other within the *whānau* (the extended kinship relationship)” (p. 110). These ideas are reflected in relationships and practices within the centre that are recognised by teachers through role modelling, commentary and documentation. In these ways they are reinforced. And so the term ‘Aunty’ may be used to describe children as well as adults, when children take on responsibilities.

And anyone can be an ‘aunty’ so when the students come in here, they automatically become ‘aunty’. And children become ‘aunty’ as well, because some children, especially coming up four and five years old, they step up and they are teachers. And they’ve always been teachers but they become like, very into that role so—and it’s suddenly, ‘Oh we have a new aunty’. So an older child can be the ‘aunty’ for the younger children. So that can really be similar to like the Māori philosophy of children stepping up and taking responsibility (Robyn).

Through these experiences the children and their families learn more about New Zealand culture whilst also being empowered to pass on their funds of knowledge regarding their own cultures. In Mitchell and Ouko’s (2010, 2012) study of the experiences of Congolese refugee families, one of the

needs expressed was for opportunities for families and children to find out about living in New Zealand. The practice at the Carol White Centre is to gradually help children to step out into the next culture while supporting them to learn and retain their own. This was evident in another video episode with the same child at story time, where he had taken the role of teacher. The episode started with a welcome song in te reo Māori and English (“Tēnā koutou, welcome to all. Haere mai everyone.”). The Burmese boy, Ong Mannout, standing at the front of the sitting children took responsibility for calling out the name of each child in turn as each was greeted with “Good to see you”. He then found the alphabet book and participated in leading an alphabet song, holding the book and pointing to letters. The teacher was empowering and encouraging the child to communicate in English. Ong showed himself to be interested in books, enthusiastic with literacy and confident.

Children here are linguists because they know two or three languages. They love to read te reo Māori. “Read it again! Read it again!” they say. In the everyday life of the centre the children are seen working together even though they do not have a common language or culture. Role modelling from adults is copied by the children and there is fairness, consultation and respect in the play.

The Burmese dad was surprised at how much his child knows, learns and is capable of doing. He commented on his child’s sense of belonging, understanding and kindness as well as the breadth of learning he saw in her play as she built a temple and road with blocks.



Figure 14. Sar Yah Chan building a temple and road

This is the first video clip I have ever seen of my child. It brings out the bigger picture of my child’s learning and development. My child is wonderful; she is making a big road and playing with her friends.... I saw my child play really comfortably at the centre. She feels she belongs there. I have the responsibility of supporting my child’s learning. In the video, I can recognise which area to support my child in.... I like the way she builds the road. She is not distracted and copes with the other children who are destroying her work. She has a kindness inside and she is able to understand that the destructive children are younger and they do not upset her.

Both Htwe Htwe, the supervisor and Robyn, the teacher, commenting on this same excerpt spoke of the child’s understanding and her inner qualities. “The child can problem solve without conflict because she understands the spiritual learning of happiness and contentment” (Htwe Htwe). “The child is not angry or upset by the destruction of her work because she understands [the younger child’s] stage of development, her mind set is very open” (Robyn).

Underlying emphases within these examples are of contribution, the child as a person participating in a social practice, and belonging through connections made with cultural identity, home languages, funds of knowledge and interests from home (Ministry of Education, 2012).

Likewise, families are encouraged to participate and be appreciated for what they do. Hence, the Burmese dad could not describe any ways in which the Carol White Centre could be improved because he said that Robyn and the teachers were perfect. He offered ways in which he himself could contribute. Htwe Htwe translated him as saying: “Whatever he can do to help, just ask him – painting,

anything, he is there for us – anything broken he can fix or if things need painting, whatever he can do he will do it for us”.

The centre offers opportunity for families to learn for themselves in the REAF programme and to participate in the centre, as members of the community, as volunteers and in paid employment. In the ten years since it was opened, the centre has employed many parents to work at the centre as bilingual teaching assistants, cooks and cleaners. Approximately eight parents have gone on to undertake training for different occupations: nursing, retail, hospitality and early childhood education. These opportunities were regarded by parents as empowering.

The bilingual teacher assistant spoke of her own learning through the literacy programme and being involved in the early childhood programme. Her comments show how participation in the programme enables parents to experience a New Zealand education environment and some common activities in New Zealand that are different in their home country.

Through playing with children at Carol White Family Centre, I have had the opportunity to learn and experience what I missed in my childhood. I never had the opportunity to play in the sand pit, do painting or even use play dough. I take children to the bush for walks and we play. Carol White Family Centre gives a new experience to the children and adults working with them who come from refugee backgrounds. (Bilingual teacher)

Everything is good like English and reading. If I need support I get it from the centre. We are always going forward not backward. I am always learning and I am happy to volunteer because I can play and talk with the children. Through volunteering at the centre I have built my confidence. My English language is better and I can communicate and build relationships with both adults and children. Thank you so much. (Burmese mum)

Communication, language and identity

The Communication strand of *Te Whāriki* takes a broad view of communication, having as an overall aim that the “languages and symbols of [children’s] own and other cultures are promoted and protected”. *Te Whāriki* portrays language as multi-modal. “Language does not exist only of words, sentences and stories: it includes the language of images, art, dance, drama, mathematics, movement, rhythm and music.” Hence, the goals for the Communication strand are for children to experience an environment where:

- they develop non-verbal communication skills for a range of purposes;
- they develop verbal communication skills for a range of purposes;
- they experience the stories and symbols of their own and other cultures;
- they discover and develop different ways to be creative and expressive (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 72).

The Carol White Family Centre offers rich opportunities for verbal and non-verbal communication to flourish.

The example below from a video excerpt shows how Htwe Htwe uses her cultural knowledge of dancing to respond to children’s interest in music and dance.



Figure 15. Aunty Htwe Htwe and children dancing

In order to analyse the video, we used the framework described in the Ministry of Education resource, *Kei Tua o te Pae, Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars* (Ministry of Education, 2005) of “noticing, recognising and responding”, after Bronwen Cowie’s description in her work on assessment in science classrooms (Cowie, 2000).

These three processes are progressive filters. Teachers *notice* a great deal as they work with children, and they *recognise* some of what they notice as learning. They will *respond* to a selection of what they recognise. (Ministry of Education, 2005, Book 1, p. 6)

In this excerpt, the children collectively show their interest in the music and dancing, as they ask Htwe Htwe, their teacher to put the music on for them so that they can play at dancing. The teacher notices the child’s interest, and recognises that the situation is an opportunity for teaching and learning of cultural values through the transmission of cultural knowledge about a particular culture’s dance. Htwe Htwe, demonstrates this as she responds by putting the requested music on for the children and joining in with the activity of dancing and the specific motions of hand movements associated with the dance from the children’s culture. In doing so, Htwe Htwe collaborates with the children in celebrating the funds of cultural knowledge that the children bring with them to the centre, regarding the dance of their culture, and also adds her own knowledge of the dance as she engages enthusiastically with them as they communicate their solidarity in their collaborative dance moves. When another child who is not of Burmese decent approaches, Htwe Htwe also encourages his interest in the dancing too, passing on new knowledge that involves cultural practices. Through supporting the children to engage in this activity Htwe Htwe is implementing *Te Whāriki* as she notices, recognizes and responds to the children’s willingness to contribute to the learning environment, “Each child’s culture is included in the programme through song, language, pictures, playthings, and dance” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 67).

On looking at this video excerpt, Htwe Htwe notices that the child knows the right steps, can move his hands, feet and body. In Burma, dancing is part of the culture and both boys and girls are taught how to dance from a young age. Children as young as six months are already taught how to use their hands. This child has learned his dancing steps from home. His co-ordination is amazing. Feet, legs, hands, eyes, shoulders, and hips come together in a choreographed dance. Htwe Htwe points out that dancing is an important activity in the Burmese calendar of activities. The Carol White Family Centre has performances on the Burmese New Year, which is celebrated in the second week of April.

The Burmese parents who were interviewed particularly liked the celebration of Burmese culture and use of Burmese language at the centre. An authentic video of Burmese New Year is shown on a large screen at the centre.

The centre is very good; they learn Burmese language and culture, English language and also get a lot of support from the centre. . . . The centre

celebrates the Burmese New Year in April on the exact day they celebrate in Burma. . . . My child learns more Burmese language and culture at the centre than at home. I love the centre very much (Burmese dad).

In one video episode, a Burmese boy, Ong Mannout, is reading a story in a one-to-one interaction with Htwe Htwe. Htwe Htwe uses English, te reo Māori, and the child's Burmese language, thereby enabling learning and understanding to be deeper because Htwe Htwe is using the child's home language to give explanation. She is aware of and uses culturally and socially significant intonation and oral forms. This child's mother liked the skilful use of Burmese at the centre.

I like the one on one reading to my son with aunty Htwe Htwe. I like when my son learns his culture because he learns about the different tones we use when he talks to his friends, his mum or grandmother (Burmese mum).



Figure 16. Ong Mannout and Aunty Htwe Htwe reading

Discussion

The values of dignity and social justice embedded within the Carol White Family Centre have laid a foundation for participants to create a community where they have a sense of belonging, they feel comfortable, and their wellbeing is ensured. From this base, active contributions and equity for all participants are encouraged and acted on.

Several teaching and learning practices have fostered these values. Qualified and registered bilingual and multilingual teachers who can communicate with children and families in their home language and on a deep level are employed. The linguistic skills of these culturally diverse teachers support and encourage the participation and contribution of children with limited English language to fully engage with teaching and learning experiences. In their everyday practice, teachers engaged in culturally informed interactions, both verbally through engaging in multiple languages and non-verbally through dance. Through interactions with children that notice, recognise and respond to their cultural knowledge, the teachers celebrate the cultural identity of each child and their family in positive 'educational relationship' (Portera, 2008, p. 488), removing deficit thinking about the children of 'other' cultures and power imbalances as the teachers often positioned themselves as learners.

The aims for children and families to become rich contributors to society are realised at the Carol White Family Centre. What is striking is that these children and their families have come to New Zealand from refugee experiences, usually with little or no English or knowledge of living in New Zealand, and through participation in the Carol White Family Centre, strengthen their own sense of cultural identity and are supported to move confidently into a new world.

6. CONCLUSION

Relationship-based practice

In reflecting on the interviews, video episodes and Learning Stories we saw the role of the teachers as relationship-based, an idea that is “at the heart of the *Te Whāriki* curriculum” (Peters, 2009, p.23). Teachers had developed strategies for intercultural exchange of ideas within their own teaching team and with families. They took responsibility for finding out about family values and catering for these within their practice.

Through engaging in such responsive, reciprocal relationships the family members and teachers’ values both align with the aspirations of the national early childhood curriculum where:

This curriculum emphasises the critical role of socially and culturally mediated learning and of reciprocal and responsive relationships for children with people, places, and things. Children learn through collaboration with adults and peers, through guided participation and observation of others, as well as through individual exploration and reflection (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9).

In doing so, the teachers practically implemented the theoretical underpinning of *Te Whāriki*, as Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system’s theory recognises ‘the learner engaged with the learning environment’ through such responsive, reciprocal relationships (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 19).

The teachers provided an environment that was co-constructed with family members, aligning with the ‘Relationships’ principle of *Te Whāriki*

The learning environment will assist children in their quest for making sense of and finding out about their world if

- adults know the children well, providing the basis for the “give and take” of communication and learning;
- there are active and interactive learning opportunities, with opportunities for children to have an effect and to change the environment;
- there are opportunities for social interaction with adults and other children. (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 43)

The context of the ECE centres was co-produced—each member contributing to create the setting. In this way, the early childhood community members were “creating a world”, a terminology used by Bruner:

One of the people whom I have admired all of my adult life is Gian Battista Vico. It was Vico who recognized that there was some important way in which human beings not only lived in reality, but created the reality in which they lived.

Now a new chapter in this revolution has begun. We begin to realize that the revolution begins in childhood, in the way in which we make it possible for our children to create a world (Bruner, 1998, p. 6).

A willingness to learn as well as teach

The creation of ‘a new world’ within each centre was managed by the shared values of the teachers and families, where the teachers valued and spent time in observing what and where each family needed, and through taking time to listen to parents and children. The teachers demonstrated a culture not only of questioning, but also of listening and a willingness to change. Teachers had an articulated value base that was open for discussion and shaped around the changing needs of their families and

children. Teachers reflected on their own “taken for granted assumptions”, examining the roles and justifications for established practices. In doing so, they were supported through their reading and study, professional development workshops, and being part of research investigating their own practice. The actions of the teachers worked to demonstrate their commitment to providing authentic culturally responsive pedagogy through active listening and a willingness to build bridges wherever necessary.

These findings contribute to a body of evidence (Mitchell & Cubey, 2003) indicating the role of professional development and research support in facilitating a culture of critical enquiry. Examples from Centres of Innovationⁱⁱ and Teaching and Learning Research Initiative projectsⁱⁱⁱ the value for teachers in investigating their own practice and of having an external researcher or professional development adviser to support this process. External advisers are able to offer access to theoretical and research-based readings, support for data gathering and analysis, and another perspective on interpretation of practice. Conditions to support enquiry in early childhood education settings includes time for staff to meet together as a group, hold discussions, analyse documentation, and talk with parents.

Language, communication and identity

In looking across the three centres, these varied interpretations highlight the worth in multicultural communities of enabling first languages to be used and cultural practices to be understood and incorporated as a basis for good communication, learning and development. Language is often linked to culture and identity, particularly in the early years of a child’s life (Issa & Hatt, 2013), where parental involvement in supporting diversity of cultures and identity in the early years is being given an increasing amount of importance (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2001).

Provision was made for the diverse languages and cultures of the kindergarten families and community—through employment of staff from different cultural backgrounds, inviting children and families to contribute their knowledge and expertise, reinforcing the value and use of children’s home languages.

In providing for a diverse range of languages within their setting the teachers supported the social development of the children and families, as valued in the national curriculum under the ‘Communication’ strand:

Experiences in this strand [communication] also help to build Relationships, as children develop the ‘give and take’ of communication and learning and have opportunities to work effectively with others in ways which have an impact on their environment. The ability to communicate increases their enjoyment and involvement with Family and Community, helping them to make sense of, and participate in, the wider cultural and social world. Communication reinforces the child’s Holistic Development of a concept of self, enhancing their recognition of their spiritual dimension and the contribution of their heritage and environment to their own lives (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 72).

Weaving Te Whāriki

What this project has contributed to this field of knowledge is *how* teaching and learning in culturally diverse early childhood settings are practically implemented and supported through a national curriculum framework. Within this research project the participating teachers and families were observed to share the same values and beliefs about what was important for their children and they worked together to ensure that these values were implemented in everyday practice. Throughout each of the early childhood settings, relationships were identified as a key priority, and the way in which

ⁱⁱ Refer <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/ECE/22551>

ⁱⁱⁱ See reports at <https://www.tlri.org.nz/tlri-research/research-completed/ece-sector>

these relationships were encouraged was through recognising the importance of verbal and non-verbal communication, expressed in multi-modal ways. Through encouraging and supporting such a freedom of expression, the settings supported a culture of empowerment through contribution, as each culture was attended to as a matter of importance by staff who were from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds themselves. In such ways, social justice, belonging and well-being were afforded. A major finding from this research is that of the significance of the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, in providing an opportunity to support such context specific teaching and learning. In these settings, the 'Relationships' principle and the strands of 'Communication and Belonging', anchored the weave for the other strands and principles to be woven around; in other settings different principles and strands that are present in *Te Whāriki* may stand out. Through providing a framework from which practice can be responsive to the needs of the individual, the unique whāriki of each early childhood education setting will make visible the individual creations of new worlds.

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