

PATHWAY TO THE FUTURE?

Doing childcare in the era of New Zealand's Early Childhood Strategic Plan

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PATHWAY TO THE FUTURE?

DOING CHILDCARE IN THE ERA OF NEW ZEALAND'S EARLY CHILDHOOD STRATEGIC PLAN

Introduction

Long Acres Early Childhood Centre is the pseudonym that I gave to the childcare centre that generously participated in my doctoral research (Nuttall, 2004a, 2004b). The real Long Acres is in a quiet suburb of a large New Zealand city. It has seven teachers and offers nine full-day childcare places for children aged from birth to 2 years, and 24 full-day places for children from 2 to 5 years old. The families served by Long Acres are mainly drawn from the surrounding middle-class suburbs. From September 2000 to February 2001, I visited the centre on a regular basis, in order to investigate the phenomenon of teacher intersubjectivity around the construct of curriculum.

I have always been interested in teachers' work in groups, partly because of my background as a teacher in centre-based childcare and, more recently, as a facilitator of in-service teacher education. When I turned to the literature on teacher decision-making with respect to curriculum I found, however, that existing studies were almost all drawn from accounts of individual teachers. It seemed to me to be one thing to examine individual teachers at work, investigating their beliefs about curriculum and their articulation of their practice (e.g., Ayers, 1989; Burton, 1997; Hsieh & Spodek, 1995; Paley, 2001). But what if several such teachers were put together for several hours, in a single teaching space, with a large group of children aged from birth to five? How would they make it work?

As I contemplated this research focus, it was evident to me that the curriculum was a key construct around which teachers' shared decision-making might be explored. A milestone in New Zealand education during the 1990s was the development of the early childhood curriculum framework *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Matauranga mo ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa: Early Childhood*

Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996a). This document was the result of extensive collaboration and consultation across the early childhood sector (Te One, 2003) and had been greeted enthusiastically in its draft form by early childhood teachers (Murrow, 1995). But, as I embarked on my doctoral research in late 1999, a persistent question troubled me: What did early childhood teachers mean when they used the word “curriculum”? Several years had passed between the release of the draft version of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1993) and the beginnings of my research, but there had been very little investigation of this question in New Zealand. The combination of my interest in teachers’ work in groups and this conundrum about early childhood curriculum generated my principal research question: *How do groups of early childhood teachers intersubjectively construct and enact their definition(s) of curriculum?*

In the resulting thesis (Nuttall, 2004b), I drew upon the work of Argyris and Schon (1974) to argue that the teachers at Long Acres had developed a sophisticated theory-of-action. I also claimed that this theory-of-action was not consistent with the teachers’ practice, as I observed and interpreted it; instead, the teachers had developed an equally sophisticated set of theories-in-use, which only partly depended on their definitions of the centre’s curriculum (see Nuttall, 2002, for a discussion of these definitions). Contrary to my initial expectation—that the curriculum would provide the principal construct around which teacher decision-making in the centre was consciously organised—I found that a great many of the teachers’ efforts were concerned with managing the inevitable tensions between their shared theory-of-action and their theories-in-use. I have argued elsewhere (Nuttall, in press) that the teachers had developed a range of shared cognitive strategies in order to manage these tensions. These strategies included assertions about the quality of the centre’s programme, understandings about each other on the basis of their respective pre-service preparation for teaching (see also Nuttall, 2003a), and the presentation of their professional selves in particular ways to centre parents.

During the production of the thesis, the context for the study made one of the forward leaps that has characterised early childhood education in New Zealand, at least at the policy level, during the last three decades. This shift was the

publication of *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki, the 10-year Strategic Plan for Early Childhood Education* (Ministry of Education, 2002; hereafter referred to as the Plan). Although it did not provide part of the context for the design of this study, or for the subsequent fieldwork and data analysis, it was the dominant feature of the early childhood political landscape as the research was completed and disseminated. In this paper, I begin by offering a description and critique of aspects of the Plan, drawing attention to the multiple, even contradictory, discourses which underpin its ambitious goals. In this analysis I treat the Plan itself as data, which researchers can “compare, contrast, aggregate, and order” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 242), in order to establish a thematic rendering of aspects of the Plan.

In the second part of this paper, I return to life at Long Acres, re-visiting some of the claims I made in my doctoral thesis, in the context of the Strategic Plan. As early as the fieldwork phase of my research, I realised that the implications of my study would not be for practising teachers as much as for teacher educators and policy makers. In the discussion in the second part of this paper, I hope to offer a second critique of the Plan, one that is less about its discursive underpinnings and more about its implications for the daily work of early childhood teachers and those who support them in the profession.

The nature of the Strategic Plan

Let me state at the outset that I believe the Plan to be one of the most important and worthwhile documents concerned with early childhood education to be produced by any government in the minority world in recent times. With the exception of the United Kingdom’s Sure Start and Early Excellence initiatives (www.surestart.gov.uk), policy in early childhood education in the Western world has been characterised by its fragmentary nature and lack of funding at state and federal levels.

The genesis of the Plan offers, in itself, a fascinating exercise for students of educational history and policy. The forward leaps in government policy, noted earlier in this paper, have been several and have spanned governance and accountability, teacher education, funding and regulation of services, the

education of Māori, and curriculum and assessment. These policy initiatives, described in detail by May (2001), include: the shift of the administration of early childhood services from the Department of Social Welfare to the Department of Education in 1986; the integration of childcare and kindergarten teacher preparation programmes from 1986 onwards; *Education to Be More*, known as the Meade Report (Ministry of Education, 1988); the *Statement* (and *Revised Statement*) of *Desirable Objectives and Practices* (Ministry of Education 1990a and 1996b, respectively); *Quality in Action* (Ministry of Education, 1998); and the draft and final versions of the early childhood curriculum framework, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education 1993, 1996a). Many in the early childhood field experienced these shifts as upheavals, and there were sometimes problems along the way (May, 1991, 2001; Duncan, 2001; Te One, 2003) but, taken as a whole, these policy markers, and the developments that were initiated by them, represent a remarkable story of progress in a part of the education sector that has struggled for legitimacy around the world.

The Strategic Plan represents not only a coalescence of these previous initiatives (and the multiple levels of advocacy that underpinned each of them) but evidence of a maturing of the early childhood field in New Zealand. It is perhaps no coincidence that this field has reached a point where claims can be made about the emergence of a specialised culture of early childhood research (Cullen, 2003), where the field can look back with some pride over twenty years of Early Childhood Conventions (May, 2003a), and where the early childhood curriculum framework is capable of sustained critique (Nuttall, 2003b).

That said, it is important to remember that the Plan is not primarily intended to be an expression of the wishes of the early childhood field, despite the Minister's assertion of a "shared sector vision" (Mallard, 2002, p.1). It is an articulation of government policy. It represents not only the will and the intentions of the present Government, but a programme of planning, bureaucratic work, and funding priorities that the Minister responsible for the Plan believes will be acceptable to his Cabinet colleagues. The road map provided in the summary section of the Plan is both a response to the early childhood field and an indication of Government priorities in the medium- to long-term. The Plan is a

policy text and, as such, primarily a tool of government, no matter how synchronous its contents might be with the wishes of the field.

It is at the level of policy that the Plan demands immediate scrutiny, both as a tool to guide policy and practice, and as a text in its own right, situated in its own place and time. Perhaps inevitably, given that it was drafted by a group of 31 stakeholder representatives (Mallard, 2002, p. 1), it has a number of internal tensions as well as its agreed goals. In the analysis that follows, after a brief synopsis of its contents, I pay particular attention to two aspects of the Plan: the image of the child portrayed in the plan; and the Plan's assumptions about the early childhood field. It is on the work of the early childhood field, and on the Plan's consequences for children, that the success of the Plan depends.

Synopsis of the Strategic Plan

The Plan identifies 14 strategies and seven steps, designed to achieve the following three goals: increased participation in early childhood education; improvements in the quality of early childhood provision; and the promotion of collaboration between stakeholders in early childhood services. The 14 strategies expand on these three goals, thus:

Goal	Strategies
Increase participation	Increase participation
	Improve access to responsive, quality ECE services
	Improve sustainability of ECE services
Improve quality	Increase the number of registered teachers
	Support quality in ECE services provided by parents and whānau
	Improve ratios and group size
	Promote the effective delivery of Te Whāriki

Establishment of, and reflection on, quality practices in teaching and learning

Promote collaborative relationships Promote coherence of education between birth and eight years

Provide more integrated services to children, parents, families and whanau (Ministry of Education, 2002, pp. 21-22).

The seven steps, which form the one axis of a matrix of 68 initiatives “plotting the journey”, with the 14 strategies on the other axis, provide a chronological sequence for these initiatives, although they are “not linked to specific years” (p.20). Four further “supporting strategies” are identified as complementary to the “journey” of the Plan: review of the *Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations 1990*; review of the current system of funding to early childhood services; a programme of ongoing research; and “involvement of the sector in ongoing policy development and implementation” (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 3).

As a policy text, the Plan is remarkably optimistic and, in his public comments, the Minister of Education has suggested that some of its goals, particularly with respect to teacher qualifications, are probably not achievable; he remains committed, however, to these goals as an ideal (Mallard, 2003). In addition to the roll out of a large work programme for the Ministry of Education, the Strategic Plan also describes an extended and intensive programme of work for the early childhood field, including parents, administrators, teachers, teacher educators, and researchers. But what does it have to say about children?

Images of the child

The Plan makes repeated reference to two representations of New Zealand childhood in particular: a proportionately small but critical group of children who are “currently missing out” on early childhood services (Ministry of Education,

2002, p. 6); and children in general as future contributors to the “social, educational and economic health” of the nation (Mallard, 2002, p.1). In electing to portray children in this way, the Plan reflects a persistent concern of the Minister of Education (building somewhat on that of his predecessors), with respect to the achievement of Māori and Pasifika children in schools and their under-representation in higher education. The causes of this underachievement are debatable and undoubtedly various, but the Strategic Plan confidently asserts at least one source of this problem: that the families of these children are “often...not well informed about the value of ECE to their children’s development both in the present and in the future” (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 6).

An initial reading of this statement suggests that the provision of information will have a causal effect on participation in early childhood services, and improved information about early education is indeed an aspect of the Plan. Elsewhere in the Plan, however, we meet with “disadvantaged backgrounds” (p. 9), “targeted communities”, (p. 11), and “ethnic communities” (p. 17). Such phrases reinforce a deeply-held deficit view of Māori and Pasifika communities, at least when measured against middle-class, pākeha benchmarks of social and educational success. In extensive statements in the Plan discussing each of its goals with respect to Māori and Pasifika communities, there is reference to “*their* needs” (p. 10, my emphasis), particular “challenges” (p. 13), “more effort for Māori children” (p 16), and taking care of “more than just their minds”. These phrases represent the way in which the Plan fails to acknowledge and celebrate the diverse knowledges and contributions that Māori and Pasifika children, families, and communities make to early childhood education in New Zealand. There is an overwhelming sense of social pathology embedded in the plan: these children are at risk of failing to acquire, prior to school entry, the thinking and behaviours necessary to success in Western schooling; consequently, they represent a threat to the future health of the nation.

The key to this long-term challenge for the Government is the participation of Māori and Pasifika children in early childhood education, since “[r]esearch shows that having access to quality education in early childhood offers the

greatest benefits for the very children who are least likely to be attending (children from low socio-economic backgrounds)” (Mallard, 2002, p. 1). This statement can be interpreted as an assertion about the compensatory function of early childhood education, as a response to the perceived dysfunctions of particular social groups. This perspective is complemented elsewhere in the Plan with a vision of early childhood services as the conduit for bureaucratic access to these groups, “[b]uild[ing] on current work between the Ministries of Education, Health and Social Development to improve links between early years’ services” (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 17).

A key source of the Government’s deeply held anxiety about Māori and Pasifika children is identified in the Plan, although somewhat in passing: “Māori children will form a larger proportion of this country’s birth-to-five-year-olds within the next 10 years” and “Pasifika children ... will comprise an increasing proportion of birth-to-five-year-olds over the next 10 years” (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 10). The present high birth rate of Māori and Pasifika women (projected to decline to 2.4 per Māori woman and 2.7 per Pasifika woman by 2011) in comparison to the less-than-replacement birth rate of New Zealand women overall (1.85 per woman) means that, by the time the current generation of the workforce reaches retirement age (and begins drawing their government superannuation payments), an increasing largely proportion of the working population will be of Māori or Pasifika descent (Pink, 2004). It is essential for the future economic viability of New Zealand, in an increasingly globalised economy, that these workers are literate, numerate, and compliant participants (i.e., taxpayers) in the mainstream economy.

I am not necessarily suggesting that the Plan is fundamentally flawed on this point; nor that it is wrong to suggest that *all* children can benefit from good quality early childhood education. It is also self-evident that today’s infants are tomorrow’s taxpayers. It is worth noting, however, the images of the child that the Plan omits. Children are not positioned in the Plan as citizens, with entitlements to participation and access to early childhood services in their own right and for their immediate benefit. Nor are they portrayed as future participants in the democratic processes of the state. Surprisingly, given the

Romantic underpinnings of much early childhood curriculum (particularly with respect to play), the image of children's participation in early childhood education is highly instrumental: children are not permitted to *be*, but are on the "critical first step" in their "ongoing learning and development" (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 2). This perspective is, of course, not new. The Plan also quotes (on p. 12) from *Quality in Action* (Ministry of Education, 1998, p. 5): "[T]he quality of early childhood education today influences the well-being of citizens and society in the future." This anxiety about the future overlooks the ways in which the well-being of citizens (particularly women and young children) benefits from early childhood education *today*.

Gail Sloane Canella, in her 1997 book *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education*, traces the genealogy of childhood in Western countries across the centuries. Canella identifies the ways in which conflicting contemporary images of childhood bifurcate society's understandings about children's life worlds—between, for example, children's perceived vulnerability at the same time as our hopes for the future are placed upon them—and undermine children's fundamental rights of voice and participation. It is important to understand the ways in which the Strategic Plan, in positioning children as at risk, whilst simultaneously preparing them to shoulder the future economic burden of the nation, has particular implications not only for bureaucratic initiatives but for relationships between services and parents, trends in curriculum and assessment, and the perpetuation of deficit views of children and childhood.

For example, the image of the children implicit in *Te Whāriki*, of young children as fundamentally competent and agentic, is deeply at odds with the discourses of the Strategic Plan. Recent work by Fler and Robbins (2004) suggests that bureaucratic and professional assumptions about the correlation between low socio-economic backgrounds and families' poor understandings about the importance of literacy and numeracy may be questionable. In the Catch the Future project, families in a low SES community in Australia were invited to identify and submit naturalistic data about day-to-day activities that they understood to foster literacy and numeracy in their young children. The accuracy and richness of the resulting data powerfully confronts deficit-oriented beliefs

about these families, beliefs which continue to influence curricular arrangements in centres and schools.

The images of the child evident in the plan have implications not only for curriculum and assessment but have their corollary in images of the teacher. These images, in turn, generate implications for teachers' professional learning. In the next section of this paper, I turn to the assumptions about the early childhood field that can be detected in the Plan, and draw on data from my doctoral research to problematise the implications of the Plan for those on whom its successful implementation largely rests.

Assumptions about the early childhood field

In this section I focus, in particular, on two issues: teachers' use of *Te Whāriki*; and the intensification of teachers' work.

The use of Te Whāriki.

One of the initiatives stated in the Strategic Plan is the Government's intention to "legislate Te Whāriki" (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 15). At present, the legislative requirements that dictate the curriculum in early childhood centres are contained in the *Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations 1990* and the *Revised Statement of Desirable Objectives for Early Childhood Services* (Ministry of Education, 1996b), and these reflect the language and intent of *Te Whāriki*. The open prescription provided by *Te Whāriki*—that curriculum is "the sum total of the experiences, activities and events, whether direct or indirect, which occur within an environment designed to foster children's learning and development" (Ministry of Education, 1996a, p. 10)—creates a particular challenge for early childhood teachers' thinking about curriculum, which was foregrounded by my research: the constantly emerging and negotiated nature of the curriculum in centres. This complex emergence/negotiation occurs both in response to children's interests and development, and as a consequence of constant negotiation between teachers. Furthermore, these negotiations largely occur at the same time as the curriculum is experienced.

In order to articulate a shared theory of action, the teachers at Long Acres had adopted four curriculum-related constructs, drawn from wider discourses of formalised curriculum theory and early childhood education: using *Te Whāriki*, core curriculum, emergent curriculum, and the planned programme. This curriculum language was a key part of the official definition of the situation (Goffman, 1990) with regard to curriculum at Long Acres, because it allowed the teachers to co-construct what Connelly and Clandinin (1988) call a “language of practice”: “We need a language that will permit us to talk about ourselves in situations and that will also let us tell stories of our experience. What language will let us do this?” (p. 59). This eclectic approach, which I called *co-opting*, allowed the teachers to locate the formalised curriculum models, from which they borrowed key terms, in relation to their existing practice without having necessarily to change existing practice to conform to any unified curriculum model or construct.

The commitment to *Te Whāriki* as a key part of the teachers’ theory of action was reflected in the teachers’ decision to focus on communicating to parents about *Te Whāriki* for their in-centre professional development programme. This commitment had been signalled at my initial meeting with the centre staff, when one of the teachers commented that: “...we have been trying hard to use the language of *Te Whāriki* more with the children, day to day”. I later interpreted this statement as confirmation that the teachers were seeking to co-opt the *language* of the document into their theory of action, rather than adopt its underlying theoretical principles or guidelines for practice into their theories-in-use. Cullen (1996) was alert to the possibility of *Te Whāriki* being used in this way: “The most likely outcome [of the introduction of *Te Whāriki*] is that the guidelines will be interpreted on the basis of existing philosophies and practices with an ‘overlay’ of the new terminology (p.118)”.

At one of the under-2s’ teachers’ monthly planning meetings, Marsha opened the discussion by suggesting “eating and drinking” as the focus for the next month’s programme with the under-2s. Marsha then searched through the poster summary of *Te Whāriki* for a goal that related to the suggested focus:

Marsha reads Wellbeing, Goal 1 from the poster [‘their health is promoted’] and turns to this section in *Te Whāriki*. She suggests giving the children flannels and letting them attempt washing themselves. She then reads aloud one of the reflective questions: “‘Are the routines flexible?’ Well, that’s okay. They have no restraints. Well, within reason. You have to have some limits.”

Marsha and Clare agree on the focus [“self-help skills”] and Marsha records this on the planning sheet. They turn to the section on the planning sheet headed ‘Learning Outcomes’. Clare says, “Well, the reason we’re doing this is because we want them to become independent.” Marsha replies, laughing, “Because we haven’t got time to do it.” Clare jokes, “If we could just teach them to clean...”

Once the language of reflective questions, goals, and learning outcomes has been co-opted, then recorded on the centre’s planning sheets, an outside observer is unable to detect whether *Te Whāriki* has guided the teachers’ decisions or simply been used to legitimate existing practice. Barb, the centre’s professional development facilitator, also identified that this was the way *Te Whāriki* was being used in the centre. As part of the discussion at the planning meeting for the parent evening Barb commented, “*Te Whāriki* is not about justifying what you do”.

By the midpoint of the fieldwork, I had identified that the key constructs on which the centre’s curricular arrangements depended (such as shared understandings about the use of *Te Whāriki*) were neither securely defined nor routinely enacted in the centre. It was evident to me that the teachers’ theory of action at Long Acres, which was based on their official definition of the centre’s curriculum, did not correspond to what they actually *did* from day to day. Instead, the teachers appeared to be exhibiting what Fullan (1991) calls “false clarity”, which “occurs when people *think* that they have changed but have only assimilated the superficial trappings of the new practice” (p. 35).

These data suggest that the assumption that mandatory implementation of *Te Whāriki* will cause improvements in the quality of early childhood services, made explicit in the Strategic Plan, needs to be treated with some caution. In their *Strategic Research Initiative Literature Review: Early Childhood*

Education, Smith, Grima, Gaffney, Powell, Masse, and Barnett (2000) questioned:

To what extent is research supportive of the curriculum orientation which has been adopted in New Zealand? [It] is only in the most general sense that the New Zealand curriculum model has been tested. There is not a great deal of research which has directly compared curriculum models, where other aspects of the early childhood environment (such as ratios, and teacher education) are the same but only curriculum has been systematically been [*sic*] varied... What seems to be an urgent need for future early childhood research is to determine the extent to which our curriculum model is actually being put into practice. ERO reports and Smith's research (1996a, 1999) suggest that we have no reason to be complacent about process quality in New Zealand centres (pp. 67-69).

Little progress has been made in understanding how teachers actually use *Te Whāriki*, or whether its use has identifiable consequences for children's learning and development. This remains a notable gap in New Zealand early childhood research, one that needs to be addressed in the "longitudinal research" (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 3) promised in the Plan. We do not know whether the use of *Te Whāriki* promotes children's learning in ways that would not otherwise occur, nor is there evidence of teachers' appropriation of *Te Whāriki* as a tool for planning and assessment in the way that its writers intended. We do know, however, that the work of teachers in early childhood settings has steadily intensified during the 1990s (Duncan, 2001; Nuttall, 2004b) and that this trend will continue as a consequence of the Strategic Plan.

Intensification of teachers' work

Structural pressures, particularly group size and ratios of teachers to children, have changed little since the widespread establishment of childcare services in New Zealand in the 1970s. During the 1990s, however, all teachers in early childhood settings have been subject to considerable professionalisation and intensification of their work. This is evidenced by the increasing number and complexity of demands upon teachers in areas such as individual assessment of children, ongoing professional development, and centre self-review (Ministry of Education, 1998). The Strategic Plan continues this trend, including policies to

increase requirements for formalised qualifications in teacher-led services, provide leadership development programmes, strengthen programmes of self-review, roll out the Early Childhood Exemplars project, introduce Centres of Innovation, and ensure that all teachers in teacher-led services will be provisionally or fully registered by 2012 (Ministry of Education, 2002, pp. 21-22).

These policies need to be examined in the wider context of the structural realities that govern teachers' day-to-day work in early childhood settings, particularly in childcare centres. I have argued that the teachers' shared theory-of-action at Long Acres was aligned around the planned programme, using *Te Whāriki*, and the emergent and core curricula. I observed, however, that the teachers were strongly aligned, *in practice*, around a completely different definition of the planned programme. In this next section, I describe this alternative conceptualisation of the curriculum, offer one explanation for the resulting conceptual gap, and review this finding in the light of the Plan.

Two key centre documents, displayed in the main indoor space, indicated an alternative definition of the curriculum at Long Acres. The first was a statement headed "Daily Routines", which provided a timetable for the centre programme, dividing the day into periods of play, broken up with key routines, such as lunch time, mat time, and tidy up.

DAILY ROUTINES

OVER 2s

8.00 am	Greeting children, whanau [extended family], staff Free play outdoors
8.30 am	Group session and Art activity Free play in and outdoors
9.10 am	Waiata (singing) time/sharing time, news
9.30 am	Morning kai [food] time/toileting & nappies Free play indoors/outdoors
11.20 am	Tidy up

11.30 am	Mat time
11.45 am	Karakia [prayer-like ritual]/Lunch
12.30 pm	End of session
	Greeting new children/whanau
	Tidy up time/rest time on mat
	Sleep time as required
	Quiet activities for children who come in the afternoon
1.00 pm	Art activity
	Free play in or out doors
3.00 pm	Afternoon kai time/toileting & nappies
	Free play in and out doors
3.45 pm	Tidy up time in and out doors
4.15 pm	Toileting & nappies
4.30 pm	Mat time/stories
5.00 pm	Centre closes

NB: Sometimes child-initiated activities/needs over-ride these Routines.

Such timetables are easily found in early childhood centres, since the *Education (Early Childhood Centres) Regulations 1990* require that such a statement be displayed. This list dovetailed with a second document, the staff duty roster. This was made up of several lists that the teachers had negotiated, which described the relationship between time and tasks for teachers during the centre day. These were displayed in the centre's kitchen, and included inside-outside rosters, which dictated tasks for the teachers who worked inside the centre in the morning and in the playground in the afternoon and vice versa:

INSIDE-OUTSIDE

Supervision of children is important at all times.

8.30 Greet children and families. Supervise and facilitate children's play. Write up day's toileting first.

9.10 Help with sharing time.

9.30 Get morning tea ready, staggered or group. Tidy up afterwards and do dishes. Open communication with staff to ensure children's toileting needs are being met.

10.20 Change nappies where needed. Check toileting. Check laundry.

10.30 Reset activity tables. Supervise and facilitate children's play and learning.

11.20 Gather children and encourage them to tidy up inside.

11.30 Mat time. Set up lunches, tablecloths on, lunches out, heated if needed.

11.45 LUNCH. Supervise children in bathroom. (Pick up hot lunches on Friday.) Set up beds. Help with lunch. Stay with sleepers.

12.30 Session ends

OUTSIDE roster now.

Remember there MUST be a teacher outside at all times if children are outside, so get another teacher to relieve you if you need to go inside.

When outside, supervise and facilitate children's play and learning.

2.30 Afternoon tea. Staggered or group, inside or outside, weather permitting.

4.00ish Tidy up time, all children to help. Put toys in garage. Empty water trough/messy play. Encourage children to pick up rubbish. Rake and cover sandpit (twice a week). Fridays — wash sandpit toys with hose. Make sure shed is LOCKED.

4.20ish. All children inside to help tidy up.

4.30 – 4.50 Quiet time in the sleep room. Stories, songs, games and fruit. Farewelling children and families.

5.00 Session ends.

ALL STAFF

Remember to sweep bark and concrete daily.

END OF DAY – Bring chairs and clothes in. Check windows and all doors are closed and locked. Coffee pot is off and everything else. Double check fire exit door.

PLEASE REMEMBER: to use open communication and to be flexible.

There are many possible readings of the Daily Routines charts and the staff rosters. The most obvious one is that they are a logical and pragmatic way for the teachers to communicate their expectations of each other's behaviour at particular times during the day. This conceptualisation of centre programmes, as particular arrangements of time, space, people, and materials, is common in the early childhood curriculum literature (e.g., Arthur, Beecher, Dockett, Farmer, & Death, 1996; Faragher & MacNaughton, 1998). At Long Acres, having arranged the physical space and materials around a materials-oriented concept of the core curriculum (sometimes called "areas of play", adherence to the staff rosters and the daily routines ensured that everything that needed to be done was done, and that children were securely supervised.

An alternative reading of the Daily Routines chart and the staff rosters at Long Acres is that these documents describe the teachers' theories-in-use, since they are the products of the teachers' negotiation of key aspects of day-to-day life in the centre. I interpreted the way in which tasks had been signified in these documents to suggest that facilitating "children's play and learning" is what teachers do *between* routine events. In negotiating the rosters, the teachers had made explicit the idea that implementing routines is not teaching and, therefore, not part of their image of the curriculum at Long Acres. Although the statement at the end of the Daily Routines chart suggests that child-initiated, emergent curriculum might be allowed to take precedence over the routines, the chosen language reinforces the way that routines are the primary focus of the centre's

lived curriculum: children's interests can only be accommodated "sometimes" and, for this to occur, they must be pressing enough to "over-ride" the routines. Paradoxically, by positioning "children's play and learning" in this way, "teaching" becomes yet another routine that the teachers have to fit into the busy centre day.

In their persistent attempts to resolve the relationship between the centre's espoused curriculum and the realities represented by the daily programme and staffing rosters, the teachers experienced frequent misalignment, both within and between their individual perspectives. These misalignments, rather than being examined, were partly managed through a strategy I called *grounding*: I observed that whenever the teachers' alignment around key constructs was being called into question at an abstract, conceptual level, they quickly shifted their discussion to the concrete realities of their daily lives.

An example of this was a discussion that I had with Marsha, one of the teachers in the under-2s' area, about how she applied the (abstract) concept of a core curriculum to her work with the youngest children in the centre.

Marsha tells me that they don't have a "core curriculum like the over "[in the under-2s] because there is so much mess. She tells me that they have "more things out" in warmer weather when they can use the outside space and that "lack of space" is part of the reason why there aren't many activities available to the under 2s.

The teachers' debates about the centre's curriculum were always grounded in this type of practical reality. A joint effect of the strategies of co-opting and grounding was to limit exploration of the relationship between the official definition of the situation with regard to curriculum (the teachers' shared theory of action) and the centre's curriculum in practice (the teachers' theories in use).

There is one explanation that seems to offer an obvious answer to the rigid dichotomy between theories-of-action and theories-in-use at Long Acres: that the day-to-day demands of centre life meant that the teachers had very few opportunities to explore their thinking and practice together in a conscious, reflective way. Given the lack of time for the teachers to systematically generate

and reflect on evidence about the relationship between their theory of action and their theories in use, it is no wonder that there was a persistent gap between centre rhetoric and the multiple lived realities of the centre's curriculum. So, in order to maintain the social act of doing childcare, the teachers had adopted a rigid set of expectations about how daily life in the centre would be organised. These expectations were reified through the use of centre policies and other key documents, which also served as tools to enculturate new staff, thereby ensuring the smooth continuation of centre practice.

It is hardly surprising that the routine use of time and resources dominated daily arrangements in the centre. Much of the enacted curriculum in the centre appeared to be a logical response to the practical requirements of doing childcare. Having been a teacher in childcare, this systems orientation was familiar to me but I was still struck by how it dominated the teachers' thinking about their work. On my first day at Long Acres, I noted in my research diary:

The lists displayed in the centre (e.g., the 'Daily Routines' chart) hint at a strong "glue" of systems and routines that holds everything together—how the staff are deployed and what the children will do, and when.

Later the same day I noted:

I am struck by the prevalence of "systems" in every aspect of the centre, particularly with regard to adult activity. A lot of energy appears to go into maintaining these.

The teachers at Long Acres had adopted a set of pragmatic constraints around their approach to life doing childcare. This pragmatism was obvious both in the literal sense, as a practical way of organising the considerable demands on centre resources (particularly teacher time), and in the epistemological sense, that the more unified the teachers were around a particular idea or practice, then the more it was valued as part of the teachers' professional knowledge. The distinction between routines and the planned programme largely rested on this deeply pragmatic base. The challenge of getting smoothly through the day at Long

Acres, as in all childcare settings, relied on an elaborate network of relationships between space, time, objects, and people.

Whilst these systems seemed necessary and efficient, they also had the effect of isolating the teachers from one another. An assumption that I had held before beginning the fieldwork was that the teachers' would frequently exchange ideas about teaching and learning during their day-to-day talk. But one of my earliest impressions was that the teachers spoke with each other very little during their contact time with the children. Early in the fieldwork, I made a note to this effect in my research diary:

When I came back in [from outside] I went into Sue's office to get my ruler to rule up further pages in my fieldnotes. Sue asked what I had been observing this morning. I told her I was still trying to understand the various centre systems. I joked that I was trying to figure out how staff know what to do without talking about it much. She commented that they are constantly communicating with each other about this. I said "No they're not. They seem to be reading each others' minds" and Sue laughed. She immediately became serious and told me that "issues" are discussed in staff meetings.

Sue's response confirmed to me the role of staff meetings as a formal site of curriculum negotiation but I was no nearer to understanding how the teachers' day-to-day curriculum practices became aligned.

I had also found that the exchanges between the teachers during the centre day were mainly of a very limited kind. One morning I noted:

I observed morning tea closely to note the number and nature of staff interactions with each other. Between 9.50 a.m. and 10.00 a.m. there were only four direct interactions between staff, each discrete and having only one or two exchanges, and all involving the organization of the food.

The questions and comments exchanged by the teachers were most commonly to do with the material needs of individual children. When the teachers did occasionally have the opportunity to talk together without children present, other than at staff meetings, the only conversations that I observed involved (again)

exchanging basic information about children's needs or maintaining social relationships between the teachers.

There were few formal opportunities to discuss the centre's curriculum. The under-2s' and over-2s' teachers met (separately) just once a month for programme planning. In their one-hour meeting, they not only had to evaluate the previous month's under-twos' programme and plan the next, but also discuss the progress of individual children and any other general matters affecting their part of the centre. Planning between these monthly meetings was done "on the run", during the busy centre day. This meant that the teachers' decision-making was responsive to practical constraints, but unsupported by time for reflection on the consequences of their decisions or consideration of alternative possibilities. Nor did the teachers have time for in-depth discussion of *Te Whāriki*.

The staff rosters provide part of the explanation for this on-the-run exchange of limited types of information. Although I had assumed that the teachers would be enacting their definitions of curriculum intersubjectively, the staff rosters meant that time spent teaching together was highly fragmented. Allowing for lunches and tea breaks, and the early/late rotation of their rostered working hours, the teachers were only scheduled to be teaching together for a maximum of three hours during the 9-hour day. In fine weather, the inside/outside roster meant that some of the teachers would not observe each other teaching for a week at a time. In the snatched times available to talk during the centre day, it seemed inevitable that exchanges would almost always be of a need-to-know variety.

One of the most notable aspects of the Strategic Plan is the way in which it signals a distinction between "teacher-led" and "parent-led" services. In doing so, the Plan confirms the increasing intensification and professionalisation of the early childhood field that has occurred in New Zealand, and elsewhere, since the 1980s. This intensification has not been paralleled by equivalent changes in conditions of service designed to both support and reward the increased professionalism of early childhood teachers. The reality of work in childcare is one of wage work, rostered shifts, and little or no non-contact time for planning and reflection. Life at Long Acres still reflects these structural arrangements. Sophisticated activities such as centre self-review demand considerable amounts

of time for in-depth conversation between teachers and with other adults. The working conditions of the teachers at Long Acres, with limited opportunities to meet or to have time to work alone, away from the children, are typical; indeed, the teachers at Long Acres considered themselves fortunate to have an hour each per week of non-contact time, as well as paid opportunities to meet fortnightly for planning and general staff meetings.

A particular issue for Phoebe, one of the over-2s teachers at Long Acres, was the maintenance of assessment records, in the form of individual portfolio books. During her interview, Phoebe told me that the teachers were maintaining these at home, in unpaid time. The work required to maintain the children's profile books was a flashpoint for Phoebe but she did not seem to have fully appreciated this until during the interview. I asked Phoebe why staff did centre work in their own time:

Joce: I mean, nobody can *make* you work in your own time, so there has to be some buy-in to that vision or that philosophy. Do you see what I'm saying?

Phoebe: Yeah. We're doing it so we've obviously agreed on doing it and that's the way we do it.

Joce: Or you haven't agreed but you're doing it anyway.

Phoebe: We're doing it but we've never brought it up. I do know that we all just grumble about it, [and ask each other] "what time do you finish" [working on the books at home].

Joce: Why do you think it's never been brought up in the group?

Phoebe: Because we've never, never talked about it in the group. We've never... [pauses]. It's never come up.

Joce: [I note a horrified expression on Phoebe's face and laugh]. Don't look at me like that, it wasn't my idea!

Phoebe: No one's ever ...Stop the tape! Stop the tape!

During the pause while the tape was stopped, Phoebe sat silently and still for about a minute then indicated that she wished to restart the interview. When the interview restarted, I returned to asking her about aspects of her work that she found difficult and she went on to recount a story about a child with a speech

difficulty, unrelated to the issue of the profile books. At the end of the interview, I asked her again why the issue of teachers working on the profile books during their own time had not been brought up in the group. Again, Phoebe looked shocked, as if we had not discussed this previously. Putting her open palm over her mouth, she said, “Oh my God” then “That’s so true, you know”. I laughed and said that I wasn’t trying to suggest that she did bring it up, but that since it was obviously a serious issue for her, I was wondering why it hadn’t been raised. She replied, “It just hasn’t”.

Despite her enthusiasm for the job, the employment conditions in childcare (compared to primary teaching), and lack of wider legitimization as a teacher, were becoming increasingly frustrating for Phoebe:

It’s just the whole set up. It’s just unfair, and I can’t understand how. You’re still in the education industry. I just can’t for the life of me work out why. And all this work now with the curriculum, all this extra work that we have to do, all these profile books [individual child assessments], you know, if you want to become a top centre. You know the work that you’re doing is perhaps not as much as you would [do] in a school but it’s certainly up there.

I interpreted from Phoebe’s comments a link between poor conditions and lack of recognition of teachers working in childcare, and Phoebe’s identity as a professional. Despite her long experience of teaching in early childhood, and her enjoyment and personal growth in working in childcare, Phoebe had recently decided to return to primary school teaching:

Phoebe: [Sighing] Yes, absolutely. It’s the hours and the money.

Joce: So is it about wanting better conditions? Or is there something to do with this centre, or with early childhood generally, that makes you want to leave?

Phoebe: There are a lot of things. I said to [the centre licensee] and Sue at my PD and A [professional development and appraisal meeting], it’s almost in protest. It’s a protest that we don’t get the recognition from the government, even though we’re completing our Quality Journey [centre self-review]. We should at least get a star, be some sort of five-star centre, and each time you do it you get another star. Or you get money or something. We’ve been doing this on Saturdays, with a lot of input, our own thinking. And no holidays. I mean, the holidays in this environment, the hours.

I believe that the structural arrangements of life at Long Acres denied the teachers access to the professionalised identities they were seeking to construct. The implications of this for the successful implementation of *Te Whāriki* are considerable since, as Mitchell and Cubey (2003) show, the development of effective centre curricula depends on highly professionalised activities, such as critical reflection on curricular arrangements. This means that *Te Whāriki* is unlikely to be implemented fully in childcare as long as current structural arrangements persist. The teachers' strategies of grounding abstract questions about practice in the day-to-day realities of life in the centre, and of allowing these structural realities to shape their private worlds, exemplifies the power of centre structures to confound teachers' attempts to think about the implementation of centre curricula in new ways.

Implications for teacher education

Better ratios of staff to children, more noncontact time, more (paid) time to meet together, more frequent professional development opportunities, and better baseline training for all staff have been persistent features of campaigns on the part of the early childhood sector to improve structural and process quality in early childhood services in New Zealand for the last twenty years (May, 2001, 2003b). The short-term goals of the Strategic Plan include a review of the regulatory framework for the early childhood sector and of current funding systems. Longer term, the goals of the Plan include a progressive reduction of group sizes and ratios in parts of the sector.

The proposition that underpins initiatives to improve the structural arrangements of early childhood education (such as increased teacher education and improved working conditions) is that, with increased opportunities to discuss and reflect on practice, and with access to theoretical tools and documentation strategies with which to examine curricular arrangements, teachers will routinely explore these arrangements in a systematic way, thereby improving process quality in early childhood services. This claim is largely borne out by the literature on structural and process quality in early childhood settings (e.g., Farquhar, 2003; Siraj-

Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden & Bell, 2002; Smith, et al., 2000). The important caveat to these findings is that there is nothing automatic in the relationship between teacher education and working conditions that leads to better outcomes for children and their families. Well-educated teachers are equipped with better interpretive tools with which to change their practice (and, perhaps, with a confident sense of their identity as teachers) but they must willingly exert their personal agency in order to apply such tools.

The implications of this claim are serious for the implementation of the Strategic Plan and its increased emphasis on cooperation between agencies serving young children and their families. An example of this is the Plan's strategy to establish closer links between early childhood services and schools. The resulting processes of community building and curriculum negotiation between early childhood centres and schools will demand that early childhood teachers are confident in their understandings about early childhood curricula, especially when working alongside teachers who have long enjoyed considerably better working conditions and higher status, and who share a different history and set of understandings about the curriculum.

Recent work by Mitchell and Cubey (2003) has reviewed the literature on the effectiveness of teacher professional development in early childhood education, identifying those characteristics that have been shown empirically to correspond with better outcomes for young children, particularly on measures of literacy and numeracy. Mitchell and Cubey make eight principal claims about such programmes, including that effective professional development “incorporates participants’ own aspirations, skills, knowledge and understanding into the learning context” and that “[effective] professional development helps teachers/educators change practice, beliefs, understanding, and/or attitudes” (p. 81). Professional development programmes that aim to achieve these characteristics take time, since they rely on a further characteristic identified by Mitchell and Cubey, the need for sustained investigation (including systematic data generation and analysis) in centre settings. Miller (2000) argues that “quality provision is dependent upon adults being responsible for their own psychological well being—their welfare, care and health. This means having systems which

allow time for planning, for talking in teams, for assessing and evaluating work collaboratively” (p. 22). In the case of Long Acres, only two hours per month were assigned for teachers to meet together, and these were usually used for planning and general staff meeting purposes rather than professional development.

In an account of research conducted as part of the United Kingdom’s Sure Start programme, Anning and Edwards (1999) describe their attempts to “bring together expertise from key practitioner researchers from a range of types of preschool and day care settings, with university-based researchers, to develop and articulate a curriculum model for effective education in literacy and mathematics for very young children” (p. 3). A particular focus of their research was the creation of contexts for professional development for the practitioner researchers, and their centre- and service-based colleagues. The authors identify the principles for successful learning communities that they adopted with the early childhood practitioners: a shared sense of purpose, a collective focus on children’s learning, collaborative activity, the deprivatisation of activity, and the use of reflective dialogues (pp. 149-150). Since the key practitioners were drawn from a range of services, including day care, speech therapy, nursery schools and child welfare agencies, differing assumptions about professional practice were quickly evident, providing the impetus for rich and challenging dialogue.

Conclusion

In hindsight, and with the benefit of the omnipotence granted to readers and researchers, it is easy to identify the contradictions in the work of the teachers at Long Acres. The study was not an evaluation of Long Acres but an attempt to understand a distinctive social world. Since teachers, like researchers, are fallible, we should not be surprised if they behave in ways that do not always correspond with comfortable images of teaching (Korthagen, 2003). Such judgements are hasty and ignore one of the central understandings explored in my research: that the co-construction of curricula in early childhood settings is extraordinarily complex work, demanding constant juggling of multiple and competing interests, and subject to a range of factors beyond teachers’ immediate control.

This complexity has the potential to both confound and to sustain the implementation of the Strategic Plan. Its strategies will take time to be realised and the Plan is largely realistic in this regard. It is not entirely realistic, however, in its assumptions about New Zealand children, and what they and their families and whānau bring to early childhood education. How realistic its strategies are with respect to teachers' work remains to be seen. The Plan is inevitably vague on this point, referring only to the "flow-on effects" of pay parity, "release time", and researching teacher supply (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 14). Such initiatives will largely depend on the recommendations of the reviews of funding and regulations. On an Orwellian note, the Plan states that the professional development offered to teachers will be "aligned with the Government's strategic goals" (ibid, p. 15).

I had begun my research believing that the need to understand better how teachers think together in early childhood was sufficient rationale for the research. As the implementation of the Strategic Plan unfolds, this rationale seems increasingly justified.

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