

“IT’S A SHIFT IN THINKING, A SHIFT IN PRACTICE”

MOVING TO A NEW ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK IN
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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He toka tū, arā he toa rongonui

Your strength is like a rock that stands in raging waters.

Abstract

This qualitative ethnographic study explored the various ways a team of early childhood teachers made sense of, and used, an assessment framework based on learning dispositions and formative assessment for assessing children's learning. In the late 1980s and early 1990s traditional methods for assessing children were being significantly questioned. The development in 1996 of *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum, signalled a re-form of assessment practices in the early years. This reform involved a major shift in thinking and practice for teachers who worked in early childhood education. The teachers in this study were already beginning to change their assessment practices to reflect learning dispositions and formative assessment. This study focused on the theoretical and policy framework that reflected the shift toward teachers being encouraged to adopt these new ways for assessing children's learning

Multiple sources of data collection included individual interviews, a group interview, an analysis of documents including relevant policies, staff meeting minutes and Learning Stories written by three of the teachers over a six-month period. Findings revealed that the ways in which the teachers in this study made sense of, and used, the dispositional framework depended on how they viewed the purposes of assessment and their role as teachers. The study also explored some of the consequences of teachers adopting the dispositional framework when they were already experienced in other forms of assessment practice. The significance of self-directed professional development was also highlighted. Implications for management include the need to consider that the theoretical concepts associated with shifting from a developmental approach to a dispositional focus requires extensive time, resources and a team that is committed to change.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

This qualitative study explores the ways a group of early childhood teachers made sense of, and used, a framework for early childhood assessment, based on dispositions for learning. At the time of the study we were reviewing our assessment practices. We had a common goal of ensuring that assessment was meaningful for children and reflected new theoretical developments (Ministry of Education, 1996b). In this study I investigated the ways we made sense of change and used a framework for assessing dispositions over a six-month period. This thesis reports on my study.

In 2004 my teaching team participated in short snippets of professional development, in which they investigated key ideas that surround formative assessment and dispositional learning. Following this, I purposely designed this project to explore how a group of early childhood teachers (including myself) interpreted and used a new assessment framework. In this chapter I share my interest in the topic and outline the context in which the research question was constructed. I also describe practices of assessment in Aotearoa/ New Zealand early childhood centres and discuss the orientation to assessment that has emerged in New Zealand in recent times. I discuss my position in relation to the project and then outline the framework for this thesis.

My interest in the topic

When I began teaching in 2002 I experienced a gap between what I had learnt about assessment in my teacher education degree and what I was asked to do in regard to assessment as a teacher in my new early childhood programme. I remember feeling quite disappointed with the programme planning and assessment procedures. My experiences as a student teacher did not reflect the policy and practices I was observing and was expected to implement as a teacher. When I was studying to become a teacher in early childhood education, I had learned that assessment practices should make a valuable contribution to children's learning. That is, assessment practices should reflect and foster the complexity of children's learning in positive and meaningful ways. However what I observed, and took part in, in my early childhood setting failed, in my view, to achieve this expectation. The assessment

material I had engaged with in my study between 1999 and 2001 reflected a sociocultural approach. After I had graduated from my teacher education programme I read Gipps (2002) who explored what this approach could look like in practice. Findings from that research suggested that teaching, assessment and learning are interconnected. This led me to question why our assessment practices, to my thinking, fell short of a sociocultural approach.

I felt assessment in our early childhood setting was carried out for the purpose of record-keeping or accountability to outside agencies. As such it replicated the sorts of approaches to assessment found by Wilks (1993) to be common amongst early childhood settings in New Zealand. The assessment information collected seemed to be for the purpose of satisfying statutory agencies, such as the Education Review Office, that the assessments of children in our early childhood setting were worthwhile and showed evidence of children's developmental achievements.

Assessment in my centre also measured developmental milestones that children had previously made. Standardised observations usually focussed on aspects of development and included practices such as the use of developmental checklists geared to assess performance (Cannella, 1997; Crooks, 1993; Cubey & Dalli, 1996). This kind of approach, which focussed on deficits in children's performance, had been questioned (Carr, 2001; Wilks, 1993). The developmental approach was critiqued because it failed to address the importance of the cultural and social aspects of children's learning (Fleer, 2002). At this time the social and cultural aspects of learning were becoming more prominent in early childhood education in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, criticism of the standardised testing approach was heightened in the face of assessment research that prioritised formative assessment (Carr, 1998a). The long-term *New Zealand Competent Child* project noted that the use of a "checklist of single items for any given skills or knowledge area are unreliable indicators of children's performance at this age" (Wylie, Thompson, & Hendricks, 1996 p. 29). Assessments of children's learning were beginning to be seen as needing to be more complex and sophisticated to measure the complexity of children's learning.

As a beginning and new teacher in this early childhood setting I was not able to effect change immediately. In my new early childhood setting I was surrounded by experts who were telling me to disregard the assessment practices I had learnt about in my teacher education programme. However I was not prepared to let go of the practices I had learnt about as a student teacher and this led me to research this topic.

My sense was that early childhood teachers in Aotearoa/New Zealand were in a state of flux. Prior to the publication of the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996b), teachers' assessment practices were oriented towards what has been called a "deficit approach" (Carr, 2001). Teachers were trained to assess isolated skills, knowledge and developmental gaps in children's learning and to remediate these gaps. Teachers also worked to conform to the demands of accountability (Wilks, 1993). However the introduction of the draft early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* in 1993 (Ministry of Education, 1993) and the revised document in 1996 (Ministry of Education, 1996b) brought with it an expectation that teachers would assess children within a sociocultural context. Early childhood teachers were now being guided by a curriculum policy that emphasised learning over development and formative assessment was a large part of this. The assessment of isolated skills, knowledge and understanding seemed incongruent with what the new early childhood curriculum asked teachers to be cognizant of. Some early childhood teachers began to review and modify their assessment practices in order to reflect a sociocultural approach that focused on children's strengths and interests (Carr, 1998a; Davis, 2002; Davis & Molloy, 2004; Te One, 2001). During this time early childhood teachers nation-wide were supported through government initiatives to do the same (Ministry of Education, 2004).

Sociocultural approaches

Wertsch, Del Rio and Alvarez (1995) define a sociocultural approach to teaching and learning as "the relationships between human mental functioning, on the one hand, and the cultural, institutional, and historical situations in which this functioning occurs, on the other" (p. 3). Thus, when teachers implement sociocultural theory in order to observe and assess children's learning, they must consider more than the individual child (Fleer, 2002). This approach allows the teacher to "think more about

the nature of interaction between children and between children and staff within a range of contexts” (Fleer & Surman, 2006 p. 146).

Fleer (2002) argues that while teaching and learning theory in early childhood education has been informed by sociocultural theory, assessment theory “has not had the same level of conceptual change” (p. 2). Carr, Hatherly, Lee and Ramsey (2003) note that, for a child’s learning to be assessed within a sociocultural approach, the teacher must think differently about assessment and the learners. As a team in my workplace, we were becoming committed to “changing our beliefs and attitudes about what should be given value in assessment of children’s learning” (Davis, 2002 p. 32) and, at the start of my study, were keen to implement change.

Sociocultural theoretical ideas are emphasised in the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996b). In early childhood education “a child’s learning environment extends far beyond the immediate setting of the home or early childhood programme” (p. 19). This suggests assessment of children’s learning must consider the whole child and the contexts of the communities they learn in and inhabit on a daily basis. Fleer and Robbins’ (2004) idea that assessment of a child’s learning must occur “as a result of participation with others in culturally relevant contexts and tasks” (p. 23) reflected this further. I found that I agreed with Fleer and Robbins. This idea gave a stronger voice to what I was experiencing in the early childhood setting, as it did not seem to be happening where I worked.

The context of this study in an early childhood setting

In my early childhood setting the teachers were beginning to change their assessment practices towards the kinds of ideas that I had learnt about in my teacher education programme. Included in this was a shift to using what are called *Learning Stories*. Learning Stories are a method for documenting learning that are consistent with *Te Whāriki* (Carr, 1998a). The Learning Stories framework emerged from the *Project for Assessing Children’s Experiences* (Carr, 1998b, 1998c). This project enabled teachers to explore and develop a range of assessment procedures and ideas. During my study the teachers in my early childhood setting, including myself, had engaged in professional development that centred on the learning story framework. We had been involved in on-going discussion about our personal role and expectations in the

assessment process. In effect, we were mapping out and discussing where we were at with our assessment practices and where we wanted to go. Our discussions centred on our beliefs, attitudes and values about assessment practice. We wanted to plan with children and their families, and gain confidence and competence in documenting and sharing children's learning within a sociocultural approach. As a team we were beginning to question and review our beliefs, attitudes and values about assessment.

The teachers in my early childhood setting were beginning to make sense of new ideas such as learning dispositions and formative assessment. Learning first about dispositions from the work of Katz (1985), we understood that dispositions were “relatively enduring habits of mind or characteristic ways of responding to experience across types of situations” (p. 1). Dispositional learning was considered important in early childhood education because it recognised “that the acquisition of skills and knowledge alone does not guarantee that they will be used and applied” (Katz, 1993 p. 17). For example, a child may have the potential to play a musical instrument but may or may not have the disposition to be a musician. Nevertheless, the skill of playing music is likely to improve with practice and motivation. Ideally teachers should consider the ways in which the dispositions associated with the skill of playing a musical instrument can be fostered.

Building on this work in the New Zealand context, Carr (2001) defined learning dispositions as “participation repertoires from which a learner recognizes, selects, edits, responds to, resists, searches for and constructs learning opportunities” (p. 10). Carr also described dispositions in terms of “being ready, willing and able to participate in various ways” (p. 21). We learnt, therefore, that learning dispositions were connected to responsive and reciprocal relationships between the learner and the environment and that dispositions can become attached to experiences, places and things.

Learning dispositions are a cumulative sequence of ever-increasing engagement to learning that requires an assessment practice that engages the child in further learning. As well as focusing on dispositions, formative assessment was becoming an important part of our professional learning discussions. Gipps (2002) defines formative assessment as “the process of appraising, judging or evaluating students' work or

performance, and using this to shape and improve their competence” (p. 78). The idea of an assessment practice that fostered the complexity of children’s learning in order to “bring the learner into a more active role in which he or she is afforded more responsibility”, appealed to the teachers in my early childhood setting (p. 77).

I developed a real empathy for the assessment practices and ideas being put forward by researchers like Carr (2001), Te One (2001), and Davis (2002). The idea of assessment engaging children in ongoing learning that emphasised learning dispositions appealed, as it made sense according to what we had learnt previously about assessment in terms of the new policy context. Between 2002 and 2004 I began to raise questions within the infant and toddler teaching team about our assessment policy and practice. My colleagues agreed, for instance, that assessment procedures based on developmentalism and short written anecdotes that described developmental progress, only documented part of a child’s learning (Carr, 2001). Yet in our centre we frequently wrote short anecdotal stories, which documented children’s skills and knowledge. We seemed to be documenting for an external audience in the manner that Wilks described (1993). However we wanted to practice in a way that had meaning for the children too. Further, as a team, we wanted to feel that our teaching practice did not consist of repeating a static programme year after year which is what we seemed to be doing at the time.

The appointment of a new supervisor in late 2003 led to an opportunity to revisit our policy and practice in assessment. The team embarked on a slow journey of change. We continued to participate in brief snippets of professional development and had meetings where we discussed new ideas about assessment. Topics included Learning Stories, learning dispositions and formative assessment. Five teachers in the infant and toddler area, including myself, decided it was time to make adjustments to our assessment practices to reflect these new ideas. This jump-started a process of change in our centre. However the change was difficult for some teachers and did not run smoothly. Some centre team members envisioned an assessment practice that reflected new theoretical ideas while others were concerned about what this new practice would actually look like, or whether change was, in fact, necessary.

The process polarised the entire teaching team. Some preferred the practices that were once used, others were curious about new ideas in assessment. Despite these concerns across the centre team, the infant and toddler team committed to change. This change then exposed new dilemmas as we formulated a new way to assess children's learning. As a team we discussed our beliefs and attitudes about what aspects of assessment we valued and began preparations for a new assessment policy. This study began toward the end of the formal professional development. The infant and toddler team continued to engage in individual professional development and this work accounted for some of the data collected in this study. The next section introduces and describes briefly the broader context of change in early childhood assessment practices in Aotearoa/New Zealand that lay behind the change happening in my centre.

Why did assessment practices have to change and what did they change to?

The development of *Te Whāriki* (the early childhood curriculum) in 1996, signalled a new way to assess children (Ministry of Education, 1996b). Assessment practices in early childhood education needed to re-form in order to meet the assessment expectations and teaching and learning theories emphasised in *Te Whāriki*. The traditional methods of assessing children were being significantly questioned and there was a growing concern that early childhood education may become tied to school-based curricula (Carr & May, 1993). Alongside this were international and national debates about appropriate assessment practices for young children. Many of these debates were triggered by growing concerns about the inappropriateness of standardised testing of young children (Podmore, 1989). However in Aotearoa/New Zealand a new way of assessing children was being devised, intended to reflect the working theories and dispositions emphasised in *Te Whāriki* (Carr, 1998b, 1998c).

In 1995 Carr led a research project, titled the *Project for Assessing Children's Experiences* (PACE), in five early childhood settings in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Carr, 1998b, 1998c). The project was designed to formulate a new way of assessing children and was aligned with the new assessment expectations emphasised in *Te Whāriki*. The idea of the dispositional framework was a result of the PACE project. Dispositions were described as the inclination to respond to the world in certain ways and under certain conditions to signify learning (Carr, 2001). The introduction of

dispositions to the field of early childhood education in Aotearoa/ New Zealand was to bring significant change to the way teachers thought about, and were expected to assess, children. The emphasis changed from teachers measuring the acquisition of isolated skills and knowledge to teachers measuring children's capacity to respond to the world with behaviours like involvement, responsibility, expressing a point of view and persisting with difficulty.

The dispositional approach was informed by the work of Drummond (1993). Her definition of assessment - "the way in which, in our everyday practice, we observe children's learning, strive to understand it and then put our understanding to good use" (p. 13) - became central to how New Zealand early childhood practices were to be conceptualised. Carr (1998a) used this definition of assessment to frame a professional development resource for teachers which, from the late 1990s, was used nationally. She explained that assessment involves several key ideas:

- 1) assessment is something that happens during everyday practice;
- 2) assessment is observation based;
- 3) assessment is about children's learning;
- 4) assessment is an interpretation that may include reflection and discussion (as we strive in various ways to understand our observations); and
- 5) assessment is purposeful (as we put our understanding to good use).

(p. 33)

It was these ideas that I took on in my teacher education programme and that came with me into my job as a practising teacher. I was struggling to put these into practice in the context of my work place. This study gives an account of the ways the teachers in my early childhood setting, including myself, made sense of change and implemented a new framework for assessing children's learning.

Chapter 2

The context of assessment for learning in early childhood education

Introduction

In this second chapter I identify the theoretical, policy and research contexts of assessment that, historically, have shaped early childhood practices in New Zealand. I describe the purposes that assessment has served and the methods of assessment that teachers have employed. This establishes the context within which assessment in my early childhood centre was situated.

Then I summarise and review the literature relevant to this study of teacher change in assessment. This section of the chapter positions my project within a research and policy framework that reflects a shift toward teachers being encouraged to adopt formative assessment and learning dispositions in Aotearoa/New Zealand early childhood education. The timeline is important because it shows the theoretical and policy shifts that teachers, like those in my centre, were responding to in practice. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the literature relevant to this study.

Purposes of assessment

Educational assessment meets several different purposes, including providing feedback to external agencies, parents and children, identifying children's strengths and weaknesses and monitoring children's learning and development (McGee, 1997). In the assessment literature the purposes are referred to as *summative*, *formative* and *diagnostic* assessment. *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum, indicates that these kinds of assessment are necessary for teachers' practice. This project illustrates how my colleagues and I shifted our assessment practices more towards formative rather than summative and diagnostic assessment. We were becoming more involved in what is known as 'assessment [for] learning' (Ministry of Education, 2004). In *Te Whāriki*, assessment is described as a process that will "give useful information about children's learning and development to the adults providing the programme and to children and their families" (Ministry of Education, 1996b p. 29). This useful information could serve different purposes. It could enable teachers to prove to

parents and government agencies that they are accountable for the work they do (Ministry of Education, 1998). The information could also be used to plan for further learning, i.e., be formative. A key purpose of formative assessment is to inform the most important audiences - the child, their parents and their teachers - about the learning that occurs within the early childhood programme (Carr, 2001).

As noted in Chapter 1, Drummond's (1993) definition of assessment - "the way in which, in our everyday practice, we observe children's learning, strive to understand it and then put our understanding to good use" (p. 13) - has informed early childhood teacher practice in Aotearoa/New Zealand in recent years. This approach reflects the current curriculum emphasis on formative assessment. However, early childhood assessment theory in Aotearoa/New Zealand has not always been consistent with these ideas. Previously, summative assessment, that is 'assessment [of] learning', and diagnostic assessment had been a major purpose of assessment in early childhood education (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Carr, 2001). In the following section I discuss diagnostic, summative and formative assessment to illustrate the difference between them and to show the scope of change that I was studying in this project.

Diagnostic assessment

Diagnostic assessment gives information on children's strengths and weaknesses and shows the things children can do particularly well and the things they are struggling with (McGee, 1997). This information enables a teacher to plan a programme designed to extend strengths and address learning difficulties. This purpose is remedial in practice as it sets out to determine children's strengths and weaknesses and place them into appropriate learning programmes specifically tailored to meet their learning needs (Black and Wiliam, 1998). Although early childhood teachers did not diagnose children's learning as such, Carr (2001) recalls it was common practice for New Zealand kindergarten teachers to assess children's learning and development with a strict checklist that involved a rigorous list of pre-defined skills to ensure school readiness. For example: early writing and mathematic skills (writing and counting) and scissor cutting. If deficits were identified the teacher would provide appropriate activities to fill these gaps.

Summative assessment

Providing feedback about learning and assessment to external audiences fulfils a primarily summative purpose (Sutton, 1991). Summative assessment provides information to external audiences (parents, children, other teachers, government officials) and is primarily designed to sum up a learner's achievement at a particular point in time. The assessment is intended to identify what has been learnt from engagement in a specific teaching and learning programme (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Gipps & Stobart, 1993). In early childhood education an example of an assessment for a summative purpose might be seen as a tool to see if a child's learning goal had been met. For example, a teacher might set a goal for a child to learn how to hold a spoon correctly within a four-week time frame. At the end of the four weeks the teacher would assess the child's progress by observing whether the goal had been achieved. If it had been achieved, the achievement could be partially attributed to effectiveness of the teacher and learning programme.

Summative assessment focuses on *performance* rather than the learning *process*, as it represents a summing up of already achieved performance at one time or another. It can sometimes give a static representation of the child (Sutton, 1991). Children have little opportunity to learn from their mistakes or recognise their strengths and abilities due to the limited feedback summative assessment provides them (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Summative assessment does not engage children in future learning. It was these kinds of critiques of summative assessment that supported a shift to formative assessment in early childhood education during the mid 1990s.

Formative assessment

Assessment can also be undertaken for formative purposes. When assessment information contributes to an improvement in learning, it fulfils a formative purpose. That is, it helps children understand their learning better and engages them in on-going learning (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & Wiliam, 2004) Cowie and Bell (1997) define formative assessment as "the process used by teachers and students to recognise and respond to students' learning in order to enhance that learning, during learning" (p. 18). Cowie and Bell's definition implies that formative assessment takes place during the context of the day and that teachers and children are actively involved in this on-going process (Carr, 2001; Crooks, 1993, 2002a, 2002b). When

assessment is being undertaken for formative purposes, assessment data can be used immediately to plan for the next steps in children's learning (Perrenoud, 1991; Sutton, 1991).

Feedback from the teacher to the student is a key element of formative assessment and, if structured carefully, can be used to improve learning. According to Tunstall and Gipps (1996) feedback occurs when the teacher involves the child in the assessment process. Documented assessment of children's learning becomes formative when teachers revisit and give children feedback about their learning. Thus, "feedback to children on their learning... [can] enhance their sense of themselves as capable people and competent learners" (Ministry of Education, 1996b p. 30). Feedback informs the child as to what outcomes are valued, how they are learning, "and it acknowledges the goals that children set for themselves" (Ministry of Education, 2004, book 1, p. 6).

Formative assessment endeavours to unite external accountability and responsive teaching practices. This process involves focusing on, and documenting, learners' achievements, which are responded to by reflective and responsive teachers (Carr, 2001). Occurring primarily through the interactions between learners and others in the context of the learning and teaching programme, formative assessment can also include documented assessments that are used to promote learning.

Although early childhood teachers have historically used summative assessment practices (in the context of a developmental approach) for assessing children's achievements, they are now expected to use formative assessment for assessing children's learning. Assessment should allow teachers to gather and record relevant information. However, this information must be meaningful in order to support and enhance teachers' practices and children's learning. The way early childhood teachers made sense of assessment information was also changing. This was because of the shift from a developmental to a dispositional focus that was taking place. In the next section I explain why the way teachers make sense of assessment information matters.

Why does the way teachers make sense of assessment information matter?

Before Drummond's (1993) definition was used to frame assessment in Aotearoa/New Zealand early childhood education, teachers used to interpret assessment information that was gathered in a very different way. Using a combination of *norm-referenced* and *criterion-referenced* assessment, teachers would compare children's performance or capabilities to external reference points, e.g. developmental norms or pre-determined criteria (McGee, 1997). The way assessment information was gathered and then interpreted could lead teachers to draw different conclusions and make different decisions about children. However, *Te Whāriki* encouraged teachers to adopt "*ipsative assessment*" (Sutton, 1991) as a referencing tool for making sense of the assessment information gathered. Such a move provided for vastly different possibilities and interpretations. This section describes the three main referencing techniques teachers have used to interpret assessment information and discusses why the shift to ipsative referencing was being encouraged at the time of my study.

Norm-referenced assessment

Because teachers in early childhood education were used to making judgements about children's progress in relation to norms of development, they compared children's development with other children's development. This approach to making sense of assessment information is called norm referencing. Norm referencing makes judgments about a child's performance and compares it with other children who performed the same assessment (Crooks, 2002a, 2002b; Gipps & Stobart, 1993; McGee, 1997). The information gathered from these comparisons identifies if children are above average, below average or about the same as other children at a similar age or stage. The information gathered might be used to create a baseline for later testing or be used to describe a child's performance in a particular area with reference to children who performed the same task.

Criterion-referenced assessment

In a criterion-referenced assessment the teacher does not compare the individual child's performance or capability with another child; rather the child's performance is compared to an external standard (Sutton, 1991). This procedure can still be rather mechanistic in practice. For example, some early childhood teachers hold *Te Whāriki*

up and ask questions like: “how is a child’s sense of belonging developing in this centre?” Teachers may turn *Te Whāriki* statements into a criterion and assess the child’s development of “belonging” against the statement documented in the strand *Belonging*. Thus a child’s development is assessed by comparison to criteria rather than by comparison with other children. Criterion-referenced assessment is used to obtain information about the specific skills and knowledge each child can demonstrate.

Ipsative assessment

Early childhood teachers have however been asked, in early childhood policy, more generally, to adopt a different referencing technique for making sense of assessment information (Ministry of Education, 1996b, 1998). Known as ipsative assessment, teachers are expected to make sense of a child’s achievements in relation to previous records of that child’s performance. *Te Whāriki* suggests that “assessments of children’s learning... should always focus on individual children over a period of time and avoid making comparisons between children (Ministry of Education, 1996b p. 29). Sutton (1991) refers to ipsative-referenced assessment as a way “to gauge individual progress over time” (p. 7). For example, a child may set a goal to be able to reach the top of the rope ladder. Initially, the child may be unable to complete the task. However over time the degree of ability may improve. Within six weeks a teacher may revisit and celebrate the child’s achievement in reaching the top of the rope ladder. Ipsative assessment details the whole learning curve and measures achievements based on earlier performance rather than merely recording a particular moment in time.

The assessment technique a teacher uses to make sense of a child’s learning and development can lead to the teacher forming different conclusions about that learning and development. Teachers have shifted from using a mix of norm and criterion-referenced assessment to a mix of criterion-referenced and ipsative assessment. Norm-referenced assessment has not been discarded, but in terms of ‘learning’, criterion and ipsative referencing are two main guides that teachers use for measuring children’s learning.

Alongside the shift in assessment practices there have also been changes in policy. The next section describes the changes in policy that have signalled a shift from summative to formative assessment. It investigates the impact of government and sponsored research on the journey towards the development and implementation of dispositional assessment practices in early childhood settings.

Government policy, sponsored research and approaches to assessment

When I started teaching in early childhood education I entered the field during a time of change with regard to how teachers conceptualised and practised assessment for learning. The context for change had been building for several decades because of a series of important changes and events in early childhood education throughout the 1970s and 1980s. For example, in July 1986 the administration of early childhood was shifted from the Department of Social Welfare to the Department of Education. This move reflected a change in how childcare was viewed. Dominant views, that had previously seen childcare as a charity service for the disadvantaged or needy, shifted to a growing acceptance that care and education could not be separated (May, 1985; Smith, 1998). This change created new expectations for the early childhood education sector. Education came to the fore, teachers would be trained, and children's learning as well as their development was seen as important (Dalli, 1992).

The shift from care to education would eventually lead to new practices and a new curriculum document in early childhood education in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Part of the change included the introduction of a three-year, integrated training course for teachers who wanted to work in early childhood education. The introduction of such teacher training removed artificial distinctions between those intending to work in childcare or kindergarten, and it brought education and care together. These changes signalled an intention to improve the quality of teaching and raise the profile for early childhood teachers as highly skilled professionals (Smith, 1998).

Once the shift to education had occurred, the way was paved for discussions to begin about an appropriate curriculum for children in their early years. A group of early childhood representatives met at a professional development course at Lopdell House in Auckland in 1988 (Report of the Lopdell Centre Course Participants, 1988). The

topic of their deliberation was the formation of an early childhood curriculum. In the same year, another seminar saw a discussion about what might be considered as appropriate objectives in early childhood education (Podmore, 1989). The Lopdell House discussions generated a definition of curriculum in early childhood education: "...the curriculum is the sum total of all children's direct and indirect learning experiences in early childhood settings. Deciding the curriculum involves deciding what these experiences will be" (Report of the Lopdell Centre Course Participants, 1988 p. 1). Later, a variation of this statement was to find its way into the early childhood curriculum document, *Te Whāriki* in 1996 (Ministry of Education, 1996b). The formation of a curriculum was important not only for teaching but for assessment as well.

In the 1980s, theory about teaching and learning in early childhood in Aotearoa/New Zealand was shaped predominantly by an approach to early childhood programming known as 'developmentally appropriate practice' (DAP). This was promoted by the American National Association for the Education of Young Children in a publication called *Developmentally Appropriate Practices in Early Childhood Programmes* (Bredekamp, 1986) and was widely known internationally and in New Zealand. Revised in 1997, DAP is a series of recommendations to guide and support the implementation of appropriate teaching practices within an early childhood programme (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

The DAP approach rests on a set of assumptions about children and their learning and teachers and their teaching. A child is understood to develop through a series of biological, age-based stages that represent a 'normal' level of development (Fleer, 1995a, 1995b; Sutton, 1991). These assumptions draw heavily on Piaget's developmental age based stages and children, irrespective of their context or their strengths and weaknesses, were assessed according to their age and appropriate stage of development (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999). Usually, these developmental stages were promoted within a child-centred or play-based learning environment (Nuttall, 2003). DAP remained a dominant approach in early childhood education in Aotearoa/ New Zealand.

In practice DAP results in the teacher following rather than leading a child's development (Anning, 2004; Fler, 1995a; Smith, 1998; Wolfgang & Wolfgang, 1999). Teaching practices are non-interventionist, which positions the teacher outside the learning experience and places children in isolation (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett, & Farmer, 2004; Fler, 1995b; Lubeck, 1998). This approach was prominent in Aotearoa/New Zealand prior to the introduction of the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* (see, for instance, the original *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (DOPs) (Ministry of Education, 1996a) statement and the *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1993) draft). However, because DAP limits the opportunities for reciprocal learning relationships to occur between the teacher and the child, it has since been questioned. Smith (1998) argues that DAP is a limiting and prescribed approach. It creates a specific level of expected development for children, to which teachers teach. No extension beyond this level is expected.

DAP was institutionalised in Aotearoa/ New Zealand with the introduction of the *Education (Early childhood centres) Regulations* (1990). The 1990 regulations asked teachers to involve parents or whānau in the evaluation process of an early childhood programme which focused on children's developmental needs. This requirement was strengthened by the early childhood education charter guidelines (Ministry of Education, 1990), which asked teachers to: "regularly observe and assess children's developmental stages and needs and plan and evaluate the programme accordingly....There will be an established procedure enabling parents/whānau to find out about their children's learning" (p. 10).

The original DOPs statement required teachers to ensure their programmes reflected developmentally appropriate practice. Teachers were expected to formally assess and document children's developmental progress. The DAP approach found its way into a draft of *Te Whāriki*, but changes to the document saw DAP de-emphasised in the final document in favour of different ideas. The sole emphasis on development was broadened to learning and development (Ministry of Education, 1990) and this change was also supported in the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices* (DOPs) (Ministry of Education, 1996a), which are outlined in *Quality in Action* (Ministry of Education, 1998). A seven-stage planning cycle, introduced in *Quality in Action*, led teachers in my early childhood centre to follow a systematic, step by step

process “to ensure curriculum facilitated the learning and development of children in their care” (p. 30).

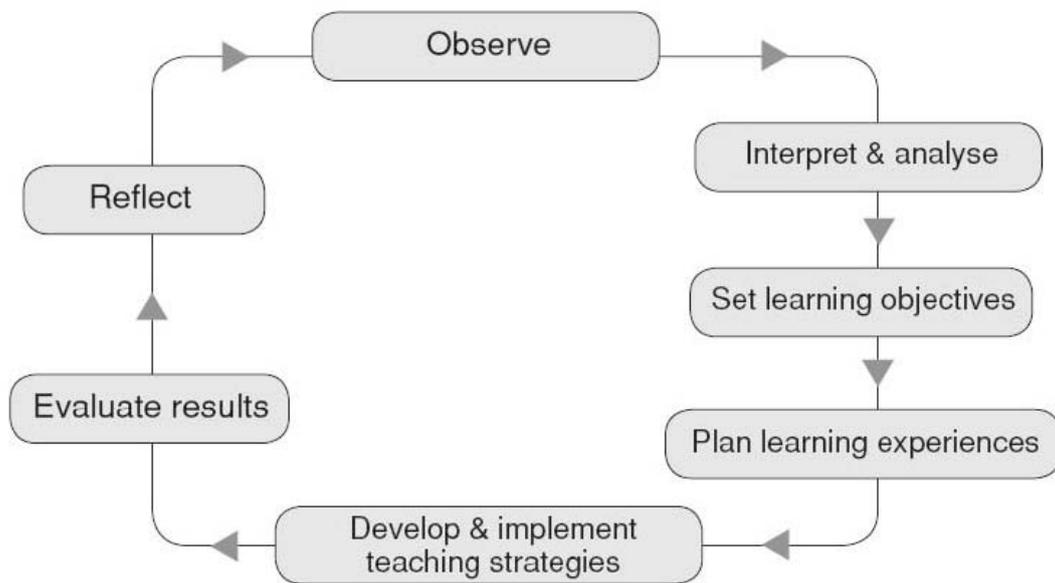


Figure 1. Planning cycle illustrated in *Quality in Action*

When I arrived in my early childhood setting, this cyclical diagram had become the ‘recipe’ that we used for formally documenting the assessment process. This cycle was often understood by early childhood teachers as a formal step by step process for assessing children’s learning (Davis, 2006). As a result, I felt that assessments were becoming task orientated and accountability-driven.

Relevant research

Beyond the policy context, research in New Zealand was also encouraging and supporting a shift in early childhood assessment practices. In the early 1990s Anne Wilks, a New Zealand researcher, was contracted by the Ministry of Education to examine the assessment procedures used by early childhood teachers throughout Aotearoa/New Zealand. This nation-wide study, later known as the *Wilks Report* (1993), was designed to examine four main questions:

- 1) Why teachers assessed children’s learning;
- 2) The types of procedures or methods early childhood teachers used when assessing children;

- 3) How the assessment information was used once it was collected and
- 4) How the early childhood teachers could be supported to carry out assessment in their settings.

(Wilks, 1993)

The research occurred just as the curriculum was being drafted. Wilks (1993) argued that the assessment of children's development in early childhood education was only just beginning to be considered important in Aotearoa/New Zealand. As there were no national curriculum or assessment guidelines for assessing children's development, there was speculation "that assessment may lead to harmful practices within early childhood programmes" (p. 20). Through the use of questionnaires, structured interviews and observations in New Zealand kindergartens and childcare centres, Wilks found that teachers assessed children primarily for the purposes of record keeping or accountability. Yet findings also indicated that some teachers used assessment information to plan early childhood programmes for some children. Often centred on children with 'special' developmental needs or concerns, this planning and assessment seemed to be for diagnostic purposes. Rather than extending existing strengths and interests, assessments identified and filled the gaps in children's development. Children identified as having a need or concerns were more likely to have written assessments. Wilks explains:

If educators only assess children with a special need or concern then those children without a special need are not having their needs met and, more importantly, their learning is not being promoted based on their abilities, strengths and interests.

(p. 107)

Wilks (1993) concluded with a series of recommendations for assessment in early childhood settings across Aotearoa/New Zealand. Importantly, Wilks writes that assessment of children's learning should be ongoing, meaningful, and reflect the holistic way children learn. Limited professional knowledge and no national guidelines in early childhood education was not a barrier for centres when implementing and trialling new assessment practices. This indicated professional commitment to bring change to assessment procedures. However, national guidelines

and in-service training for early childhood teachers were recommended. The *Wilks Report* called for assessment practices that would extend children's strengths and interests.

Following the Wilks (1993) report, and the introduction of *Te Whāriki*, Carr directed a research project known as *Project for Assessing Children's Experiences* (PACE) in five early childhood settings in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Carr, 1998a). The research aimed to identify "key outcomes from *Te Whāriki* and to work with practitioners to develop a range of assessment ideas and procedures that will be useful for them when they work with young children"(p. 1).

Te Whāriki suggested that when knowledge, skills and attitudes come together, they form a child's 'working theory' which then assists the child to "develop dispositions that encourage learning" (Ministry of Education, 1996b p. 44). The PACE research paid particular attention to the relationships between working theories and dispositions (Carr, 1998a), situating dispositions within the context of working theories. Through PACE, the researchers focused on understanding "children's emerging working theories about what it is to be a learner, and about themselves as learners. And [the PACE researchers] developed the ideas that these working theories were made up of packages of learning dispositions" (p. 17).

The researchers in PACE identified a chain of behaviours or decisions made by children when involved in a particular topic or activity (Carr, 1998c). Carr describes the chain or packages of decisions made by children as *Learning Stories*. Noticing patterns in children's approach to involvement in activities in the early childhood programme, Carr explains:

Children were making the following decisions, frequently in the following order: deciding... about whether there is anything of interest [in the early childhood setting], deciding whether to get involved...deciding whether to engage and challenge, and whether to persist when difficulties arise, deciding whether to express a point of view...[and] deciding whether to take responsibility in this social setting. (p.22)

Recording these episodes of involvement was like telling an increasingly complex story about the children’s participation. The notion of a ‘Learning Story’ emerged from these observations. Learning Stories then became defined as “a particular form of documented and structured observations that take a storied and non-deficit (credit) approach, and an underlying agenda of protecting and developing children’s identities in accordance with the national early childhood curriculum”(Carr et al., 2001, p. 29) .

Carr (1998c) aligned the dispositions with the strands of the curriculum document and described key behaviours that would show the dispositions in action.

Table 1. *Dispositions in action*

Strands from Te Whāriki	Learning Disposition	Key Behaviours
Belonging/mana whenua	Courage and curiosity	Finding something of interest
Well-being/mana atua	Trust	Being involved
Exploration/manaaoturoa	Perseverance to persist with difficulty	Persisting with difficulty
Communication/mana reo	Confidence	Expressing a point of view or feeling
Contribution/mana tangata	Responsibility	Taking another point of view (and taking responsibility in other ways)

The behaviours are like a chain showing increasing complexity. In a Learning Story a child’s learning is viewed as continuous and situated in relation to people, places and things. When children make the decision to become involved at an increasing level of complexity they are developing dispositions for learning. They are taking an interest, being involved, persisting with difficulty, expressing a point of view, and taking responsibility (Carr, 2001).

The idea of a disposition stems from developmental psychology. The expression ‘disposition’ points to the domain of human attributes that is evidently different from ‘knowledge, skill and understanding’ (Carr & Claxton, 2002). Carr and Claxton also position learning dispositions within a sociocultural context and portray learning dispositions as transacted or jointly composed. Carr (2001) describes a range of learning outcomes along a complex continuum that considers “social and cultural purpose” (p. 5) compared to traditional skill and knowledge-based teaching and learning. Carr refers to dispositions as a conceptual continuum where knowledge, skills, learning strategies, attitudes, intent and motivation are interrelated and closely linked.

Dispositions are believed to contribute to and describe intellectual behaviours such as being broad, adventurous, curious, playful and strategic (Tishman, Jay, & Perkins, 1993). Tishman et al. describe the difference between the delivery of a ‘skills-centred’ approach and a ‘dispositional approach’ to teaching and learning. They argue that acquiring skills is useful for learning but it cannot be relied upon for on-going performance. Therefore, on-going performance is related to the development of dispositions. Learning dispositions have been referred to as the inclination to respond to situations in certain ways and also involve being confident and sensitive to the occasion (Resnick & Klopfer, 1989).

Csikszentmihalyi (1997) has questioned why people perform certain tasks and activities that do not provide extrinsic rewards. The feeling of ‘flow’, as described by Csikszentmihalyi usually occurs when a person is engaged in an enjoyable experience they wish to experience again. His research suggests that the feeling of flow “acts as a magnet for learning - that is, for developing new levels of challenges and skills” (p. 33). The feeling of ‘flow’ relates to certain characteristics such as having a sense of balance between challenges and skills-specific goals, concentration and whether the experience was enjoyable. The feeling of ‘flow’ is an important concept for children’s learning in early childhood education. Carr (2001) states when children are in ‘flow’ they are involved in a learning episode. The feeling of flow is characterised by several key features such as focused concentration, “awareness of the here and now, no worry of failure, a lack of self-consciousness, little sense of time and an activity that is enjoyed for its own sake” (p. 29).

Carr (2001) explains: “Deep involvement with a topic, even at very young ages, can provide a ‘base domain’ or a fund of knowledge that is useful for analogical thinking and metaphors in other domains” (p. 29). Therefore, learning dispositions develop when children are deeply involved or focussed on a particular topic or activity that Csikszentmihalyi (1997) refers to as the feeling of flow. A child’s learning dispositions develop when their learning goes beyond the topic or activity. Carr suggests a three-part interest and involvement system that involves the child “using the artefacts of the culture (such as objects, tools and stories), is engaged in an activity, and when this activity is valued and supported by a social community” (p. 49). This three-way system allows early childhood teachers to analyse how children’s learning dispositions become more complex and develop over time. Therefore, funds of knowledge can only develop when a child is ready, willing and able to pursue a particular interest and become involved. The concept of progress, as described in the PACE research (Carr, 1998b), occurs when the complexity of learning enables a child’s Learning Stories to become *longer, wider and deeper*.

A child’s Learning Stories will become *longer* when the child moves along the chain of behaviours or decisions identified in the PACE research (Carr, 1998b). For example, a child settling into a centre may take an interest in a painting experience, and then make a decision to become involved, and perhaps tackle difficulties of making new friends, through expressing his or her own ideas in art. For children’s Learning Stories to become more frequent, or *wider*, learning dispositions or habits of learning must be well established. If children are exposed to regular occurrences such as looking after friends or sharing knowledge and ideas, they develop dispositions for becoming involved and taking responsibility for sharing knowledge and ideas. Key behaviours and dispositions will occur in different circumstances, with different people or in different experiences. In order for a child’s learning to become more complex, or *deeper*, the child will spend more time completing tasks as they practise learnt skills and tackling new challenges as their confidence increases. Adults will encourage children to develop a repertoire of strategies to strengthen key behaviours such as tackling challenges, persisting with difficulties or taking more responsibility (Carr, 1998a, 1998b). Shifts in assessment practices towards these kinds of ideas are what I am focussing on in this study.

The final phase of the PACE research was a case study of several early childhood centres trying to put the Learning Story and disposition ideas into practice. In the same year, a cooperative project between the Ministry of Education, Early Childhood Convention Committee, the University of Waikato and the New Zealand Council for Educational Research saw the development of a professional resource called *Assessing Children's Learning in Early Childhood Education* (Carr, 1998c). This programme uses videos and workshops to provide early childhood teachers with guidelines for developing their own assessment practices. It proposes that assessment ought to be unobtrusively “woven with the curriculum” (p. 11) and encourages teachers to consider the following questions: “What should we assess? Why should we assess? How should we assess?” (p. 1).

This resource poses a range of discussion questions to promote critical reflection among teachers. It encourages teachers to make decisions about the ways in which they should assess children's learning. A credit-based model of assessment, that builds on the Learning Story framework described in the PACE project, is examined (Carr, 1998c).

In addition to this, the Ministry of Education contracted Margaret Carr and Wendy Lee to direct *The Early Childhood Education Learning and Assessment Exemplar (ECLAE) Project* in 2001. Initially the ECLAE project was a pilot alongside the Ministry of Education national exemplar project in New Zealand primary schools. The purposes of this project were:

- To provide examples of assessment using the *Te Whāriki* framework
- To highlight learning outcomes from *Te Whāriki* in action
- To illustrate the four principles of *Te Whāriki* mandated for assessment in the DOPs
- To describe progress in a range of ways, compatible with *Te Whāriki*
- To highlight the connection between learning and learning opportunities in any one setting
- To illustrate assessment that include the voices of a range of participants

- To illustrate assessments that are meaningful and accessible to a range of audiences
- To reflect the value of early childhood experiences
- To illustrate links to the national school curriculum

(ECLAE Project, consent information, 2001 as cited in Davis, 2006, p. 29).

Following this project, a professional development resource *Kei Tua o Te Pae Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Assessment Exemplars* was launched in 2005 (Ministry of Education, 2004). When *Kei Tua o Te Pae* was first launched it consisted of eight booklets which were released to all early childhood services. At the time of writing this thesis, a further ten booklets were distributed into early childhood settings across New Zealand. The first nine booklets in the *Kei Tua o Te Pae* series indicated that assessment should be:

- Formative
- Sociocultural
- Bicultural
- Inclusive of children's voices
- Positive in terms of supporting community, competence and continuity
- Inclusive of infants and toddlers
- Inclusive of all children

(Ministry of Education, 2004 books 1-9).

In *Kei Tua o Te Pae* assessment for learning is described as three processes of 'noticing, recognising and responding'. According to *Kei o Tua Pae* these three processes act as progressive filters. Therefore, when teachers assess they: "...notice a great deal as they work with children, and they *recognise* some of what they notice as "learning". They will *respond* to a selection of what they recognise" (Ministry of Education , 2004 booklet 1, p. 6).

This description of assessment for learning emerged from Cowie and Bell's (1997) definition of formative assessment, which I introduced earlier in this chapter as "the

process used by teachers and students to notice, recognise and respond to students' learning in order to enhance that learning during learning" (p.18). Formative assessment engages children in further learning and suggests the idea of children and teachers negotiating and deciding the next step for learning. In a Learning Story this is often documented as the 'what next' and is designed to provide the next step for learning. The title 'what next' is positioned at the end of the 'notice, recognise, respond' cycle and can be referred to as revisiting.

Kei Tua o Te Pae introduced new ideas and added to the already changing landscape for assessment in our early childhood centre. This resource provided us with authentic examples of assessment practices from a range of early childhood settings. It emphasised narrative as a way for teachers to document children's learning. This signalled a shift from traditional observation methods of summative and norm-based assessments to an ongoing, interactive process where documentation is used to make learning visible in the early childhood setting.

When *Kei Tua o Te Pae* was released the teachers in my early childhood setting, including myself, were coming to terms with change in assessment language and were exploring new, complex assessment measures designed to foster children's learning in meaningful ways. We were learning about formative assessment, dispositions and the sociocultural implications for assessment in early childhood education. Alongside this we were also beginning to make changes to our beliefs and attitudes about assessment in early childhood education. In the next section I discuss the features of teacher change and the impact change can have on teachers' practice.

Teachers making change to practice

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways teachers made sense of, and used, a framework for early childhood assessment. As I indicated earlier, we had participated in professional development that focussed on the key ideas of formative assessment and dispositional learning. To integrate these key ideas into our assessment practice it was necessary for us to make changes to the ways we assessed children. Following the professional development, we engaged in self-directed learning and continued to explore what formative assessment and dispositional learning might look like in our centre practices.

Britzman's (2003) ethnographic study explored what learning to teach means for newly qualified secondary school teachers. Britzman explains that: "learning to teach, like teaching itself is a time where desires are rehearsed, refashioned and refused" (p. 221). This idea suggests that teaching is a social process of negotiation which involves teachers coming to terms with their intentions, values and beliefs. Although the teachers in this study had been teaching in early childhood education for many years, they were learning to practice a new way of assessing children's learning. Britzman suggests that the process of learning a new practice will involve a constant shift of negotiation, construction and consenting to their identity as a teacher. This reflects Britzman's notion that practice makes practice. For the teachers in this study this process of negotiating, constructing our assessment practices and consenting to our identities as teachers was beginning to emerge when I began this study.

Mitchell and Cubey (2003) describe how self-directed learning can empower teachers to take control of their learning and signify change in their practice. Mitchell and Cubey report that when teachers engage in collaborative, reflective discussion, this can invoke critical reflection where teachers begin to question and test existing theories and practices. Brookfield (1998) describes critical reflection as an interrelated process, which includes:

- (a) the process by which adults question and then replace or frame an assumption that up to a point had been uncritically accepted as representing common sense or wisdom;
- (b) the process through which adults take alternative perspectives on ideas, actions, forms of reasoning and ideologies previously taken for granted;
- (c) the process by which adults come to recognise the hegemonic aspects of the dominant cultural values and to understand how self-evident renderings of the "natural" state of the world actually bolster the power and self-interest of unrepresented minorities. (p. 376)

As we explored formative assessment and dispositions for learning we engaged in discussions. During these discussions we began to question and challenge the dominant assessment practices we used for assessing children. While we reflected

critically on our assessment practices we also considered our personal role and expectations in the process.

Mitchell and Cubey (2003) suggest that critical reflection is required to encourage transformation of learning. That is, changes in the way teachers view themselves and the world. Critical reflection, when coupled with a substantial professional development programme that allows teachers to share ideas and support one another, can assist teachers to develop deeper theoretical knowledge and understanding. Timperly and Parr (2004) refer to this as a *professional learning community* where teachers participate in *learning conversations* and work together to enhance the quality of their teaching and raise student achievement. For example, a learning conversation might happen when a group of teachers or managers begin to make changes to their practice. This is similar to the process of change that occurred in my early childhood centre.

Gould (1997) indicates that teacher change comprises several important features including a change in beliefs, attitudes and practices. She emphasises that teacher change also involves a change in teaching behaviours and practices. However teachers must be dissatisfied with their practices and gain ownership before they can commit to change. Te One's (2000) interview study investigated three teachers' experiences of compiling and using portfolios in an early childhood centre. Te One found the process of compiling portfolios included critical decision stages and that the teachers indicated a degree of dissatisfaction with developmental methods of assessment that were included in children's portfolios. Te One noted that the assessments undertaken by the teachers prior to the introduction of *Te Whāriki* were often disconnected to the teachers' beliefs and attitudes about how children learn. Yet, following the release of *Te Whāriki* in 1996, Te One reports that the teachers in her study included a mix of traditional assessment methods with the aspirations of *Te Whāriki* that located the teachers' assessment practices somewhere between the developmentally appropriate and re-conceptualist view of assessment. Therefore, this could indicate that the teachers did not change their practices accordingly. Gould (1997) argues that whilst teachers' experiences are influential, a change in beliefs and attitudes will not necessarily lead to a change in practice. A teacher's commitment to change is paramount. Timperley and Parr (2004) add that:

A deep and thorough grasp of new knowledge and skills is unlikely if teachers do not understand what it is they need to learn. What is needed in professional development is focused learning where the teacher is treated professionally, understands his or her own learning needs and actively takes steps to address them.

(p. 124)

A case study of teacher change by Carr et al. (2003) reviewed evidence that showed teachers can shift their beliefs and attitudes to encompass social and cultural perspectives if they are committed to change. This case study investigated teacher change and professional development in the area of assessment and identified two types of shifts in teacher identity as teachers made changes to their practice. The first shift in teacher change centred on teachers' "roles and expectations in relation to families, children, and community. The second was a growing confidence to set their own learning goals and to articulate their practice" (p. 187). Carr found the use of Learning Stories to document children's learning was the initial catalyst for teacher change as they increased the opportunity for collaborative discussion with children, other teachers, families and the wider community. The teachers in Carr's study had "moved from planning *for* to planning *with* children and their families" (p. 206). It is this kind of shift I was studying in this project in the context of my early childhood centre.

The New Beginnings Centre of Innovation Study (Wright, Ryder, & Mayo, 2006) also provided evidence of teachers moving from planning 'for' to planning 'with' children and their families. The study, in which teachers examined their own practices with the goal of improving the way they worked with children and their families, focused initially on visual arts. However the research challenged the teachers' assumptions as they became motivated to examine and learn from their practice in order to improve their teaching and learning. As the research progressed the teachers strengthened their individual and professional identities to consider a social cultural perspective. In particular the teachers' identity shifted to include what it meant to be a co-learner, a teacher and a learner. This process is similar to what Davis (2002) observed when she identified three central, interrelated shifts in teachers' practice during her work as a professional facilitator and coordinator for the Ministry of Education *Early Childhood*

Learning and Assessment Exemplar Project. Davis (2002) noted that these shifts “commonly occur in teachers’ assessment practices as they explore and adopt (to various degrees) formative assessment processes and practices” (p. 32). These shifts involved a change in the teachers’ beliefs that reflected a sociocultural perspective.

Through the use of interviews, participant and video observations, Davis (2006) investigated the ways a group of early childhood teachers understood and practised assessment. Davis’ findings showed that the teachers had not recognised the paradigm shift associated with moving from assessment ‘of’ learning to assessment ‘for’ learning and what this meant for teaching within a sociocultural context. Therefore when the teachers were faced with a new assessment approach, “the teachers either embraced what had the most meaning to them, or resisted that which did not” (p.144) As a result the teachers in Davis’ study used a mishmash of traditional methods of assessment that did not entirely embrace the new policy context. Hatherly and Sands (2002) questioned whether some early childhood teachers actually understood the theory that distinguished the Learning Story framework from previously existing methods of assessment. They claim that this tension, if it exists, can be problematic as it can lead to a superficial adoption of principles that are often thought to support and enhance learning, but in fact may undermine it.

The tensions teachers face as they shift towards sociocultural perspective on assessment was explored by Fler and Richardson (2004). Their study followed a group of early childhood teachers, well versed in developmentalism, as they explored and adopted a sociocultural approach. It was evident that teachers were resistant to change as they preferred the developmental “programming formula and [they appreciated] its predictability” (p. 75). However, once teachers moved beyond developmentalism and attempted to adopt sociocultural ideas, their practice gradually shifted. This was also evident in Fler and Robbin’s (2004) work with pre-service early childhood teachers. Their study investigated how a group of students broadened their interpretations of assessment from a focus on developmentalism to a sociocultural perspective. Sociocultural ideas for assessing and interpreting children’s learning were integrated into a series of lectures and tutorials. Following this,

students had opportunities to explore these ideas in practice. Fler and Robbin's reported that, when students observed children through a sociocultural lens, they tended to position themselves within the assessment process and played an active role in co-constructing children's learning. The focus shifted from documenting children's development achievement to capturing a "richer picture of children and their learning" (p. 30). However, given that DAP continued to be embedded in early childhood practice, Fler and Robbins argued that new conceptual tools were needed to broaden teachers' understandings of socioculturalism.

Research in New Zealand has shown that early childhood teachers need time to make sense of the new ideas and thinking they acquire through professional development (Carr, 1998a, 1998b; Davis, 2002, 2006). Often the process of change involves a social and personal reconstruction of "what it means to be a teacher" (Carr, 2001 p. 184). When I began as an early childhood teacher, the expectation for assessment emphasised a sociocultural perspective that centred on dispositions. The next section draws on the features of sociocultural approaches to assessment.

Features of sociocultural assessment

During my teacher education programme I learnt about assessment practices that reflected a sociocultural approach to teaching and learning. The principles in *Te Whāriki* emphasise ideas about teaching and learning that are informed by sociocultural theory. These principles are reflected in *Quality in Action DOP 4* (Ministry of Education, 1998) which asked teachers to implement assessment practices that:

- a) reflect the holistic way that children learn;
- b) reflect the reciprocal relationships between the child, people, places and things;
- c) involve parents/guardians and, where appropriate, whānau;
- d) enhance children's sense of themselves as capable people and competent learners. (p. 33)

Consistent with the curriculum document, DOP 4 was reflecting the shift towards a formative, sociocultural orientation in assessment. *Te Whāriki* and *Quality in Action* emphasise that a child's assessment not be seen in isolation, but rather that it be viewed within the context of their relationships with children, their teachers, their environment, their wider community and, most importantly, their immediate and extended family (Ministry of Education, 1998). Children are perceived as prepared and capable learners, who have the curiosity to develop and construct their own learning while having opportunities to engage in social interactions with their learning environments. Therefore assessments are distributed across people, places and things

Sociocultural assessment connects what is being learned to meaningful situations rather than focusing on the acquisition of isolated skills and knowledge. Carr (2001) argues that teachers should foreground the inclination and “pay attention to the background contributing milieu, and the skills and knowledge, when they appear relevant to encouraging the inclination” (p. 43). Instead of focusing on the acquisition of isolated skills, teachers look for evidence of children being ready, being willing and being able to participate in the learning environment. For example: if a child was learning to hold objects in a pincer grip the teacher might document the child's inclination to negotiate a turn with a pen (learning skill) rather than focusing on the developmental skill associated with pincer grip. Therefore sociocultural assessment practices foreground a credit-based approach that empowers the learner and emphasises dispositions for learning, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

According to the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 1996b), assessment should be a ‘two-way process’. Early childhood teachers, parents and children should be involved in the assessment process and this process should inform and provide insights to foster the complexity of children's learning. Assessment practices must include “documentation of what teachers do, say and think alongside of children's interactions” (Fleer, 2002 p. 9). That is, the teacher considers the child's interactions with one another and their learning environments as well as “cultural tools, such as the teacher” (p. 9). Carr's (1998a) project for assessing children's experiences identified that “documented assessment can make a valuable contribution to the

encouragement of positive learning, and assessment can be integrated with curriculum implementation in creative and thoughtful ways” (p. 37).

Fleer (2002) describes how it is important for assessment practices to ‘map’ and shape learning pathways. Earlier in this chapter I introduced the concept of progress and described how a child’s Learning Stories can become longer, wider and deeper. Documentation of a child’s learning should tell an increasingly complex story about the child’s interest and participation within the learning environment (Cowie & Carr, 2004).

Researchers claim that teaching practices in early childhood education have progressed from a developmental focus on the individual child towards a sociocultural approach with a strong focus on the relationships between learners, other adults and the wider community, although it has been argued that assessment practices continue to be positioned within a developmental theory (Carr, 2001; Davis, 2006; Fleer, 2002; Fleer & Robbins, 2004; Te One, 2000). Sociocultural ideas about children’s learning contrast with earlier views informed by developmentally-appropriate practice. Assessment from a developmental perspective foregrounds individual weaknesses and is often a linear and sequential process, whereas assessment from a sociocultural perspective is designed to map the transformation of children’s learning in relation to people, places and things. Effective assessment practices should be socially mediated and more than an individual construct. These are some of the ideas I focus on in my analysis of the Learning Story and staff meeting data in Chapter 3.

The research questions

In chapter one I outlined my thinking that assessment practices in Aotearoa/New Zealand were in a state of flux when I began teaching. This project was deliberately designed to explore the ways teachers (myself included) made sense of a new approach to, and theory of, learning and assessment. The investigation explored the teachers’ understandings of the dispositional framework through staff meeting minutes, Learning Stories, interviews and a focus group. The following questions framed this study:

- How did we make sense of the dispositional framework for assessing children's learning in early childhood education?
- How did we use the dispositional framework for assessing children's learning in early childhood education?

Summary

This chapter has identified the theoretical, policy and research contexts of assessment for learning in the context of early childhood education in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The chapter has investigated the context for change and discussed literature on teacher change and sociocultural approaches to assessment. In the following chapter I outline the research orientation, the research methods used and the theoretical frameworks that have informed and guided this research study.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

To study the ways a group of early childhood teachers, myself included, made sense of and used the dispositional framework, I undertook a qualitative ethnographic study. This chapter begins by discussing the orientation of the study, ethnography, and my research position. The second half of the chapter describes the methods and procedures I used in the study as I set about exploring teacher change in assessment in my centre. The chapter concludes with a discussion of my data analysis and comments on the aspects of my study that ensure its quality.

Davidson and Tolich (2003) write that “all research begins with some kind of curiosity” (p. 90). This was the case for me as I found myself perplexed at the assessment practices I encountered when I first began teaching. Excited by the prospect of change, I was curious to explore the ways we would make sense of, and use, the dispositional framework. In order to explore this idea I adopted a qualitative research design (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) predominantly grounded in ethnographic approaches (Brewer, 2000; Pole & Morrison, 2003).

Research orientation

This is a qualitative research study. A qualitative research orientation was required for this study because I was interested in finding out about the ways teachers made sense of a phenomenon (Neuman, 1997), in this case an assessment framework. A qualitative orientation was best suited for gathering rich data that could capture and tell a story about change. Adopting a qualitative orientation enabled me to “tell the story of a group from the group’s perspective” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999b p. 27) and involved telling our story of change in this process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Denzin, 1994).

I sought qualitative methods that would address the complexity of human behaviour (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). I wanted to explore the ways the teachers,

including myself, created and utilised their understanding of the dispositional framework, by observing their diverse behaviours, actions and thoughts (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). A qualitative orientation was best suited for my study because I was interested in investigating depth and exploring the complexities associated with constructing meaning and understanding (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Patton, 2002).

A qualitative orientation is holistic and flexible. It considers the “whole picture, and begins with a search for understanding the whole” (Janesick, 2000 p. 385). The main purpose of this research was to gain a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon - that is, explore the ways teachers made sense of and used a framework for early childhood assessment based on dispositions for learning. The reason this research orientation needed to be holistic and flexible is because I was studying complex lives and complex situations.

Creswell (2005) states that “qualitative research tends to address research problems requiring an exploration in which little is known about the problem” (p. 51). There is limited research in Aotearoa/New Zealand that investigates teachers’ understandings of the dispositional framework. As there is little known about the topic under investigation I required a research orientation where I could learn from the teachers through exploring their experiences and understandings, without generating results to represent the wider population . In addition, I required a form of study that allowed me to be an active participant within the research. This particular form of qualitative research is known as ethnography.

Form of the study

In order to understand the ways a group of early childhood teachers made sense of a new assessment framework, I undertook an ethnographic study. Ethnography has been shaped by anthropology and sociology, and has become influential in educational research (Bernard, 1994; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Ethnography is a method often used to learn from people in their natural setting. Ethnographic researchers are not concerned with unnatural or experimental circumstances (O’Connell-Davidson & Layder, 1994). Instead they seek to capture an insider’s view and understand the natural phenomena or cultural patterns by describing “what happens in the setting, how the people involved see their own actions and those of

others, and the context in which the action takes place” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995 p. 6). Brewer (2000) believes that:

Ethnography is not one particular method of data collection but a style of research that is distinguished by its objectives, which are to understand the social meanings and activities of people in a given field or setting, and its approach, which involves close association with, and often participation in this setting. (p. 11)

Knowledge of the social world and of the phenomenon being examined is acquired through the researcher’s active participation and involvement in the natural environment. Ethnography allows the researcher to work in close proximity with, and frequently participate in, a setting. This allows the researcher to focus on a discrete setting or group to describe social meanings and actions (Brewer, 2000; Pole & Morrison, 2003). LeCompte and Schensul (1999b) note that researchers “must become intimately involved with members of the community or participants in the natural settings” (p. 11). As I was interested to study, from an insider’s perspective, the teachers’ cultural views, behaviours and actions when making sense of the dispositional framework, an ethnographic approach was fit for my purpose.

Undertaking ethnographic research means that a researcher has to be flexible and accepting of ambiguities that may arise in the course of the study. The ethnographer, LeCompte and Schensul argue, “must understand the arena of culture to be investigated and all of the possible additional contextual factors that could potentially relate to or influence it” (p. 16). As an insider within the early childhood setting, I had some insight into the context of my study, but I also needed to ensure I was flexible and could attend to any ambiguities that might arise. Ethnographic approaches to research are “emergent” and often evolve over time. My lack of experience as an ethnographic researcher made conducting this type of research more difficult. Therefore I needed to be conscious of my dual role as a researcher and participant within this study.

My position

Researcher positioning is an important consideration in ethnographic research. The researcher's active participation in the study, and close association with the setting, is influential in their positioning. A key part of ethnographic research involves reflexivity (Brewer, 2000; Taylor, 2000). Scott and Morrison (2006), define reflexivity as "the process by which the researcher comes to understand how they are positioned in relation to the knowledge they are producing, and indeed, is an essential part of that knowledge-producing activity" (p. 202). Therefore the researcher must be conscious of and discuss "his or her role in the study in a way that honours and respects the site and participants" (Creswell, 2005 p. 485).

Initially I gave little attention to how I constructed my identity and role as a researcher or the sort of impression I might create within the early childhood setting (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). This could be due to the familiarity and comfort I experienced as a teacher within the setting. Ethnography is, most often, undertaken by members of the setting. This suggests it is unlikely that I could become disconnected or isolated from the research context.

Coffey (1999) adds that these identities or roles "can adapt and change; can be singular or multiple" (p. 24). Before this project began, the teachers in my early childhood setting regarded me as a colleague and a friend. I then took on the additional roles of being a researcher and participant. In effect these new roles influenced my status. LeCompte and Schensul (1999b) agree that these roles can be "so compelling that people may react to the person more in terms of his or her role than they do in terms of the individual's personal characteristics" (p. 5). This can be due to the conventional stereotypes that influence people's thoughts about science and research.

I was nervous about carrying out research in my work place. I was aware that the concept of being a researcher in my early childhood setting could provoke discomfort amongst my colleagues (Coffey, 1999). I needed to be open and responsive to any possibilities that may arise. Concerned and challenged by uncertainty, I wanted to be able to identify and respond quickly to possible issues. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) discuss the qualitative characteristics of relationships with participants during the

research process. It is common for the qualitative researcher to have intense contact with the participants and multiple roles within the field (Hammersley, 1998; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). As a researcher in my centre it was important that I focused on establishing a researcher's role with the participants while still maintaining my role as a colleague and friend. This conscious decision allowed me to be open and responsive to challenges and develop empathy by considering the teachers' comfort when sharing their understandings.

The setting and participant recruitment

In this section I introduce and describe the setting and participant recruitment procedures used in this study.

The setting

This study was conducted in my place of work, an early childhood centre. The centre is attached to a large tertiary institution. Its community is derived from staff and students of the institution. The centre is open between 7.45am and 5.30pm and caters for children aged between six weeks and six years of age.

Participant recruitment

The non-probable convenience sample (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) of five early childhood teachers, including myself, was selected from my workplace. Their selection was on the basis of being the infant and toddler team. A convenience sample strategy is frequently used in ethnography as it allows the researcher to choose participants who are convenient to the researcher and available for the study (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). In this study the participants were a 'captive audience' of teachers who were accessible to the researcher and willing to participate (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000).

For the purposes of this study I refer to the participants as 'teachers'. Before each teacher was individually interviewed she was asked to choose a pseudonym to ensure autonomy and confidentiality. Tessa, Elena, Lottie, Mabel and I each had either a Diploma or Bachelor of Teaching and Learning in early childhood. Our teaching experience in early childhood education ranged from six years to 20 years.

Gaining access and consent

In September 2004 I approached the supervisor and centre manager in the early childhood setting where I worked to discuss my research ideas and arrange a time to talk with the staff. This allowed the staff to ask questions about the process and their role as participants in this study. Following this, verbal consent was sought from the supervisor, centre management and the teachers to be involved in the study. This enabled me to discuss and clarify the research process. Prior to the data collection phase the participants received an information sheet that outlined the purposes of the research, participation requirements and a consent form. The participants signed and returned the consent form before interview times were scheduled.

Sources of data

To study the ways teachers made sense of, and used, a framework for early childhood assessment based on dispositions, I collected data from relevant policies, staff meeting minutes, Learning Stories, individual and group interviews and kept a research journal as time allowed. This section describes and explains the data collection methods used in this study. A content analysis of the relevant policies, staff meeting minutes and Learning Stories is also discussed.

Individual and group interviews

There is widespread agreement that the interview is a very important data collection method in ethnography (Brewer, 2000; Fetterman, 1998; Pole & Morrison, 2003; Wolcott, 1995, 1999). Interviews are useful for gathering data rich in social meaning. The researcher is “better able to obtain data addressing the questions asked in the study” (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1993 p. 116). This suggests interviewing can provide rich, in-depth data about the participants’ understandings (Brewer, 2000). However, LeCompte et al. (1993) advise researchers to use other methods for data collection and not rely on the interview alone in ethnographic studies. The use of other data collection methods limits the possibility of distorted or misleading data.

In this study I used individual, semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews involve a combination of structured and unstructured questions (Kvale, 1996; Patton, 2002). This method allows the structure of the interview to be reordered and

expanded for “new avenues to be included, and further probing to be under-taken” (Cohen, et al., 2000 p. 146). Brewer (2000) states that semi-structured interviewing is a ‘conversation with a purpose’ Therefore, interviews are useful in qualitative research for identifying thoughts and feelings and constructing understandings.

The participants were also interviewed in a focus group. The purpose of the focus group interview was to draw on emerging themes from the initial interview analysis. The group interview also allowed the participants to react to, and build on, ideas they talked about in the individual interviews. Stewart and Shamadasani (1990) describe this process as a ‘synergistic effect’. This practice “often leads to the production of more elaborated accounts than are generated in individual interviews” (Wilkinson, 2004 p. 180). The focus group involves interactions between participants rather than an ongoing discussion between the interviewer and the group. One disadvantage of focus groups is that they often occur in an unnatural environment. This, coupled with the presence of other participants, could hinder the likelihood of personal matters or opinions emerging (Litoselliti, 2003). In this study the teachers were familiar with one another and engaged in formal discussions each fortnight. However, I needed to consider the teachers’ comfort and willingness to engage in discussions about their practice. The use of individual interviews prior to the focus group allowed each teacher to address and discuss their personal opinions in a confidential environment.

Document analysis

I undertook an analysis of three kinds of documents - staff meeting minutes, Learning Stories and relevant assessment policy. To gain further understanding of the ways this group of teachers made sense of the dispositional framework, I participated in, and photocopied the minutes of, five staff meetings. Staff meetings occurred regularly each fortnight. Each staff meeting was approximately one and a half hours in duration. The purpose of the staff meetings was for teachers to plan a programme that was consistent with the children’s documented learning. The staff meeting minutes provided insight into the ways teachers made sense of and incorporated dispositional learning and formative assessment into practice.

I also collected a sample of children's Learning Stories. This type of documentation counts as student records (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Bogdan and Biklen argue that student records are not very useful in qualitative research because they can give a misleading or distorted picture of the child's progress. However Bogdan and Biklen point out that this type of student record can provide very useful insights into organisation and teachers' thinking. In this study I was primarily interested in exploring how teachers utilised the dispositional framework through their construction of the Learning Story, rather than in investigating the children's progress.

To understand the teachers' obligatory requirements within the early childhood setting I collected the assessment policies relevant to this study. Formal documents such as assessment policies were, and still are, significant in early childhood settings. They are designed to form and guide the day-to-day organisation of an early childhood setting. In early childhood, education policies are often written by, or in consultation with, parents, teachers and the wider community. McCulloch (2004) points out that many social researchers neglect or ignore the use of policies as a data source. This could be because some researchers see policy as "basic data" that does not produce absolute truth or reality (Wood, 1986). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), "these materials have been viewed by many researchers as extremely subjective, representing the biases of the promoter and, when written for external consumption, presenting an unrealistically glowing picture of how the organization functions" (p. 128).

Understandably, formal documents alone may provide limited data. However in this study the existing assessment policies were significant as they represented the expectation for assessment practices within the setting. They also governed and drove the way in which teachers practised and assessed children's learning. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) state that "official documents... should be treated as social products: [and] they must be examined" (p. 168). Thus assessment policies assist in identifying and describing the teachers' roles and responsibilities.

Ethics

Ethical consideration was strictly adhered to throughout this study. As already stated, prior to writing my research proposal I sought verbal permission from the supervisor, centre manager and the teachers involved. Each teacher gave verbal permission to be involved in this study. Once ethical approval from the institution in which I was studying was granted, the centre management and participants received an information sheet outlining the participants' requirements in the study, and a consent form to be signed prior to collecting the data. Once the children's learning journals had been selected at random, I wrote letters to each parent outlining the purposes of the study. Each parent received a consent form. Once the parents gave consent I began collecting the children's Learning Stories.

Confidentiality was guaranteed for both the participants and the early childhood setting (Hodson, 1999). To ensure confidentiality, only my supervisors and the transcriber of the individual and focus group interviews (in addition to myself), accessed the data. The data was stored securely on my computer and required a password to be accessed. Back-ups of the data were stored on pen drives and were kept in a locked file in my study. The participants were advised that any quotations used in the published work would not be directly attributed to the persons interviewed and to ensure this occurred I asked the teachers to choose a pseudonym to be used for the purposes of this study. The participants were advised of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage (Darlington & Scott, 2002). Additionally the participants were informed of the tertiary institution's complaints procedures under which this study was conducted.

Quality issues

Issues of credibility in ethnographic research have been heavily debated (LeCompte, et al., 1993). This is because "the methods, field conditions, and objectives of ethnographic research do not lend themselves to the same kinds of detachment and control over practice that are possible in clinical studies, experimental and epidemiological research" (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999, p. 272). However, Schensul et al. agree that "validity is a major strength in ethnographic

research” (p. 276). This is due to the length of time ethnographers invest in the setting.

By learning about the phenomenon and collecting data rich in personal experience, the ethnographer is able to achieve credibility in his/her environment. Schensul et al. (1999) note that “building rapport, reciprocity, and empathy are the hallmarks of ethnography because they are fundamental to the acquisition of good information and deep understanding” (p. 293). I ensured credibility by reporting on my dual positioning as a researcher and teacher in the early childhood setting. The reasons for choosing the sources of data were also a foundation for credibility. Each data source was described and justified earlier in this chapter.

Several data collection methods were used in this study. As described previously, these included individual interviews and a focus group interview along with relevant policy and assessment information about children’s learning. This use of various methods of data collection further enhances credibility (also referred to as triangulation) (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). This approach enables the researcher to explain the complexity of human behaviour through the collection of data from several different angles (Cohen, et al., 2000), making it possible for me to explore the relationship between the participants’ theories and their practices (Patton, 2002). The combination of interviews, the focus group, analysis of centre documents and participant observations assisted me in identifying relevant and stable themes and patterns. I was therefore able to investigate the participants’ understandings of assessment procedures without making comparisons or generating abstract theories (Bouma, 1996).

Mertens (2005) advises researchers who use convenience sampling not to “attempt to generalise beyond the given population pool” (p. 322). To generalise the findings would make them baseless, as it would give an extremely inaccurate representation of the findings gathered (Cohen, et al., 2000). Non-probable sampling was selected as I had no intention of seeking representation of the whole early childhood teacher population or of generalising the findings. The group of teachers studied simply

represented themselves. Rather than generalising the findings I wanted to form a unique interpretation of the phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2000).

In this study I used a number of strategies to enhance the teachers' comfort levels. Each teacher was given the opportunity to select the interview venue. Three of them were interviewed in the early childhood centre while one chose to be interviewed in her home. This enhanced her level of comfort during the interview. The teachers were also given the opportunity to make amendments to their interview transcripts. Such 'member checks', help to establish respondent validity (Silverman, 2001). I was able to both verify and clarify my interpretations of the teachers' responses to the interview questions. It also provided the teachers with an opportunity to ensure their responses were fair and reflected a true representation of their understandings. Janesick (2000) and Bogdan and Biklen (2003) note that these strategies can enhance credibility and ensure the researcher's interpretation reflects a true representation of the phenomenon.

To study the ways we made sense of and used the dispositional framework for assessing children, I used a range of data-gathering techniques. In the next three sections I describe and justify the methods used to gather, organise and analyse each data source.

Data gathering

This research was carried out over a period of six months, from the end of March to September 2005. As described earlier in this chapter I used a range of sources for gathering the data. Once formal consent was sought and granted, I interviewed each participant and organised a focus group interview. I also collected staff meeting minutes from five programme-planning meetings. The staff meeting minutes focused on the on-going learning identified in children's Learning Stories. The stories contributed to the monthly programme plan, which was displayed in the centre.

During March and April of 2005 I carried out four individual interviews and one focus group interview. The individual interview venues were selected by each teacher to promote their comfort. It was negotiated with the supervisor and senior teacher that

the focus group interview take place during a scheduled programme-planning meeting. This interview lasted approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes. Following each interview I wrote in a researcher's journal.

The focus group was held after all the participants had been interviewed. Cohen, et al. (2000) state that "group interviews require skilful chairing and attention to the physical layout of the room" (p. 287). Before the focus group began I made sure the room was set up so that the teachers could see each other. Prior to the focus group each participant was asked to say her name, to assist with the transcribing process. Following the focus group the participants were invited to view the transcript and make changes or clarify comments. One participant made changes to her transcript.

Both the individual interviews and the focus group were recorded onto cassette tapes. I then listened to each tape before sending them off to be transcribed. This enabled me to record notes around what I had learnt and reflect on potential ideas explored in the interviews. I found this process to be very useful when I began the initial data analysis. Patton (2002) identifies this process as the beginning of an in-depth analysis because it allows the researcher to reflect on initial thoughts, feelings, ideas and perceptions that relate directly to the study.

From March to September 2005 I collected a random sample of children's Learning Stories from three of the five teachers, by pulling children's names out of a hat. Two of the teachers did not document children's learning due to the nature of their job description in the early childhood setting. I selected three children from each of the three teachers. Each story that was written about these nine children was filed as data for this research over a period of six months. Permission and consent to use the children's Learning Stories was formally sought from the children's parents. An information sheet outlining the purposes of the study was given to the parents. The parents were assured that their child's Learning Stories would only be used to examine the teachers' understandings of the dispositional framework. Following this, the parents received a letter outlining the purposes of the study and a consent form that was to be signed and returned before data was collected. The Learning Stories

were photocopied from each child's learning journal and stored in a locked file in my study.

Following each individual interview, staff meeting and the focus group, I recorded notes in a researcher's journal as time allowed. The journal was an avenue for me to freely express my feelings, understandings and role as an ethnographic researcher.

Organising the data

There is widespread agreement in ethnographic research that the data collection finishes when data saturation point is reached (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999a, 1999b; Schensul, et al., 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). With over 80 pages of interview transcriptions and more than 50 pages of assessment policy, field notes and learning journals, I had reached saturation point after (six months) in the field. I familiarised myself with the data by reading the interview transcripts while I listened to the interview tapes and by re-reading the notes I had recorded in my journal (Baptise, 2001). I made several copies of each interview and the focus group transcript. I checked the interview scripts for accuracy and made small changes to ensure flow and coherency. Each transcript was then double-spaced, lined and page numbered to assist with locating text. I also line and page numbered the notes recorded in my researcher's journal.

I gathered and made copies of the relevant assessment policies. I then line and page numbered each policy to ensure ease of use. During the data collection phase a new assessment policy (which superseded the previous policy), was written in consultation with the participants of this study and other team members. This policy was also analysed. I compared the prior policy with the new one to explore how teaching practices, values and beliefs about assessment had evolved in my centre over time.

The Learning Stories were gathered over a period of six months. As the Learning Stories were collected they were line and page numbered. Following this, each learning story was filed in chronological order from March through to early September. The Learning Stories were stored in separate folders. The pseudonym of the teacher who wrote the stories was recorded at the top of each story. This system

allowed for easy retrieval and good storage, which “is critical for keeping track of what data is available; [and] for permitting easy, flexible, reliable use of the data” (Huberman & Miles, 1994 p. 430) in preparation for the data analysis.

Data analysis

In qualitative and ethnographic research, data collection and analysis occur simultaneously and are not carried out at a specific time or stage of the research (Delamont, 2002; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Wolcott, 1995, 1999). Bogdan and Biklen, (2003) describe data analysis as “the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials” (p.147). This process allowed me to work “with the data, organizing [it], breaking [it] into manageable units, coding [it], synthesizing [it], and searching for patterns” (p.147). Specifically, “the goal of data analysis [in ethnographic research] is to create less data not more” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 3). I was then able to generate a concise collection of data that transformed from raw to “cooked” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) in that, “cooked data” generates results.

The key task of an ethnographer “is to describe and explain what has been observed in the field” (Pole & Morrison, 2003, p.89). In my study this process began by identifying codes and patterns, which is similar “to assembling a jigsaw puzzle” (LeCompte & Priessle, 1993, p. 237). This allowed me to establish and build a picture of the phenomenon in question (Brewer, 2000). That is, the ways we made sense of an assessment framework.

Wolcott (1994) identifies several ways to approach data analysis. He refers to the term ‘think display’ coined by Huberman and Miles, (1994), which enables the researcher to convey information, dramatise and emphasise specific characteristics of the study. This approach enables the researcher to visually display his or her findings through the use of tables, charts and diagrams. A data display is an effective way to compress and map data to display its meaning. It also allows the researcher to establish similarities and differences between the categories and codes in order to draw on and verify conclusions when interpreting the data (Cohen, et al, 2000).

Finding Huberman and Miles' idea useful, I developed large mind maps as I identified potential themes that gave meaning to the study. I worked through each document I had produced/gathered in chronological order before examining all the data together. First I focused on the individual interviews and focus-group data. During this process I was guided by my two research questions:

- How did we make sense of the dispositional framework for assessing children's learning?
- How did we use the dispositional framework for assessing children's learning?

I assigned labels to the data, using words and phrases based on the two research questions. This created a coding system with over 25 categories; for example: 'development' or 'the challenges experienced'. Later, as I noted relationships and overlaps between some of the categories, I was able to regroup them into solid themes. For example categories such as 'isolated skills', 'knowledge', and 'deficits' were combined to create the 'development' theme.

A content analysis was carried out on the relevant assessment policies and staff-meeting minutes. Content analysis techniques enable me to gather and produce rich, in-depth accounts of social life that can be used to understand a social phenomenon. As I read through the staff-meeting minutes, assessment policies and Learning Stories I was guided by my second research question:

- How did we use the dispositional framework for assessing children's learning?

I developed another large mind map and made two columns in which I recorded possible categories and emerging themes. This process allowed me to examine the frequency or recurrences of key words or phrases in the staff meeting minutes and policies (Wilkinson, 2004). This was of particular interest for the assessment policies as each policy imposed different expectations for assessing and documenting children's learning.

A table for reading the learning story data was then developed. I was interested to see if a sociocultural approach was evidenced in the Learning Stories. As I read through the data I looked for the concepts described in Table 2 below. These concepts are emphasised in *Te Whāriki* and are considered important for teachers' teaching and children's learning (Carr, 2001).

Table 2. *Sociocultural concepts*

Continuity over time	Documenting children's performance and progress over several Learning Stories
Assessment for learning Formative assessment Dispositions	Dispositions fore-grounded Extending child's interest into other curriculum domains Teachers giving feedback about children's learning
Reciprocal relationships between people, places and things	Evidence of teachers recognising and documenting the relationships children have with people, places and things.
Connection to <i>Te Whāriki</i>	Evidence of links to <i>Te Whāriki</i>
Teacher's presence	Evidence of the teacher's presence in the learning story

As I read through the learning story data I also noticed evidence of other practices that did not reflect a sociocultural context. I was interested to explore why these practices were sometimes present in the Learning Stories. Table 3 below describes the recurring concepts and practices I noticed.

Table 3. *Recurring concepts and practices in learning story data*

<p>Assessment of learning Summative assessment</p>	<p>Evidence of formative assessment giving way to summative and criterion-referenced assessment</p> <p>Development and isolated skills foregrounded</p> <p>Teachers record a particular moment in time with little attention given to continuity over time</p>
<p>Teachers using a mish-mash of assessment practices</p>	<p>Evidence of a combination of formative, summative and criterion-referenced assessment practices</p> <p>Evidence of formative and ispiative assessment giving way to summative and criterion referenced</p>
<p>Continuity over time</p>	<p>Little evidence paid to documenting children’s learning over time</p>

As I read through the data I recorded evidence of the sociocultural concepts from Table 2 on a written chart and developed a column of the recurring concepts and practices for Table 3 that did not reflect a sociocultural context.

Following this I turned back to all of the potential categories and generated two broad themes that I felt would tell the story of change in my early childhood setting. Initially these themes were: *how we made sense of the dispositional framework* and *how we used the dispositional framework*. In doing so, I cross-examined each mind map and written chart to identify common categories and themes. However I also

found that writing and redrafting the findings chapters made me think more carefully about the best way to tell this story of change and helped me to fine-tune the data. Redrafting the findings chapters allowed me to explore and crystallise the following two themes: *moving from a deficit to a credit approach and assessment and who you are as a teacher*. *Moving from a deficit to a credit approach* focused on two sub themes: *the purpose of assessment* and *learning to aim for shifting goal posts* and *assessment and who you are as a teacher* focussed on *teacher absences/presence* and *the changing ideas of the teacher's role in assessment*.

Summary

This qualitative, ethnographic study explored the ways a group of early childhood teachers made sense of, and used, a new assessment framework. In this chapter I discussed my position in the research process and introduced the setting and the participants. The sources of data collection were discussed. Ethical and quality issues were considered and justified. Data analysis revealed several themes which illustrated the sense we were beginning to make of these new ideas. The next chapter focuses on the theme *moving from a deficit to a credit approach* and presents evidence on the ways we made sense of a new way for assessing children's learning.

Chapter 4

Moving from a deficit to a credit approach

Introduction

The project that this thesis reports on was designed to explore how a group of early childhood teachers, including myself, made sense of, and used, the dispositional framework. This chapter is the first of two findings chapters. It emphasises how the teachers that I worked with began to shift their thinking to reflect a credit-based approach for assessing children's learning in our early childhood centre. The second findings chapter goes on to examine the ways in which we thought our roles and positions in assessment and learning were changing.

To begin, I reintroduce the teachers' positions and relationships within the context of this study. Tessa, Elena and I worked together with Lottie, our senior teacher, in the infant and toddler area. Tessa, Elena and I documented children's learning, while Lottie was responsible for administrative work such as booking enquiries. Mabel was the centre supervisor and was responsible for leading the team through professional development. Mabel was also responsible for the development of policy. Neither Lottie nor Mabel was involved in writing Learning Stories. Mabel and Elena have worked in early childhood education for 20 years while Tessa has worked for almost eight years. The teachers have worked as a team in this centre for almost two years.

When I began this study of change in assessment practices in my early childhood centre, I collected data from individual interviews and a focus group interview, Learning Stories, relevant policies and staff meeting minutes. In this chapter I start to explore how teachers began to shift their thinking from a developmental focus to a dispositional approach. I look at this through exploring the teachers' views of the *purposes of assessment* and on notions of *learning to aim for shifting goal posts*. In this Chapter I present data around each of each of these themes to explain how teachers anticipated their practice might change.

The purposes of assessment

I developed the *purposes of assessment* as a sub theme for two reasons. Firstly, it became clear, through my analysis of the data, that the teachers had viewed development as the main focus of assessment and their teaching. Secondly, my analysis showed that the way we viewed the purpose of assessment influenced its focus. I was interested to find out what the teachers identified the purposes of assessment to be and if this changed as they learnt about formative assessment and learning dispositions. My analysis emphasised a relationship between development and the purpose of assessment. When the teachers were talking about how they used to do assessment they made comments like:

We assessed children's development rather than learning and we would just write down their routines and what they may have done throughout the day.

(Elena, Interview, L 145-148).

We would look at where their development was at and used RAPIDS to find out where that gap was...The gap in the child's development.

(Lottie, Interview, L 32-33).

These comments emphasise development. The focus of assessment attended to children's developmental milestones and their daily routines in the centre. The RAPIDS acronym stood for routines, activities, play, interests and day and was used by teachers as a criterion-reference tool for making sense of children's learning and development. Ideas like Elena's and Lottie's were typical of the other teachers too. For example, when I asked Tessa about the type of assessments she used to collect when she first started teaching at the centre, she said:

Once all the observations had been done, we reviewed the observation notes and assessed what we have not seen the child doing within her developmental level. Then chose one area in that child's development to work on with the child; set up learning objectives and strategies to achieve those objectives. It is more like achieving the outcomes on a step-by-step process.

(Tessa, Interview, L33-45).

In Chapter 2 I discussed Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) and the implications this practice can have for teaching and learning (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Flear, 1995a, 1995b; Smith, 1996). The purposes for assessment, as described by these teachers (in particular Tessa's comment about achieving outcomes on a step-by-step process) reflected an approach to assessment that was guided by DAP. This idea suggests assessment was primarily geared towards diagnosing and responding to gaps in children's development (a hallmark of DAP). Assessing children in this manner only identifies what a child can or cannot do within a certain developmental age or stage, giving little information about the quality or process of children's learning.

Tessa also described a similar focus of assessment to Lottie and Elena but added that the planning process involved learning objectives and teaching strategies designed to measure developmental achievement. You will recall, from Chapter 2, that this process was mandated in the Education (Early Childhood Centre) Regulations (1990) where teachers were expected to "regularly observe and assess children's developmental stages and needs and plan and evaluate the programme accordingly" (p.10). For these teachers, the focus of assessment was on identifying and responding to gaps in children's development. As discussed in Chapter 2 this focus reflects DAP and generates a specific level of development for children, to which teachers teach.

Tessa also referred to this assessment process as being 'objective' and 'systematic'. Her concepts reflect the seven stage planning cycle I talked about in Chapter 2 which encouraged the teachers in my early childhood setting to follow a step-by-step process when documenting children's learning and development (Ministry of Education, 1998). This suggests that, in practice, she found this cycle to be objective and systematic. The notion of objectivity has had particular consequences for the role of the teacher and how they constructed assessments and reported on children's achievements:

I was observing a child for two weeks,... I noticed a child who was nearly going to school had a difficulty cutting with scissors. So I decided to focus on

the manipulative skills of the child... We had to do different forms of observations to see where the child is at in terms of their so-called 'PILES' before we can write up the learning outcomes for the child. There was no input from the child it is not like what we are doing now.

(Tessa, Interview, L50-56).

Tessa explained that PILES was an assessment tool that she used for making sense of children's physical, intellectual, language, emotional and social development. The quote above illustrates how the purposes of assessment and the role as a teacher are closely tied. That is, when the focus of assessment was on development, teachers often distanced themselves from the observation process and their teaching attended to the acquisition of isolated skills and knowledge rather than emphasising learning dispositions and formative assessment. The ways in which teachers positioned themselves and carried out assessments is explored further in Chapter 5.

The purposes of assessment that the teachers described to me drew heavily on developmental age and stage-based ideas like those described by Fler and Robbins (2004). Teachers were expected to focus on developmental milestones and isolated skills rather than emphasising the learning skills associated with dispositions. Mabel confirmed this when she said:

Yes, the early Piaget way of thinking was to move through developmental stages. You move through the stages and once you mastered one you went onto the next one.... I think the old (assessment) model was skills based where you either can or you can't.

(Mabel, Interview, L86-88).

It seems that developmental theory was a feature of the teachers' previous views of assessment. This approach can be thought of as "a ladder-like progression to maturity" (Dahlberg, et al., 1999 p. 46). The children, irrespective of their context or their strengths and interests, were assessed according to their age and appropriate stage of development.

The relationship between development and assessment also featured in the original assessment policy. When I began collecting data for this study the *Curriculum Planning and Evaluation Policy (1)* provided assessment guidelines for the teachers in my centre. The purpose of assessment in this policy was to:

Provide a planned curriculum based on the progress, interests, abilities and areas of development in children, for both groups and individuals.

The purpose of the *Curriculum Planning and Evaluation Policy (1)* reflected a developmental approach and was replaced with a new policy part way through the study. Up to that point, the way teachers were expected to construct assessment was primarily based on DAP, which signalled a focus on development. However the policy was changed part way through my study and replaced with the *Curriculum Management Policy (2)*. As the new policy would be central to teachers' assessment practices I decided to undertake a content analysis of each of the policies to see if they could help me understand the process of change in my teaching team. Although DAP had been the focus of assessment, the new policy showed that the goal-posts for assessment were shifting. The purpose of the new assessment guidelines was:

To provide a planned curriculum based on observations of children's progress, interest, abilities and learning dispositions (for individuals and within group situations) that are reflective of the intentions for learners described in *Te Whāriki*. (p. 1)

The new policy replaced the developmental focus with an emphasis on learning dispositions and the aims from *Te Whāriki*. At a procedural level, teachers were now expected to shift the purpose of assessment from a developmental (deficit-based) approach to a dispositional (credit-based) focus.

Following the introduction of the new policy my analysis of the staff meeting records also illustrated a relationship between development and assessment. These records were collected during and after we participated in professional development about formative assessment and the dispositional framework. My analysis of these records

illustrated that as we learnt about the dispositional framework the idea that assessment would focus on development rather than learning was still evident. For example:

Elizabeth is climbing up and down the stairs. She is balancing on the obstacle course and practising her skipping and jumping. Her gross motor skills are developing.

(Staff-meeting minutes, 12.04.05 written by Karen).

This excerpt provides evidence that, at times, we retained a focus on skill acquisition and developmental milestones rather than the learning skills associated with dispositions. Davis' (2006) study of assessment in an early childhood centre found that teachers' beliefs about DAP, established through their teacher education programme, continued to influence their thinking and practice. The notion of identifying developmental milestones and teaching specific skills continued to govern the way we constructed assessments.

In Chapter 2 I referred to Te One's (2000) research that discussed the disconnects between teachers' theoretical understanding and practice. Following the release of *Te Whāriki* the teachers in Te One's study had indicated dissatisfaction with the traditional purposes of assessment, yet they continued refer to these purposes as they practised assessment in their early childhood setting. Davis (2006) also reports that the teachers in her study relied on previous purposes of assessment as they began to make sense of a new assessment framework. This seems to be similar to what was happening in the data I present here. The way we viewed the purposes of assessment centred on our previous views of assessment as we tried to make sense of, and use, dispositions for learning in practice.

In this section I have shown that the relationship between development and assessment was evident in our view of assessment. The focus of assessment hinged on the developmental (deficit) approach to assessment, signifying that DAP had continued to influence our thinking and practice as we were learning about dispositions and formative assessment. The policy change part way through my study showed how the goal posts for assessment were shifting to reflect new ideas

such as learning dispositions and formative assessment. However, the new purpose of assessment often became tangled in the old framework. This influenced the way we viewed and then practised assessment in my early childhood setting. In the next section I explore this idea further through the sub theme *learning to aim for shifting goal posts*.

Learning to aim for shifting goal posts

Having shown a relationship between development and assessment, I made it possible in my analysis to consider the ways in which we were *learning to aim for shifting goal posts*. The new purpose of assessment described in the *Curriculum Management Policy* showed how the context for assessment was shifting. In effect, the purpose of assessment was shifting from a developmental approach to a dispositional focus. I developed the sub theme *learning to aim for shifting goal posts* for several reasons. Firstly, during the individual interviews and focus group we talked about the factors that we thought had supported a shift in our thinking. Secondly, my analysis revealed key differences in what my colleagues were saying about assessment and I noted that their views of the dispositional framework differed. In the first half of this section I explore the key elements that we thought supported our shift in thinking. In the second half of this section I illustrate the key difference in what my colleagues were saying about assessment and explore how we tried to make sense of the new assessment focus.

As discussed, the context for assessment in my early childhood setting was formalised when the *Curriculum Management Policy* (2) was introduced part way through my study. At a procedural level, this change required teachers to think about and practise assessment in a different way. However, it is important to note that this change had been building well before the new policy was introduced and that some teachers were already beginning to adjust their thinking to reflect the new ideas. My analysis showed that as we reflected on the change, we identified the key elements that we thought contributed to the ways we made sense of the new assessment framework. Mabel explains:

Through professional development, just going to courses over the year, talking with colleagues where I work and also just in the early childhood community

and reading material that comes out and being involved in the early childhood exemplar project I learnt a lot through that, yeah, those are the main places

(Mabel, Interview, L32-36).

Mabel's learning was largely self-directed in that she decided what she wanted to learn and went about it when she participated in courses and through her involvement in *The Early Childhood Learning Exemplar and Assessment Project (ECLEA)*. As discussed in Chapter 2 the ECLEA project explored assessment in the context of *Te Whāriki* and provided early childhood teachers with examples of assessment in a new context.

Like Mabel, Tessa also talked about her involvement in self-directed learning:

The dispositional framework is a big thing so this year I focused on my reading as my professional development is to read books, articles and exemplars about Learning Stories and the dispositional framework from which our assessment of children is based from. ...Often it's good to hear other staff ideas, it opens up my thinking cap

(Tessa, Interview, L104-108).

In Chapter 2 I wrote about the value of self-directed learning and the positive impact this can have on teachers' learning (Mitchell & Cubey, 2003). Both Tessa and Mabel read as a means to gain further understanding of the dispositional framework. In addition Mabel attended professional development courses and talked with colleagues to assist with the change. Tessa touched on listening to her colleagues' ideas as this helped to refine her thinking and contributed to her understanding of the new ideas. This idea was also evident in the focus group discussion:

I think the team has been fantastic and there's been heaps and heaps of talk about what is a learning story, and do you think this is a learning story, and do you think this is worth writing down... if we don't have these conversations then we will never change and we will never reflect on what we are doing. So the more we talk about assessment the better the practices within the centre. I think our centre has a culture of talking and reflecting and questioning what we are doing,

that's great because it means we never just think what we are doing is exactly right.

Everyone: Yes!

(Mabel, Focus Group, 128-138).

Collegial support and reflective practice were used as tools for supporting teachers as they developed new ideas and began to make sense of the new assessment framework. There was a sense of commitment among the team to accept this shift and teachers managed this change by engaging in continual reflection. Davis (2002) explains that “as practitioners are exposed to new ways of thinking about and managing assessment in their settings, change becomes more possible and probable” (p. 35). The idea that “*we are never just thinking what we are doing is exactly right*” suggests that we were committed to continuously evolving and shaping our practices in light of this new way of thinking (Britzman, 2003). In addition the kinds of activity that Elena, Mabel and Tessa described as useful - reflection, reading how others wrote assessments using sociocultural ideas and listening to and participating in discussions and staff meetings - were also the kinds of activities teachers at the New Beginnings Centre of Innovation study engaged in (Wright, et al., 2006). These activities were valuable for the teachers in my early childhood setting as they were *learning to aim for shifting goal posts*.

In this second half of this section I present data around *learning to aim for shifting goal posts* to show how we tried to make sense of the change. My analysis illustrated that while we were shifting our thinking to reflect learning dispositions and formative assessment we demonstrated different levels of understanding. As we engaged in self-directed learning and offered each other collegial support, some of the teachers' view of assessment began to shift, as the next quote shows:

My understanding about the dispositional framework is about noticing, recognising and responding to children's interests and how they are developing several dispositions in the way in which they explore their environment and interact with people, places and things... We no longer looked at the deficit aspect of the child, but we are looking at the holistic aspect of the child's

development: Home and cultural environment and preschool centre environment. All of these are embodied in Te Whāriki principles for learning.

(Tessa, Interview, L112-115 & 128-131).

Ideas about assessment were shifting to include learning dispositions and the learning intentions described in *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum. That is, Tessa imagined that assessment, within the dispositional framework, involved the wider community and was closely tied to *Te Whāriki*. Mabel's explanation was similar to Tessa's thinking:

I think the dispositional framework is a tool that teams of teachers can use to assess, to notice, recognise and respond to what's happening for children in an early childhood setting and they are based on Te Whāriki and basically the framework is a tool to use to assess and plan and evaluate what's happening in centres...so it is a big shift in thinking ...what we write down (and) what we value as important is different in this method than in the old method, and it's much more credit based... it doesn't talk about what children can't do, it talks about celebrating where they are at.

(Mabel, Interview, L44-62).

Mabel made a number of connections that illustrated she had embraced, in her thinking, several of the dispositional framework and formative assessment ideas. This was evident when she talked about the dispositional framework being a credit-based model and recognised that this new approach is based on the learning intentions in *Te Whāriki*.

In addition, when Tessa and Mabel described their understanding of the dispositional framework, they began to contrast and critique the two approaches (deficit and credit) and recognise the deficit focus in the developmental approach. This process is similar to that noted by Davis (2002), during her work as a professional facilitator and coordinator for the Ministry of Education *Early Childhood Learning and Assessment project*. Davis' work showed that teachers made clear distinctions between the two assessment approaches as they explored and adopted some of the formative assessment ideas.

As some teachers were beginning to contrast and critique the two approaches other teachers were still influenced by former theoretical perspectives, as Elena explains:

Learning Stories have a framework which supports the learning dispositions and the Te Whāriki curriculum and they work together. When you are writing a learning story you can see the learning dispositions or areas or support that the child may need.

Karen: What do you do when you notice dispositions or areas of support?

Then you can reflect on the 'what next' and plan your programme to encourage and extend the child's learning or to help them with any difficulties that may show up

(Elena, Interview, L33-37).

Elena made connections between learning dispositions and *Te Whāriki*. In that, she imagines that the two frameworks work together. However the comments about 'areas of support' and 'difficulties' could suggest that Elena's thinking was still informed by DAP because she indicates that she would continue still, to respond to and fill, gaps in children's development within the dispositional framework.

A similar idea was also shared by Lottie:

It's like molding it (the dispositional framework) into the everyday programme without a great big change...it's like a rollover. It's not like you've got this module (dispositional framework) and you've got this module (developmental framework) you've got an integration of both...it's just like putting another level into your teaching but you're calling it a dispositional framework

(Lottie, Interview, L157-180).

Both Lottie's and Elena's comments are examples of how new ideas can become stuck in old frameworks and I interpret their comments to indicate that they were grappling with their understanding of the dispositional framework. The dispositional

framework was seen as an addition rather than a replacement of existing assessment practices. I argue that conceptualizing the dispositional framework as an additional assessment practice will bring teachers into conflict as they attempt to implement dispositions for learning and formative assessment within a developmental milieu. This idea is explored further in Chapter 5.

Differences in what my colleagues were saying about assessment were emerging. Both Tessa and Mabel talked about assessment involving the wider community and reflecting reciprocal relationships between people, places and things. These comments highlight a growing emphasis on sociocultural approaches to assessment which reflects the community that the child is connected to. Elena and Lottie's comments suggest some uncertainty and apprehension with what the new assessment framework would mean in practice. They also seem to be making connections between what they knew of DAP and what they were learning with respect to assessment for learning. Britzman (2003) explains that while there is no single road to teaching and learning there are "some shared persistent dilemmas, contradictory realities and common narratives that the newly arrived personally confront and internalize as their own" (p. 6). In effect, some of the teachers in this study were beginning to explore and implement these new ideas while for others this process led to new ideas becoming stuck in old frameworks.

The possibility that new ideas get stuck in old frameworks was also evident in the Learning Story data and staff meeting records. As I examined this data I identified the influence of other theoretical perspectives, specifically DAP and summative assessment. I found that a focus on development and 'skills identification' featured regularly in the Learning Stories. For example Tessa wrote a story about Richard:

It's time to challenge Richard's gross motor skills. It is obvious he is interested in climbing up and down planks so we will make sure there are obstacle courses available to support this skill

(Learning Story, 02.06.05).

It seems that Tessa is holding onto a conceptualization of assessment that retains the acquisition of skills rather than the development of dispositions. She identifies what

Richard can already do - “climb up and down planks” - and plans to help him improve this interest. This leaves me wondering where this fits as we were trying to move toward a dispositional framework for assessment. This kind of practice was also evident in the staff meeting records:

Sammy is walking now. We will introduce him to the obstacle course so he can practice this new skill

(Staff meeting minutes, 01.03.05, written by Lottie).

In Chapter 2 you will recall I wrote about the Wilks report (1993). Like the teachers in Wilks’ study, my colleagues had been expected to identify specific needs or concerns and fill any developmental gaps that were identified by the other teachers, parents or whānau. Children were rarely involved or included in the assessment process other than to test if developmental gaps had been filled. In 2005, in spite of a significant policy and theoretical shift in early childhood education, they still seemed to be doing the same. I was perplexed at this approach as it did not reflect what we had learnt about formative assessment and learning dispositions, even though the policy and research about assessment had been urging change for well over ten years.

Along with noticing a focus on ‘skill identification’ I also noticed examples of assessment that summed up a child’s achievement as a result of engaging in the learning programme. For example a learning story written by Tessa, about Lucy, said:

...Lucy is a quiet and observant child, who waits and observes to see what the situation can offer her before entering into a group situation. She loves music activities, especially dancing and singing.... She loves playing with dolls and Barney... Lucy is also a bookworm... Lucy has so many interests and persists in activities in which she is interested for a long period of time... Lucy is a quiet child, but underneath that structure she is also determined.... She can communicate her needs and feelings verbally and also with her body language

(Learning Story, No Date).

I wonder about the importance Tessa was placing on summing up Lucy's progress over a period of time. This example illustrates how summative assessment is neither designed nor useful for engaging children in future learning (Sutton, 1991) and focuses on providing a summary of Lucy's abilities and interests. This is an example of how formative assessment and ipsative assessment frequently gave way to summative assessment which was not consistent with a sociocultural approach in early childhood assessment.

These examples illustrate some of the tensions we faced when producing assessment information about children rather than for children. This is similar to Davis' (2006) study that examined how a group of early childhood teachers negotiated and practised assessment. Davis identified the tensions and complexities associated with negotiating a new assessment approach, in that, as teachers began to embrace new ideas, these were sometimes lost in favour of traditional assessment practices that they were accustomed to. Like Davis, I also noted that, as we embraced a new assessment approach, we continued to use traditional methods of assessment in a new policy context. New assessment practices such as formative and ipsative assessment were at times lost in favor of traditional methods. My hunch is that, as we began to make sense of dispositions and assessment for learning, we used all the skills knowledge and understandings we had about assessment in order to make sense of assessment within a new policy context. I also wondered if the ways in which we made sense of, and used the dispositional framework depended on how we viewed assessment and our role as teachers.

Summary

This chapter set out to report on the ways a group of teachers tried to shift their thinking from a deficit approach to a credit-based focus. The sub theme *purposes of assessment* illustrated how the teacher's view of assessment was influenced by DAP and showed a clear relationship between development and assessment. The introduction of the new assessment policy showed how the goal-posts for assessment were changing to reflect learning dispositions and formative assessment. The second half of this chapter focused on the key differences in what we were saying about assessment and explored how we were *learning to aim for shifting goal posts*. I also looked more closely at what we were actually 'doing' in practice. Chapter 5 traces a

similar kind of development and looks at the changing ideas about the teachers' roles in assessment through the theme *assessment and who you are as a teacher*.

Chapter 5

Assessment and who you are as a teacher

Introduction

Chapter 4 explored the ways in which teachers in my early childhood setting began to shift their thinking to reflect a credit-based approach for assessing children's learning. This second findings chapter offers an account of the changing ideas about the role and position of the teacher in the assessment process. It also explores how we used the dispositional framework to assess children's learning within a new policy context. In this chapter I begin to illustrate the ways our team began to put our learning into practice. How we talked and what we wrote showed how we were constructing new understandings of our role in the assessment process. I look at this by exploring the teachers' changing views on *teacher presence/absence* in the assessment process and on notions of *the changing ideas about the teachers' role in assessment and teaching*.

Teacher presence/absence

The sub theme teacher presence/absence was developed to explore how the place of the teacher was changing. As we began to make sense of new assessment theory and what it might mean for our practice, my colleagues began to critique the old assessment theory. The place of the teacher was changing. For example Tessa and Lottie reflect on their position in the assessment process before they learnt about dispositions and formative assessment:

...in these observations we had to be very objective; we could not write down our assumptions and feeling.

(Tessa, Interview, 39-40).

Yes, I sat back a lot, um, I think that's what we were trained to do, not to be part of the observation but to write up what was happening around you

(Lottie, Interview, L49-51).

Tessa and Lottie both described previous assessment practices as ‘objective’. That is, their feelings and assumptions about the child’s development were not included in the assessment process. This approach gives the illusion of teacher absence in the assessment. It is as if nobody, apart from the child being observed, actually exists. This was a feature of the developmentally appropriate approach, which Wolfgang and Wolfgang (1999) say often expected teachers to step back and withdraw from interactions when observing and recording assessment information. Recording in this way suggests that the child is acting in isolation, separated from their peers and other adults. When I asked Elena about her previous involvement in the assessment process she said:

It’s quite different from today because today you are actually allowed to be involved. Whereas way back then you had to sort of distance yourself and just concentrate on specific skills or milestones such as “Johnny’s picked up the pencil in his left hand, he has good pencil grip

(Elena, Interview, L178-179).

Hatherly and Sands (2002) identify that maintaining emotional detachment, whilst observing, was common practice for many early childhood teachers in New Zealand. There was a concern that if teachers’ “judgements are allowed to enter the equation they will only taint the truth” (p. 10). The illusion of teacher absence in assessment was shifting as teachers recognised opportunities to be involved. This idea was shared by Mabel:

It [the dispositional framework] puts teachers in the picture rather than sitting on the outside looking in. The teacher is actually in the relationship. I think it takes teachers a long time to put themselves in the picture though

(Mabel, Interview, L107-119).

Mabel talked about the teacher’s place in assessment and how she believed this was changing. In a sociocultural approach an “observation has to take into account the social experience and thinking of those who do the observation” (Smith, 1998 p. 41). That is, the teacher must gain objectivity through including their personal voice when

documenting learning (Hatherly & Sands, 2002). In Mabel's comment we can see the tensions teachers may face when they begin to assess children in a sociocultural context. In effect, teachers may begin to resist or reject old theoretical perspectives as they try to figure out what it means to be a teacher in this changing landscape. Like the teachers in Fler and Robbins' research (2004), my colleagues were beginning to take on these new ideas and position themselves within the assessment or observational process. This was evident in my analysis of the learning story data. A story written by Elena illustrates how she did this in her assessment of Sarah:

It was in the afternoon when Sarah went over to the blanket that Mabel had placed over the pillows and said "someone's hiding" I said, "do you want to play the blanket game?" Sarah nodded.... I watched Sarah walk over to the magnet board and pick up an Octopus and placed it under the blanket...

(Elena, Learning Story, 18.3.05).

In the first half of this section Elena talked about how, in the new framework for assessment, she was now able to include her voice in the assessments she wrote. This seems to be happening in the data I describe here. Elena sees the opportunity to be involved in the assessment process and documents this in the story she wrote for Sarah. In Chapter 2 I wrote that documentation of children's learning must illustrate what teachers think, do and say (Fler, 2002). These ideas were reflected in a learning story written by Tessa:

It started at the drawing table where Lucy and Sarah were drawing with felts. Sarah started to draw lines on her face with red and blue felts. I said to Sarah "you are drawing on your face Sarah". A thought popped into my head – why don't I introduce them to face painting?.... I showed Sarah and Lucy the jar of paints and told them I was going to paint their faces.... I started with Sarah...

(Tessa, Learning Story, 15.4.05).

The inclusion of the teacher's voice is important as it places the teacher inside the assessment process. Therefore, as Tessa and Elena made sense of new assessment theory they gained objectivity through including their personal voice and their role in the assessment process. Hatherly and Sands (2002) believe that, "as meaning making

is central to our interest in assessment, then objectivity becomes more authentic when a variety of perspectives are canvassed and documented” (p. 10). The stories illustrate the power of the assessment strategy and the possibilities that it gave Elena and Tessa to write themselves into the stories they wrote. These stories are examples of the ways we beginning to document assessment in a sociocultural way.

In this section I illustrated how the teachers began to critique old assessment theory and make changes to the way they positioned themselves in the assessment process. As teachers resisted and rejected old assessment theory their position in the assessment process began to change. This also included a shift in the teachers’ role in the assessment process. In the next section I explore this idea through the sub theme *the changing ideas about the teachers’ role in assessment and teaching*.

The changing ideas about the teachers’ role in assessment and teaching

In Chapter 4 I began to show how the purpose of assessment was shifting from a developmental approach to a dispositional focus. As well as this, at a procedural level, teachers were now directed towards different processes and methods for gathering assessment information. This section draws on the *changing ideas about the teachers’ role in assessment and teaching* and explores whether change actually occurred. The methods for gathering assessment information as described in the *Curriculum Planning and Evaluation* (1) policy asked teachers to:

...aim to observe one child per fortnight in depth.

At the end of the two-week observation period an individual learning objective will be set for the child and documented on the child’s profile sheet. Plans for implementing this objective will be recorded on the programme plan sheet.

Learning objectives for children will be evaluated and documented on their individual profile plan two weeks later.

In Chapter 4 Tessa described these assessment procedures as ‘objective’. This process was viewed as systematic and inadvertently directed teachers to identify and respond to gaps in children’s learning. The new *Curriculum Management Policy* (2)

shifted this focus. The role of the teacher in the assessment process was changing. Now teachers were asked to:

Gather and collate information for the purpose of assessment, planning and evaluation.

Teachers, parents and children regularly assess and plan in informal undocumented ways... Teacher also formalise this process through documentation

All teachers take responsibility for gathering examples of assessments of children's learning throughout their regular day-to-day work with children.

No longer were teachers expected to 'observe one child per fortnight in depth' or set 'individual learning objectives'. They were to gather continuous assessment information and formalise this process through documentation. Teachers, parents and children were invited to be part of this process. This reflected a shift to sociocultural ideas that I discussed in Chapter 2. A further significant difference in the policies concerned the involvement of others in the assessment process. The *Curriculum Planning and Evaluation Policy* (1) read:

Prior to the child being formally assessed, the primary caregiver will inform the parent (s), caregivers. This is an opportunity for shared consultation between the home and centre.

Following the formal assessment period, staff will set up a time to share with parents about their child's learning and development.

Following this formal discussion, parents will be asked to sign their child's individual profile sheet confirming that a formal discussion has taken place.

Previously teachers consulted parents before their child was to be assessed but now the new *Curriculum Management Policy* (2) emphasised a sociocultural approach that

encouraged children, teachers and their whānau to contribute to the assessment process:

Teachers, parents and children regularly assess and plan in informal undocumented ways...

Children and parents/whānau are encouraged to contribute to this process through sharing their perspectives and aspirations, by either documenting these directly or through a teacher.

You will recall, in Chapter 2, I wrote about teachers making changes to their role in the assessment process. This seems to be what is happening in the data I describe here. Our roles and expectations of the families' contribution to the assessment was changing. Carr et al. (2003) found that the teachers' roles and expectations in relation to families also changed when they embraced a sociocultural approach. In our teaching team we were expected to begin engaging in on-going, collaborative discussions with children, teachers and their families about learning. This change involved a shift in the teacher's role and identity in the assessment process. Such a change was becoming evident in the focus group which provided insight into the kinds of things we discussed and reflected on as we thought our role in the assessment process was changing:

Lottie: ... the challenge for these children is not what they have learnt but what they are going to be learning.

Elena: ...for them [the children] it's extending them, and it makes a big difference I think in our planning. We are planning more for the children than

Mabel: Than off the top of our heads?

Elena: Yes, it's more individual children rather than just, well we haven't done a certain thing for a while we'll do that.

Karen: ... rather than focusing on a theme... we are focusing on the children as individuals and as groups... and children drive their assessment and their learning. We are more interested in dispositions and the principles of Te Whāriki...

Mabel: I think the other big thing for me is that we are looking at dispositions and the principles of Te Whāriki rather than looking at skills, we are looking at dispositions and we are looking at the whole picture, we are looking at relationships with others, and we are looking at this community and we are looking at children's contributions to their own learning, and also to other children's learning.

Everyone: Yes

(Focus group, L 30-92).

In Chapter 2 I introduced Timperley and Parr's (2004) idea of professional learning communities and learning conversations. Teachers engage in learning conversations to enhance the quality of their teaching practice or work towards a shared goal. The excerpt above gives an example of the kind of learning conversations we engaged in and illustrates how our role in assessment was changing.

In Chapter 4 I wrote about a relationship between development and assessment. Before we learnt about learning dispositions and formative assessment, our role in the assessment process centred on identifying and responding to gaps in children's development. In the focus group there seemed to be a shift in the kind of things we talked about. This excerpt illustrates how we thought our role in the assessment process was changing from a developmental approach to a dispositional focus that was closely tied to *Te Whāriki*. As a team we talked about what children were going to be learning rather than what they have learnt and shifted our attention to the child coming first in the assessment process rather than the programme driving it. We agreed that our role in the assessment process was changing to include some of the sociocultural ideas I discussed in Chapter 2. This was evident when Mabel talked about the focus of assessment shifting from skills to dispositions and referred to children making contributions to their own learning. As my colleagues and I were

beginning to make sense of new assessment theory and our role within the assessment process, our conversations expanded to account for many more variables than our previous focus on developmental theory, routines and skills allowed for. Our role in the assessment process was shifting to focus on children and learning rather than on the programme and development.

Some of the ideas that the teachers talked about in the focus group were also evident in my analysis of the learning story data and staff meeting records. As we began to make sense of the new assessment framework I noticed how our role in the assessment process was shifting from documenting children's development to recognising and documenting dispositions and relationships among children. This signalled that we were beginning to pay attention to some of the sociocultural ideas I talked about in Chapter 2 and document these in the stories we wrote. Tessa wrote a story about Lucy's interest in the garden. The 'what next' for this story reads:

...we will continue to talk to Lucy about the importance of looking after our plants, to encourage her to take responsibility and develop a relationship with the natural environment

(Tessa, Learning Story, 11.03.05).

And Elena wrote a story about Sarah. The 'what next' for this story reads:

... We will continue to offer Sarah varied art activities to encourage her interest in art and her growing task persistence.

(Elena, Learning Story, 04.03.05).

In Chapter 2 I introduced the four processes of assessment for learning as described in *Kei Tua o Te Pae*. That is, the 'notice, recognise, respond, revisit' framework (Ministry of Education, 2004). These examples provide evidence that the role of the teacher was shifting from identifying and responding to gaps in children's development to emphasising taking responsibility and task persistence as a possible next step to engage Lucy and Sarah in further learning. Attention has been paid to the chain of behaviours and dispositions identified in the PACE research (Carr, 1998a, 1998b). This example also illustrates how we used the concept of taking

responsibility and task persistence, as a way to understand and make sense of children's learning. Tessa and Elena are focusing on dispositions for learning rather than the child's performance or the acquisition of isolated skills that could be associated with looking after the plants or completing art work.

Along with beginning to document dispositions I also noticed the importance we paid to documenting relationships among children. I wrote a story about Ian and George:

Ian and George have been playing follow the leader. I have noticed how their friendship has blossomed over the weeks. Today I watched Ian crawl over to the kai table. George followed closely behind. When Ian stood at the kai table George did the same. I watched Ian reach out and gently touch George's face. George smiled and looked at me for reassurance. George looked back at Ian and reached out to touch Ian's face. He couldn't quite reach but persisted as he stretched his arm out and took a step toward Ian - What a delight!

This friendship between Ian and George has been developing for several weeks. Our programme supports an environment where children are encouraged to build relationships as they play alongside each other. Ian and George are imitating each others behaviour – it is their game – their way of communicating with each other

(Karen, Learning Story, 17.06.05).

This learning story is one example of the kind of stories we wrote that illustrated how our role in the assessment process was shifting. In effect, relationships among children were beginning to be valued and featured within the assessment process. The learning story above illustrates how I allowed for the relationship between Ian and George to be documented and identified how this linked to our programme. Tessa's learning story about Sarah and Rose shared similar features:

Rose's friendship with Sarah began last year. It was developing strongly, but when the Christmas break came, the continuity of that friendship was cut off. Rose came back in January, but Sarah only came every Thursday. Rose shows her delight each time Sarah arrives at the gate with her Mum and big sister every Thursday morning. She did not forget Sarah however, Sarah had not

responded to Rose's warm vivacious greeting. It could have been a difference in temperament maybe because Sarah comes in looking quite tired. However, all of this changed when Sarah started attending full-time. They have renewed their friendship. I saw them together playing in the sandpit, painting together, dancing and laughing together and hiding in the cubicles together...

(Tessa, Learning Story, 15.3.05).

These two Learning Stories illustrated how we paid attention to relationships among children and documented these in the stories we wrote. *Te Whariki*, draws our attention to the importance of children “learning through people places and things” (Ministry of Education, 1996b p. 43). In these stories Tessa and I emphasised that learning is linked to warm and consistent relationships between children. Tessa's Learning Story about Rose and Sarah illustrates the importance she placed on documenting social interactions as part of her role in the assessment process. This emphasis we placed on relationships was also evident in the staff meeting records:

Erica is very interested in being involved and building relationships with other children. We can support this interest by initiating group activities or experiences where she can be involved with other children

(Staff meeting minutes, 05.06.2005, written by Tessa).

In Chapter 2 I wrote that a child's learning is viewed as continuous and assessments should be situated in relation to people, places and things. In that, relationships between children are a fundamental part of learning. Carr (2001), claims that reciprocal relationships and opportunities for children to participate with others are pivotal in the assessment process. This idea builds on a sociocultural approach to learning that enables children to acquire knowledge and understanding about their world by engaging in shared experiences with people, places and things. Now we not only provided opportunities for rich social interaction, but we also documented this in some of the staff meeting minutes and Learning Stories we wrote for children. This shows how our role in the assessment process was shifting as we began to make sense of dispositions for learning and formative assessment.

In Chapter 4 and earlier in this Chapter I provided evidence that the new *Curriculum Management Policy (2)* had indicated a shift in the purpose of assessment and the role of the teacher in the assessment process. However at times my analysis of the Learning Stories and staff meeting records clearly demonstrated how our role in assessment and teaching moved between the old and new theoretical perspectives. That is, at times we paid attention to the traditional methods for collecting assessment information as well as adopting some features of the dispositional framework and formative assessment. The following quote provides evidence to illustrate this point. Elena wrote a story about Sarah's interest in a game:

What learning is taking place for Sarah; communication, task persistence taking an interest? Taking responsibility for her learning and making choices.

(Elena, Learning Story, 18.04.05).

In this story Elena's role was to use the dispositions for learning as a criterion-referenced tool for making sense of Sarah's learning. Elena identified the learning that was taking place for Sarah by listing several dispositions and behaviours identified in the PACE research (Carr, 1998a, 1998b). In Chapter 1 I talked about checklists that were intended to assess developmental progress and performance. This is similar to the data I describe here. The teacher's role was to use the dispositional framework as a checklist to assess whether Sarah was performing the chain of behaviours described in the PACE research. This was not the only time that this kind of practice occurred, as the following data from a staff meeting showed:

What's under the blanket?

Sarah

What learning is taking place?

Communication

Persistence

Taking an interest

Taking responsibility

Making choices

(Staff meeting minutes, 15.05.05, written by Karen)

Drawing upon dispositional concepts from the PACE research, at times we were effectively assessing the child's performance against these. In effect, ipsative assessment was lost in favor of using a criterion-referencing approach as a purpose of assessment to make sense of children's learning and this influenced our role as teachers in the assessment process. This was incongruent with the broader policy drive towards formative assessment. I wondered if we were using the dispositional framework in the same way that old developmental checklists had been used. That is, we measured the child's achievement against the dispositional framework. Our role in the assessment process shifted from noticing and recording dispositions to comparing the dispositional concepts, such as involvement, interest, responsibility, with the child's performance and using this information to make sense of a child's capacity to be involved or persist with difficulties.

My analysis of the staff-meeting minutes provided further insight into how the teacher's role shifted between old and new theoretical perspectives. For example, we used the dispositional framework for summing up children's learning:

Sam's attention span is increasing. He just loves watching the bubbles fall, playing in the sandpit and dancing to lots of different music. He is developing well and happy to play alongside his friends

(Staff meeting minutes, 12.4.05, written by Tessa).

In Chapter 2 I introduced summative assessment and its focus on performance rather than the learning process. The excerpt above illustrated how our role shifted to use the dispositional concepts as a measure for summing up a child's performance at a particular point in time. Prior to learning about assessment for learning and dispositions, we had engaged in summative assessment where we had been expected to summarise a child's progress at the end of a teaching and learning programme. This role was reinforced in the cyclical planning process described in *Quality in Action* that I wrote about in Chapter 2. Along with using the dispositional framework as an external standard and summarising the child's learning I also noticed that we were not paying attention to shaping pathways for future learning.

A fundamental feature of the dispositional and formative assessment procedures is how assessment accounts for progress. As I reviewed the Learning Story data I noticed continuity over time was not evident in the Learning Stories we wrote for children. I illustrate this with three consecutive extracts from Sarah's Learning Journal:



4.3.05

ame to the table where was showing how to paste autumn leaves onto cellophane. I showed her the paste brush and how to paste the leaves to make her picture she copied my actions saying "pat pat" as she placed the leaf onto her picture, we completed it together. Afterwards started her own picture repeating the process that I had showed her.

Interpretation:

is able to follow direction and instructions as she was able to make a picture on her own. was focused and sustained while making her picture demonstrating a developing disposition to task persistence.

What Next:

We will continue to offer varied art activities to encourage her interest in art and her growing task persistence.

Figure 2. Sarah is pasting. Teacher: Elena

revisits the blanket game



Date 18th March 05



It was in the afternoon when [redacted] went over to a blanket that [redacted] had placed over [redacted]. Some pillows and she said, "Some ones hiding" I said "do you want to play the blanket Game?" she nodded and we sang, some ones hiding some ones hiding who could it be? who could it be? [redacted] pulled the blanket back and said "Oh! No!" when there was no one there. [redacted] went to the board story and picked up the octopus and placed it under the blanket. We sang the song adding I think it might be octopus and she pulled back the blanket, and then ran over to the board and picked up the fish and hid it under the blanket carefully replacing it over the fish. We sang the song again and added I think it might be fish? Each time she laughed out loud when she discovered the props from the story board that she had placed there

Interpretation

What learning was taking place for [redacted]; communication, task persistence, taking an interest? Taking responsibility for her learning and making choices.

What Next

We Will continue to offer [redacted] /opportunities/ to use these developing dispositions to challenge and extend her learning

Figure 3. Sarah revisits the blanket game. Teacher: Elena

Visiting the over 2's area

21st March 2005

Today I decided to take [redacted], [redacted] and [redacted] to visit the over 2 area. During our visit [redacted] was the first one to head for the dough table with [redacted] and [redacted] following. [redacted] and [redacted] loved the doll area and played for ten minutes enjoying their dramatic role playing. [redacted] recognised [redacted] and found her a hat to put on. Outside [redacted] pushed [redacted] on the swing; it was great to see these children renewing their friendship. [redacted] stayed quite close to me and seemed to enjoy the larger play area. [redacted] went off on her own happy to explore and climb the slide.

Interpretation/ analysis

[redacted] enjoyed the larger area and renewing old friendships. I feel sure this will help her in her transition.

Although [redacted] needed me to remain close to her she played happily alongside the other children at the dough table.

[redacted] enjoyed the larger outside area and was happy to explore on her own.

What Next:

We will continue these visits as often as we can; [redacted] is getting to know [redacted] now [redacted] needs more visits to get to know the toddler team. [redacted] also needs to get to know the toddler team. These visits will help their transition.

Figure 4. Visiting the over 2's area. Teacher: Elena

Figure 2 focuses on Sarah engaged in a pasting activity and the planning consequence shows that the teachers were going to offer Sarah a variety of art experiences to encourage her art interest. Figure 3 is a snapshot of Sarah involved in a blanket game and the planning consequence is that teachers were going to offer Sarah opportunities to develop dispositions to challenge and extend her learning. Figure 4 is a story about Sarah's visit to the over-two area and the planning consequence was that teachers were going to continue these visits to support Sarah's transition into this area.

In Chapter 2 I described how the PACE researchers defined progress or continuity over time in the dispositional framework (Carr, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c). That is, where a child's Learning Stories are described as becoming longer, wider and deeper. Learning becomes longer when a child moves along the chain of behaviours. A child makes more decisions as they move along the Learning Story chain or as they demonstrate interest, involvement, communication, contribution and responsibility in more complex ways. Learning becomes wider when certain Learning Stories recur and dispositions become established. Learning becomes deeper or more complex when the child spends more time completing tasks as they practise new skills, tackle new challenges and as their confidence increases. Cowie and Carr (2004) refer to continuity over time as "learning pathways that provide platforms for further learning" (p. 103).

The three Learning Stories written by Elena provided evidence that her role in the assessment process was to record particular moments in time, rather than achieving this sense of continuity. These stories seemed to emphasise assessment of Sarah's learning that is somehow static. These three stories are a typical example of the way in which we documented a range of specific situations or experiences, over time, without making links to a child's previous performance or achievement. Rather than enhancing a child's competence and closing the gap between an actual level of competence and a reference level our documentation of learning was often not connected and made little sense in relation to previous stories. It would be desirable to document learning over time to show how children monitor and shape their learning pathways. This would allow for Learning Stories to become wider, longer and deeper rather than focusing on particular moments in time. These stories did not reflect the concept of documenting learning and change over time and leave me wondering why ipsative and formative assessment was so difficult to implement. Our role in the assessment process moved between using a combination of traditional assessment practices, such as summative criterion-referenced assessment and recording particular moments in time as we started to make sense of, and use, dispositions for learning in practice.

Summary

The teachers' views about *assessment and who we are as a teacher* presented in this chapter emphasised how we thought our place and role in the assessment process was changing. As we began to critique the old assessment theory the illusion of teacher absence shifted to teachers seeing opportunities to be involved in the assessment process. The introduction of the new assessment policy showed how the role of the teacher was shifting from a focus on the acquisition of skills and knowledge to a focus on documenting learning dispositions. The teachers' view of their role in the assessment process was also shifting to reflect some of the sociocultural ideas I discussed in Chapter 2. On one hand we were documenting learning dispositions and relationships among children. On the other hand, this Chapter has also revealed how our role in the assessment process shifted between new ideas and old theoretical perspectives. At times we used the dispositional framework to sum up children's learning or measure children's performance against a set of criteria or record particular moments in time rather than shaping learning pathways. This chapter has captured examples of how the teachers made use of all the skills, knowledge and understandings they had about assessment as they began to make sense of assessment in a sociocultural context. It also alludes to the close relationship between the purpose of assessment and the role of the teacher. The next chapter weaves these two concepts together and begins to show why formative and ispative assessment were so difficult to obtain.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

In this final chapter, I draw on the findings from the preceding chapters to synthesize and conclude my thesis. This qualitative study has explored the ways in which a team of early childhood teachers (myself included) made sense of, and used, a framework for assessment based on dispositions for learning and formative assessment. In choosing this focus I was influenced by my experience as a pre-service early childhood student and as a graduate in my new early childhood setting. The experience I gained as a pre-service teacher had challenged what I was asked to do in regard to assessment in my new early childhood programme. Prior to participating in professional development that introduced new ideas such as dispositional learning and formative assessment, the teachers in my early childhood setting had been expected to assess isolated skills, knowledge and developmental gaps in children's learning. This was a different sort of practice to that I had anticipated. Although the introduction of a new centre assessment policy and professional development assisted us to develop and refine our understandings of dispositional learning and formative assessment, some of these ideas were more difficult to apply in practice.

In this concluding Chapter I summarise the key findings of this study and discuss their relationship to the research question. In particular, I focus on the construct of teachers moving from a deficit to a credit approach and how this can be influenced by the teachers' view of assessment, its focus and the teachers' role. Before we learnt about dispositional learning and formative assessment, our thinking and day- to-day practice had been significantly influenced by DAP criterion-referenced and summative assessment. As we learnt about new assessment practices we began to engage in the process described by Fleer and Richardson (2004) who emphasise:

...that for new conceptual tools to be appropriate, a backward and forward dynamic process between theory and practice is needed. As teachers move in and out of practice, working hard to go beyond existing and tried ideas...knowledge and action are transformed (p. 80).

This chapter explores some of the tensions associated with this dynamic process and also the idea that change takes time when a teaching team is involved in a major shift in thinking and practice. In the next section I summarise the key findings and the manner in which these findings relate to the literature and research question.

Summary of the findings chapters

I have shown the various ways my colleagues and I made sense of a new assessment framework and began to put this new framework into practice. This was explored through two main themes: *moving from a deficit to a credit approach* and *the changing ideas about the teachers' role in assessment and teaching*. Chapter 4 focused on teachers thinking and practice *moving from a deficit to a credit approach* and looked at this through two sub themes: *the purpose of assessment* and *learning to aim for shifting goal posts*. It explored how our thinking was influenced by DAP and our assessments of children had focused on the acquisition of isolated skills and knowledge. This chapter also showed the ways in which the context for assessment was changing and identified some of the tensions we faced as we tried to aim for shifting goal posts.

Chapter 5 paid attention to the theme *assessment and who you are as a teacher* and looked at this construct through two sub themes: *teacher absence/presence* and *the changing ideas about the teachers' roles in assessment and teaching*. This Chapter addressed the ways in which we tried to construct our understandings of the new assessment framework by exploring some of the changes we made to our place and role in the assessment process. Although the context for assessment was changing to reflect dispositions and formative assessment, this chapter provided evidence of new ideas becoming stuck in old frameworks. This depended on the teacher's view of the purpose of assessment, its focus, and the role of the teacher in the assessment process.

The consequences of moving from a deficit to a credit approach

This study begins to show some of the complexities associated with teachers beginning to make sense of and use a new framework for assessment when they were already experienced in other forms of assessment practice. Earlier in this chapter I introduced Fleer and Richardson's (2004) idea of teachers engaging in a "backward and forward dynamic process" as they begin to negotiate a shift in their thinking and

practice. This section describes some of the consequences of moving from a deficit to a credit approach that I noticed as we began to shift our thinking and assessment practice to reflect a sociocultural focus.

One of the tensions associated with the shift from a developmental focus to a sociocultural approach is the transformation of theory to practice. As we made sense of, and used the dispositional framework we began to pay attention to learning dispositions and relationships among children and documented these in the assessments we wrote. This provided evidence that we were “working hard to go beyond existing and tried ideas” and in some instances our “knowledge and action was [transforming]” (Fleer & Richardson, 2004 p. 80) to reflect some of the sociocultural ideas I discussed in Chapter 2. While we were paying attention to learning dispositions and relationships we also recognised opportunities to document our voice and involvement in the assessment process. This illustrated one of the ways we made sense of and used the dispositional framework, in that the way we viewed the purpose of the assessment influenced its focus and this showed how our thinking and assessment practices in our early childhood setting were beginning to change. For example, if we viewed the purpose of assessment as fostering learning dispositions and recognising relationships among children and adults then it was likely that we would practice assessment and see learning in these kinds of ways.

The value we placed on developmental domains, criterion-referenced and summative assessments was something I struggled with and also questioned during the data collection phase. In Chapter 4 I wrote about the new policy that shifted the purpose of assessment and how it was central to the ways teachers would eventually practice assessment in a new policy context. The new policy was introduced during the data collection phase and replaced the developmental focus with learning dispositions and aims of *Te Whāriki*. However this focus was not always reflected in the teachers’ practices. This is because of the construct that new ideas can become stuck in old frameworks. In other words, some of the teachers saw the dispositional framework as an addition to their existing teaching and tried to use the two approaches within a one context (Cowie & Carr, 2004). This was another way that some of the teachers in this study began to make sense of a new assessment framework.

Although our new centre assessment policy replaced the developmental focus with learning dispositions and formative assessment, and our thinking expanded to include some of these new ideas, DAP, criterion-referenced and summative assessment continued to be entrenched in our practice. This created another ‘forward and backward process’ that saw the purpose of assessment and the teachers’ role move between a developmental focus and a sociocultural framework. The data showed that the way we documented assessment information was in a period or state of flux. While our thinking about, and understanding of, the theories about assessment had begun to change, these new ideas were not as consistent in our practice. Britzman (2003) explains that “... misrepresentations, confusion, conflicts, and little gifts of error are all crucial to the stuff of understanding and constructing knowledge” (p. 2). I noticed that our understanding of the dispositional framework was sometimes murky and misrepresented as a result of engaging in the assessment practices we were accustomed to. As a result this influenced the way we viewed the purpose of assessment and our roles as teachers. For example: if we viewed the purpose of assessment as identifying and responding to gaps in children’s learning then it was likely that we would do assessment and see learning in these kinds of ways. Dunn (2004) refers to this process as an “automatic default to a deficit view of the child” (p.127) that saw us automatically slip back, unconsciously, into old familiar habits where we emphasised the acquisition of isolated skills and knowledge over formative assessment and the learning skills associated with dispositions.

In Chapter 2 I wrote that Hatherly and Sands (2002) questioned whether early childhood teachers had distinguished the key differences between the dispositional framework and other existing methods of assessment. In Chapter 4 and 5 I argued that the conceptualization of the dispositional framework as an additional assessment practice is problematic and will bring teachers into conflict. In effect, the assessment technique a teacher uses to make sense of a child’s learning and development can lead to the teacher forming different conclusions about that learning and development. Furthermore, the way teachers view the purpose of assessment will influence how they practice assessment. Davis (2006) claimed that the teachers in her study used Learning Stories as a template for their more traditional assessment methods, rather than recognizing the paradigm shift associated with moving from a developmental to a dispositional milieu. In a similar way this study shows that at times we continued to

look for and document developmental skills rather than the learning skills associated with dispositions. There were instances where we ‘authenticised’ the children’s performance and developmental achievements and used this information to form the basis of our programme (Dunn, 2004) rather than focusing on learning dispositions and formative assessment.

Davis (2006) suggests that when the teachers in her study were faced with a new approach to assessment, “they failed to recognise the alternative view these [ideas] represented and applied their traditional meanings to these” (p. 146). The data in this study showed that some of the teachers did recognise the alternative view these new forms of assessment represented, but in practice these ideas were sometimes abandoned in favour of approaches they were accustomed to. As a consequence we ended up drawing on both the traditional and the new approaches to ensure that all assessment dimensions were being met. In effect, this study captured evidence of us moving between two competing approaches to assessment as we began to make sense of and apply the new ideas. Shifting between two competing approaches led to inconsistencies in our practice which then influenced the way we viewed the purpose of assessment and our role as teachers in the assessment process. This suggests that change can be difficult and takes time.

Change can be difficult and takes time

This study showed that change is ongoing and at times a difficult journey. For change to be effective and meaningful teachers need to develop a shared vision and be involved in its development and implementation within the setting (Arthur et al., 2004). This study emerged from my concern around assessment practices and gradually became a team process. It was encouraging to see that we were willing to begin to make significant shifts in the ways we practised assessment in our early childhood setting. As a team we began to question, review and make some changes to our beliefs, attitudes and values about the assessment process. We engaged in discussions regarding assessment practices and reflected on our journey of change as we began to shift our thinking and practice to reflect learning dispositions and formative assessment. At the same time the teaching team demonstrated variations in their conceptual grasp of the new ideas. Time was needed to bring everyone comfortably on board.

The teachers reported that self-directed professional development can support change. They emphasised the importance of self-directed learning as a useful tool for making sense of a new assessment framework. Mitchell and Cubey (2003) suggest that professional development must be available to all teachers for change to be effective or meaningful. Through participating in ongoing discussions we were able to begin to deepen our theoretical understandings of the new ideas. As we challenged our original practice we developed new insights and began to shift our thinking to reflect learning dispositions and formative assessment. This is similar to Gould's (1997) findings that suggested teachers must be dissatisfied with their practices before they begin to make changes to them.

In Chapter 2 I positioned my research within a timeline of policy and research that reflected a shift with regard to how teachers conceptualized and practised assessment for learning and illustrated how this change had been building for several decades. The release of the early childhood curriculum document, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996b) saw the sole emphasis on development broadened to learning and development. Nevertheless, for some of the teachers in this study the change had only just begun. This study has illustrated that nearly nine years on from the release of *Te Whāriki* there was still a lag between teachers' thinking and practice regarding sociocultural theory and assessment practices. In particular, in the way teachers had conceptualized assessment for learning. This is due to the teachers in my study being experienced in developmental assessment practices that often foreground assessment of learning. Carr et al. (2000) also found that making changes to assessment practices takes time and that some early childhood teachers require substantial professional development, over time, before change actually occurs. However, over time and on balance, the shift to dispositional learning and formative assessment will occur and the hope is there will be a critical mass that will see the change cemented. However, what this study has shown is that while teachers began to make changes to their assessment practices, there is a long way to go. Extensive time and professional development is needed for teachers as they begin to review and make changes to the ways they conceptualise and practise assessment for learning. In the next section I discuss the limitations and strengths of this study.

Limitations and strengths of the study

This ethnographic study was designed to explore the ways a team of teachers made sense of the dispositional framework and put their understandings to use. I participated in the focus group interview and documented children's Learning Stories but did not participate in an individual interview. If I was to replicate this study again I would ask someone to interview me. This would add my voice to those of the other participants.

Time and its constraints was another limitation. I collected data over a six-month period for the purpose of a Masters thesis. A longitudinal study would provide a more comprehensive picture of the ways teachers made sense of the dispositional framework and put their understandings into practice. It would also permit a more thorough exploration of the challenges teachers face as they shift their thinking to reflect these new ideas. An opportunity for all participants to interview each other and explore the ways their thinking is constructed and then applied in practice would be valuable for determining the parameters associated with shifts in thinking and practice.

The use of various data sources strengthened the quality of this study. As described previously, these included individual interviews and a focus group interview along with a document analysis of relevant policy and assessment information about children's learning. The range of data sources allowed for triangulation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) and provided multiple insights into how we made sense of and used the dispositional framework within a changing policy context. The combination of data sources assisted me to explore our understanding of assessment practices without making comparisons or generating abstract theories (Bouma, 1996).

Further research

In light of this study it would be interesting to explore how learning dispositions and formative assessment practices are being used with children in inclusive education. This study could explore the significant implications a widespread adoption of assessment for learning would have on early intervention practices. In particular, it could examine the ways teachers view the purposes of assessment in inclusive

education and how these purposes influence the role of teachers as they align their practices to reflect assessment for learning.

Given that teachers in different early childhood settings may respond differently to the sample in this study, further ethnographic research studies would be useful. A study that follows several teaching teams' experiences of change as they adjust their assessment practices to reflect assessment for learning, while participating in a sustained professional development programme, is warranted. This study could investigate whether professional development regarding assessment for learning is effective when used with teaching teams who are well versed in developmental theory. It would be interesting also to explore the practical support and resources required for teachers to make changes to their thinking and practices. This could involve a case study designed to track the teachers' progress and investigate the difficulties associated with the change. It could also explore the impact sustained professional development has on teachers as they construct and develop new ideas.

The participants in this study had been involved in early childhood education for many years. It would be valuable to follow a group of newly qualified early childhood teachers as they move from their teacher education programme into teaching positions. This could investigate how understandings of learning dispositions and formative assessment evolve when teachers graduate from their teacher education programmes and move into teaching positions. It would also be interesting to explore the degree of alignment between the practices newly qualified teachers are taught in teacher education programmes and the existing assessment practices that are applied in the field.

Possible implications for teaching teams

An implication for managers and senior teachers, who are responsible for teaching teams in an early childhood setting, is the need to consider what this study might mean for supporting their staff as they come to grips with major new ideas. Managers and senior teachers need to be aware of their pivotal role in supporting and leading teaching teams through change. They also need to appreciate the consequences of trying to implement change in an early childhood setting. It is unlikely that teachers

will come into change with a blank slate. Teachers will draw on all their existing skills and experiences to make sense of the change.

The theoretical concepts explored in this study were not “little tweaks” to policy. They involved a major shift in thinking and practice. This could be problematic for teachers who are expected to make changes to their practice before they have come to grips with the theoretical concepts that underpin the change. Teachers need sufficient time and resources to make sense of the concepts underpinning the change, to explore what this change might look like in practice and to bring everyone comfortably onboard. Teaching teams can develop a plan that identifies clear timeframes and responsibilities for each teacher. Ideally the plan would involve opportunities for teachers to review and critique their thinking and practice. In order for teachers to make changes, they need to decide on an agreed structure and reasonable timeframe to review and make changes to policy and practice. The structure would need to involve extensive time for teachers to discuss the concepts and theory behind the change before investigating what this change might look like in practice. The opportunity for teachers to visit and observe teaching teams that are slightly more advanced in the change could also assist teachers to develop and refine their thinking.

Final words

I began this project with the intention of documenting a process of teacher change with respect to assessment practices. What I discovered was that, as teachers make changes to their thinking and practice, this is likely to involve a forward and backward dynamic process which will see practice move between a familiar (in this case developmental) and a new (in this case sociocultural) framework. I also discovered that teachers need time to conceptualize their understanding of the change and explore what the change looks like in practice. Even once a conceptual shift has occurred and teachers understand and are willing to take on a new approach, the application of that new understanding is a challenge, one that will find them 'reverting' to familiar ways of working or mixing the two. Thus, the ways we made sense of and used the dispositional framework depended on how we viewed the purpose of assessment and our role as teachers.

This study concludes that one of the useful roles of professional development at this point would be to enable teachers to critically reflect on their practice and identify for themselves instances of reversion to the familiar. Teachers need opportunities to examine their understanding of the purposes of assessment and the implication this can have on their role in the assessment process. This study also illustrated that the role of the team is an important part of the change process. The fact that we were tackling this new learning as a team, through sharing ideas and developing insights, helped the learning process. This also points to the value of shared professional development and critical reflection in instituting change.

Some people say ‘practice makes perfect’. However, as Britzman (2003) pointed out it’s, ‘practice makes practice’ and “[teaching and] learning is never so cut and dried” (p. 2). Teaching and learning is a social process that involves time and resources. Teachers need opportunities to access quality professional development programmes that will support, guide and assist them as they move through change. Change is not immediate; it is an evolutionary process especially if the change requires a shift in both thinking and practice. As early childhood teachers we need to accept and be committed to change and appreciate that change takes time.

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Appendix 1



3rd February 2005

Information for Teachers

I am working towards a Masters of Teaching and Learning at the Christchurch College of Education. As part of my degree I am required to undertake a research project. I will be working under the supervision of Graeme Ferguson, a lecturer in the School of Professional Development at the Christchurch College of Education and Karen Haywood and Liz Depree who are Early Childhood Support Facilitators for the School of Professional Development at the Christchurch College of Education.

I will be investigating the ways a team of early childhood teachers made sense of, and used a framework for early childhood assessment based on dispositions for learning.

What types of participants are being sought?

Teachers from the under two's setting and a selection of children's learning journals.

What will participants be asked to do?

Teachers will be asked to participate in an interview and a focus group. Interview transcripts will be returned to each participant for amendments to be made. Teachers will receive a copy of their interview transcripts to keep. The minutes taken at 5 staff meetings will be photocopied and analysed. I will also collect a sample of the learning journals you write for children. This data will be collected for approximately six months.

How much time is involved?

The interviews should take no longer than 45 minutes. The focus group will take about one hour.

How will confidentiality and anonymity be addressed?

No findings that could identify any individual participant will be published. Since data must be stored for at least five years according to college regulations, you will be asked to choose a pseudonym, which will be used for the interview and focus group transcripts.

Are all teachers required to participate?

No, participation is voluntary.

What happens to teachers who choose not to participate?

Their transcripts and written documentation will not be used in the research.

If I agree to take part, can I change my mind and withdraw from the study?

If you agree to take part, you can withdraw at any time by contacting the researcher.

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

Complaints Procedure

The College requires that all participants be informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to:

The Chair
Ethical Clearance Committee
Christchurch College of Education
P O Box 31-065
Christchurch
Phone: (03) 348 2059

Please contact my supervisors or myself if you have any other queries or concerns about the project or would like to be informed of the aggregate research finding.

I can be reached by phone on: 03 348 8929 or by email: Karen.turnock@cce.ac.nz

Graeme Ferguson: Lecturer for the School of Professional Development at the Christchurch College of Education.
Phone: (03)
Email: graeme.ferguson@cce.ac.nz

Liz Depree: Early Childhood Support Facilitator for the School of Professional Development at the Christchurch College of Education.

Phone (03) 349 5864
Email: liz.depree@cce.ac.nz

Karen Hayward: Early Childhood Support Facilitator for the School of Professional Development at the Christchurch College of Education.

Phone (03) 349 1351
Email: karen.hayward@cce.ac.nz

Thank you.

Karen Turnock

Appendix 2



Consent form for Teachers

I have read and understood the information provided to me concerning the research project and what will be required of the participants.

I understand that the information participants provide to the researcher will be treated as confidential and that no findings that could identify either them or their centre will be published.

I understand that participation in the project is voluntary and that I may choose to withdraw from the project at any time without incurring any penalty.

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

E-mail: _____

Signature _____

Date: _____

Please return to; Karen Turnock
Flat 4/299 Armagh Street
Christchurch.



Information for parents and caregivers

Kia Ora. My name is Karen Turnock and I am working towards a Masters of Teaching and Learning at the Christchurch College of Education. As part of my degree I am required to undertake a research project. I will be working under the supervision of Graeme Ferguson a lecturer in the School of Professional Development at the Christchurch College of Education along with Karen Hayward and Elizabeth Depree who are Early Childhood Support Facilitators for the School of Professional Development at the Christchurch College of Education.

What is the aim of the research project?

The aim of this research is to explore the ways teachers make sense of, and use an assessment framework based on learning dispositions and formative assessment

What types of participants are being sought?

A team of teachers from the under two setting and a selection of children's learning journals.

What will participants be asked to do?

Teachers will be asked to participate in an interview and a focus group. Staff meetings minutes from 5 meetings will be photocopied. Interview transcripts will be returned to each participant for amendments to be made. Teachers will receive a copy of their interview transcripts to keep.

The parents/caregivers will be asked to give written informed consent for their children's learning journal to be used in this research. A selection of Learning Stories will be photocopied and analysed to explore the ways teachers make sense of an assessment framework based on learning dispositions and formative assessment.

How much time is involved?

There is no time involved for parents who choose to let their child's learning journal be part of the research

How will confidentiality and anonymity be addressed?

No findings that could identify any individual participant will be published. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity you will be asked to choose a pseudonym for your child.

Are all teachers, parents or caregivers required to participate?

No, participation is voluntary.

What happens to teachers, parents or caregivers who choose not to participate?

Their interview and focus group transcripts will not be used in the research. The children's learning journals will not be used in the research

If I agree to take part, can I change my mind and withdraw from the study?

If you agree to take part, you can withdraw at any time by contacting the researcher.

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

Complaints Procedure

The College requires that all participants be informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to:

The Chair
Ethical Clearance Committee
Christchurch College of Education
P O Box 31-065
Christchurch
Phone: (03) 348 2059

Please contact my supervisors or myself if you have any other queries or concerns about the project or would like to be informed of the aggregate research finding.

I can be reached by phone on: 03 348 8929 or by email: Karen.turnock@cce.ac.nz

Graeme Ferguson: Lecturer for the School of Professional Development at the Christchurch College of Education.
Phone: (03)
Email: graeme.ferguson@cce.ac.nz

Liz Depree: Early Childhood Support Facilitator for the School of Professional Development at the Christchurch College of Education.

Phone (03) 349 5864
Email: liz.depre@cce.ac.nz

Karen Hayward: Early Childhood Support Facilitator for the School of Professional Development at the Christchurch College of Education.

Phone (03) 349 1351
Email: karen.hayward@cce.ac.nz

Thank you.

Karen Turnock

Appendix 4



Consent form for parents and caregivers

Parent/Guardian

I give permission for _____ learning journal to be part of study regarding ways a team of early childhood teachers made sense of and used the dispositional framework

I have read and understood the information provided to me concerning the research project and what will be required of participants.

I understand that the information participants provide to the researcher will be treated as confidential and that no findings that could identify either them or their centre will be published.

I understand that participation in the project is voluntary and that I may choose to withdraw my child from the project at any time without incurring any penalty.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____

Please return to: Karen Turnock

7 Glenbyre Place
Bromley
CHRISTCHURCH