

**ART IN EARLY CHILDHOOD:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the art process in early childhood education in two early childhood centres in Christchurch, New Zealand. The purpose of the study was to examine the provisions teachers made for children in the early childhood art area, to observe how they guided children through the art process and to find out what eventually happened when an art product was completed.

The study employed a qualitative design. It involved unstructured interviews with six qualified early childhood teachers. Settings for participant observations included, a childcare centre, a kindergarten, and the Early Childhood Support service. Relevant documentation was also collected. Three themes eventually emerged for consideration. The themes were, *planning for art experiences, verbal and non-verbal expression of art and the product.*

The first section of results dealt with teachers' involvement in programme planning, setting up the art area and providing materials and activities. The contribution of *Te Whaariki* (1996) in the planning process used by the teachers was also discussed. The second section concerned the participation, of both the teachers and the children, in art expression. It examined the dialogue the teachers used when talking to children about art, how the teachers worked with the children in the art area, and the skills the children demonstrated when involved in the art process. The third section of results concerned the final product, and the value and meaning placed on the children's work of art by the teachers, the parents, and the children themselves.

The results of this research suggested that the teachers predominantly used developmental theory in their work with children in the art area. Teachers attempted to imitate some of the elements found in the Reggio Emilia preschools, but did not appear to have complete knowledge of the theoretical underpinnings of the Discipline Based Art Education approach used by these schools. Teachers were aware of the importance

of including *Te Whaariki* in their planning of art experiences, in centres, and used the document as a guide, to facilitate their work. Implications were for increased in-service training for teachers in the area of art education theory and practice.

The early childhood teachers in this study expressed a variety of views, both implicit and explicit, about artistic expression and children's learning. Their practice in the art area, generally confirmed connections with the theories they articulated and revealed gaps in art education in early childhood. The implementation of *Te Whaariki* has impacted early childhood teaching throughout New Zealand and has been instrumental in shaping teachers' practical work in the art area. Specific training in the area of art education may serve to enhance teachers abilities to teach art to young children at a developmentally appropriate level, and may give them the confidence necessary to provide art programmes which contribute to the richness of children's experiences.

Chapter 1:

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

This study investigated the art process in early childhood education in two early childhood centres in Christchurch, New Zealand. The purpose of the study was to examine the provisions teachers made for children in the early childhood art area, to observe how they guided children through the art process and to find out what eventually happened when an art product was completed.

As a lecturer in early childhood at the Christchurch College of Education, I had many opportunities for observing teachers and children in art areas in early childhood centres. The following example illustrates an activity based method of teaching art in early childhood that teachers commonly term the 'tabletop' approach. This incident, and others like it, initiated my interest in research pertaining to early childhood art education.

Consider two and three year old children's involvement in an art activity in a childcare centre. The tables are cleared of morning tea, wiped down and the children and teacher sit down at the table. There is yellow dye in pottles, with brushes, on the table and some glue. Some commercially bought sparkly paper that is cut up small and some crayons are provided. The teacher draws on each sheet of paper, a large flower and two honey bees. The drawing is well done. The children are encouraged to colour in the flower and bees to the best of their ability and to cover them with yellow dye. This accomplished, they are told where to put the glue and handed some sparkles to put on the middle of the flower. The picture is then considered to be finished and the child places it on a separate table to dry.

This process is repeated until every child has done one. It is unclear whether the exercise is compulsory or not. A look at the finished products all laid out together to dry demonstrates the similarity of each picture. There is a veritable sea of sparkly yellow flowers and honey bees. The only trace of creativity, ingenuity, or uniqueness are the various crayon markings over the flower. One small child, who is two years old, approaches an adult proudly holding her picture. She says 'My Mummy will like this'.

As a teacher of art education in the Early Childhood Programmes, I have had the opportunity to read extensively about recent ideas in the development of art curriculum in early childhood education. I was intrigued to find that my earlier ideas about working with young children in the area of art education sustained a radical change. I decided to adopt the new theories as a significant alternative to the practices I encountered and applied as a former early childhood educator.

Recent exposure to contemporary art theory and the remarkable effects accomplished by the teachers in the Italian preschools of Reggio Emilia, combined with the variety of art education practices I encountered in early childhood centres, aroused my curiosity about the state of art in early childhood. In addition, the introduction of *Te Whaariki: Early Childhood Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1996) provided a documented form of accountability for early childhood teachers in all curriculum areas.

On observing a student on teaching practice, in a kindergarten I had visited one year previously, I noted that the children's art work displayed around the centre was prolific and of remarkable quality. I told the head teacher that I was impressed with the work and the atmosphere of the kindergarten in general, and asked what had occurred to effect the change. I was told they had been doing the Early Childhood Support's *Te Whaariki* course, and that the implementation of the document was having a positive effect on many curriculum areas in the kindergarten, including art.

This incident increased my interest in early childhood educators' beliefs and theories about young children's art and the ways in which they were reflected in practice. I also became aware of the profound effect that implementation of *Te Whaariki*, in an appropriate manner, had on centre practice, teaching styles and children's learning.

The remainder of the chapter provided a brief overview of the historical context in which art education practices developed in Christchurch. I included my own experiences, and examined the path I took in developing a philosophy of art education (Middleton, 1993). There was discussion about the importance of the children's understandings and perspectives when planning an art curriculum. The final section deals with the influence of *Te Whaariki* in providing a developmentally appropriate curricular context for children in early childhood settings.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Activity Based Learning: The Tabletop Approach

Throughout my practical experience as an early childhood teacher, from 1988 to 1995, I had encountered and applied a variety of methods for use with children in the area of curriculum art. These ranged from structured, prescribed, activity based or adult directed activities (Bredekamp, 1993), to providing children with a variety of art media, art materials and space, and letting them create at will. The following example occurred in 1991, in an early childhood centre where the teachers, including myself, were instructed by the owner of the centre, to deliver what I considered to be a restrictive programme.

This childcare centre had a structure which allowed the teachers little freedom to set appropriate programmes for children. The children in the

centre were regimented in everything. There were separate times for music, stories, outdoor play, toileting, and free play which were timetabled at half hour intervals. There was no space set apart for art activities. There was a daily allowance of art time, when an activity was prepared for the children, depending on their age, and set out for them over a half hour period. The children were expected to all do the same activity, and the teachers to keep them working at it for the duration. They had no freedom of choice, and little occasion to express themselves creatively.

At times it was a nightmare. The group of children I was expected to provide for were 18 months to 2 1/2 years. Understandably, these children did not always want to cooperate. I recall an incident not long before Christmas, when I was asked by the supervisor of the centre, to present these toddlers with a group mural involving pre-cut reindeer, paint, glitter, glue, and cotton wool balls to represent snow. Since this was an inappropriate activity for children of this age group, the situation rapidly became chaotic.

Memories of the previous incident and knowledge that this was not what I had been taught at teachers college in the late 1980's, inspired me to ask friends and colleagues who did their kindergarten training in the 1970's, what they were expected to do for children in art education. Consistently, the reply has been that they were expected to provide various activities for children. The teacher prepared all the art media for the children and a model to work from. The children were encouraged to produce an adult-pleasing result. Some of the teachers working in early childhood today did their training in the 1970's when this tabletop approach appears to have been used exclusively. Teachers learned, or created, a range of activities which they were expected to use to provide as much variety for children as possible (J. Wright, personal communication. July 4, 1997).

Seefeldt (1995) argued that the 'paper plate spaceman' and 'egg carton caterpillar' type of art activities, paled into insignificance and even appeared ridiculous when compared to artwork of children who were encouraged to creatively extend their own ideas and knowledge. The theory underpinning the activity based type of art education dates back to the 1880's (Kindler, 1995), when children were often perceived as untrained and unskilled miniature adults who needed to develop good habits and learn proper drawing skills. This attitude lends itself to the implementation of a rote approach to art education where art experiences are carefully structured, instructed and executed.

Although the tabletop model was now considered to be responsible for stifling children's creativity, residues of it were still evident in early childhood centres in Christchurch. This type of art activity frequently appeared in early childhood centres before Christmas and Easter. It usually involved stylistic fluffy bunnies, egg shaped cards, or bell, candle and Christmas tree templates. This product-focused approach may serve to provide evidence to the parents that the child had done something constructive during the day.

Interestingly, text books from the 1970's repeatedly entreat teachers to avoid providing the tabletop type of activity. The message in the text books said, that it was inappropriate for teachers to make or model for children, that children needed to be free to create their own works, and that they needed to be encouraged to express their feelings (Read, 1971; Walker et al., 1967). Consider the following, for instance:

Avoid making models in any art medium for the children to copy. This may seem like an arbitrary rule....Of course it takes away the fun of drawing a man or making little dogs or Santa Clauses out of clay for an admiring crowd of preschoolers. All this may seem like innocent fun, but we must remember that art is valuable because it is a means of self-expression....If

he has models before him, he may be blocked in using art as a means of self expression. He will be less likely to be creative and more likely to be limited to trying to copy (Read, 1971).

It appeared that new art education theory took a considerable amount of time to filter through the system. In the 1970's when the developmental theories expounding free expression and creativity were in full swing in the text books, teachers were applying themselves to tabletop, activity based learning which had its roots solidly fixed in the previous century. The next section discussed the developmental approach in detail.

Developmental Theory: The SEACOH Approach

During the 1980's developmental theories, which had their roots in the 1920's, were acknowledged and children were encouraged to be expressive and creative (Seefeldt, 1995; Wright, 1991). An art education programme, extolling the beliefs of developmental theorists, led to another approach to children's art work in New Zealand. An early childhood centre, where I worked from 1992 to 1995, employed the Structured Environment Allowing for Communicative Original Happenings (SEACOH) approach. This was the approach most strongly favoured when I trained as an early childhood teacher in 1989.

Building on the developmental art theories expounded in the 1970's, SEACOH was developed in New Zealand throughout the 1980's (Hatherley, 1986). The thrust of this programme was that all art materials must be available for children at all times. Appropriate furniture was designed to maximise visibility of materials and to allow children easy access. Children were encouraged to express, experiment and create. I recall this model being touted as the ideal during my period at Christchurch Teachers College. The way the model was taught gave the impression, to me, and I suspect many others, that the role of the teacher was that of a non-interventionist. This was not

the intention of the programmes instigator, Yvonne Adam (Hatherley, 1986). The ethos of the model was to shift the emphasis from teachers providing a series of unrelated activities (the table top approach) to a more integrated approach (Hatherley, 1986).

Lowenfeld's (Wright, 1991) ideas are recognisable in art education in early childhood in New Zealand today. He believed that children developed naturally through drawing, painting, or modelling materials and that external influences had no part to play in the development of children's artistry. The role of the teacher, according to Lowenfeld, was not to teach children how to produce art but to nurture art experience and development by encouraging self expression (Wright, 1991).

The impact of these theories on the art scene in early childhood, was to make teachers, including myself, unsure of their role in the art area, and they avoided working directly with children and their art process, seeing the children's products as secondary to the process.

In my opinion, this approach was a vast improvement on the tabletop method. It did however, discourage teachers from entering the art area in the fear that they may interrupt the child's creative flow. This was obviously not the intended result of the SEACOH model. The model focused firmly on the process and not the final product. It was strongly based on the notion of developmentally appropriate practice. This concept included both age appropriateness and individual appropriateness, and was openly critical of art projects, such as the colouring of pre-drawn images, that reflect the teacher's thinking rather than that of the children (Bredenkamp, 1987). It was also based on the teachings of Jean Piaget who did not regard direct teaching of children, by adults, as important for cognitive development. His theory recognised that children had an active, independent ability to make sense of their own world without adult interference (Berk, 1997).

During my time as an early childhood teacher, from 1990 onwards, I ensured that children had recourse to a wide variety of materials for collage, drawing, painting, construction and clay work. At all times, they were free to choose from a variety of materials and activities. My major contribution in the art area was to assist children with technical difficulties such as cutting, or finding tools and materials. I would speak to children about the process they were undergoing and spend time in conversation with them, usually about things unconnected with their art. I rarely commented on the final product except to say that their work was good, or that it was beautiful and I liked it. These were the years when children were praised for every effort, in order to maintain their self esteem. Read wrote, “The teacher’s first task is to help the child feel good about himself” (1971, p,339). I tended to shy away from the art area as I did not have a clear understanding of what my role was in this area.

Even though the centre where I worked adhered to the SEACOH model, there were elements in the programme that were not totally in accord with this. I frequently supplied novel, or gimmick, activities which were less structured than the reindeer episode discussed previously, but included things like cotton-bud and balloon painting. This gave children less choice and autonomy as I picked the activity and supplied the materials. In retrospect, I believe the dominant philosophy at the time, was to keep the children content, busy and focused and had little to do with art education.

The discovery of the Reggio Emilia approach and the embracing of the same by educators in the United States of America, led to New Zealand educators also becoming interested. The following section describes the philosophies and principles of Reggio Emilia Schools and Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE).

Discipline Based Art Education: The Reggio Emilia Approach

Eventually I was appointed to a lecturing position with the Christchurch College of Education. My major teaching subjects were child development and curriculum art. To familiarise myself with the latest advances in art education, I read some recent articles based on research with young children in this area. Schiller, (1995) introduced me to Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE). I was fascinated by the simplicity and discernment of the theory.

DBAE encouraged teachers to actively intervene in children's art experiences. Teachers were expected to present to the children an appropriate form of art criticism, art history and aesthetics. The onus was on the teacher to talk with children about their art work, and to provide rich and varied experiences for children while focusing on the children's interests (Schiller, 1995). This approach had been made famous by the infant schools of Reggio Emilia in Italy and captivated the interest of some early childhood educators in kindergartens and childcare centres in Christchurch, who were attempting to imitate it. Teachers told me they had attended in-service teacher training courses, where they were introduced to the Reggio Emilia approach to art education. They appeared to have embraced some of the ideals demonstrated by the model but I was not sure if they had also been exposed to the theory that underpins this approach.

The Reggio Emilia schools and the DBAE model introduced children to high quality works of art. Children were taken to art galleries and exposed to prints of various types of adult art works, within their environment. They learned to explore these using appropriate terms, such as, negative and positive space, still art, line, colour, shade, mass and volume. Children were also instructed in the use of art materials, and learned how to criticise art in terms of their own understanding (Schiller, 1995).

For me, methods employed by the Reggio Emilia pre-schools and DBAE theory, opened up an entirely new way for young children to explore art in early childhood. I was fascinated by the sense in the DBAE concept, and by the way that the approach actually gave the teacher an effective role, while the power of the process remained with the children. I was struck by the relationship of DBAE with the socio-cultural approach, expounded by Lev Vygotsky. He “viewed cognitive development as a *socially mediated process*—as dependent on the support that adults and more mature peers provide as children try new tasks” (Berk, 1997, p27).

Vygotsky’s view, that higher cognitive processes develop out of social interaction and that joint activities with adults and older peers assisted children to think in meaningful ways, is explained by the **zone of proximal development** (Berk, 1997). This referred to the range of tasks the child cannot yet manage alone but can accomplish with the assistance of adults or more skilled peers. The link with DBAE emerged from Vygotsky’s theory that children engaged in cooperative conversations with more mature partners, reconstructed the social interaction as private speech and used this to organise their individual efforts (Berk, 1997). The key, therefore, to exploring art with young children, was that the adult was able to enter into meaningful dialogue with children about the subject and, to assist children to engage in meaningful and critical dialogue with each other.

Schirmacher (1986) was convinced that adults have difficulty discussing art with young children. He asserted that traditionally, children and their art works, had frequently been exposed to clumsy adult interactions that included complements, judgements, valuing, inappropriate questioning, probing, and correcting. He believed there are more effective ways to talk with children about their art, which gives them the ability to appraise their own product and the confidence to improve their understanding of art.

Schirrmacher (1986) believed children needed to be left to complete their artistic discoveries without adults projecting themselves into the art, by comparing or correcting. Teachers could focus on design qualities, rather than constantly searching for representation. This means that teachers needed to be trained to discuss colour, line, mass or volume, pattern, shape or form, space and texture. An appropriate time for a teacher to begin a discussion was when the child had finished their work. A pause was suggested at this stage, which gave the teacher a chance to appraise the child's work and decide on an appropriate and sincere utterance. It also gave children the opportunity to have their say first, if they chose to.

Art development in young children could be enhanced by early childhood teachers' acknowledgment of the role of aesthetics. Aesthetics was defined by Feeney and Moravcik (1987) as referring to the love of beauty, the criteria for judging beauty, and individual taste. An exploration of the subject of aesthetic development in early childhood led them to conclude that early childhood centres were often decorated with commercial, highly stylised products, with little artistic merit and frequently of poor quality. They were concerned, that if children were not exposed to the beauty of art during early childhood, they would not learn to appreciate it or to understand that they had the ability to create it.

Debate has ensued concerning a young child's ability to make mature judgements or to make an aesthetic response to art. Some art specialists considered early childhood a developmentally inappropriate time for this type of experience (Erickson, 1995). However Feeney and Moravcik stated that,

Children are fascinated by beauty. They love nature, and talking about art. They express their feelings and ideas through succinct and picturesque language; song, sometimes boisterous and sometimes lyrical; and expressive movements—the essence of poetry, music and dance. Young

children have strong preferences for books, objects, and food. They are creative and inquisitive, and have delightful insights into the arts (1987, p8).

Any early childhood teacher who crouched down with wonder to a child who was delicately holding a handful of tiny petals in her small hands and wants to show how beautiful they were, will understand the concepts stated above.

Therefore, the role of the teacher in developing an awareness of aesthetics in children, was to encourage an awareness of beauty by reflecting on the meaning of beauty in their own lives and sharing it with the children in their care. They can respond to the aesthetic qualities of the natural world around them, and design and enhance the physical environment of the preschool. Attractiveness for children should be everywhere and this approach was clearly demonstrated in the schools of Reggio Emilia which are astonishingly beautiful (Feeney & Moravcik, 1987).

What was it about the infant schools of Reggio Emilia that captured the imagination of early childhood educators and made them wish to reproduce this environment? What was happening there that encouraged so much creativity and artistic insight in children? Reggio Emilia is a small city in northern Italy. Over the past 30 years an innovative system evolved there which has started to impact on early childhood education systems in other parts of the world, including New Zealand.

Edwards, Gandini and Forman, clearly outlined the basic philosophy of the Reggio Emilia model in the following statement,

This approach fosters children's intellectual development through a systematic focus on symbolic representation. Young children are encouraged to explore their environment and express themselves through all

of their natural “languages,” or modes of expression, including words, movement, drawing, painting, building, sculpture, shadow play, collage, dramatic play and music (1994, p3).

In the schools of Reggio Emilia there also existed a close partnership between parents, educators and children. The environment was organised to support a highly collaborative, problem-solving approach to learning in small group situations (Edwards et al., 1994).

Katz described the project approach, introduced by Katz and Chard (1989) and used extensively in Reggio Emilia schools, as “in-depth studies of particular topics undertaken by small children” (1994, p20). The project approach evolved from children’s interests, encouraged them to understand a topic deeply, and to make their own decisions and choices in learning. This was based on the DBAE process.

Called *progettazione* in Reggio Emilia schools, it encompassed a concept not easily translated into the English language. This approach allowed for freedom to explore, unhampered by the rigid rules and regulations of an inflexible education system. The children were encouraged not only to study, but to record their findings by means of graphic representation. At the same time the teachers recorded the children’s statements about what they have seen and learned, to further their understandings of the children’s knowledge, and as a basis for future planning (Katz, 1994).

Katz (1994) also reflected that the children and teachers at Reggio Emilia are frequently found in strong purposeful conversations rather than in discussing management details, giving praise, and talking about the children themselves and their behaviour. She cited Bruner who discovered in 1980, that in preschools in Oxford, England, only 20 percent of interactions between teachers and children contained genuine examples of in-depth conversation. My experiences in early childhood centres in Christchurch suggested that

the situation was similar here. Because of the partnership between the teachers and children in Reggio Emilia schools, the two are to be found working at a similar level and sharing matters of real interest to both parties. Katz said that in the Reggio Emilia preschools the “children’s roles in the relationships were more as apprentices than as the targets of instruction or objects of praise” (1994, p29).

Rinaldi described the method of curriculum planning, that was used in the Reggio Emilia schools,

The teachers lay out general educational objectives, but do not formulate the specific goals for each project or activity in advance. They formulate instead hypotheses of what could happen on the basis of their knowledge of children and of previous experiences. Along with these hypotheses they formulate objectives that are flexible and adapted to the needs and interests of the children. These interests and needs include those expressed by children at any time during the project as well as those the teachers infer and bring out as the work proceeds (1994, pp101-102)

This project approach or *progettazione* described above is commonly known in New Zealand as the emergent curriculum, or sometimes the negotiated curriculum (Gandini, 1997). This type of model encouraged projects that may have begun through a suggestion from an adult, a child’s idea or interest, or from a spontaneous and interesting event. The role of the teachers was to provide time for the thinking and actions of children to develop (Rinaldi, 1994).

This investigation examined the type of relationships teachers and children had with each other, and their interactions in curriculum art. It also examined teachers’ theoretical understandings of early childhood art, and to what extent they were implementing it in early childhood centres. In order to understand what was

appropriate in art education in early childhood, teachers needed to understand how young children perceive art and talk about art. The following section deals with the children's perspective and their ability to discuss art and other things a level of depth of understanding.

Table 1: Summary of theoretical approaches to art education.

	Activity Based (Tabletop)	Developmental	DBAE
Materials	Teacher's choice. Placed on tabletop.	Freely accessible. Children's choice.	Freely accessible. Children's choice.
Activity	Teacher's choice. Prescribed steps.	Children's choice from a range of materials. Teachers' make suggestions.	Children's choice. Suggestions by teacher based on children's needs and interests.
Environment/ Aesthetics	Not accounted for.	Materials presented attractively and kept tidy. Children's art work displayed attractively.	Emphasis on beauty in environment. Fine art displayed in centres.
Children's interests, needs, strengths.	Not accounted for. May present something children 'enjoy' doing.	Assume children offered a free choice will provide for their own interests.	Of vital importance. Children are observed, and their needs and interests taken into account when planning.
Teacher's role.	Directive. Assist children to work through steps and to complete the product correctly.	Responsive. Supply materials, encourage creativity by questioning and suggesting. Assist with skill (cutting).	Active, reciprocal partnership with children. Teach art criticism, art history and aesthetics. Teach art elements and techniques.
Talking with children.	Explain steps of activity and guide through process. Make sure children get product 'right'.	Discuss process. Ask questions, make suggestions and add more complex materials to extend children.	Discuss product. Engage in meaningful dialogue relating to art and children's interests. Discuss elements of art.

CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF ART

Tizard and Hughes (1986) suggested that children were able to discuss topics they were familiar with to a deep level of understanding. When confronted by something unfamiliar, or attempting to understand a new idea, children were revealed as persistent and logical thinkers (Tizard and Hughes, 1986). These types of conversations were most often found in the children's homes, rather than in their preschool environments. Tizard and Hughes were ultimately concerned with "the role of the adult in giving meaning to the child's experiences" from an adult-child perspective (1986, p22). This research indicated, that given the chance, children may be able to talk about a variety of things, including art, with depth of understanding.

In research which investigated children's views of reading, Michel also, found that "young children had valuable insights about reading, although their perceptions do not always match those of adults" (1994, p2). Although previous research suggested that children were confused and mistaken about the purpose and nature of reading tasks, Michel suggested that, "beginning readers have rich understandings of reading and are able to share these insights with any adults who care to listen" (1994, p xiii). This related directly to children's views about art and their ability to understand and discuss fine art works if given the chance to do so by adults who 'cared to listen' and to engage them in conversation about these matters.

Studies based on young children's responses to adult art discovered that children show distinct preferences for colour and subject matter. The colours they preferred were bright and strongly contrasting and the images clear, and simple in composition (Kerlavage, 1995). Kerlavage also noted that children reacted positively to depictions of favourite or familiar subject matter. In contrast, they were unable to relate to subject matter beyond their experiences and immediate world.

Children's ideas about art, picture preference, perception and response to art works appeared to change as they aged and matured (Kerlavage, 1995). Their artistic and aesthetic understanding moved through three defined stages, referred to as sensorial, concrete, and expressive.

Preference for subject matter, color, and artistic style travel gradually through the three stages. Children move from a total reliance on the senses to a place where they can make judgements based on expressive and abstract information. These stages are also apparent when discussing children's verbalized reasons for choice and their ability to respond about their choices (Kerlavage, 1995, p59).

For children of this age to be able to look at, and talk about, works of art with any artistic or aesthetic understanding, the art programme needed to be developmentally appropriate. It must, be based on children's interests and knowledge of their worlds, provide opportunities for children to work with fine arts from an individual point of view, make art works part of the children's everyday world, and be aware of children's learning through play (Kerlavage, 1995).

Children who engage in art will also engage in storytelling or narrative, while they do so. Children talk to themselves, continuing the narrative as they draw, paint, model or make. Zurmuehlen and Kantner (1995) noted that children's commentaries may be primarily for naming a particular symbol, for self-directing a succeeding action and occasionally used for critical reflection when something had not gone as planned.

Zurmuehlen and Kantner, (1995), expressed the opinion that repetition is fundamental to basic stories by preschoolers. It served to elaborate an event or object, and to structure events, objects or feelings, often by means of contrasts. For example, 'the cat's up, now it's down, now it's up, now it jumps down'. They believed that children

structured their drawings in a similar way by repeating a line or shape in various experimental ways and creating boundaries in the form of borders. The most simple situation of a young child painting one colour on a page, indicated intentions of the child, realised and repeated, on the paper (Zurmuehlen and Kantner, 1995).

Tarr's research examined ways children acquired cultural understandings about the nature and representational potential of art materials.

Children come to understand art making in the preschool classroom as a direct result of their interactions with teachers and peers around the experience of using art materials, as well as the experiences they derive from interactions between family members and the general community. This understanding, or acquisition of meaning, plays a direct role in what children do with the art materials, how they respond to them during the process of making art, what kind of product results (1995, p23).

Tarr (1995) noted that children actively sought out teachers for validation and acceptance of their work. This generally took the form of the teachers responding with remarks such as, 'lovely', 'beautiful', and, 'I like the way you...'. She argued that although teachers were attempting to encourage children's positive views of themselves, what they were not doing was assisting children to learn about art or to acquire art skills.

Further meanings children gleaned about art were from the types of instructional strategies teachers employed (Tarr, 1995). Teachers appeared to model art skills, and also made positive comments about a child's work in front of other children in order to encourage others to try the activity. At times, teachers explained the process of an activity to a large group of children. Tarr (1995) suggested, that this type of instruction did not give children a chance to respond individually, and immediately, to the teachers'

explanation. This type of instruction also carried the implication that this was an important project which, to complete successfully, involved following the prescribed steps.

And what about ownership of the final product? Tarr (1995) found that teachers mostly stressed the importance of the process over the product, based on the Piagetian model of the child constructing knowledge about the world through interactions with it. Her research suggested that the emphasis on process is frequently contradicted in practice, with the teachers acknowledging the product rather than the process. This was expressed by naming the child's work and by making sure there was an appropriate 'safe place' for the article. The value therefore, was placed on the product, and the 'property', belonging to the child. Tarr (1995) suggests that this valuing was reinforced for children, by parents asking whether they had made something to take home.

The research in the previous sections suggested that children's understandings and perceptions about art can be nurtured and extended with adequate planning and attention to children's interests and environment. The following section includes the role of *Te Whaariki* in helping teachers to plan for children's strengths, needs and interests.

CURRENT CURRICULAR CONTEXT: TE WHAARIKI

The introduction of *Te Whaariki* in 1996 (Ministry of Education), which articulated an early childhood curriculum philosophy, gave early childhood educators an opportunity to reassess their curriculum programmes, including art practices. *Te Whaariki* acknowledged the work of Piaget and Erikson whose child development theories have, for many years, been the basis of early childhood practice. Middleton and May (1997) explained, that *Te Whaariki* was grounded in the theories of L.S. Vygotsky which placed the learning experiences of children in a broader social and cultural context.

They also said that a more active role for the teacher is emphasised in *Te Whaariki* based on the contributions of Vygotsky and Bruner who considered the teacher's role was to 'scaffold' children towards more complex thinking and increasing competency (Middleton & May, 1997).

Te Whaariki emphasised,

the critical role of socially and culturally mediated learning and of reciprocal and responsive relationships for children with people, places, and things. Children learn through collaboration with adults and peers, through guided participation and observation of others, as well as through individual exploration and reflection (Ministry of Education, 1986, p9).

Ministry of Education initiatives introduced *Te Whaariki* by making available government contracts for courses, to help teachers gain a sound understanding of what the new curriculum document entailed and what was required of them. Early childhood centres were notified that the Early Childhood Support contract for the course on *Te Whaariki* was running and were invited to apply. Courses were available for individuals and also for groups. With the group courses, all staff in the centre had to be willing to undertake the course as a team and make a commitment to it for the entire year. There was a selection process, as application numbers had been higher than there are places available (J. Wright, personal communication, July 4, 1997). The rationale behind having the whole team participate was that this type of professional development, especially in curriculum areas, relied heavily on each team member having the same information.

In the past when we've had one staff member come on board, that one person has found it really difficult to go back into the kindergarten, share

the information and get the same commitment from everyone to put things in place (J. Wright, personal communication, July 4 1997).

There were slightly different structures in place for childcare centres, as opposed to kindergartens, since they had different needs (because of staff size and the style of the programme). The kindergarten course was made up of 12 hours of seminar time, attended for three hours on four separate Saturday mornings throughout the year. In addition, 18 hours were available for a facilitator to spend six visits (each of three hours duration) with the team collectively, or with individual teachers at the kindergarten.

The seminars, explained the elements of the course and how the action research model worked as an agent for educational change. Burns explained this term,

In action research, 'theories' are not validated independently and then applied to practice. They are validated through practice. Action research is a total process in which a '*problem situation*' is *diagnosed, remedial action is planned and implemented, and its effects monitored*, if improvements are to get underway. It is both an approach to problem solving and a problem solving process (1997, p346).

The action research model was used in the course by having the teachers identify a problem situation or situation that requires change. After a focus was identified by the team, the teachers were encouraged to complete observations of the area, and to access literature on the subject if possible. Data were analysed and an aspect for change was noted. Using the principles, strands and goals of *Te Whaariki* the teachers implemented the change and reassessed the situation by taking more observations and making further changes if necessary.

Within the seminars, the historical background of *Te Whaariki* was introduced and the principles, strands and goals were examined minutely. Opportunities to understand planning, assessment and evaluation were offered and there was also time made available for teams to share their progress.

The visits and meetings allowed the facilitator to observe the centre programme, assisted the team to discover a focus for their action research project and helped with anything they needed. For example, there were frequent requests for ideas for displays for *Te Whaariki*, literature on the focus subject in question, policy writing, interpreting data, and assistance with planning models (J. Wright, personal communication, July 4 1997).

This course appeared to be an ideal starting point for teachers to focus on the art curriculum and to investigate opportunities for making changes to their approach. The teachers in the kindergarten under investigation decided to do the Early Childhood support course with the art area as their aspect for change. This gave me an ideal opportunity to focus, for part of the research, on the process the teachers went through during the course, and the changes that occurred as a result of the course.

SUMMARY

A review of the literature of art education theory revealed that children can be exposed to art history, art criticism and aesthetics at a developmentally appropriate level. Contemporary theory suggested that the role of the teacher in art education was to engage in purposeful conversation with children about art, to scaffold their learning and to plan, using the children's interests as a basis for programming.

The influence of the Reggio Emilia preschools on practice in Christchurch early childhood centers, had been noted in teachers conversations about the emergent

curriculum. However, the theoretical underpinnings of this approach are less well articulated. Research on children's understandings of art suggested they had the ability to discuss art with depth of understanding, and produce art with a richness only rarely contemplated. Possible implications for practice were, that with a complete understanding of the art theory and cultural aspects apparent in the Reggio Emilia preschools, the teachers in New Zealand early childhood centres may have found their efforts to emulate the Reggio approach resulted in the changes they were attempting to make.

Te Whaariki drew on socio-cultural, and ecological, theoretical approaches with many parallels to Discipline Based Art Education theory. Implementation of *Te Whaariki* included training for educators, and thus an opportunity to examine current curriculum practices and to concentrate on making positive changes in the area.

The following questions arose from my interest in the many art education practices I had observed in early childhood centres in Christchurch, and from the literature about the preschools at Reggio Emilia including the theoretical approach of DBAE. My analysis of the findings was informed by the DBAE theory.

- *In what ways do teachers connect theory and practice in early childhood art education?*
- *How might the implementation of Te Whaariki, shape teachers' practices in early childhood art education?*

The next chapter of this report describes the methodology I used to accomplish this research. In chapters three, four and five I present the findings under the headings of, *planning for art experiences, verbal and non-verbal expression of art, and the product.* In chapter six I present a discussion of the findings and conclude the research.

Chapter 2:

METHODOLOGY

STUDY DESIGN

This thesis presents a qualitative study of art education in two early childhood centres and an Early Childhood Support course in Christchurch, New Zealand. Qualitative research is concerned with processes rather than products. Qualitative methodology is inductive in nature, meaning that it is possible to continue accumulating and confirming evidence and theories from detailed data. This type of research is concerned primarily with the ways that people understand and explain their everyday experiences within the limits of societal structures. The qualitative approach within an early childhood setting helps to establish the context of the participants' lives and enables changes over time to be observed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

In using a qualitative approach, including participant observations and interviews, I hoped to establish relationships with interviewees by participating in a part of their lives. I aimed to learn about them, and their lives and beliefs from a point of view based on understanding and mutual respect.

In order to establish validity for the research I endeavoured to use a triangulation technique. Triangulation is defined by Burns as "the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour" (1997, p.272). In the current study the participants' perspectives were gained through the use of unstructured interviews, participant observations and document collection. The qualitative approach focuses on understanding a topic in a holistic way rather than segregating all the parts into discrete variables. I hoped to understand about art in early childhood from the participants own frame of reference. The emerging story from the data analysis

presented the findings in a meaningful way that included the perspectives of all the participants.

The participant observation is a qualitative research technique, enabling the researcher to enter the world of the people who are being studied. During this time the observer becomes well acquainted with the participants who in turn got to know and to trust the observer. Detailed field notes were recorded based on the observations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

I used an in-depth interviewing technique termed, 'unstructured', 'openended', 'nondirective', and 'flexibly structured' (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). This type of interview allows the researcher to gain an understanding of what the participants think about things, people and events in their lives.

As well as participant observations and interviews, documents related to the study were collected.

PROCEDURES

When designing this study, I chose early childhood centres from the range employed by the Christchurch College of Education, which regularly supplied a placement for the student teachers. I made this decision because these centres regularly accommodated lecturers and students, and I thought they would be more willing to accept me in my role as researcher. Two centre settings were chosen: a childcare centre and a kindergarten. The child care centre was chosen because, as a former staff member, I had contacts with the staff there. Further, I felt that it was a well resourced centre where all children were encouraged to participate fully in all areas of the curriculum.

The kindergarten was chosen due to a fortuitous meeting with the Head Teacher, who informed me that her team was about to embark on an Early Childhood Support course, focusing on the art area. I arranged to follow the team through part of this process by attending some of the support group meetings as a participant observer. This also gave me the third setting, Early Childhood Support.

The data for the study were collected over twelve months in the three settings (see Table 2). Data collection included participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and gathering of relevant documentation. The participant observations took place in the childcare centre, the kindergarten, and in the conference rooms of the Early Childhood Support offices. The interviews were accomplished in my office, the childcare centre and the kindergarten, the Early Childhood Support Offices and over the phone when I had a point to clarify. I endeavoured to make the interviews as unstructured as possible. I had some questions for the participants about their philosophy of art as it related to early childhood. Apart from these questions I let the participants take the lead, gently guiding them back on track, if necessary, and asking them to clarify or give examples where appropriate. I gathered relevant documentation as the occasion arose.

Table 1:
A schedule of interviews and participant observations during 1997

Month	Interviews	Participant Observations
January	Caroline (her office)	Childcare centre (full session)
February	Sally (childcare centre)	Childcare centre (planning meeting)
March	Kristina (researcher's office)	Kindergarten (planning meeting)
May	Sharon (by phone)	Early Childhood Support course (3 hours) Kindergarten (full session)
June	Sharon (her office)	Early Childhood Support course (3 hours)
July	Nancy (kindergarten) Raelene (kindergarten)	
October		Kindergarten (one hour)
December	Nancy (by phone)	Kindergarten (one hour)

ETHICS AND ACCESS

The research followed the ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality and the right of the participant to withdraw at any stage of the study. Written permission was granted by the Supervisor of the child care centre, the Head Teacher of the kindergarten and the Staffing Committee of the Canterbury Westland Free Kindergarten Association. Individual interviewees signed a consent form. Notices describing the research were placed in the childcare centre and kindergarten for parents to read every time an observation was carried out. All participants were aware that they had the right to examine any field notes or view the interview transcripts. None of the participants availed themselves of this opportunity. Approval was granted by the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Canterbury.

SETTINGS AND PARTICIPANTS

The observations and interviews took place in a childcare centre attached to a tertiary learning institution, a diversified kindergarten and the Early Childhood Support offices. Eight participant observations were accomplished between January and December 1997. Two observations took place in the childcare centre, four in the kindergarten and two in the Early Childhood Support offices. There were only two observations in the childcare centre as the teacher, who was the childcare centre participant, left to go overseas shortly after her interview. A further reason was because the research began to focus on the Early Childhood Support course and the participant observations centred around the seminars and kindergarten. I also decided that a three hour observation in the kindergarten was too long because of the large number of people in the setting and changed the observation time to approximately one hour.

Six interviews were conducted. The participants interviewed for this study included one child care teacher, three kindergarten teachers, and two coordinators from Early

Childhood Support. Other participants, not interviewed, were two childcare teachers, several kindergarten teaching teams from a variety of Christchurch kindergartens on the *Te Whaariki* course, three relieving teachers, and many children and parents who were attending the kindergarten and childcare centre at the time participant observations took place. Six of the interviews were recorded onto audio tape and were transcribed by an independent typist. I also conducted clarification interviews over the phone and wrote up impromptu interviews as they occurred throughout the participant observations.

The Childcare Centre

The childcare centre is located in the north west area of Christchurch on the campus of a tertiary learning institution. It is well resourced and has been established for over 10 years.

The centre catered for infants from 0-2 years of age, toddlers from 2-3 years of age, and young children from 3-5 years of age. It had a reputation in Christchurch for providing quality care for children. At the time of the observation, the ratio for the 3-5 year area was one teacher for eight children and the group size was 24 children. Each group was in a separate part of the centre with their own physical resources and outdoor play area. There was a sleep room with either cots or mattresses, which were placed on the floor at rest time in each area. Some mingling of the age groups occurred during the day where possible. The centre had a warm, welcoming atmosphere. Staff greeted new arrivals with enthusiasm. The children appeared to be very self contained and several engaged in conversation with me. The art area was very user friendly as the children had plenty of resources to choose from and were encouraged to do so. The following is a description of my initial impressions of the art area when I entered the centre for the participant observation.

The art area was set up with a screen printing activity and two painting easels. One of the easels had three paint pots on it with three colours of paint. There were conventional brushes in two of the pots and a large black feather in the other. The other easel was set up for drawing and had a container full of colouring in pencils. The area was a hive of activity with parents saying goodbye to children. The three teachers were all busy engaged with children and parents. (Childcare centre)

This centre catered for the children of academic and ancillary staff of the learning institution. The children were well dressed, obviously well cared for, and appeared to be mainly from a privileged background. The centre opened from 8.30 in the morning until 5.00 in the evening. The majority of the children had attended the centre since they were small babies and are there all day. Staff believed this ensured a consistent programme and a settled group of children. There was a very low staff turnover, with the majority of the staff having been at the centre for three to eight years, some since not long after its inception in 1988.

Sally - Sally was one of the participants in the research. She was a qualified teacher, who had worked in this childcare centre for five years. She was the Assistant Supervisor of the centre, with responsibility for 12 staff members and 50 children who attended the centre most days. She worked exclusively with children who were between 3 and 5 years.

Sally agreed to be interviewed regarding her beliefs about art in early childhood and to have an observer in the centre while she and her team worked with the children. She was also prepared to let me attend a planning session, so I could observe the process the team used in planning their programme. The interview took place at the childcare centre after the children had gone for the day.

The Kindergarten

The kindergarten was situated in the north east area of Christchurch. The teachers in this setting regarded this as a low socioeconomic area with special requirements. One of the teachers told me that many of the children resided in sole parent households, and that there were major unemployment issues and several migrant families in the area.

On arrival I noted that the kindergarten was situated in a lower socio-economic part of Christchurch. The houses were a little run down and there was a preponderance of state houses, some in unkempt condition, giving the impression of a poorer area. There was a bus stop, right outside the kindergarten, which was covered in graffiti.

The atmosphere in the kindergarten was warm and welcoming. The children came and conversed without effort. The teachers, although busy with the children, always made time available for adults.

The ratios were one teacher to 15 children and the group size was 45 children in the morning and 30 in the afternoon. The children ranged in age from 2.8 to 5 years. This kindergarten was diversified and the teachers believed this had been a positive experience. There were generally parent helpers in the centre and often a student teacher on teaching practice. The kindergarten ran sessionally, from 8.45 to 11.45 in the morning, and 12.45 to 3.30 in the afternoon.

Kristina - Kristina, the Head Teacher of the kindergarten, was another participant in the study. With a background in qualitative research herself, she readily agreed to be interviewed. Unfortunately, she was seconded to another job and was absent from the kindergarten for most of the year. Therefore, she was unable to participate in the

observations. Kristina was interviewed in my office at the Christchurch College of Education.

Nancy - In Kristina's absence, the responsibility of being Head Teacher fell on the shoulders of Nancy who kept the kindergarten running smoothly. Nancy initially appeared rather hesitant to be interviewed and observed. However, as she had a great interest in art herself, she agreed willingly when she realised the subject was art in early childhood. She was very supportive and always agreed readily when I asked to come into the kindergarten setting for participant observations.

The interview with Nancy took place in the kindergarten on a planning day, which occurred every week on a Wednesday, when there was no session for the children. I was intending to do further interviews after the *Te Whaariki* course was completed but some of the participants were uncomfortable with the tape recorder. Therefore, I decided to talk informally about what the issues were for the teachers in the kindergarten. I wrote these conversations down as part of the participant observations.

Raelene - Raelene was the third teacher at the Kindergarten. She had a great deal of experience in the kindergarten system. Raelene appeared hesitant to be interviewed but did agree.

I interviewed Raelene in the kindergarten on the same day as Nancy. She appeared somewhat nervous and spoke very softly. I found that the tape recorder did not pick up her voice very well and little of the interview was recorded. This was compensated for by remembering as much as possible. I did not feel that I could ask her to do the interview again as she had not appeared very comfortable. Since she was happy to talk with me informally, I decided to initiate conversations and to note down her replies during participant observations.

Early Childhood Support

Early Childhood Support was a government initiative, whereby early childhood educators tender for a contract to educate and support early childhood teachers working in the field. They offered educational services and support for both kindergartens and childcare centres.

With the introduction of *Te Whaariki: Early Childhood Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1996), early childhood teachers had a new document to become familiar with. To this end, the Early Childhood Support ran separate courses for individuals and teams, aiming to reach as many teachers as possible. The support group was composed of three teachers experienced in kindergarten work and childcare. They worked with kindergarten and childcare teams, introducing them to *Te Whaariki* and demonstrating how they can use it to plan for change, using an action research model (see p23). Sally, the childcare teacher I interviewed, had attended one of the courses for individuals, and the kindergarten team had been accepted for the team course.

Caroline - Caroline was one of the facilitators of the Early Childhood Support team. She was a trained primary school teacher who had been involved in early childhood for several years. She initially worked in various centres, and then became a lecturer for the Christchurch College of Education. Caroline was very knowledgeable about childcare in Christchurch and she was able to give me some valuable insights into how the Early Childhood Support programme operates. The interview with Caroline took place during working hours in her office.

Sharon - Sharon was a trained kindergarten teacher who was the Head Teacher of a kindergarten in Christchurch and who had been seconded into the position of a team member of Early Childhood Support for a year. She was involved in the kindergarten component of the course and was able to supply information about the running of the

courses and the individual support given to the kindergarten teams. I initially interviewed Sharon by phone, then tape recorded an interview with her at her place of work.

DATA COLLECTION

The methodology of the study was, as previously stated, participant observation with unstructured interviews, used to extend and focus the study, and collection of relevant documentation. The collection of the data took place between January and December 1997.

Participant Observations

Participant observations of the art area in the kindergarten and the childcare centre focussed on the interactions between children and teachers. In view of the principles of the Discipline Based Art Education theory, particular note was made of the language the adult used when talking to the children about their art work and what the children had to say to the adults and to each other. Further observations in the area set aside for art activities, focussed on what the children did and said when working in the area.

Planning sessions were an integral part of the early childhood teacher's working life. One of the participant observations took place in the child care centre, where the three teachers allowed me to become involved in their planning session. They answered my questions and showed me the documentation they used in programme planning and the assessment of children.

A further participant observation at the kindergarten planning session enabled me to introduce myself to the teachers and to explain the purpose of the study. It also gave

the teachers an opportunity to become acquainted with me and to explain various aspects of their kindergarten and programme planning methods.

As the kindergarten teachers were involved in the Early Childhood Support course, incorporating the use of *Te Whaariki*, I was invited to attend these seminars and participate fully. I attended two sessions and was given the opportunity to introduce myself and my research. I then proceeded to participate in the workshops with the kindergarten teams.

Interviews

A further procedure involved unstructured interviews of one of the childcare centre teachers, two of the support staff, and the three kindergarten teachers.

The interviews with the teachers, focussed mainly on their philosophy or beliefs about art, and about working with children in the art area as this was one of the principal questions the study was designed to address. I also wanted to find out if they had any personal interest in art. I asked how they worked with children in the art area and whether they had any particular ways of talking to children about their art work. Apart from these major areas, the interviews were unstructured, and the participants could talk about anything related to their early childhood philosophy and their role as a teacher, although I did try to keep the focus on art in early childhood as much as possible.

The initial idea was that unstructured interviews would be held with the kindergarten teachers at the beginning of the study and again after the teachers had finished the in-service course and had had time to implement changes. I revised this approach after an interview was unproductive because the teacher had a very quiet voice and the taped

recording was unable to be heard. As discussed previously, this appeared to indicate that the person was uncomfortable and did not wish to be recorded.

I further found that the teachers would often come up to me in the middle of an observation and communicate an interesting piece of information. Therefore, I decided to ask questions of people informally when doing the participant observations. In this way I could focus on aspects that had emerged from the observation data.

RESEARCHER POSITION AND DILEMMAS

At times during the study I encountered problems with where I positioned myself and where the participants positioned me. Initially I did not anticipate this, but soon realised that my lecturing position at the Christchurch College of Education placed me in a position of knowledge that appeared to impact on the observations.

I found the participant observation method particularly helpful as I felt part of the setting. However, problems arose as I found myself being regarded as an 'expert', likely due to my job at the Christchurch College of Education. I found that when I was interacting with the children in the art area, the teachers tended to stay away from the area and let me work. This was useful at times as I had the chance to talk with the children about what art meant to them. On occasions I deliberately positioned myself out of the area and simply observed from a distance to ascertain what the teachers did in the situation.

The first participant observation was in the childcare centre. The original objective was to include myself in the art area of the centre and to participate fully with the children. After talking with the Assistant Supervisor, I realised that my presence in the area would actually alter things dramatically. The area was small and the teachers would probably not come into the area if I was interacting with children. This would have

defeated the purpose of the observation as I specifically wanted to get the teacher/child interactions. I decided to put some distance between me and the children initially and positioned myself where I had an uninterrupted view of the art area, but could still talk to the staff, parents and children. This worked very well, except that I was not much of a participant.

The second participant observation was also at the childcare centre and took place after the children had left for the night. This involved a planning session with the three staff members I had previously observed. I was aware that I may be intruding by attending a planning session at this centre. However, everyone appeared very comfortable and they readily discussed the way they planned for the centre programme.

Further participant observations took place in the kindergarten. My first contact with the kindergarten was on their planning day. Initially, I felt a little apprehensive because I did not know most of the teachers and was uncertain about their reaction to my study. I did not want them to feel obliged to participate. I gave the staff a brief outline of my research and what it would involve and showed them my research proposal. I gave them some readings on curriculum art and offered more as they became available. They all agreed to being interviewed. One of the teachers appeared hesitant, saying very little. However, she signed the consent forms.

I remained at the kindergarten for the entire morning for the first participant observation during session time. In retrospect this was probably too long. There were a large number of people at the kindergarten and it was difficult, when writing up, to remember all that had occurred. Therefore, the following participant observations at the kindergarten were reduced to approximately one hour at a time.

I carried out the preliminary data analysis, before returning to the kindergarten, and found that my approach to the observations appeared to lack emphasis on children.

With the next observation I focused more clearly upon what the children were doing. I also remained at the kindergarten for an hour only. This worked well. The observation was more focussed and I felt that I was able to clearly observe the children and the teachers.

At this stage I was feeling somewhat frustrated with the study and with data collection. I was not getting the 'break-through' in the art area I expected based on the readings I had been doing. I had not seen evidence of the DBAE theory at work. On reflection, I realised I had been approaching this research in the guise of a reformist. I had seen the light. I expected the participants to see early childhood art as I do. However, I had read a great deal about different theories of art, and had taught them several times in my curriculum art classes at college. Further, knowing that the kindergarten was doing a *Te Whaariki* course, focussing on art, and that the staff had read the same material about DBAE as I had, I expected them to adopt all those ideas and apply them with gusto to the kindergarten environment. In summary, I had preconceived notions about what I expected to observe.

The next two observations at the kindergarten were particularly useful as I focused more on the questions I wished to address. For example, I noted the role of the Head Teacher throughout the morning and the interactions between the adults and the children.

During the participant observations that took place within the context of the course focussing on *Te Whaariki*, I discovered that once again I was positioned as expert. I joined in with all the exercises that the others did and expressed an opinion occasionally. On several occasions, I decided not to express an opinion as I did not want to influence the opinions that were being expressed by others. I did this because I did not want to upset the balance of interactions that were occurring. Although I was

there as a researcher, and I did not want to be perceived as an 'expert', the teachers were aware that I worked for the College of Education.

I also realised I was evaluating everything, rather than interpreting the information. This is likely due to the requirements of my employment, where I assess and evaluate student teachers' practical work in the light of what they had been taught about the underlying theory of early childhood development. Unconsciously I was evaluating and assessing the teachers' every move using my knowledge of early childhood. However, I endeavoured to put my prejudices aside, along with my role as tutor of student teachers, and examined the data from a position of non evaluation while attempting to understand and interpret the action.

DATA ANALYSIS

I had two research questions to address, and attempted to divide the data gathered from the participant observations and interviews, into themes with which to address these questions.

Initially I began coding the data, by categorising, in an effort to expose effective themes. The categories were sorted and resorted, and it appeared that some may be worth pursuing. I based my initial coding on Bogdan and Biklen's (1992) coding system. A range of words and phrases began to emerge. These included *the role of the teacher, the way children learned, environment, philosophy, teamwork, promoting skill, conversation, creativity and a range of policy expectations including, programme planning, evaluation and assessment, and reflection.*

At first I tried to put some of the categories into diagrammatic form, without much success. Therefore, I attempted to cut up observations and interview notes and arrange them manually.

I decided to sort everything into sections—*the role of the teacher, the way children learned, and the importance of team work*. As I read, I found that the data was not as clearly delineated as I initially thought. Some data certainly went where I had originally thought, but on closer inspection, they could just as easily fitted either of the other two sections. Perhaps I did not have three tentative themes, but only one theme.

My incipient idea was that this one category or theme concerned the role of the teacher. A vision of a diagram, consisting of the teacher's role as crucial to the type and quality of art curriculum in early childhood, developed. Sub-categories included, *children's learning, promoting skill in children in the art area, conversation with children about art, teamwork, professional development, programme planning, evaluation, assessment, reflection, teacher's needs, training, teachers as provider of materials and environment*.

I drew a diagram based on these thoughts and focused on the data, giving examples in note form from the cut up material. Everything in the diagram was based on the words of the participants, with a couple of exceptions (reflection and training), where the word came from me.

At this stage it appeared that the children were being left out of the equation. I felt I had tended to lose sight of the children in this study and I now needed to make an effort to include them—their desires and needs, pleasures and disappointments. Therefore, I returned to my original research questions, in particular, what are children saying and doing when engaged in the art process? I returned to the field concentrating more fully on the children, which gave me more data that needed to be coded and categorised. After discussion with my supervisors I reorganised the data into three main areas.

The first theme was *planning for art experiences*. I was hoping to discover if the planning process and the way the area was set up would reveal teachers' beliefs about art theory or practice. I was also interested in the response of the children. The second theme became *verbal and non-verbal expression of art*. I expected this section to include teachers stated theories and beliefs about art education. It would also include an examination of what children and teachers were doing when engaged in artistic expression. The third theme was that of the response of teachers and children to the final *product*, the work of art. This section was to examine the values placed on the children's art work by teachers, parents and the children themselves. What follows is my interpretation of the three previously stated themes in the form of the findings of the study.

Chapter 3:

PLANNING FOR ART EXPERIENCES

This chapter examines the views that teachers held about providing appropriately for children in art education. There is also discussion about the planning that occurred in order to prepare an art programme for children in early childhood centres.

IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENT

Discipline Based Art Education theory stated, as one of its principles, that an aesthetically pleasing environment was particularly important for the development of children's appreciation of art. It also placed emphasis on the need for children to develop an awareness of beauty around them. Teachers in the study appeared to find it important to provide a pleasing environment for children to work in. They were clear that children's art materials needed to be presented in an attractive manner and kept tidy in order to be visually appealing. One of the teachers had this to say, about art materials,

I think they should be presented in a way that's attractive and that children will want to interact with them, or return to them, or that there's space to put things that they have not quite finished, then come back and either finish them or change them, differently. (Sally)

Providing a visually stimulating environment for children at the centre, was an important consideration. Providing a pleasant environment, based on the children's interests and knowledge, also appeared to be a priority for teachers.

We made the environment visually appealing. Nice. We put flowers around and made sure the fish tank was clean. We set up the nature table

with a beach scene and the kids loved it. They had been to the beach.

(Sally)

The teachers in this study believed that the environment needed to be, not only attractive, but that the work space must also be practical giving children a useful area in which to work and create.

There needs to be enough space, without crowding and difficulty in working. In an area, like, whether you are working on your own, or in a group, there still needs to be a little bit of space, so they've got that freedom to move and access things. (Sally)

It appeared that the children's needs were implicit in everything the teachers did and this included ensuring that the physical environment was conducive to their work. The environment included the materials provided by the teachers for the children to use, and the activities that occurred in the art area.

MATERIALS AND ACTIVITIES

Developmental art theory strongly suggested that teachers should provide a variety of materials and experiences for the children and then leave them to create. In the kindergarten and the childcare centre there was certainly a variety of objects provided. These ranged from basic art materials (paint, crayons, brushes), to more complex art activities (screen printing, crayon activity with a hot iron). A brief description of the childcare centre gives some indication of the variety of materials and experiences available on just one day.

At the art table there was a screen printing activity set up. A teacher sat at the table and was surrounded by six children. On the table there was a

large screen, some scissors, shallow containers of paint with rollers in them, and thick pieces of paper. Some of the children were cutting out designs they had drawn on the paper. One was using the printing screen with the help of the teacher.

One side of the art area had low shelves easily accessible to the children. On the shelves were several containers filled with interesting resources. I noted bottle tops and various types of shiny paper. There was a container with greeting cards and one with small plastic film canisters. A variety of natural materials such as shells, dried flowers and leaves were also available.

As well as the containers with collage materials, there was a variety of paper in different sizes, colours and textures so the children could choose what they wanted. Glues (paste and PVA) scissors, staplers and Sellotape were also freely available for the children to use. A stack of magazines was on one of the shelves and a box of knitting wool stood beside them.
(Childcare centre)

The kindergarten was also well equipped with a large range of options for eternally busy and creative children. The following description was of the range of materials and activities in the art area on a typical day.

I noted that the two easels were set up with six pots of paint and brushes on the table between them. There were four sides available for the children to paint a picture on. Above the easels, there were lines for hanging the children's paintings up and there were about five paintings drying on the lines.

On the other side of the kitchen, there were four tables pushed together, that were surrounded by collage equipment. There were child height shelves with many containers holding interesting resources for the children to choose from to make their collage. These included pieces of lace and shiny paper, bottle tops, straws and a variety of natural materials. On the collage table there were glue pottles, pallet paints and water with brushes, a hole punch, scissors, staplers, cellophane and Sellotape.

Another table was set up with paper and crayons in front of a mirror. I think the intention was that the children could use the mirror and draw their own faces. A child had left a drawing there consisting of a circle with two blue eyes and brown hair which extended right around the circle.

I noted a rack on which the children put their finished products so they could find them to take home. There was also a small round piece of furniture with shelves which held various tools such as felt pens, crayons, scissors, and staplers.

On a separate table, between the kitchen and the easels, there was an activity set up. There was an adult present and four children. Square pieces of wax paper, crayons and potato peelers were provided. The children were required to scrape the crayons with the peelers and let the curls drop onto the wax paper. They could then choose a leaf, either from a bowl provided or get their own from outside the kindergarten. This leaf went onto the paper which was folded over and taken by the child to the kitchen where a teacher or parent-help ironed it closed with a hot iron.
(Kindergarten)

It was interesting to note that in both centres an adult was at the activity which needed constant supervision. There were many children moving in and out of the area throughout the sessions. They were making things, socialising, or just looking for something to put in a handbag or carry bag for dramatic play scenarios. The teachers did not appear to interact often, if at all, with the children, except for those at the more prescribed activities.

Providing the right sort of tools and materials appeared to be an important consideration for the teachers. A tool that does not do the job it was intended to do, can lead to disappointment, and possibly, failure for the child. Sally was clear about the importance of providing children with tools that work.

We had scissors that were okay, but they weren't really sharp, which was very frustrating, and we've just got these huge scissors that are incredibly sharp which is sort of a bit scary but we're finding them just so much more used. (Sally)

The intention here was for teachers to discover ways to avoid frustration for the children as they learned new skills and refined previous ones. In this case the way to encourage children to use scissors was to make sure they had access to some that worked.

From formal planning sessions and spontaneous happenings came ideas for activities. These ideas were based on what the teachers had observed during session time and were put forward with the children's enjoyment, and learning, in mind. The teachers appeared to take this part of their job very seriously and expressed great regard for the needs and interests of the children. This was put into practice within the notion of emergent curriculum.

We try and do things that are evolving. That notion of emergent, that things emerge from the children's interests and from the teachers' lives.

(Sally)

The teachers planned with the notion of the emergent curriculum in mind. I observed some art work in the childcare centre that was done by the children directly after a visit to the beach, which had been planned using the principles of *Te Whaariki* and related to their interests after their holidays.

The art work was displayed at child height around a nature table laid out with lots of items gathered from the beach including fish bones, seaweed, and shells. The work was quite stunning in quality and represented fish, jelly fish, shells and the entire party of children at the beach doing a variety of things. (Childcare centre)

It appeared that planning with the children's interests in mind, and relating art to enjoyable and familiar episodes in children's lives, had a positive effect on the resulting art work. Considering this, what then did the adult presence contribute?

ADULT PRESENCE AND INVOLVEMENT

The theory underlying the Reggio Emilia preschools stated, that the relationship between the child and the teacher was a partnership and that the interests and suggestions of the adult were also to be taken into account. Although the children's needs and interests appeared to be paramount in the philosophies stated by the teachers, the adult's interests were present as well. Kristina stressed the importance of the role of the teacher in providing natural materials for children to use, and said how important this was to her personally.

I have a very strong philosophy about natural materials, so for a long time I did a lot of artwork using natural materials, and when I started at this kindergarten, we did things to change how it was presented. We got things like cane baskets, and we put a lot more natural materials into the collage area. We encouraged the children to use the natural materials by making suggestions when they were working at collage. (Kristina)

All the teachers said that the children were encouraged to find what materials they needed themselves. However, the teachers' also believed their role was to remind children what was available or to present them on a table top for easy access. Sally explained it in this way.

We have self choice, and there's all these containers, and there's changeover, and there's different things in them but sometimes certain children will not access them unless they are put in front of them on the tabletop, or presented in a way that takes on part of what they're interested in. So, I guess it's a balance again. Children need to be stimulated to initiate things and sometimes just providing things doesn't always do it, unfortunately. (Sally)

Teachers sometimes provided materials during the sessions as suggestions for children, to help them expand and enhance their work and ideas. This was not always accompanied with verbal interactions. The following was observed at the childcare centre.

Karen has just returned to the area and has brought a large bag of cellophane which she shows to Alex and Jane so they can choose a piece for their telescopes. (Childcare centre)

Teachers were usually available close by the art area to assist children with materials or activities if asked. They were not often to be found in the art area except when replenishing paint pots, wiping up spills and generally keeping the area tidy.

In this study the teachers appeared to be interested in ascertaining children's current interests by observing them at play. Their interests were then used to plan the centre programme. How this happened is described in the next section.

CHILDREN'S CURRENT INTERESTS

DBAE theory advocated a large amount of formal planning in the process of providing for children. This planning needed to have some flexibility. Teachers must be skilled in observing children, to discover their interests, and allow spontaneous and formal planning to take place. The teachers, who took part in the study, appeared to be aware of including children's individual needs and interests throughout their planning process. In both centres, the actual planning process involved the team discussing the strengths, needs and interests of the children, brainstorming appropriate activities and writing them down. Further, both teams told me that they used an emergent curriculum process. A clear example of the planning process is demonstrated by the childcare team.

Sally - 'Let's brainstorm ideas. What are the kids' interests at the moment?'

Karen - 'We've done lots of summer. Beach, sunglasses, sunhats. They're still really into it. And masks and scary monsters.'

Sally - 'Chasing games, chasing, scary games. The kids get carried away.'

Karen - 'Lots of sports things. Cricket. They knew lots of things. Wicket keepers. They'd been watching it on television. Watching

the cricket. We could reinforce this. Do lots of outdoor things before the long winter. And they're enjoying dressing up and face painting.'

Sally - 'We'll have to write one of these for the beach thing.' (She is referring to the planning sheet). Karen offers to do this.

Karen - 'What have we done?'

Sally - 'Impromptu camping and the beach ball. Why not have an excursion before I leave, to the beach? Fish and chips on the beach. Karen do you want to organise the beach thing?'

Karen - 'Okay.'

Sally - Let's plan the songs and stories.

They all brainstorm for a while and come up with some songs and books with a nautical theme. Karen writes all this down onto her planning sheet.

(Childcare centre)

As noted previously, it appeared that as the excursion was planned with the children's interests and strengths at the forefront, and the children had an experience meaningful to them, this had an impact on the quality of the work produced.

As well as programme planning, both teams spent some of their planning time discussing the children's individual needs and what each child was interested in. The teachers said that they attempted to provide for each child in the centre.

They began to discuss the children individually. Each teacher was involved in the discussion and they had all done observations on particular children. Each staff member had a list of names and these were the children they were responsible for observing. Observations ranged from formal time samples and running records, to anecdotal accounts of the children's doings. (Childcare centre)

The children's individual and group interests were the main focus for the teachers' planning and the following section explains how much time and effort was put into the planning process.

PRIOR PLANNING

There appeared to be a vast amount of time and team work invested in the planning meetings. The kindergarten teachers set aside some time on the day they worked without children in the kindergarten. The childcare teachers, on the other hand, worked out of business hours, after the session was over. They met, for planning purposes, once every two weeks. I asked the childcare teachers whether they got paid for the two hours they spent planning. They said no, that they were paid for only one hour. In response to my comment that they had worked really hard, one of them replied,

Yes, we don't muck around, and it is still not really long enough. (Sally)

The teachers appeared to do a lot of things, for their work, in their own time. This was also happening with the kindergarten teachers. For example, consider the following exchange on a Saturday when, after attending the three hour Early Childhood Support course, the teachers still gave up more of their own time.

I asked Nancy how things were going at the kindergarten. She replied that they were very busy with one thing and another, and talked about the government decision to expel kindergarten teachers from the state sector. Laughingly she said, 'What with triathons and the demands of life I don't really know what I'm doing.' 'Triathons?' I inquired. 'Oh we've got a triathlon to go, to at the kindergarten, after this. It's a fund-raiser.' (Early Childhood Support)

This seemed typical of kindergarten teachers' lives. They are expected to help in fundraising for their kindergarten outside of work hours. The Early Childhood Support course was part of their professional development, and with the two events it meant a whole day out of their weekend which did not appear to be acknowledged in any way.

Teachers supported the learning of new skills at whatever level the children might be. To that end they made alterations in planning and organising the activities. The teachers in the kindergarten found mat time to be a good opportunity for teaching skills such as, how to use unfamiliar tools and materials.

We realised a lot of the young children were not understanding some of the more complex art processes. So we changed our mat time to the beginning of the session, and at times we use this for going through an art process with the whole group, and we noticed that it made a huge improvement to the use of some materials because the young ones had it explained and demonstrated. (Kristina)

The teachers reported that group work appeared to be an effective way to dispense information to children who were at different levels development.

The use of *Te Whaariki* was an important consideration when the teachers were planning.

Te Whaariki stated that,

Planning the curriculum whaariki [mat] should be a continuing process, involving careful observation, identification of needs and capabilities,

provision of resources, assessment, and evaluation (Ministry of Education, 1986, p28).

In both centres, planning for children, and the programme, appeared to reflect the approach upheld by *Te Whaariki*. This was illustrated by the programme planning session at the childcare centre.

Sally took a book out of the filing cabinet, sat down and spread an A3 sheet of paper across the table. She then gave me an explanation. 'This is our *Te Whaariki* planning sheet. This is what we use to plan our programme when we have planning meetings which are held about every two weeks after the centre closes for the night. Because we have just returned from a holiday break we decided to focus on resettling the children back into the centre. This was seen as important for the children's needs and we wanted to use and update our professional knowledge.' (Childcare centre)

The planning sheet had a circle in the middle with 'rationale' written there. Around the circle there were various other inscriptions including activities, routines and headings, which were based on the principles, strands and goals of *Te Whaariki*.

Karen showed me the rationale for the topic they were doing. She said, 'This is how we define our practice and in this case we felt the children's need to settle back into the centre after a holiday break was important.' (Childcare centre)

This type of planning was also demonstrated by the kindergarten teachers, who used a very similar type of planning sheet, also based on the principles of *Te Whaariki*.

SUMMARY

The teachers' commitment to providing a stimulating environment and an abundance of materials in order to encourage children into the art area, was apparent in the way the centres were set up and in the unmistakable enthusiasm with which they discussed the importance of providing an advantageous environment for children to work in. Children's individual needs and interests were considered during the planning process. Teachers appeared to be aware of the importance of including the principles of *Te Whaariki* in their planning process and attempted to employ the emergent curriculum approach.

What then happened, in the centres studied, in the context of artistic expression? The way teachers described art, and worked with the children, are the subjects of the following section.

Chapter 4:

VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL EXPRESSIONS OF ART

This chapter examines teachers engaged in artistic expression—teachers ‘talking about’ art and teachers ‘doing’ art. The teachers told of their views and ambivalences. They discussed, and were observed, talking with and listening to children, and finally, actually participating in artistic expression with the children.

TEACHERS’ VIEWS ON ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

Teachers revealed their implicit and explicit understandings of the purposes of art, as they discussed and described the following aspects of the ‘art process’.

For Kristina, creativity was the key. For her, artistic expression was demonstrated in creative terms, expressed within the art area, and intermingled with other parts of the child’s world.

I think art runs alongside a lot of other activities in a child’s life, and I think it falls into the broad group of being able to creatively express yourself. And so I see that children do art throughout the whole kindergarten. I see when they’re arranging leaves on the path, or when they’re making things in the sandpit, or when they’re constructing carpentry work, or putting collage on it, when they’re dressing up and painting their faces and when they’re creating patterns with playdough, all of that is art. (Kristina)

Kristina saw artistic expression everywhere, and in everything the children did. The process and development of creativity appeared to be very important to this teacher, who saw this ‘unfolding’ as fundamental to the human condition.

And I see that it is a very important part of a child's world because you so often see them making patterns and creating things all the time. In fact they spend their entire time really, in a creative mode. Social play is also very important but you'll see that they bring creativity into their social play as well. They order the environment, they decorate it, so I think it's such an intrinsic part of human beings. (Kristina)

This linked to the belief of the importance of giving children the opportunity to display their feelings and to gain self confidence with art, as was clearly expressed by the following statements. Here Sally interpreted art as an expression of feelings.

Incredibly, it's not only the ability to be able to express yourself through different forms, whether they be manipulating with dough or combining materials to produce something, or cutting something up. I think it's really important to be able to have those experiences for a range of feelings that might just be an expression. It might be to produce something, it might be for self esteem or confidence or just the pure enjoyment or excitement of doing or making something. I think it's really important because it's a way of expressing their individuality and just experimenting on who they are and what they can do and things they can achieve. It's essential really that it's encouraged. (Sally)

Kristina agreed,

If we can give children a confidence to express themselves then perhaps this is a very important thing for us as people, for them as people.
(Kristina)

Art was also perceived as a form of communication, where children were able to illustrate what they know about the world they live in. In this case the role of the teacher was a facilitative one, whereby children were encouraged to extend their knowledge of the world.

I'm constantly fascinated by the way they depict the world around them and see that creative expression is really a way of communicating. It's a vehicle for communication and I really believe in as little as possible structuring and lots of experience, and allowing the children to create without adult ideas coming in over them and I think that adults have a role in facilitating that.
(Kristina)

She views the adult role as 'allowing' children to create by not interfering. A further perception of the purpose of art for children, was that they were able to experiment and learn through doing and, more significantly, that they had the freedom to choose.

At college, during art, we could do anything we wanted, and those values, I guess, came through in what I do with children. It's quite good not having set ways of, this is how you should do it, this is what you do, and this is what's available. Just having the freedom to choose and explore, it's the process of doing it really. That's important, and enjoyable and you learn. (Sally)

Sometimes the freedom to choose resulted in children choosing to stay as far away from the art area, and artistic expression, as possible, and therefore not gaining experience in this area at all. This may be exacerbated by teachers ambivalence about art and lack of knowledge about when and where to intervene.

The teachers views of the purpose of art include, expression of feelings, means of communication, chances to choose and therefore and increased confidence in ability. An examination of teachers' ambivalences indicated where teachers felt unsure about their role in guiding children in artistic expression.

TEACHERS' AMBIVALENCE

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, many current teachers trained at a time when colleges of education were supporting a developmental theory of art education, which assumes that a child should be left to discover for themselves, rather than the creative process be interfered with by teaching.

Caroline offered a criticism of this long held view of early childhood art practice.

I mean, we don't promote skill. We don't promote technique with little children. We don't. Why is it that in other areas we promote those things but for some reason in art I haven't seen a lot? I find it quite depressing. I think that art has not been a strength in my living time in College, and I think that, out there, it is quite obvious. I think we get quite a few students who can get out there and do some amazing things, and this whole sort of rubbish that adults shouldn't do any drawing or any constructing or any making, well, from my very limited understanding of social constructivism, I would suggest that if children construct in the social context, then one of the things they should be seeing is adults producing art and being creative.
(Caroline)

Caroline's opinion clearly expressed some of the principles of DBAE and indicated that attitudes towards art education in early childhood needed to change if a DBAE

approach was to be adopted. She further suggested that teachers were rarely to be found engaging in artistic expression with children.

And something also that upsets me is I see very little of adults in the so called art area. It seems to be something that they are very happy to let children do, and they'll just come up at some stage and hang a painting up and remind a child to put something they've constructed into their locker or something like that. The thing that I find so fascinating, is, there is such a laissez-faire, hands off attitude to art and I don't think I ever really expected to see that. It's the whole sort of psycho-dynamic approach that it's going to come from within and that the adult shouldn't do anything.
(Caroline)

In corroboration of Caroline's observation, the recorded data also suggested that there were few periods when teachers were engaged in the art area for any length of time. Why were teachers rarely to be found in the art area doing anything more than hanging up a painting?

The teachers appeared to be somewhat ambivalent about their own abilities to accomplish art. This may have impacted on what they did, and what they said to children, and also may have led to a lack of interactions between children and teachers.

We have some children who seem to have been in the scribbling stage for a long time and I, as an adult, am still unsure of what point I start to expect that they may use some of these materials in a different way....I mean, how much can I take them into collages, or how can they begin to glue and stick different materials? At what point does it become inappropriate to interfere if it's happening over time? (Kristina)

Teachers indicated, that they did not believe they had the confidence or knowledge to work more actively with a child.

Lately I've been reading a wee bit about different philosophies and how they work with drawing and the idea of extending children's artwork by pointing out things they could have added to it or getting them to really look at things. But I'm not very confident in that technique yet myself and I feel, as an adult, I need to explore it a bit more to do it appropriately.
(Sally)

This lack of confidence appeared to be an obstacle to teachers expressing themselves with children doing art. A further example occurred at one of the seminars conducted by Early Childhood Support. Attending a course involving *Te Whaariki* gave the teachers in the kindergarten the opportunity to focus on art and the art area in order to improve what was happening there. The original problem was described by Nancy, at the first seminar.

We are a diversified kindergarten and we have quite young children in both sessions. We feel that we needed to know more about who is using the area, what they are actually doing in the area, and what the children need. We are aware that with the mixture of ages there are different skills that need fostering. The method we're using to gather the data is that of time sampling. (Nancy)

The teachers, from the other kindergartens on the course, had spoken about their area of focus previously. Their subjects for focus included dramatic play, carpentry and block areas, gender equity, afternoon mat times, the transitioning of children from their parents into settled play and managing morning and afternoon tea times. I noted that with all of the other problems someone provided an explanation of what they did at their kindergarten or advanced an idea to try. Interestingly, when Nancy expressed the

problem with the art area, no one had anything to say. There were no ideas or solutions advanced. Perhaps this was because other teachers were also unsure about this area, and did not feel knowledgeable enough, about art education, to comment.

This uncertainty about having sufficient knowledge was demonstrated in the study in ways that were not conducive to art education. Teachers were not often observed in the art area, were not prepared to critique the children's work and were not observed talking with children about their art

A possible reason for this may be that many adults believe they can't draw and therefore would not know how to make suggestions or critique children's work constructively. Therefore, they leave children to get on with it. The following section deals with how the teachers engaged in dialogue with children in the art area.

TALKING WITH CHILDREN

The teachers' perceptions about the importance of conversation in the art area were mixed. However they all had a view about the part conversation plays in the relationship between the adult and child. When asked to give an example of what they might say to children when discussing art, they all had various approaches. Some believed that the hands-off approach worked best.

I guess I try not to interfere too much unless they ask something or say something, or if I can see that they are kind of pondering something or looking at it. Sometimes I say, 'Can you tell me about your picture?' or, 'Is there anything else you need?' Sometimes I pick something out and say, 'That colour looks really good,' if I like it. Or, things I guess you can say is, 'That bird looks like it is really flying,' or.... Well I have been

known to say, 'Well, that's a great picture' and keep walking especially when they say, 'Look at this,' and I'm in a rush. (Sally)

Nancy was more specific about what she said to children when discussing their art works. She did not appear to adhere to the hands off approach.

Sometimes you can just go and sit with them and they'll start up the conversation. Other times I might say something, particularly with a painting. I'll talk about what kind of colours they're using sometimes, what kinds of patterns, I'll talk if they're doing dots. They do rainbows a lot so I talk about the colours in the rainbow and point out we have a prism there that makes rainbows so they can look at that. Sometimes I talk about how rainbows are really made. Sometimes I talk about how they're using their page, they might be using all the page or whether they're just using part of the page. Are you mixing colours? Which colours are they mixing together? (Nancy)

Nancy continued by explaining that she was aware of recent articles that discussed the traditional methods of talking about children's art work (Schirmacher 1986). She was not totally in agreement with the sentiments expressed in these.

I do know that a lot of articles say that you should never say it's a lovely, beautiful painting but I don't actually agree with that because art is a personal thing and as long as you're not saying 'Oh that's beautiful,' to everybody's without even looking at it. I mean, make sure you show them that you're really looking at it first. That it's not one glance, 'Oh that's beautiful,' hang it up. And sometimes I qualify it by saying I like the colours, or I like the pattern, or I like the picture of the people, you know? (Nancy)

Kristina also had some interesting views regarding what was appropriate when talking to children about their art. It was clear that it depended on the child, and the situation, and she assessed these things before committing herself. She believes that sometimes silence was the best remark of all.

One of the things I've stopped doing is actually saying very much at all now, because I think it's probably better to say nothing than to say something that gets in the way of the process, but also just the acceptance of that child's work by saying nothing can actually be more helpful to the child. But I delight in a child's process so I'm more likely now, when they're in the middle of doing it, to say, 'Gee that looks like fun' or 'You look like you're having a really good time'. I think when children are scribbling and marking I'm probably less likely to comment. (Kristina)

It appeared that she was more likely to comment on what the children were doing (the process), rather than what they had done (the product), and that it was easier to comment on representational art rather than experimental. However, she had some methods that were unusual and, she believed, effective.

And sometimes I sing the painting. If they've made a line, just making the tune with my hand, following the line going up and down and I find they really enjoy that too, so I'm not, it's not a comment, it's just like la, la, la, and using intonation so that they, they enjoy that as well. And sometimes if I see that they're obviously trying to represent something, I may say to them 'Tell me about this,' you know, I don't just go up to them out of the blue and say this, but I might be there doing something or they might ask me to write their name on it or something - 'Tell me about this painting' and use intonation of voice to show interest, because I'm very conscious at the

same time of not putting them under pressure to say something for the sake of saying something and answering an adult. (Kristina)

Kristina seemed clearer about what she thought was inappropriate, than what she considered acceptable.

I think that we, as adults, find it easier to question children rather than working alongside them so I hear inappropriate questions like ‘What is this?’ and sometimes I’ve slipped up in this and the children’s responses have told me that this is not what they want me to do with their artwork, that they don’t want to be questioned about it. They might say ‘Oh, it’s nothing’. You know? Then I realise that was a stupid thing to say. (Kristina)

Kristina thought it was better to say nothing at all, rather than saying the wrong thing and perhaps spoiling the child's joy in their creation. The tendency toward silence in early childhood settings may be further indication of teachers’ ambivalence toward areas where they are unsure of what they are to do, or say.

The teachers in the study appeared to have their own methods for talking with children about art and were able to articulate their beliefs. The participant observations revealed few examples of teachers actually talking with children about their art. Teachers were more likely to be involved with the process and to be discussing this. The following paragraphs demonstrate examples of the teachers and children engaged in dialogue in the art area. Sally is observed discussing the process of a screen printing activity with Mark, a four year old child.

She initially asks him, ‘Would you like to come and do one of those screen prints?’ She then shows him how to do it, explaining every step clearly

and patiently. Mark watches intently saying nothing. After he has had a turn rolling the paint over the screen, she and Mark lift the screen together. She says, 'Wow, what do you think?'

This type of comment appeared to give the child some autonomy over the criticism process. It gave the child a chance to comment about their own work if they chose to do so. It was an open ended question which suggested that the teacher was actually interested in the child's point of view. In this case however, Mark chose not to answer her and she did not attempt further conversation.

I noted during one of the participant observations that Nancy talked about the colours represented in a child's painting.

A child brings a painting to Nancy to hang up. 'You've got pink. Did you mix the pink with the red? You've got a reddy-pink colour.' The child nods but does not reply verbally. (Kindergarten)

In the Reggio Emilia preschools, the children had a very active role in all they do in the area of art education. They were researchers, observers, linguists, planners and artists (Katz, 1994). In the art areas of this study, the children were sometimes very silent, as they concentrated on their work. Occasionally they talked spasmodically.

Children responded to an adult's interest in their work and actively sought out comments from adults at times, possibly for validation of their work (Tarr, 1995). The following conversation, which occurred in the kindergarten, begins poorly. However, it did improve as it continued. The talk was primarily about the content of the drawing and involved the child.

Jack brings me the picture he has painstakingly been working on. I look at it and comment on the thick black lines he has drawn down the sides. He says nothing, just nods and I make a blunder. I say, 'Is it a person?' He says, 'It's a tiger'. I save face as quickly as possible by saying, 'Of course it is. I can see the really sharp claws you've drawn there.' He nods smiling. 'And I see all the fur. You've done that by making sharp lines haven't you? Zig zags'....He smiles again and then says, 'And eyes'. 'Yes,' I say. 'Big eyes,' he repeats. 'Yes they are big tiger eyes and a big tiger nose. Is this a roaring tiger or a quiet one?' He looks at me and then says, with a look of surprise on his face, 'I forgot to draw the mouth.' Oh you did too,' I say. He takes it off me and returns to the collage table, presumably to add the mouth. (Kindergarten)

This is an example of the child self-correcting. The conversation gave him the clue, and he immediately went to add something further to his picture. The conversation the teacher engaged in with this child eventually extended the art process.

Teachers stated they used various techniques when discussing art with children. Some spoke about asking children to tell them about the picture, some picked things, like colours, out of the children's work and talked about that, sometimes they might say, 'That' a great picture', and move on, and some felt silence was the best approach. The observations showed that the teachers did not often engage in serious conversations with children about their art work. Sustaining conversation and engaging in meaningful dialogue with children meant listening carefully to what they were saying and responding to the cues they gave.

LISTENING TO CHILDREN

Caroline in her role as an Early Childhood Support person, attended many childcare centres and remained there for some time. She believed that there had been recent changes, where early childhood staff were more likely to listen to the children than previously and therefore based their practice and programming on the children's interests.

They're finally starting to listen to children, finally starting to take the sorts of things that children say to them quite seriously and respectfully, and then trying to say, 'Well, what does that mean, what can I do for the child?'
(Caroline)

However, she felt that many early childhood educators still had work to do in sustaining conversations with children and in extending their learning.

People are getting out of the questioning technique and getting into conversations. One of the things that some adults working with children haven't worked out is that conversation isn't about me asking you a question and you answering it, then me going 'Oh' and then the next question. I think that's where many people are at that I've experienced. Or they might say to the child 'Oh I find that really interesting, shall we go and see if we can find some books on it or would you like to draw that or shall I help you make that or whatever' so that then they take it one step further. They have begun to listen to what the child is saying, and to build on that. (Caroline)

Caroline had suggestions for teachers who wanted to explore their style of conversation with children further.

They take a tape recorder and they listen to themselves. They can then say, 'This is where I dropped the ball'. There's a Playcentre article I always use for first year students. Well, conversation is like a game of tennis. Children serve, the adult hits back and it's usually always the adult that drops the ball. And this is what's happening, and I like the analogy. It makes it funny, you say 'Oh look, that went right out of court. Kid didn't even know what you were talking about.' And I mean, I do that sometimes. Talking with children is very tricky. Sometimes I think that I'm being extremely patronising. (Caroline)

Talking with children can be tricky, and even more difficult is attempting to talk with them about their art work. To carry out a conversation based on art elements teachers need to be familiar with art history, art criticism and the terminology that applies to this discipline. It is not surprising that there were not many examples of teachers and children engaged in this type of dialogue as the teachers probably did not have the terminology to do so. The following section addresses what the teachers' role actually was, including what they did for children engaged in artistic expression.

TEACHERS' ROLES IN ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

What do teachers do when they are interacting with a child in the art area? I observed Nancy working closely with Michael in the collage area. I recorded her language and found that she was very involved in working through the process with him.

She sat down beside him and watched him cut a piece of string. I am not sure what he is doing, or making, and I heard her say, 'Can you cut a longer piece of string Michael?' She handed him another pair of scissors and said, 'Try this pair of scissors, they might be better, that's it, much

better. That's much longer.' Nancy then holds his work while he threads the string through. 'Is this too long or is it okay?' she says. Michael says something about eyes and Nancy says, 'You need eyes in it? Okay. What are you going to do, to make eyes?' (Kindergarten)

She guided him through the process, but I wondered how much of the ownership of the process remained with the child. Compare this with another incident, with a student teacher, who was involved with a child in the art area.

I turn my attention to Eve and find that she is sitting with the children doing the crayon and leaf, art activity. She said, 'Would you like to put some leaves in it Amy? You can if you want to.' The child shakes her head. 'No? Okay let's get it ironed.' She helps Amy carry it over to the iron where the relieving teacher irons it. Eve then says, 'Do you want it like that Amy? I'll write your name on it.' She does this. 'You want to open it? I don't know if it will open. Open it and see what happens.' She watches as the child pulls open the pieces of ironed paper. (Kindergarten)

The student teacher was involved in all the child was doing. Her language was clear and encouraging. She empowered the child by giving her choices at every stage. Even though the child wanted to do something that was not part of the activity (opening the sealed paper), Eve was prepared to let the child make a choice about the process. Therefore, Amy retained ownership of the entire process, not just the finished product. After the child opened the paper there was no more conversation.

The art area was a great place for children to learn how to solve problems, by themselves, or with the help of a teacher or peer. Children's learning strategies included using an *adult as a resource* (Cullen, 1988), asking for assistance, or

indicating, in a non verbal way, that they required attention. Here, the teachers role was that of an assistant to the child's expression of art.

I moved to the collage table where there was a child who was standing looking a bit lost. She was holding a long piece of soft card about eight inches wide. She said to me, 'Can you help me make a mask?' I was happy to help, so I sat down and asked her what she needed to make the mask. She said the piece of card and some Sellotape. I asked her if we would need anything else and she got a great big spool of string from one of the tables. She put the string on the collage table and then sat down next to me. (Kindergarten)

The teachers involved in this research believed that teaching children how to use the tools necessary for art, was an essential component of their work and was part of what counts as art. Sally sees the teaching of skills to young children as a technique that eventually enabled them to extend their own learning.

You can learn skills and change them or develop them or choose not to use them, but I don't think it hurts to learn skills or learn how to use tools because if children learn one way I'm sure they can think of another way they can use them anyway. I don't see it as limiting. I just see it as, it increases children's ability to use something else and produce something else and do something else. (Sally)

The teachers appeared to be in agreement about the importance of imparting skills to the children in the art area. They discussed teaching children how to use tools and the way they worked with the children.

You can be with the children and you can help them manage activities and give them ideas. I think it's a much more logical thing to do than to leave them to it, particularly in this area, where the children haven't had that experience at home, so they've hardly had a pair of scissors in their hand, or glue. So where else do they learn these skills from? So that is something that we have to work at. (Nancy)

Caroline talked about the importance of presenting art in a culturally meaningful way. This includes teaching skills to children rather than just letting them explore on their own.

I went to Bali one year, years ago and saw the children of artists. They've got all sorts of different artists over there painting, or carving, or whatever. Whatever the father was doing the children hung around and did it and they were quite definitely taught. Now the parent was handing over the knowledge and the skill in quite a directed sort of a way. We just let children have this quite long period of time where they play, they explore, they're given a long exploratory period. But you know what, in early childhood we don't ever tend to put the skids on the exploratory. Some children get out of it themselves. I mean, I think we explore all our lives, it's not a stage idea, but I think that at any one particular time you can be working on any number of levels, so I might be exploring with my clay but I pick up a pencil the next day and I could learn some skill about shading or something. (Caroline)

This belief had links with DBAE theory, which said that young children needed to be exposed to a range of experiences including learning techniques of art and observing adult artists at work.

Throughout the observations, I noted that teachers appeared to have little time for this type of interaction with children. They were constantly interrupted with house keeping problems in the kindergarten.

I looked back at the collage area to see what Nancy and Michael were doing. I could now see that Michael was making a mask. Nancy was saying, 'You do have to be careful when you push the holes through'. She picked up a piece of paper from the table and said, 'Someone's done a lot of stapling.' A parent comes up and starts talking to Nancy. Nancy listens and then gets up and follows the parent. As she leaves she says, 'Are you all right Michael? You need to finish, it's nearly tidy up time'.
(Kindergarten)

Because of the interruption, I was unable to observe whether Nancy would have continued working with Michael and discussed his mask with him. One of the main things I noted over the whole period of observations was, that throughout the entire time I was present, the teachers were frequently very busy with parent enquires. This left little time for quality interaction with the children. The time they each were able to spend with children was precious, though minimal. Often a teacher had no sooner settled herself with the children than she was interrupted with requests from parents and other staff, by the phone ringing frequently during the morning, with general supervision and keeping the place running smoothly. Therefore it was difficult to begin and sustain any interaction with the children. This meant that most interactions addressed what the child was doing rather than providing an in-depth chance to clarify meanings and confront beauty (Katz, 1994).

The teachers attempted to extend the children's learning and skill development through ideas learned in their course involving *Te Whaariki*. At one of the Early Childhood Support seminars, the teachers were asked to describe what they were going to do

about their specific focus following the analysis of their observational data. Nancy had this to say about their work in the collage area.

Our observations showed that the staff do not spend a lot of time in the area because of other duties. However, we also found that we had seriously underestimated the children's abilities with use of equipment in the art area. The children are actually using all the equipment very successfully.

We decided that we are going to be extending the children in the area of sewing and weaving. We talked it over as a team and decided to begin with practising simple skills such as threading. We decided to begin with the concepts of under and over, and in and out, and up and over. To do this we decided to concentrate on circle games like 'In and out the dusty bluebells'. We are hoping that by introducing all these concepts in a slow but steady way, the children will more easily be able to understand the sewing processes. The main problem we anticipate for the teachers, is the labour intensiveness of the sewing and weaving. We are enlisting parental aid in sitting with the activities and working with the children. (Nancy)

This idea appeared to have sprung from the interest of one of the staff members. The other teachers on the course proposed some inspirational ideas for working with weaving, including using a branch from a tree and inter-weaving some natural materials. Someone suggested a large wooden weaving frame that could be a communal effort and added to, or changed, at any time. Nancy and Raelene appeared interested in any ideas and noted them down.

During the final participant observations at the kindergarten I was hoping to see some of this work in action, but activities of this kind did not occur during the times I visited. Therefore, I telephoned Nancy and asked her what happened when they implemented

their weaving ideas and whether she thought doing the course made any difference to the way art was managed in the centre.

We did lots of sewing and pom poms. They were out every day. The next step was that they would be available all the time. But then we had lots of relievers and the weaving never got started. I've got the driftwood at home. And what with the end of the year, it was such a busy time. I can still use it this year. (Nancy)

She also said that doing the course was useful, as it gave them many ideas for making changes in other areas of the kindergarten. The teachers stated that they attempted to extend and discuss the process of art with children and this is what the observations demonstrated. They were also limited in the time they were able to spend with children in the art area as they were frequently thwarted by a myriad of housekeeping activities and parental need.

SUMMARY

The teachers in the study expressed views on the purpose of artistic expression in early childhood. It was clear that the teachers regarded the art process as an important contribution to the children's personal development. Creativity and self expression were cited as important. Some teachers saw art as a form of communication while others regarded it as a vehicle for experimentation and learning.

The teachers expressed ambivalences and uncertainties about their role in the children's artistic expression. They indicated that they did not believe they had the confidence or knowledge to work actively with children in the art area.

It was, therefore, not surprising that there were few examples of teachers talking with children about their art in this study. In fact, several of the teachers actually believed that saying little or nothing was the best approach.

The teachers were, on occasions, observed in the art area assisting and guiding the children in their artistic expression. The teachers were in agreement that the imparting of skills was an important part of their role. However, it was observed that the teachers had little time to spend with the children in the art area, as they were constantly interrupted by housekeeping matters. The teachers in the kindergarten were aware of this problem and specifically attempted to extend the children in the art area, through their course on *Te Whaariki*.

Chapter 5:

THE PRODUCT

The developmental and DBAE theories did not have much in common when it came to the art work produced by the children. Developmental theory had little to say about the product. It implied that the product needed to be valued. The way this was implemented, was to praise the child for the work and to present it attractively on centre walls. The art work was seen as a by-product of the process. The process remained the vital ingredient in art education for young children.

For DBAE the product was valued for what it was. It was perceived as important. It was the partial reason for the process, and could be demonstrated by the children being shown professional artists' works in art galleries, and in their own environment. The product was concerned in aesthetics, art criticism and art history. It was also important that children be encouraged to visually and verbally explore their own and each other's work.

The developmental and DBAE theories demonstrated totally opposing views except in the way the children's art work might be presented. DBAE theory is very clear about the way children's work needed to be displayed. It suggested that art galleries in the early childhood centres be at child height and presented attractively. Developmental approaches agreed with this.

VALUE

Teachers, parents and children all appeared to value the product and demonstrated this in a variety of ways. Although they did not say so directly, teachers in the study appeared to value the children's work. This was implied, in their awareness that

children's art work needed to be displayed in a respectful and attractive manner and they achieved this in a variety of ways.

We try to present the children's art in different ways. Sometimes we might frame the work with some coloured paper or cut round small drawings and place them together on a large sheet of paper with the children's names on them. Mostly, I guess, this is for the parents. We do try to put them at child height, if we can, but it depends on whether there is enough room around the walls. (Sally)

The walls and ceilings, of both the childcare centre and the kindergarten, were festooned with children's art. Pictures were framed and presented attractively. Some of the lighter models the children had made were caught up in large nets, that were strung across the ceiling in the kindergarten. Nancy was aware, that due to lack of space, often only certain types of art work were displayed.

That little cabinet over there, someone gave us that and I don't know if it's going to work, but we were wondering whether maybe we could display some more of the children's actual construction work or woodwork. We don't usually display that. (Nancy)

The teachers explained that some parents appeared to value their children's art work highly. Sally told me the following story.

I had become quite friendly with a parent, whose child I spent a lot of individual time with, because she had a special need, and I went, with another staff member, to her office to say hello after the child had gone to school. We were really happy to see some of Jennie's art work on her

wall, and her brother's work, and it had all been framed professionally. I'll never forget that. (Sally)

I asked her why it remained so strongly in her memory.

Oh, I don't know really. I think it's because it showed that her Mum definitely cared about her child's work and, in a way, that sort of meant to me that she also valued the things that we were doing at the centre. (Sally)

Tarr (1995) suggested that this valuing was reinforced for children, by parents asking whether they had made something to take home and this occurrence was frequently observed in the kindergarten setting. A reason for parents asking whether the children had done something during the day to take home, could be an attempt to make a connection with what had happened for the child during the day.

Children also appeared to value their work. I had noted previously, that children sometimes returned to their work, after leaving, to add more to it. Maria had written her name on the paper herself, did the painting, left it for a while, then returned to complete it.

At the easels, Maria is doing a bluey green painting in a block of colour. She stops and moves away for several minutes, and watches what some other children are doing on the mat. She then returns to the painting and adds a stripe of orange, in a vertical line from the bottom of the bluey green block of colour. She adds a small green line horizontal to the orange line. She then goes away again. (Kindergarten)

That children value their work was noted in the way they were observed using an article they had spent their time working on. This only occurred when the article did not need to be hung up to dry.

I turned back to Sarah and found that she had a solution to the eye-hole problem. She had cut right through the edge of the paper and had cut a bit out of the middle. She looked a bit concerned about it but I said that it could be fixed with Sellotape. She got the Sellotape and I held it while she cut it. She then placed it over the cuts. With her permission I cut a slightly bigger hole for the eyes. She said 'Tie the string'. So I did, checking for size around her head. She went off with the mask on and joined a group playing in the dramatic play area. I heard her say to another child, 'Look at my mask'. (Kindergarten)

I noted many children saying they were making a present for a member of their family or a friend. It seemed to be important to spend some time at the collage table, wrapping the gift in shiny paper or material, and using copious amounts of Sellotape. This appeared to be a way for children to demonstrate that they valued their product, and that they knew that someone else, the recipient of the present, would value it as they did.

Two girls are working with the Sellotape and one of the children is wrapping something she has made in material. 'This is for Daddy,' she says to the parent who appears to be her mother. The woman hands her some of the Sellotape without replying. 'I want some more' she says. The parent hands her the scissors and the child cuts more Sellotape off the roll.

Children are also generous and often spent a great deal of time on a work of art that was to be given away. Sometimes this was to a complete stranger, as occurred in the example below.

Jack comes back with the completed tiger. 'Look at those sharp teeth,' I say, 'That would be a good mouth to roar with.' Jack agrees, and I note that he had added whiskers as well, so I comment on them. He seems pleased that I noticed them. I ask him what he is going to do with it now and he says, 'It's for you'. (Kindergarten)

I felt this child trusted that I would not reject the present and believed I would value it as he did.

Teachers' said they valued the children's art works and that they tried to present them attractively in the centres. The observations showed that this was important to teachers as the art work was displayed with respect throughout the kindergarten and the childcare centre. The issue of ownership was intermixed with the value the teachers, children and parents placed on the product. This took place in the following ways.

OWNERSHIP

It was noted in the study that the majority of interactions between teachers and children in the art area consisted of naming the work and hanging it up. Tarr (1995) suggested that teachers who stated a preference for the process over the product in art education, often did not conform to their own beliefs. She used the example of the naming of the art work to confirm her argument. I noticed the following type of incident occurring frequently.

There is a boy at the easels, completing a painting of several different colours, in definite patches, covering almost all of the page. His name is written at the top left corner of the page. As I watch, he finishes and takes

the bulldog clips off the easel. He holds the picture in his hands and calls out. 'Carly will you hang up my painting?' She doesn't attend immediately and he dances around with it in his arms. Carly (a relieving teacher) then comes over and he gives it up to her to hang up. As far as I can see there is no dialogue between them. (Kindergarten)

This child had completed his art work. He had experimented with the materials, and had spent some time working with the colours and the shape of the picture. This boy appeared to know that a name was necessary, and called to a teacher for help in hanging up his work. The teacher did not talk to him about anything, nor did he appear to expect it or make overtures himself.

Almost all children appeared to use the teacher to put their name on their paintings and drawings, or did it themselves. The by-product of the children's ownership of the art work was the need to identify the object in order that the child can take it home.

Working at an easel a boy is doing a bluey/green painting. This painting is of a large blob of paint in the centre of the paper. As I watch, the child reaches up, standing on tiptoes, for the crayon that is usually kept on top of the easel so the teachers or children can write their names on the paper. He appears to be having trouble getting hold of it, so he goes around to the other side and reaches up again. I can see him feeling all along the ledge for the crayon. He gets hold of the crayon and looks up and catches Raelene's eye. 'Raelene,' he calls. 'I'm coming,' she says. She takes the crayon from him and writes his name at the top, close to the right hand side. Raelene walks away and the child immediately paints over the name, using the same green paint. The child does no more to the picture but catches Raelene's eye again and points to the line where all the paintings are hanging to dry. Raelene goes over and hangs it up for him. I notice her

look at the painted-over name as she does so. She does not comment.

(Kindergarten)

I had long been fascinated by this and had seen it occur again and again, especially with younger children. I always thought that children did not want their name on the picture, when adults put it on unasked, so they obliterated it. However, this child specifically asked for it to happen and then painted it out. Another child spent quite some time working on her highly representational painting. It is interesting to see what happened for her when she completed her work and subsequently what happened to her painting.

A girl at the easels is doing some of the spongy painting with the squeezey bottles. She uses the brown bottle and draws a person's shape with eyes, nose, mouth and hair. I think it is a picture of a female because it has what appears to be a dress on. There are no arms or legs. The child repeatedly picks up the bottom of the paper and folds it up as she draws. She does this three or four times. The last time she does this, she holds it up and looks around, apparently for the teacher. She looks as though she wants someone to hang it up for her. She continues to look around the kindergarten for approximately 30 seconds. She then walks away, leaving her work on the easel, when no one responds. (Kindergarten)

The lack of response by a teacher resulted in this child walking away from her work. This painting was unnamed and left to dry on the easel. Later I noticed a teacher held up the painting and said. 'Whose is this?' No-one replied and the picture was hung up, unnamed and unclaimed.

The children appeared to understand that if they wanted to keep their collage work, they needed to indicate this to the teachers and parents, by placing it in the correct place on completion.

The girl in the red top puts the lid on the shoe box and decorates it with paper, cellophane and milk bottle tops. When she finishes, she picks it up from the table and puts it on the rack. (Kindergarten)

Nancy later told me that if the children wanted to take anything home they knew to put their work on this particular rack, a wooden construction of four dowelling shelves, arranged at about the right height for most children to access at least two or three of the shelves. It appeared that if a child's product was not placed on this rack, it was likely to go into the rubbish at tidy up time. At the childcare centre, the children did not appear to have a place to put their work other than their lockers. Very often the work was left on the table and the teachers, as they were tidying the area, would ask the children if they wanted the work.

Sally tidies the collage and screen printing tables. She picks up Jeff's cut-out and says, 'Do you want to keep the cut-out Jeff?' Jeff says 'No,' and continues to paint at the easel. (Childcare centre)

In the kindergarten, children's dry paintings were folded with the name on the outside. They were put in a box, in alphabetical order according to the child's name, (assuming that there was one written on it) and the parents could search for it at their leisure. At the end of the session, at the kindergarten, there was frequently a child insisting that they had made something, and a parent, and occasionally the teachers, would be searching for the article. In the childcare centre the paintings were folded and placed in the children's lockers for parents to claim when they collected their children.

Issues of ownership and value were clearly stated by the teachers and they demonstrated their commitment to making sure the children were able to take their art home with them or have it displayed on the walls of the centres.

SUMMARY

The value placed on children's art work was demonstrated by the manner in which the teachers made an effort to display the work in the centres in an attractive way. Parents looked for the children's work to take home and helped the children to find missing articles. That the children valued their work was undeniable. They returned to their art work to complete it, gave it away as presents, indicated they wanted to take it home and used it in their play.

Ownership was demonstrated by the naming of art work by teachers and children. Children knew to name their own work, to get an adult to name it, or to put it in a certain place if they wanted to keep it.

The following chapter examines the links between theory and practice, in order to understand more about the process of art education in these early childhood centres.

Chapter 6:

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study hinged on the theoretical understandings of the early childhood educators and how they applied theory and practice. The theories described in the introduction and the beliefs articulated by teachers, are used in planning for children, and in doing art with children.

Developmental theory concentrated on what the experience meant to the children. This theory considered creativity, free expression of feelings, and experimentation, to be the main reasons for doing art in early childhood. The role of the teacher was important as provider of materials and facilitator of the process. It was not considered appropriate however, for educators to teach art.

The main principles inherent in Discipline Based Art Education were, that young children can be exposed to the disciplines of art history, art criticism, and aesthetics, in a form which accommodates their level of understanding. Teachers are encouraged to actively intervene in the art process and to teach art to young children in developmentally appropriate ways. The children's interest are paramount in DBAE theory. This model was illustrated most clearly in the preschools of Reggio Emilia (Schiller, 1995).

In the following discussion I attempt to explore the findings of this study through the headings of, theoretical orientations of teachers, the role of the teacher, talking with children, aesthetics in the children's world, the children's interests and finally *Te Whaariki*.

TEACHERS' THEORETICAL ORIENTATIONS

Developmental theories of art education stated that the role of the teacher, was not to teach children artistry but to nurture art experience and development by encouraging self expression and creativity (Wright, 1991). Certainly, this model was valid for the education of young children but could be extended further. The DBAE model argued for more depth in art programmes for young children, centring around an active, rather than supportive, role for the early childhood teacher (Berk, 1997; Edwards, 1994; Kolbe, 1991; Middleton and May, 1997; Rankin, 1994;).

The main beliefs of the teachers in this study appeared to centre around developmental theory. *Te Whaariki*, Communication, Goal 4, stated that, "Children experience an environment where they discover and develop different ways to be creative and expressive" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p80). In agreement with the principles of *Te Whaariki*, the teachers' believed that art was a creative process, allowing children to express themselves and their feelings. Children were encouraged to engage in artistic expression, and through this process, to gain in self esteem and self confidence.

The teachers believed the art area was where children could learn about themselves and the world about them, through experience and experimentation. Art was also referred to as a form of communication, where children were encouraged to ultimately represent the world in symbolic form. They believed that giving children choice and opportunity, and talking to them about the process, helped children's holistic development and encouraged free expression.

The teachers in the study talked about their role as giving children 'encouragement' and 'facilitating' the children's learning or process. They indicated this by stating they needed to provide materials for children to choose from, used words of praise throughout the process and assisted children to use tools such as scissors and

Sellotape. Emphasis was placed on self expression, the expression of feelings, experimentation, and physical skill development.

The only person who appeared to understand the full implications of the DBAE process was the Early Childhood Support facilitator, Caroline, who discussed the promotion of art technique with children, the importance of dialogue about the art product and the need for children to see adults producing art. She also indicated from her experience, that children were frequently left alone in the art area in early childhood centres, without active intervention from adults in their art process.

This may be due to teachers ambivalence about the art area. Some of the teachers in the study indicated that they were often unsure of their role in art education and did not know when to intervene and when to leave the children alone. They indicated nervousness about not having enough actual knowledge themselves to teach children about art. This may be a reason for the lack of teachers in the art areas of early childhood centres.

The teachers had some ideas that were consistent with recommended DBAE practice (emergent curriculum), but did not discuss DBAE in a direct way. Their own theories and practices were probably acquired from a variety of sources (like any theory, including DBAE). What was missing was a consistency that might have been more possible from an explicit theoretical framework which could act as a foundation when teachers were unsure of their practice.

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

The developmental idea that teachers had an important role as providers of materials for the children was undisputed. The teachers appeared to do this well, and believed that making a range of art materials available for children to use was vital to artistic

expression. The centres in the current study were set up in a manner which encouraged children to experiment with different materials. There were a wide variety of art media available to children and many tools and materials to choose from. The art materials were chosen and presented with care, taking into account the children's age and developmental needs. The children's art work was also displayed with care, and attention to detail, for example, the framing of the art works.

Teachers were aware of the necessity for tools that did the job efficiently and precluded frustration during the children's work. They also declared an understanding of the need for children to have autonomy in choosing what they wanted to work on and what they needed to fulfil their creative ideas.

DBAE theory suggests that providing children with all the materials they needed was not sufficient for children's artistic development. Ursula Kolbe challenged the developmental view by stating,

The eclectic approach appears to assume that an abundance of materials and ample free choice automatically ensure opportunities for self-expression and creativity. However, closer inspection shows that many art activities, involving art materials, are provided primarily as opportunities for novel sensory experiences, with little consideration for the development of symbolisation, aesthetic sensitivity and technical mastery (1991, p27).

Katz (1994) described the special relationship between the children and the teachers in the Reggio Emilia preschools as being among the most notable reasons why this approach was so successful. The relationship was a partnership, where the children were encouraged to make decisions, solve problems and used their peers to help critique their work. The teachers actively scaffolded the children's learning and in doing so learned themselves.

DBAE theory said that an active role for the teacher included direct instruction in art criticism and art history at a developmentally appropriate level for young children. An essential part of accomplishing an active role meant the teacher needed to be able to convey, through conversational skills, a sound understanding of the elements of art to children (Schirmacher, 1986). Teachers must be able to articulate the elements of fine art and communicate these to the children through examination of the children's work.

I did not see many examples of teachers actually working with children in the art area. This may have been due to the large number of children present (45 in the kindergarten and 24 in the childcare centre) and the amount of times the teachers were interrupted the moment they sat down with a child, or small group of children, to do anything. The interruptions were mainly about housekeeping matters, or included parents who needed to talk something over. In the few examples of teachers actually working with children in the art area, there appeared to be a focus on what the child was doing. I noted that teachers carefully guided children through the process. They sometimes made suggestions, asked questions to extend children, or helped children to cut or paste. This level of involvement appeared to be compatible with the teachers' theoretical views about the purpose of art education. They worked with the children encouraging and facilitating the process. The role of the teacher in the centres was very much like that described by developmental theories of art.

The final product, the children's artworks, are painstakingly achieved in some instances, and simply part of an experimentation procedure, in others. The teachers did not seem to take a lot of notice of the final products when the children were working on them, however they did make an effort to see that the children got to take home their work and that some were displayed in the centres.

How valued was the final product by children, teachers and parents? The developmental approach was often condensed by teachers in the 1980's, into the phrase 'it's not the product, it's the process, that's important'. Alternatively, in the children's art in the schools of Reggio Emilia, the product was valued exceedingly well. The following description of one of the preschools illustrates this.

Stunning displays of art surround you. Brightly colored drawings and paintings, surrealistic in appearance and depicting all kinds of animals—giraffes, zebras, horses, lions, and tigers—decorate the walls. A mural of children playing in a field of red poppies hangs from the ceiling. ... No one can visit the childcare centres in Reggio Emilia without being awed by the beauty and wonder of the children's art (Seefeldt, 1995).

The teachers in this study appeared to value the art produced by the children. Although they did not spend time discussing the children's work with them they talked to me about how important it was to display the work in a respectful manner, to put it at child height if possible, and to frame it. This is demonstrated by their commitment to presenting the final product in an attractive manner. Both centres had examples of children's art work on display all over the walls and hanging from the ceiling. The childcare centre incorporated the children's art around a display of things found at the beach. The kindergarten hung models from the ceiling in a large net.

Teachers named the children's work, and placed paintings on a high wire to dry. They organised safe places for children to store their art if they wanted to keep it, and asked children if they wanted to save their work. Paintings were folded when dry and placed in a box, in alphabetical order, for caregivers to search and take home the next day. In all these ways teachers indicated that they valued the art work of the children.

A further indication of the role of the teacher that was elemental to DBAE theory but not covered by developmental art theory was the teachers role in talking with children about their art work.

TALKING WITH CHILDREN

DBAE theory was clear about the importance of teachers having the skills to discuss adult art and the children's own art with them. The teachers needed the ability to talk to children about design qualities like, colour, shape, form and texture (Schirmacher, 1986).

In the interviews, teachers gave examples of ways they talked to the children about their art. These ranged through 'hands off' or silent approaches, to probing and complementary approaches. All of the teachers thought that questioning the children about their work was inappropriate. They also stated that they talked to the children about colours, patterns, use of the page, or what the child was representing, if it was clearly representational. The teachers also said that they would talk through the process with the children with an emphasis on guiding them in their use of tools and materials.

In the few examples of teachers actually working with children in the art area, there appeared to be a focus on what the child was doing rather than on sustaining a meaningful conversation with the child about their art. There were only six recorded examples of conversations occurring between children and teachers, during the process, and three examples of an adult discussing the child's art work, none of which was totally successful or incorporated the full range of DBAE ideas involving art criticism, or aesthetics.

The example of the tiger picture (see p69) produced a clumsy attempt, by me, to elicit from the child the subject matter of the drawing. This did improve eventually, with

Jack and I sustaining a short conversation on some of the elements of his drawing and on the subject. The example of the teacher talking with the child about the colours of her painting (see p68) did not elicit a response from the child apart from a nod. And finally, the example during the screen printing (see p67-68) also resulted in the child's silence.

I observed teachers engaged in dialogue with children in other areas of the kindergarten, but once again the discussions centred around what the child was doing or the activity itself. This was in accordance with Bruner's (Wright, 1991), study of Oxford preschools in 1980. It was also an area that Schirmacher (1986) identified as problematic. He stated, that emphasis was most frequently placed on skill and concept development, and the expression of feelings. Although these areas should not be undervalued it was vital to include, aesthetic aspects of children's creations (Schirmacher, 1986; Kolbe, 1991; Schiller 1995). Of course, this assumes that teachers had an understanding of art techniques and art elements. Teachers may not be comfortable or confident enough, to talk with children about these things.

AESTHETICS IN THE CHILDREN'S WORLD

One of the arguments advanced by DBAE theorists was that aesthetics had a definite place in the world of the child. This includes an "ability to critically evaluate works of art according to criteria that are defined by culture" (Feeney and Moravcik, 1987, p9). Feeney and Moravcik said that children were positively influenced by exposure to art in their environment. They emphasised the importance of providing fine art in the classroom and deplored the use of substandard commercial posters common to many childcare centres. Some of their suggestions for including fine art in the centres are, postcard and calendar reproductions, lotto and card games using art postcards for sorting, borrowing from libraries, and making available superbly illustrated books with a range of examples of visual art .

The centres in the study had their walls arranged in an attractive style with commercial posters, and the children's work displayed attractively. There was no sign in either centre of any adult art works displayed on the walls or of books about artists or art in the reading area.

Kolbe (1991), stated that the key to a good visual arts programme was a well organised, aesthetically pleasing space in which to work in a self directed manner. Art supplies needed to be well sorted and furniture must be appropriate. Displays of interesting 'found' objects and carefully mounted children's art work, were imperative.

Feeney and Moravcik claimed that, "experiences with fine arts in schools for young children are rare and education in aesthetic development is delayed" (1987, p8). A further understanding, of the role aesthetics has in children's lives, included encouraging children to have an appreciation of beauty and an ability to love beauty for its own sake. Some awareness of aesthetics was indicated by the teachers' comments. They appeared to be aware of the significance of an attractive environment. They talked about presenting materials attractively and making sure the children had space to work, unhindered by clutter and mess. To this end, they were often seen neatening the art area by throwing away discarded materials and wiping the tables.

Although the teachers had a personal interest in beauty, or belief that beauty was important in the lives of children, they did not appear to have a full understanding of the significance of aesthetics, as promoted by DBAE, in a child's world. This may be because many of these teachers trained at a time (1970's and 1980's) when the creative process was considered the ultimate goal for children's art in early childhood. To force adult conceptions of beauty on children would inhibit self expression, and self expression was mentioned by the teachers on several occasions as an important

consideration. These views demonstrated in essence, a developmentally based approach to art education.

THE CHILDREN'S INTERESTS

Kolbe argued, that "a genuinely child-centred art program is not simply a program with plenty of bright materials and free choice, but is one that caters for children's individual needs through specifically chosen means" (1991, p27). The teachers in the study appeared to agree with this statement. Their programme planning was carried out with enthusiasm and forethought. Planning for the programme was a team effort, relying on a certain amount of observation of children, individually and in groups, and then a brainstorming of ideas after analysis of observation material. The children's needs and interests were uppermost throughout the planning process.

Focusing on the needs and interests of the children did not prevent the teachers from including things that they were interested in personally. This conformed with the concept of emergent, or negotiated, curriculum. If a teacher was sufficiently passionate about something that was special in their lives, this enthusiasm can create an interest for children, where previously there was none. When they were planning, the teachers frequently utilised areas that some of the children had an interest in. An example of this was taking the children to the beach. The teachers also encouraged and supported children in extending their ideas, and expressing their thoughts about the beach symbolically, through their art.

DBAE stated that children and teachers needed to be partners in all that occurred within the art area. This view was based on the teachings of Vygotsky (Berk, 1997) who stated that children developed through their social and cultural interactions with adults and older peers. The children in this study were very actively involved in the art area. I observed children, drawing, painting, constructing two and three dimensional

collages, making masks and presents, sorting materials into different piles, exploring what happened when wax crayons melt and discovering screen printing. Much of their work was done without adult intervention or assistance unless the work needed adequate ongoing supervision as with the screen printing activity and the melting crayon activity.

Some of the children spent a lot of time working on a painting or at the collage table. I frequently saw them repeating a motion or exercise over and over again. I noted children seeking validation from adults, asking adults for assistance and playing with other children in the area, although not usually discussing art.

There did not appear to be a consistent and equal partnership occurring between the teachers and the children. The teachers were there to supply the tools and material necessary to the art process and to assist when a child asked for help. The children did not appear to expect anything further.

I noticed that children frequently appeared to ensure that their name was on the painting. Some asked for the name to go on before they started. Other children, on finishing their work, called for a teacher to put their name on and hang it up. A few children seemed oblivious to the naming ritual and ignored it entirely. They simply completed their work and walked away. One girl waited for some time for a teacher to come and name her painting and hang it up, but gave up and walked away when the response was not forthcoming.

The way children valued their work varied. Some children appeared to be very proud of their work, for example the child who made the mask, showed it to her friends and then used it in her play. Some children expected to be able to take something home when they left for the day. Others simply walked away from their painting or drawing and appeared to forget all about it.

Children's interests covered a wide variety of topics and developed from spontaneous happenings. It was up to the teachers to develop and extend the children's interests by formal and informal planning. This was done in the centres with the help of *Te Whaariki*.

TE WHAARIKI

Te Whaariki stated,

Each programme should be planned to offer sufficient learning experiences for the children to ensure that the curriculum goals are realised. Planning will usually begin from observations of the children's interests, strengths, needs and behaviours (Ministry of Education, 1996, p28).

The planning process was of vital importance to the teachers in the study. There was evidence that the teachers in the kindergarten, and the childcare centre, were aware of the need to plan using *Te Whaariki*. Both of the centres observed individual children, then used the observations to decide what sort of programme to run in the following weeks. They also utilised a planning sheet where ideas were mapped out using the principles, strands and goals from *Te Whaariki*.

The Early Childhood Support course had a large component based on planning, evaluation, and assessment practices in early childhood based on *Te Whaariki*. I did not note any changes in the kindergarten team's planning processes after the course. They appeared to be already applying the techniques presented during the course, in their planning.

As a function of their course on *Te Whaariki* the teachers in the kindergarten made a decision, after formally observing children in the art area, to introduce the children to sewing and weaving processes. Unfortunately I was not able to observe what occurred, as these processes did not take place during the times I visited the kindergarten. I was informed that the sewing activities were instigated but due to time pressures and not having stable staffing, the weaving was shelved until the following year. The course appeared to have long term implications in that it demonstrated, to teachers, a process that could be used for change in any area of the centre.

The quality of the art work produced by the children in the childcare centre after their trip to the beach indicated that planning, and using *Te Whaariki* appropriately and effectively had a positive effect on the outcomes for both children and teachers. The art work, with various fish and beach scenes, reflected the enthusiasm of the children for their experience, one that was born out of their interests and strengths. The appropriate use of *Te Whaariki* in the centres was an important consideration in the planning of art programmes.

IMPLICATIONS

Teachers' included elements of various theories and attempted to put these into practice in their early childhood centres. Developmental art theory was most often articulated and appeared to be the theory which teachers used most often in their practice. Some principles of DBAE, such as are found in the concept of emergent curriculum, were implemented at times. This was more likely to be found in teachers' formal planning process than in the centres on a day to day basis.

Implications were for increased in-service training for teachers in the area of art theory and practice. Teachers have some understanding of the principles inherent in the emergent curriculum approach to art education in early childhood. They appeared to

understand the importance of talking with children about their art but were ambivalent about their ability to do so. They may benefit from a course which explained the theoretical underpinnings of this approach, and included a practical guide to discussion of art elements with children.

A further implication for programming is that a greater understanding of the theoretical background to the emergent curriculum may assist teachers in integrating art with other areas of the curriculum in developmentally appropriate ways.

CONCLUSION

The early childhood teachers in this study expressed a variety of views, both implicit and explicit, about artistic expression and children's learning. Their practice in the art area, generally confirmed connections with the theories they articulated and revealed gaps in art education in early childhood. The implementation of *Te Whaariki* has impacted early childhood teaching throughout New Zealand and has been instrumental in shaping teachers' practical work in the art area. Specific training in the area of art education may serve to enhance teachers' abilities to teach art to young children at a developmentally appropriate level, and may give them the confidence necessary to provide art programmes which contribute to the richness of children's experiences.

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