

**Sexualities Matters in Early Childhood Education:
The Management of Children/Bodies and their
Unsettling Desires**

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality in early childhood education. The study focused on the operation of teacher discourses of sexuality within early childhood centres, and the subsequent regulation of sexualities.

Open-ended individual interviews and a group interview were conducted with three teachers. In an analysis of the interview findings, the teachers' talk and practice about and around sexuality is placed within a wider framework of heteronormativity. The context of heteronormativity serves to create barriers to, and/or narrow options for teachers' talk and practice about and around sexuality, while reducing opportunities for acknowledgement of diverse identities. Any such reduction sits uneasily alongside both prevailing liberal discourses demanding recognition of difference and diversity, and the inclusive ideals central to the national early childhood curriculum: *Te Whaariki: He Whaariki Maatauranga mo ngaa Mokopuna o Aotearoa. Early Childhood Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1996b). Connections between teachers' talk and practice, heteronormativity, and Foucault's concepts of power, surveillance and normalisation are explored.

Three key findings are discussed. The first key finding suggests that children/bodies and sexuality are centred as normal by and through discourse. The second key finding suggests that the teachers' talk and practice consciously or sub-consciously, takes up, enacts and is governed by particular discourses as a form of regulation of sexuality. Regulation of sexuality transpired through the practice of specific management strategies. The third finding draws attention to the endpoints of discourses that centre and manage – the marginalisation, resistance towards, and silencing of sexuality in early childhood education; and, the marginalisation of children/bodies. These endpoints highlight absences that make problematic both teachers' talk and

practice focused on children's learning about sexuality, and the expression of, and honouring of, sexualities.

The study findings, in troubling notions of sexuality and accepted pedagogical practices in early childhood education, raise questions about the implications of discourses that are productive of marginalising endpoints and absences. A case is put forward for 'being bad' and risk taking for both the teacher in the early childhood centre, and within pre-service teacher education, in order to create new possibilities for inclusion and to enable a way forward in relation to sexualities matters.

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Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Contents	v

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction.....	1
Topic and aims of the study.....	2
Researcher interest in the study.....	2
Researcher presence, positioning and bias.....	3
Context for the study.....	5
Research questions.....	7
Significance of the study.....	8
Limitations of the study.....	9
Summary.....	9
Overview of thesis format.....	10

Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical perspectives

Introduction.....	14
Literature review.....	14
Theoretical perspectives.....	27
Summary.....	31
Introduction to Chapter 3.....	32

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction.....	33
Research design.....	33
Methods.....	35

Ethics.....	43
Summary.....	47
Introduction to Chapter 4.....	48

Chapter 4: Centring and managing children/bodies and sexuality

through discourse

Introduction.....	49
The idealised untouched child.....	50
The universal, pre-determined and ever-maturing child.....	53
Child-centeredness: shaping the child by and through her interests...	63
Reinscribing sexuality as dangerous: protecting children, seeing subversion and avoiding incrimination.....	67
Summary.....	71
Introduction to Chapter 5.....	71

Chapter 5: Margined bodies: the endpoints of discourses that

centre and manage

Introduction.....	72
Reading the margins: deciphering absences.....	73
Summary.....	88
Introduction to Chapter 6.....	88

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Introduction.....	90
Looking back in order to look forward.....	90
The implications of discourses productive of marginalising endpoints and absences: ‘being bad,’ risk taking and the way ahead.....	92
Last words.....	97

References.....	99
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Draft interview guide.....109
Appendix 2: Information sheet.....112
Appendix 3: Consent form.....115

As sexual creatures, the need for understanding our sexual nature is always with us. Ignoring childhood sexuality does not make it go away.

(Heller, 1997, p.154)

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Robinson (2000) suggests “many young children may have to fumble through issues of sexuality with little knowledge or the language to comprehend and make sense of the contradictions that arise for them” (pp.103-104). In order to learn about teacher beliefs about, and responses to, these issues, which, in this thesis, I deliberately refer to as ‘sexualities matters’¹, I set up a qualitative study to explore teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality in early childhood education. That is, I intended to explore both teacher talk and practice specifically *about* sexuality, and teacher talk and practice that skirted *around* (or avoided) sexuality.

As the first chapter of this thesis, Chapter 1 plays a critical part in laying some initial foundations for the remainder of this work. These foundations are necessary and important – they set the scene for the study as a whole and map out what is to follow. My scene setting includes an introduction to the topic and the aims of the study and a description of my personal and professional interests in it. It also includes consideration of my presence, as researcher, and the impact of this and my positioning and bias on the study. I describe the context for the study and explain how the research questions arose from this context. I address the significance of the study and some of its limitations. Lastly, in plotting the path ahead, I provide an overview of the thesis format, and a rationale for my choice of structure and layout, in order for a reader to see the links between these.

¹ My use of ‘sexualities matters’ in the thesis title and throughout the thesis body can be read in two ways. A surface reading suggests I am referring to matters about sexualities. A deeper reading implies that these matters are important matters to address in early childhood education.

Topic and aims of the study

This qualitative study combined individual interviews and a group interview, thus enabling some co-construction of meanings around the study topic – teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality in early childhood education.

The aims of the study included exploring how teacher discourses of sexuality operate in early childhood centres and the ways in which these discourses regulate sexualities. I began the study with the belief that questioning the regulation of sexualities could be beneficial for both teachers and children potentially creating opportunities for new ways of ‘doing’ sexualities together. A strong desire for social justice encourages me to ask such questions and thus “cause trouble” (Cannella, 1997, p.173). Causing trouble was both a central purpose of this study and an ongoing aim; as I begin to disseminate the study findings beyond the confines of this thesis I hope to both provoke debate and contribute to the limited literature addressing the topic.

Researcher interest in the study

This study was of interest to me on two levels, the personal and professional. Beginning with things personal, I name myself as queer. This position explains my concern in heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is the notion that heterosexuality is an institutionalised, superior and privileged standard, “the elemental form of human association” (Warner, cited in Sumara & Davis, 1999, p.202).

On a professional level, I am strongly committed to early childhood education. This commitment, and my position as lecturer in early childhood teacher education, brings responsibility towards others in the field. I see heteronormativity as problematic to the field. Heteronormativity endorses a restricted range of identities (Cannella & Grieshaber, 2001). It works against prevailing liberal discourses that encourage lenience towards and

acknowledgement of diverse identities (Jones Diaz & Robinson, 2000). It makes it difficult to raise awareness of difference, diversity and social inequalities in a meaningful way. My responsibility towards others means I refuse to disregard the impact of heteronormativity – on my colleagues, the students I teach, the children these students will eventually teach, the families of these children, and myself.

Researcher presence, positioning and bias

In choosing to acknowledge my presence, positioning and bias in the opening chapter of this thesis, I signal the significance of each – both to qualitative research as a whole and this study in particular. Researcher presence “is always an explicit issue” (Neuman, 1997, p.334). Room can be made to incorporate this (Janesick, 1994). Doing so demands reflexivity. The researcher must perceive and know her identities as multiple (Moore, 2004). This requires self-awareness – the researcher should remain aware of her positioning and bias (Patton, 2002). Such self-awareness enables a balance between subjectivity, objectivity and empathetic neutrality (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Patton, 2002). In this section of this chapter, I describe my presence as manifested in and through my positioning and bias and some of the ways this impacted on the study.

Earlier, I named myself as queer. As queer, I represent the ‘other.’ I live my life on the margins. Margins designate borders – in my case, the border between ‘natural’ and ‘deviant’ sexualities. Margins are liminal, risky and necessitate policing (Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). The policing of sexualities and subsequent construction of those of us traversing the boundaries of the sexual ‘norm’ are of ongoing interest to me.

As queer, and as a queer researcher, I have come to believe through my reading of the literature, that sexuality is socially constructed, that children are sexualised beings, that early childhood centres are sexualised sites and that

teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality within these sites acts to police sexualities. It is not surprising, therefore, that I began this study with the belief that troubling the regulation of sexualities could be valuable for both teachers and children, as I have already indicated. These biases were constant; my analysis, interpretation and re/presentation of the research data did not stand outside my own embodied desire as queer to read these biases into the data and write them into the findings. As Olesen (1994) suggests, however, biases can be utilised positively; “if the researcher is sufficiently reflexive about her project, she can evoke these as resources to guide data gathering or creating and for understanding her own interpretations” (p.165).

Despite my bias – or because of it – I actively sought ways to remain open and to present points of view alternative to my own in ways that were not judgemental. This was no easy task. At times, in the wake of my bias, a judgemental undercurrent eddied below the surface of my writing. I was to return many times to this and each time, in the re-writing, sought to remind myself that my views are themselves constructions – they arise from my positioning and experiences and draw from particular theories and discourses as surely as alternative views do. As such, my views are as open to challenge as alternative views. It was never my intent to set up a binary of my beliefs good / other beliefs bad. Rather, I wished to emphasise what my beliefs challenge – that is, the homogenising effects of heteronormativity. In so emphasising, I hoped to highlight new possibilities for teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality – talk and practice that disorders, disarranges and re-arranges representations of children/bodies² and their unsettling desires.

I was to face other struggles besides those related to my ability to remain open. While immersed in this study, uncertainties regarding the professional

² I use ‘children/bodies’ (or ‘child/body’) throughout this thesis both to draw attention to children as embodied beings and as a reminder of the need to attend to their bodily realities.

wisdom (or lack thereof) of undertaking research in the contentious area of sexualities matters while identifying as queer were present. Questions I grappled with initially included: Will I be safe? How will my choice of this topic effect my career path and options? Will my work be published and either way, what will the implications for my career be? These were important questions and not to be dismissed lightly given Tobin's (1997a) claim, that those in the "ranks of the professionally missing" (p.6), are those who take the risk to research sexualities (and in particular, desires) in both early childhood centres and schools. While these questions remained with me through each stage of the study, their troublesome nature receded from the forefront of my mind becoming less worrying as the practical demands of conducting research took over.

My positions as queer/queer researcher were not the only positions I claimed. In the previous section, I made reference to my position as lecturer in early childhood teacher education. From the study outset, I was particularly conscious of the ways in which this role further positioned me as colleague to the study participants. I have chosen to take these positions up when addressing methodology in Chapter 3 (see 'Researcher/participant relationship'). I made this choice on the basis that these positions bring particular ethical issues that had a bearing on the choices I made when presenting the study data.

Thus far in this thesis, I have engaged in scene-setting through consideration of my choice of study topic and the aims and interests I held – all of which culminated in reflection on my presence, positioning and bias. I turn now to things for the most part, beyond myself – the overall context for the study.

Context for the study

In Aotearoa/New Zealand early childhood education encompasses a range of services developed over the last century to meet the needs of infants, toddlers

and young children alongside those of their families and whaanau³. As the field in which this study was conducted, early childhood education provides an important context for it.

The national early childhood curriculum is also important to the context of the study. Development of the curriculum began in 1991 when Helen May and Margaret Carr were contracted by the Ministry of Education to direct and manage the process (May & Carr, 2000). This move responded to several earlier and significant documents that highlighted the need for a common curriculum (Department of Education, 1988; Meade, 1988; Ministry of Education, 1990).

The first version of the curriculum was prepared during 1992 (Carr & May, 1993a, 1993b). Published as *Te Whaariki: Draft Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Programmes in Early Childhood Services* in 1993 (Ministry of Education, 1993), subsequent redrafting of Helen May, Margaret Carr and their curriculum development team's work by the Ministry of Education culminated in the final version. This version was launched in 1996 as *Te Whaariki: He Whaariki Maatauranga moo ngaa Mokopuna o Aotearoa. Early Childhood Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1996b), hereafter referred to as *Te Whaariki*. Since the launching of *Te Whaariki*, licensed and chartered services have been obliged to demonstrate that the programmes they offer are consistent with this document (Carr & May, 2000). Both the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (Ministry of Education, 1996a), and the announcement from the Minister of Education that the document's implementation is to become a statutory requirement (Ministry of Education, 2002), reinforce this obligation.

This obligation and the actual content of *Te Whaariki* highlight its importance as a context for this study. In terms of content, two points are particularly

³ The Maaori term for family.

pertinent. Firstly, *Te Whaariki* positions children's development holistically: curriculum provision is required in the cognitive, physical, spiritual, social and cultural dimensions and from within a framework cognisant of social and cultural contexts. An inclusive response to varied aspects of development, difference and diversity is expected and is reflected in the underlying metaphor, the whaariki⁴. The whaariki symbolises a "mat for all to stand on" (Carr & May, 2000, p.156).

Secondly, while demanding an inclusive response to varying aspects of development, difference and diversity, *Te Whaariki* lacks overt identification of sexuality as one such facet. Curious about this omission, I began some years ago to query a weft that weaves a whaariki exclusive of this. Did the omission silence sexuality, as I have argued elsewhere (Gunn et al., 2004; Gunn & Surtees, 2004; Surtees, 2003)? Did the omission reduce opportunities for meaningful inclusion by legitimising, reproducing and reinforcing heteronormativity (Surtees, 2003)? Did it leave teachers uncertain about appropriate talk and practice about and around sexuality and how best to teach to this? Given the omission, what opportunities were possible for children's learning about sexuality and for the expression, honouring and celebration of sexualities? This study grew from such questions – as did the research questions themselves.

Research questions

The overarching research question arising from my beliefs regarding teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality, the exclusion of sexuality from *Te Whaariki*, and my ongoing curiosity about the effects of this exclusion on those within early childhood communities (particularly given the nature of the whaariki metaphor) was:

⇒ How does teacher talk and practice construct meanings around sexuality?

⁴ The Maaori term for a woven flax mat.

Additional questions that subsequently emerged included:

- ⇒ What is the teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality?
- ⇒ What is excluded from teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality?
- ⇒ What informs teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality?

Significance of the study

This study is significant because barriers to exploration of sexualities matters in early childhood education serve to prevent or hinder realisation of the inclusive ideals central to *Te Whaariki*. These ideals are mandated as inclusive practices through the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (hereafter referred to as DOPs). The Code of Ethics (Early Childhood Code of Ethics National Working Group, 1995), the Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations (New Zealand Government, 1998), Quality in Action (Ministry of Education, 1998) and the Human Rights Act (New Zealand Government, 1993) also reflect these inclusive ideals and practices.

Clearly, teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality and teachers' acts of omission are significant when considered alongside these documents. Understanding teacher talk, practice, and acts of omission should prove a useful starting point in considering the range of ways teachers can apply these documents to sexualities matters in their day to day work with children and families. This is particularly so given that the documents themselves and other traditional sources of guidance, such as textbooks, generally fail to make these matters explicit. Likewise, literature and research barely address sexualities matters in early childhood education or related perspectives on exclusion and inclusion.

This study is also significant in its intent to reflect the Ministry of Education's (2002) *10-year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education* purpose of establishing and reflecting on quality teaching and learning practices. Presumably, quality teaching and learning practices will come about where inclusion plays out in its fullest sense – encompassing therefore, the honouring and celebration of diverse sexualities.

Limitations of the study

There were a number of limitations to this study. Earlier in this chapter, I sought to account for the impact of my presence, positioning and bias on the study.

In Chapter 3, I address methodological limitations weaving these into the description of the methods I adopted.

Practical constraints created limits. This study was completed in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a degree of Master of Teaching and Learning – the thesis component being equivalent to one-year of full-time study. Patton (2002) notes that in the case of theses or dissertations, it is important to realise this purpose and the limits set by those responsible for these works. At the same time, he highlights the way “limited resources, limited time, and limits on the human ability to grasp the complex nature of social reality necessitate trade-offs” (p.223). My own limited resources, time and human ability saw me trade-off my desire to produce a substantial piece of work that offered new insights into the topic of study for this imperfect (but I hope provocative) work, that may or may not offer new ways of understanding the topic.

Summary

This chapter has laid some initial foundations for the remainder of this thesis. I introduced the study topic: teacher talk and practice about and around

sexuality in early childhood education; the study aims: exploration of how teacher discourses of sexuality operate in early childhood centres and the ways in which these discourses regulate sexualities; and, set out the research questions.

I highlighted my personal and professional interest in sexualities matters and drew particular attention to my presence, as researcher, and the effect of my positioning and bias on the study. I outlined the context for the study, that is, the field of early childhood education and *Te Whaariki*. I explained the significance of the study in relation to *Te Whaariki*, other guiding documents, and the Ministry of Education's (2002) *10-year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education*. Lastly, I attended to some limits of the study.

As suggested in the introduction to this chapter, these foundations are necessary and important to this thesis. At their core, and as implied throughout each of the chapter components, lie some troubling questions about sexualities matters in early childhood education that are yet to be fully recognised, acknowledged and debated in the field – in the following chapters, some of the issues these questions represent come to light. I turn my attention now, however, to an overview of the remainder of the thesis format. I will introduce the structure adopted, chapter layout and my reasoning behind the choice of organisation.

Overview of thesis format

The format of this thesis has had numerous iterations. The final iteration represents one of several potential ways of organising the document. While this is neither inherently better nor worse than other ways, I believe that the shape I settled for offered the best way to tell this 'story.' I make this claim because it was a shape that enabled me to resolve significant problems faced in earlier iterations, as I will shortly describe. Ultimately, it was also a shape

that enabled me to realise my goal of completing this work. Here then, is what I settled for.

Chapter 1 began the task of building initial foundations for the thesis as a whole. It has in many ways, a personal flavour. This flavour was borne of successive, unsuccessful attempts to hold back material related to my interests, presence, positioning and bias to the ‘proper’ place – which was, I assumed, with methodology and ethics. But I wrote improperly – my interests and presence popped up unbidden in varying places across chapters entirely getting the better of me. At this point, I decided to declare myself loud and clearly from the outset.

Chapter 2 continues to lay the foundations of this thesis through a review of the literature and an introduction to the theoretical framework. The literature review unfolds around four interrelated discourses important to traditional and contemporary constructions of children and sexuality. These discourses are: a discourse of children as asexual and innocent; a discourse of children as biological, developmental entities; a discourse of child-centeredness; and, a discourse of sexuality as dangerous. Each of the discourses is located both within a broad historical framework and a contemporary framework. Links to the field of early childhood education and the role of the teacher are made throughout. Several concepts are then covered, both because of their importance to perceptions about sexuality, and to these discourses. The concept of heteronormativity is returned to with links to the heterosexual / homosexual binary and the interrelated nature of sex, gender and desire. The concepts of power, surveillance and normalisation are explored. These concepts are re-visited in varying ways in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

Chapter 2 also includes discussion of the theoretical perspectives of social constructionism, poststructuralism, discourse analysis and queer theory. Each

of these perspectives proved useful in guiding this study, as the chapter elaborates.

Chapter 3 addresses methodology, research design and the actual methods and tools used in the study. Ethical issues are explored with considerable attention given to the researcher/participant relationship.

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 present the findings of this study. Chapter 4 explores two of the three themes produced by my reading of the data and is organised around the discourses outlined in Chapter 2. The first theme, *centred bodies*, highlights the centring of children/bodies and sexuality as normal through these discourses. The second theme, *managed bodies*, highlights management strategies that serve to regulate sexuality again, through these discourses.

Chapter 5 explores the third theme, *margined bodies*. This theme highlights endpoints – the centring of children/bodies and sexuality through discourse, and the use of particular management strategies, leads to specific endpoints. I suggest these endpoints are marginalising in effect and address some resulting absences.

I struck two significant problems as I worked up the findings chapters, both of which influenced the organisation described here. The first problem was the interrelated nature of the themes: *centred bodies*, *managed bodies* and *margined bodies*. Originally, these themes were addressed in three separate chapters. To this end, I struggled repeatedly to disentangle them. For example, I was forced to make arbitrary decisions about the placement of data given that the data used to illustrate the first theme often illustrated the second and third equally well (hence my decision to place the bulk of the data in Chapter 4 with minimal data only in Chapter 5). Ultimately, I came to understand that each theme is simultaneously and inextricably linked in ways that make any such division artificial.

The second problem I faced when working up the findings chapters was the protection of the participant teachers. Initially, I had a strong focus on the teachers as individuals as evident through use of pseudonyms. Over time I came to appreciate that this offered the teachers little security and contributed to the judgemental undercurrent in my writing, as earlier described. To overcome this concern I removed the pseudonyms and increased the focus on discourse. I address this issue and other related ethical issues more fully in Chapter 3.

In order to make sense of the four discourses and three themes as already outlined, I sought for visual images that might represent these and the interrelationships between them, as a point of reference both for my reader and myself. A length of braided rope coiled in a circle seemed appropriate. In this visualisation the discourses can be imagined as a series of threads able to be pulled together and braided in varied ways before being coiled in a circle. In this case, the discourses/threads pull together into themes/braids with each discourse/thread appearing in each theme/braid as these intertwine. Conceivably, in this depiction, single threads/discourses can also be pulled out altogether and/or be replaced with alternative threads/discourses in order to create new possibilities.

The final chapter of this thesis, Chapter 6, briefly re-visits the study intent, key research question and research design. The major findings of this study are re-stated and some related implications are explored with the intention of opening up a largely silenced topic. Finally, a way forward in relation to sexualities matters in early childhood education is proposed.

Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical perspectives

Introduction

This second, foundational chapter is comprised of two main sections. The first section of the chapter summarises the literature relevant to the study. Having implied questions about sexualities matters in early childhood education are troubling, and offered a ‘taste’ of why these matters might in fact matter in Chapter 1, the literature review builds on this in order to further highlight the issues these questions represent, their significance, and the context within which the study fits.

The second section of this chapter covers the theoretical perspectives relevant to this study. These theoretical perspectives were crucial to this study, because they acted as a guide throughout all aspects of the research process, shaping and enabling my understanding of the study topic.

Both the literature review and my discussion of the theoretical perspectives in this chapter are invaluable in supporting arguments I make later in this thesis.

Literature review

As noted in the previous chapter, the literature review unfolds around four interrelated discourses important to traditional and contemporary constructions of children and sexuality. Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) suggest that ‘discourse’ is a term both fashionable and subject to indiscriminate use. As a preliminary definition, these authors define discourse as “a particular way of talking about or understanding the world” (L. Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002, p.1). In other words, language moulds and directs world-views in ways that become a form of convention (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999). My use of this term within this thesis is elaborated on later in this chapter.

The discourses described in this chapter are explored under the sub-headings: ‘A discourse of children as asexual and innocent’; ‘A discourse of children as biological, developmental entities’; ‘A discourse of child-centeredness’; and, ‘A discourse of sexuality as dangerous.’ The description of these discourses includes reference to the wider, historical and contemporary context and links to both early childhood education and the role of the teacher within the early childhood centre, as these provide a context for and are significant in informing the findings of this study.

Finally, this literature review covers several concepts important to the constructed, contested nature of sexuality and the identified discourses. The concept of heteronormativity is re-visited with reference to the heterosexual / homosexual binary and the ways in which sex, gender and desire are entangled with one another (Butler, 1990). The concepts of power, surveillance and normalisation are also covered, with reference to Foucault (1976, 1979).

A discourse of children as asexual and innocent

A discourse of children as asexual and innocent has a long history. This discourse has been constant in Western culture since medieval times. With roots in Christian views about the sinless condition of the child (Adams, 1997), it is a discourse that represents an idealised image of children (Epstein & Johnson, 1998). To uphold this image and hence the ‘cult’ of childhood sexual innocence (Goldman & Goldman, 1982), children’s pristine state must remain untainted, unpolluted and “unspoilt by the violence and ugliness that surrounds them” (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998, p.14). Adult practices designed to maintain this state in children, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, included vehement denial of childhood sexuality and/or actions to control evidence to the contrary. Subjugation “operated as a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence, an affirmation of non-existence, and, by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such

things, nothing to see, and nothing to know” (Foucault, 1976, p.4). Adult actions focused on the repression of children’s sexual ‘weaknesses’ including the repression of masturbation. The careful watching of children from birth (Heller, 1997) enabled monitoring, hasty deterrence and eradication of this and other ‘immoral’ vices. Mothers were encouraged to pin their baby’s nightgown sleeves to the bed and to “tie the baby’s feet to opposite ends of the crib so that he cannot rub his thighs together” (Heller, 1997, pp.150-151). Children were “discouraged, even punished, for playing with their genitals or masturbating” (Martinson, 1994, p.121).

In today’s world, teachers in early childhood centres have easy access to this discourse, perpetuated as it is by the media and through popular culture (Cannella, 2001; Robinson, 2000, 2005b; Woodrow & Brennan, 2001). It is not surprising therefore, that teachers (and other adults) persevere in ‘protecting’ children’s supposed pristine state and that this state continues to generate “a desire to shelter children from the corrupt surrounding world – violent, oppressive, commercialised and exploitative – by constructing a form of environment in which the young child will be offered protection, continuity and security” (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p.45). “Horror and outrage” (Jackson, 1982, p.48) is likely to be vented at any threat to this. As James, Jenks and Prout (1998) explain, children’s “natural goodness” and “natural characteristics” are “those we can all learn from; they represent a condition lost or forgotten and thus one worthy of defence” (p.13).

While the possibility of loss of children’s sexual purity was taken seriously in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and continues to be taken seriously today, a discourse of children as asexual and innocent began to be tested in the twentieth century. The advance of scientific rationalism provided the necessary catalyst for this.

A discourse of children as biological, developmental entities

As the twentieth century dawned, “the idealised child met a radical challenger: Freud” (Levine, 2002, p.xxix). The leading force on childhood sexuality of this period (Carlson, 1992), Freud attributed sexual feelings to children from shortly after birth (Goldman & Goldman, 1982; Martinson, 1994). As Freud (1969) put it, “in early childhood there are signs of bodily activity to which only an ancient prejudice could deny the name of sexual” (p.10). He believed the manifestation of such bodily activity was characterised by the oral, anal and phallic stages across the first five years of life, followed by a lull, or period of latency, until the onset of puberty. Freud’s beliefs can be understood within the context of the discipline of psychology which emerged in and was significant throughout that century (Prout, 2005).

With roots in biological enquiry, the science of psychology became known “as an experimental, testing, fact-finding discipline” (Mayall, 1999, p.11). Within this discipline, children were observed and judged against constructed characteristics considered central to growth and functioning (Cannella, 1997). While “children have belonged to psychology” (Mayall, 1999, p.11), they have belonged most particularly, to developmental psychology. This field, more than any other, has produced the assumptions pervading child development (Cannella, 1997). Persisting in the goal of knowing “how small people become big people” (Mayall, 2002, p.22) the field capitalises on and privileges biological and developmental theories (Yelland & Kilderry, 2005). These theories contribute to a discourse of children as biological, developmental entities within which, “children pass through universal stages of development determined according to their chronological age” (Yelland & Kilderry, 2005, p.5).

These fields, alongside the new field of early childhood education, provoked changes in adult practices in the home and teachers’ practices in the early childhood centre. Sanctioned as natural through a discourse of children as

biological, developmental entities, childhood sexuality was embraced in pre-service teacher education. Tobin (1997a) writes that from 1900 until the mid-1970s pre-service teachers took courses covering Freud's stages of oral, anal and phallic sexuality and learnt about the normality of children's sexual curiosity and play. Thus prepared, and guided by the accepted view that children lacked the maturity to understand and control sexual behaviours (Robinson, 2000), teachers were presumably considered well equipped to manage sexuality in the early childhood centre. Teacher confidence in play as cathartic, therapeutic and requiring free expression during much of this period (Dockett & Flear, 1999), may have ensured that those experiencing discomfort with sexual exploration simply distracted children with alternative activities rather than continuing earlier, punitive practices.

Currently, a discourse of children as biological, developmental entities continues to dominate the field of early childhood education. Readily available to early childhood teachers, it continues to be sanctioned and reinforced through government, the academy, professional associations and courses underpinned by child development within pre-service and in-service teacher education. *Te Whaariki* is, for instance, central to pre-service and in-service teacher education and while it acknowledges variations in rate, timing and patterns of children's development and the importance of socio-cultural contexts, it also references to broad developmental stages and notions of developmental appropriateness. A discourse of child-centeredness further supports this discourse.

A discourse of child-centeredness

The foundations for a discourse of child-centeredness lie within psychology and developmental psychology. This discourse maintains promotion of universal, stage-based growth as normal and best fostered in a child-orientated environment where each child is understood as an individual (Alloway, 1995). Child-centred pedagogy as the ideal vehicle for teaching children is privileged

within this discourse (Ryan, 2005). Within child-centred pedagogy, play is the basis of learning; “since it is ‘natural’ for children to play, they are able to learn through play, without even knowing it” (Brooker, 2005, p.120). The ‘naturalness’ of children’s play and learning and the construct of play itself are cultural products that have gone largely unquestioned (Cannella, 1997). Such assumptions are evident in *Te Whaariki*. For example, under the strand of Exploration – Mana Aoturoa, Goal 1 states: “children experience an environment where their play is valued as meaningful learning and the importance of spontaneous play is recognised” (Ministry of Education, 1996b, p.84).

Child-centred pedagogy and play are closely linked to Developmentally Appropriate Practice or DAP (Cannella, 1997). DAP is a series of position statements to guide appropriate practice and ensure quality teaching. DAP guides appropriate practice (and therefore quality teaching) by distinguishing between, and providing examples of, both appropriate and inappropriate practices. These examples assume “that practice, or at least the worthiness of practice, can be determined by knowledge of children’s development” (Walsh, 2005, p.43). Originally edited by Bredekamp (1986), and published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), DAP was extensively adopted in the West.

In promoting appropriate practice, DAP upholds such practices as applicable to all children – an assumption that has been criticised for some time (Blaise & Andrew, 2005; Cannella, 1997; Fler, 1995; Lubeck, 1998; MacNaughton, 1995; Mallory & New, 1994; Swadana & Kessler, 1991; Walsh, 2005). The dualist and decontextualised approach arguably makes difficult consideration of alternative options (Lubeck, 1996). Writing about himself, and his fellow authors, Tobin (1997a) describes their objections to DAP stating, “what we object to in DAP are its prescriptiveness, normalisation, ethnocentrism, cocksureness, and joylessness” (p.33). Despite such condemnation, DAP

continues to be a dominant and widely supported paradigm within the early childhood education field.

A DAP position typically involves teachers following rather than leading children. Teachers are positioned outside of the educational exercise and children in control of it (Alloway, 1995). Teachers implement curriculum that responds to children's developmental levels and interests (Fleer, 1995). As Bredekamp and Copple's (1997) revised edition of DAP notes, "learning experiences are more effective when the curriculum is responsive to the children's interests and ideas as they emerge" (p.131). Through statements such as this, the concept of the emergent curriculum comes to the fore. Emergent curriculum is an approach to planning and programming based on children's interests (E. Jones & Nimmo, 1994). Teachers observe and respond to children's interests, typically identified through play, in order to extend and enhance their development and learning (Dockett & Fleer, 1999).

A discourse of child-centeredness continues to maintain currency today. Legitimated through child-centred pedagogy and assumptions about play and learning as highlighted by documents such as *Te Whaariki*, and the concepts of DAP and the emergent curriculum, any aspect of sexuality not evidenced through children's interests may be relegated as an inappropriate or irrelevant topic for teacher introduction.

A discourse of sexuality as dangerous

While I have suggested a discourse of child-centeredness could be one explanation for a reluctance to introduce some aspects of sexuality to children, a discourse of sexuality as dangerous provides an alternative interpretation of this reluctance. Stemming from moral and religious viewpoints of the Victorian era, this discourse began to experience resurgence in the late twentieth century and continues in the present-day. As Levine (2002) states,

“the Victorian fear of the poisonous knowledge of worldly sexuality is still with us” (p.xxx).

The resurgence of a discourse of sexuality as dangerous was both fed by and fuelled a growing focus on child sexual abuse and a new climate of ‘risk anxiety.’ Risk anxiety is the common perception of the world as less constant, secure and reliable (Furedi, 1997; Jackson & Scott, 1999). It refers to both ongoing uneasiness or worry about actual or perceived hazards across many aspects of social life and the continual monitoring of these (Jackson & Scott, 1999; Scott, Jackson, & Backett-Milburn, 2001; Tulloch & Lupton, 2003). Child sexual abuse is an example of such a hazard. Persisting as an all-pervasive feature of Western society (Furedi, 1997; Tulloch & Lupton, 2003), risk anxiety is compounded by ‘moral panics.’ Moral panics “are usually short-lived, generated through publicly aired concerns about particular events or situations about which ‘something should be done’” (Scott et al., 2001, p.16).

In Aotearoa/New Zealand one such event was the Christchurch Civic Childcare Centre case. This case was launched in late 1991 following a decade of intense focus on child sexual abuse and from within a growing atmosphere of accusation – early childhood centres were becoming sexually risky sites and the teacher within these sites was equally risky. Teachers were suddenly, inevitably, objects of suspicion and figures of threat (A. Jones, 2003a, 2003b). Against this backdrop charges were laid against five childcare workers all of whom were committed for trial. Prior to the trial, four of the childcare workers were discharged. In 1993, the remaining childcare worker, who had consistently claimed innocence, was found guilty of various counts of sexual violation, indecent assault and the performing of, or inciting of children to perform, indecent acts (Hood, 2001).

The intense focus on child sexual abuse was to continue unabated throughout the 1990s (A. Jones, 2003a). As was the case in the nineteenth century, safeguarding children's assumed asexuality and innocence becomes paramount where evidence of sexual knowledge and behaviours compromise it. Such safeguarding, write Jackson and Scott (1999), is considered necessary to keep childhood "free of the shadow of sexuality" while ensuring children's safety and "future sexual health and happiness" (p.104). To this end, understandings of childhood sexuality based on the earlier discourse of children as asexual and innocent re-surfaced.

Today, censorship has returned to the fore; "a screening out, a disinformation campaign, a process of actively not speaking, hearing, or thinking about children's sexuality" (Tobin, 1997a, p.10). Teacher education reflects this. Courses focused on the positive expression of childhood sexuality, the norm three decades previously, are no longer typical. Courses focusing on child sexual abuse have however, proliferated. This proliferation has and continues to occur as a direct result of panic about abuse and the increase in awareness of this in the past two decades (Larsson & Svedin, 2001).

Meanwhile, the teacher finds herself left unprepared to manage children's sexual curiosity and play and without the specific direction of tools such as *Te Whaariki* (as outlined in Chapter 1). Herein lies a tension – early childhood education philosophy continues to value children's free expression through play alongside the support and guidance of sensitive teachers (Dockett & Fler, 1999; MacNaughton & Williams, 2004; Ministry of Education, 1996b), yet the censoring of children's sexuality leads to a reduction in such support and guidance. Subsequently, opportunities for children to make sense of their own and others' sexuality are reduced.

Now unable to unreservedly accept children's sexual curiosity and play as normal, censorship marks teacher actions. The teacher must remain alert to

and differentiate between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ sexual behaviours (Gourlay, 2001; Honig, 2000b; Rothbaum, Grauer, & Rubin, 1997) and act on those considered red-flag (Essa & Murray, 1999). Such behaviours are interpreted in terms of normalising discourses, including a discourse of children as biological, developmental entities. As the teacher draws from and reinforces the normal through such discourses, “the unclear, ambiguous aspects of human life are placed in the margin” (Cannella, 1997, p.60). Children’s sexuality, their sexual knowledge and innocence or lack thereof is a case in point.

As the twenty-first century unfolds, a discourse of sexuality as dangerous and the consequences of the phenomena of risk anxiety and moral panic around children’s sexuality, continue to exact a toll on children and early childhood education settings. In today’s world, these settings have become sexually fraught and as a result, “fear and hostility to pleasure and desire are diminishing the quality of life for young children and their teachers” (Tobin, 1997a, p.2). In order to better understand why this has and continues to occur, I turn now to an exploration of concepts pertinent to this study: heteronormativity, power, surveillance and normalisation.

Heteronormativity and the heterosexual / homosexual binary: sex, gender and desire

The exploration of sexualities matters in early childhood education is influenced by the varied discourses described to date. Infused with anxiety and panic, any exploration is typically “fraught with many obstacles and cultural taboos” (Robinson, 2002, p.416). One such barrier is heteronormativity. In Chapter 1, heteronormativity was described as the notion that heterosexuality is the favoured standard, the “very model of intergender relations” (Warner, cited in Sumara & Davis, 1999, p.202). Robinson (2002) suggests that heteronormativity is present in varied ways in early childhood centres but goes largely unrecognised.

Heteronormativity upholds heterosexuality as the natural and appropriate sexuality. As the 'norm' it is centred through and requires and depends on the existence of the 'abnormal' to function – homosexuality. As relational concepts (Sumara & Davis, 1999), and products of the same conceptual framework (Spargo, 1999), the structure and ranking within this binary is socially constructed. The terms within binaries mark particular positions. Davis (1994) explains this further:

The first term is ascendant and normative, the second term is a deviation from the norm. In each case the person positioned in the first category need not be aware of their categorisation. They can see themselves simply as a person whom any one else is free to be like. Those in the second part of each pair are aware of themselves being in that category, their definition of themselves being intricately tied to their category membership. (p.18)

Within the heterosexual / homosexual binary the first term is ascendant and normative and the second, a deviation. Those marked by the first term are privileged. Drawing from Butler (1990) those in this group are signaling a 'proper' female or male 'performance'; they are embracing heterosexualised ways of 'performing' and 'doing' desire. Butler argues this is possible because sex (the physical body), produces gender (the female or male body) which in turn causes desire towards the opposite sex. In this way, sex, gender and desire are inextricably bound up with each other and require internal coherence. On the other hand, those marked by the second term within the heterosexual / homosexual binary are marginalised; their performance is 'improper.'

Like the concept of heteronormativity, the heterosexual / homosexual binary and the sex, gender, desire link jeopardise acknowledgment of diverse identities and attendance to difference and diversity within the early childhood

community, thus making attainment of the inclusive ideals of *Te Whaariki* difficult.

Power

For Foucault (1976), power is constituted in and through discourse. As Foucault explains, discourse can be both a tool and an outcome of power: “discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (p.101). Power is conceptualised by Foucault as something that acts on everyone; it is something that is exercised as opposed to an actual object of possession located in particular agents or interests (Dahlberg et al., 1999; L. Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). In Foucault’s conceptualisation, power is both productive and prohibited (L. Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). It can be positive, enabling and liberating as well as negative, suppressive, exploitive and coercive (Olssen, Codd, & O’Neill, 2004).

The exercise of power – disciplinary power – is not, however, coercive in a simple, clear-cut way. As Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) state, “disciplinary power does not coerce in a straightforward sense, but achieves its goals through the constraint of a conformity that must be achieved” (p.29). Disciplinary practices are, Foucault argues, an effective means of control that invites self-discipline (Dahlberg et al., 1999).

Of the disciplinary practices described by Foucault, surveillance and normalisation are of significance here. Disciplinary practices control by classification and categorisation (Olssen et al., 2004). These practices are evidenced both in the way individuals regulate themselves and in the ways institutions such as the early childhood centre and the school regulate individuals.

Surveillance

Foucault (1979) argues that the instrument of surveillance, as a disciplinary practice, ensures the routine functioning of power. As Foucault states, the power of surveillance is

Both absolutely indiscreet, since it is everywhere and always alert, since by its very principle it leaves no zone of shade and constantly supervises the very individuals who are entrusted with the task of supervising; and absolutely 'discreet,' for it functions permanently and largely in silence. (p.177)

In making all visible while remaining invisible and therefore unverifiable, Foucault argues the all-seeing gaze ensures individuals self-consciously monitor and regulate their own behaviours, not knowing if they are actually being watched, but knowing they could be at any moment. In this way he suggests surveillance is permanent, exhaustive and omnipresent “even if it is discontinuous in its action” (p.201).

Applied to early childhood centres, surveillance subjects both children and teachers to compulsory visibility. Children and teachers watch and are watched – “visibility is a trap” (Foucault, 1979, p.200). The child understands “his or her body is visible to others and that this visibility makes it subject to others’ control” (Leavitt & Power, 1997, p.68). The teacher too, understands his or her body is visible and open to control. Perceived of as dangerous the teacher/body therefore both requires and seeks the protection of surveillance (A. Jones, 2001a; Tobin, 1997b).

Normalisation

Foucault (1979) saw the ‘norm,’ like surveillance, as a significant instrument of power and control. The norm allows for shaping or steering of the subject, preferably without their awareness, to a particular standard, a particular end (Dahlberg et al., 1999). It is normalising in effect and both homogenises and

highlights differences. As Foucault (1979) states, “the power of normalisation imposes homogeneity, but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another” (p.184).

As Adams (1997) suggests

Normalisation draws our attention to discourses and practices that produce subjects who are ‘normal’, who live ‘normality’, and, most importantly, who find it hard to imagine anything different. These discourses and practices work to delineate possible forms of expression, sexual or otherwise, as legitimate, while others are left to exist beyond the limits of acceptability. (p.13)

Those forms of expression considered ‘beyond the limits of acceptability’ highlight the end result of normalisation – that is, marginalisation. In relation to sexuality and in the context of early childhood education the marginalisation, resistance towards and silencing of sexuality go hand in hand. Resistance signifies opposition and/or refusal. Fine (2003) suggests that silencing “signifies a terror of words, a fear of talk” (p.14) and “constitutes the practices by which contradictory evidence, ideologies, and experiences find themselves buried, camouflaged, and discredited” (p.16).

Heteronormativity, power, surveillance and normalisation are returned to in varying ways in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

Theoretical perspectives

Theoretical perspectives used in the study draw from social constructionism (for example, Burr, 1996; Crotty, 1998), poststructuralism (for example, B. Davies, 1994; MacNaughton, 2005) discourse analysis (for example, Fairclough, 1992, 1995, 2001; L. Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002; N. Phillips &

Hardy, 2002) and queer theory (for example, Britzman, 1998; Dilley, 1999; Jagose, 1996; Sumara & Davis, 1998).

Social constructionism

Social constructionism claims all reality, and the meanings attached to reality, are constructed and sustained by social processes (Burr, 1996; Crotty, 1998). Meaning is built and perpetuated by human beings in the course of every-day social life, “as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (Crotty, 1998, p.43). Critique of taken-for-granted knowledge and perceptions of the world are invited; all such perceptions are seen as historically and culturally specific and relative (Burr, 1996). A social constructionist view therefore rejects taken-for-granted knowledge and perceptions about ‘the child’ and ‘childhood’ as resting on a pre-determined foundation, contending instead that such constructions are simply “a way of looking, a category of thought, a representation” (James et al., 1998, pp.139-140). Ways of looking, categories of thought and representations are plural. A multiplicity of childhoods can consequently “coexist, overlap and conflict with each other” (Prout, 2005, p.63).

Poststructuralism

Like social constructionism, poststructuralism, according to MacNaughton (2005), is also interested in the interconnections between individuals, the social, and notions of knowledge and truth. Like the social constructionist view of the child and childhood, the poststructuralist view suggests early childhood pedagogy is essentially and unavoidably contradictory and that numerous and varied pedagogical truths are conceivable (MacNaughton). Both views were useful therefore, for facilitating my understanding of the differing ways teachers in early childhood education might view the child, the nature of childhood and the nature of children’s development, including the development of sexuality and sexual identity.

'Discourse,' a term I introduced at the start of this chapter, is central to social constructionism and poststructuralism. Howarth (2000) suggests the proliferation of "... 'discourse about discourse' has resulted in rapid changes to the commonsensical meanings of the word" (p.2). Used in different ways within and across different disciplines, it is a word that cannot easily be "pinned down to one meaning" (Mills, 1997, p.6). According to Foucault (1972), discourse, or discourses, consist of signs and are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (p.49). Poststructuralism recognises that discourses have social effects, are allied with and comprise different power relations, and that those in circulation at any one time vary (MacNaughton, 2005). An individual's access to a particular discourse in circulation will also vary with her subjectivity (her sense of identity, thoughts, feelings and ways of relating) which is determined by those she has access to (B. Davies, 1994; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 1999). Accordingly, this perspective was helpful in my consideration of teachers' changing positions within multiple discourses.

Discourse analysis

In this thesis, I use discourse to refer to the particular ways of talking about (or otherwise representing) particular understandings, events and objects (Burr, 1996; L. Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002) or more specifically, to the ways "differently positioned social actors 'see' and represent social life" (Fairclough, 2001, p.123). Discourse analysis as both a theoretical perspective and method drawing on social constructionism and poststructuralism allowed me, in this case, to explore the ways teachers (as social actors) saw and represented sexuality in early childhood education, the meanings the teachers gave to those understandings, how they used those meanings to regulate sexualities in the centre, and the identity implications for children.

Critical discourse analysis, in particular Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model requires analysis of (1) the actual text or communicative

event (that is, spoken or non-spoken communication) (Fairclough, 1995); (2) discursive practice (that is, the use of language in text production and consumption); and, (3) the wider, related social practice. In highlighting the way discursive practice creates and maintains the social world (L. Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002), critical discourse analysis enabled me to consider the power relations privileging some children's identities and marginalising others. As Foucault (1976) suggests, power relations "have a directly productive role, wherever they come into play" (p.94). It is, of course, these very relations that make critical discourse analysis critical (L. Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002).

Queer theory

Queer theory stems from poststructuralist views (Robinson, 2005b) and is a useful tool in understanding sexuality as a constructed concept (Sears, 1998). Focusing on the deconstruction of sexual categorisation processes, queer theory seeks out the incoherencies in the terms sex, gender and sexuality demonstrating the ways in which they function to license heterosexuality as normative (Jagose, 1996). Rejecting the binary systems of male / female, masculine / feminine and heterosexual / homosexual (Dilley, 1999; Luhman, 1998; Meiners, 1998; Sumara & Davis, 1998; Tierney & Dilley, 1998) that underpin systems of Western thought, queer theory suggests identities are multiple, relational, contradictory and unstable (Weeks, 1999).

Queer theory "is as elusive to nail down as mercury" (Dilley, 1999, p.457), and queer "among the slipperiest of terms" (Carlson, 1998, p.113). In simple (albeit slippery) terms, to research queerly involves undertaking all stages of the research process from a queered position. Taking such a position "calls the bluff of heterosexist epistemology and reveals the arbitrary and mediated nature of its otherwise apparently unquestionable logic" (Gardner Honeychurch, 1996, p.344).

Britzman (1998) suggests queer theory demands the use of methods requiring an ‘impertinent performance’; including

An interest in thinking against the thought of one’s conceptual foundations; an interest in studying the skeletons of learning and teaching that haunt one’s responses, anxieties, and categorical imperatives; and, a persistent concern with whether pedagogical relations can allow more room to manoeuvre in thinking the unthought of education. (pp.215-216)

To ‘think against conceptual foundations’ and to ‘study skeletons of learning and teaching,’ I have brought to light traditional homogenising theories and the discursive binary distinctions within these in my presentation of the findings. I have endeavoured to unearth and deduce the ways pedagogy is sexed through teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality and more specifically, the ways it is unequivocally heterosexed (Sumara & Davis, 1998). I have questioned “the presumptions, values, and viewpoints from those positions (marginal and central), especially those that normally go unquestioned” (Dilley, 1999, p.462). Finally, to seek ‘further room to manoeuvre’ I have tried to create new spaces for visualising a sociality dislodged from the prevailing order (Britzman, 1998). This will, I hope, enable teachers to begin to ‘think the unthought of education’ – exploring and finding new ways of doing sexualities together.

Summary

The literature review contained within the first section of this chapter highlighted four interconnected discourses particularly relevant to traditional and contemporary constructions of children and sexuality. The importance of these discourses to this study, alongside the concepts of heteronormativity, power, surveillance and normalisation, cannot be underestimated. It is through these discourses and concepts, that some insight into questions about sexualities matters in early childhood, and the significance of these matters,

can be gleaned. Such insight is particularly pertinent and necessary, given the inclusive philosophy central to *Te Whaariki*.

Similarly, in addressing the theoretical perspectives of social constructionism, poststructuralism, discourse analysis and queer theory, and the ways in which these underpinned this study, further awareness of a complex, challenging topic is made possible.

Introduction to Chapter 3

The foundations for this thesis have been well established, through scene setting in Chapter 1, and a review of the literature and an introduction to the theoretical framework in Chapter 2. Now that this backdrop, necessary to an appreciation of the general methods used in this study is in place, I turn to a description and justification of those methods – in other words – what I actually did, and why what I did was appropriate. Chapter 3 outlines, therefore, the methodology, research design and specific methods and tools relevant to this study. Ethics are also addressed.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

With the terrain to this study now fully sketched – the backdrop in place – the purpose of this chapter is to chart the overall methodology, research design and specific methods and tools used in the study. The description of what I did, and the limits of this, are located within and supported by literature on qualitative research. This literature highlights particular characteristics of qualitative research. Understanding these characteristics, and how to effectively apply them to the research process, was important to the success of this study.

Understanding and addressing ethical issues was also critical to the outcome of this study, because consideration of moral issues and dilemmas, as well as the protection of participants, are key responsibilities of any researcher. I took these responsibilities seriously, and outline the actions I took in this regard, in this chapter, with particular reference to the researcher/participant relationship.

This chapter concludes with a brief summary of content covered and an introduction to Chapter 4.

Research design

A research design signals a plan for proceeding. To proceed, I needed first and foremost to determine what it was I wanted to know. As outlined in Chapter 1, I was eager to learn about the ways in which teacher talk and practice constructs meanings around sexuality. While this topic began to crystallise, I toyed with possible research questions. At the same time, I delved into the qualitative research literature considering both the potential of this approach to research, and the potential of the theoretical perspectives of social constructionism, poststructuralism, discourse analysis and queer theory, to

help me understand the research questions. With a bent towards the interpretive and/or towards deconstruction, I quickly realised qualitative research and my theoretical perspectives were well suited to studies exploring the ways subjective meaning is individually constructed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; N.K. Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Neuman, 1997; Patton, 2002). I also realised that qualitative research, in demanding the gathering of extensive data rich in detail (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), was well suited to my desire to tell a story by capturing and communicating “someone else’s experience of the world in his or her words” (Patton, 2002, p.46). While gathering such data, I wanted to engage with the study participants in ordinary ways, to model my interactions with them after typical conversations and from within a context that provided them with some comfort and familiarity (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Patton, 2002; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). I concluded therefore that an open-ended interview study would enable me to realise my aims; to explore the meanings the study participants gave to sexuality and how and why they constructed those meanings at the time of their contribution to the study. I was interested in my particular study participants’ points of view only, their lived realities, rather than in deducing the nature of the ‘real’ world or attempting to produce results that could be repeated.

Once I had gained initial clarity about my topic, research questions, research approach and theoretical perspectives, my specific plans began to take clearer shape. My plans were emergent and flexible, as is characteristic of qualitative research. My early clarity was tested time and time again by this feature, given that I am not generally accustomed, in my professional life, to proceeding as if I knew very little about the people and places I would visit (here, I paraphrase Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p.49). I believed proceeding in this way was important however, because sexuality in early childhood education is largely an unexplored topic and one that can provoke discomfort. I didn’t know what might surface and needed to be open and responsive to varied possibilities. This was challenging. Similarly, I was challenged by the

confusion and uncertainty Patton (2002) notes is rife in qualitative research which, he states, “seems to work best for people with a high tolerance for ambiguity” (p.242). While uncertainties milled about at the back of my mind, I felt, at the same time, liberated by the adaptability of this form of inquiry and the acceptability of making decisions in an ongoing fashion (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Janesick, 1994; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

The characteristics of qualitative research, described to date, are by no means the only characteristics that influenced my research design. They were, however, very much to the forefront as I made initial choices. As Patton (2002) notes, the ways in which researchers focus a study reflect “not choices between good and bad but choices among alternatives, all of which have merit” (p.228). My research design and the subsequent choices I made are further elaborated on throughout this chapter.

Methods

In this section I outline the methods used in the study including sample selection, data collection, data analysis and my interpretation and re/presentation of the data. I also introduce the participants.

Sample selection

Qualitative research data abounds “in description of people, places, and conversations” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p.2) and should enable in-depth study (Burns, 1994; Patton, 2002). Interested in ensuring depth (rather than breadth), I was uncertain about the number of participants I could expect to generate the amount of data necessary given the scope of the study. I hesitantly planned to err on the side of caution, with a minimum sample, as recommended by Patton (2002). Accordingly, I decided to confine participants to three or four before reviewing the volume of data collected and making a decision about whether or not further participants were needed.

I did not require a representative sample, as I had no intent of generalising from my sample to that of the population from which it drew. That being the case, I used purposeful sampling to choose my participants. This form of sampling allows for selection of participants for a particular reason, such as selecting those considered likely to be especially informative (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Neuman, 1997; Patton, 2002). As already indicated, the topic of the study can provoke discomfort, so I wanted to ensure those participating would be both interested in the subject and skilled communicators – articulate and reflective. Using my professional networks, I approached two teachers both of whom held positions of responsibility in their early childhood centres and both of whom I considered well able to share their beliefs openly. The teachers were willing to participate and presented my research plans to their teaching teams in order to help identify any additional teachers who may also have been prepared to take part. A third teacher, also known to me, was selected as a result of this. No other teachers at either of the centres these teachers were employed in wished to be involved. I was left pondering whether my sampling strategy had been partially thwarted; how did I expect it to unearth those interested in the topic when sexuality in early childhood education remains largely unspoken or hidden? Or was I reading too much into a decision not to participate? Although disappointed not to have a fourth participant, in keeping with my tentative plans, I made no other approaches to potential participants.

Data collection

In my experience, good interviewing requires finely honed skills. Nervous about my interviewing skills, I nevertheless felt that this method suited the purpose of my study – it would give me the opportunity to learn about the participants' feelings, beliefs, knowledge, talk and practices about and around sexuality in a relaxed way. In hindsight, this method had limits. The use of interview in discourse studies has been critiqued on the basis that these represent researcher-instigated discourse rather than naturally occurring

examples of language and practice in use (N. Phillips & Hardy, 2002). I was reliant on data that represented teacher talk about their talk and practice about and around sexuality. Participant observation, as an additional method, would have enabled me to gather direct data of actual teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality. This may well have been useful in my pursuit of in-depth understanding of the topic. As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) note, combining types of data increases depth.

Patton (2002) argues interviewing is frequently poorly done. Uncertain about my skills as an interviewer, I prepared carefully in the hope this would stand me in good stead, particularly given that the sample size left little room for carelessness. As part of my preparation, I read widely about qualitative interviewing, deciding to adopt the semi-structured interview approach. Typically, such an approach has sequential themes, possible questions to address, and allows for flexibility (Bell, 1993; Burns, 1994; C. A. Davies, 1999; Gillham, 2000; Glesne, 1999; Kvale, 1996; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Opie, 2003; Patton, 2002; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). I anticipated observing participant reactions to the process and adjusting it accordingly, while allowing them to determine what was discussed within the framework of an interview guide.

I developed a draft interview guide that included a minimum of open-ended, singular questions with prompts to use if necessary. I undertook a trial run using the draft with a colleague making use of her constructive criticism to finalise the guide (Appendix 1). Further fine-tuning occurred once interviews were underway. Participants had the opportunity to comment on both the questions asked and my interviewing skills.

Prior to interviewing, I gained participants' verbal approval to participate. Participants were then supplied with an information sheet that briefly outlined the study purpose and aims, participant requirements and conditions of

anonymity and confidentiality (Appendix 2). Participants also received and signed a consent form thus indicating they understood all requirements and conditions of the study (Appendix 3).

Each of the participants was individually interviewed using the interview guide. Individual interviews were conducted at a venue of each participant's choice and were approximately one-hour in duration. Two participants chose to be interviewed in their early childhood centres. One participant chose to be interviewed in my office.

The participants were also interviewed once as a group. The purpose of the group interview was twofold: to provide a forum to share emerging themes from my initial analysis of the individual interviews with the participants and to give them the opportunity to elaborate on themes and/or respond to my thinking about these. The group interview was conducted in an interviewing room at my place of work. It was approximately two hours in duration.

Suitable times for the individual interviews and the group interview were negotiated upon receipt of consent forms. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed by a research assistant who was bound by confidentiality (as outlined in the information sheet).

Immediately post-interview, I reflected on the interviews and what I had learnt through writing detailed and lengthy field notes. Within twelve hours, these were further expanded, as I listened to the interview tapes before reluctantly sending them out for transcription. My field notes formed a vital part of the data. As Patton (2002) explains it, these are descriptive in nature and generally consist of the researcher's perceptions of what occurred, reactions to this, insights and beginning analyses.

Data analysis

Field notes inform and provide a context for analysis (Davidson & Tolich, 2003; N.K. Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Kvale, 1996). The first stage in data analysis therefore included reviewing my field notes and re-listening to the interview tapes while checking these off against the transcriptions and making minor changes to ensure accuracy. The participants read the transcripts. I asked that they check whether or not they provided a faithful record of their views and provided a margin so they could add explanatory notes. Two of the three participants added brief notes to clarify various points. I then formatted the transcripts so that each block of text was numbered. With 80 pages of transcripts and 16 pages of field notes, I had reached saturation point. With sufficient data, my tentative plans to access a third centre and additional participants through my professional network, or by using the snowball technique, were unnecessary.

At this point, the second stage of data analysis began in earnest. I immersed myself in the data reading and re-reading the transcripts and adding extensive interpretative and methodological notes alongside each block of text while cross-referencing to my field notes. As I read, re-read and made notes, I looked for and began to perceive patterns generated by my readings of the data. Patton (2002) states “finding patterns is one result of analysis. Finding vagaries, uncertainties, and ambiguities is another” (p.437). Navigating around vagaries, uncertainties and ambiguities in search of patterns, I was supported by my research questions and my interview guide. These acted as analytical props aiding me to ‘see’ patterns. The way I ‘saw’ patterns was influenced by both my theoretical framework, and the concepts of heteronormativity, power, surveillance and normalisation and helped shape the way I chunked, categorised and understood the data. For example, I understood data around children’s sexuality in relation to social constructionism, poststructuralism and queer theory all of which enable views of sexuality as socially constructed. I coded and noted all potential themes on

a chart adding corresponding reference numbers to relevant blocks of texts. This enabled me to move quickly between themes and associated texts. Ultimately, I ‘produced’ three broad themes that I considered most significant, *centred bodies*, *managed bodies* and *marginised bodies*.

I applied Fairclough’s (1992) three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis to the data. This was a complex, demanding and time-consuming process requiring both analysis of the text, in this case the description of talk and practice about and around sexuality contained within the transcripts; and, analysis of discursive practice, in this case the use of this talk and practice in the production and consumption of other talk and practice. It also required analysis of the wider, related social practices, in this case heteronormativity, power, surveillance and normalisation. Phillips and Hardy (2002) claim many studies remain two-dimensional in analysis; text and social practice are considered but managing the discursive level, which is “immensely difficult” (p.86), remains inadequately considered. This was true of this study; managing the discursive level provided ongoing challenges some of which have been poorly met. Yet, as these authors go on to note, it is this very level that brings understanding of “how structured sets of text and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception together constitute the social” (p.86).

Throughout the process, two questions guided my analysis: how do teacher discourses of sexuality operate in early childhood centres? And, how do teachers use their dominant understandings of these discourses to regulate sexualities in early childhood centres? To help unpack these overarching questions, I developed a number of more specific sub-questions, adapting these from the work of Phillips and Hardy (2002). I applied these sub-questions to the three themes, both to try and establish what discourses were at work within them and as a way of further organising my data. These sub-questions were:

- ⇒ How are teachers and children (as the primary social actors present in the text) positioned and constructed within the text?
- ⇒ What discourses do the constructions of teachers and children draw on?
- ⇒ How did these discourses come about?
- ⇒ Why do these discourses have particular meaning today?
- ⇒ How do these discourses draw from, reproduce or restructure other discourses?
- ⇒ How are these discourses constructed through diverse texts?
- ⇒ How do these discourses give meaning to the social and political context?
- ⇒ How do these discourses empower and disempower teachers and children and what are the consequences of this?
- ⇒ How do these discourses legitimate teacher positions and practices and make these possible or inevitable?

As I reflected on and answered these questions in written table format, I cross-referenced to my field notes, my interpretative and methodological notes on the transcripts, and relevant literature. The culmination of these processes enabled “the denaturalization of text [and] the possibility of alternative readings and interpretations, particularly those silenced by dominant social institutions that tend to privilege a particular analysis, reading position, or practice as official knowledge” (Luke, 1995, p.19). I looked for alternative readings and interpretations as I worked, at the same time as acknowledging that these are my own, a point I highlight in the next section.

Re/presenting the data

With no single truth about the world possible, there can be no single or true interpretation of it (Crotty, 1998). Rather, interpretative practices will make the world visible in different ways to different observers (N.K. Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). I am aware therefore, that my re/presentation of the data is but

one of many possible truths and one of many possible ways to tell it. As Denzin (1994) states, “stories can always be told (inscribed) in different ways” (p.506). Those I speak for may tell their stories differently, thus challenging my own “biased production” (p.506). This particular production – my thesis – has been filtered through varied lenses including my positionings as set out in Chapter 1. It symbolises my attempt to learn the art of interpretation, which, as Denzin suggests, is a skill best learned through the doing.

Participants

I refer to the three participants in this study as ‘the teachers.’ Pseudonyms are not used. I briefly outlined my rationale for this decision in Chapter 1 and will re-visit this in further detail in the next section, ‘Ethics’ (see ‘Researcher/participant relationship’).

The first teacher was the supervisor of the early childhood centre where she worked. This teacher had 19 years teaching experience and held a nationally recognised early childhood teaching diploma. Her early childhood centre was a childcare centre that catered for children aged six weeks old to six years old. Children were able to attend the centre on a part-time basis or a full-time basis.

The second teacher was the head teacher at her early childhood centre. She had 22 years teaching experience. Like the first teacher, this teacher held a nationally recognised early childhood teaching diploma. Her early childhood centre was a kindergarten catering for children from two years old to six years old. Children attended the centre for either a morning session or an afternoon session.

The third teacher was a teacher in the same centre as the first. She had six years experience and also held a nationally recognised early childhood teaching diploma.

Ethics

Critical attention was given to ethics in this study. The study was subject to ethical approval by the Christchurch College of Education Ethics Committee. In this section I address the conditions of participation in this study, credibility and integrity and the researcher/participant relationship.

Conditions of participation

As noted earlier in this chapter, informed consent for participation in this study was required. To recap, the teachers verbally agreed to participate in the study and shortly thereafter received an information sheet about the study (Appendix 2). Written permission prior to gathering data was then obtained through use of a consent form (Appendix 3).

The teachers were guaranteed confidentiality. To this end, all records and data remained confidential with access to data restricted to my supervisors, the transcriber and myself. To ensure this condition was met, I made security provisions. All study materials were stored on computer file requiring a password entry and backed up on CD-Rom in a secure study at my home and/or in a filing cabinet in the study. These materials will be retained in this manner being used only for the purpose of this thesis, conference presentation and publication, and possible auditing.

In addition to confidentiality, the teachers were guaranteed anonymity. The teachers' real names and other identifying information were not used in this study.

The teachers had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage and/or to withdraw information or data pertaining to them. The topic of this study can be characterised as ‘sensitive.’ That is, it demands the sharing of deeply personal beliefs and is concerned with deviance and social control (Renzetti & Lee, 1993). While no real risk to the teachers was anticipated, I expected any concerns would be minimised by these guarantees of withdrawal. In addition, the teachers were informed of the Christchurch College of Education complaints procedure.

Credibility and integrity

Ensuring credibility and integrity is vital when designing a study. Given the sensitive nature of this study’s topic, this was particularly significant. Qualitative research employs the researcher as instrument; the credibility and integrity of a study relies largely on that researcher’s competence and skill (Patton, 2002). In preparing this thesis I reported therefore, on my abilities, presence, positioning and biases. Appropriate use of tools is also important (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). For this reason this thesis identified the advantages and limitations of the tools I used earlier in this chapter.

Limerick, Burgess-Limerick and Grace (1996) write that researchers enter the field with the purpose of voicing participants’ stories and that, “consciously or not, the interviewees entrusted their words to the researcher for that purpose” (p.457). These authors use the metaphor of a gift – participants’ words should be respected, rather than betrayed, abused or misused. Proving worthy of such a gift is important. Careful consideration of the perspectives of each participant is necessary. Checks on data recording help lessen inaccuracies and enhance credibility and integrity (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). With this in mind, as earlier noted, I sent interview transcripts out to the teachers for comments and/or corrections to assist in the accurate recording and interpretation of their views. Checks on analysis and interpretation further enhances credibility and integrity (Janesick, 1994; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

Such checks can occur throughout a study. As already stated, the teachers had the chance to check my initial analysis and interpretation during the group interview. As Harrison, MacGibbon and Morton (2001) note, “by asking participants to examine field notes and early analyses, researchers can give back something to their participants and engage in member checks as a means of ensuring trustworthiness” (p.323).

Much debate exists on the credibility and integrity of qualitative research. I have endeavoured here, to highlight those actions I took to enhance the credibility and integrity of this study. Some additional actions are described in the next section within the context of the researcher/participant relationship.

Researcher/participant relationship

In this section, I turn my attention back to my positioning as lecturer in early childhood teacher education. From the study inception, I was aware and mindful of this position, the ways it further positioned me as colleague to the three teachers, the privileges afforded me through both positions and the impact of these on the researcher/participant relationship.

I was conscious that as a lecturer I might be positioned as an ‘expert’ by the teachers: expert on being queer by virtue of being queer; expert on sexuality by virtue of my sexuality; expert on early childhood education by virtue of my ‘status.’ At the same time, I knew perceived differences in lecturer/teacher status means lecturers can sometimes be seen as upholding an impossible, unrealistic ideal while remaining so far removed from the realities of the daily life of teachers in centres so as to be entirely out of touch. Wary of both an expert label and the impact of status, an early planning decision saw me seek to reassure the teachers that I was interested in their perspectives on sexuality rather than pre-conceived notions of ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ responses to the topic of study. To a certain extent, I also assumed my long-term and therefore well-established professional relationships with the teachers would cushion the

impact of any ostensible disparities in our respective standings within the early childhood community. I had worked alongside the first two teachers intermittently throughout the decade prior to the start of the study and the third teacher for a lesser period of time. In recent years, this has most typically seen me in the role of visitor to their centres where we have liaised together directly about student progress during teaching practice placement or where I have liaised with other centre staff.

Knowing the teachers was an advantage during the initial stages of this study. It meant I was comfortable liaising with and interviewing them. Possibly, this may also have eased any anxieties they had about being interviewed. In the later stages of the study my comfort lessened however. Somewhat to my surprise, and emerging alongside my stropmy intent to 'cause trouble' (as stated in the opening to this thesis), emerged a desire for their approval. I recognised this as an understandable but not particularly realistic desire, given the contested nature of sexuality and its perceived relevance, or lack thereof, to the field of early childhood education. This wish became apparent through early anxiety about the teachers' potential responses to my interpretation of the data. Would they be angered? Or worse, would they feel demonised in some way? While they had the opportunity to learn about, respond to and extend on emerging themes drawn from my field notes and initial analysis of individual interviews during the group interview (which somewhat mollified me), this did little to ease later anxiety when actually writing the thesis given I did not invite them to offer feedback on the draft. At the time, rightly or wrongly, this felt beyond the scope of a thesis at the masters level. In an attempt to address the reappearance of my disquiet (which met with partial success only), in an earlier section in this chapter I highlighted my re/presentation of the data is but that – mine – one of many possible re/presentations.

To further address my disquiet, to prove worthy of the teachers' gift of words⁵ and finally, in recognising the lack of protection I'd provided the teachers with in my original presentation of the findings chapters, I made a late decision to remove the use of pseudonyms. The use of pseudonyms had placed a strong focus on the teachers as individuals, rather than allowing for a focus on the teachers as in some way representative of the use of particular discourses prevalent in early childhood education. Removing these afforded greater security to the teachers as a whole, lessened the labelling of individual teachers and helped de-personalise the findings overall. In order to do this, an increase in focus on discourse was needed.

My relationship with the teachers was then, a mixed blessing. Patton (2002) states that "closeness does not make bias and loss of perspective inevitable" (p.49). My closeness to the participants brought rewards and concerns; in identifying my varied positionings and the impact of these on both the participants and myself, I have subsequently reflected on my bias and the impact of this.

Summary

This chapter has charted the methodology, research design, and methods and tools used in the study, the choices made along route and the actions taken. Qualitative research literature has been used to support those choices and actions. Importantly, the links to literature provide some measure with which to consider the effectiveness and appropriateness of my tool use and choices, and hence, the overall credibility and integrity of the study.

In this chapter I also gave considerable thought to ethical issues with a strong focus on the researcher/participant relationship and the impact of this. In so doing, I believe I have prepared the ground for what is to follow – my analysis

⁵ Here I return to Limerick, Burgess-Limerick and Grace's (1996) metaphor of a gift.

and discussion of the study findings – in ways that both show respect for, and offer protection to, the teachers.

Introduction to Chapter 4

Chapter 4 is the first findings chapter. Structured around the discourses described in Chapter 2, it examines two of the three themes created through my reading of the data – a process thoroughly outlined in the previous chapter. The first theme, *centred bodies*, draws attention to the way children/bodies and sexuality are positioned in the centre as normal, through these discourses. The second theme, *managed bodies*, focuses on management strategies with which to manage sexuality, through these same discourses. Exploration of the themes/bodies highlights their linked and entangled nature and shows how the teachers take up, enact and/or resist the discourses available to them. Both these themes/bodies shed light on aspects of the research questions as set out in Chapter 1.

Chapter 4: Centring and managing children/bodies and sexuality through discourse

Introduction

Having established the credibility and integrity of this study, through a discussion of methods and ethics, Chapter 4 explores two of the three themes pertinent to this study. These themes are *centred bodies* and *managed bodies*. My exploration of the processes these themes reflect proved consistent with the study's aims to explore how teacher discourses of sexuality operate in early childhood centres and the ways in which these discourses regulate sexualities. Furthermore, the data chosen to illustrate these processes suggests some possible answers to the study's overarching research question, 'how does teacher talk and practice construct meanings around sexuality?'

The theme *centred bodies*, runs throughout the chapter. Highlighting the way children/bodies and sexuality are centred as normal by and through discourse, this theme is sometimes made explicitly present and at other times is present by implication. The centring reflects the dream of the collective adult body for her children – the dream of 'normality.'

The teachers' talk and practice about and around sexuality suggests they each have access to varied discourses currently circulating in the field of early childhood education. Davies (1993) suggests that discourses shape subjectivities – particular discourses make available particular possibilities for subject positions. In this way, discourses govern practice (acting and doing) in specific directions (Dahlberg et al., 1999). Identifying the discourses the teachers have access to and the possibilities these discourses afforded for subject positions offered some potential answers to the research question, 'what informs teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality?' I subsequently identified in my production of the first theme, four of these discourses. These discourses, introduced in the literature review in Chapter 2,

are: a discourse of children as asexual and innocent; a discourse of children as biological, developmental entities; a discourse of child-centeredness; and, a discourse of sexuality as dangerous.

In this chapter, I argue the teachers' talk and practice about and around sexuality consciously or sub-consciously, takes up, enacts and is governed by these discourses as a form of management of sexuality. As such, management of sexuality is a 'product' of the teachers' talk and practice, negotiated and accomplished through it. This argument brings the second theme explored in this chapter to the fore.

The second theme, *managed bodies*, reflects the notion that the dream of normality (as earlier noted) is a dream that must be manipulated in order to maintain coherence. Manipulation, or the search for coherence, is the act of regulating the tension between 'normality' and 'abnormality' by shaping children/bodies and sexuality in the 'right' direction – towards the centre. A number of management strategies serve this purpose. In highlighting these strategies, this chapter will show what sexuality looks like when it is 'well' managed.

Throughout this chapter (and Chapter 5), quotes by the teachers are in italics to distinguish them from quotes taken from the literature.

The chapter makes brief links to the concepts of heteronormativity, power, surveillance and normalisation. These concepts will be returned to in greater depth in Chapter 5.

The idealised untouched child

A discourse of children as asexual and innocent has been critiqued by a number of authors (see for example, Cahill & Theilheimer, 1999; Cannella, 2001; Dockett & Flear, 1999; Jackson, 1982; Jackson & Scott, 1999; James et

al., 1998; Johnson, 2000, 2001; A. Jones, 2003b; Robinson, 2000, 2002, 2005b; Scott et al., 2001; Silin, 1995b, 1997; Tobin, 1997b). Embodied in this discourse, as suggested in the literature review in Chapter 2, are notions of sinlessness and purity; “essentially pure in heart, these infants are angelic and uncorrupted by the world they have entered” (James et al., 1998, p.13). This discourse makes some things about sexualities ‘sayable and do-able,’ therefore providing some plausible clues to the research question ‘what is the teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality?’ For those whose subjective positionings are in alignment with this discourse, these things include the defence, protection and maintenance of this idealised, untouched state.

Teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality that takes up, enacts and is governed by this discourse could be expected to reinforce children’s idealised, untouched state as the norm – hence the theme *centred bodies*. To achieve this end, a management strategy of denial of children’s sexuality appears logical. This strategy draws attention to the theme, *managed bodies*, as outlined in the following section.

A management strategy of denial

A management strategy of denial of children’s sexuality both positioned sexuality as the exclusive domain of adults, and encompassed the use of non-sexual terms, to explain the child/body’s physical responses. Comments one teacher made that illustrate the crediting of sexuality solely to adulthood include

Like sexuality to me is a personal thing, and I think it’s, I just can’t see the relevance of me talking about sexuality to preschoolers, like I can’t, cause their brain too is, yeah, I can’t, to me it’s sort of an adult thing so yeah.

Sexuality to me is an adult thing, I guess that's what I'm saying, and so I couldn't see it, you know, like as a focus, as something that yeah would come through.

I can't get out of thinking that it's an adult thing.

These comments can be understood from within the context of the child / adult binary.

Prout (2005) writes the child / adult binary constructs childhood and adulthood as separate, discrete states of being. Adults, as the more powerful social group of the two, have fashioned children in the West as a minority social group (Mayall, 2002), the ultimate 'other' – "a group of human beings not considered able or mature enough to create themselves" (Cannella, 1997, p.19). In so doing, adults have determined "what children are" and "what knowledge about them is needed" (Mayall, 1999, p.11). Adults' subsequent promotion of this knowledge has seen each group occupying separate social worlds (Cannella, 1997, 2001; Dockett & Fler, 1999; Jackson, 1982; Mayall, 1999; Robinson, 2005b). Accordingly, the asexual, innocent child is understood in relation to the sexual, worldly adult. She is shaped towards asexuality and innocence, towards the centre, and away from things sexual and worldly. Consequently, sexuality is well managed; the child/body remains untouched by this supposedly adult domain. A management strategy of denial of children's sexuality through the crediting of sexuality solely to adulthood becomes problematic however, where the child/body's physical responses contradict this.

To uphold the truths within a discourse of children as asexual and innocent, one teacher employed the use of non-sexual terms to explain the child/body's physical responses where these threatened to disrupt those truths. The following quote referring to boys touching their penises during toileting is illustrative:

I think that's a natural physical response, to you know, like right from quite young when they wake up, you know or, and so, that it's, to me it's not a sexual, it's just a body thing, like though it is hard to know whether they feel pleasure from that, which I'm sure they do, but in a kind of normal way like if they eat something nice.

This quote perhaps implies that any disruption to the truths of this discourse can be contextualised from within a context of biological determinism. Sexuality is well managed where this is the case; here, this teacher appears to suggest that boys' touching their penises is simply a natural, normal, expected (yet asexual) occurrence on the biological, developmental path to maturity. This biological, developmental path is explored in the next section.

The universal, pre-determined and ever-maturing child

In the literature review I highlighted the ways in which developmental psychology shaped the assumptions central to child development (Cannella, 1997). These assumptions have been offered “as certain and objective truth...a ‘grand narrative’ that has done much to produce the constructions of young children” (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p.100). A discourse of children as biological, developmental entities is representative of this. Within this discourse children's bodies are positioned as “biological machine[s]” (Connell, 1999, p.97). Universal, biologically pre-determined and chronological stage-based norms mark development, including the development of a fixed gender and heterosexual sexuality. These norms are expected to unfold naturally with continual progress toward a state that is more sophisticated than the state preceding it until such point as maturation is achieved (Cannella, 1997; Robinson, 2002).

A discourse of children as biological, developmental entities makes some things about sexualities sayable and do-able. For example, those aligned with this discourse are more likely to engage in talk and practice about and around

sexuality that is reflective of biology, development and assumed norms. This contributes to the normalisation of children – and the theme *centred bodies* – at the same time as providing further, promising clues to the research question ‘what is the teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality?’ To manage this view of children, management strategies such as pragmatic talk and practice and the supervision, surveillance and reduction of masturbation and sex play are both rational and commonsense. These management strategies contribute to the theme, *managed bodies*, and are outlined in the following sections.

A management strategy of pragmatic talk and practice

Each of the three teachers drew on the management strategy of pragmatic talk and practice. This talk and practice positioned children’s bodies as the sum of their parts and processes while positioning bodily development as sequential, normal and natural.

Sexuality has numerous, contestable components. Traditionally, biology has been considered one of these components. The biology elements of anatomy and physiology were evident in aspects of the teachers’ talk and practice about and around sexuality.

Teacher talk and practice highlighting anatomy, or the physical structure of the human body, included use of accurate terminology. Teacher comments included

I use the right words, so to speak.

I think it’s important to name body parts with their correct anatomical names.

It’s more okay now to talk about bodies and a penis is a ‘penis’ and not a ‘do do’... but there would have been a time when it wasn’t okay to do that.

Well people don't like saying words like penis or vagina for a start in some families, yeah... Parents frequently rename private places, rather than use the correct word...I could write a book of all the names I know for parts of your body.

Teacher talk and practice drawing attention to physiology, or the way the human body works, focused on body processes. Opportunities for such talk and practice arose for each of the teachers during daily toileting and hand-washing routines in their centres' communal bathroom areas. The following comments illustrate this:

We have our lunchtime train, and they [the children] chug into the bathroom. Then they wash their hands. And one boy, one engine, had to hurry past the queue to get to the toilet the other day, and there was this little girl who was waiting to go to chug on to the basin, she was just waiting in the doorway and she saw Matthew. She has a sister at home and she has quite a sheltered life... and she could not believe her eyes. He was standing there peeing and then he noticed she was staring. He's quite a worldly young man, he said 'what's she doing, why is she looking at me?' And so that led to a conversation...with me supporting the two of them...We were talking about you know, how boys and girls pee differently because their bodies are different.

Quite often I get um 'why won't my penis go down cause I can't wee' and so I go 'oh just wait.' Like I'm pretty matter of fact...I'm pretty matter of fact because they're asking cause they want to know but not in any great detail, you know, not what I would want to know or whatever...I use the right words so to speak, and I go oh, but I'm not quite sure really why, I just go oh, 'it'll go down soon' or, like I talk about it [body processes], cause it's a respect thing too, cause you know it's their body.

Teaching to body processes included some talk about (hetero)normative reproduction. As a rule, the teachers felt this was appropriate only when the topic emerged from children's cues as is highlighted in this remark:

I would talk about where babies come from but I don't know whether I'd initiate that...No, I wouldn't.

The comment that follows, is an example of one way in which the topic might emerge from children's cues:

We have books, that you know, that could be out, that might not be all the time, they might be loaned to a family, that have pictures of babies, you know drawings of babies in utero. There've been times when they've [the children] been in the book corner and that that's been a talking point about growing inside your mum.

Teacher talk and practice related to body parts and processes appeared to be an aspect of sexuality considered appropriate to initiate with children or to respond to as a consequence of questions and comments. A possible reason for this could be teacher beliefs about children's developmental readiness and ability to understand this aspect.

The teachers' talk and practice about and around sexuality draws attention to the developmental framework they utilise to frame that talk and practice. Some examples of comments made in reference to aspects of sexuality considered appropriate to share with children, or the ways children might express knowledge of these, and my interpretation of this follow:

I think when you think about appropriate you think about, well I think about what is appropriate for age and stage...yeah, of age and stage. What is the kind of play you'd expect to see, what is the kind of knowledge that children might or might not have, you know, what's appropriate to the developmental level.

I'm also aware that there's a school of thought that thinks if you give children info it gives them ideas that are not appropriate, I mean I believe children only take out of any situation the amount they can cognitively cope with at that time, that's what my, I guess, my inherent belief is.

I know my ground more and I feel like I know what, I have a stronger sense of what, what play is okay and kind of normal, for want of a better word.

I heard the other day, I heard a boy say um how a woman's got hair on her vagina or something, and another girl went 'no, no they haven't,' and he went 'yeah, cause she's a woman,' and then he just laughed... But they were being matter of fact, just inquisitive, and just like oh you know, how strange is that, you know.

These statements infer that normally developing children progress through age-based stages. They also infer that particular indicators such as play type, quantifiable amounts of expected knowledge or cognitive levels and a matter of fact attitude and inquisitiveness mark these stages, and that this is recognisable as normal.

Referring again to Connell (1999), the management strategy of pragmatic talk and practice serves to position children as 'biological machines.' Children's bodies are shaped through this strategy towards the centre; sexuality is well managed where this shaping positions bodies as the simplistic, anatomical and physiological sum of their parts and processes and bodily development as sequential, normal and natural.

A management strategy of supervision, surveillance and reduction of masturbation and sex play

Each of the three teachers also utilised, as management strategies, the supervision, surveillance and reduction of masturbation and sex play. In so doing they enacted a discourse of children as biological, developmental entities while shaping and positioning children/bodies in the centre as decorous.

The teachers spoke freely about masturbation and the ways in which they respond to this. I suggest the management strategies of supervision and surveillance lie behind the following comments:

I know we've had discussions in staff meetings about well how do we respond if we do come upon children who are touching in a way that we feel is inappropriate... I know teachers certainly in my experience are very on to it about talking about that, it's something that teachers usually want to get sorted out pretty quickly... It's a question new teachers will ask, will want to know the answer, well how do I respond if this happens. So it is, it is an issue that I think teachers think about.

I've dealt with a woman this year whose son was masturbating a lot in the holidays, and he said that he learnt it here off one of the boys, so she was concerned and she rang me and um quite often in the past when I used to get that my little heart would go boom, boom, boom, but now it's just like oh, okay it's just something else I have to deal with.

I was talking [to a father] about what children's stress responses were... I was saying that sometimes when children are tired or stressed these are some of the responses that we see. And I actually mentioned masturbation... [I was saying] so 'this is what we do' and you know, 'this is how we handle this.'

It's just a normal part of being an early childhood teacher now, dealing with that kind of, those kind of concerns that parents have about their child if they are masturbating, and masturbating is probably one of the biggest issues.

In my analysis, an aim of the management strategies of supervision and surveillance is teacher control and regulation of masturbation in order to maintain the decorous body and, as indicated by some of the quotes, parental reassurance.

For two of the teachers, supervision and surveillance of masturbation typically occurred during children's routine rest times. The following comments are illustrative:

I do quite a lot of the sleepers and like there's always one in every group, you just go oh well, yeah to me it's pretty matter of fact, it's 'can you stop and go to sleep,' it's no big deal.

I've had situations at sleep [time] like putting children to bed when um, I can think of one girl who used to masturbate all the time, um and I chose to talk to her mother about it because it was a situation where she was going to bed, it was quite a private thing, it wasn't like she was in a situation where it was out in the open, it felt okay socially, I guess, and cause she was under a blanket, and so I just chose to talk to her mum and her mum was okay, so I just left it, if that was something she needed to do to help her go off to sleep.

In addition to the management strategies of supervision and surveillance evident in these quotes, I argue that a reduction of masturbation is also evident. In the first quote, masturbation is presented as “*no big deal.*” Johnson (2000) argues that the field of early childhood education “continues valorizing conservative, singular, humanist perspectives on children and their sexual/developmental progression” (p.69); masturbation as “*no big deal*” is located within such a perspective – a discourse of children as biological, developmental entities. As such, masturbation is reduced to something that is considered a normal part of development. This reduction means it can be both simply explained (“*there's always one in every group*”) and explained away (“*it's pretty matter of fact, it's 'can you stop and go to sleep,' it's no big deal*”).

Likewise, the second quote presents masturbation as “*no big deal*” and in so doing also reduces it to something that is developmentally recognisable and expected. Despite this, the quote contains some tensions. Firstly, if

masturbation is “*no big deal*,” then is the focus on its occurrence in bed, in private and under a blanket necessary? Does this focus imply masturbation would become a big deal if it occurred openly amidst a social group and minus a blanket and if so, would a different course of action (besides contacting the mother) be necessary? And secondly, if it is “*no big deal*,” why raise it with the mother at all? Perhaps the teacher concerned felt there was a risk associated with not raising it with her. The tensions here perhaps show that even where masturbation can be simply explained (and explained away) varying levels of (dis)comfort will exist for teachers as they face children’s bodily expression.

While I have suggested these two teachers positioned and subsequently reduced masturbation in the same ways, different ways of responding are evident in the quotes. The first teacher stated she asks children whom she sees masturbating to stop and the other, describing a specific occasion, chose to ignore the child’s masturbation and engage in discussion with the child’s parent. These different ways of responding potentially lead to different outcomes. I argue however, that both ways of responding make possible teacher management of sexuality through the use of the management strategies of supervision, surveillance and reduction of masturbation thus ensuring the bodies in question remained decorous. In these examples, disorderly conduct is to be prevented altogether or ignored so long as it remains concealed under a blanket where it can’t disturb.

Like the teachers’ responses to masturbation, responses to sex play facilitated management of sexuality through the same management strategies; a safeguarding of the decorous body resulted. Deployment of the management strategies of supervision and surveillance appeared to be justified according to context. Suspicion of abuse as a trigger for sex play is one such context. In the description of the following situation, the teacher concerned presumably

turned to centre policy to guide her response, as is required where abuse is suspected:

I suppose the one that stands out the most was where a young girl was living in a family situation which was violent and we definitely suspected that there was some kind of abuse going on, not necessarily directly to her, but within the household, and she was doing a lot of quite controlling play, and a lot of simulating full-on intercourse, a lot of humping in quite a controlling, creepy little way. Yeah, so I guess that those ones kind of stand out, the ones that are a bit dodgy and you suspect that there is something going on.

Likewise, deployment of the management strategies of supervision and surveillance could be expected to be prompt where there is a likelihood of harm through sex play. This is unsurprising given the protection of children is central to both a discourse of children as asexual and innocent and a discourse of children as biological, developmental entities. Within both discourses, children are understood either in opposition to adulthood or as in progress towards adulthood. Teachers aligned with these discourses therefore have a clear directive for the imposition of such strategies in worrying situations. Included below is a statement from another teacher that highlights such a situation as a catalyst for direct action:

When children engage in sexual play, I can't think of any recently, but like I can think of times where children have wanted to stick, put sticks or things up their vaginas, and the importance of talking to children about how precious our bodies are like, in keeping, helping keep our bodies safe, sharp sticks aren't safe to put up there.

The use of the management strategies of supervision and surveillance also occurred however, where the context of the sex play suggested neither abuse nor harm. The following teacher's comment highlights this:

I think the most recent one I had was when two two-year-olds were doing quite a lot of sex, what we call sex play, and they were touching each other's penises... That touching the penis one, sucking was involved as well, so it was a sucking thing I think. The mouth, the oral sex thing, yeah.

The teacher then went on to explain how this situation was managed:

And I think other teachers handled it, I initially saw the boys playing, and I wasn't aware they were touching each other's penises, but it just felt like they were doing something that they needed to hide away to do. And then I asked another teacher to go and see what was going on, and the teacher dealt with it by, I think she just told them that it wasn't okay to do that, that keep your hands to yourself, basically, probably, but, and then I think it happened again and the supervisor talked to the parents and that was when she got a really strong reaction.

A second episode, described by the same teacher, involved one girl licking another girl's vagina:

And another one I can think of was when two girls, one girl was licking another girl's vagina, which I suppose is one of the more out there ones. I don't know. In that situation I talked to the parent and they just wanted us to monitor it and if it happened again to say that it wasn't okay to do that in the playground at childcare.

In both these situations the management strategies of supervision and surveillance are to the fore with a focus on avoiding a repeat of the sex play. As Robinson (2000) states "children's sexuality is perceived to require constant adult surveillance at all costs" (p.95); the ongoing monitoring and watching of the play described here highlights this point. Like masturbation, sex play is also reduced – here it appears to be reduced to something of questionable value that should be avoided.

Leavitt and Power (1997) suggest that sometimes children's enthusiastic bodily expression is managed and exchanged for the teacher's sense of order and control. The management strategies outlined in this section presumably help maintain order and control though the application of these does not necessarily come easily as this observation suggests:

Oh sometimes actually, if children are playing and they're playing what I perceive as being too sexual, that's quite hard for me to kind of say hey, let's play something different, or, cause it does sometimes, the role modelling sort of gets a bit explicit at the centre and yeah, that can be quite difficult, how to handle that, yeah.

In erring on the side of caution, I argue the teachers' responses to sex play ensured maintenance of the decorous body; once again, bodily desires were controlled and prohibited, that which considered unruly resisted and silenced.

Enacting a discourse of children as biological, developmental entities, the teachers shaped and positioned children/bodies in the centre as decorous through the management strategies of supervision, surveillance and reduction of masturbation and sex play. In so doing, sexuality became well managed.

Child-centeredness: shaping the child by and through her interests

A discourse of child-centeredness, as described in the literature review, is closely linked to child-centred pedagogy, DAP and the emergent curriculum. Within this discourse teachers are positioned "as a 'hovering-provider' to children's natural development" (Alloway, 1995, p.56); teachers are led by children and respond to their interests. The theme, *centred bodies*, highlights the normalisation of the binary central to this discourse. As Alloway suggests the child-centred learning component of the child-centred learning / teacher-directed learning binary is privileged.

Within a discourse of child-centeredness, the emergent curriculum as the appropriate guide for planning and programming therefore reflects that which is sayable and do-able about sexualities. As a management strategy, the emergent curriculum ensures that the talk and practice about and around sexuality of teachers aligned with this discourse will be dependent in the first instance, on child-initiated interest in the topic. In so ensuring, a convincing answer to the research question ‘what is the teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality?’ is suggested.

Emergent curriculum as a management strategy: responding to interests

Each of the teachers was asked what aspects of sexuality they considered appropriate to share with children. For each of the teachers, things appropriate included discussion about bodily parts and processes as outlined in relation to a discourse of children as biological, developmental entities. Such discussion was either initiated by the teachers or transpired as a result of children’s interests gauged through their comments, questions and play. Children’s interests provided direction for implementation of the emergent curriculum; for the topic of sexuality to range beyond the pragmatics of the body the context of the emergent curriculum appeared to be considered a necessity. If this context wasn’t present the topic became inappropriate, as this statement makes clear:

If it doesn’t emerge in children’s play, then it doesn’t ever get put on the agenda as something to, that’s really talked about as a focus of learning, yeah.

The importance of children’s interests was highlighted by each of the teachers during their individual interviews. Examples of interviewer/teacher interactions that demonstrate this importance follow:

Interviewer: *What aspects of sexuality do you think are okay for teachers to talk about in centres?*

Teacher: *Just questions that they are asked.*

Interviewer: *Okay, so questions from children?*
Teacher: *Yeah.*

Interviewer: *What aspects of sexuality do you think are acceptable for teachers to talk about?*
Teacher: *I think some of it's just about responding where children are at and the types of things they are interested in. So I think it's led by the children, and I think teachers need to yeah, just be open and honest and portray an attitude of being comfortable talking about it.*

Interviewer: *What aspects of sexuality do you think are relevant in early childhood education?*
Teacher: *I think every moment is a teachable moment and children need information but they also need responses to their questions. So, I think one of the things practitioners need to be is open, very open to what the children bring and to talk about it with them.*

Interviewer: *I was wondering if you can think of any situations where you have avoided the topic of sexuality in the centre altogether?*
Teacher: *Well, yes, I do, um, I don't talk about it with the children.*
Interviewer: *Basically you avoid it unless children ask?*
Teacher: *Yeah, yeah, definitely.*
Interviewer: *Can you tell me again, I think you probably have, a bit about why you do that?*
Teacher: *Because, like it would be like... I suddenly walk in and start talking about the moon or um, and it has to be something of interest.*

Teacher: *If it seems appropriate to talk about something [about sexuality] yeah. I'd do it.*
Interviewer: *So how do you decide if it's appropriate?*
Teacher: *Well a lot of what you do is emergent curricula, and that might be emergent because it's something children are talking about or parents are talking about.*

The teacher in this last interaction provided an example of her response to children's talk about marriage that highlights her expressed views around the need for such responsiveness:

Oh well a conversation I'll tell you about, yeah, that I had the other day, we were doing some photocopying, two girls and myself...and we were talking as you do when you're doing a kind of repetitive job and they were telling me they were getting married and they were going to get married when they grew up and they were going to marry each other... I talked to them about marriage and how the law is at the moment and how that um it might not be possible for them to get married but they could have a civil union... So they asked me about a civil union, I said well, and I was explaining, this got on to a long thing about laws and laws being like rules and you know the conversation went on for about half an hour, and I was explaining where they made the laws, they were thinking about a civil union. So then they asked me what that was and then we had this conversation and they decided they were going to have a civil union.

Whether or not these children's interest in a civil union⁶ evolved into play that was subsequently supported and extended by this teacher, as part of the emergent curriculum and alongside discussion about non-heterosexual sexualities, was not explored.

Within a discourse of child-centeredness the child is shaped primarily by and through her interests. Child-centred learning is normalised and privileged through this discourse and through the emergent curriculum as a management strategy that encompasses responsiveness to those interests. Teacher management of sexuality is thus simplified; sexuality need not be addressed with children unless first initiated through their interests.

⁶ Civil unions were passed into law in New Zealand in 2004 with the Civil Union Act (New Zealand Government, 2004). The Civil Union Act enables same-sex and opposite-sex couples to have their partnerships officially registered and formalised.

Reinscribing sexuality as dangerous: protecting children, seeing subversion and avoiding incrimination

According to Silin (2005), Foucault believed the spoken and unspoken are both reflections of the same sociopolitical setting. For Silin, this means “we speak about sex as something fraught with danger” while “we are silent about sex as a site of pleasure, connection, and learning” (p.91). As outlined in the literature review, a discourse of sexuality as dangerous took root in Victorian moral and religious beliefs. Within this discourse, sex as ‘fraught with danger’ is fuelled today by risk anxiety, moral panic and fears about child sex abuse. This potent combination has ensured teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality is frequently dominated by a narrow focus on child sexual abuse, thus suggesting a credible answer to the research question ‘what is the teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality?’ For teachers aligned with this discourse, this narrow focus makes sayable and do-able the management strategies of ‘safe’ practice and caution. Safe practice ensures teachers practice in ways prescribed by policy; policies are designed to keep children safe from abuse (Johnson, 2000, 2001; A. Jones, 2001a, 2003a; Tait, 2001; Tobin, 1997a). Typical policies state, for example, that children are not to be alone with an adult and prescribe detailed rules about toileting and ‘acceptable’ touching; “the good teacher today ‘touches without touching’” (A. Jones, 2003b, p.103). Jones (2001a) points out that “...‘teachers touching children’ has become the site of a new social taboo, one about which there is much confusion and anxiety amongst teachers, as well as parents and children” (p.9). Policies are however, twofold. In addition to keeping children safe from abuse they are also designed to keep teachers safe from accusations of abuse (A. Jones, 2001a, 2003a; Tait, 2001).

The combination of risk anxiety, moral panic and fears about child sex abuse have increased teachers’ reading of sexual behaviours in children in circumscribed and diminished terms: ‘normal’ behaviours indicate evidence of a lack of subversion from such things as abuse whereas ‘abnormal’ behaviours

indicate the possibility of such subversion. At the same time, teachers tread cautiously and carefully in respect to their own behaviours ensuring these are consistent with expected norms – norms that deny and reject any hint of the erotic, of desire, or the taking of pleasure in their work with children. In these ways, both the child/body and the teacher/body are centred as normal thus drawing attention to the theme, *centred bodies*.

A management strategy of 'safe' practice

Two of the teachers highlighted the fear that surrounds sexuality, the anxiety about sexual abuse and touch and the growth in 'safe' practice. Both teachers made strong links to the impact of the Christchurch Civic Childcare Centre case. The following comments are illustrative:

There's kind of an element of fear and I think that comes from the Civic stuff but also all the other child pornography, internet stuff, that's been happening as well, people are really wary.

I think there's lots of negative feelings and I think there's a lot of fear, people's fear around it [sexuality], and I think, I think the Civic case made people even more fearful of anything to do with children touching each other, or sexuality in the centre. I think that all kind of got really squashed and it wasn't okay to talk about it or it was scary to talk about it, or maybe that was a good thing that happened and maybe people are more aware of it since then, I don't know.

Is my teaching affected by that [the case]? I think more strongly close to the time it happened. I did feel quite, because of what was happening, it was a scary time, um but I do really think it's time to move on from there. Like I look at our prevention of sexual abuse in children. It's fucking pages and pages... I know that it comes out of a time and circumstances but it does kind of give you a bit of a message about what we think of sexuality in the centre or a certain fear of inappropriate touching.

A really positive [thing] that came out of the Civic Creche court case and things...but one thing is that it has helped develop some good practices in early childhood for keeping children safe and for adults to keep themselves safe.

I think that's [the case] made us think lots more about sexuality in lots of different ways.

A management strategy of safe practice, while ensuring sexuality looks well managed, can have unintended costs for both children and teachers. It reinforces the defence, protection and preservation of children's assumed, idealised and untouched state as described earlier in relation to a discourse of children as asexual and innocent. For teachers, as Jones (2003a) suggests, the promotion of safe practice can give rein to unpredicted and dangerous consequences; "paradoxically, it reinforces the notion that early childhood educators are 'unsafe'" (p.24). Perceived of as unsafe and/or feelings of lack of safety presumably reinforce teachers' safe practice at the same time as reinforcing caution.

A management strategy of caution

Sexuality, constructed as dangerous, is perceived as "needing a great deal of caution and sensitivity if it is not to disturb the child" (Jackson, 1982, p.57). Caution, as a management strategy, was evident in the teachers' talk and practice about and around sexuality in varied ways.

Caution was evident in the teachers' responses to masturbation and sex play as earlier outlined. A description of a very different situation demanding of caution follows:

We had a family that went, I can't remember where it was, somewhere really hot...somewhere really hot in the Islands, and they regularly used to send us photos and they sent one of their daughter... She was nude and she had wee beads on and she had a lizard on her tummy and the child sent it and the mum typed in the caption and when we downloaded

it we then thought 'god we shouldn't even have this on our computer.' Now this is one of our kids, and we were in fear and we didn't actually print it off and we turned it off and we didn't download any more photos. We could see that that was, that others might see that it was inappropriate of us to have that image.

Other references to the need for caution or care included

There's always this controversy around it [sexuality] and so it seems, it does feel like quite a sensitive issue, and it does feel like we do have to be careful, but we don't really have any guidelines that I know of. Like I don't even think the word sexuality's mentioned in Te Whaariki.

I think all adults, parents say that too, they're careful what they say to their children, because they don't want it to be misconstrued by other adults, or they don't want to damage children.

You've gotta say the right thing [about sexuality], so you're always careful about what you think 'cos it's such an important aspect. And I think the first thing that, in some ways for me, I guess I am practical and matter of fact 'cos I'm safe with that and that, yeah, if I do go further in that I'm not trained to go further, I don't know, you know, what I could be saying to build upon it, if you know what I mean, 'cos I don't know what else I could say without incriminating myself, you know, without getting in trouble.

The teachers' safe practice, their caution and awareness of the potential for distortion of conduct and/or the possibility of incrimination illustrates the powerful effects of surveillance as a disciplinary practice and social control apparatus (Foucault, 1979). Each appeared conscious of the need to self monitor and regulate her practice. In so regulating, sexuality becomes well managed at the same time as a discourse of sexuality as dangerous is reinscribed.

Summary

This chapter has explored the themes *centred bodies* and *managed bodies*. The first of these themes ran throughout the chapter, sometimes drawing attention to the centring of children/bodies and sexuality as normal by and through discourse in explicit ways, and other times, by implication. The second theme, overtly present throughout, drew attention to the way teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality takes up, enacts and is governed by specific discourses as a form of management of sexuality. The data presented throughout the chapter therefore illustrated those things about sexualities considered sayable and do-able by discourse – in other words, specific management strategies.

Of particular significance in this chapter, are notions of normality – and how, when and why this notion is applied to children/bodies and sexuality, as well as assumptions about what sexuality looks like when it is well managed. These notions, their application, and related assumptions, may well have provoked conjecture on the part of the reader about the outcomes of the processes described in this chapter. Chapter 5 addresses these outcomes, and in so doing, further builds the case put forward in this chapter, while strengthening the arguments central to that case.

Introduction to Chapter 5

I have now opened the way for speculation about consequences or effects. As stated, Chapter 5 will attend to this by showing that the outcome of the centring of children/bodies and sexuality through discourse is the arrival at marginalising endpoints. These endpoints are discussed with reference to the third study theme, *margined bodies*, and further, to the absences within this theme.

Chapter 5: Margined bodies: the endpoints of discourses that centre and manage

Introduction

MacNaughton (2000) states, “teachers’ sense of what is right and/or normal in teaching is socially constituted in and through discourse(s)” (p.53). In my reading of the data to date, I have shown the teachers’ sense of things right and/or normal as constituted in and through a discourse of children as asexual and innocent; a discourse of children as biological, developmental entities; a discourse of child-centeredness; and, a discourse of sexuality as dangerous. The examples of data, in Chapter 4, illustrated the ways the teachers’ talk and practice takes up, executes and is dominated by these discourses as a way of regulating sexuality. I suggested this occurs through the practice of particular management strategies that centre children/bodies and sexuality in normalising ways and that my exploration of this process provided a possible answer to the study’s overarching research question while remaining consistent with the study aims. Now that I have illustrated this, Chapter 5 strengthens the case already presented, by arguing that the centring of children/bodies and sexuality in normalising ways leads to specific endpoints. At the same time, further, potential answers to the study’s overarching research question are revealed.

In this chapter, two endpoints are to the fore: firstly, the marginalisation, resistance towards, and silencing of sexuality in early childhood education and, secondly, the marginalisation of children/bodies. The marginalisation, resistance towards, and silencing of sexuality in early childhood education occurs through processes of heteronormativity and *erasure*. I use the term erasure to refer to the undermining of the significance of sexuality to children’s lives and/or the pretence of its non-existence in children. The marginalisation of children/bodies occurs through the maintenance of prevailing heteronormative, narrow views of both. Both endpoints are

interrelated – product and effect of one another. These two endpoints give expression to the third study theme, *margined bodies*. Attention is drawn to absences within this theme as explored under the sub-heading ‘Reading the margins: deciphering absences.’ Links are made to the concepts of heteronormativity, power, surveillance and normalisation throughout the chapter.

A word on chapter structure and use of data is pertinent at this point. While I return to the discourses discussed in earlier chapters, and in the same order, my re-visiting of these discourses here is framed around the absences contained within them. As I noted in the overview to the thesis format in Chapter 1, data is used minimally in this chapter. A small amount of new data is introduced and some of the data already presented is briefly reconsidered.

Reading the margins: deciphering absences

The marginalisation, resistance towards, and silencing of sexuality in early childhood education and the marginalisation of children/bodies as already noted, give expression to the theme, *margined bodies*. At the same time, absences within this theme act to expose those things about sexualities that are made ‘unsayable and undo-able’ from within a discourse of children as asexual and innocent, a discourse of children as biological, developmental entities, a discourse of child-centeredness and, a discourse of sexuality as dangerous. My deciphering of the absences – the unsayable and undo-able – appeared to reflect those aspects of sexuality teachers aligned with these discourses might consider improper to address with children. This provided me with a feasible answer to the research question ‘what is excluded from teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality?’ I turn now to an exploration of the absences.

Absent: children as sexual and worldly

Absent from a discourse of children as asexual and innocent are notions of children as sexual. For example, consider a quote first shared in Chapter 4:

I think that's a natural physical response, to you know, like right from quite young when they wake up, you know or, and so, that it's, to me it's not a sexual, it's just a body thing, like though it is hard to know whether they feel pleasure from that, which I'm sure they do, but in a kind of normal way like if they eat something nice.

Here, the endpoint, the marginalisation, resistance towards, and silencing of sexuality in early childhood education, is revealed through a process of erasure. In construing behaviours as non-sexual (“*to me it's not a sexual...*”), the talk both undercuts the significance of sexuality to children’s lives (“*...it's just a body thing*”), and renders it non-existent. The talk, and presumably related practice, becomes something that occurs around sexuality. As Johnson (2000) argues, “the popular discourse around childhood sexuality is a discourse focused not on teaching about sexuality, but on teaching *around* sexuality – a process of erasure” (p.67, italics in original).

At the same time the second endpoint, the marginalisation of children/bodies, is revealed through the upholding of narrow views of children/bodies. To maintain asexuality, the child/body is placed “under surveillance, surrounded in his cradle, his bed, or his room [or the early childhood centre] by an entire watch-crew” (Foucault, 1976, p.98). The ‘proper’ child/body is categorised as ‘normal.’ The child/body showing ‘inappropriate’ understanding of and interest in sex and sexuality may be categorised as ‘abnormal’ and that understanding and interest as dangerous (Jackson & Scott, 1999).

Children/bodies classified in this way are disempowered. Children/bodies are ‘othered,’ considered ‘unnatural,’ holders of ‘unnatural knowledge’ (Robinson, 2002) and/or criminalised as “play that in other eras would have

been considered normal and unexceptional becomes evidence of their being victims or perpetrators of sexual crimes” (Tobin, 1997a, p.9).

Furthermore, as innocent, worldliness is absented within this discourse and children/bodies are disempowered through a loss of power to their binary opposite – the worldly adult. Adults (including teachers), are constituted as all-knowing and regulate and retain this power (MacNaughton, 2000; Woodrow & Brennan, 2001). In so doing, they may disqualify and deny children’s knowledge (Cannella, 2001), deprive them of independence and opportunities to explore their lived realities and/or to respond to these realities, and to make decisions and determine action on their own behalf (MacNaughton, 2000; Silin, 1995a; Woodrow & Brennan, 2001).

Absent: non-traditional and non-heteronormative notions, complex and multiple themes

While a discourse of children as biological, developmental entities enables some acknowledgement of childhood sexuality, absent from this discourse is an understanding of this in terms other than those prescribed by biology, development and alleged norms. Johnson (2000) argues this is an approach entrenched within popular early childhood textbooks and journal articles that serves to reduce sexuality to traditional heteronormative notions and conservative, unifying themes within which normalcy, safety and science are to the fore. Johnson illustrates this reduction by emphasising particular textbook passages and quotes from journal articles. One such textbook passage is included below. Within that passage I have inserted italicised quotes from Chapter 4. These quotes demonstrate the ‘safe’ responses the author of the textbook advises making and highlight a focus on science ‘facts’:

It is appropriate to answer a child’s questions (*why won’t my penis go down*) at the time it is asked but it is unwise to answer with details beyond the child’s level of understanding (*it’ll go down soon*). It is important to be

frank (*I'm pretty matter of fact*) but strictly to the point (*a penis is a 'penis' and not a 'do do'*) and limited to the topic of the moment (*boys and girls pee differently because their bodies are different*). (Lively & Lively, 1991, cited in Johnson, 2000, p.66)

I suggest that in this case, sexuality is reduced to the conventional heteronormative concepts and conservative, unifying themes of things pragmatic and demure. Things pragmatic and demure were introduced in Chapter 4 and include the body as the sum of its parts and processes, the body's development as sequential, normal and natural and bodies as decorous. This reduction, as I will shortly illustrate, reveals both endpoints: the marginalisation, resistance towards, and silencing of sexuality in early childhood education and, the marginalisation of children/bodies.

The concepts and themes of things pragmatic and demure are heteronormative (and therefore marginalise both sexuality and children/bodies) because, as indicated in earlier discussion of a discourse of children as biological, developmental entities, biologically pre-determined and chronological stage-based norms are believed to characterise development and this encompasses the establishment of a set gender and heterosexual sexuality. Within this discourse, the physical body makes obvious gender (*"boys and girls pee differently because their bodies are different"*). Butler (1990) argues gender is in fact a product of the physical body. Robinson (2005b), drawing from Butler (1990), suggests children are constructed as gendered beings and learn to perform in gendered ways – as masculine boys and feminine girls. Robinson explains that normal performances reflect masculinity and femininity, that children are simultaneously heterosexualised, and that acceptance of this process is reflected in support for children's play at 'marriage,' 'mothers and fathers' and 'girlfriends and boyfriends' in early childhood centres. The following observation from the data highlights the prevalence of this kind of play:

I guess the other things I think about sexuality are relationships, like what's celebrated in the centre and often that's heterosexual couples or marriage, there seems to be a lot of marriage play. Over the years in centres I've noticed kids sort of doing mock weddings or talking about weddings or that kind of thing so I guess that's linked to sexuality as well.

Accepted as unproblematic from within the political institution of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1987), these activities are seldom recognised as “part of the ‘normalisation’ of the construction of heterosexual desire and the inscription of heterogendered subjectivities in young children” (Robinson, 2005b, p.24). Also remaining unrecognised is the ways in which this normalisation contributes to the marginalisation of non-heterosexual sexualities.

While more explicit heterosexualised sex play is unlikely to find the same, active support as that of the play already described, it also highlights the dominance of discourses of heterosexuality in children's lives. In Blaise and Andrew (2005), Andrew describes children's pleasure in ‘The Sex Game’ that spontaneously arose in the childcare centre he taught in. Writing about the heterosexualised knowledge the children showed through this game, he states “they knew that sex was about lying down, getting naked, kissing, and power. They also understood some of the rules, or culture, of sex – that it is regarded as private and secret” (p.56). Stephen, a five-year-old boy in a study by Connelly (1995) showed similar knowledge. Stephen claimed to have one hundred girlfriends, all of whom he could ‘sex.’ He explained how he would go about this to his friends, in the following way

I'll pull all of them on top of each other and when I've done one – put her over there, then when done another one put her over there, then another one put her over there, then over there, and over there and over there. (p.185)

These examples highlight a tension that in turn, exposes both endpoints. On the one hand, sexuality is perceived as irrelevant to children's lives (Johnson, 2000; Jones Diaz & Robinson, 2000; Robinson, 2005b; Theilheimer & Cahill, 2001). This assumed irrelevance acts to marginalise, resist and silence sexuality. On the other hand, children/bodies are constructed as heterosexual subjects and heterosexuality as a normal, relevant and accepted part of their daily worlds – albeit “rarely ever noticed, and almost never thought about” (Robinson, 2005b, p.24). This construction serves to marginalise children/bodies through heteronormative, narrow views of both.

Having explained why the concepts and themes of things pragmatic and demure are heteronormative, I now draw attention to the ways in which such things are also conservative and unifying. I suggest this is the case because biologically pre-determined and chronological stage-based norms of development represent a particular certainty: the certainty that specific truths, preordained before birth, pertain to all human beings (Cannella, 1997). As “benchmark standards” (Blaise & Andrew, 2005, p.50), the truths of developmentalism “produce a child who develops according to nature’s template and who only requires conditions that support this natural phenomenon to achieve her / his full potential as an individual” (MacNaughton, 2000, p.201). Such truths are assumed the appropriate knowledge base with which to know and understand all children regardless of place on earth, culture, social background and other differences. This creates an image of a universal child – a child who is defined only in these terms (Campbell & Smith, 2001; Cannella, 1997; Dahlberg et al., 1999; Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001; Viruru & Cannella, 2001). The universal child is therefore, conceptual, theoretical and out of context (Dahlberg et al., 1999). She is also reified, this reification “abstracting complex and ambiguous human functioning into simple deterministic entities” (Cannella, 1997, p.40).

The reduction inherent to the universal, reified child goes largely unnoticed where she obligingly fits the requisite construct. “Reduced to separate and measurable categories” (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p.46), this child’s fit with the requisite construct affords her both privilege and protection through her categorisation as normal. Power, residing at the centre in normality and the normalising gaze, combine to ensure she follows, rather than strays beyond, her biologically pre-determined and chronological stage-based norms of development.

The child and her ‘complex and ambiguous human functioning’ is, however, at risk if she refuses to fit the obligatory construct by, for example, displaying improper knowledge of and interest in sex and sexuality. As outlined in the previous section, such knowledge and interest may categorise her as ‘abnormal.’ The marginalisation of children/bodies results; once again, children/bodies are disempowered, othered, viewed of as unnatural with unnatural knowledge and/or criminalised.

Absent: teachers leading children

As outlined in Chapter 4, the emergent curriculum is influenced by the child-centred learning / teacher-directed learning binary within a discourse of child-centeredness. The emergent curriculum engages teachers in following children thus making likely teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality primarily reliant on child-initiated interest in the topic and at the same time, licences absences. I suggest absences can arise in three ways and elaborate on each of these.

Firstly, the emergent curriculum requires teacher observance of children’s interest in sexuality but this cannot be guaranteed. At times, teachers may simply not see children’s interests thus rendering them absent. This possibility was highlighted in an example of teacher/teacher interaction during the group interview:

- 1st Teacher: *If you look at emergent curriculum, and you look, you look at your community, then you celebrate what's happening in your community and also add information to the picture that the children bring.*
- 2nd Teacher: *I think the problem with emergent curriculum though is that you only kind of notice what you notice and you're not necessarily picking up all the things that are happening and depending on the people you are working with and depending on your own individual strengths and what you're into, you wouldn't necessarily pick up something that you weren't looking for.*

Secondly, children's interest in sexuality may be recognised but not supported in ways that enable that interest to continue or be extended as is expected within the emergent curriculum. For example, interests may be rendered absent through ignoring them altogether, or through preventing and/or re-directing them. Masturbation and sex play were subject to supervision, surveillance and reduction and, as described in Chapter 4, this often resulted in prevention and/or re-direction. It is likely lack of support occurs where teachers consider particular interests to be inappropriate and/or where it provokes their discomfort, as was possibly the case in the following situation:

We had a child whose gone to school now but he frequently, well it became a habit, at like kai⁷ time to stand up and say 'I've got a big dick'... and I thought wow you know, I don't want to shame him out, I don't want to say, 'look that's not an okay,' so I would go 'pull your pants up and sit down.' I wouldn't sort of acknowledge, so that, that was quite difficult... like how do you respond to that? That was quite hard 'cos I thought well you know, we're all kind of looking at each other wondering what's the best response here because, but in actual fact I thought well it's sort of like saying it was a big arm or a hand, I don't know.

⁷ The Maaori word for food.

In this situation, the teacher concerned did not want to shame the boy (“*I don’t want to shame him out*”). The teacher appeared aware that her lack of direct acknowledgement of his comments and actions might have carried a negative message – for example, that the boy’s penis should remain hidden, that his actions were at fault and that he needed redirection if a semblance of the normal was to be maintained. She recognised the inconsistencies in this message in comparison to messages about other body parts (“*but in actual fact I thought well it’s sort of like saying it was a big arm or a hand*”) and seemed to struggle to find a satisfactory resolution (“*what’s the best response here... I don’t know*”). In due course, the teacher chose to enforce rules rather than to explore the interest in or meaning behind the recurrent ‘habit.’ Phelan (1997) suggests, the “apparatus of supervision allows the enforcement of rules (we don’t display our genitalia in the lunch room) and, subsequently, the differentiation between what is deemed licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden” (p.84). While I have chosen to use the ‘big dick’ scenario to highlight problems inherent to the emergent curriculum it also highlights support for the maintenance of the body decorous, as introduced in Chapter 4, in relation to a discourse of children as biological, developmental entities. Maintaining this body through the enforcement of rules is a ‘safe’ option and fits with Johnson’s (2000) claim that safety in relation to matters sexual, as already noted, is to the fore in popular early childhood textbooks and journals. Honig’s (2000a) advice to refuse to allow such exhibition in an article promoting healthy psychosexual development in the *Young Children* journal is a case in point.

The third and final way the emergent curriculum licenses absences is through reliance on children’s knowledge about sexuality. Typically however, children’s knowledge about sexuality is limited or non-existent. Goldman and Goldman (1982) state there is a “public conspiracy against the acquisition of sexual knowledge” (p.7). This ‘conspiracy’ is very much evident in early childhood education and manifests in the marginalisation, resistance towards,

and silencing of sexuality. In Chapter 2, I used the term ‘censorship’ to highlight this resistance and silence. Here, Robinson (2005b) uses the term ‘taboo’ to a similar end:

Children grow up with very little information, if any, about sex and sexuality; the secrecy and taboo nature of sexuality results in children often being fearful of talking about sexuality issues with adults; and the information they do have is often misinformation gained from discussions with peers. (p.23)

Because children’s knowledge and/or access to knowledge about sexuality is narrow and restricted, they are unlikely to express interest in the topic. Jackson (1982) illustrates this in relation to sex, “if a child has never seen an elephant s/he is unlikely to ask why it has a trunk – and children who have no idea about sex are just as unlikely to express curiosity about it” (p.57). Without an expression of interest in sexuality by children, the absence of this topic from the curriculum is both licensed and reinforced.

When children’s knowledge about sexuality is inadequate or lacking, expressions of interest remain wanting. Consequently, teachers may judge children ‘not ready’ for new knowledge (Alloway, 1995). Writing about the concept of ‘readiness,’ Cannella (1997) states it “focuses on the maturity and experience base that naturally determines when a child is prepared to learn” (p.119). It is therefore, central to a discourse of children as biological, developmental entities. While waiting for an indication of readiness, teacher silence acts to privilege the child-centred learning component of the child-centred learning / teacher-directed learning binary, as noted in Chapter 4. But teachers themselves are also privileged and retain power through their surveillance of children; this is, as Canella suggests, a necessary gate keeping mechanism of a readiness focus.

Sometimes (and whether ‘ready’ or not), teachers will proactively seek to readdress perceived gaps in children’s learning. The following quote signals the import of this:

About ninety percent of our stuff is emergent... And I don't know that I actually think that that, I think that there actually needs to be a better balance probably than that. It's really important that the curriculum is child driven but I still think there are some things that are helpful for children to learn about and that we can weave that in.

At issue however, is what exactly is “*helpful for children to learn about.*” In the context of this study, bodily parts and processes are probably an example of what the teachers consider helpful to weave in to the emergent curriculum given this is an aspect of sexuality they were willing to introduce, as identified in the previous chapter.

Beliefs about what might be beneficial to add to the emergent curriculum will vary. Jones Diaz and Robinson’s (2000) “hierarchy of tolerance” (p.257) suggests some forms of difference and diversity are more readily responded to than others; sexuality is positioned in this hierarchy as of least importance within pre-service teacher education where the defence of sexualities matters exceeds the defence required for other topics (Jones Diaz & Robinson, 2000; Robinson & Ferfolja, 2001, 2002). At the early childhood centre level, this positioning may ensure sexuality is marginalised, resisted, silenced – erased as unnecessary to children’s learning or as only necessary for some children’s learning.

In the following quote the teacher concerned appears to accept that heterosexualised play is the domain of children parented by heterosexuals:

If you think that most of the children in your community are in, well in this place at this time, are in, are seeing two parents usually in a heterosexual relationship and they're

playing in, the children are playing to understand their world, they're playing what they see, so if they were in a different family um setting, their play would be different.

A common, heteronormative assumption is that children parented by heterosexuals do not need to learn about other forms of family structures, such as those headed by adults of non-heterosexual sexualities, because they are not believed to be of direct relevance to them. This assumption does not account for the ways in which heterosexuality depends on homosexuality to operate as a norm as outlined in Chapter 2. Sedgwick (1990) argues the heterosexual / homosexual binary impacts on, and is therefore relevant to, the full range of possible sexuality identities. Referring to this as a universalising view, Sedgwick states the binary can be seen “as an issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities” (p.1), rather than as an issue of importance for a fixed homosexual minority only. Deconstructing the binary can enable understanding of the restrictions, limits and policing that occurs across the spectrum (Robinson & Ferfolja, 2002).

Teacher resistance and silence around sexualities matters, or selective silences about such matters, arguably endorses existing inequities while limiting opportunities to make connections between difference and diversity, power relations, structural inequalities and discrimination. Jones Diaz and Robinson (2000) found teachers rarely made such connections with each other, children, and families, despite the relevance and importance of sexualities matters; “sexuality, in all its various manifestations, is as relevant and important to young children’s lives as issues of racism, sexism and linguicism” (p.266).

Canella (1997) states that “child-centeredness constructs the illusion that children in educational environments have choice when actually the ‘will’ is imprisoned through the pretense of freedom” (p.135). As one aspect of a discourse of child-centeredness, the emergent curriculum contributes to the

illusion of choice. The emergent curriculum's licensing of absences through teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality primarily dependent on child-initiated interest in the topic exposes the endpoints – the marginalisation, resistance towards, and silencing of sexuality in early childhood education and, the marginalisation of children/bodies. Failing to notice or pick up on children's interest in sexuality and recognising but not supporting children's interests are acts of marginalisation, resistance and silence. Assuming that children's limited knowledge about the topic equates to a lack of readiness to learn about it and/or that it is of limited relevance is also marginalising in effect. As Bickmore (1999) states, as children grow up they “gain power to protect themselves by learning to acquire and evaluate knowledge, not by being denied information” (p.21).

Absent: spontaneous, natural pleasures

Jackson and Scott (1999) write that “sexuality is constructed as a ‘special’ aspect of social life, as uniquely pleasurable but also potentially dangerous” (p.87). Notions of sexuality as pleasurable are however, absent from a discourse of sexuality as dangerous. Such notions are therefore, absent from the talk and practice about and around sexuality of teachers aligned with this discourse. The examples provided in Chapter 4 in relation to this discourse, in focusing primarily on fears about child sexual abuse, touch, and the need for safe practice and caution, highlighted this.

McWilliam (2001) argues that when adult-child sex is constituted as child sexual abuse and when sex is strongly associated with touch, “a powerful set of mechanisms need to be put in place so that professionals can ride the boundaries of ‘proper’ touch” (p.38). Riding the boundaries of ‘proper’ touch also necessitates riding the boundaries of ‘proper’ pleasure. Foucault (1984) provides insight into how this occurs.

Foucault (1984) determined to explore the ways in which individuals came to know themselves as sexual subjects. That is, he sought “to analyze the practices by which individuals were led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognize, and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire” (p.5). Foucault was concerned with ‘prescriptive texts’; texts that, in a variety of forms, offered rules of conduct advising individuals “on how to behave as one should” (p.12). The texts, as functional devices, “would enable individuals to question their own conduct, to watch over and give shape to it, and to shape themselves as ethical subjects” (p.13). As both Jones (2001b) and McWilliam (1999) see it, Foucault demonstrated the ways texts ‘trained’ groups of individuals in knowledge about ways of being a proper ethical desiring subject and about the limits beyond which particular practices could be deemed excessive. Pleasure is an example of an effect of this ‘training’ – or ‘practices of the self.’ In this sense, pleasure is not therefore, considered as spontaneous or natural.

The safe practice policies described in the previous chapter are an example of modern texts that seek to ‘train’ or steer ‘practices of the self’ in relation to pleasure in early childhood education. As Jones (2001b) describes it, Foucault did not only mean that such policies guide practice but, “that the texts and the meaning they embody serve to discipline and train our desires, pleasures and fears – those things we experience ‘spontaneously’” (p.111). So, for example, Jones notes

A ‘good’ teacher will literally feel or experience no pleasure when a child clings onto/leans on him – his training is such that child-touch is instinctively experienced as wrong, and dangerous. Therefore, any pleasure that is to be had from cuddling a child is necessarily experienced as improper, and thus tinged with guilt and anxiety. (p.116, italics in original)

The all-seeing gaze compounds such ‘practices of the self.’ Teachers readily accept systems that “lead them to always remain visible, under surveillance, and under the gaze and guard of a larger, ever-watchful society” (Johnson, 2000, p.45).

Children too, “are trained in correct pleasures” and “taught to take pleasure appropriately” (A. Jones, 2001b, p.115). Children’s bodies are erotic sites; they represent excesses in a world where control and restraint of self and desire is valued and rewarded (Phelan, 1997). The child/body’s exuberant pleasures are therefore trained, taught (or traded) for the finding of pleasure in containment and disciplined conduct (A. Jones, 2001b). The teacher is charged with managing the process of ‘civilising’ the child/body; to this end “teachers unceasingly use the power of the gaze to ensure that children are doing *what* they should be doing *when* they should be doing it” (Leavitt & Power, 1997, p.67, italics in original).

The process of civilising the child/body is however, a process that disregards the body as the child’s self. Children are embodied beings; teachers who resist, silence or understand children’s embodied pleasures in terms of a discourse of sexuality as dangerous, give effect to the endpoint the marginalisation of children/bodies. This endpoint is achieved through the safeguarding and preservation of limited understandings of children and their bodies within which, pleasure is feared, at the same time as it is narrowly circumscribed and managed.

The reduction of pleasure in early childhood education comes at a price (Tobin, 1997a). As Johnson (2000) states, “harm results when either adult or child learns to fear the social and legal repercussions of an appropriate and pleasurable adult-child intimacy” (p.x). In particular, children may be harmed where their needs for emotional and physical connection are not met (Farquhar, 2001; Johnson, 2000; A. Jones, 2003b). Conversely, when teachers

“attend to and respect children’s embodied experience, they – we – embrace, validate, and empower the body and the child” (Leavitt & Power, 1997, p.71).

Summary

This chapter has been important in bringing the study findings full circle. Firstly, from a focus in Chapter 4 on what occurs: the centring of children/bodies and sexuality in normalising ways. Secondly, to a focus in that same chapter, on how this occurs: the practice of particular management strategies. And thirdly, to this chapter’s focus on the end result: the marginalisation, resistance towards, and silencing of sexuality in early childhood education and, the marginalisation of children/bodies. Also significant to this chapter, was the theme *margined bodies* (as a form of expression of the two endpoints), and a range of absences within the theme. I have used the term full circle here deliberately, suggesting that the endpoints and absences signal both an end to the three-part process described in the findings chapters and a beginning. The endpoints and absences, in and of themselves, presumably ensure a return to the start of the process – the centring of children/bodies and sexuality in normalising ways.

Introduction to Chapter 6

Chapter 6 is the final chapter of this thesis. While I have suggested the study findings have been brought full circle (as befits the visual image offered in Chapter 1 – a length of braided rope coiled in a circle), the work itself is not yet at a close. The next chapter however, brings closure.

Having argued that the endpoints and absences make problematic teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality focused on children’s learning about sexuality, and for the expression of, and honouring of, sexualities, it is now important to take this up. In so doing, Chapter 6 considers some implications of these endpoints and absences as well as making suggestions about what could be changed, and what change might require, if new ways of ‘doing’

sexualities in early childhood education are to be embraced – something I implied would be beneficial for both teachers and children in the opening chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Introduction

As the final chapter of this thesis, Chapter 6 has two primary concerns. Firstly, looking back, in order to look forward, and secondly, re-imagining the way ahead – both concerns enable this work to draw to a close. The latter is particularly significant, in order that this thesis might move beyond simply airing troubling issues about sexualities matters in early childhood education as first alluded to in Chapter 1, and building a case that highlights this in the chapters that followed, to offering alternatives to the current situation.

The chapter begins by briefly returning to the study aims, primary research question and methodology under the sub-heading: ‘Looking back in order to look forward.’ In this section, the study’s major findings are also briefly restated and drawn together.

Implications for inclusive practices are then addressed under the sub-heading: ‘The implications of discourses productive of marginalising endpoints and absences: ‘being bad,’ risk taking and the way ahead.’ I argue being bad and risk taking, through deconstruction of the discourses explored in this thesis, and the accessing of discourses not widely circulating in the field of early childhood education at this time, provides a way to progress sexualities matters. I return to the theoretical perspectives of social constructionism, poststructuralism, discourse analysis and queer theory to strengthen my argument.

Looking back in order to look forward

This qualitative interview study focused on teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality in early childhood education. The aims of the study were twofold – to explore how teacher discourses of sexuality operate in early childhood centres and the ways in which these discourses regulate sexualities;

and, to cause trouble. That is to say, to provoke debate, to contribute to the limited literature around this vexed topic, and, in so doing, to create opportunities for new ways of 'doing' sexualities in the field.

In pursuit of these aims, and in order to seek out some possible answers to the study's overarching research question, 'how does teacher talk and practice construct meanings around sexuality?' I conducted open-ended individual interviews with three teachers and one group interview with the same three teachers.

Detailed data was gathered. Analysis of this data provided insight into the meanings the teachers gave to sexuality and how and why they constructed those meanings at the time of their contribution to the study. The theoretical perspectives of social constructionism, poststructuralism, discourse analysis and queer theory, and the concepts of heteronormativity, power, surveillance and normalisation guided my production of three broad themes: *centred bodies*, *managed bodies*, and *margined bodies*. These three themes reflected the study's three major findings that in turn, both troubled notions of sexuality and accepted pedagogical practices.

The data in Chapter 4 highlighted the first two themes/findings. The data demonstrated firstly, that children/bodies and sexuality are centred as normal by and through discourse and secondly, that the teachers' talk and practice about and around sexuality takes up, executes and is dominated by particular discourses as a way of regulating sexuality. As I saw it, this appeared to transpire through the practice of specific management strategies. A number of management strategies were identified for each of the discourses. Within a discourse of children as asexual and innocent, the management strategy of denial was to the fore. Within a discourse of children as biological, developmental entities, the management strategies of pragmatic talk and practice; and, supervision, surveillance and reduction of masturbation and sex

play were to the fore. A discourse of child-centeredness appeared to legitimate reliance on the emergent curriculum and child-initiated interest while a discourse of sexuality as dangerous appeared productive of safe practice and caution.

The data in Chapter 5 highlighted the third theme/finding, building on the first two themes/findings, to strengthen the case put forward. The data was used to illustrate how the centring of children/bodies and sexuality in normalising ways leads to two related endpoints: the marginalisation, resistance towards, and silencing of sexuality in early childhood education through processes of heteronormativity and erasure and, the marginalisation of children/bodies through the maintenance of prevailing heteronormative, narrow views of both. I suggested these endpoints give expression to the theme, *margined bodies*, and that this theme has within it a number of absences. Absences included notions of children as sexual and worldly; understandings of children's sexuality reflective of non-traditional, non-heteronormative, complex and multiple themes; spaces for teachers to lead children; and finally, spaces for both to experience spontaneous, natural pleasures. I suggested these absences make problematic teacher talk and practice about and around sexuality focused on children's learning about sexuality, and the expression of, and honouring of, sexualities.

The implications of discourses productive of marginalising endpoints and absences: 'being bad,' risk taking and the way ahead

I have chosen to address three implications that arise as a result of over-reliance on discourses that are productive of marginalising endpoints and absences. The first implication is that the scope for understanding difference and diversity as it pertains to sexuality and related perspectives on exclusion and inclusion, is immediately limited. Largely homogenising in effect, the discourses discussed in this thesis are exclusionary and leave little room for teachers to welcome different or diverse expressions of sexuality beyond those

ideas fixed within them. For example, in simplifying the complexities of children/bodies and sexuality, a discourse of children as asexual and innocent and a discourse of children as biological, developmental entities ignores deviations from or subversions of norms.

The second and related implication is that these discourses make it difficult for teachers to meet their inclusionary responsibilities. That is, the fulfilment of the inclusive philosophy of *Te Whaariki* (Ministry of Education, 1996b), the inclusive mandate of DOPs (Ministry of Education, 1996a), and the inclusive ideals and practices reflected in other significant documents, regulations and acts as outlined in Chapter 1. In that chapter, I stated this study is significant because barriers to exploration of sexualities matters hinder this process. The favouring of these discourses, over other discourses, appears to be one such barrier.

The third implication relates to pre-service teacher education. Research on exclusion and inclusion in early childhood settings would suggest pre-service teacher education is failing to sufficiently prepare teachers to fulfil these responsibilities (Gunn et al., 2004). Presumably, over-reliance on discourses that generate marginalising endpoints and absences within pre-service teacher education is a contributing factor to some teachers' lack of preparedness. Likewise, over-reliance on traditional modernist instructional methods that depend on the existence of a fixed body of knowledge and the achievement of set standards that pertain to this knowledge may also be a contributing factor. Instructional methods will need to be liberated to a more open, situated state; teacher educators need opportunities to engage each other and their student teachers in discussion of sexualities matters (Gunn & Surtees, 2004).

The way forward – towards inclusivity – necessitates being bad and risk taking. Blaise and Andrew (2005) suggest being bad is synonymous with risk taking and that risk taking means getting uncomfortable. Similarly, Robinson

(2005a) acknowledges both the need for risk taking and the likelihood of discomfort. Robinson describes risk taking in positive terms (despite related discomfort) believing this can contribute to the creation of different future possibilities. As she states

Taking risks can open an array of personal and professional opportunities and options, as well as enriching ways of looking at the world for both adults and children. Taking risks can increase our understandings of ourselves and extend our perceptions of what we, as individuals and communities, are capable of achieving in our lives and those of future generations. (Robinson, 2005a, p.181)

I believe being bad and taking risks requires the uptake of two processes both within pre-service teacher education and for the teacher in the early childhood centre: the critique and deconstruction of exclusionary discourses through discourse analysis, and the accessing of alternative, inclusionary discourses.

Critique and deconstruction of exclusionary discourses through discourse analysis and the taken-for-granted assumptions within them demands an ‘impertinent performance’⁸: a thinking against their conceptual foundations. Such a performance will necessitate regular, ongoing opportunities for teacher engagement in critical thinking and reflection about individual positioning within these discourses, individual subjectivity and the impact of power relations, structural inequalities and discrimination. Part of this work will include challenging categorical thinking in order to deconstruct binaries. Deconstructing binaries demonstrates how each side relies on the other side to give it meaning and shows the ways in which meanings can be remade (MacNaughton, 2000).

Creating new possibilities for inclusion will require teacher adoption of new ways of thinking, talking and practicing about and around sexuality. The

⁸ I refer here to Britzman (1998), as elaborated under ‘Theoretical perspectives’ in Chapter 2.

adoption of such ways is timely given the terrain of early childhood education is changing. Significant remodelling is occurring; as alternative perspectives begin to impact on practices, Yelland and Kilderry (2005) suggest teachers will need to “look beyond the boundaries of the field” (p.6). Accessing alternative, inclusionary discourses through the tools of social constructionism, poststructuralism and queer theory is one way to achieve this end. While these theories enable the opening of discursive spaces that increase possibilities for broader representations of children/bodies and sexuality, I remain mindful that they are simply several theories among many. As such, they are neither inherently better nor worse than those others may choose to suggest.

To utilise the tools of social constructionism, poststructuralism and queer theory, teachers will need to favour a plurality of truths over a single truth. Tentativeness is required. As Crotty (1998) states

What is said to be ‘the way things are’ is really just ‘the sense we make of them.’ Once this standpoint is embraced, we will obviously hold our understandings much more lightly and tentatively and far less dogmatically, seeing them as historically and culturally effected interpretations rather than eternal truths of some kind. (p.64)

Teachers who accept their truths in tentative terms will likely be in a better position to remain open to alternative understandings about sexuality. For example, understandings about sexuality as a socially constructed, integral aspect of children’s identity that is continually reviewed and renegotiated throughout life; “a non-linear, multifaceted, complex, contradictory and unstable social relationship that can vary across cultures and over historical periods of time” (Robinson, 2000, p.94). Such a queer view enables a wider focus – a shift from things primarily biological and developmental – to such things as “relationships, life choices and practices, dispositions, pleasures, desires and fantasies – all of which are aspects of everyday life in which both

children and adults actively engage” (Robinson, 2005b, p.22). Similarly, it could be expected that teachers who acknowledge their truths with some tentativeness will also remain open to alternative understandings about children/bodies – such as children/bodies as sources of the erotic. Making a queer turn enables the charting of pleasure and brings to the fore discourses of desire. Tobin (1997a) notes that pleasure and desire “are under siege in early childhood education” (p.2). Representing the unspeakable in this way, the marginalised, resisted and silenced, is to challenge this siege. Accordingly, masturbation and sex play need, for instance, no longer be primarily represented as unproblematic facts about development but perhaps, as sensual, pleasurable experiences for children.

Such alternative understandings about sexuality and children/bodies should begin to redress the inclusive requirements in early childhood education as earlier outlined, and have a positive impact on both children and teachers. Children will likely experience empowerment as they gain in opportunities for learning about aspects of sexuality previously over-looked and denied. New goals for their learning can emerge; goals relating to the development of sexuality and the ways in which it is constructed under the strand of Well-being – Mana Atua, in *Te Whaariki*, and for the expressing, honouring and celebrating of sexual diversity and embodied desires under Belonging – Mana Whenua (Surtees, 2003). Teachers, on the other hand, will likely experience an increase in comfort, and a greater measure of appreciation for the significance of sexualities matters, as well as some ideas about possible ways to embrace these.

I have argued the way forward – the way towards inclusivity – calls for being bad and risk taking in both pre-service teacher education and in the early childhood centre. I have further argued that doing so demands the critique and deconstruction of exclusionary discourses through discourse analysis and the accessing of alternative, inclusionary discourses such as those supported by

the perspectives of social constructionism, poststructuralism and queer theory. The implications of this task are significant: “at stake is the capacity of the educational apparatus and its pedagogies to exceed their own readings, to stop reading straight” (Britzman, 1998, p.226). In the balance therefore, is the capacity of the teacher educator and teacher to stop reading straight. This is no easy task. As Canella (1997) cautions

Even those of us who want to hear multiple voices become so committed to our constructions of how to listen and what to hear that we silence both younger human beings and those in their lives that do not speak our language. (p.11)

Teachers must ask which discursive representations of reality they have not recognised, what the social consequences of different representations of reality are and what the consequences might be if different understandings of reality were to be accepted. Teachers who choose to frame their talk and practice about and around sexuality within alternative understandings made possible by social constructionism, poststructuralism and queer theory perspectives may find their worlds, and the worlds of the children they teach, become more complex and interesting spaces.

Last words

This chapter has looked back, in order to look forward. In addressing implications a re-imagining of the way ahead has also been offered. In drawing this thesis to a close, I repeat my earlier call – that is, a call for pre-service teacher education and teachers to invest in the skills necessary to badness and risk taking with a view to advancing sexualities matters in early childhood education. As Blaise and Andrew (2005) so aptly state

If we believe in the importance of providing children with the tools to understand their experiences with gender and sexuality, then we cannot remain silent in either the early childhood or university classrooms. Rather than children needing to be constructed as ‘bad’ for talking about

difficult subjects like sex and sexuality, we need to be prepared to be 'bad' too, and engage in these important conversations with children and preservice teachers.
(pp.56-57)

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Appendix 1



**CHRISTCHURCH
COLLEGE of EDUCATION**

Tē Whare Whai Matauraka Ki Otautahi

Draft Interview Guide

Teacher Talk: Constructions of Sexuality in Early Childhood Education

1. How do you define sexuality?
 - ⇒ What's it like for you, having this particular view?
 - ⇒ Where do you think your ideas about this come from?
2. How do you view children's sexuality, in the early childhood years?
 - ⇒ In what ways do you think this is a typical or atypical view?
 - ⇒ What do you think has influenced your view?
3. What aspects of sexuality do you think are relevant in early childhood education?
 - ⇒ For self?
 - ⇒ For other teachers?
 - ⇒ For children and their families?
 - ⇒ Do you think any of these aspects are problematic?
 - ⇒ In what ways?
4. What aspects of sexuality do you think are OK to talk about in centres?
 - ⇒ For self?
 - ⇒ For other teachers?
 - ⇒ For children and their families?
 - ⇒ What talk are you most comfortable with and why?
 - ⇒ What talk are you least comfortable with and why?
5. I'm keen to hear about particular experiences you've had around sexuality in the centre, how you responded to these experiences and what you thought and felt. What particular experience stands out for you?
 - ⇒ What happened?
 - ⇒ What was your response?
 - ⇒ What were you thinking?
 - ⇒ How did it make you feel?
 - ⇒ What did you say?

- ⇒ How did it affect you afterwards?
 - ⇒ Has talking about this experience reminded you of any others?
6. What is the most difficult situation you've experienced around sexuality in the centre?
- ⇒ What made this difficult?
 - ⇒ How did you respond?
 - ⇒ What kinds of feelings did you experience?
 - ⇒ How did it affect you afterwards?
 - ⇒ Has talking about this situation reminded you of any others?
7. In what ways do you monitor what you say about sexuality in the centre?
- ⇒ Why do you monitor yourself?
 - ⇒ Can you recall any specific situations where this happened?
 - ⇒ How did you feel?
8. In what situations have you avoided the topic of sexuality in the centre altogether?
- ⇒ Can you describe a specific experience of this?
 - ⇒ How did this make you feel?
 - ⇒ Can you give me any other examples?
9. Can you describe a centre situation where you experienced conflict between what you believe about sexuality and something that happened?
- ⇒ What happened?
 - ⇒ What was your experience of this?
 - ⇒ How did it make you feel?
10. Can you describe any centre situations related to sexuality where your thinking changed as a result of that situation?
- ⇒ What happened?
 - ⇒ What learning occurred for you?
 - ⇒ What difference has this made to your practice?
11. I've asked all I need to about the topic. Is there anything new you've remembered, that you'd like to add?
12. I'd like to ask a few questions about your teaching background. Is this OK with you?
- ⇒ When did you graduate as a teacher?
 - ⇒ What qualification did you graduate with?
 - ⇒ How many years experience have you had teaching in

centres since graduating with this qualification?

13. Now I'd like to ask a few questions about this interview to help me improve my technique. Is this OK?

- ⇒ Which questions were helpful to you in clarifying your thinking?
- ⇒ Which questions blocked your thinking?
- ⇒ Do you have any idea about how I might revise questions further?
- ⇒ Is there any other feedback you'd like to give me?

Appendix 2



Information Sheet

February 2004

Project Title

Teacher Talk: Constructions of Sexuality in Early Childhood Education.

Background Information

The ways in which teacher talk acts to construct sexuality in an early childhood centre and subsequent related perspectives on inclusion and exclusion is an unexplored topic in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It is a topic worthy of research given *Te Whaariki's* inclusionary intent, the requirement through the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* for teachers to incorporate inclusive practices into their programmes and the 1993 Human Rights Act.

My name is Nicola Surtees and I am hoping to investigate this topic in order to further understandings of the relevance of sexuality to the early childhood sector as part of the requirements for a Master of Teaching and Learning degree at the Christchurch College of Education. I will be working under the supervision of Carol Mutch (MA, BA, DipTchg), Associate Director, Courses and Qualifications, School of Professional Development and Missy Morton (MEd, BA, NZ Registered Psychologist), the Research Coordinator of the Master of Teaching and Learning degree and a senior lecturer both at the Christchurch College of Education.

Participant Requirements

Participant teachers will be interviewed using a semi-structured format with an emphasis on allowing participants to determine the content of the interview. Following the completion of all interviews, I will hold a focus group for those interviewed. Readings relevant to the research topic will be made available prior to the focus group to assist generate discussion. Key themes drawn from the interview data will also be used to stimulate discussion.

Interviews will be conducted at a venue of each participant's choice and will be approximately 45 minutes duration. The focus group will be conducted at the Christchurch College of Education and will be of one to two-hour duration. Suitable times for the interviews and focus group will be negotiated

upon receipt of consent forms and are expected to occur March – May 2004. Interviews and the focus group will be audio taped. Transcripts of the interviews will be sent out to participating teachers for comments and/or corrections to assist in the accurate recording and interpretation of views.

Ethical Considerations

The Christchurch College of Education Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

Participation of teachers is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty. Participating teachers will have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage and/or to withdraw information or data pertaining to them without penalty.

Participating teachers will be guaranteed anonymity; real names and other identifying information will not be used. All records will remain confidential and access to data will be restricted to myself, my supervisors the typist and transcriber. Both records and data will be securely stored and retained for up to three years.

While no real risk to participating teachers is anticipated, anxiety may be present for some given the research topic can be characterised as sensitive. This will be minimised by guarantee of anonymity and right of withdrawal from the study as outlined above.

Data will be used specifically for the purposes of this study and any related conference papers or journal articles that may follow.

Any complaints concerning the manner in which the research is conducted may be conveyed to myself, my supervisors or, if preferred to The Chair of the Ethical Clearance Committee (details below).

If you are willing to participate, please complete the attached consent form and return to me by 1 March 2004.

Yours sincerely

Nicola Surtees
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Research Coordinator, Master of Teaching and Learning/Senior Lecturer

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Ethical Clearance Committee Chair

The Chair

Ethical Clearance Committee

Christchurch College of Education

PO Box 31 065

Christchurch

Phone 348 2059

Appendix 3



Consent Form

Teacher Talk: Constructions of Sexuality in Early Childhood Education

The researcher has explained the nature of this research project to me, including the purpose of the research and conditions of confidentiality and anonymity. I have read the provided Information Sheet and understand what will be required of me if I agree to participate.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the project at any time without incurring any form of penalty.

I agree to both an individual interview with Nicola Surtees and to take part in a focus group facilitated by Nicola Surtees as part of this research project.

If I have any queries or concerns about the research project I will speak to Nicola Surtees (researcher) or Carol Mutch or Missy Morton (supervisors) or The Chair of the Ethical Clearance Committee.

The Chair
Ethical Clearance Committee
Christchurch College of Education
PO Box 31 065
Christchurch
Phone 348 2059

Name _____
Signature _____
Date _____