

Original Research Study

Parents as Educators at Playcentre: Understanding the Constraints and Enablers of Teaching Practice

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Abstract

This paper reports on a study which investigated four parents as educators' use of their life experiences, skills and knowledge in their teaching practice in an urban Playcentre. This paper focuses on two themes that arose from the analysis. Firstly, the influence that the parents as educators' changing sense of belonging to the group had on their teaching practice is discussed and how this suggests the need to build a temporal dimension into understanding teaching practice within a team. Secondly, findings are examined that suggest that a sociocultural approach to the discourse surrounding adults' teaching practices could open up the possibilities of more culturally valued mature activities being undertaken within the centre setting, enabling educators to draw more fully on their own funds of knowledge.

Introduction

Playcentre is uniquely positioned within the early childhood education landscape of New Zealand for many reasons. When the Playcentre movement began in 1941 it was influenced by the ideals of progressive education, as espoused by the New Education Fellowship, which aimed to bring about social reform and release the creative powers of the individual through transformed educational practices (May, 1997; Stover, 1998). The original aims of Playcentre included opportunities for social development for children, mutual support for mothers and parent education about the education and caring of young children (May, 1997; Stover, 1998). Hence, it encompassed both educational and community oriented aspirations. From the beginning, Playcentres have been run as parent co-operatives with parents being supported to educate their own children in a group based setting. Over the years the philosophy of Playcentre has evolved, but the key tenets of parents being involved with the education of their children, adult education and of parents supporting each other remain.

In the current early childhood education policy context which has emphasised increasing participation in quality early childhood education, improving quality of early childhood education services and promoting collaborative relationships (Ministry of Education, 2002), Playcentre is ambiguously positioned. As a parent co-operative it is strong on promoting collaborative relationships and building social capital within the community (Powell, Cullen, Adams, Duncan & Marshall, 2005). However the philosophy of parents and children learning alongside each other is incompatible with the policy requirement that by 2012 all teachers will have a high quality coherent teaching qualification recognized by the New Zealand Teachers Council, such as the Diploma of Teaching (ECE). The Ministry of

Education (2001) has recognised the valuable contribution that early childhood services provided by parents make to the sector by negotiating a separate licensing agreement that sets out combinations of qualifications for group supervision in a funded Playcentre session. The emphasis on family participation at Playcentre, whilst providing support for parents in line with governmental social policies, also requires a parental time commitment that does not sit easily with broader economic policies encouraging women to return to the workforce. As it works to continue to offer an alternative choice to families about the way they raise their children in a policy context that is dominated by educational and economic discourses, Playcentre is thinking carefully about its strategic role and how it is located in the current policy context.

Playcentres are mostly licensed sessional centres that are run as parent cooperatives. Each Playcentre is autonomous but affiliated to a regional Association, which is in turn affiliated to the New Zealand Playcentre Federation (NZPF). The NZPF oversees the delivery of the Playcentre Diploma of Early Childhood and Adult Education, which is a New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) accredited education programme at Level 6 of the NZQA framework. The Diploma programme is broken into 6 Courses, with Course 1 generally seen as compulsory as for all parents, and Course 3 being a minimum education requirement for a session to be licensed and funded. Playcentre parents are introduced to the how of teaching through being involved with sessions, through the Playcentre education programme and through mentoring by more experienced Playcentre members. The 'what' of teaching is also taught through the Playcentre education, but as Playcentre parents are generally around 30 years of age or older, and often have tertiary qualifications (Powell et al., 2005), they tend to already have some in-depth subject content knowledge. Collectively, the knowledge amongst a Playcentre supervisory team can cover a very wide range of subjects. However, we do not know if and how this subject content knowledge is utilised by the parents.

As the position of parent-led centres becomes more marginal within the current regulatory and funding framework, it is important that there is a clearer understanding of how the teaching practices of parents as educators in group based settings contributes to young children's education. Nationally and internationally very little is known about the teaching practice of parents in parent-led group based settings. There is a growing body of research that has been conducted specifically in Playcentre (Gibbons, 2004; Jordan, 1993; McDonald, 1982; Podmore, 1992; Powell et al., 2005; Te One et al., 2007; van Wijk, Simmonds, Cubey & Mitchell, 2006). However, only McDonald's (1982) research has focussed on parents as educators. Her study was based on a national survey and revealed the diversity of parent helpers in Playcentre in the late 1970s. It investigated parents' roles and attitudes to parent helping but did not examine their teaching practices.

Recently, Manning (2008) investigated parents' involvement in their children's education and in particular their teaching practices. Although she found some evidence of parents using their knowledge and skills from their work and life experience in their teaching at Playcentre it did not occur frequently. This paper examines some of the data from that exploratory study to suggest two reasons why this may be the case. In particular, specific findings focused on in this paper indicate that parent as educators' changing sense of belonging to the group, and the influence that has on their individual agency within the group, has an effect on their teaching practices. This suggests the need to build a temporal dimension into understanding teaching practices. Findings are also presented that suggest the potential of using a sociocultural approach to adults' participation in this setting to come to a fuller understanding of what constrains or could enable their teaching practices, and their broader involvement in Playcentre.

Literature Review

There is very little research on parents as educators. A substantial body of research indicates that professional teachers' past lives and their beliefs and assumptions make a large impact on their teaching practice, and that "good" teachers will be aware of this and use this knowledge to improve their teaching (Ambrose, 1993; Ayers, 1989; Hawthorne, 1994; Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995; Mepham, 2000; Warhurst, 1992). A "good" teacher is considered to be someone who has thorough pedagogical knowledge, but it has been argued that teachers, including early childhood teachers, require comprehensive subject knowledge in order to extend children cognitively (Cullen, 1999; Garbett & Yourn, 2002; Hedges & Cullen, 2005; Rodger, 1995). A good teacher is also considered to be one who cares about the children being taught (Ayers, 1989; Cherrington, 1999; Dalli, 2006; Goldstein & Lake, 2000; Noddings, 1984). This would tend to suggest that parents as educators' past and current lives could impact positively on their teaching practice, in that they could draw on subject knowledge from previous work experience and that there is already a strong relationship of care with at least some of the children in the centre.

In a similar vein, recent research and writing about funds of knowledge, which positions the lives of children and the people who live in their households as sources of cultural and cognitive resources and skills which can be taken up in the classroom (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005; Hedges, 2007), suggests that parents' teaching at Playcentre could be enriched by drawing on their previous work and life experience. Some recent work in New Zealand has included looking at parents as educators' practice in 'parent-led' group settings. Research by Mitchell, Royal Tangaere, Mara & Wylie (2006) reports that children's learning in Playcentre was enhanced where some of the adults in the group were experienced and had significant early childhood teacher education, and where these adults focused on children during the session. None of the services in the study were rated highly on providing cognitive challenge or extending children's thinking.

A mixed method research study by Powell et al., (2005) investigated the impact of adult participation in Playcentre on social capital. This was researched through looking at the adults' personal lives, their educational aspirations, social networks and perceptions of community participation and citizenship. Findings from the survey phase showed that those who had been at Playcentre longer had learnt more about extending children. Given the transient nature of attendance at Playcentre, with many parents involved only for a few years, it would suggest that many parents at Playcentre would not have had time to learn much about extending children's learning which would be consistent with the Mitchell et al., (2006) findings.

The findings from these two studies concentrated on process quality, that is, the quality of the teaching process. Both studies concentrated on how the teaching is carried out, not on what is being taught. They showed benefits of teacher education for programme process quality, but did not specifically investigate the other attributes that the parents bring to the teaching, such as subject content knowledge. It is this area that the study reported here sought to investigate further, by trying to understand the role that previous education and experiences (not all of which are early childhood related) contribute to the parents as educators' teaching practice in the centre.

Methodology

The main aims of the study (Manning, 2008) were to produce a description of parents as educators' practice in one Playcentre, and to interpret this practice in the light of their life

experiences, including educational, cultural and professional experiences, and their statements about teaching and learning. The unit of interest was the individual Playcentre parent as educator. This was investigated by focussing on four parents as educators in one urban Playcentre over one ten week school term. The sample selection was purposeful (Stake, 1995) to try to represent the diversity of experiences present in Playcentre. The selection criteria for parents were that they had no prior teacher education, were at different levels of Playcentre education, and if possible, had different cultural or gender backgrounds. However, due to the membership of the Playcentre at the time of the study, all the participants were women and Pākehā.

Data generation methods for each participant consisted of at least four hours of observations of teaching practice spread over at least four sessions, document analysis, a short questionnaire about the participants' backgrounds, education, qualifications and experiences, and an individual interview. A description of teaching for each participant was built up using a framework developed from studies by McWilliam, de Kruif & Zulli (2002), de Kruif, McWilliam, Ridley & Wakely (2000), Jingbo and Elicker (2005) and Kontos (1999) (see Appendix 1 for the framework, and Manning, 2008, for more detail on its development). The descriptions of each participant's teaching practice were used in conjunction with the other data to make connections between teaching practice and the parents as educators' backgrounds. Secondly, the analysis was carried further by comparing these findings from the four participants. The examples that have been drawn on for this paper emerged from this comparison.

This comparison was based on Rogoff's (2003) concept of the three planes of analysis. Rogoff argued that understanding that development of human cultural activity requires concurrent information about the individual, the relationships between individuals, and the cultural-institutional tools being used. Her methodology is to foreground one of these aspects (individual/interpersonal/cultural) for analysis whilst still keeping the other aspects in the background. This approach was used in the study, where the data from all of the case studies were analysed by focussing on the personal, interpersonal and cultural planes in turn. The findings presented here are informed by the analyses of the three planes, but in particular we foreground the interpersonal and cultural frames.

An additional layer of analysis used the concept of individual agency. Individual agency is where a person feels they have control over their own actions and decisions. Reid and Stover (2005) developed a model for of individual agency within a group, such as within a Playcentre, and what influences this agency. This model was found to explain some of the findings that arose from the interpersonal and cultural planes of the cross-case analysis.

The project was approved by the Victoria University of Wellington's College of Education Ethics committee, and the NZPF and local Playcentre Association. Informed consent was gained from all parents in the centre for themselves and their children to be observed, and further consent was gained from the four case study participants for their extra involvement. The guiding principle of relational ethics (Flinders, 1992) was used, where an open and respectful relationship was fostered to minimise harm and imposition. Pseudonyms (Kim, Sally, Tracey and Jane) were used for participants.

Findings

A theme that emerged from the literature suggested that parents as educators' teaching practice could be enriched by using their wealth of background skills and knowledge. In this study parents were observed on several occasions to be drawing on previous skills and knowledge in their teaching. For example, on one occasion Sally, who had a Master's degree

in hydrology, talked with a child in the sandpit about the water from the hose creating channels and a landslide, similar to one that had been on the news recently. Parents also drew on their parenting skills and funds of knowledge in their interactions with other people's children. However, the data generated across the case studies indicated that this enrichment of teaching practice with prior background was the exception rather than the rule. For example, Kim could play the guitar but never did so at the centre. Tracey, who was an avid renovator of houses, tended by her own admission to avoid the carpentry area at the centre. Jane's hobby was painting and art but she only taught in the art area once in the time of the study. Jane commented in her interview:

I felt like you weren't seeing the full side of me, because of this whole arty, creative thing that we've talked about, that hasn't really been achieved or anything on Tuesday session" (Manning, 2008, p.74).

The evidence from this study suggests that it was a number of competing factors, such as personal choices, interpersonal factors such as a sense of belonging and the context of particular sessions, and cultural factors such as Playcentre philosophy, which worked to restrict parents drawing on their own knowledge and experiences of life in their teaching and learning with children. Two of these factors will be considered here: the temporal dimension associated with a sense of belonging, and the aspects of Playcentre philosophy that generate a perceived lack of authenticity to child-initiated activities.

Interpersonal Plane of Analysis: Belonging

According to Reid and Stover (2005) a sense of belonging to a group is essential to both having individual agency within that group and encouraging participation in the group's practices. This individual agency seemed to be a pre-requisite for a parent as educator to feel empowered to draw upon their background skills and knowledge, rather than simply imitating what they saw other parents in the Playcentre teaching. However a sense of belonging is not static, but changes as an individual participates in the group and as the group itself changes over time. Wenger's (1998) idea of an identity trajectory, relating to the identity that a person negotiates within a community of practice over time, was found to be useful for understanding changes in a sense of belonging. Wenger argued that an identity was not an endpoint but was continually constructed and therefore changing. A member's participation in the community of practice is affected by this trajectory, which includes both the past history of forming an identity within the group and the projected future identity. Examples from two of the participants demonstrate this changing identity.

Being on the fringes of the group: The case of Kim

Kim had one boy (3 years old), had been at Playcentre for about 2 years. She had few qualifications beyond Secondary school, and had completed Course 1 of the Playcentre education. She had previously been a salesperson, and enjoyed creative activities and singing.

Kim's identity trajectory started with her taking an interest in Playcentre and getting involved by enrolling her child and taking her place on a team. However, Kim did not appear to get more involved, showing an ever greater sense of belonging to the centre, which is a common trajectory in Playcentre. Although she had been at the centre for over two years at the time of the study she was not taking on positions of responsibility. Her role in the centre of "Welfare Officer" was a support one, where she arranged farewells or meals for parents with new babies. She had completed the compulsory Course 1, but was overtly not interested in continuing education, even though the centre needed people to complete the

higher qualifications in order to remain licensed. Kim was very child focussed, stating that she saw her role in the centre as educating children, and perhaps supporting adults in her job as Welfare Officer, but certainly not in educating or being a role model for other adults.

Despite two years of interactions, Kim seemed still to be on the fringes of the social grouping of the centre. She seemed friendly with most people at the centre yet no-one appeared to be a particular or close friend. There also seemed to be a difference of opinion between her attitude to gun play (by her son) and the attitudes of others in the team, which seemed to result, for Kim, in a lack of individual agency. This was shown when her son Paul asked to play with the construction set that he made guns from and was denied by another adult, who explained to Kim what she had said to him and why. The body language of the two women appeared quite awkward, as if neither of them were comfortable with the situation. Paul then asked Kim the same question and Kim replied “we’re not allowed them”. It seemed that Kim did not feel that she could make the rules or contribute to the rule making process in the centre, but had to abide by what the others had decided.

Another effect of her position on the group fringes was that although there was constant pressure in the centre for people to train for funding purposes, no-one seemed to put this pressure on Kim. The pressure seemed to be applied only to those people who appeared to be on a trajectory towards the core of the community. As a community member on the periphery, Kim had some freedom from expectations, but at the same time was marginalised when it came to making the rules. Soon after the study ended, Kim left the centre. Possibly some of her reserve in sharing her background skills and knowledge at the centre arose from her growing decision to withdraw from the group.

Being a part of the core group: The case of Sally

Sally had two boys (one almost 5 years and one just 1 year old), and she had been at Playcentre for about 4 years. She had a Master’s degree in hydrology, and had completed Course 3 of the Playcentre education. She had worked in administrative jobs, travelled overseas, worked as a chef, and was currently interested in photography and scrapbooking.

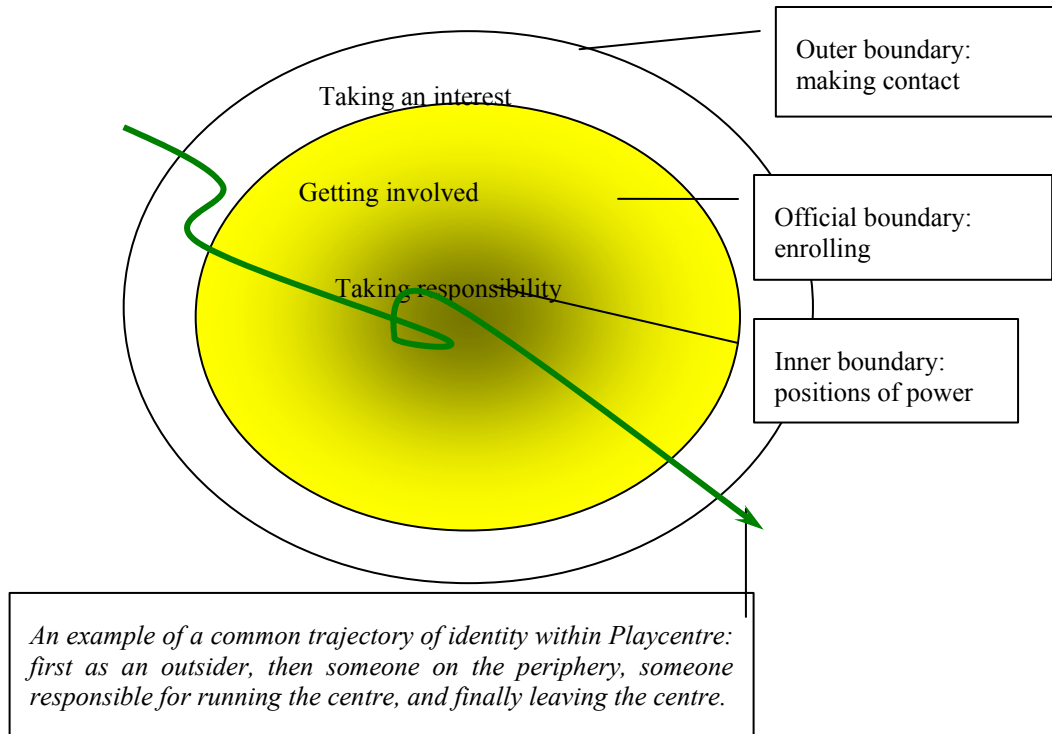
In contrast to Kim, Sally was already at the core of the community, and had been for some time. She had been President of the centre, and although she had taken on more minor roles since she had had a second baby, she was still involved in the decision making at the centre. For example, she took it upon herself to approach someone about being the next President in the centre. Sally had completed Course 3, not because of an ongoing interest in early childhood education, but rather because of a disposition for ongoing learning and a commitment to the needs of the centre which were to have at least one person on every session with a minimum of Course 3.

Her identity as someone in the core of this community empowered her individual agency within this group. She was well known and shared her background openly with others, and since she was in a position of power within the centre it enabled her to choose what it is she would do on session. For example, it was well known that she had worked as a chef and currently owned a café, but she was not expected to do more than her fair share of the food preparation with the children or providing morning tea for the adults, nor did she volunteer to do more than take her turn at these activities. It did not appear that she had any doubts that she could do what she wanted within the centre. An example was when Sally was looking for a cooking implement and couldn’t find it. Her immediate response was “I’ll buy it! I’m the equipment officer!” Another time she talked about parents’ recurrent complaints about a lack of photos in their children’s portfolios, and her answer had been “Well, pick up the camera and take them yourselves”. For Sally, secure in her identity at the core of the

community, her sense of individual agency and power was strong. Her intention was to remain in Playcentre until her 2-year-old went to school.

This idea of identity trajectories within Playcentre is depicted visually in Figure 1. The model combines ideas of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) and of dispositions (Carr, Podmore, & May, 1998). The dispositions linked by Carr et al. to *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) strands of “Belonging” (taking an interest), “Well-being” (becoming involved), and “Contribution” (taking responsibility) characterise the changing ways the adults constructed their identity in Playcentre.

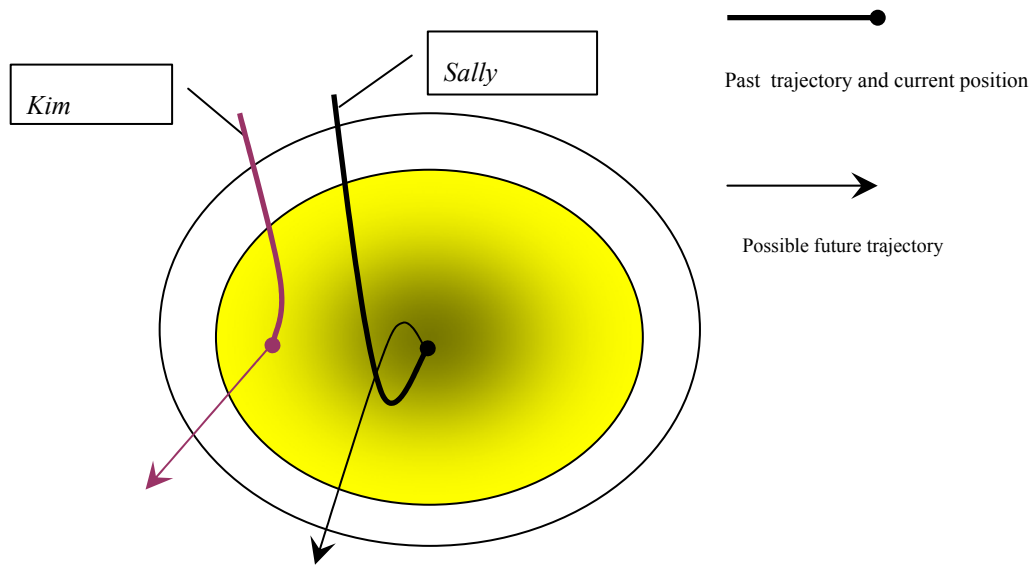
Figure 1. A model of identity trajectory within Playcentre.



The two identity trajectories of Kim and Sally can be depicted on this model, to help understand their individual agency and identity within the centre (Figure 2).

The data presented, along with the other data contained in the full study (Manning, 2008), showed that those parents who had a stronger sense of individual agency felt more empowered to use their background skills and knowledge in their teaching. There was a sense that they could make the rules, rather than having to abide by rules that had been set. This individual agency was influenced by their sense of belonging to the group and their identity within the centre, and this belonging and identity changed over time. Therefore to understand a parent as educator’s teaching practice and the way they use their background, we argue that it is important to consider the temporal dimension with regard to their belonging within the group, as visually depicted in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 2: A model of identity trajectory of the case study adults within Playcentre.



Cultural plane of Analysis: Philosophy and Authenticity

Even when the parents as educators reached a point where they felt a sense of belonging within the Playcentre group, they still did not often draw on the skills and knowledge they had. When analysing the data along a cultural plane of analysis, (keeping the personal and interpersonal factors in background whilst not ignoring them altogether), it was found that the Playcentre philosophy and discourse had both an inhibiting and empowering effect on the parents as educators’ choices to use their background skills and knowledge.

Sally, as an experienced member, was certainly comfortable at the Playcentre, but she didn’t actively use her science knowledge on session often. Sally had studied at an advanced tertiary level, and did not seem to feel that this knowledge was relevant to early childhood education, saying: “That sort of background is so far removed from dealing with children. You know, it’s...it doesn’t seem relevant.”. However, she did acknowledge that her child knew a lot about the principles of geography because she talked with him about these things at home.

Another parent in the study was Tracey, who had two boys of ages 4 and 2 years old, and had been at the centre for about 2 years. She had Diplomas in Hotel and Tourism, and in Beauty Therapy, and had completed Course 2 of the Playcentre Diploma and was working on Course 3. She had a strong interest in renovating houses. Tracey therefore presented as someone who was comfortable at Playcentre and felt a sense of belonging and commitment to the group. It was interesting to note, therefore, that she involved her own children in house renovations at home as a matter of principle, but did not like to get involved in the carpentry at the Playcentre. Tracey considered the resources in the carpentry area to be lacking but was not motivated to improve them (even when she had plans for improving other aspects of the Playcentre that she saw as deficient).

The fourth parent in the study was Jane. She also had two boys of ages 4 and 2 years old, and had been at Playcentre for 2 years. Jane had no formal qualifications, but had completed

Course 1 of the Playcentre education. Her working history included retail work, gardening and sewing for the film industry. She was quiet and creative, and painted artworks for a hobby. However, she was reluctant to initiate art activities at the centre like she did at home. She saw the team leader of the session as holding strongly to the Playcentre philosophy that promoted unstructured child-initiated art activities and felt that this would affect how her ideas were taken up.

My philosophy might not be the proper Playcentre philosophy. I sometimes believe that children need a bit of help when they start the art work, and that sometimes they might need an example to follow, to give them an idea to build on. I don't think it's a good idea just to put equipment and things out and let them try and figure it out. I believe that, you know, if you wanted children to play a constructive ball game, you'd show them some rules. You wouldn't expect them to come up with the idea of rugby themselves. That isn't the philosophy of our team leader at the time, and so it's a hard thing to get happening sometimes on Tuesday sessions. (Manning, 2008, p.75)

These examples illustrate the way the parents as educators saw the Playcentre environment as having different rules to that of their own homes. In their homes they used their skills and knowledge, often in an authentic activity such as house renovations, and their children were included alongside them, learning through participation and conversation. At the Playcentre, however, they did not do this to the same extent. The philosophy that the Playcentre was a child-centred place meant that the adults only exercised their own skills and knowledge for the explicit purpose of the children's education. The activity itself was not being carried out for its intrinsic value; rather it was the resulting learning that was being valued. This strong focus on the children was expressed by Tracey when she said "I'm there for the kids, not the adults". The Playcentre philosophy of child-initiated activities with an emphasis on the process rather than the product was closely followed, even where the parent did not hold to that philosophy (as Jane stated above).

Playcentre, like other Western forms of centre-based early childhood education, is physically separated from the wider community (Brennan, 2007; Cole, 2005). Brennan (2005, 2007) raises questions about these models of early childhood education, where centres separate children from the adult community and so unwittingly limit the extent to which children are able to learn from ongoing authentic activities associated with daily life. Playcentre does incorporate some of the children's significant adults and both children and adults have relationships that are lived out beyond the centre. However, many of the activities engaged with at the centre are not ones that provide opportunities for children to be engaged with adults in real ongoing activities associated with daily life. For example, the children are allowed to wash the small plastic dishes in the family corner, but are not allowed into the kitchen to help with the washing up of morning tea dishes as safety rules inhibit this. Authentic, child-sized tools are provided at the carpentry table, but the Playcentre philosophy has emphasised process over the product which means that adults are not supposed to direct the building of anything in particular. In addition, if there is actual building work being done at the centre by a carpenter, then the children are allowed to observe from a distance but not participate. The explicit message being given is that the activities children are allowed to participate in are 'for play' and, implicitly, not for an authentic purpose where the end product will be used.

Furthermore, Playcentre has historically embraced a developmental approach where the activities provided for the child to choose from are considered developmentally appropriate

for young children (Burman, 1994; Hedges, 2003). These factors together contribute to a lack of authenticity in many of the activities presented for the children, and perhaps inhibit a more authentic adult contribution to children's learning.

The original aims of Playcentre included both educational and community oriented goals. In many ways Playcentre is more strongly structured than other forms of early childhood education for deep and sustained parent participation and community building, yet it still adheres to the basic principle of physically separating early childhood education from the community (Brennan, 2005, 2007) and to the discourse of child-centredness. *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) promotes a sociocultural approach to early childhood education where children are seen as competent and their background and current context are incorporated in to the early childhood education programme. If this sociocultural approach was widened to include the work (domestic or previous paid work) of the parents as educators it might open up the possibilities of also including culturally valued mature activities.

These activities could draw on the 'funds of knowledge', that is the "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992, p.133), of both the children and the adults. Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005) state that "...by drawing on household knowledge, student experience is legitimated as valid and classroom practice can build on the familiar knowledge bases that students can manipulate to enhance learning" (p.43). Children learning through being involved in such culturally authentic activities has been termed 'guided participation' by Barbara Rogoff (1990) and is a valued teaching technique in many cultures. Further, this approach might provide a way of responding to the issues raised in research about the capacity of parents in 'parent-led' group settings to provide cognitive challenges and extend children's thinking (Mitchell et al, 2006).

Conclusion

Playcentre is a multi-faceted organisation with multiple agendas. The study on which this paper is based was a small scale exploratory one, focussing on one aspect of parents' involvement in Playcentre, their use of their background skills and knowledge in their teaching practice. Although there is a general agreement on many aspects of Playcentre philosophy, how this is enacted by individual parents in their teaching practice, on particular sessions, within individual centres and across associations, is likely to vary widely throughout the country. Hence, it is inappropriate to generalise about the findings of this particular study. However the findings do suggest that future research about parents as educators' teaching practice should be attentive to parents' sense of belonging and agency within Playcentre and how this changes over time. This underscores the importance of Playcentre's traditional emphasis on leadership and educating parents to work with other parents to ensure that all parents are encouraged and enabled to contribute to the curriculum.

For some time now the field of early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand has been exposed to thinking about the experiences of children through a sociocultural lens. The findings from this study support the need to continue to do that, particularly in thinking about what is valuable for children to be doing and learning in early childhood settings and how the curriculum connects with opportunities for learning through engagement with culturally valued activities in multiple contexts (Rogoff, 1990). Further thought needs to be given to the separation of places where young children learn from the ongoing activities of daily life. The findings from this study also add weight to the call from Brennan (2007) for

the need to look at the experiences of adults participating in learning and teaching with children through a sociocultural lens. Further research is needed to investigate ways of making visible to adults (parents, teachers and parents as educators) the value of the experience, skills and knowledge of families as a resource for the curriculum.

The research that has been reported in this exploratory study focussed on observation of individuals and their accounts of their practices. However, what emerged from the findings was that the relationship between the individual and the group was of prime importance; a methodology that focussed more on the relationship and less on the individual would have perhaps been more useful. The individual as the unit of analysis has a long history within early childhood education and as researchers we need to be reminded of how the habits of our minds need disrupting to facilitate new modes of enquiry that can more adequately generate understandings about the multi-layered, processual and relational nature of social life.

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Appendix 1: Teaching Practice Framework

(See Manning, 2008 for a description of the development of this framework).

CONTEXT	FACTORS INCLUDED IN DESCRIPTION
Environmental	General description of Playcentre; this was a common environment for all four case studies. Individual parent-as-educators' background.
Planning	Style of preparation; contribution to planning; general purpose of activities initiated by the individual parent-as-educator; preferred activity setting and identification with Kontos' (1999) cluster groupings (generalist/art and craft specialist).
Approach	Selection of who to interact with; initiations and rejections and power relationships in interactions (Jingbo & Elicker, 2005); general role taken (Kontos, 1999).
Interaction	Specific strategies used in interactions, especially as used by de Kruif et al. (2000).

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