Early childhood teachers' use of Picturebooks to counter heteronormativity: Children's working theories about gender diversity and LGBTIQ-parented families

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Kathryn Dawn Morgan

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WHAKATAUKĪ: NĀ TŌ ROUROU, NĀ TAKU ROUROU KA ORA AI TE IWI.
With your food basket and my food basket the people will thrive.

This whakataukī/proverb encapsulates the notion that whilst living a solitary life might result in survival, working together can take people from surviving to thriving. Although working in solitude on this thesis has been necessary much of the time, this whole endeavour has been grounded in the support of so many people. I would like to acknowledge them here:

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study acknowledges the pervasive social context of heteronormativity within early childhood education and society in general. It investigates how five early childhood teachers used picturebooks as a possible pedagogical tool to counteract heteronormativity in one kindergarten, with fourteen 3- and 4-year-old children. During the study the teachers shared gender- and family-focused picturebooks with a small group of children in weekly sessions. Teachers used the picturebooks during these sessions as a means to encourage discussion. Children had the opportunity to develop and refine their working theories in discussion with others.

Findings centred on children's working theories in relation to gender diversity, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer-parented families, and teachers' reactions to these. Children's working theories largely focused on reinforcing binary gender signifiers, disrupting hegemonic ideas of fixed gender, and considering different family types. These working theories sometimes included topics perceieved by teachers as *dangerous* or *risky* such as the potential of a girl to "get a penis" if "becoming a boy." Teachers typically reacted to these working theories by asking further questions and presenting new information to develop thinking; or minimising discussion and changing the subject. A key finding was the extent of teachers' power to influence which children's working theories are supported and which are silenced. Teachers emphasised the need for time to reflect on their dialogues with children in order to better respond. Sustained shared thinking was found to be particularly difficult to maintain when children's working theories involved *risky* or *dangerous* topic focus.

This study concluded that professional development in the areas of sustained shared thinking, heteronormativity, gender diversity and family diversity would be beneficial for both pre-service and registered employed early childhood teachers because of the potential lack of confidence and skills in these areas. Such professional development could focus on increasing the knowledge bases of teachers, alongside skills acquisition around how to talk about these *risky areas*.

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GLOSSARY

INTRODUCTION

Throughout this thesis I use some terms in te reo Māori (the Māori language), for example referring to the country where I live as Aotearoa New Zealand, and often using the word "kaiako" instead of "teachers." This is a small gesture towards recognising and celebrating the indigenous people, language and culture of this land I call my home. Like many other countries around the world, Aotearoa New Zealand has a shameful colonial past. Although a treaty was drawn up in 1840 between some Māori tribal chiefs and representatives of the British "crown," this was highly problematic and flawed in a multitude of ways. Furthermore, even this treaty (Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Treaty of Waitangi) has largely been disregarded for over 150 years (Mikaere, 2007; Tomlins-Jahnke & Warren, 2011; Piripi, 2011). This thesis is situated in Aotearoa New Zealand, therefore, I am making an attempt to counteract "whitestreaming" (Ritchie & Skerrett, 2014) by integrating certain te reo Māori kupu (words) interchangeably with English ones.

KEY WORDS IN TE REO MĀORI

Aotearoa New Zealand – The name of this country, the "Land of the long white cloud," acknowledging tangata whenua (the indigenous people) first, then colonisers. It combines both the Māori and English names for the country.

Hui – Meeting.

Kai – Food, or the verb "To eat."

Kaiako – Teacher(s). This term also implies that teachers are learners too, as the Māori word 'ako' encompasses both.

Kaupapa – Culture and protocol.

Kōhanga reo – Literally "language nests". Māori language immersion early childhood centres often, but not always, based on marae (Māori gathering places).

Kupu – Word(s).

Marae – Māori gathering places often on sites of historical significance to Māori people. Usually comprising a Wharenui meeting house, Wharekai - kitchen and dining room, plus sleeping and ablution facilities.

Māori – The indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Pākehā – Fair-skinned inhabitants of Aotearoa New Zealand, primarily of European descent.

Pasifika – Indigenous people of the Pacific Islands.

Tamaiti – Child.

Tamariki – Children.

Tangata whenua – Indigenous people, literally "people of the land." This term can describe Māori people with historical roots in a particular locality, or Māori people generally as "tangata whenua of Aotearoa New Zealand."

Te reo Māori – The indigenous Māori language.

Tikanga – Māori ways of being and doing, derived from the Māori word for "right" or "correct" – *tika*. This term encompasses culture, customs and protocol.

Whakataukī – Māori proverb. These short poetic sayings are given high importance in everyday life, often used in te reo Māori speeches and in some instances used as touchstones to guide behaviour.

Whānau – Family group.

PROLOGUE: "IT REALLY MAKES ME WONDER ABOUT ALL THESE GAY PEOPLE HAVING CHILDREN AND WHAT KIND OF NORMALITY THOSE CHILDREN ARE GROWING UP WITH."

The personal recollection of a conversation with "Sally" in 2014 that follows, has been one of many catalysts encouraging me to engage in work (including this study) to counter *heteronormativity* in early childhood education.

> Sally: Did you see that "Sunday" programme on tv last night? The one about the gay men buying a baby and then abusing it...
>
> Me: No, I didn't... but it sounds horrible.
>
> Sally: It was terrible. It really makes me wonder about all these gay people having children and what kind of normality those children are growing up with.
>
> Me: (after a few seconds pause while I worked out how to respond) You know that I'm gay, right?
>
> Sally: No...
>
> Me: And that I have a child...
>
> Sally: Well, I knew that bit. But really I guess I was talking more about the gay men. It seems more "normal" for gay women to want to have children, but not gay men.
>
> Me: Well, my son's father is gay, and he's a great dad!
>
> Sally: Oh, so it didn't work out between you then?
>
> Me: No, he's gay and I'm gay. We were never together as partners, we are just friends. We both wanted children, so my son was conceived through clinic-mediated insemination. His father is a regular part of his life and they get on brilliantly.

Sally later reflected on this conversation with me, and worked hard to broaden her outlook, professionally and personally. This exchange, while a number of years ago now, nevertheless continues to remind me of the need for a deepening understanding of diverse family types within society as a whole, and in early childhood education in particular.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

This thesis documents my qualitative research with five kaiako and fourteen 3- and 4-year-old tamariki at a kindergarten in the South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. My research project explored how kaiako might use picturebooks as a possible pedagogical tool to counteract heteronormativity and to discuss themes of social justice with very young tamariki. Heteronormativity is a term that was first coined by Warner (1991) to refer to the way heterosexuality (attraction to the opposite gender binary) is positioned within society as the only acceptable sexual expression. I will revisit this concept multiple times throughout this thesis, but introduce it here as one of the key concepts underpinning this study.

This research also investigates how tamariki develop working theories in response to picturebooks addressing themes of gender[1] diversity and LGBTIQ[2] -parented whānau. In addition, it investigates the power kaiako have in supporting or silencing these working theories. Six picturebook sharing sessions took place over a period of 2 months in late 2017, each led by one kaiako and with varying numbers of tamariki taking part[3]. Within the pages of this thesis you will find an analysis of data gathered from tamariki and kaiako during these picturebook sharing sessions, focusing on the working theories tamariki developed in response to selected picturebooks, and the ways kaiako supported or shut down these working theories.

The primary aim of this introductory chapter is to give some broad context to my research. This begins with some catalysts for the study and a description of my multiple positionings and biases. Next I provide the background to the study and my rationale and key research questions. Finally, in this chapter you will find details on the structure of the thesis.

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[1] In multiple places in this thesis I discuss genders, gender binaries and gender stereotypes. In Aotearoa New Zealand and many other parts of the world children are born into this male/female societal structure, so I have used those terms in this thesis. My use of these terms does not indicate my acceptance of the male/female dichotomy. On the contrary, I acknowledge and celebrate the wide range of possibilities beyond traditional hegemonic male/female categories.

[2] LGBTIQ = Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer.

[3] Pseudonyms of kaiako and tamariki participating in each picturebook sharing session can be found in Chapter 3. Participant profiles are situated in Appendix 7.

CATALYSTS FOR THIS RESEARCH

Providing impetus for this research were my experiences of homophobia in my first few years after *coming out* as a lesbian; the issues my multi-parented whānau (and especially my young son) experienced in navigating the Aotearoa New Zealand education system; and my later employment within that same system. Additionally, the exchange with "Sally"[4] detailed in the Prologue strengthened my already firm resolve to encourage celebration of diverse family constellations and sexuality and gender diversity in early childhood education settings at every opportunity. One way of doing that was to engage in this research.

The dearth of resources showing LGBTIQ families, in all five early childhood education settings I have worked in, has been another catalyst for this research. My anecdotal findings align with Hardie's (2014) research results in Aotearoa New Zealand public libraries. Hardie surveyed the collections of 58 libraries in the Wellington and Porirua regions searching for books showing LGBTIQ -parented whānau and found a total of only three titles portraying same-sex parents. More recently, Daly (2015) found that despite family diversity in terms of single parents, blended families, nuclear families and extended families, none of the picturebooks in the original New Zealand Picture Book Collection - He Kohinga Pukapuka Pikitia o Aotearoa (NZPBC) had same-sex parents. Daly's (2017) subsequent analysis of picturebooks in the revised New Zealand Picture Book Collection (NZPBCII) highlighted the same omission, with no whānau depicted as having same-sex parents. Daly (2017) cites "cultural hegemony" (p. 184) as the root cause for this deficit, as well as the reason for sparse representations of disability and language use found within the NZPBCII.

Picturebooks are both "art objects and the primary literature of early childhood" (Salisbury & Styles, 2012, p. 75) and, as such, they are valuable pedagogical tools. Kelly (2012) found in her study of picturebooks featuring same-sex parents that whilst children were confident to discuss diverse family types, teachers were not – a topic I wished to investigate further. Picturebooks have immense power and potential to influence, reassure, challenge and enlighten us in a non-threatening and enjoyable way, and as a beginning Master of Education student I could see the potential of picturebooks as the basis for my study.

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[4] Sally, like every other personal name used in this thesis (except in the acknowledgements), is a pseudonym – an alternative name chosen either by the person concerned or by myself, in order to help preserve their anonymity.

A final catalyst for this research is the stark reality that transgender, lesbian and gay teenagers are more at risk of bullying, self-harm and suicide than others (Hatchel, Ingram, Mintz, Hartley, Valido, Espelage & Wyman 2019; Mustanski & Liu, 2013). Hatchel et al (2019) cite Meyer's (1995) "Minority Stress Theory" as an explanation for the higher rates of suicidal ideation amongst LGBTIQ youth. They explain that people with marginalised identities (e.g. non-heteronormative sexual/gender identity) often experience chronic ongoing stress due to stigma including internalised homophobia, and this can increase the risk of self-harm/suicide. Warner (1993) laments the way that heterosexual, gender and identity ideologies combine to bear down "in the heaviest and often deadliest way on those with the least resources to combat it: queer children and teens" (p. xvi). My idealistic hope is that young tamariki might grow up to be inclusive of people no matter their sexuality or gender, through engaging with relevant picturebooks and teaching. Perhaps then as these tamariki grow to teenagehood, self-harm statistics can be lowered.

MY MULTIPLE POSITIONINGS AND BIASES

I situate myself in this study as a British pākehā cis-gender trans*-inclusive[5] lesbian feminist parent and early childhood kaiako currently in my late 40s. As Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault (2016) state, qualitative research makes no pretence that the researcher is unbiased. I am certainly biased, based on my hope for a society where diversity is seen as a strength, where people are included and celebrated no matter their ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality or (dis)abilities, and where all kinds of whānau and all kinds of tamariki feel welcomed in early childhood centres and society at large.

I came out as a lesbian at the age of 24. That was in the mid 1990s in Scotland, and I was working as a speech and language therapist with children. I experienced both blatant and covert homophobia in my Scottish workplace and in the rest of my life in Scotland. In the early 2000s I became a new immigrant to Aotearoa New Zealand with my female Scottish partner, our almost-teenage daughter and our young son, both of whom we co-parented. People in Aotearoa New Zealand generally appeared far more welcoming towards our lesbian-parented family than those in Scotland, and my sexuality seemed a non-issue at work. But still, it was challenging to navigate the early childhood education system with our young son, whom at every opportunity proudly proclaimed that he had two mums. There were many

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[5] Trans*-inclusive signifies my understanding that feminism includes all women – not just those assigned female at birth.

forms to fill in, all of which only had space for *mother* and *father*. The fact that this child lived with two mums, but also had a dad who visited regularly from overseas, and that *all* of these parents were lesbian or gay seemed almost too much for some kaiako to comprehend. Over the years, these diverse aspects of my life have combined to lead me to undertake this research.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT TO THIS RESEARCH

This study is based firmly in the early childhood education context within Aotearoa New Zealand. Non-compulsory early childhood education provision for children aged 5 years and under has a strong tradition in this country (May, 2019). There is a long history of *Playcentres* where families lead the learning with their tamariki. *Free Kindergartens* have also been stalwarts of early childhood education over many decades. In the early 1980s as efforts to reinvigorate te reo Māori intensified, te reo Māori immersion early childhood provision known as *Kōhanga reo* were set up by Māori leaders around the country for tamariki from infancy until 5 years old (Tomlins-Jahnke & Warren, 2011). Pacific Island language nests were then developed as another non-English language immersion option for whānau and tamariki in Aotearoa New Zealand. There are many different types of home-based care, and an ever-growing number of privately-owned early childhood education centres – some owned by private individuals and others part of a corporate business model. Various governments within Aotearoa New Zealand have mandated specific requirements for teacher qualifications, and percentages of non-qualified versus qualified teachers allowed to work in each type of centre.

All early childhood education services in Aotearoa New Zealand are bound by *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early childhood curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2017; Ministry of Education, 1996) – hereafter shortened to *Te Whāriki*. This is Aotearoa New Zealand's bilingual te reo Māori and English language national early childhood curriculum document. The kaiako who agreed to be participants in this study therefore teach within the framework of *Te Whāriki*, like every other kaiako in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Te Whāriki* literally means "the woven mat" and the curriculum consists of four curriculum principles interwoven with five curriculum strands. The curriculum principles are : empowerment/whakamana; holistic development/kotahitanga; family and community/whānau tangata; and relationshiops/hononga. Interwoven throughout are the curriculm strands of wellbeing/mana atua; belonging/mana whenua;

contribution/mana tangata; communication/mana reo; and exploration/mana aotūroa. These are illustrated below, in Figure 1:
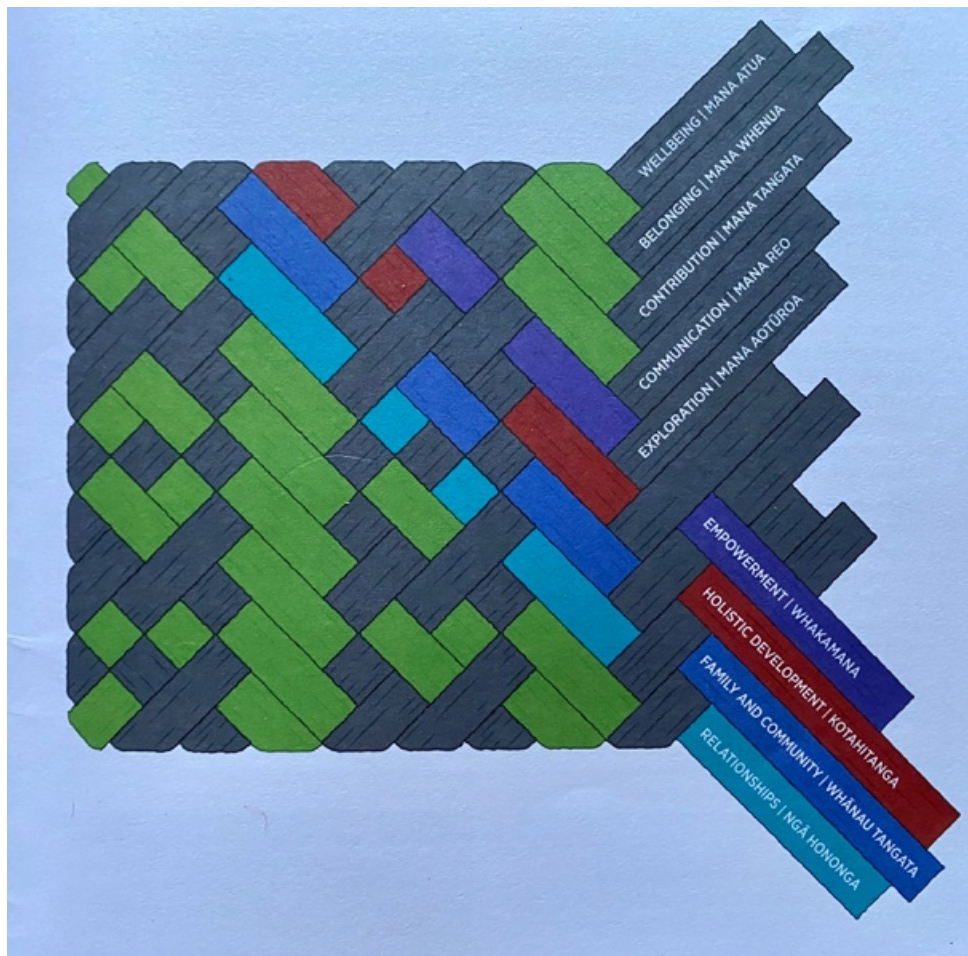
Figure 1. Visual representation of the whāriki. From *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 11). Copyright 2017 by Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga: Ministry of Education.

In both the 1996 original and the 2017 revision, *Te Whāriki* highlights a kaupapa (culture) of celebrating diversity, inclusion, cultural identity, social justice, gender equity and family/whānau belonging. On page 10 of *Te Whāriki* the curriculum is described as a "mat for all to stand on." As discussed by Gunn (2003) and more recently Kroeger, Recker and Gunn (2019), this strongly inclusive stance taken by the writers of *Te Whāriki* positions kaiako strongly to work on anti-heteronormativity and foregrounding an anti-bias curriculum. LGBTIQ-parented whānau in various types of family constellations are an increasingly visible part of society and early childhood education (Burt, Gelnaw & Klinger Lesser, 2010; Liang & Cohrssen, 2020; Surtees, 2020), therefore anti-heteronormative teaching practices are essential if all families are to feel welcome and represented.

Over the last decade or so there has been increasing interest in working theories from the early childhood profession and researchers. This study also centres on working theories, from both tamariki and kaiako perspectives. I will give a broad overview here, but discuss working theories in more detail in the next chapter. Working theories are described in *Te Whāriki* as "the evolving ideas and understandings that children develop as they use their existing knowledge to try to make sense of new experiences" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 23). Working theories evolve through children's "meaningful interactions with people, places and things" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 12) and are woven throughout *Te Whāriki*. Working theories are closely related to learning dispositions, and both concepts reflect learning that is highly valued within the principles and strands of *Te Whāriki* (Sands, Carr, & Lee, 2012).

The development of learning dispositions and working theories in tamariki is expected to be prioritised by kaiako because they both "enable learning across the whole curriculum" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 23). Thus focusing on working theories in my research aligns with the mandate from our national curriculum document. In early childhood education settings, kaiako have immense power regarding which children's working theories get supported and extended, and which tamariki and working theories are ignored or silenced (Areljung & Kelly-Ware, 2017). This became an intrinsic part of my research, and I look at this issue in depth in Chapter 5, and return to it again in Chapter 6.

My research encompasses themes of children's developing working theories relating to LGBTIQ-parented families and ways of doing gender differently, and teachers' support for or silencing of these fledgling working theories. Kaiako decisions around these issues can be influenced by heteronormativity. Thus another key theme in this research involves the interplay of heteronormativity with teachers' own beliefs and their pedagogical enactment of *Te Whāriki*. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, *heteronormativity* as a term was first coined by Michael Warner in 1991 to refer to heterosexual culture's binary view of itself as inevitably the only natural way to structure society – it is a neologism combining heterosexuality/normativity. I will further discuss the concept of heteronormativity as it relates to early childhood education, in Chapter 2.

Whilst a heteronormative society might be very comfortable and non-threatening for those who conform to the hegemonic heterosexual norms expected of its citizens, for anyone who does not fit that mould, life in the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990) can be jarring at best.

This includes non-heterosexual whānau and tamariki who might be accessing early childhood education centres around Aotearoa New Zealand. Many people in Aotearoa New Zealand have written about heteronormativity in early childhood centres (e.g. Gunn, 2008; Gunn, 2015; Kelly, 2013; Morgan & Kelly-Ware, 2016; Surtees, 2003) and despite the efforts of many whānau, academics and kaiako, it persists.

RATIONALE AND KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The motivation for this research has already been outlined to some extent above, but I will clarify it here. My lived experiences as a lesbian parent, speech-language therapist and latterly as an early childhood teacher have all led me to value the role of picturebooks as pedagogical tools for advancing social justice, causing readers/listeners to "question and rethink societal norms" (O'Neil, 2010, p. 41). Through this research I hoped to observe kaiako sharing particular picturebooks with tamariki, and gain some insight into how these pieces of literature can instigate conversations around issues of social justice.

Two related but slightly different research questions were refined during the course of my research:

- What working theories around LGBTIQ-parented families and gender diversity are 3- and 4-year-old children developing as they engage with relevant picturebooks?

- In what ways do early childhood teachers support and encourage or inhibit and silence the development of children's working theories around LGBTIQ families and gender diversity?

In this thesis I aim to answer these two research questions, through providing examples and analysis from the data gathered, and drawing upon this to identify implications and possibilities for both teaching practice and further research.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

In summary, this thesis begins with some preliminaries and an introduction, literature review, discussion of methodology and ethics, two findings chapters and a concluding discussion. These chapters are followed by the appendices, a list of relevant picturebooks and academic references. The chapters are discussed in more detail below.

In Chapter 1, I have explain the background to this study, my rationale and key research questions, and the structure of this thesis.

Chapter 2 looks in depth at the existing academic literature which underpins this study. This chapter addresses the theoretical frameworks which inform my study; heteronormativity in early childhood education; the use of picturebooks to encourage critical thinking; young children's understandings of gender diversity and LGBTIQ whānau; teachers' support and silencing of working theories; and *dangerous knowledge* (Britzman, 1991).

Chapter 3 follows on with a detailed explanation of the methodology underpinning this study, and some discussion of the ethical considerations involved in undertaking research with early childhood kaiako and young children.

The study findings are spread over two chapters, forming the heart of the thesis. Chapter 4 focuses on findings directly related to the tamariki and their developing working theories. Within Chapter 4 there are themes focused on children's working theories around gender signifiers, gender change and family diversity. In Chapter 5 I examine the kaiako responses to these children's working theories. Crucially, the choices kaiako make in supporting or silencing them influence which working theories are discussed amongst other tamariki and the kaiako, and which are ignored, whilst the conversation moves on in another direction.

Key findings and possible implications are summarised in Chapter 6. This chapter also provides an opportunity for some concluding thoughts regarding the study, ideas for furthering early childhood teachers' professional practice in the sometimes risky terrain of dangerous knowledge, and some possible future directions.

Having set the scene for the rest of the thesis, providing background and context to both the research and myself as a researcher, in the next chapter I will explore pertinent literature, as it relates to the scope of this thesis.

CHAPTER 2 - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS, CONCEPTS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I introduce the theoretical frameworks, concepts and research literature which underpin this study, grouped around specific themes. These themes are: theoretical frameworks and concepts; heteronormativity in early childhood education; picturebooks to encourage children's critical thinking; young children's understandings of gender and family diversity; the role of the teacher in relation to working theories; and risk anxiety, moral panic and dangerous knowledge.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND CONCEPTS

The primary theoretical frameworks that have informed this study are Judith Butler's theories on gender performativity and subjectivity, and Foucault's (1980) work regarding power relations and control, subjectivity, normalising gaze and sexuality. Both these philosophers are linked to *queer theory*, which is strongly influenced by post-modern philosophies and poststructural feminism (Jagose, 1996). Queer theory pushes against rigid categorisation and seeks to disrupt normalising ideologies (Olesen, 2018). It is based on the theories of Butler, especially her seminal work Gender Trouble (1990) alongside influences from Foucault (1978), Fuss (1991) and Sedgewick (1990; 1993). Butler and Foucault's theories relevant to my study will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Other theoretical influences on this study include Michael Warner (1991; 1993) for his neologism *heteronormativity* and his development of theories on this concept; Joseph Tobin (1997) for his work on *moral panic*, briefly discussed here. Tobin (1997) postulated that pleasure and desire were under threat in early childhood education due to a discourse of fear regarding "any event suggestive of sexuality" (p. 1) in north American early childhood education back in the 1990s, and arguably continuing today. He expressed frustration with the phenomena of "suppressed desire, victimization, and heteronormativity" (p. 2) in early childhood education, research, theory and practice, and the environment of moral panic that this produces. Heteronormativity in early childhood education is the topic of the next section of this chapter, and Warner's (1991; 1993) writing is considered there.

QUEER THEORY

Queer theory is a slippery concept, inherently difficult to define. For example: "Queer theory is a collective of intellectual speculations and challenges to the social and political constructions of sexualized and gender identity" (Alexander, 2018, p. 278). Queer theory encourages us to see the many factors contributing to heteronormativity, and highlights the way certain individuals and families are privileged over others (Few-Demo et al, 2016). Queering processes come into play when gender, sexuality, and/or family binaries are challenged (Oswald, Blume & Marks, 2011). I anticipated that queer theory would enable me to explore how tamariki develop working theories in response to picturebooks addressing themes of gender diversity and LGBTIQ families and whānau as well as to analyse the power teachers have to support or silence these working theories. As the study progressed, queer theory was invaluable in aiding analysis of the data collected from both from tamariki and kaiako.

In this thesis, the term *queer* is used loosely to denote those individuals and groups of people whose sexuality and/or gender expression and/or ways of making and being a family run counter to the hegemonic heteronorm. As already implied, queer is a term that refuses to be pinned down. It is a category in the process of becoming, a label that rejects attempts to place it neatly in a box - a term whose "definitional indeterminacy, its elasticity, is one of its constituent characteristics" (Jagose, 1996, p. 1). Jagose further claims that for the term "queer," part of its political efficacy actually depends on this very resistance to being precisely defined. Queer resists hegemonic stability, and instead "focuses on mismatches between sex, gender, and desire" (Jagose, 1996, p. 3). Much of what is discussed in the pages of this thesis veers towards the queer.

JUDITH BUTLER

Judith Butler's seminal theories on gender performativity, subjectivity and sexuality (1990; 2004) have had significant implications for feminist and queer theories and politics. They are key in my interpretation of data relating to children's working theories around gender signifiers and gender change, terms I define shortly. Butler (1990) in her classic book *Gender trouble* is concerned with the ways that the identity categories of sex and gender are established, and examines their essential role in a societal system of compulsory heterosexuality. Butler argues that gender can be seen as an enforced cultural performance, driven by compulsory heterosexuality, and gender is therefore performative.

Butler (1990) argues that performativity involves the reiteration and repetition of certain ways of saying, being and doing. Butler states that repeatedly performing these small acts constitutes our identity, whether that be gender identity or another facet of our humanity. In her 2004 publication *Undoing gender*, Butler reconsiders her earlier views of gender performativity, and places her gender norm critique within the framework of human persistence and survival. It could be argued that tamariki repeatedly performing binary gender, as detailed in Chapter 4, may be doing so partially to ensure their acceptance and "survival" amongst their peers in the socio-cultural setting of an early childhood centre.

One of Butler's major concepts in *Gender trouble* (1990) is that of the heterosexual matrix, a "tripartite sex-gender-sexuality system" (Tredway, 2014, p.164) which explains how we make assumptions about what we experience, based on this invisible heterosexualised framework permeating society. In *Bodies that matter* (1993), Butler revises the term to *heterosexual hegemony* but its purpose remains – as a means of regulating bodies to ensure they perform their gender as required by a heteronormative society. Whatever the intentions of teachers and parents, children grow up immersed in this heterosexual matrix, subject to heteronormativity since before they are even born. Consider the recent trend of mid-pregnancy *gender reveal* parties, and the often highly-gendered gifts presented to the expectant parents at baby showers when the gender of the foetus is known (see for example, Gieseler, 2018). This type of event is saturated in heteronormativity, deeply enmeshed in the heterosexual matrix where only two genders are acknowledged: male or female.

Drawing on Butler's (1990) notion of the heterosexual matrix, Sandretto (2018) explains how logically there are only two options available for a *normally gendered* person: "male that desires a female or female that desires a male" (p. 198), and any person who desires someone of the same gender therefore lives outside the *norm*. Within the heterosexual matrix/hegemony, gender signifiers or gender attributes are ways that we can convey information about our gender, through means such as gait, hair length, jewellery, dress, and ways of speaking for example. In this study gender signifiers became an important theme in tamariki working theories, and this is explored in Chapter 4. Gendered norms within the heterosexual matrix dictate that people of specific genders are seen to perform in certain ways, and those who fail to meet the binary gender standards required may be subject to gender policing (Mayeza, 2017; 2018) and/or disciplining for transgressions (Barron & Capous-Desyllas, 2017).

The second gender-related working theory theme that emerged from the tamariki data was gender change. In terms of the working theories tamariki shared, which will be discussed in Chapter 4, gender change refers to the process of someone assigned as one binary gender "becoming" another. In more common parlance it may be called *gender variance* (Rahilly, 2015) *gender non-conforming* (Erickson-Schroth, 2014) or the person may be considered *transgender* (Bevan, 2017; Barron & Capous-Desyllas, 2017). Meanwhile, Jeffreys and Gottschalk (2014) question the validity of such concepts, and call for the abolition of gender which would remove the need for terms like these. Whilst tamariki tended to reinforce binary gender signifiers in themselves and each other, there were also many instances when tamariki disrupted the hegemonic heterosexual matrix ideals of fixed gender.

MICHEL FOUCAULT

Michel Foucault was a gay French historian and philosopher, associated with the structuralist and post-structuralist movements. In Michel Foucault's (1980) view *power relations* exist as a reciprocal relationship between power and knowledge, and are used as a form of social control on the population through social institutions such as - in the context of my study - early childhood education. He refutes the common view that knowledge *is* power, because if they were one and the same thing then there would be no relationship between them to study. Foucault considered power to be a means of shaping the behaviour of others when there is an unbalanced relationship between two free subjects. One acts upon the other, one is acted upon, but, importantly, with no force involved. It can thus be seen that early childhood kaiako are quite literally powerful – full of power – in comparison to tamariki in early childhood centres. At the same time, tamariki wield their own power in the way they challenge kaiako in all sorts of ways, as shown in many of the data extracts in Chapter 4. Nevertheless, kaiako are complicit in the structures of disciplinary power regardless of best intentions, aspirations or level of compliance and participation.

Foucault (1990) cautions that we must be vigilant about the effect we have through everything we participate in. This vigilance might minimise the controlling effects caused by the operation of knowledge and acts of power in normalising disciplining societies such as our own. He states "My main concern [is] to locate the forms of power, the channels it takes, and the discourses it permeates in order to reach the most tenuous individual modes of behavior" (Foucault, 1990, p. 11). This topic of power relations is influential in analysis of

this study's data relating to kaiako responses to tamariki working theories, as explored in Chapter 5.

Foucault (1980) explains the term *discourse* as a grid of power and knowledge that envelops a culture, for example through its writing, language, theory, practice, pedagogy and law. Within feminist post-structural thought, the term *discourse* is used to describe particular bodies of knowledge that have come to be seen as true or common sense, as a result of being repeatedly spoken about (Blaise & Taylor, 2012). Hegemonic discourses are those bodies of knowledge assumed to be true because they align with the dominant culture (heterosexual, white, patriarchal). Foucault (1980) himself explains it this way: "Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true" (p. 131). In a society such as ours heteronormativity is one of those dominant hegemonic discourses, and the following section of this chapter discusses its influence within early childhood education.

HETERONORMATIVITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

> Invisibility is a dangerous and powerful condition, and lesbians are not the only people to know it. When those who have the power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you, whether you are dark-skinned, old, disabled, female, or speak with a different accent or dialect than theirs, when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing. Yet you know you exist and others like you, that this is a game with mirrors. It takes some strength of soul – and not just individual strength, but collective understanding – to resist this void, this nonbeing, into which you are thrust, and to stand up, demanding to be seen and heard. And to make yourself visible, to claim that your experience is just as real and normative as any other...can mean making yourself vulnerable. (Rich, 1986, p. 199).

The sentiment behind Adrienne Rich's words above is one of the contributing factors to my striving for inclusion and celebration of LGBTIQ people in education settings and society as a whole. I suggest that Rich is describing amongst other things, what it feels like to be on the

receiving end of heteronormativity – that *void of invisibility*. As mentioned in the Introduction, heteronormativity refers to heterosexual culture's assumption that heterosexuality (attraction to the opposite gender-binary) is the only natural way to structure society.

The concept of heteronormativity was introduced by Michael Warner in his landmark work, *Fear of a queer planet* (1991; 1993). He laments the fact that, "Even when coupled with a toleration of minority sexualities, heteronormativity can be overcome only by actively imagining a necessarily and desirably queer world" (1993, p. xvi). It follows then that in order to successfully work to interrupt and disrupt heteronormativity in early childhood education settings, kaiako need to "queer the whāriki" (Surtees, 2003, p. 143). In considering heteronormativity in social theory, Warner references Monique Wittig (1992): "[T]o live in society is to live in heterosexuality... Heterosexuality is always already there within all mental categories" (p. xxi). That is to say that heterosexuality, due to the milieu of heteronormativity is always the assumption, unless measures are taken to transgress that expectation.

With reference to Foucault (1980), heteronormativity can be viewed as a dominant discourse within Aotearoa New Zealand society. Pervasive and often invisible norms of heterosexuality mean that anyone who does not identify as heterosexual is less valued. Early childhood education centres are sexualised sites, where teachers may act to *police* gender expression and sexuality within them (Surtees 2008; Mayeza, 2018; Bryan, 2019). They are also important cultural and social spaces where young tamariki learn to interact with others different from themselves, but whether deliberately or not – widespread heteronormativity within Aotearoa New Zealand's education system often makes queer cultures, and LGBTIQ families, invisible.

In contrast to this, according to *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017), tamariki and whānau have a fundamental right to a sense of belonging in early childhood education settings. *Te Whāriki* is an "inclusive curriculum - a curriculum for all children" (p. 13) and specifically encompasses diversity of "family structure and values" (p. 13), with the promise that "all children will be empowered to learn with and alongside others by engaging in experiences that have meaning for them" (p. 13). As such, it is a resource that can be used to push back against heteronormativity. One way for kaiako to work towards this goal of an

inclusive curriculum is by actively encouraging acknowledgement of diverse family structures within the early childhood education centre (Terreni, Gunn, Kelly & Surtees, 2010). In more recent years another Aotearoa New Zealand researcher, Sandretto (2018), has made a case for teaching (literacy) with "queer intent" (p. 197), to work towards deconstructing heteronormativity in the classroom.

By incorporating first-hand responses from tamariki in response to selected anti-heteronormative picturebooks, my research builds upon many studies already completed in Aotearoa New Zealand (for example Surtees 2006, 2008; Surtees & Gunn 2010; Carpenter & Lee 2010; Lee 2010; Gunn 2008; Gunn 2011; Kelly, 2012; Morgan & Kelly-Ware, 2016; Kelly-Ware, 2016). A recurring theme in these studies is that even though there is greater visibility of LGBTIQ people generally, heteronormativity is pervasive within society. Despite this, there has been substantial legislative progress in this country regarding rights for LGBTIQ people. For example, civil unions became available in April 2005 under The Civil Union Act, 2004; legal parenthood for lesbian non-birth mothers is now possible in some situations (Status of Children Amendment Act, 2004); and marriage equality realised (The Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Act, 2013). This latter Act removed the legal prohibition against people of the same gender marrying, and caused much heated heteronormative debate in the Aotearoa New Zealand media, as discussed in Goodwin, Lyons and Stephen (2014). Yet, even with this legislation in place, the aims of *Te Whāriki*, and the efforts of many educators, early childhood education is entrenched in heteronormativity.

Overseas, there is a burgeoning of academic literature focused on themes of heteronormativity within early childhood education. For example, in Sweden Sotevik, Hammarén and Hellman (2019) explore the effects of age-coded heteronormativity in early childhood education. They investigated how the Swedish children studied tended to reproduce, renegotiate and challenge heteronormativity during predominantly female-led imaginative "mum, dad, child" play. Collaborating from disparate locations of Hong Kong and Australia, Blaise and Taylor (2012) use queer theory as a lens to rethink gender equity in early childhood education. They explain how the hegemonic heterosexual norms of society and dominant gender discourses have a powerful effect on children's gendered behaviour. Australians Davies and Robinson (2013) state that: "the normative family is still viewed as heterosexual, with queer families continuing to be excluded and rendered invisible in most representations of family" (p. 40). In South Africa, Bryan (2019) explores the play activities

of Black boys who "do not fit into hegemonic and Black masculine norms and expectations" (p. 309), and provides guidelines for teachers to engage in critical counter hegemonic praxis.

PICTUREBOOKS TO ENCOURAGE CRITICAL THINKING

Roche (2015) extols the value in using picturebooks even with very young children as a way of encouraging critical thinking. Blakeney-Williams and Daly (2013) focus on the importance of teachers selecting picturebooks that resonate with them personally, demonstrating personal attachment and engagement with the books to the children they teach. They further explain, "It is the teacher modelling, discussion, and teaching from the picture books that provides the space for children to draw on their range of life experiences and cultural contexts" (p. 47). It seems that picturebooks have great potential to be used as a tool for promoting social justice. Something this study explored was whether teachers at one kindergarten use queer-themed picturebooks for this purpose. Roche points out the importance of allowing time for children to pay attention to the illustrations as well as the text, in order to enhance their visual literacy and critical thinking. She talks at length about the benefits of "interactive readalouds" (p. 49) with teachers sharing books with a group of children. Roche claims that these *interactive readalouds* are "genuine and authentic spaces for real engagement with literature" (p. 49) and she follows the ideas of Bakhtin (1981) that reading followed by *dialoguing* is essential for comprehension.

One way of broadly encouraging children's critical thinking is to enhance their social agency. Mackey and de Vocht-van Alphen (2016) explore the use of teacher-child dialogues and picturebook sharing to encourage this. Exploring social justice, Gunn and de Vocht-van Alphen (2011) talk of the richness and interest in dialogues between teachers and children around issues of social justice. Kelly (2012; 2013) has investigated the use of picturebooks to encourage critical thinking and enhance young children's understandings of queer families. In her 2013 study, Kelly provided a set of 13 picturebooks, and teachers selected 10 of those books to share with 3-5-year-old children. Teachers were interviewed, and over the course of a month they gathered data about the sharing of these picturebooks with the children. Data included teachers' reports of children's responses to the picturebooks. Kelly suggested that an omission in her research was "hearing children's voices directly" (p. 28), and recommended that further research might record children's responses to the books directly rather than second-hand via teachers. This was one of the factors that influenced the research design for this study, and is discussed further in Chapter 3.

Hawkins (2008) discusses how children's books can encourage children to ponder the existence of social justice issues and their thoughts around these. Children are better able to understand others' perspectives through tools such as picturebooks according to Souto-Manning (2009), and this increased awareness can encourage them to take action towards social justice and equity. Likewise, Bishop (1990) introduces the concept of *mirror books* which reflect ones own lived experience, and *window books* which provide a window into other people's experiences, different from the reader's own, thereby building understanding of others' viewpoints.

Exploring the use of picturebooks as a *social studies strategy* in early childhood education, Meléndez (2015) discusses how teachers can "use social studies to explore social justice issues" (p. 49). Meléndez considers how books are useful in helping children explore social justice issues mirroring real events in their lives. She also cites the view of Williams and Cooney (2006) that if children grow up feeling strong in their own individual and group identities whilst embracing a sense of harmony with diverse others, then they will more likely become adults who are prepared to take a stand for a more socially just and equitable society. Meanwhile, Lambert and Seeger (2015) recommend a whole book approach to get even the youngest of children looking at every aspect of the picturebook, thinking with their eyes and engaging in critical thinking. They underline the importance of reading books *with* children rather than *to* them, in order to ensure an interactive discussion promoting critical thinking and an appreciation of each book's text, main points, illustrations and design.

Miller (2019) identifies and analyses an emerging category of children's literature representing transgender and gender creative child characters. She describes this genre as "new queer children's literature" (p. 1645) and suggests that an ambivalent reading of these texts and images can "help us understand the queer present at its most affirmative" (p. 1645). Another researcher who values the use of picturebooks in exploring gender and sexuality diversity is DePalma (2016). She explores the *queer possibilities* of proactively incorporating these picturebooks into primary school classrooms, as part of the British-based *No Outsiders* research project, aiming to address sexualities equity in primary schools due to concerns over school-based homophobic[6] bullying. Yet, for some people, DePalma reports the inclusion of

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[6] Homophobia refers to a range of negative attitudes and feelings towards those who identify as LGBTIQ

these picturebooks in the curriculum represented a "terrifying rupture to the comfortable and invisible heteronormative school narrative" (p. 834).

Taylor (2012) and Lester (2014) have an entirely different complaint. They both rail against the homonormativity which has crept into many picturebooks which, if judging a book by its cover, appear to be anti-heteronormative and inclusive of gender and family diversity. Lester examined 68 queer-themed picturebooks and found that perhaps counter-intuitively, far from disrupting the heterosexual matrix, most of them reinforced heteronormativity. They did this by celebrating only "homonormative, non-threatening LGBT characters that conform to expected gender roles, have a vested interest parenting and are White and upper middle class" (p. 244). Further, Lester contests that children's books with queer themes frequently fail to challenge intersectional forms of oppression. Taylor (2012) points out that this celebration of homonormative subjects reproduces dominant hegemonic discourses and obscures all other forms of queer, causing a stealthy yet dangerous collective queer paralysis.

Picturebook publishing in the gender diversity/family diversity genres has increased substantially since Rowell's (2007) study lamented the dearth of picturebooks reflecting lesbian and gay families. These picturebooks are still under-represented, however, in public libraries and educational settings in Aotearoa New Zealand (Hardie, 2011) as previously mentioned. Jeff Sapp (2010) reviewed gay and lesbian-themed early childhood education literature, and provided a review of 22 gay- and lesbian-themed picturebooks published in the U.S.A. since the year 2000. He also contrasted them with 27 earlier books of the same genre reviewed by Day (2000, cited in Sapp, 2010). Sapp found that the picturebooks published between 2001 and 2007 were generally more nuanced and appealing to children than the early heroic, but rather didactic attempts at lesbian and gay themed picture books. Sapp speculates at what the next 10 years may hold, and now ten years later in 2020 I suggest that his wish for books portraying gender diverse or transgender characters has come to fruition. Furthermore, around the world a new phenomenon has emerged in some libraries – that of "Drag queen storytime" (Campbell Naidoo, 2018, p. 12). This usually involves a drag queen performer reading stories and singing songs, similar to a typical storytime session at a library. A variety of titles may be shared, and much of the value is from the children interacting with someone who defies gender stereotypes, and the underlying message that "It's ok to be who you are" (p. 16).

Some of the picturebooks I shared as part of this research deliberately interrupt gender norms, and illuminate other ways of doing gender, for example: *Morris Micklewhite and the tangerine dress* (Baldacchino, 2014)*; I am Jazz* (Herthel, Jennings & McNicholas, 2014)*; I'm a girl!* (Ismail, 2015)*; Jacob's new dress* (Hoffman, Hoffman & Case, 2014)*;* and *My Princess boy* (Kilodavis & DeSimone, 2010)*.* These picturebooks and others detailed in the Picturebook List – for instance *Julian is a mermaid* (Love, 2018), and *Neither* (Anderson, 2018) – prove that published picturebooks portraying transgender or gender diverse characters have become a reality. Books depicting gay males are considered in Crisp's (2018) research discussing political and literary considerations for kaiako and others evaluating children's literature for authentic representations of gay males rather than stereotyped anachronisms. Sciurba (2017) critically examines picturebook representations of gender variance in male characters, in order to assess their viability for addressing social justice issues with elementary students in the U.S.A. She analysed 12 picturebooks which met these criteria – five of which feature in my study – and found various examples of gender variant behaviour within them. Nevertheless, despite the burgeoning supply of picturebooks interrupting gender norms, as Epstein (2014) states, bisexuality still largely remains invisible even in queer-leaning picturebooks.

Sandretto (2018, p. 197) argues that when queer theory and critical literacy band together they can be used by teachers and students to resist Warner's (1991) "regimes of the normal" (p. 16). Whilst Sandretto's research involved primary school teachers and children, some of the learnings gleaned can equally be applied to early childhood education settings and teachers, as touched upon earlier in this chapter. For example, Sandretto talks about the normal/abnormal binary, and how kaiako can use *queer intent* with the deliberate teaching strategy of queering/questioning this binary logic, in order to allow a different kind of meaning-making to flourish in children's minds. In this way, Sandretto postulates, we can "create opportunities to revise restrictive norms that constrain the ways we love and live" (p. 208). I will revisit this strategy again in Chapters 5 and 6.

Despite the increasing publication of LGBTIQ-themed picturebooks, heteronormativity could be one explanation for my anecdotal observation that they are not widely evidenced in education settings. In preparation for undertaking this study, in 2016 and 2017 I obtained many different picturebooks which look at gender and families through a queer lens. From approximately 50 titles of varying quality, I selected those which I believd would appeal to

tamariki and kaiako alike, and support the development of critical thinking and working theories around gender and family diversity in the tamariki.

As mentioned previously, the 14 picturebooks used in the research, alongside some other queer-leaning picturebooks can be found in the Picturebook List. In my own teaching experience prior to this research, it had been rare to find any resources portraying LGBTIQ families or gender diversity in posters, picturebooks or other material accessible to children/families in contemporary early childhood education centres in Aotearoa New Zealand. This has been partially addressed in the kindergarten where I work, through acquisition of picturebooks used in the research presented in this thesis, prominent display of several small rainbow flags and some small but colourful cartoon-style *Stonewall*[7] posters showing a diverse range of whānau types emblazoned with the words "Different families, same love." In the country as a whole, much still remains to be done, however.

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN WORKING THEORIES AND SUSTAINED SHARED THINKING

For nearly the last 25 years in Aotearoa New Zealand, working theories and learning dispositions have been the two main learning outcomes foregrounded by *Te Whāriki*. As introduced in Chapter 1, learning theories are "the evolving ideas and understandings that children develop as they use their existing knowledge to try to make sense of new experiences" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 23). Working theories are specifically referenced in two of the twenty learning outcomes within *Te Whāriki*. In strand 5 of *Te Whāriki* – Exploration/Mana aotūroa – one of the goals states: "Children experience an environment where: They develop working theories for making sense of the natural, social, physical and material worlds." The associated learning outcome is: "Over time and with guidance and encouragement, children become increasingly capable of: Making sense of their worlds by generating and refining working theories – te rangahau me te mātauranga" (Ministry of Education, p. 47). Likewise, in Strand 3 – Contribution/Mana tangata – the goal "They are affirmed as individuals" is linked with the learning outcome: "Recognising and appreciating their own ability to learn/Te rangatiratanga." Another description of working

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[7] Stonewall is a British charity for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, aiming to empower individuals, transform institutions and work for LGBT-friendly laws across the U.K.

theories is supplied by Davis and Peters (2011), who state that working theories are "islands of interest...[and] expertise" (p. 9).

Whatever the definition used, kaiako have a crucial role in recognising children's working theories as they emerge, and making decisions around fostering or challenging these working theories. Depending on how kaiako react to working theories which are under construction, these may develop or disappear. Davis and McKenzie (2016) insist it is imperative that kaiako are attuned to noticing and responding to these fledgling working theories. These authors are mentioned again in Chapter 5 regarding the findings relating to kaiako responses to working theories. They suggest that, by nurturing tamariki language, culture and identity through the lens of working theories, kaiako can "work with young children to influence their thinking, actions and attitudes" (p. 9). The following year, Davis and McKenzie (2017) found that children's working theories fall into four broad and overlapping categories, as they grapple to make sense of: cultural values and practices; connections; their cultural selves; and other people. Furthermore, in terms of children's working theories, if kaiako theorised around children's expressions, actions, ideas and understandings which tamariki used to make sense of new experiences, then kaiako "were in a stronger position to design more focused and worthwhile teaching responses" for these tamariki (Davis & McKenzie, 2017, p. 7).

One of the ways that kaiako can foster and develop children's working theories is through a process known as "sustained shared thinking" (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010b), sometimes abbreviated to SST. *Sustained shared thinking* can be defined as:

> An episode in which two or more individuals 'work together' in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative etc. Both parties must contribute to the thinking and it must develop and extend the understanding. (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden & Bell, 2002, p. 8).

Perhaps one of the obvious key concepts in sustained shared thinking is that it is *shared*. In an early childhood education setting that could mean that a kaiako and a tamaiti (or multiple tamariki) work together in an active and creative process. As an alternative, it could involve no input from a teacher but two or more tamariki, one of whom is more knowledgeable about something. The defining factor in the *shared* aspect of sustained shared thinking, however, is

that it is a "true two-way exchange with information flowing both ways" (Brodie, 2014, p. 4) so the kaiako learns from the tamaiti and vice versa. Regarding this aspect of sustained shared thinking, Purdon (2016) comments that,

> In Siraj-Blatchford and Smith's study (2010), one of the success factors for effective SST was the ability of adults to show an interest in a conversation led by the child, extend it and develop it without resorting to their personal agendas which often involved trying too hard to lead children to the 'right' answer" (Purdon, 2016, p. 271).

One of the ways for kaiako to avoid trying to steer tamariki towards a particular outcome is by deeply listening to the tamaiti or tamariki, and following their lead. In Purdon's (2016) study of kaiako perspectives of sustained shared thinking, one practitioner said: "We listen to them, they listen to us, but they take the lead" (p. 275). On a related topic, Meade et al. (2013) investigate whose goals and interests are foregrounded when kaiako join in tamariki play with a pedagogical intent – that is, with a teaching goal in mind. In line with British results (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009), Meade et al. found that sustained shared thinking occurred in less than 10% of all teacher-child interactions, and was most likely if a kaiako was qualified, especially in settings where all kaiako were qualified. In line with Davis and McKenzie's (2017) findings, Meade et al. concluded: "Teachers' active use of theorising encourages young children to critically examine and problem solve. The basis must be the teacher believing the child has this capacity and knowing the child's dispositions for learning" (p. 52).

Returning finally to working theories, they involve "children's theorising about the social and material worlds" according to Areljung and Kelly-Ware (2017, p. 370). These authors emphasise the importance of teachers' role in supporting or silencing childrens' emerging working theories. This focus on the teachers' role has now become a strong focus of my thinking in this thesis. I realise the power teachers wield in selecting which working theories are given airtime – "what and whose theories get unpacked and extended" (Areljung and Kelly-Ware, 2017, p. 370) - and which working theories are just quietly ignored. One of the likely factors in teachers' instantaneous classification of working theories as worthy of

support or silencing is the degree of *risk* involved, and this is addressed in the next section of this chapter.

Children's access to sexual knowledge has always been considered *risky* due to dominant discourses of *childhood innocence* (Davies & Robinson, 2010; Taylor, 2010). These discourses are built upon distinctions between adult sexuality and childhood asexuality and innocence. Taylor states that within contemporary Western thinking there is the "widespread belief that sexuality is both antithetical to childhood and a threat to children's natural innocence" (p. 48). Children tend to build narratives around relationships and sexual knowledge using whatever information sources they can access. This can include resources such as teacher talk, parental discussions, older siblings and friends' conversations, and picturebooks. Britzman (1991) introduced the concept of *dangerous knowledge*, resting on the dominant discourse of children innocence, with the relationship between childhood and sexuality viewed as risky and dangerous due to the emotional immaturity of tamariki.

Since the early 1990s, many researchers have explored topics around dangerous and difficult knowledge. Robinson (2008) discusses the *moral panic* (Tobin, 1997) which tends to be associated with any mention of childhood and sexuality. Robinson argues that moral panic is deliberately deployed as a political strategy to assist in maintaining the "hegemony of the nuclear family, the sanctity of heterosexual relationships and the heteronormative social order" (p. 114). According to Robinson, Smith and Davies (2017), childhood innocence is a hegemonic discourse used to restrict children's access to knowledge, particularly about sexuality (Davies & Robinson 2010, 2013; Robinson 2012, 2015).

In some of the picturebooks offered to kaiako as part of this research project, LGBTIQ-parented families are highlighted. Burt, Gelnaw and Klinger Lesser (2010) discuss the way in which kaiako talking about these families often gets confused with kaiako talking about sex:

> When we speak about the parents of a child who has one mother and one father, no one assumes we are talking about sex. Yet, if we speak of a child's two mommies or two daddies, all of a sudden, the topic of sex often seems to be in the forefront. (Burt, Gelnaw and Klinger Lesser, 2010, p. 98).

As well as heteronormativity, this discrepancy is likely entwined with discourses of childhood innocence, risk and dangerous knowledge, which are likely to influence how kaiako react to children's learning theories. These hegemonic discourses certainly seemed to be operating in many of the data examples discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

In this chapter I have explained the theoretical concepts and frameworks underpinning the research, and explored literature relating to various aspects of the study. Theoretical frameworks discussed include queer theory, Butler's (1990) concept of gender performativity, Foucault's (1980) philosophical work on discourses and power relationships, and Tobin's (1997) concept of moral panic, related to dominant discourses of childhood innocence. These theories and concepts permeate deep into the data collected from both kaiako and tamariki, as I will show in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

Through the lenses of power, gender norms, and hegemonic discourses, I have discussed the persistence of heteronormativity in early childhood education, with reference to many authors. Next, the focus of this chapter shifted towards picturebooks as a tool to encourage critical thinking, especially around the topics of gender diversity and LGBTIQ-parented whānau. Through their exposure to selected picturebooks in this study, tamariki developed working theories and engaged in some instances of sustained shared thinking with their kaiako. Teachers' roles regarding children's working theories and sustained shared thinking were explored in this chapter, in relation to the research literature. The literature pointed to the power that kaiako have in deciding which working theories to silence and which to support (Areljung & Kelly-Ware, 2017). Finally, I have shared some literature pertaining to childhood innocence, risk and dangerous knowledge, which can be a contributing factor to kaiako unwillingness to unpack and develop certain working theories. In Chapter 3 I will highlight the research methodology and ethical considerations guiding this study.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY AND ETHICS

"Research – like life – is a messy, contradictory affair." (Plummer, 2011, p. 195).

INTRODUCTION

As already mentioned in Chapter 1, this research project and thesis grew out of my fascination with children's development of working theories around gender diversity and LGBTQ-parented families. It had its beginnings some 13 years before I began my research journey, in our family's and my son's experiences in early childhood education. The way my lesbian-led family was treated by teachers, and later how my son's friends reacted to his *two mum family* and *non-stereotypical masculinity* led me to wonder how it is that tamariki build their working theories around gender, and family difference and diversity. From this starting point so many years before, my research story followed a meandering path, which left me wondering how I could turn this subjective yet nebulous interest into a valid research study. As the quote opening this chapter acknowledges, research and life are indeed contradictory and messy affairs.

With the guidance of my research supervisors, however, beginning in 2017 I found a productive way to research my topic of interest, and navigated the University of Canterbury ethics requirements. Through this research in one particular kindergarten I have been able to explore the development of children's working theories in response to picturebooks foregrounding gender and family diversity. I have also investigated whether teachers used picturebooks as tools for social justice and the ways that they reproduce or challenge heteronormativity perhaps through silence, ignoring, unpacking or supportive comments. Akin to the approach used by Mackey and de Vocht-van Alphen (2016), picturebooks were a key resource to support tamariki in expressing their views - in my research this was facilitated by teachers during picturebook sharing sessions.

In this chapter, I share details of the research design used for this project, aspects of my positioning within the research not previously introduced, and some ethical considerations prior to and during the study. I then explain the process of participant recruitment and selection, along with providing information on each research participant. Next, I discuss how I carried out data collection and analysis, before presenting a concluding discussion.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design is all about building a plan for proceeding. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), qualitative research design can be situated anywhere on a continuum from "rigorous design principles on one end, to emergent, less well-constructed directives on the other" (p. 310). This research sits somewhere in the middle. At the beginning of my research, I had to consider which research approach to use. The main choices seemed to be qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods. One of the broad aims of my research project was to understand and describe meaningful social action, which Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault (2018) state is a primary goal of qualitative research. Specifically, I hoped to gain greater understanding of some of the meanings young children might ascribe to family and gender, through exploring the childrens' developing working theories. At the beginning of my research journey I considered the teachers' role in supporting or silencing these working theories to be a secondary consideration, although by the end of my research, I realised the meanings ascribed to teacher's social actions were crucial. Qualitative research is an eclectic set of complex interpretive methods and practices, embracing tensions and contradictions within its methods, findings, and interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018), all of which made it a good fit for my study.

My research topic sits under the umbrella of *feminist qualitative research* (DeVault, 2018), with its emphasis on knowledges: "Whose knowledges? Where and how obtained, by whom, from whom, and for what purposes?" (Oelesen, 2018, p. 152). This study looks at children's knowledges shown through their emerging working theories, but also kaiako knowledges. It soon became clear that with the messy data I would potentially be wrangling, qualitative research with its *bottom up* basis was better suited to my study than the more prescriptive *top-down* format of quantitative research methodology. The methods used were centred on participant observation during picturebook sharing sessions, led by kaiako familiar to the tamariki. Picturebooks were used as a stimulus for discussions around gender and family diversity because picturebooks are crucial pieces of literature during early childhood. They are ubiquitous and commonplace, yet also so varied in the many worlds they can hold within their covers. Picturebooks are acknowledged in the research as a means of supporting children to express their thoughts (Mackey & de Vocht-van Alphen, 2016). Souto-Manning (2009) explains how children are able to use picturebooks as tools for understanding others' perspectives, which is an important part of their learning as tamariki build working theories around constructs of gender and family.

I opted to conduct the research in the kindergarten where I worked. This decision was partially influenced by the work of Kelly (2013), who provided warning of potential pitfalls I may stumble across in participant selection. She reported that her research did not proceed in the first early childhood education setting she approached, due to several teachers' issues with the picturebooks' content - they were "unhappy to be seen to be *promoting homosexuality*" (p. 25). Whilst there was certainly no intention to be promoting homosexuality, either by Kelly or myself, I considered that researching in the kindergarten where I was employed would be simpler for several reasons. Due to our pre-existing strong relationships, teacher and child participants were relatively easy to recruit. Kaiako had no hesitation to teach tamariki using the selection of picturebooks I provided. On reflection, this ease was perhaps thanks in part to their familiarity with my social justice agenda, my open identification as a lesbian kaiako, and my personal kaupapa regarding gender performativity and LGBTIQ families. Although I work in the infant and toddler room at the kindergarten, this research was carried out in the over 2s room, specifically with a group of 3-4-year-old children and their teachers. This gave me a slight *distance* from the research participants during my work life, whilst retaining the advantage of the strong interpersonal relationships I already had with all the parents, children and teachers across the kindergarten.

Potential disadvantages of researching in the early childhood education setting where I work included the possibility of kaiako research participants treating the research less seriously because it was "only" being carried out by a work colleague; kaiako or whānau feeling pressured to take part because of a sense of duty or wanting to help; and participant anonymity being harder to maintain given that I specifically identify the research kindergarten as the one where I work. If a reader were to ascertain which kindergarten employs me, then identifying participants (especially kaiako) would likely not be a complex task. Another potential pitfall could have been the "paradox of familiarity" (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010a, p. 273) which I discuss later in this chapter. On balance, however, the advantages seemed to outweigh the disadvantages, so research proceeded in the kindergarten where I am employed. This proved to be a satisfactory decision for all concerned, and other than my lasting concerns re the potential risk to participant anonymity, none of the perceived pitfalls eventuated.

POSITIONING MYSELF IN THE RESEARCH

One of the main characteristics of qualitative research is that the researcher is an acknowledged central part of the entire research process (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2016). It is impossible to remove the researcher from the research equation, so instead the researcher's personal values are acknowledged in a transparent manner, and serve to frame the research context. This explicit centrality of the researcher appealed to me, and enabled me to frame my research within the influences that my own values and viewpoints provided. In Chapter 1 I acknowledged that my personal and professional interests in carrying out my research project were due to my own experiences of heteronormativity in early childhood education both as a parent and as a teacher. In this section, I add to my earlier discussion, with a focus on reflexivity, subjectivities and my potential placing within the insider/outsider dichotomy (Milligan, 2016).

Pillow (2003) considers reflexivity, increasing attention on researcher subjectivities and how "who I am, who I have been, who I think I am and how I feel affect data collection and analysis" (p. 176). These issues will be explored further below. Pillow discusses reflexivity as a way of questioning research practices in light of the researcher's subjectivities. "Whose story is it, the researcher or the researched?" (p. 176). My part in this research story is that amongst the many facets of my identity previously shared in Chapter 1, I am lesbian. This "lived experience" as a white cis-gender lesbian female often feeling "othered," means that through directly experiencing the effects of heteronormativity I have a strong urge to create positive change regarding inclusion and celebration of diversity in our educational system, a point introduced in the introductory chapter.

There are a plethora of reasons why someone may feel othered rather than recognised and included, and queer experiences are only one aspect of that - oppression is intersectional. My own experiences drive me to help create positive social change, however, and to contribute towards a society that truly values our human diversity as a strength. Throughout the research process I have consciously taken care that these personal experiences combined with my social justice lens are not steering the research in the way I *want it to go*.

Taking into account my identity as an early childhood teacher, in this research project I could be considered an insider researcher, potentially leading to the *paradox of familiarity* (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010a). Siraj-Blatchford states this paradox occurs when a shared framework of

understanding such as I have with the local kindergarten community makes it relatively easy to interpret the behaviour of community members, but paradoxically difficult to isolate and make explicit the principles behind the behaviour. Due to my identity as a lesbian parent within the context of my research, however, I find myself pondering whether I am an insider, outsider or "inbetweener" (Milligan, 2016, p. 248). Milligan supports several other authors who argue against the dichotomy of insider versus outsider, instead positing the term inbetweener to recognise that the researcher can actively attempt to place themselves in between. Whilst I worked (and still work) in the kindergarten where my research took place, I did not directly teach the child participants in my study, nor did I work as part of the team of *over 2s* teachers who led the picturebook sharing sessions. Rather, I taught in the next door room with the younger children aged 0-2. Outsider? Insider? Inbetweener? I think the latter is the best fit, as I am "neither entirely inside nor outside" the research domain (Milligan, 2016, p. 235). In relation to my teaching colleagues, my identity as lesbian also sets me somewhat apart. Whilst I am a kaiako (insider), my experiences 15-20 years ago as the lesbian parent of a pre-school child nurtured in a multi-parent family constellation, navigating the heteronormative early childhood system as a parent give me an outsider perspective too. Once again I am an *inbetweener*.

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

Absolutely key to the success of this research was securing a research location. Whilst I considered that the kindergarten which employed me would be an ideal location in which to research, that depended on consent from the local kindergarten association, the kindergarten's head teacher, and individual teachers who might choose to become research participants. To begin, I spoke informally to the head teacher to explain the research project and it immediately became clear that she was keen for the kindergarten to be the chosen research site. Next I wrote an email to the kindergarten's senior education advisor, outlining my proposed study and seeking permission, which was granted. Finally, I talked about my proposed research project with all the kaiako at a staff meeting, and provided information sheets and consent forms to each teacher in the over 2s area of the kindergarten, seeking their consent to participate (see Appendices 5 and 6). A total of six kaiako agreed to take part, although only three of these kaiako took part in picturebook sharing sessions, which were the primary means of data collection in this study.

Tamariki were recruited to the study via their parents in the first instance. Parents were given an information sheet and a consent form to give informed consent on behalf of their child(ren), shared in Appendices 1 and 2. They were also provided with an information sheet to read to their tamaiti to ensure the child was willing to participate (Appendix 3). Children whose parents consented for them to take part in the research and who also verbally agreed to participate were asked to complete an assent form to signal their participation in the research project (Appendix 4). It was emphasised that kaiako and whānau were free to withdraw at any time until data analysis had begun, and that each participant child was free to take part in any picturebook sharing session, or not. Indeed, on several occasions a tamaiti declined the opportunity to take part in a picturebook sharing session, or left partway through a session. Some parents who had verbally signalled interest in the research project did not return their consent forms and so their tamariki were not included in the study. I was careful to distance myself from the recruitment process – other kaiako were instrumental in distributing information sheets and consent forms to whānau – so that parents would feel minimal obligation to participate. This was a crucial part of my adherence to the ethical principle of voluntary participation in the research (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2016).

PARTICIPANT SUMMARIES

Of the 14 tamariki taking part in this research, three were assigned male at birth,[8] whilst 11 were assigned female. Their ages ranged between 3 years 5 months and 4 years 11 months at the beginning of the study. As mentioned above, 6 kaiako indicated their willingness to participate in the research. All these early childhood teachers were qualified to diploma or degree level, and were fully certificated by the Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand. They had between 10 and 38 years' teaching experience when the research began. Three teachers led picturebook sharing sessions, whilst two teachers collected anecdotal evidence only. More detailed participant summaries can be found in Appendix 7.

DATA GATHERING

PICTUREBOOK SHARING SESSIONS AND ANECDOTAL DISCUSSIONS

As the primary means of gathering data for this research, I provided a selection of 14 commercially-published picturebooks[9] foregrounding gender and family diversity for kaiako

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[8] This refers to the binary gender "male" or "female" usually assigned to a baby at birth. The gender assigned at birth is typically deduced by examination of the newborn's external genitalia. It may or may not coincide with the gender that person identifies with in childhood and beyond.
[9] Details of these picturebooks can be found in the Picturebook List at the end of this thesis.

to use as the basis of several picturebook sharing sessions during October and November 2017. One unpublished homemade picturebook was also used. Picturebook sharing sessions consisted of a teacher reading picturebook(s) with a small group of children in a quiet room at the kindergarten. This was a multi-purpose room, used at various times for resting and sleeping, teacher lunch breaks and small group work. Kaiako shared one or two picturebooks of their own choosing from the research picturebooks provided, as a way of supporting the children to express their thoughts (Mackey & de Vocht-van Alphen, 2016). Whilst kaiako led these picturebook sharing sessions I was in the room observing and video-recording tamariki responses to the picturebooks on my iPad™.

In research methodology terms therefore, these were *participant observation sessions* (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2016) in the form of multi-participant discussions between kaiako and tamariki around picturebooks portraying diverse families and counter-stereotypical/non-binary gender. In total, seven of the 14 commercially-published picturebooks provided were used in picturebook sharing sessions. In addition, Robyn shared a homemade unpublished picturebook featuring one child participant's then four-year-old uncle and his two mothers. I wrote field notes afterwards based on both my immediate recollections and the video footage. Four different kaiako were involved in this part of the research. Janice facilitated the first two picturebook sharing sessions, Charlotte carried out the third, and Robyn led the last three sessions. In one session, a student teacher named Tiana took part. More details are presented in the table overleaf:

Table 1. Details of the picturebook sharing sessions (N.B. All names are pseudonyms).

Session number	Kaiako name	Tamariki participating	Picturebook titles shared
1	Janice	Bob, Boom Boom, Dante, Jack, Lauren, Melie, Suzie, Tais, Viv	Red: A crayon's story A tale of two mommies
2	Janice Tiana (student teacher)	Bob, Hella, Jack, Lauren, Melie, Pink, Possum, Sahara, Suzie, Tais, Viv	A tale of two daddies
3	Charlotte	Bob, Hella, Jack, Lauren, Melie, Possum, Sahara, Viv	A tale of two mommies I'm a girl!
4	Robyn	Bob, Boom Boom, Jack, Melie, Suzie, Tais	Not every Princess
5	Robyn	Bob, Boom Boom, Jack, Sahara, Suzie, Viv	Thomas starts school (unpublished) Families, families, families!
6	Robyn	Bob, Boom Boom, Jack, Melie, Suzie, Tais, Viv	Introducing Teddy

In addition to the picturebook sharing sessions, participating kaiako noted down relevant discussions they had with children in the six week period whilst picturebook sharing sessions were taking place. These additional notes provided extra data in the form of written anecdotes from participant teachers.

INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS WITH RESEARCHER

After all the picturebook sharing session data had been collected and transcribed, and participating teachers had had time for reflection, I had an informal conversation with each kaiako. I also had a discussion with the parent of one of the child participants – Jack's mother. I requested to speak with Jack's mother in particular because of the way Jack's responses often differed markedly from those of his peers and I wondered if she could enlighten me on this. I audio-recorded these discussions, and simultaneously took notes with pen and paper. I later transcribed each audio recording in its entirety. One of the memorable quotes recorded during these chats is: "Oh my gosh, is that how you heard me say it?" That quote reflects the teacher's surprise at reading her own words, which I had transcribed verbatim from the video recording. For me, this statement was a pertinent reminder of how critical it is to transcribe data verbatim. It also reminded me of the trust these kaiako placed in me by consenting to this research, and thus allowing me to transcribe, analyse and pore over their every word in hours and hours of video footage. At times that has felt like a weighty responsibility.

DATA ANALYSIS

I followed the process set out in Lichtman (2013, p. 252) to guide extraction of meaning from my data. The first step was to transcribe the conversations that took place during each picturebook sharing session. My transcription conventions were as follows:

NAME CAPITALISED = teacher

Italics = text read verbatim by kaiako from picturebook

TEXT CAPITALISED = emphasis

(Italicised text in parentheses) = denotes non-verbal details

[Brackets] = denote brief explanation, for example: Toby [brother]

Next I read and re-read the field notes, teachers' anecdotal notes and the transcripts several times, referring back to the videos of picturebook sharing sessions when necessary. As this process continued, I started looking for coding categories. I was guided in this thinking by the key concept of heteronormativity introduced in Chapter 2. I searched for any recurring themes, unexpected topics or ideas which came up across and within sessions and participants. I coded the data using coloured pencils on printed transcripts and field notes, covering them in hand-written underlining and notes. My next step was to re-organise the data into separate *chunks* relating to categories which had emerged throughout the coding process. Finally, I teased out salient concepts and themes. Codes, categories and concepts are closely related to each other, and at times it was impossible to discern which was which.

In this study, children's working theories tended to group around the following areas: Gender markers, changing gender, getting married, parent roles and superheroes. Some of these themes are discussed in detail in Chapter 4, which focuses on children's working theories verbalised during the picturebook sharing sessions. As I analysed the data I also realised that another story was emerging from the data – that of the teachers' responses to children's working theories, and how teachers have the power to support or shut down children's developing thinking (Areljung & Kelly-Ware, 2017). Chapter 5 relates specifically to these findings, which have become a joint focus of this research.

In terms of methodology and ethics, it is pertinent to note that the data extracts presented in this thesis have been chosen because of the way that I personally analysed the large amounts of raw data collected. Another researcher may have chosen a very different way of analysing and representing the data. This hypothetical researcher may have chosen a different location on the qualitative research continuum – spanning postpositivism on the far right, humanistic subjective knowledge on the left and a large middle ground of first-person voice, description, analysis and insight (Ellingson, 2011). Likewise, the research participants themselves may have preferred a different analysis and chosen to present or omit varying pieces of data. Therefore, this thesis presents just one person's selection of theoretical framework and salient points arising from a small study in one kindergarten in Aotearoa New Zealand. I hope there is value in it nonetheless.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In my research I have been guided by the University of Canterbury's (n.d.) Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (ERHEC) principles and guidelines. Adhering to these guidelines has helped ensure my research study is ethical, and harms no-one physically or psychologically. Mutch (2005) provides reassurance that generally, if the researcher treats all participants with fairness, respect and consideration then the researcher is acting ethically. She cautions, however, that ethical issues should be considered in depth, which I have done since the outset of this project. Before I could begin my research, my proposal had to be considered by ERHEC, and on their advice I made some changes to information sheets and consent forms.

In terms of ethics, the issue of informed consent was of primary importance to me, as well as for the children, families and teachers involved. Kaiako, as well as tamariki and their whānau all received information sheets about the study, as well as consent forms as already mentioned (see Appendices). Consent forms had to be returned before any data collection could begin. Finch (2005), Te One (2007), Dockett and Perry (2011), and Crane and Broome (2017) all talk at length about consent pedagogies regarding children, and especially in relation to how children might make meaning from the information presented to them, given their developing cognitive skills. I created a simple informed assent form (Te One, 2007), in order to gain each child's independent non-coerced agreement to participate in the research, in addition to gaining parental consent before beginning my study. Teachers and parents/caregivers verbally explained the research project to child participants, before offering them the opportunity to sign the assent form. As previously indicated in Chapter 1, as part of this recruitment and consent process, teachers, parents and children chose pseudonyms for themselves. These pseudonyms are used throughout this thesis in place of people's real names, in order to attempt anonymity.

I continually reflected on issues of anonymity and confidentiality during this research project. The research kindergarten has not been named in this thesis, but Aotearoa New Zealand has a small population of almost five million. Within that number, the early childhood education teaching community is particularly small and close-knit. As already mentioned in the research design section of this chapter, I took care to warn participants that the location of the study may be easily ascertained by some potential readers of this thesis. Furthermore, the kaiako at the kindergarten know each other very well, and so may be able to identify each

other in the thesis, despite careful use of pseudonyms. Complete anonymity therefore could not be offered, and participants were made fully aware of this before being asked to give informed consent.

All electronic data gathered, including video recordings, were treated in a confidential manner, and kept safely on a password-protected computer. I was the only person to ever have access to these raw data. Anderson and Muñoz Proto (2016) discuss ethical requirements and responsibilities for researchers in relation to video recording, particularly in light of the lack of confidentiality inherent in video footage. Although Anderson and Muñoz Proto address video recording within psychological research, much of what is discussed is equally relevant when researching in an educational setting. As they suggested, I gave careful consideration to whether the risks to anonymity associated with video recording negated the potential benefits that would come from its use in this research. I decided that in the multi-participant situation with many young tamariki likely talking at once, for my purposes of identifying speakers during data transcription the benefits of using video recording far-outweighed any potential risks. Handwritten field notes were kept in a locked filing cabinet, and also transferred into an electronic format. Teacher research participants were offered, and accepted, the opportunity to perform member-checking on their own picturebook sharing session transcripts, but otherwise I was the only person to have access to the raw data collected.

Yin (2011) comments on the importance of "building trustworthiness and credibility into qualitative research" (p. 19). One way of assuring trustworthiness is to ensure data is collected ethically, and that power differentials are acknowledged and minimised as much as possible. Phillips and Carr (2009, cited in Lichtman, 2013) explain that the term *trustworthiness* includes "transparency of the process, data gathered for a purpose, search for multiple perspectives, change in the researcher and in practice, and results that matter" (p. 292). In order to enhance the rigour and trustworthiness of my research project I took several deliberate steps. I referred frequently to my supervisors at every stage of the research process, as a check on the integrity of my research. I kept a reflective research journal to help me unearth and deal with my own values, assumptions and biases. As suggested by Roberts-Holmes (2005) I used triangulation of the data in order to increase the validity (and therefore trustworthiness) of my research. Triangulation involves gathering data from multiple sources/perspectives and was substantially advanced by Denzin in the 1970s as a more

systematic approach for social qualitative research (Flick, 2018). Flick states that "triangulation makes an important contribution to studying issues around social justice topics" (p. 444), therefore triangulation is very relevant to this research. My various data sources are described earlier in this chapter.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

In this chapter I have presented an overview of the research design I developed, and have explained my procedures for recruiting participants along with data collection and analysis methods. This research project had a small beginning, and gradually transformed from a shape-shifting nebulous idea I had contemplated for years, into a research design which satisfied the University of Canterbury's thesis registration and ERHEC requirements. As part of the preliminary work for this project I considered my own positioning in the research, and how multiple facets of my identity (woman, lesbian, parent, teacher) could present certain biases and assumptions that I needed to recognise. I realised I was neither an insider nor an outsider in this research, but something of an *inbetweener* (Milligan, 2016). Ethical considerations were many, and resulted in some changes being made to the initial research proposal. As is wont to happen in qualitative research, the data can be surprising, and the thrust of the research is different now than I imagined before embarking on this study. Yet, alongside a strong focus on teachers' responses to children, this thesis still centres on children's working theories developed in response to pictureboooks, and the next chapter will explore this in detail.

CHAPTER 4 - CHILDREN'S WORKING THEORIES ABOUT GENDER AND FAMILY DIVERSITY: "YOU'RE GONNA HAVE A PENIS ONE DAY"

INTRODUCTION

Gunn (2008) argues that heteronormativity in early childhood centres is found in "constructions of the family, of genders, and of sexualities" (p. ii). It therefore follows that through the use of picturebooks focusing on these areas—and depending on their actual content—heteronormativity may be either reinforced or challenged. The six picturebook sharing sessions undertaken as part of this research provided opportunities for tamariki and kaiako alike to challenge heteronormative understandings of family, gender and sexuality, while developing and discussing working theories. As discussed in detail earlier in this thesis, working theories are evolving ideas and understandings that children develop as they try to make sense of new experiences, using their existing knowledge bases (Ministry of Education, 2017). Additionally, according to Areljung and Kelly-Ware (2017), children are constantly theorising, both in solitude and collaboratively with others, in their efforts to make sense of this world in which they find themselves. One of the ways tamariki are able to engage in this meaning-making is by using picturebooks as tools for understanding others' perspectives (Souto-Manning, 2009). The picturebook sharing sessions provided ample opportunities for this.

The research question relevant to the children in this study is: *What working theories around LGBTIQ-parented families and gender diversity are 3- and 4-year-olds developing as they engage with relevant picturebooks?* Two key themes consistently emerged in the children's working theories and will be addressed in this chapter. The first of these themes was gender signifiers. In Chapter 2, I described gender signifiers as external markers that signal a person's gender. Due to hegemonic pressures of heteronormativity these gender signifiers tend to follow binary lines e.g. characteristics that outwardly signify binary male or female gender. For tamariki, this may include markers such as hair length, hair style, colour choices, toy choices, voice pitch, jewellery, fingernail length and adornment, and clothing styles. In this chapter, the gender signifiers of hair length, fingernails and gendered colours are to the fore.

The second major theme of children's working theories, gender change, refers to the possibility of changing gender from that assigned at birth, as previously indicated. This theme was evident in children's working theories even when the picturebook being shared did not necessarily refer to gender change. Both these themes have been touched upon in previous chapters, but they will now be explored in more detail with reference to the data.

In this chapter I argue that tamariki often reinforce each other's working theories, and this is markedly more frequent when these developing working theories uphold hegemonic heteronormative society. In many data examples, children's working theories on gender are binary-based, and tamariki tend to assume that gender matches sex assigned at birth. Kaiako largely have similar assumptions. In addition, during the picturebook sharing sessions tamariki often engaged in displays of binary gender performativity. In contrast to these observations regarding binary gender, there were also many instances of tamariki interrupting heteronormative determinist concepts of fixed gender, to freely discuss options for changing gender from girl to boy or vice versa.

GENDER SIGNIFIERS

Gender signifiers are by definition something that outwardly signifies a person's gender performativity. A *gendered self* is produced and performed by the regulation of certain gender signifiers or attributes "along culturally established lines of coherence" (Butler, 1990, p. 33). In conversation with one of the teachers - Charlotte - about the book *I'm a girl!* (Ismail, 2015) after the picturebook sharing sessions had concluded, she discussed the entrenched gender stereotypes she observed in some of the tamariki:

> There is a strong "That's a boy, that's a girl." You know, I've always known about that. But then when you question them like "Must girls have long hair?" I'm like "Well I know someone who has long hair and that's a boy" so what does that say? Then it's just yeah, they're very open for change. But yeah y'know cos I kind of know Jack's point of view, probably more so from what Rose (mum) has talked about. Ummm and even Bob, thinking well he's from a family that has the two nannas, two grandmothers (a lesbian couple) but he still seems to have that stereotype within him.

Stereotypical gender conceptions such as those discussed above by Charlotte spring from binary duality thinking. The strength of the heterosexual matrix is such that it produces only masculinity and femininity as logical options within a framework of heterosexuality (Butler, 1990, 1999; Blaise & Taylor, 2012). As Gunn (2017) states, this dualistic thinking is likely to be foregrounded in young children who "rely upon the very visible extremes of stereotypes to inform their conceptions of what it means to be *girl* or *boy*" (p. 71). As reported by Charlotte, this often occurs even when a tamaiti such as Bob comes from a whānau where non gender-stereotypical lesbians make up a large number of the family and social circle. Perhaps, however, in Bob's case although he knows these women love each other he might not understand that they are couples, living as *wife and wife*. Several different types of gender signifiers are discussed below, with reference to this study's research data: hair length, finger nails and gendered colours.

HAIR LENGTH: "MINE IS LONGER THAN YOURS – SEE?" (SUZIE, AGED 3 YEARS 10 MONTHS). Anecdotally, length of hair is often cited by children as a way of denoting gender. As was previously mentioned in Chapter 2, the literature review, hair length is commonly used as a marker of gender performativity (Butler, 1990) amongst children and adults. This idea of short hair denoting *boy*, and medium to long hair signifying *girl*, was revisited in many of the picturebook sessions both by teachers and children. The following data extract is from the second picturebook session, looking at the picturebook *A tale of two mommies* (Oelschlager & Blanc, 2011). Janice is the teacher, pointing to an illustration of a child in the picturebook as she asks:

JANICE: How would I know if it was a girl?

Jack: And a boy!

JANICE: I like your hand up Pink *(pointing at Pink).* How would I know?

Pink: Uhhhh… cos it's got long hair.

JANICE: Maybe.

In the data extract above, Pink states that she knows the child is a girl "cos it's got long hair." Janice, the teacher, responds rather more tentatively to this assertion with a "Maybe." In this way, Janice validates what Pink is theorising, but also plants the idea that perhaps child in the illustration might *not* be a girl simply on the basis of long hair. In this way, Janice seeks to question the heteronormative ideal that *long hair = female gender*. In our discussion some months later, Janice stated her hope that children are able to think more inclusively about gender, and by questioning hegemonic ideals related to hair length, Janice is trying to counteract heteronormativity in early childhood education (Gunn, 2008).

Janice continues in her apparent attempts to broaden out the children's thinking around gender signifiers in their developing conversation around *A tale of two mommies* (Oelschlager & Blanc, 2011)*.* The children often reinforce each other's developing working theories, especially the hegemonic heteronormative ones. As Gunn (2017) comments, young children are often reliant on stereotypical gender signifiers as they begin to negotiate their understandings of gender. Here, just like Pink, Bob uses hair length to hypothesise that the child in the picturebook illustration is a girl. Several girls then reinforce his deduction by commenting that they also have long hair:

Bob: That's a boat. And that's a girl.

JANICE: What makes you think this is a girl?

Bob: Cos cos cos cos it's got long hair.

JANICE: Long hair?

Bob: Yeah, so that's the girl's boat.

Suzie: Yeah I have long hair, Bob.

Melie: Me too.

Suzie: Bob, Bobby - you, I have long hair.

Viv: Yeah I got long hair too.

In this way, Suzie, Melie and Viv are likely cementing Bob's working theory that long hair signifies *girl*. Bob has a teenaged uncle with shoulder-length hair, yet throughout several of the picturebook sessions Bob still insisted that long hair was associated with female gender. There is therefore a tension between Bob's personal lived experience within his whānau, which tells him that males can have long hair, and his co-construction of a working theory amongst his peers (Peters & Davis, 2011), suggesting that long hair signifies female gender.

In the following example, Bob initially suggests toy choice as a marker of gender: truck = boy toy. Bob continues to back up his assertion by pointing at the child's short hair in the book illustration to suggest that short hair signifies *boy*.

JANICE: Boy? What makes you think it's a boy?

Suzie: Or maybe a girl?

JANICE: It might be a girl.

Bob: He's a boy. And there's a truck. There's a boy playing with a truck.

JANICE: Hmmmm… so that's why you think this might be a boy?

Bob: Yup! Cos cos cos cos because hair *(pointing at book illustration of child)*

JANICE: Aahhh, so boys often have their hair quite short like that, don't they?

Suzie: But girls

Pink: And they have long hair!

Suzie: Yeah… I nearly have mine super long.

JANICE: But but but do boys have long hair? *(Melie, Pink and Suzie compare the length of their hair, touching it, twirling bunches/ponytails/plaits, smiling in affirmation at each other)*

Suzie: Mine is longer than yours - see?

In the example above, Pink seems to be suggesting that boys can have long hair too, in response to Janice's question "So boys often have their hair quite short like that don't they?" Melie, Suzie and Pink then actively perform their femininity, apparently trying to *get their gender right* in front of their peers (Butler, 1990). Robinson (2005) states that it is through repetitive performances like this that young children's masculinity/femininity are defined and constructed, and they learn to perform as masculine boys and feminine girls in a heterosexualised manner. Likewise, Surtees (2006) discusses the contradiction of tamariki being portrayed as "innocent and asexual" whilst simultaneously "being heterosexualised" as a matter of course (p. 75).

NAIL POLISH: "MY FINGERS ARE NOT PRETTY" (VIV, AGED 4 YEARS 1 MONTH).
The next *gender signifier* data extract examined here comes from picturebook session 6 with Robyn. It is part of a lengthy chunk of data which occurred in response to the anthropomorphic picturebook *Families, families, families!* (Lang & Lang, 2015). This picturebook uses images of various animal families to illustrate diverse family types e.g. one parent, two mums, raised by grandparents, adoptive families. Robyn and the tamariki discuss a variety of family types. The discussion also quickly veers into the territory of girls performing their femininity, as in the previous example.

ROBYN: Some children have two dads, like Thomas has two mums. And some boys have two dads. Some have one mummy. Just one mummy. I know lots of children that just have one mummy. Do you know any?

Boom Boom: *(Showing fingernails)* Yeah, I got nail polish coming off!

ROBYN: You've got, yes look it's coming off, you could put some more on.

Suzie: *(Showing toenails)* I got some too!

ROBYN: Yeah, I see your coloured toes.

Boom Boom: Look - I got nail polish.

ROBYN: Do you know some children that just have one mummy?

Viv: My my my *(holding up hands with unvarnished finger nails)* these are, my fingers are not pretty!

ROBYN: Yes they are, you've got lovely beautiful fingers. Do you know what, the MacGregors have one mummy. Suzie and Sahara - the MacGregors have one mummy: Blanche. And Mary-Lou has one mummy. Mary-Lou has one mummy - Kerry. And let me see…

Sahara: Yeah and I have too, *(holding up one finger)* I have one mum.

In the above data extract, Robyn's intention (confirmed with me verbally later that day, and discussed further in the next chapter) is to encourage 3- and 4-year-old children to think about different family types, and people they know who have families like those portrayed in the picturebook *Families, families, families!* (Lang & Lang, 2015). Boom Boom, however, responds immediately to Robyn's question about family diversity by talking about her nail polish. This occupies Robyn along with Boom Boom, Suzie and Viv. Sahara is the only female present (other than the researcher) who does not join in this discussion, and nor do Bob and Jack – the only two children in the session who were assigned male.

Robyn chooses to engage with the discussion about nail polish and performing femininity (Butler, 1990) even though Boom Boom's comment about nail polish seems unrelated to the question Robyn had asked about whether the children knew any families with just one mummy. Power relations (Foucault, 1980) are happening all the time, including each time a teacher chooses to build upon a child's comment. By responding to Boom Boom's comment

about nail polish, and even suggesting to Boom Boom that she could apply some more nail polish, Robyn is (deliberately or inadvertently) adding weight to Boom Boom's notion of appropriate ways to do girl-ing. Suzie responds to this by showing off her painted toe nails, whereas Viv shyly holds up her hand and comments "My fingers are not pretty." Whilst Robyn reassures Viv that her fingers are beautiful, perhaps Viv has already picked up on the message that applying nail polish to finger nails is desirable if she is to perform her gender *appropriately*. Peters and Davis (2011) discuss the quandaries teachers face in choosing which working theories to respond to and which to let go. In this case Robyn chose to respond to Boom Boom's comment about nail polish and that detracted from the discussion of family diversity.

ANYBODY'S COLOUR: "THAT'S A BOY'S COLOUR" (BOB, AGED 4 YEARS 3 MONTHS).
In addition to children developing working theories around hair length and nail polish, some discussions occurred around colours as gender signifiers. The picturebook that prompted the most discussion was *Red: A crayon's story* (Hall, 2015)*.* Janice shared this picturebook with the children in the very first picturebook session, and a lengthy discussion about "girls' colours" and "boys' colours" resulted.

> JANICE: This is a story called Red: A Crayon's Story.

> Bob: That's that's a… that's a boy's one. That's a boy's colour.

> JANICE: Is it?

> Melie: No, it's a girl colour.

> JANICE: It's a girl's colour too?

> Melie: *(Nods)*

> Bob: No, it's a boy's. Just boys'.

> JANICE: Oh?

Melie: No, it's girl colours and boy colours.

Bob: No, it's just boys, it's just boys, it's just boys.

Lots of children: Yeah!

Dante: Look at this

JANICE: Shall we read it and see?

Bob: No it isn't!

Suzie: *(shaking head)* No it isn't!

JANICE: Because some people think it's a boy's… who thinks it's a boy's colour?

Viv: I like boys' colours.

Melie: Me too!

JANICE: Put your hand up if you think it's a boy's colour. *(Sahara, Bob, Dante, Tais, Suzie raise hands)*

JANICE: Ok. Put your hands down… Put your hands up if you think it's a girl's colour. *(Viv, Suzie, Sahara, Melie raise hands)*

Bob: Not me! It's a boy!

JANICE: Put your hands down. It's allright Bob, I've heard that. But I'm interested who thinks it's a girl colour?

Sahara: Me!

Bob: Look behind the book.

(Suzie, Sahara, Melie raise hands)

JANICE: Put your hands down… Who thinks it's anybody's colour? *(Bob is first to raise his hand).*

Jack: My colour.

Viv: Um my colour.

JANICE: Could be boys or girls.

Many children: My colour, my colour, my colour, my colour, my colour!

In this data extract, Janice initially seems to be encouraging the children to think about colours, and indeed gender, as being binary, by asking the children if colours are a "girl's colour" or a "boy's colour." Several children begin with entrenched views about which colours are "boy's colours" and "girl's colours." Interrupting gender norms, Viv (assigned female) comments "I like boys' colours." Later in the data extract, however, Janice asks "Who thinks it's anybody's colour?" which does not overtly suggest a binary. Janice then further comments: "Could be boys, could be girls" returning to the gender binary once more. Red is not necessarily perceived as a particularly gender-stereotyped colour, but Bob is unfaltering in his proclamation that red is "just (for) boys." Perhaps lending weight to Bob's working theory, Paz-Albo Prieto et al (2017) found 5-year-old boys strongly preferred to play with red/blue games versus 5-year-old girls having a strong preference for pink/purple games (p. 1273). Although the character *Red* is never identified with a gender in the picturebook *Red: A crayon's story*, the introduction of *Red* as the protagonist of the book, and the pervasive gender binary assumptions made by much of society, may have encouraged Bob to think that *Red* must therefore be either male or female. This could help explain Bob's

thinking around red being a boy colour, but perhaps Bob considered red a "boy's colour" before exposure to this picturebook.

In many of the picturebook sharing sessions, tamariki pondered the possibility of changing from one gender to another, and working theories emerged as they engaged in dialogue about these concepts with each other and the kaiako. Some examples of these working theories are discussed below.

GENDER CHANGE
"I CAN BE A GIRL IF I WANT TO" (JACK, AGED 4 YEARS 6 MONTHS).
In this research project, all but one of the five picturebooks overtly focusing on stories of gender change/gender diversity were overlooked by kaiako in the picturebook sessions. The five books focusing on this topic were: *I am Jazz* (Herthel, Jennings, & McNicolas, 2014), *Jacob's new dress* (Hoffma, Hoffman, & Case, 2014), *My Princess boy* (Kilodavis & DeSimone, 2010), *Morris Micklewhite and the tangerine dress* (Baldacchino, 2014), and *Introducing teddy* (Waltoon & MacPherson, 2016). Only the latter was selected for a picturebook session - by Robyn for the final session of the research project. Nonetheless, the idea of a tamaiti wanting to be a different gender to the one assigned at birth arose several times in children's talk within picturebook sessions, regardless of the topic of the picturebooks.

One of the picturebooks that Charlotte chose to share was *I'm a girl!* (Ismail, 2015), where the female protagonist is frequently mis-gendered as a boy. As a result of sharing this picturebook, with its focus on mis-gendering, a conversation between the teacher Charlotte and several children ensued:

CHARLOTTE: Has she been called a boy? Would you wanna be called a boy if you're a girl?

Jack: Yes!

Sahara: No

CHARLOTTE: Would you wanna be called a girl if you're a boy?

Jack: Yes.

Bob: Boy!

CHARLOTTE: Does it matter? Does it matter?

Jack: Yes

Jack both says he would want to be called a boy if he were a girl, and called a girl if he were a boy. Jack is the one child who says "Yes" when Charlotte asks if this actually matters. Most of the children say nothing, whilst Bob comments "Boy, boy!" Jack repeatedly and consistently stood apart from the other tamariki in his views and opinions expressed during the seven weeks of data collection. Jack was assigned male at birth, but as his mother commented when she gave permission for Jack to take part in this study, Jack sometimes identifies as a girl, and sometimes as a boy. This varies frequently within a day.

Certainly, as part of an ever-changing group of tamariki[10] taking part in the seven picturebook sessions over this research project, Jack was not afraid to voice his views on gender issues even when his opinions were very different to those of the other children. Robinson and Jones Diaz (2006) observe that these interactions between children become "critical sites of children's gendered and sexualized identities on a daily basis" (p. 163). Through sharing his different viewpoints Jack is contributing to other children's identities and construction of working theories as well as his own. This co-construction (Peters & Davis, 2011), and refining of working theories amongst the tamariki happened during every picturebook session.

Sometimes Jack spoke out defiantly, other times softly and almost timidly, and many times with a mischievous sparkle in his eyes. But in an eary childhood education setting where most of the tamariki were arguably trying to show how authentically they were performing their assigned gender (Butler, 1990), Jack was often forging a different path, as expressed in his working theories, discussions with peers and teachers and clothing choices. One of the

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[10] See Table 1 in Chapter 3 for details of individual child and teacher participants in each picturebook sharing session.

teachers, Robyn, observed in our informal discussions, that Jack had never felt comfortable to come to kindergarten wearing a dress until the research project was underway. From this point on, Jack regularly wore a dress to kindergarten, and whilst wearing the dress would often claim the name *Peachy*. Robyn wondered if perhaps the teachers sharing picturebooks showing various ways of doing gender (Butler, 1990) gave Jack the courage to occasionally come to kindergarten as Peachy - a persona previously reserved for the safety of home.

In the following exchange, Sahara states her desire to be a boy:

Sahara: But my brother said I wanna change into boys.

ROBYN: Did he? Did he say that to you too?

Sahara: Yeah and I wanna change into a boy.

ROBYN: You can change into a boy any time you want.

Suzie: And and boys have penis, eh?

ROBYN: They DO have penises.

Suzie: And you're gonna have a penis one day, Sahara.

ROBYN: *(Glancing momentarily at researcher - embarrassed)* Oh I don't know about that *(Laughing)*.

Robyn, the kaiako, reassures Sahara that wanting to change into a boy is acceptable. Suzie immediately clarifies with Robyn, that "Boys have penis, eh?" Robyn affirms this, which leads Suzie to logically assert that therefore Sahara will have a penis one day. Robyn appears to experience embarrassment (marked by facial expression and laughing and verbally confirmed to me by Robyn in discussion later), and Robyn neither confirms nor denies Suzie's statement that Sahara will inevitably have a penis one day if she changes into a boy. At this point, the conversation seems to have veered into uncomfortable, dangerous territory

for Robyn. Perhaps her ideas of childhood innocence are in tension with what Suzie says about Sahara "getting a penis one day." Suzie's statement seems to be dangerous knowledge for Robyn (Robinson, 2013b), and Robyn appears unsure how to respond. Perhaps there is an element of *moral panic* (Robinson, 2012) for Robyn to contend with too, in a room full of young children listening to this conversation and potentially building their own working theories around gender. This data extract and issues arising from it are discussed further in Chapter 5 through the lens of teacher responses to childrens' working theories.

The only picturebook with overt themes of gender change which was shared with children was *Introducing Teddy* (Walton & MacPherson, 2016). Following Robyn's reading of the picturebook text "I need to be myself Errol, in my heart. Guess what? I've always known that I'm a girl teddy," Jack and Bob engaged in an exchange that highlights gender change:

Jack: Know what? I'm a girl teddy.

ROBYN: Are you a girl teddy?

Bob: And I'm a boy teddy.

ROBYN: And you're a boy teddy?

Bob: I'm a black, brown teddy.

ROBYN: It's ok to be whatever kind of teddy you want.

Bob: And I'm a spider teddy.

In the data extract above, Jack is the first person to volunteer their gender identity in this conversation, and once again it is at variance to Jack's assigned gender. Only a minute or two later however, Jack seemingly contradicts this stance:

ROBYN: *Today teddy felt like a girl teddy.* Not a boy teddy. Not a boy teddy. *I wish my name was Tilly, not Thomas.* Teddy wanted to change his name to Tilly. Cos teddy wanted to be a girl. Is that good?

Jack: No!

ROBYN: Is that ok?

Jack: No, it's not!

ROBYN: Why is it not ok?

Jack: Cos… he's naughty. (lying on back with Bob, holding hands to face)

ROBYN: No he's not. Teddy's just feeling different.

Bob: And he's (unintelligible) other people.

ROBYN: (To Jack and Bob) If you wanted to be a girl today and you were a boy, would that be ok? (To Suzie) If you wanted to be a boy today would that be ok? (1 second pause) That's ok, you can be whoever you want to be.

In the data extract above, Jack equates stating a desire to be a different gender to the gender assigned at birth to be "not ok" and "naughty." This is a real tension, given the contradiction of Jack's own tendency to do exactly this. He has likely heard this message from society generally, or perhaps from certain children or adults in his life. Tamariki learn to police their own and each other's gender expression at a very early age, constantly monitoring and regulating each other's gender behaviours (Mayeza 2017, 2018; Bryan, 2019), reinforcing hegemonic masculinity in those assigned male, and femininity in those assigned female.

As for Robyn, she responds to the picturebook text about Thomas the Teddy wanting to change into Tilly, by asking a closed question "Is that good?" This (perhaps unintentionally) acts to shut down a discussion about the issue of changing gender. Later in the conversation, Robyn tries to explain to Jack and the other children that Teddy wanting to change from a boy to a girl is not *naughty* - it means "Teddy's just feeling different." Robyn attempts to extend this by asking Jack, Bob and Suzie questions about whether it would be ok to want to be a different gender. She reassures them "That's ok, you can be whoever you want to be," but none of them respond verbally to her questions. It is impossible to know why the children don't answer Robyn's direct questions, but perhaps they were picking up on some subtle clues in Robyn's facial expression, body language and prosody (stress and intonation), as well as her overt introduction of the judgement "good" - also implying its opposite *bad* - which may have led the children to wonder (in their own terms) whether gender change is a dangerous topic (Britzman, 1991; Robinson, 2012).

Almost two weeks after the research project picturebook sessions had finished, one of the teachers noted down the following comment from Jack, who was unambiguously assigned male at birth. Unfortunately, no context was given, and without the name of the teacher who recorded Jack's comment I was unable to ask for clarification: "I'm a girl. My name is Peachy. I can be a girl if I want to." This statement is consistent with Jack's declaration of gender in the picturebook session above, as well as many informal chats I have had with Jack over the course of my daily teaching practice. As mentioned earlier, Jack has increasingly been more open at kindergarten about the choice to be female-identifying Peachy, or male-identifying Jack, and Robyn commented to me that she believes Jack only became comfortable about sometimes wearing a dress to kindergarten, and/or identifying as Peachy once the research project picturebook session had begun, which is a tangible positive outcome of this piece of work.

An increasing amount of research has been done in the area of gender variance and transgender issues in the last decade. Edwards-Leeper and Spack (2012) report that there is a marked decrease in the age at which young people are now disclosing their gender variance. Rahilly (2015) backs up this assertion, citing the increasingly widespread visibility of gender-variant children from the mid-2000s onwards. Jack's mother spoke to me about Jack's gender fluidity after she expressed interest to the kindergarten head teacher about Jack taking part in the research project. She said to me "Half the time he says he's a boy, the rest he is a girl."

Jack's parents have chosen to raise all their children in an open-minded and accepting manner. Jack is no exception to this, so Jack's mother seemed matter of fact when describing his gender identity to me. I had not previously been aware of these details about Jack. Minter (2012) discusses how children can be harmed by societal and family rejection, as well as by "attempts to change their gender identity or gender expression" (p. 422). In Jack's case, the family surrounding him is nurturing of all facets of his gender identity. In addition, through Jack's inclusion in the research project picturebook sharing sessions, Jack may have felt more tangibly supported than previously at kindergarten.

Of the 14 tamariki taking part in the picturebook sharing sessions, three came from blended whānau, four lived with only one parent, one was being raised by a solo grandparent and six lived with their biological mother and father. In this small sample of tamariki therefore, there was some variation of whānau type, and within the wider kindergarten cohort at the time the diversity was significantly greater, including two tamariki with LGBTIQ-parented whānau, and many tamariki living in an extended whānau with parent(s), aunties, uncles and cousins. Less than half the research participant tamariki lived in a so-called *traditional* family, illustrating how commonplace family diversity of all kinds has become in Aotearoa New Zealand. In the next section, I present some data relating to working theories tamariki shared around family diversity.

FAMILY DIVERSITY

 "THAT'S SILLY!" (SUZIE, AGED 3 YEARS 10 MONTHS).

Six books addressing family diversity and/or LGBTIQ-parented families were part of the 14 research project picturebooks presented to kaiako. Of these six family-focused picturebooks, one picturebook looking at a variety of family types (including LGBTIQ-parented families) was chosen by teachers. This book was *Families, families, families!* (Lang & Lang, 2015). This picturebook prompted many conversations amongst the children, but little discussion relating to LGBTIQ-parented families.

Two picturebooks directly focusing on LGBTIQ-parented families were chosen by kaiako, *A tale of two daddies* (Oelschlager, Blackwood & Blanc, 2010), and *A tale of two mommies* (Oelschlager & Blanc, 2011). In these two picturebooks the "low risk" illustration style (Morgan & Kelly-Ware, 2016, p. 3) gave no hint that the parents might love each other, nor was this ever mentioned by either of the two kaiako involved in sharing these books with

tamariki. Instead, similarities were drawn by kaiako between the two fathers or two mothers in these picturebooks, and a biological parent/step-parent whānau situation where a child might possibly be described as having "two mums" or "two dads." In an impromptu addition to the picturebooks shared, one of the tamariki asked to share a homemade picturebook about their uncle starting school. The book clearly showed and stated that this child lived in a family with two mums who were in a loving relationship. This allowed further opportunity for discussion of LGBTIQ-parented whānau. The family diversity research project picturebooks *And Tango makes three* (Richardson & Parnell, 2005), *The family book* (Parr, 2003), and *Heather has two mummies* (Newman, 1989; 2016) were not selected by teachers.

The first data extract on the theme of family diversity comes from the very first picturebook session, facilitated by Janice. The first picturebook Janice chose to share was called *A tale of two mommies* (Oelschlager & Blanc, 2011). Immediately that Janice read out the title of the book, Suzie responded "That's silly!" The following exchange shows how this conversation developed:

JANICE: This is the tale of two mummies.

Suzie: That's silly!

JANICE: You sit down and we'll read it… *A tale of two mummies. If you have a mumma and a mummy, who fixes things when they break?* Hmm, that's a good question.

Suzie: Mum!

Tais: Dad!

JANICE: Oh, *mummy has all the tools. There's nothing she can't fix.*

Dante: Daddy! Daddy, daddy, daddy!

JANICE: *Who's your mum for riding a bike?*

Suzie: Me me me!

JANICE: *And who's your mum for flying a kite?*

Dante: Me me me!

When Suzie says "That's silly," instead of furthering the discussion around whether two mummies is silly or not, Janice chooses to simply ask Suzie to sit down and listen to the story. Perhaps this is because Janice, like many teachers, feels some reticence around the topic of LGBTIQ-parented families (Burt, Gelnaw & Klinger Lesser, 2010) or maybe it is the more practical consideration of keeping up the children's high level of engagement in this picturebook session. In response to the question "If you have a mumma and a mummy, who fixes things when they break?" both Suzie and Tais relate Janice's question to their own lives. On this occasion however, the book reading continues and there is little opportunity for developing either Tais or Suzie's working theories. This contrasts with Robyn's question-driven discussion with tamariki in the following data segment.

This data extract concerns the sixth picturebook session led by Robyn, sharing the book *Families, families, families!* (Lang & Lang, 2015) with the children. In this conversation, 4-year-old Viv suggests that the daddy duck laid an egg, and Robyn queries this working theory.

Viv: Those are duck's eggs.

ROBYN: Baby ducks eh? Duck's eggs. They are duck's eggs. He's peeking out of…

Viv: The daddy one laid an egg.

ROBYN: Yeah did the daddy lay one? Can daddies lay eggs? Can daddies lay eggs and have babies? *(Laughs)*.

Viv: No

ROBYN: Who laid that egg? Who do you think the daddy is and who do you think the mummy is? You can have all different kinds of mummies and daddies.

Sahara: *(Pointing)* The daddy one's that big.

ROBYN: You think so?

Sahara: Yeah

ROBYN: That one? That's the daddy one? You think so? Why do you think that's the daddy one?

Sahara: Cos that's… the daddy one's that tall.

ROBYN: Is the daddy one taller?

Sahara: Mm-hmm.

ROBYN: But sometimes girls can be taller than boys.

Viv: No

Sahara: *(Nods head).*

Suzie: *(Shakes head).*

ROBYN: I used to be taller than lots of boys when I was young.

Robyn uses a strategy of asking lots of questions - at one point asking six questions in a row. "Yeah, did the daddy lay one? Can daddies lay eggs? Can daddies lay eggs and have babies? *(Laughs)* Who laid that egg? Who do you think the daddy is and who do you think the mummy is?" Robyn seems to be using a binary logic here - i.e. if mummy ducks lay eggs

and have babies, then daddy ducks can't. Yet, Sandretto (2018) postulates that binary logic "closes down the potential for making meaning differently" (p. 207).

After asking the string of questions listed above, Robyn switches to asking why Viv and Sahara think that one particular duck is the daddy one. When the duck's size seems to be Sahara and Viv's main rationale for assuming male gender, Robyn takes the opportunity to point out that females can be taller/bigger than males, thereby potentially disrupting the children's working theories that *greater size = male gender*. Robyn continues to give the children the message that "You can have all different kinds of mummies and daddies," presenting this in a reassuring and inclusive manner.

Burke and Copenhaver (2014) state that using animals as people in children's literature can add emotional distance for the reader, and make difficult topics easier to broach. In the case of *Families, families, families!* (Lang & Lang, 2015) the animals add a strong element of humour and absurdity which many children find appealing. Perhaps, in addition, as suggested by Burke and Copenhaver, this picturebook is less risky for teachers to share because of the use of animals rather than human characters. I recorded in my field notes at the time that the kaiako seemed particularly at ease with this picturebook, and the children appeared to enjoy the humour.

Later in the same picturebook session, at Bob's request, Robyn shares a homemade picturebook with the group. I made this picturebook myself, featuring my son starting school. Robyn's intention of using the picturebook as a way to encourage discussion around having *two mums* is almost derailed by two children's focus on superheroes portrayed in the book, stimulated by the photograph of Thomas' fourth birthday cake which had a Superman decoration on the top.

> ROBYN: *Kia ora. My name is Thomas and I am four years old, almost five.* I'm the same age as you all.
>
> Bob: Me!
>
> ROBYN: And the same age as you. You're all four in this room. *This is my* - who's that? - *This is my mum.* Who's that?

Jack: *(Pointing at researcher)* Kate!

ROBYN: Kate, one of our kaiako.

Bob: And that's Maria!

Researcher: *(Laughs)*.

ROBYN: *And this is Maria.* This is Maria… This is Maria. Thomas has two mums. Thomas has two mums doesn't he?

Bob: Mmmmmm

ROBYN: Kate and Maria. He's lucky to have two mums.

Suzie: Yes, he is!

Jack: Who's?

Sahara: *(Pointing to book)* Superman!

Jack: Who's the other two?

ROBYN: Where's superman?

Jack: Where's the other mum?

ROBYN: *(To Jack)* Where's the other mum? Do you think there's another mum?

Jack: *(Nodding)* Yes!

Researcher: *(Laughs)*.

Jack: *(Laughs).*

ROBYN: *(Laughs)* That would be cool to have three mums! Where's the other mum? Who do you think the other mum is?

Bob: *(Pointing to book)* Superman! … I wanna see the superman picture!

ROBYN: Oh, is Thomas doing Superman? But I'm just speaking to Jack and then I'll come back to you and Superman. *(To Jack)* Who do you think the other mum is? I wonder!

Jack: *(Grinning)* Batman

ROBYN: Batman mum.

In the above data extract from session six, the same child who declared "That's silly!" to the prospect of a family headed by two mums in the first picturebook session, is now in agreement with Robyn's assertion that Thomas is lucky to have two mums: "Yes he is!" Suzie says. Robyn characterises the prospect of three mums as "Cool" which is perhaps a way of over-compensating for possible discomfort caused by this subject. The discussion Robyn starts about having two mums is quickly overtaken by Bob and Jack's superhero talk. Bob has prior knowledge of this book, and knows there is a picture of a Superman cake, and that the main character 'Thomas' wears a Superman suit in many of the photographs. "I wanna see the Superman picture" Bob demands, keen to point this out to his friend Jack, who equally appreciates superheroes.

Coyne, Linder, Rasmussen, Nelson and Collier (2014) find that superhero viewing on television correlates with higher levels of male-stereotyped play for boys, and greater frequency of weapon play for both boys and girls. Certainly both Jack and Bob are very keen on superhero play, but Jack also engages in a wide variety of non-gender-stereotyped behaviours. Harris (2016) talks about the importance of early childhood educators' role in reconceptualising superhero play in early childhood education settings. Perhaps this is

something Robyn was able to return to and re-frame later, during the regular daily kindergarten sessions.

Blaise and Taylor (2012) offer the suggestion that for some children who are gender creative, engaging in heteronormative play that is consistent with the heterosexual matrix (such as superhero play for boys) may in fact build these tamariki some acceptance with gender-conforming boys. This performance of heteronormative play then allows a certain amount of gender creativity to be more readily accepted by their peers. This could be a possible explanation for the way Jack enthusiastically joins Bob in his superhero play, a scenario that was played out in many of the picturebook sessions. It could be that Jack's superhero play performance allows more freedom subsequently for Jack's female persona Peachy to wear a dress to kindergarten.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Throughout the six picturebook sessions, the data show 3- and 4-year-old tamariki engaging in discussions with each other and their teachers, and developing, testing and refining often contradictory working theories. The children's working theories tended to cluster around three major themes - gender signifiers, the possibility of changing gender, and family diversity. In this piece of research, the bulk of children's working theories focused on gender. Perhaps this is because at the age of 3 and 4, tamariki are bathed in hegemonic heteronormativity wherever they look. Gender policing is rife amongst their peers (Mayeza, 2017; 2018), and so gender is of vital importance to them. Every conceivable product seems to be packaged to appeal to girls or boys, the toy aisles in department stores are gendered, and at fast food outlets parents are typically asked if they want a "girl toy" or a "boy toy" with their child's meal (Edmunds, 2017). Stereotypical toy preferences in young children have also been noted in the literature. Todd, Barry & Thommessen (2017) explored British 9 to 32 month old infants' and toddlers' preferences for "gender-typed toys" (p. 1) during independent play. They found sterotypical toy preferences in boys and girls in each of three age-groups.

Although the majority of children's working theories centred on gender attributes or gender change, nonetheless a substantial number foregrounded family diversity. The picturebooks I managed to source portraying LGBTIQ-parented whānau tended to present a homo-normative view highlighting only families led by two same-gender parents, whereas the

reality is far richer than that (Surtees, 2012; Surtees, 2017; Gunn & Surtees, 2009). In many LGBTIQ-parented whānau there are multiple parent figures involved - often at least three or four (Côté & Lavoie, 2018; Surtees, 2017). Yet, LGBTIQ-parented families in picturebooks are repeatedly portrayed as having only two mums or two dads and no other parent figures. Picturebook portrayal of unpartnered yet overtly LGBTIQ parents is also rare.

At the time of conducting this research in 2017 I was unable to find any picturebooks highlighting transgender parenting, although there are a growing number of picturebooks relating to the transgender child's experience e.g. *I am Jazz* (Herthel, Jennings, & McNicholas, 2014) and *10,000 dresses* (Ewert & Ray, 2008). It could be argued, however, that we don't necessarily know the assigned gender of any parent portrayed in a picturebook. Bartholomaeus and Riggs (2017) highlight the fact that via available picturebooks at the time of their writing, cisgender children in Australia may learn to be accepting of transgender people only on narrow terms. Nevertheless, for tamariki raised in whānau with a transgender parent, it may be helpful to have a more overt mirror of their lives portrayed in picturebooks. On this topic, Epstein (2014) discusses the immense value for children in seeing their lives reflected in *mirror books* which, alongside *window books*, are terms coined by Bishop (1990), and previously referred to in Chapter 2. This applies to tamariki with transgender parents just as much as those with lesbian, gay or bisexual parents. For tamariki in other types of family, a more overt picturebook portrayal of a transgender parent would be a window book into a different life, and part of a rich anti-bias curriculum (Burt, Gelnaw, & Klinger Lesser, 2010; Derman-Sparks, LeeKeenan & Nimmo, 2015).

In this chapter I have shown that many children's working theories on gender are based on a binary, with an assumption that gender is synonymous with sex assigned at birth. However, some other tamariki refuse to take up these culturally entrenched deterministic gender concepts. This finding seems to align with that of Gunn (2017) in her work regarding children's interactions and learning about gender. In addition, in the research data obtained in my study, tamariki are more likely to reinforce each other's working theories if they are in line with hegemonic ideals of the gender binary and heteronormative family life. This binary gender ideation and biological determinism thinking is largely supported by kaiako, in much the same way as reported by Karagrigori (2019). Many examples in the data point to the effect that teacher questions and responses have on these conversations: which discourses are upheld and privileged, and which are silenced and shut down. The following chapter looks in

more detail at the ways that teachers operate within power relations (Areljung and Kelly-Ware, 2017) and heteronormativity to navigate the often-risky landscape of children's working theories around gender and family diversity.

CHAPTER 5 – TEACHERS' RESPONSES TO CHILDREN'S WORKING THEORIES: "YOU CAN CHANGE INTO A BOY ANYTIME YOU WANT"

INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in Chapter 2, for the last two decades and more, working theories and learning dispositions have been central learning outcomes in *Te Whāriki*. Kaiako are frequently in a position to scaffold children's working theories as they emerge during play. For example, Davis and McKenzie (2016) postulate how vital it is that adults working with young tamariki deliberately try to notice and respond to children's expressions of their working theories under construction. Without this noticing and responding to a seed of an idea, fledgling working theories may not find the soil they need to flourish in.

In this research project, the question I wanted to explore in relation to early childhood teachers was, *"In what ways do early childhood teachers support and encourage or inhibit and silence the development of children's working theories around LGBTIQ-parented families and gender diversity?"* This research question was addressed by analysing kaiako conversations, actions and interactions with tamariki in the six picturebook sharing sessions, plus some suppplementary data gathered from teacher interviews and kaiako observations of tamariki outside the picturebook sharing sessions.

The predominant working theories that came to the fore from 3- and 4-year-old tamariki in my research were those about the social world. Davis and McKenzie (2016) state these social-oriented working theories are particularly important because they "mediate engagement with others, as well as engagement with the tools provided by cultures" (p. 10). In this chapter of the thesis, I will be looking at how teachers use power regarding the provision of tools (picturebooks) and concepts which children can use to understand their social world. Kaiako are key in mediating which tamariki working theories are elevated, and which are shut down. The choices kaiako make around silencing or supporting working theories were previously discussed in Chapter 2, and often seem to be influenced by teachers' operation within the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990; 1999). In this chapter I address the necessity for time and space, both for kaiako and tamariki to consider, unpack and extend working theories arising. In addition, kaiako attempting to teach "critical literacy with queer intent" (Sandretto, p. 199) may be able to disrupt the heteronorm and question queerly, and these points are discussed below. Later on in this chapter I will return to ideas about risk and

difficult/dangerous knowledge first introduced in Chapter 2, reflecting on how such knowledge can be incorporated into teaching.

TIME AND SPACE

Some of the kaiako felt that they did not always have the time or space to support working theories, or encourage *sustained shared thinking* (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010b), a concept previously discussed in Chapter 2. A sense that there was never enough time or space available was a particular frustration for them. Prior to data collection, kaiako stated a desire to encourage tamariki discussion around the topics of gender diversity and LGBTIQ-parented whānau, but sometimes appeared to struggle with how best to do it. For instance, after the data collection phase had finished I discovered that several kaiako had not prepared for their picturebook sharing session before facilitating the actual session; they had not read their chosen picturebook and were unfamiliar with the content. Examples like this suggested that if kaiako were truly committed to this pedagogy then time and space might have been prioritised accordingly. Instead, space and time constraints were perhaps sometimes used as justification for potentially reproducing heteronormative teaching practices – that is, teaching practices that fail to foreground alternatives to the heteronorm. If kaiako had chosen to prioritise the time and space needed to prepare, then perhaps their pedagogical approach may have been different.

In addition to time and space constraints affecting their pedagogy, kaiako also have some control over time and space for the tamariki they teach. Davis and Peters (2010) comment on the importance of allowing children adequate time and space for the type of complex thinking involved in formulating working theories. Nevertheless, in my study, kaiako did not always provide the time or space tamariki needed to think through and develop their working theories. Regarding the children's transition from the room where her picturebook sessions occurred back into the main kindergarten environment, Robyn commented:

> It was just like out of there and they were straight away doing other things. And I
>
> don't even know if they sat down and had kai. It didn't feel like they had space to
>
> interpret, to explore, to um be in reflection of what we'd just done.

Robyn felt this could be a partial explanation for the lack of children's artwork or follow-up conversations related to the picturebooks. It should be noted, however, that Robyn was completely in charge of how each of her sessions were run, including the transition back into the main kindergarten playroom from the small room we used. This tension between how the picturebook sharing sessions were *actually* run and kaiako impressions later of how they *should* have been run seems to be centred on priorities of time and space. The kaiako were in charge of organising each session, and managing tamariki transitions to and from these picturebook sharing sessions. Therefore, one could argue that a failure to allow time and space for follow-up discussions and artwork to help tamariki formulate working theories related to the non-heteronormative content of the picturebooks could be seen as examples of potentially reproducing heteronormative teaching practices. This is exactly the type of teaching the kaiako had all previously said they wanted to avoid.

One of the reasons given by kaiako for inadequate time and space for tamariki to formulate and develop working theories was the occurrence of distractions and interference from other tamariki. For example, in the following data extract from the fifth picturebook sharing session, Sahara in particular was having difficulty sitting down on the mat as required by the kaiako. Dealing with that issue interrupted both the focus on the picturebook *Thomas starts school* (unpublished) and the children's developing working theories about families with two mums:

> ROBYN: You don't think Maria is Thomas' mum?

> Jack: No

> Bob: Yes! Yes, she is!

> ROBYN: No? Then who's Maria then?

> Jack: No-one!

> ROBYN: She is a very special person

Bob: Maria IS!

ROBYN: She's very special to us, and to Bob, isn't she Bob? And to Kate. And to Thomas.

Jack: Noooo! No! No!

ROBYN: *(Sahara is wandering around the room, refusing to sit down, but Robyn addresses Suzie)* Suzie? No, you come back and sit over there. Cos you're doing good modelling showing Sahara how to sit.

Sahara: And me!

ROBYN: Because Sahara wants to get a sticker like you, doesn't she? Look I sat on the mat with other children. Look, like you guys. That's why we're sitting on the mat cos when we go to school we have to learn, we have to sit on the mat, so you're practising at kindergarten! We do lots of practice sitting on the mat, don't we? And listening to stories about Thomas' two mums and him going off to school.

Whilst it is debatable whether one of the reasons for sitting on a mat at kindergarten is to practise those skills ready for school, Sahara's refusal to sit provided a distraction and possibly interrupted the children's focus and thinking. In these picturebook sharing sessions, the tamariki had power (Foucault, 1980) over whether they began participating in the session, which working theories they chose to give voice to, and whether they were engaged or chose to leave the room. In many instances they also used their power to question the authority of the kaiako by refusing to be quiet, sit down, keep still and by interrupting and pushing their working theories even when the kaiako is not necessarily receptive. In the data sample above, Sahara exerted her power by refusing to sit down for several minutes. Similarly, in the third picturebook sharing session Sahara used both verbal and physical means to exert her power in the situation, creating disruption to the kaiako teaching plan whilst Bob and Sahara argued over whether Sahara is a girl or a boy:

Sahara: I wear gumboots cos I'm not a boy!

Bob: Yeah, you're a boy.

Sahara: No, I'm a girl!

Bob: No, you're a boy. Boy boy boy boy boy boy!

Sahara: *(Hitting Bob in face with gumboot)* Girl!

CHARLOTTE: Oh I've lost you completely, you boys and girls! Look what's happened at the end, she's screaming! Sahara! Sahara! Sahara! *I'm a...*

Sahara: *(Loudly)* Girl!

In this data extract Charlotte admits to the tamariki "Oh I've lost you completely" referring to their lack of attention to the picturebook she is sharing, and she attempts to rally their interest once more, whilst also admonishing Sahara. In response, Sahara loudly says "Girl!" which aligns both with the gender assigned to her at birth, and the title of the picturebook being shared: *I'm a girl!* (Ismail, 2015). It is impossible to tell from the video recording which of these options was the intent of her utterance.

The influence of distraction and interference from other tamariki on children's ability to develop working theories and engage in sustained shared thinking as found in this study's data also aligns with findings by Purdon (2016). One of the methods kaiako consistently used to deal with tamariki interruptions was to question the tamariki, particularly evidenced in the first data extract in this section, involving Robyn and the tamariki discussing *Thomas starts school* (unpublished). When questioning also has a queer slant it can be used to disrupt heteronormativity, and this is explored in the next section of this chapter.

DISRUPTING HETERONORMATIVITY THROUGH QUESTIONING QUEERLY (OR NOT REALLY?)

Throughout the picturebook sharing sessions, the teaching strategy that the kaiako used most prolifically to support developing working theories was questioning. This technique was identified by Lovatt and Hedges (2015) in their discussion of strategies that foster working theory development. Gunn (2015) however, argues for the specific use of a queer lens, and such a lens can facilitate *queer questioning*. She points out that queer questioning can serve as a "small act of resistance" leading to "significant gains in disrupting the heteronormative status quo" (p. 21). Thus, she suggests, kaiako can gain the courage to resist heteronormative discourses (see Chapter 2) and engage in teaching practice "beyond the (hetero)norm" (p. 22). The following data extracts exemplify ways in which teachers use questioning to attempt to delve deeper into children's thinking, or sometimes, albeit inadvertently, to inhibit their developing trains of thought and/or maintain the hetero(norm). In many cases there is an opportunity to question queerly which remains untapped – kaiako sometimes come close to queer questioning, but do not follow through.

In the conversation below, from one of the early picturebook sessions, Janice is looking at the book *A tale of two daddies* (Oelschlager, Blackwood & Blanc, 2010) with the children. This data extract was introduced in Chapter 4, when the focus was on the way children focus on hair length and toy choice as gender signifiers. In the following data analysis the focus shifts to the kaiako, Janice. She asks the children an initial question about whom Lincoln (the child of the two daddies) might be. Janice then asks several questions of the tamariki, trying to help them tease out rationales for their heteronormative assertions. This leads on to a discussion around how you might know if someone is a girl or boy:

JANICE: Who do you think Lincoln might be?

Suzie: A boy.

JANICE: Which one do you think he might be?

Bob: *(pointing at book)* Boy!

JANICE: Boy? What makes you think it's a boy?

Suzie: Or maybe a girl?

JANICE: It might be a girl…

Bob: He's a boy. And there's a truck. There's a boy playing with a truck.

JANICE: Hmmmm… so that's why you think this might be a boy?

Bob: Yup! Cos cos cos cos because hair *(pointing at child on page)*.

JANICE: Aahhh, so boys often have their hair quite short like that don't they?

Suzie: But girls

Pink: And they have long hair!

Suzie: Yeah… I nearly have mine super long.

JANICE: But but but do boys have long hair? *(Melie, Pink and Suzie compare the length of their hair, touching it, twirling bunches/ponytails/plaits).*

Suzie: Mine is longer than yours - see?

Bob: That's the… those are two daddies.

JANICE: How do you know?

Bob: *(Pointing at book pages)* Cos cos cos that one's got jeans on and that one's got shoes on and that one's got pants on and that one's got shoes and clothes.

JANICE: So do mums wear jeans sometimes?

Many children: No.

JANICE: No? Whose mum wears…? D-do mums wear jeans?

Many children: No.

Bob: Yup - my mum does sometimes.

Janice repeatedly uses direct questioning, apparently attempting to challenge the working theories-in-progress that the children are co-constructing regarding gender markers (explored in the previous chapter). In this case, perhaps Janice is taking a more active role in leading the children's thinking, rather than allowing their working theories to unfold more naturally. This possibility resonates with Purdon's (2016) findings that sometimes teachers can foreground their own agendas and try to "lead children to the 'right' answer" (p. 271). As revealed in discussion with Janice later, it seems she was attempting to *question queerly*, and teach with *queer intent* (Sandretto, 2018) to disrupt the heteronormative thinking of the tamariki regarding gender signifiers. In light of Janice's counter-heteronormative intentions discussed with me later, perhaps her active role in shaping tamariki thinking in this data extract is unsurprising.

Janice may be missing the point of the narrative in the picturebook, however, which is titled *A tale of two daddies.* Janice's focus on gender signifiers potentially detracts from the *two daddies* narrative. Despite this picturebook focusing on a child whose two fathers are most likely in a relationship with each other, Janice does not build upon the *two daddies* as a conversation topic. At no point in her 15 minute discussion of this picturebook does Janice hint that the two daddies could be a loving couple. Given that the picturebook sharing sessions were specifically aimed at encouraging children's working theory development in the area of LGBTIQ-parented families and gender diversity, this is a big omission. Despite her likely best intentions, Janice bypassed a chance to resist heteronormative discourses and question queerly (Gunn, 2015) whilst the tamariki missed out on the opportunity for some critical thinking and working theory development.

In the following data extract from the fifth picturebook session, Robyn discusses gender change with some of the children, after they started exploring their working theories around

this topic in response to the picturebook *Families, families, families!* (Lang & Lang, 2015). In seven conversational turns, Robyn asks questions (12 in total) in all but two of these turns, however at least some opportunities to question *queerly* are being missed:

Viv: I'm going to change into a boy.

ROBYN: Are you going to change into a boy? Why would you wanna, why would you want to change into a boy?

RESEARCHER: Oh?

Viv: Cos my brother says I want, I want me to change into a boy.

ROBYN: He wants you to change into a boy, or you want to change into a boy?

Viv: Toby change into a girl now.

ROBYN: Really? Do you swap roles sometimes? Sometimes you're the boy and sometimes Toby's the girl? … That's fun, that's good to do that isn't it? That's ok to act like a boy and then act like a girl sometimes. And, I wonder how girls act and I wonder how boys act? … Cos we do diff, do we do the same things sometimes?

Suzie: No

ROBYN: YES! Boys like to wear tutus don't they?

Suzie: No

ROBYN: Yes they do.

In this piece of data, Robyn appears to be using questioning to try to encourage Viv, Suzie and Sahara to consider gender roles and gender change. Rather than questioning queerly, however, some of Robyn's dialogue reinforces heteronormativity, as explored below. During our discussion of data transcripts some months after the picturebook sessions had finished, Robyn reflected upon this exchange. Robyn particularly focused on her response to Viv's assertion "I'm going to change into a boy." At the time, Robyn replied to Viv including the words "Why would you want to do that?" Later Robyn reflected,

> So, as I see it written down and I think I probably could have asked it… so that's *me* having an almost um, not that I thought it at the time, but when I see that written down it's like *me* having a wee bit of a negative connotation to that but I didn't, I don't feel that. I think that if a child needs to be or ever wants to be a boy they need to do that.

In her reflection, Robyn acknowledges that this question is underpinned by a "negative connotation" but she denies conscious feelings of negativity towards the idea of gender change. During the picturebook session however, Robyn steers Viv's comment " I want me to change into a boy" into the *less-dangerous* essentialising discourse of gender role-playing. This could be seen as an example of what Davis and Peters (2011) describe as "hijacking" the direction of children's theorising (p. 12). Despite their stated intentions, it appears that it was sometimes difficult for the kaiako to interrupt heteronormativity and teach with *queer intent* (Sandretto, 2018) in the moment. Reflections afterwards, both individually and with me, made the kaiako realise how their teaching practice sometimes stifled the development of children's working theories related to gender and LGBTIQ-parented families, and reproduced heteronormativity.

In further response to Viv's comment "I want to change into a boy," Robyn asks Viv "Do you swap roles sometimes?" and reassures Viv that it is acceptable to "act like a boy then act like a girl sometimes." Kelly (2012) describes this "hesitancy to ask probing questions or fully engage with children's thinking" as "missed opportunities" (p. 296). Consciously or not, Robyn is missing opportunities to fully engage with Viv's thinking on gender change, and instead Robyn foregrounds heteronormative discourses here. However, Robyn fully engages in self-reflection on the conversation later in collaboration with me, and as Blaise and Taylor

(2012) posit, whilst this self-reflection is difficult and often uncomfortable work, recognising our teaching selves as frequently upholding gender stereotypes within the heterosexual matrix is essential if we are to effect change.

In contrast to the missed opportunities described above, the latter section of this data extract shows Robyn challenging Suzie with new information that does not fit Suzie's current working theories. Suzie verbalises her working theory that boys cannot wear tutus, whereas Robyn suggests that on the contrary, boys might like to wear tutus. Robyn's challenge to Suzie's working theory appears to be an attempt to disrupt heteronormativity by *queer questioning* (Gunn, 2015). Perhaps Suzie may absorb this novel information and new thinking could potentially emerge. Suzie never shares how her thinking is progressing though, as the next speaker is Sahara who joins the conversation to add that she also wants to change into a boy – a data extract which is explored later in this chapter.

In the next data sample Charlotte is reading the book *I'm a Girl!* (Ismail, 2015) with a group of tamariki. This book naturally prompts much discussion about gender signifiers amongst the children as they piece together their working theories about gender, and whether it is possible to tell if someone is a boy or a girl. Their talk seems to prompt Charlotte to ask lots of questions, some of them queering the discussion, in an apparent attempt to help the tamariki develop their thinking:

CHARLOTTE: Do you think only boys read books about boats?

Jack: (*Emphatically shaking head*)

Sahara: No.

CHARLOTTE: She's reading a book about a boat. Is she a boy?

All children: No.

CHARLOTTE: "*I'm a girl!*" she keeps telling everyone. And she likes boats.

Possum: But the other boys don't. They must be girls too.

CHARLOTTE: *(To Possum)* Are they? Why should, why must they be girls?

Possum: The babies are, the babies are friends, must be boys or something, like lots of boy rabbits!

CHARLOTTE: Boy, she might have boy rabbits as friends.

Hella: *(Pokes Possum with her finger)*.

Possum: Maybe they, maybe they... *(To Hella)* Oy stop it!

CHARLOTTE: Hella, Possum's just trying to tell me something... her ideas.

Possum: She's going to read the library book. I went to the library.

CHARLOTTE: Yeah, so she's gone to the library.

In this vignette, likely attempting to teach with *queer intent* (Sandretto, 2018) and *question queerly* (Gunn, 2015), Charlotte asks the children several yes/no questions in order to try to open up a wider conversation. Some examples include, "Do you think only boys read books about boats?" and "Is she a boy?" As the conversation develops, perhaps attempting to encourage *sustained shared thinking* (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010b) Charlotte asks an open-ended question, "Why must they be girls?" Whilst Charlotte stated in discussion with me later that she was aiming to promote the children's critical thinking, most of the tamariki gave one word or non-verbal responses. In reply to "Why must they be girls?" Possum engages more fully, but her fantastical thinking may potentially be difficult for her peers to relate to the question posed. Hella, possibly growing impatient, starts to poke Possum with her finger, causing a distraction from the picturebook discussion. Charlotte attempts to redirect Hella's interest while continuing to listen to Possum, allowing Possum to explain that the girl in the story went to the library.

DISRUPTING THE HETERONORM THROUGH INTRODUCING QUEER CONTENT

Whilst not consistent, at times in all three of the data extracts above, the kaiako attempt to disrupt the heteronorm by *queer questioning* (Gunn, 2015) and teaching with *queer intent* (Sandretto, 2018). The next data sample focuses on a kaiako disrupting the heteronorm through adding factual information into a dispute between two tamariki, rather than relying on questioning. This data extract was provided by a kaiako, Frances, several months after the picturebook sessions had finished. Frances had started working at the kindergarten after the main data collection phase of my research had taken place, but she wrote down the exchange that took place between these two tamariki because it seemed salient for her to reflect upon. As she told other kaiako about this incident, they said "Tell Kate - this is exactly what her research is about!" The exchange involved two tamariki who were already part of the research, and Frances agreed to participate in retrospect too. The context was that Pink, Boom Boom and Bob were outside at kindergarten, teasing each other initially in a light-hearted manner. Frances started out observing, then perhaps teaching with *queer intent* (Sandretto, 2018), she stepped in to offer some facts:

Pink: Bob, you're going to marry Boom Boom's sister.

Bob: No I'm not! Well… you're going to marry a girl.

Pink: *(Literally stops in tracks, becomes serious)* No I'm not!

Bob: Yes you are, you're going to marry a girl.

Pink: *(Angry)* No I'm NOT! Because girls are not allowed to marry each other in New Zealand.

FRANCES: *(Interjecting)* Actually Pink, they are! Girls CAN marry each other in New Zealand and so can boys. It's okay in New Zealand. In fact, people come from other countries to get married because it's allowed here.

Pink*: (Hands on hips, still angry)* No! It's NOT! My mummy and daddy work at the council and they said girls are not allowed to marry girls! *(Stomps away angrily)*.

Here, Frances interjects to add queer content: apparently new information for Pink about the fact that women can marry one another in Aotearoa New Zealand. Pink's mother later commented to Frances that to her knowledge they have never discussed this issue at home, and she was surprised to hear of her daughter's opinion on same gender marriage. She reported that neither she nor her husband hold the opinions that Pink reported so assuredly. Of course, Frances is correct in the new information she presents – as mentioned in Chapter 2, marriage equality was achieved in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2013 (Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Act, 2013).

Pink had an angry reaction to the suggestion that she would marry a girl, and responded by voicing her working theories on the unacceptability of two girls getting married. Her opinions are likely influenced by the hegemonic view within much of Aotearoa New Zealand society that the only acceptable family is constituted around a so-called natural expression of biology, for example male and female procreation (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). This hegemonic standpoint is not only reflected in children's working theories, but perpetuated throughout society with acts such as reinforcing the nuclear family via mothers' day and fathers' day celebrations, and various official forms with pre-printed spaces only accommodating a male-/female-led family.

Our heteronormative society dictates assumed heterosexuality even in toddlers, with anecdotal kaiako and whānau comments such as for example, "Aww he's got a little girlfriend" and "She loves the boys!" commonplace regarding male/female friendships in young children. The nuclear family is privileged, normalised, represented as the social norm and as the "only natural, normal and successful family relationship" (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006, p. 84). Other family constellations and types of partnership and marriage are often rendered invisible, not noticed and ignored. Coming from the perspective of inclusive understandings of marriage, however, Bentley and Souto-Manning (2016) argue that lesbian and gay issues "cannot be silenced, regardless of discomfort or lack of readiness" on the part of teachers (p. 198).

NOT NOTICING AND SILENCING

A strategy that kaiako may employ when faced with children's developing working theories is to ignore or silence them (Areljung & Kelly-Ware, 2017). This may be deliberate or accidental. An accidental example of this silencing occurs in the data extract below, in

response to the text *I'm a girl* (Ismail, 2015) as Charlotte tries to explain to the tamariki that both boys and girls can play with dolls. Charlotte's stated intent in discussion with me after the session was to provide a counter to the heteronormative working theory that only girls can play with dolls. Pertinent to analysis of this vignette is the fact that Jack's gender identity varies, as previously mentioned. Charlotte's opening question aims to encourage the tamariki to say "Yes" that boys *can* play with dolls:

CHARLOTTE: Do boys play with dolls?

Bob: Yup!

Jack: Yes

CHARLOTTE: Jack, do you like to play with dolls?

Jack: *(Nods, smiling)* Yes

CHARLOTTE: You're a boy!

Jack: *(Stops smiling, looks down)*

Whilst Charlotte clarified with me later that she was attempting to use Jack's response that he *does* like playing with dolls to prove that therefore boys *can* play with dolls, it has unintended consequences. This is because Jack sometimes identifies as a boy and sometimes as a girl. Based on Jack's non-verbal response on the video (stops smiling, looks down) there are two likely interpretations. One interpretation is that perhaps Jack felt uncomfortable being labelled as a boy in that moment. The other is that Jack felt that he shouldn't like playing with dolls because he has been labelled *boy* and he knows boys aren't supposed to like dolls. This data extract brings into sharp focus Foucault's (1980) theories on power relations. In this case Charlotte was exercising power over the group of tamariki, and in response to being told by Charlotte what his gender was (should be?) in that moment, Jack seemed deflated. In discussion with me later, Charlotte said that on reflection she felt "terrible" about her response to Jack that day. Long after the fact, when reading the conversation transcripts, it was obvious to Charlotte that her response could have been disempowering for Jack by inadvertently silencing one of his working theories about gender.

On the day, however, with the competing tensions of helping children develop their working theories whilst also keeping the group engaged, this moment passed unnoticed. Charlotte's first realisation of Jack's reaction was when reading the transcript weeks later. Relevant to this accidental silencing, Scheinfeld, Haigh and Scheinfeld (2008) quote Spaggiari (1994): "When children feel they are not being listened to, they don't have anything to say" (p. 17). Unfortunately, one result of our society being so saturated in heteronormativity is that this *not noticing* is the default for most of us. This relates to Areljung and Kelly-Ware's (2017) discussion of the way that "some of what children do is never noticed and some is silenced" (p. 371).

Although it is clear that Charlotte's *not noticing* was inadvertent, its potential impact remains the same. Charlotte's reflection on this data extract, however, highlights the fact that there are opportunities for teachers to revisit scenarios with children after reflection. This was also the case for the teachers in Scheinfeld, Haigh and Scheinfeld's (2008) example of some young children going to visit the *Big School.* Following an initial burst of enthusiasm, the teachers noticed "the children showed no interest in the topic" (p. 19). After the teachers reflected on this together, they realised that the tamariki were focused on windows and stairs rather than being interested in the teachers' focus on transition to kindergarten. Once the teachers responded to this child-driven focus on windows and stairs, "The children's enthusiastic response confirmed their hunch" (p. 19). Perhaps in a similar manner, Charlotte and the other kaiako may have found value in revisiting key topics with children later in the day or week, after having had time to reflect on what had happened in each picturebook sharing session.

In the following discussion I will revisit a vignette from the sixth picturebook session with Robyn, already considered in Chapter 4. This time the focus is not on the children's working theories, as was the case there, but on the kaiako response to those theories. In this piece of data, Sahara states that she wants to turn into a boy. Robyn's immediate response seems anti-heteronormative, in line with one of the teaching recommendations from Kroeger, Recker and Gunn (2019) as she respects Sahara's description of herself and says: " You can change into a boy anytime you want." After checking with Robyn that "...boys have penis, eh?" Suzie draws the logical conclusion from Robyn's response that if Sahara becomes a boy, then she will "have a penis one day." The transcript of that interaction is repeated here for clarity:

> Sahara: But my brother said I wanna change into boys.

ROBYN: Did he? Did he say that to you too?

Sahara: Yeah and I wanna change into a boy.

ROBYN: You can change into a boy anytime you want.

Suzie: And and boys have penis, eh?

ROBYN: They DO have penises.

Suzie: And you're gonna have a penis one day, Sahara.

ROBYN: *(Glancing momentarily at researcher – embarrassed?)* Oh I don't know about that *(laughing)*.

Viv: I'm gonna have a *(unintelligible)*.

Sahara: *(Smiling)* My brother's gonna turn into a girl.

ROBYN: IS she? Your brother's gonna turn into a girl? Yeah well sometimes children DO wanna change into girls, and that's ok. Cos maybe they feel different.

Suzie: I wanna change into a boy too.

ROBYN: *(Rubbing Suzie's back)* Oh. You're a girl at the moment. Shall we carry on reading the story? Shall we carry on reading? Reading the story?

 Suzie: No.

Sahara: I'm a boy!

ROBYN: *Some children have none.* What does, what do bears sometimes have none of? Oh, lots of brothers and sisters. Some children have no brothers and sisters. Do you have any brothers and sisters Suzie?

This is an example of the power that kaiako hold in choosing which working theories to uphold and extend, and which are glossed over and sink into the background of a

conversation. "The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power" (Foucault, 1994, p. xvi). The power relationships between the kaiako and tamariki influence what knowledge is allowed, and which is deemed too dangerous. Robyn exhibits clear discomfort at Suzie's statement that Sahara will get a penis one day, and in the video footage she appears flustered. Suzie's developing working theory "You're gonna have a penis one day, Sahara" relates directly to Areljung and Kelly-Ware's (2017) assertion that from a teacher's perspective, "some working theories are riskier than others" (p. 382). In this case, it seems that unpacking Suzie's working theory could expose Robyn's potential lack of knowledge and skills relating to gender identity, and with her laughing "Oh I don't know about that!" she seems to want to shut this topic down and move on.

When Sahara says her brother wants to turn into a girl, however, Robyn makes a point of stating that "Sometimes children *do* wanna change into girls, and that's okay. Cos maybe they feel different." This reassurance from Robyn possibly prompts Suzie to add that she wants to change into a boy too. This revelation might be one too many for Robyn, who hurriedly sails from the choppy seas of gender identity to the safe harbour of reading the picturebook. "Oh. You're a girl at the moment. Shall we carry on reading the story? Shall we carry on reading? Reading the story?" Robyn asks without pausing for breath. She hastily continues to read the picturebook even when Suzie replies "No" to Robyn's question "Shall we carry on reading?" – Suzie apparently signalling that she would rather continue the conversation.

As a counterpoint to this silencing type of interaction, Hardie (2015) states that teachers "must engage with children over book content, otherwise they continue to perpetuate silence and restrict learning" (p. 46). This tension between kaiako discomfort leading them to rush on to a *safer* topic, versus children needing time and space to properly think through and unpack their working theories is a theme that was repeated in several of the data extracts. This tension between kaiako discomfort, fear of dangerous topics and risk anxiety versus children's need for time and space to develop and refine their working theories is explored further in the next section.

DANGEROUS KNOWLEDGE

Returning to the data extract above and Robyn's obvious discomfort with the topic, there is the likelihood that Robyn's own working theories around the relationships between gender/sex/sexuality are still undergoing refinement – a point referred to in more detail below. Crisp (2018) considers how to deal with the issue of children giggling in response to uncomfortable topics like two gay males in a picturebook, but here it is the kaiako who is laughing in embarrassment. In my discussion with Robyn after the picturebook session, she confirmed that she felt embarrassed and wanted to move the discussion on from Suzie's logical deduction that Sahara would get a penis in the future if she became a boy.

Robyn mentioned concern over the questions that might come up relating to the possibility of Sahara having a penis in future, and how she would deal with answering them. This was an interesting reflection from Robyn, as in most cases if kaiako don't know the answer to something a tamaiti asks them they are happy to say something like, "I don't know, but perhaps we can find the answer together." It is possible to interpret Robyn's reluctance to go deeper into this subject as an avoidance of dealing with the real issues here, which in turn perpetuates heteronormativity. However, one consideration influencing kaiako decisions around supporting or shutting down working theories is how a child's family might react to any explanation focusing on issues of sexuality, a topic addressed with an older cohort of children in Robinson, Smith and Davies (2017). This may well have been one of the thoughts Robyn chose to heed when silencing the topic.

At the time, Robyn chose to steer well away from any discussion of the fact that it is possible to be a boy who doesn't have a penis - perhaps because Robyn considered this was too risky/dangerous for her to pursue (Britzman, 1991). It could also be because Robyn herself considered a penis an obligatory marker of male gender, and may have felt out of her depth discussing any other possibilities. Robyn confirmed she has believed that *genitalia = sex = gender* for most of her life, and her awareness of gender as a performative social construct (Butler, 1990; 1999) is only just beginning. Therefore, one of the issues that Robyn may have risked exposing in this instance was her own lack of knowledge and skills around gender matters. Robyn simply did not have the knowledge to be able to explain to Suzie that, "Not all boys have a penis."

This came to light in our discussions later, with Robyn reflecting on the transcripts of the picturebook sharing sessions she led. Robyn said she felt out of her depth unpacking Suzie's working theories around a penis being obligatory for a boy. This discomfort then influenced Robyn, reflecting on-the-go, to silence discussion around this working theory, and revert to the more comfortable activity of reading the picturebook aloud. Against a background of teacher-child power relations, Areljung and Kelly-Ware (2017) suggest that teaching strategies around children's working theories are often guided by the riskiness of unpacking and extending each working theory. Less risky working theories are much more likely to be verbalised and made "public" by teachers than those perceived as "risky" (p. 382).

Robyn is not alone in questioning her skills in this area. Gunn (2015) reports that, "many teachers still feel ill equipped to resist heteronormative discourses" (p. 25). Like Tate's teachers in Kroeger, Recker and Gunn (2019), Robyn was likely guided in her words and actions by what she personally felt was *appropriate* for 3- and 4-year-old children to be discussing. Choosing to exercise power to avoid topics such as sexuality on the basis of appropriateness, however, can have ramifications regarding both child knowledge and the reproduction of heteronormativity. As Bentley and Souto-Manning (2016) suggest on a related topic, "This work requires that teachers be positioned vulnerably – as teachers and learners" (p. 198). Perhaps, however, this discussion amongst a group of 3- and 4-year-olds about girls acquiring penises felt like too much vulnerability for Robyn at that moment, and she tried to change the subject.

It certainly seems Robyn was sufficiently concerned about the potentially difficult and dangerous direction the discussion was taking that she tried several times to shut down this line of thinking and move the conversation onwards. Burt, Gelnaw and Klinger Lesser (2010) note how commonly teachers have fears in areas considered *difficult or dangerous knowledge* within teaching practice (Britzman, 1991), even despite their realisation that silence on these issues can be damaging for children and families. These authors list four common reasons why kaiako may be reluctant to address these issues: lack of comfort with their own knowledge; personal dissonance regarding their own beliefs; discomfort that if they advocate for LGBT[11] people, they will be assumed to be LGBT themselves; and fear of reprisal from others in the workplace (p. 100). If kaiako are able to see past these issues however, there are

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[11] LGBT = Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, the terminology used by Burt, Gelnaw and Klinger Lesser (2010) in contrast to the more encompassing term LGBTIQ used throughout this thesis.

many things they can do in the playroom to question normativity (Blaise & Taylor, 2012; Gunn, 2015) and make space for dangerous and difficult topics. Some of these ideas are discussed in the final chapter.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Gunn (2015) defines heteronormativity as "the effect of construing particular forms of gender, sexuality and the family as normal" (p. 21). She discusses some of the ways in which teachers might work to resist heteronormative discourses within early childhood education, including the strategy of "queer questioning" (p. 22) addressed in this chapter. All the teachers involved in my research project were aware of the study's focus on children's development of working theories around gender, sexuality and diverse families. It is therefore likely that they engaged in the picturebook sharing sessions with these thoughts in mind, and a general desire to encourage the children to contemplate the possibility of non-heteronormative ways of being and doing. There is some evidence that the kaiako were beginning to address the "challenges of practising beyond the (hetero)norm" (Gunn, 2015, p. 22), reflected sometimes in how they mediated children's working theories.

Viewing the data extracts focusing on how kaiako respond to the developing working theories of tamariki, it is clear that there is a mixture of support and encouragement for some working theories, alongside a lack of development of working theories that represent *dangerous knowledge*. This finding aligns with those of Areljung and Kelly-Ware (2017). In their keenness to encourage tamariki to think about gender differently, at times the kaiako in my study were possibly *pushing an agenda* and relying on closed questioning to encourage thinking in a particular direction. Conversely, on a few occasions, children's thinking and conversation strayed into areas which provoked discomfort, verging on *moral pani*c (Tobin, 1997; Robinson, 2008) amongst the kaiako, and inhibition and silencing resulted. Britzman (1995) called for teachers to "stop reading straight" (p. 164) and whilst the kaiako in this study may have set out to use "critical literacy with queer intent" (Sandretto, 2018, p. 199) in these picturebook sharing sessions, the pervasive nature of heteronormativity in society stopped them from fully achieving this.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, in this study I have found that kaiako reflect on a minute-by-minute basis to estimate the riskiness of individual working theories. They simultaneously assess other conditions such as time available, in order to decide which

working theories they will share, extend and give voice to. Another consideration for kaiako is the potential reaction of parents and whānau involved, as each early childhood education setting has a diversity of whānau with differing cultures and values. Some of these whānau may have values and beliefs incompatible with their tamariki gaining knowledge of gender diversity and LGBTIQ-parented families. Although they were dealing with an older age group – parents of primary school children – one of Robinson, Smith and Davies's (2017) findings is relevant here, namely that some parents/carers believed that in sexuality education some topics should only be addressed at home. Potential fear of upsetting whānau with the topics addressed was mentioned as inhibitive by more than one of the kaiako in this study when trying to share *risky* picturebooks with a wider group of tamariki than those in the research project whose whānau had given express permission.

It seems that power relations interact with heteronormativity, and time and space considerations in the early childhood education setting to influence which working theories are likely to be reified, unpacked and developed by kaiako and which working theories are more likely to remain unnoticed and "fizzle out" (Areljung & Kelly-Ware, 2017, p. 383). One factor in this equation is kaiako willingness to teach with *queer intent* (Sandretto, 2018). Another related factor is kaiako knowledge and skill in the areas of the working theories being expounded by tamariki. Hedges and Cooper (2017) discuss the usefulness of teaching teams employing video recording for joint reflection as a way to "analyse children's working theory development and foster children's ongoing learning" (p. 409). This means of joint reflection could potentially be a useful way for kaiako to replay scenarios that develop, and consider together how they could in future teach with queer intent.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, engaging in *queer questioning* (Gunn, 2015), tackling difficult and dangerous topics and disrupting the heteronorm requires a certain vulnerability from kaiako, who become positioned as learners as well as teachers (Bentley & Souto-Manning, 2016). Certainly I have learnt much from reflecting on the research I have undertaken, and from the lengthy process of peer-supported reflection involved in writing this thesis. My own thinking has shifted as a result of this, for example by undertaking *queer questioning* of the data in relation to kaiako comments regarding lack of time and space to engage fully with counter-heteronormative pedagogy. This points to kaiako professional development as a key, and this theme will be returned to in the final chapter of this thesis.

CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

The original premise of this study was to investigate kindergarten children's and teachers' responses to picturebooks foregrounding gender diversity and LGBTIQ-parented families. There was a particular focus on children's working theories and teachers' support for or silencing of these responses. The intention was to build upon research carried out by Kelly (2012), which involved the provision of a selection of picturebooks to kaiako and tamariki at one early childhood centre. Whilst there were useful findings in Kelly's work, she suggested that more rigorous data might be gleaned from the researcher being present whilst the picturebooks were shared. This study thus grew from that beginning into a participant observation exploration of children's working theories during teacher-led picturebook sharing sessions. The teachers' power in relation to their responses to these working theories was also of interest.

The research questions investigated were:

- What working theories around LGBTIQ-parented families and gender diversity are 3- and 4-year-olds developing as they engage with relevant picturebooks?

- In what ways do early childhood teachers support and encourage or inhibit and silence the development of children's working theories around LGBTIQ-parented families and gender diversity?

Data was analysed and themes emerged, which subsequently formed the basis for the two findings chapters in this thesis – Chapters 5 and 6. In this concluding chapter I revisit the major findings of this study. As previously indicated these findings focus on children's working theories in response to a curated selection of picturebooks, and the power kaiako have to shut down or support these working theories. I identify several significant implications for teaching practice and children's learning. I also consider the strengths and limitations of this study as well as some possibilities for future research directions.

KEY FINDINGS

The findings emerging from this study fell into two somewhat overlapping categories. The first of these pertains directly to children's learning and was the primary focus of Chapter 4. The second category of findings concerned teachers' responses to children's working theories, and was detailed in Chapter 5.

CHILDREN'S WORKING THEORIES

Gender signifiers

In this study, most of the children's working theories springing from the picturebook sharing sessions were based around concepts of gender signifiers. Children tended to focus on stereotypical binary gender signifiers such as short hair = male/long hair = female; pink = female/blue = male; small = female/large = male. This align's with Gunn's (2017) assertion that children rely on stereotypical gender signifiers. In my study, the children considered these concepts of for example, boys' colours and girls' colours in discussions with their peers and kaiako. Tamariki sometimes refined their working theories and at other times debated the veracity of their claims with their friends or the kaiako. There were instances where children actively engaged in displays of binary gender performance, consistent with Butler's (1990, 1999) theories of gender performativity. This tended to occur whilst discussing issues of gender, for example girls twirling hair, boys engaging in superhero talk.

Gender change

Although all but one of the picturebooks highlighting gender change/transgender issues were not shared by kaiako, the topic of gender change was spontaneously discussed by the tamariki on several occasions. Most of the children made the assumption that in order to be male, a penis was required. This interpretation aligns with biological determinism, but also with Gunn's (2017) assertion that young children rely heavily on dualistic thinking and sterotypical external markers of gender. The kaiako typically felt unskilled and lacking knowledge or confidence to develop these conversations further, or provide an alternate point of view. This was particularly obvious in one exchange when a child questioned a teacher on whether "boys have penis." When Robyn agreed that boys do indeed have a penis, the child immediately told her friend – who had just stated her wish to "change into a boy" – "You're gonna have a penis one day." This is an example of the type of logical thinking young 3- and 4- year-old children are able to use in constructing their working theories.

Family diversity

Children's working theories around family diversity were generally expansive and inclusive. Comments in most of the picturebook sharing sessions implied that children felt comfortable with various family constellations *counting* as a family. Tamariki tended to vie with each other about the number of parents they had, although there was one comment "That's silly!" relating to a story about two mums. Later however, this same child (Suzie) agreed with the teacher's assertion that having two mums would be "cool."

TEACHER RESPONSES

Power relations

Power was always operating (Foucault, 1980) between kaiako and tamariki taking part in the picturebook sharing sessions. Kaiako used their power to decide whether to teach *critical literacy with queer intent* (Sandretto, 2018) thereby disrupting heteronormativity - or to back away from discomforting topics, thus strengthening the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990; 1999). Whilst not naming it as such, kaiako sometimes used a *childhood innocence* (Robinson, Smith & Davies, 2017) discourse as justification for discouraging further discussion of topics deemed too risky or dangerous for the 3- and 4-year-old tamariki in this study.

Questioning queerly (or not really?)

Frequently during the picturebook sharing sessions, kaiako used direct questioning to challenge or support children's developing working theories consistent with recommendations in the literature discussed earlier in this thesis (Lovatt & Hedges, 2015). In particular, *queer questioning* (Gunn, 2015) is a useful way to work towards disrupting heteronormativity. In my study however, while kaiako often engaged in questioning tamariki as they developed working theories, the queer aspect was seldom visible.

Not noticing or silencing, and dallying with dangerous knowledge

At times during the picturebook sessions, the absence of response from a kaiako was the salient point in the data gathered. Whether this was a deliberate silencing or an inadvertent lack of noticing, the net result was that the child's working theory was not "unpacked and extended" (Areljung & Kelly-Ware, 2017, p. 370) – another example of the power teachers wield. Areljung and Kelly-Ware (2017) further postulate that teachers' decisions as to whether or not specific working theories are developed can be guided by the *riskiness*

perceived. Teachers might shy away from working theories that may challenge their own knowledge or comfort levels, as evident when Robyn was reacting to Sahara's penis comment in Chapter 5. Furthermore, competing tensions of keeping the whole group of tamariki engaged whilst simultaneously taking time to unpack individual tamaiti working theories sometimes led to salient comments passing unnoticed by kaiako during data collection. Even inadvertent *not noticing* may have a significant impact on a tamaiti.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

There are multiple implications for teaching and learning, including many early childhood teachers' need for professional development around issues of heteronormativity, gender diversity and family diversity. Such professional development might help kaiako feel more confident when broaching topics covering risky, dangerous or difficult knowledge with tamariki, as previously discussed in Chapter 2 and 5. Another consideration is the extent to which the subjects of heteronormativity, gender diversity and diverse whānau are addressed during initial teacher education. Bryan (2019) advocates for the importance of challenging conventional play norms and expectations, and hegemonic ideals of masculinity with both preservice and inservice teachers. Increasing knowledge of diverse whānau, gender diversity and heteronormativity is especially salient considering the burgeoning number of queer families having children (Surtees 2017; 2020) and the developing understandings of gender diversity and creativity in broader society. As more kaiako become confident in their knowledge and skills in these areas, they will be able to support each other in this counter-hegemonic work, and therefore potentially develop a collective bravery in tackling so-called risky issues.

During the study presented in this thesis, teachers gained insight from looking back over the transcripts of their video-recorded conversations with children in picturebook sharing sessions, as part of the member-checking process. The insights they shared with me verbally made it clear that kaiako need time to reflect on their dialogue with tamariki in order to move their teaching practice forward. There would also be benefits in kaiako recording sustained shared thinking conversations with tamariki in order to listen back and reflect on them later. As mentioned previously, Hedges and Cooper (2017) found the use of video footage alongside joint reflection and dialogue in two early childhood education settings to be invaluable in analysing and fostering children's working theories. There is potential also in using this technique to disrupt heteronormativity and queer the pedagogy (Gunn, 2015, 2017;

Sandretto, 2018). An awareness amongst kaiako that self-reflection is vitally important to effective teaching practice is essential, and so is the determination to make it happen, and to act upon their reflections.

Professional development regarding ways to promote sustained shared thinking could also be beneficial to some teachers. In this study's findings, sustained shared thinking was particularly difficult when a *risky* topic was involved – findings supported by Burt, Gelnaw and Klinger Lesser (2010) and Areljung and Kelly-Ware, (2017). Much of my research data showed missed opportunities for encouraging sustained shared thinking, often because of tensions such as maintaining the interest of all children within the group, whilst trying to make the most of teachable moments with individual children. Brodie (2014) provides practical teaching strategies for developing sustained shared thinking across diverse curriculum areas, with age-groups from babies and toddlers to young children, as well as those with additional needs. Another implication for fostering learning is that kaiako need to talk less and listen more to tamariki as the children develop their own working theories. Davis and McKenzie (2017) noted a similar finding. Kaiako are prone to *hijack* children's working theories and disrupt children's creative thinking with teachers' own thoughts and agenda.

Kroeger, Recker and Gunn (2019) provide several recommendations for teachers who want to support gender diversity in their classrooms (p. 84). These include the kaiako reflecting on their own understandings of gender; considering how they model acceptance of gender exploration; answering children's questions about gender; respecting children's descriptions of themselves; reminding children you encourage everyone to play, explore and express themselves freely. In creating an environment where LGBTIQ families feel safe, Souto-Manning and Hermann-Wilmarth (2008) suggest that something as simple as the teacher stating that they value diversity, including a diversity of family structures is beneficial. Liang and Cohrssen (2020) postulate that for many people "an important first step is understanding what the term 'LGBTIQ-parented family' actually means (p. 45).

In most of the picturebook sharing session vignettes, the kaiako encourage tamariki to think about non-normative discourses of gender and/or family, albeit sometimes superficially. They do this despite the fact that many of the children are ostensibly contented with the norm. Perhaps like the pre-service teachers Robinson and Jones Diaz (2006) taught, they realise at

some level that to challenge discourses which encourage gender inequality is vital work reaching out into society and far beyond the bounds of early childhood education (p. 143). Certainly ideas around challenging gender stereotypes and promoting gender equity have been circulating for decades (see for example, MacNaughton, 2000). In order to query and queer children's stereotypical working theories, Hermann-Wilmarth and Souto-Manning (2007) used a strategy of reading stories to tamariki that provided counter-narratives to popular tales such as *The Three Little Pigs*. This helped children to identify and even possibly change their normative thinking. The same potential exists in these picturebook sessions, both for the tamariki and the kaiako. This is contingent on the kaiako choosing books which they feel comfortable and knowledgeable about. In a similar vein, Blakeney-Williams and Daly (2013) highlight the importance of kaiako sharing picturebooks which "resonate with them personally" (p. 44) in order to allow the best "opportunities for the children to share their ideas, their voices, and their responses with one another" (p. 47), and for working theories to develop.

Gunn (2015) suggests two anti-heteronormative teaching practices coming from Gunn and Surtees' (2009) study. The first of these is the adoption of an "overt philosophy of whānau" (p. 30) which encompasses a far broader view of who may belong in a family constellation than that assumed in the normative nuclear family. Secondly, Gunn suggests the importance of a pedagogy of relationships in early childhood education, that includes recognising, reflecting and celebrating a diversity of family types. Furthermore, Gunn states the importance of early childhood policies and practices that "name homophobia, heterosexism and heteronormativity as intolerable" (p. 31) to support kaiako in their anti-normative teaching, thereby allowing room for difficult and dangerous topics to be explored.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

One of the strengths of this study was that I, the researcher, was present as a participant-observer for most of the data gathering, specifically the picturebook sharing sessions. Because I was present for the picturebook sharing sessions, I had a *first person* understanding of the conversations and working theories/responses that unfolded. I was the "primary instrument of data collection and analysis" (Lichtman, 2013, p. 21). This enabled me to gather more authentic data than if I had been relying on third party data collection, filtered through someone else's experience, knowledge, skills, background, understandings and interpretations. I was able to see and listen for myself as tamariki interacted with each other,

the picturebooks and the kaiako in picturebook sharing sessions. Kincheloe, McLaren, Steinberg and Monzo (2018) discuss the importance of critical teacher-researchers exploring and attempting to "interpret the learning processes taking place" within their education settings (p. 241). This understanding and interpretation was enhanced by the use of digital videoing to record each session, allowing me to reliably gather data and replay initially unintelligible sections multiple times. This was an advantage compared to being solely reliant on teachers' notes, as Kelly (2012) had been. In addition, the trust built up between the research participant kaiako and me over a number of years enabled them to be open and honest in their reflections, which is another strength of this study.

One of the aspects of this study that may have been a strength or a limitation was the number of kaiako and tamariki participating. This was a small scale study, based in one kindergarten in Aotearoa New Zealand, with 14 tamariki as research participants. There were four different kaiako who fronted these sessions, rather than having the consistency of one teacher who led each picturebook sharing session in the series. This was a limitation in terms of consistency and follow-on, but perhaps a strength regarding multiple voices, and the avoidance of tamariki being exposed to only one teacher's book choices and points of view. Nevertheless, whether one kaiako had been involved, or four, this is still a small scale study, and the findings need to be interpreted as such.

There were several unequivocal limitations of the study. One of these was the age-group of the oldest children in kindergarten at the time. While I had originally planned to have only 4- to 5-year-olds participating in the study, my cohort of participant tamariki ranged in age from 3 years 5 months to 4 years 11 months, with almost half being only 3 years old. When I asked kaiako for feedback after the picturebook sharing sessions, as mentioned in the last chapter several commented that it would have been helpful if they had read the picturebooks first before sharing them with the children, so they could have more effectively adapted them to suit the younger tamariki present. Clearly this unfamiliarity with the picturebooks may have influenced the way in which kaiako chose to share the stories. This lack of preparation perhaps even lessened the likelihood of counter-heteronormative teaching, because increased familiarity with the texts may have pre-empted some of the discomfort felt around *dangerous knowledge* (Britzman, 1991).

POTENTIAL FURTHER RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES

The study presented in this thesis was a small study taking place in one kindergarten in Aotearoa New Zealand. If another similar study were to be carried out within Aotearoa New Zealand it could perhaps involve a larger number of early childhood education settings, kaiako and tamariki. This would allow for a broader range of kaiako and tamariki responses as part of the data gathering process. One facet of data collection that remained un-tapped in this study was the possibility for art-making in response to the picturebooks presented. This can be another way for tamariki to express their thinking and may have produced some interesting data. I suggested this as an option for kaiako to record, but they found no spontaneous instances, and did not for example attempt to set up art materials for the research participant tamariki at the end of the picturebook sharing session. In different circumstances however, artwork could be a fascinating source of supplementary information alongside the verbal data gathered.

In addition to these suggestions for further research, I am considering developing several resources out of this thesis, including a blog featuring regularly-updated synopses of selected picturebooks on themes of gender diversity and family diversity; some *board stories* based on selected counter-heteronormative picturebooks, and some *chatterboxes* – a series of learning packs each containing resources relating to an individual anti-heteronormative picturebook.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 2017) makes it clear that all tamariki and whānau should feel they have a place in early childhood education. This includes LGBTIQ-parented whānau and their tamariki. Yet heteronormativity is so pervasive within our society (Gunn, 2011, 2015, 2017; Kelly, 2013; Morgan & Kelly-Ware, 2016; Sandretto, 2018; Surtees, 2008) that "queering the whāriki" (Surtees, 2003, p.143) and indeed any form of anti-heteronormative teaching practice is still challenging to attain in early childhood education settings. Despite this high prevalence of heteronormativity, Robinson and Jones Diaz (2006) contend that it is mostly rendered invisible due to the silencing effects of hegemonic discourses of *childhood innocence* around sexuality in childhood. An example of this would be Robyn's reticence to unpack Suzie's comment "You're gonna have a penis one day," discussed in the previous chapter. When Robyn laughingly replied to Suzie's statement "Oh I don't know about that" these hegemonic heteronormative discourses were in play.

Every kaiako teaches based on what they know and makes informed choices regarding their on-the-spot teaching practice hundreds of times a day. For the most part they are willing to reflect critically on these decisions. Kaiako do the best they can in the moment – this is certainly true of the teachers who participated in this study. With the benefit of hindsight and close analysis, it is easy to see ways in which things could have been said differently, and more inclusively. Nevertheless, the kaiako in this study were all open to having their teaching practice scrutinised by a colleague, which required courage. In addition, they all chose to challenge the largely invisible hegemonic bias of heteronormativity within the kindergarten to varying degrees. Heteronormative thinking "clothes itself in goodwill and intelligence" (Warner 1993, p. xxii) and countering heteronormativity in the educational sphere is an ongoing process for kaiako who take up this challenge. It requires self-reflection, insight and a willingness to disrupt the status quo. Simply by taking part in this research project, all these kaiako – Charlotte, Frances, Janice and Robyn – have demonstrated their positive engagement in this work.

In conclusion, despite recent countrywide legislation with an equity focus, and decades of social justice activism, heteronormativity in early childhood education remains pervasive in Aotearoa New Zealand. The need for kaiako and others to work towards a celebration of human diversity and social justice goals is as strong as ever. This research has shown how powerful kaiako are in their ability to select which children's working theories are highlighted and which are not. These choices are linked to the perceived riskiness of the working theories themselves, and that estimation of riskiness is in turn influenced by insidious heteronormativity within society. Although this study started with a prime focus on tamariki and the genesis of their working theories around gender, gender diversity and family diversity – one of the strongest messages coming through in the findings is that teachers hold the key to whether children's working theories fly... or flop.

POST SCRIPT - MARCH 2020

In this context, the calabash is a metaphor for rules and regulations, including heteronormative constraints, which tamariki (and kaiako) may smash in order to develop themselves in a multitude of ways.

13th March 2020: Near the end of the kindergarten day, a mother brought her tearful almost 7-year-old son to me, saying:

> He told us a couple of weeks ago that he is gay. Today some of the other children have been teasing him because he is gay. And he says he *is* gay, and he is not embarrassed about it, but he doesn't like being teased. He wanted to come and see you to get a 'rainbow cuddle' and feel safe.

This incident occurred two weeks before my thesis was due to be submitted, just as I was making the final revisions. This tear-stained child was one of my picturebook research participants back in 2017: Jack. His appearance at the end of my thesis-writing process was a surprise to me, having had very minimal contact with Jack in the intervening period. Jack's sad story of bullying at school for being gay was a strong validation of my rationale for doing this study in the first place. Several of the other picturebook research participant children are in Jack's class at school, and none of them had been teasing him for being gay. Perhaps, minimal though it was, their positive exposure to stories of tamariki doing gender non-sterotypically made a difference. For those research participant children, a boy liking pink, wearing a dress or being in the kapa haka line with the girls was just *ordinary* – they had seen similar in picturebooks.

Jack's story came as a timely reminder that kaiako need to resist the hegemonic pull towards the normative. Through teachers' work to queer the curriculum and teach with queer intent, tamariki like Jack might know they have value and a place to feel safe, and all tamariki be better equipped to live in our diverse society.

1. INFORMATION SHEET FOR FAMILIES/WHĀNAU

Picturebook pedagogy in early childhood education: Counteracting heteronormativity and supporting inclusion.

Tēnā koutou,

As you may have seen in the recent kindergarten pānui/newsletter, I am currently studying towards my Master of Education (MEd) through the University of Canterbury. As part of my studies, I will be researching ways that teachers use picturebooks to help make every person from every type of family feel included. I will also be looking at children's developing "working theories" on who can make a valid family, and their views on different ways of being a girl or being a boy.

I am writing to ask if you will agree for your child to take part in this research project. Your child's participation will mean that they will be part of a group of 4 year old children meeting weekly to share picturebooks with one of their regular kindergarten teachers. This will take place as part of their kindergarten programme, similar to their current time spent with StoryGran. Teachers will read the picturebooks, then talk to the children about their ideas around these picture books. I will video-record and write down their ideas.

I will be doing my research project at kindergarten on Thursdays for 5 weeks during term 3. When I am being a 'researcher' at kindergarten I will wear a special 'researcher badge' so that everyone is aware I am not in my usual kindergarten teacher role that day.

Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary, and you and your child are not obliged to take part. Even if you do, you can withdraw from the study in full or in part at any time up until the final research findings are drafted without needing to give a reason. If you withdraw, I will do my best to remove any information relating to your child from the research project.

All information gathered for this research project will be stored on my password-protected computer and only accessed in its raw form by my two research supervisors and myself. All raw data will be stored for 5 years after the completion of the research project and then destroyed. Should you wish to, you and your child may choose a pretend name for the child that can be used in place of their real name in any data gathered. Once the research project is written up as a Masters thesis it will have a wide audience, being accessible on the internet and it may also be shared in academic journals and at conferences. The MEd thesis will be publicly available through the University library.

Because New Zealand is a small place, it is possible that despite measures taken to keep the kindergarten location anonymous, some people may be able to work out its identity. Unfortunately, this is unavoidable in a country with a relatively low

population and where members of the teaching profession have strong networks. However, your child's real first name will not be used in the thesis or in any presentations I may do as a result of this research project unless that is what you and your child prefer.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me on the phone number or email address given at the bottom of this information sheet. My research supervisors' contact details are also given below. This project has received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints about the research project, please contact me or my research supervisors in the first instance, or you can contact the Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to your child's participation in this study, please let me know by completing the attached form and returning it to me by DATE 2017.

Thank you very much for taking the time to consider this request.

Kate Morgan

MEd (curriculum and pedagogy) student
University of Canterbury
Phone: 03 546 3383 (kindergarten)
Email: kate.morgan@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Senior supervisor: Dr Nicola Surtees - Senior Lecturer

School of Educational Studies and Leadership

Phone: +64 3 369 5624

Email: nicola.surtees@canterbury.ac.nz

Co-supervisor: Dr Lia de Vocht-van Alphen - Lecturer Early Years

School of Teacher Education

Phone: +64 3 364 2987 ext. 3459

Email: lia.devocht@canterbury.ac.nz

University of Canterbury Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand.
www.canterbury.ac.nz

2. CONSENT FORM FOR FAMILIES/WHĀNAU

Picturebook pedagogy in early childhood education: Counteracting heteronormativity and supporting inclusion.

My child and I have been given a full explanation of Kate's research project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand what participation in this project will involve for my child and me. I know that I can withdraw my child from this project in part or in full at any time up until the final research findings are drafted, without explanation needed.

I understand that picturebook discussions will be video-recorded and then written down/transcribed.

I know that any information collected and research data generated about my child will be kept confidential to Kate and her research supervisors from the University of Canterbury. All information/data will be kept securely, and destroyed 5 years after the end of the project.

I understand that Kate will be sharing the findings of this research project in her thesis which will be publicly available through the university. Kate may also have opportunities to present research findings in written articles in academic journals, and/or presentations at conferences. Unless my child wants to use their real name, a 'pretend name' of their choosing will be used in any writing generated by the research project. The kindergarten will not be named in the research project. However, I understand that because New Zealand has a relatively small population with a close-knit teaching community it is possible that some people may work out the kindergarten's name, and perhaps even my child's real name.

I understand that if I require further information I can contact the researcher, Kate Morgan or her research supervisors - contact details provided on attached information sheet.

By signing below, I agree to my child participating in this project, and that I have read the information letter to my child and talked to them about this project.

My name:

Child's name:

Signature:

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM TO KATE AT KINDERGARTEN BY DATE 2017

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3. INFORMATION SHEET FOR CHILDREN (TEXT ONLY)

Picturebook pedagogy in early childhood education: Counteracting heteronormativity and supporting inclusion.

Information sheet for tamariki/children (Parent/whānau/teacher please read to the child)

Hello!
Kate from the ANONYMOUS room here.

I invite you to let me find out about your ideas when your teacher shares some picturebooks with you during Mana Tuakana time.

If you agree to be part of this picturebook project:

- I will video your teacher sharing some picturebooks with you and your friends at Mana Tuakana time on 5 Thursdays. I will be interested in what you have to say about the picturebooks. I will keep the videos safe.
- Every day for 5 weeks your teachers will collect your ideas about families, girls and boys from your art and your play. They will tell me about these ideas they see in your play and your art work.
- I will write about some of the things you talk about in Mana Tuakana time. I might also write about some of your art or play about boys, girls, or families.
- I won't use your real name in my writing. You can choose a pretend name instead.
- The complicated book that I write about your ideas and your friends' ideas will be shared with people all over the world, on the internet.
- I will turn your ideas about boys and girls and families into a simple picturebook to share with you and your friends.
- If you ever have questions or worries about this project, you can talk with any of the teachers about it. If you want to STOP being part of the project, just tell your teachers and it will all be ok.

    Thank you for listening to the information about my picturebook project.

    Kate Morgan
    MEd (curriculum and pedagogy) student University of Canterbury

    Approval gained from the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. Complaints may be addressed to:

    Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, CHRISTCHURCH

4. ASSENT FORM FOR CHILDREN (TEXT ONLY)

Picturebook pedagogy in early childhood education: Counteracting heteronormativity and supporting inclusion.
Assent form for children

Parent(s)/whānau please read this document to your child and ask them to "sign" if they agree.

- [NAME] has told me about Kate's picturebook project.
- [NAME] has read Kate's invitation out loud to me.
- I understand what they said.
- I want to join in the picturebook project at Mana Tuakana time.
- I know I can choose to be part of each Mana Tuakana picturebook time, or not.
- I can tell the teacher my ideas, or not.
- I can answer questions from the teacher, or not.
- My teachers will ask me if it is ok before they write about my play or take photos of my art for Kate's picturebook project.
- I know that if I have any questions I can ask Kate or another teacher or my parents/whānau.
- I understand that I can change my mind about being in this project and no-one will mind.
- If I want to stop being in Kate's picturebook project, I just need to tell Kate or one of my teachers or my family/whānau.

Child's real name:

Child's pretend name:

Signed by child:

Date:

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Picturebook pedagogy in early childhood education: Counteracting heteronormativity and supporting inclusion.

Tēnā koutou,

As most of you know, I am currently studying towards my Master of Education (MEd) through Canterbury University. As part of my studies, I will be researching ways that teachers use picturebooks to help make every person from every type of family feel included. I will also be looking at children's developing "working theories" on who can make a valid family, and their views on different ways of being a girl or being a boy.

I am writing to ask if you will agree to take part in this research project. Research participant teachers will take turns to meet with a group of 4 year olds weekly for 5 weeks to share picturebooks in sessions. Some weeks this teacher might be you! These group sessions will take place as part of the children's kindergarten programme, similar to their current time spent with StoryGran. If you agree to participate, you will read the picturebooks to the children, and talk to the children about their ideas around these picturebooks, whilst I video-record and write down their ideas.

I will be doing my research project at kindergarten every Thursday for 5 weeks during term 3. When I am being a 'researcher' at kindergarten I will wear a special 'researcher badge' so that everyone is aware I am not in my kindergarten teacher role that day.

Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary, and you are not obliged to take part. Even if you do, you can withdraw from the study in full or in part at any time up until the final research findings are drafted without needing to give a reason. As part of the study, you will have the opportunity to check transcripts and ask for specific pieces of data relating to you to be removed if you wish. If you withdraw, I will do my best to remove any information relating to you from the research project.

All information gathered for this research project will be stored on my password-protected computer and only accessed in its raw form by my two research supervisors and myself. All raw data will be stored for 5 years after the completion of the research project and then destroyed. You will have the opportunity to choose a 'pseudonym' that will be used in place of your real name in any data gathered. Once the research project is written up as a Master's thesis it will have a wide audience, being accessible on the internet and it may also be shared in academic journals and at conferences. The MEd thesis will be publicly available through the University library.

Because New Zealand is a small place, it is possible that despite measures taken to keep the kindergarten location anonymous, some people may be able to work out its identity. Unfortunately, this is unavoidable in a country with a relatively low

population and where members of the teaching profession have strong networks. However, your real name will not be used in the thesis or in any presentations I may do as a result of this research project unless that is what you prefer.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me on the phone number or email address given at the bottom of this information sheet. My research supervisors' contact details are also given below. This project has received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints about the research project, please contact me or my research supervisors in the first instance, or you can contact the Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participating in this study, please let me know by completing the attached form and returning it to me by DATE 2017.

Thank you very much for taking the time to consider this request.

Kate Morgan

MEd (curriculum and pedagogy) student
University of Canterbury
Phone: 03 546 3383 (kindergarten)
Email: kate.morgan@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Senior supervisor: Dr Nicola Surtees - Senior Lecturer

School of Educational Studies and Leadership

Phone: +64 3 369 5624

Email: nicola.surtees@canterbury.ac.nz

Co-supervisor: Dr Lia de Vocht-van Alphen - Lecturer Early Years

School of Teacher Education

Phone: +64 3 364 2987 ext. 3459

Email: lia.devocht@canterbury.ac.nz

University of Canterbury Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand.
          www.canterbury.ac.nz

6. Consent form for kaiako/teachers

Picturebook pedagogy in early childhood education: Counteracting heteronormativity and supporting inclusion.

I have been given a full explanation of Kate's research project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand what participation in this project will involve. I know that I can withdraw from this project at any time up until the final research findings are drafted, without explanation needed.

I understand that picturebook discussions will be video-recorded and then written down/transcribed.

I know that any information collected and research data generated as part of this research project will be kept confidential to Kate and her research supervisors from the University of Canterbury. All information/data will be kept securely, and destroyed 5 years after the end of the project.

I understand that Kate will be sharing the findings of this research project in her thesis which will be publicly available through the university. Kate may also have opportunities to present research findings in written articles in academic journals, and/or presentations at conferences. Unless I want to use my real name, my choice of pseudonym will be used in any writing generated by the research project. The kindergarten will not be named in the research project. However, I understand that because New Zealand has a relatively small population with a close-knit teaching community it is possible that some people may work out the kindergarten's name, and perhaps even my real name.

I understand that if I require further information I can contact the researcher, Kate Morgan or her research supervisors - contact details provided on attached information sheet.

By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name:

Pseudonym, if wanted:

Signature:

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM TO KATE AT KINDERGARTEN BY DATE 2017

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7. PARTICIPANT PROFILES

TAMARIKI:

Possum – assigned female, age 3 years 5 months.

Lauren – asigned female, age 3 years 6 months.

Melie – assigned female, age 3 years 8 months.

Tais – assigned male, age 3 years 9 months.

Suzie – assigned female, age 3 years 10 months.

Boom Boom – assigned female, age 3 years 10 months.

Sahara – assigned female, age 4 years 1 month.

Viv – assigned female, age 4 years 1 month.

Pink – assigned female, age 4 years 3 months.

Bob – assigned male, age 4 years 3 months.

Aals – assigned female, age 4 years 5 months.

Jack – assigned male, age 4 years 6 months.

Hella – assigned female, age 4 years 8 months.

Dante – assigned male, age 4 years 11 months.

All kaiako identified as female. Their teaching experience ranged from 6-38 years.

Janice – Bachelor of Teaching and Learning.

Robyn – Bachelor of Teaching and Learning.

Charlotte – Graduate Diploma in Early Childhood Teaching.

Frances – Bachelor of Teaching and Learning.

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PICTUREBOOK LIST

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